

# INDIAN CERAMICS MAGAZINE

DELHI BLUE POTTERY TRUST



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# THE STORY OF MY LIFE

*By Ted Secombe*

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I was born in Brisbane, Australia, in February 1957, just minutes after my identical twin brother. At an early age I moved with my family to Asia, specifically to Vietnam. My father was attached to the Australian Embassy in Saigon and worked overseeing agricultural projects in what was known as the Colombo plan, a Commonwealth initiative to advance social and economic development in French Indochina. We lived in Saigon until the Vietnam war made it impossible to do so. After a time living in Hong Kong, we moved to the Solomon Islands for two and a half years and returned to Australia in 1967 when formal education became important.

I remember the years living in the Solomon's fondly as we were mostly home schooled. Our school day commenced early, around 7am, and finished at 12.30 pm. The rest of the day was our own. We spent the afternoons exploring, fishing and visiting the local villages. It was an interesting time as there was still a great deal of evidence of the Second World War. We saw shipwrecks,



munitions, unexploded bombs and skeletal remains, mainly Japanese.

On returning to Australia my father chose to forgo his professional career in order to become a grazier. This is a term used in Australia to describe a person who raises cattle. On the farm we had a dairy herd and a beef cattle herd, a commercial flower farm and tree orchards of avocados and macadamia nuts. Much of our young lives when we were not at school was spent assisting our father on the farm. He was a harsh man and my memories of life on the farm are not happy ones. We were made to work extremely hard as children, which at the time was difficult but it has instilled in me a solid work ethic that has served me well through life.



Young Ted in Barn Studio

Queensland were in Biochemistry and Medical Laboratory Technology. I worked in this field for two years after graduation. Then I travelled to Europe, holidaying, and never returned to this field of work.

In 1979 I commenced my ceramic career. I am self-taught in all aspects of the ceramic process. I draw my influences from Asia, which for me is natural as it is where my earliest exposure to ceramic art lies. In my early years of ceramic practice, it was a struggle balancing finances as I was an unknown and being self-taught the learning curve of ceramic process was very steep. As is evident in images my curiosity was and still is insatiable for the many variables that encompass clay and glaze. I experimented with wood firing, salt glazing, earthenware lustre glazes and high fired porcelain and stonewares.

Thankfully the years as a starving artist were not large in number. I guess I was earning a reasonable income by artists' standards after five years of practice. My first studio was in an old barn with an earth floor. The floor was infested with funnel web spiders, the most toxic spider on the planet so I took great care in making sure any burrows were filled in before starting work in the mornings.

I quickly learnt that the production of utilitarian wares for the table was not my forte. I have a good deal of respect for potters who choose this road as it requires a great deal of discipline and hard work.

My high school education was completed at boarding school where I was more focussed on sport than academic pursuits. Although I was a good all-rounder, cricket was my major focus. I played in my school firsts for 5 years, achieved 3 hat tricks, and returned best figures of 8 wickets for 5 runs in an innings. I was a medium fast bowler and a middle order batsman. After school I played no more cricket despite being offered greater honours.

My studies at the University of Southern





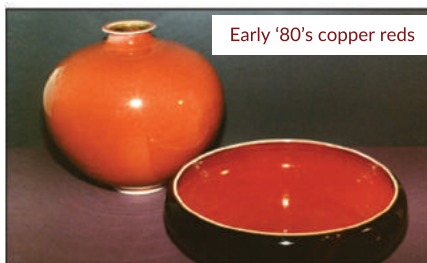
Early 80's - Earthenware



Early 80's - lidded jar wood fired



Early studio works  
1981 Multi glaze applications



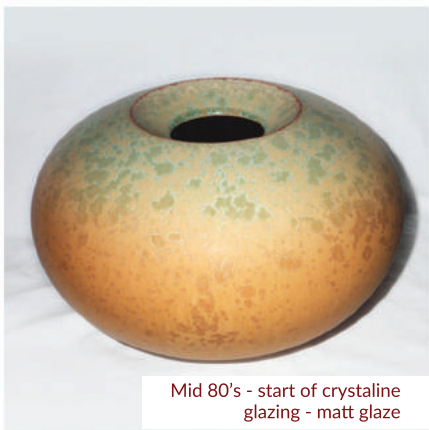
Early '80's copper reds



Early studio works 1982- saggar fired



Early 80's application of lustre



Mid 80's - start of crystalline  
glazing - matt glaze



Early studio works

All three images: In the studio late 80's



My calling was and has always been for decorative ceramics, and I have endeavoured to evolve and grow as an artist by exploring the possibilities of the decorative arts.

My career has been balanced with work made for exhibitions, 5-star hotels, casinos, shopping centres and outdoor works made to elevate garden environments. It has been my fortune to enjoy success in all these spheres.



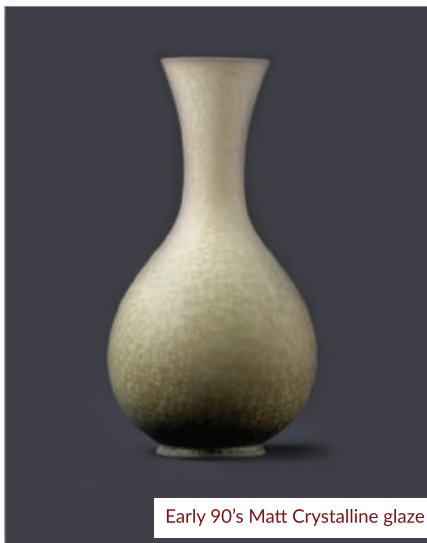
Early 90's - copper red sake pot with sterling silver handle and garnet on lid



Copper red incense burners and tea bowl with gold and platinum lustre for Japanese audience



Early 90's Crystal glaze



Early 90's Matt Crystalline glaze



Early 90's flambe glaze



1997 - 640 Works made for  
Ritz Carlton, Singapore





1997 - Loading the kiln  
for Ritz Carlton Singapore



Ritz Carlton, Singapore



Ted revisits Conrad Hilton Hotel, Singapore, early  
this year. Seen here with his work, made in 2000  
for the hotel.



2000 - Chadstone  
Shopping Centre, Melbourne





Exhibition works water features



Exhibition works water feature



Exhibition works water feature - 2



Exhibition work - Lantern







In 2008 I took a sabbatical to build a new home. This coincided with a time in my life when I believed I had said all I had to say in the ceramic realm. For two and a half years I built a house with the assistance of my younger son Joel who is a builder by trade. On completion of this challenging task, I played with the idea of landscape design.



This proved unfulfilling and I returned to an art-focussed career exploring sculpture in stainless steel and bronze. The preliminary process in producing sculpture involved modelling the ideas in clay first, and once again I was hooked. My path in clay once reignited has been unrelenting ever since. It is indeed my calling in life.



House complete 2010

I am blessed to work in an idyllic environment sharing my days with my wife Ann and we have been gifted with 4 beautiful children and 2 grandchildren.

Today my sole focus is in producing works for exhibitions through fine art galleries and my home gallery. When exhibiting at home, I engage a public relations and marketing firm to promote the exhibitions.

I usually exhibit once a year in Australia and once a year abroad, which I enjoy a great deal. To have the opportunity to exhibit in India in a solo show is incredibly exciting and I am grateful for this opportunity.

2017 - Aquisition at the  
National Gallery of Australia

# GALLERY

Ted Secombe is regarded as one of Australia's most significant and accomplished ceramic artists. After almost 4 decades at his potter's wheel, Ted says that making pots is more challenging now than when he first began, as his motivation is purely the expression of his ideas and creativity. He has now developed a mastery of the medium that allows him to take his experimentation further than ever before.



**'Kimono Series' Red with blue crystal and black monochromatic panels**



**'Kimono Series' Blue and white crystal**

Ted is known for his beautiful and graceful forms and crystalline glazes, that are rich in colour, and delicate in texture and patterning. He is constantly experimenting and developing his glazes, some of which are reminiscent of ancient Chinese glazes.

*"My current work has emanated from my experiences exhibiting in Japan and India. In both countries, I was overwhelmed by the beauty and visual feast offered by their textiles. The mastery of design coupled with an innate ability to blend and match colour drawn from a long history of involvement with process has influenced my glaze palette. Division of colour on many of the works are a direct reference to the Japanese Kimono. The broad colour spectrum used, finds its influence in the bazaars of India".*



'Kimono Series' round form in blues



Blue Grey crystal narrow necked bottle



Midnight blue narrow necked bottle



Tall pale blue crystal bottle with narrow neck



Bright blue crystal beaded form



Night sky matt crystal round form





Deep blue crystal bowl



Flat shouldered red crystal vase with lugs



Blue crystal flat shouldered vase with lugs



Red vase with lugs and gold crystal



Matt crystal vase with lugs



Flat shouldered lugged vase  
blue crystals on red



Red Vase with Green Crystals



Cerise crystal lugged vase



Metallic blue mirrored vase



Pale Blue on dark blue crystal vase



Plum Vase With Green Crystals



Blue on pale green crystal round form



Dark blue bowl with lutre crystal



Satin matt bowl with beading  
soft orange to green



Urchin form with Beading



Bowl red with blue crystals

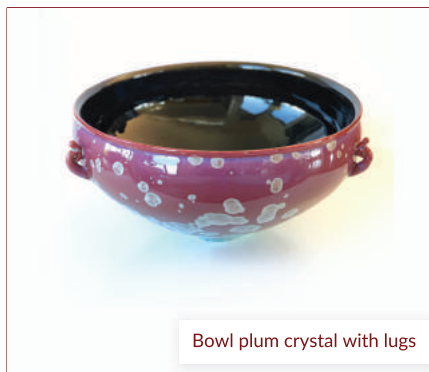


Bowl Teal Blue



Small vase orange and Blue with lugs





# WORKSHOP CONDUCTED BY TED SECOMBE

*By Leena Batra*

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Throwing demonstration



Throwing demonstration

Last December a ceramic workshop for crystalline glazes was organised by Delhi Blue, which can be considered by far the best we have ever had.

Prominent Australian master potter and sculptor Ted Secombe was invited for the Workshop and he made it a great success. No wonder he got a standing ovation at the conclusion of the workshop.

On the first day Ted made powerpoint presentation about his work and his life in ceramics. Though the intention was to glaze and fire pots on the very first day, we could not manage that. Instead we concentrated on sorting out, and weighing all the materials for the glazes, and then mixing them, in preparation for glazing.

On the second day we glazed the bisque pots that the participants had brought, under Ted's supervision. Once that was complete, we loaded the kiln very carefully, since Ted's glazes are fired in oxidation and our gas kilns tend to reduce. Very thoughtfully he had brought the oxygen probe with him. This helped to arrange for the oxidation firing along with the pyrometer. Firing had to be done to a specific schedule to achieve the proper effect. Alongside he explained the process and different techniques that can be applied to expand the possibilities.

Day three was the day of the firing, it had to start very early in the morning because it takes about 14 hours to complete, which includes 4 hours of soaking. While the firing was going on, we were treated to a beautiful



display of throwing porcelain. He gave us precise instructions on the principles of his techniques, working through a variety of forms and curves in vases and bowls - it was perfection itself!

Day four was dedicated to finishing the pots of the previous day's throwing, Ted explained the importance of proper finishing. The kiln was ready to be opened, so with a bated breath we waited to see our work, it was a beautiful moment.

On day five the grinding and polishing of the pots took place, Ted also explained the special reduction process, and firing in reduction at the low temperatures. We also learned the process of etching and enhancing the crystals in the glaze.

On the last day we had a session of questions and answers. There was a lot of excitement, and plans made for future work, and experiments with this wonderful glaze.







Finishing



Ted holds a finished pot



Glazing in progress



Loading the kiln



Kiln ready for firing



Some of the participants' work



Participants

# THE STUDIO

*By Shehla Hashmi Grewal*

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After four years of initial training, I started working as an independent in my own studio in 1999. In the beginning I had little more than two wheels and a drum of clay in the small space to one side of the staircase leading down to the basement. In the backyard I set up a small gas kiln in a temporary structure with glass walls and a tin roof. The basic framework of my setup has remained the same over the years.

I had two wheels made at the very beginning because I was always clear that I wanted to teach pottery. I'm a teacher, before anything else. For years I taught Geography to college and High school students and even after I completely changed my line of work, teaching was never far from my mind. Soon after I set up, I started working with children, doing hand-building with terracotta and firing what they produced. Around this time Gurgaon was still a small place, with few people and fewer facilities, so word spread pretty fast. Soon enough there were enquires and I got my first batch. I decided to start with two students per class. To begin with I only had two wheels, and besides, I wanted to spend sufficient time with each one of the learners.



Clay being Sieved

As is so often the case, I was learning along with my students. I realised quickly that knowing the craft of pottery is a very different process from teaching the craft of pottery.



Clay being wedged

So I began, whenever I sat down to throw, to internally verbalise the process that had become second nature to me: how was I using my fingers, my thumb, where was the pressure being applied, when was the speed of the wheel being increased or decreased. This was an important step in giving me the confidence I needed to teach.



Today my studio takes up much more space than it did two decades ago. The basement space now houses three wheels, many drums of clay (clay that I make myself) marked with dates of soaking for proper seasoning, and shelving space for drying pots and keeping student work. A small space in the adjacent store is being used for storing oxides and other material needed in the studio. The major expansion has been into the larger room of the basement, which runs the width of our house at the back. Here we decorate and finish pots, display work and it doubles up too, as a social space to spend time with the students. It also houses a slab roller which was generously gifted to me by an American couple who were learning from me

for a while. In the backyard now, I have my glazing and firing units. Here I also store in large drums, all the raw material needed for making clay and buckets of glazes.



I started with a small kiln, which was a gift from my father-in-law, made in his steel foundry based on a design by Devida. With the first few test firings I realised that this kiln was reducing a lot. I had few glazes that were working out well. It led to such confusion for a while. Devida suggested that I could shift to low temperature glazes or start testing reduction glazes. I went with the second option and I enjoyed this process tremendously. It vastly improved my understanding of mixing glazes. It did take a lot of time but every hour I spent was worth it. My Tenmoku's looked great and many of my colleagues wanted to fire in my kiln with my glazes to get those colours. I want to make it clear here that the glaze recipes were not mine. Some I inherited being Devida's student and others I got off a book by Emmanuel Cooper, given to me by my friend and colleague Sandhya Aggarawal, a gift for which I'm forever indebted to her. So, I zeroed on few glazes and started my work.

Once the small kiln wore out, I decided to make a slightly bigger one. I did not want any



compromise on the quality of my kiln, so I decided to call upon Azimuddin, who had been Devida's carpenter for over a decade, and under whose watchful eye had mastered the art of kiln-making. I have used four kilns over the years in my studio, three of which were made by Azimuddin, the latest one in October 2019. One merely has to give him the designs to Devida's well-insulated, economic, and beautiful kiln, provide him the materials and watch him work. Each one has been perfect. I tend to think of the later ones as small miracles, considering Azimuddin is well over eighty years old today!



**Student glazing her work**

Soon after I started teaching, I realised that pottery being an endless subject and my focus being on tableware, perhaps I was depriving my students of a broader understanding of their field. So I started to organise regular workshops for them. Though it varied from batch to batch, I'm happy to have had the chance to organise workshops at my studio by Devida, Manisha Bhattacharya, Leena Batra and Indu Rao among others.

The pottery scene in Delhi has come a long

way from when I started learning in September 1995. The level of exposure, interaction, information, the personal computer and the information age have changed the game vastly. Going to Stark for raw material used to be a project in itself; scouting around Kotla hardware shops for whatever could be used as a tool. Nowadays turning tools are available in every second stationary shop; readymade clay can be delivered to your door steps. You can learn hundreds of techniques off of a variety of social media; attend master classes with renowned potters from the comfort of your home. To say nothing of online mass retailers like Amazon, who can get you almost anything produced in any store around the world from electric kilns to studio machines, glazes, under glazes and books on various subjects related to pottery. Name it and its yours. Getting your studio set up and your career going, especially if you live in a large metropolis, has definitely become more comfortable.



**Kiln in the foreground**

Masters like Gurcharan Singh, my teacher Devida, Ira Chaudhuri, Bani De Roy, Rachna Parashar, Leena Batra, Kristine Michael and Lekha Bhagat were the established potters of Delhi at the time I started, and in my opinion even today their work holds up to the new crop of studio potters with newer techniques and



Firing Space

skills, increased adaptability and a flair for experimentation. Studio pottery is also finding an audience these days among hobbyists and people looking for an opportunity to relieve stress; an interesting, growing demographic, even if it remains to be seen how many will take it up later at a profession level.

Whatever the future holds for me or for our beautiful profession, in the past twenty years I'm happy to have welcomed some wonderful students in my studio. I must have worked with about seventy men and women in this time. Most of my interactions have been deeply fulfilling. Nearly all of my students have been professionals: teachers, artists, small entrepreneurs, designers, engineers while a few have been home-makers and partners of expatriates working in Gurgaon. But regardless of background, I have been lucky in that all have been vibrant, creative beings; open minded, dedicated and eager to share. Almost all remain good and dear friends.



Firing Space

Master Craftsman Azimuddin



Grandson with the Master



# STUDENT'S POTTERY SHOW

*By Shehla Hashmi Grewal*



Student's show

on them to get used to the idea of committing more time. I think I was more or less successful in this venture.

We had a students' meeting to plan the show. Individual responsibilities were assigned and dates were fixed for the firings. For me one of the tougher tasks was that of converting part of my studio into a gallery. Display blocks were cleaned, walls were scrubbed and display props were fished out from packed boxes.



Student's show at studio

I want my students to get a holistic understanding of pottery and like them to enjoy the whole process. My present batch of students comprises of women with busy corporate jobs. They have a desire for something outside of their work lives but despite their commitment to learning pottery, their hectic schedules don't allow them to be very regular in attending classes.

I planned this show in a manner that would push my students to produce pots in a limited period of time; decorate, glaze and fire them. The idea was to build their confidence, but also to put a little pressure



Some of my wonderful girls





Participants of the Exhibition

Lot of time was spent in packing my works and other displayed material in the studio to make place for the students' work. After a week of work, the studio had been converted into a kind of gallery; small but neat enough.

Four of my students and a young boy of six years participated in the show. The students used WhatsApp to invite their friends and family. They were excited to be showing their work, introducing fellow potters and serving snacks that they had made. All this created a lovely ambience. It was a rewarding experience for me as well.

# WORKSHOPS AT MY STUDIO

*By Shehla Hashmi Grewal*





Raku kiln making workshop by Indu Rao



Tool making workshop



Tool making workshop



Started working with children in 1999



Children's Work



# POTTERS MARKET LUCKNOW

*By Seema Mohaley*



The city of the Nawabs, Lucknow, was host to the Potters Market. To experience a new city is to experience its art and culture. Lucknow offered that in abundance and made our visit very special. The market was organised and hosted by the Lalit Kala Regional Art Centre. Artists from all over the country had come to participate in the three-day event. Lucknow is well known for its art right from the time of its Islamic occupation, when it was known as Awadh. The city is probably the most important city in Uttar Pradesh from the Art perspective.



The pottery market, perhaps the first of its kind in the city, aroused the curiosity of the visitors, coming from all walks of life and therefore resulting in great footfall. The weather was perfect, adding to the whole experience. As a special gesture a get together during the lunch break, on the last day, was organised by the hosts, for the participating artists.

The beauty of the colourful pots on display and most importantly the joy and smiles on everyone's faces added up to making those three days very special. The Lucknow Potters Market will always remain with me as a very fond memory.



# THOSE WHO LEFT US

**JYOTSNA BHATT**  
**THE GENTLE DOYEN OF INDIAN CERAMICS**

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11th of July 2020 was the day Jyotsna Bhatt left this world. A sad day indeed! It left her family, friends, colleagues, and the legions of students and admirers with a deep sense of loss. Loss of a warm, demure human being

Jyotsna Bhatt was born in Mandavi Kutch in Gujarat in the year 1940. She started her creative studies at J.J. School of Art in Mumbai, but then shifted to Vadodara to learn sculpture under Professor Sankho Chaudhuri. However, she soon discovered that her passion lay in ceramics. In 1965-1966 Jyotsna Bhatt travelled to New York to study ceramics at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, under Jolyon Hofsted. She later came back to India and after completing her post diploma in 1968 in sculpture, joined the Ceramics Department as a teacher at the



**Jyotsna Bhatt**

being who was a doyen of ceramics in India. Her memory took me back to the early 70s; the time when I was a student at the Fine Arts Faculty of M.S. University, Vadodara, and she was teaching ceramics there.

Faculty of Fine Arts M.S University, Vadodara. Jyotsna Ben taught here from 1972 till her retirement in 2002 as Head of the Pottery Department. As I recall, the faculty was a collection of brick buildings, interspersed with

shady trees. I can see Jyotsna-ben, as we fondly called her, walking down the path to the pottery department, or to the printmaking department, or the canteen, or her walking through the shadows of the trees on campus. Her winsome figure and her agile walk, strong and rhythmic. Always in a crisp cotton saree, her long hair tied into a bun, and sometimes entwined into a plait. She would see you and nod and smile. Her smile, as everyone who knew her will convey, was a warm and gentle one.

The ceramics/pottery department in M.S. University was in one corner at the back, right next to the sculpture department. Pottery was one of the mandatory subjects of the first two foundation years at the time. I have a recollection of the department, and of Jyotsna ben, sitting on the wheel and demonstrating the many possibilities of clay in her own unassuming way. She was always keen to listen to what we had to say, and waited without interrupting till we finished before giving her point of view. Her knowledge of all the aspects of ceramics was technically thorough and creatively inspiring. Her students learnt a lot from her understanding of clay and the techniques that went along with the medium. Jyotsna-ben was soft spoken; patience and composure were her trademarks both as a teacher and as a human being.

Aesthetics was the only purity she sought in her work, it gave her joy that was devoid of any complex entanglement of philosophical

or social messages; always just wanting to bring out the best in the medium she worked in. Her command of her craft is so visible in her work, where she pushes the boundaries, and takes advantage of all the possibilities of clay. Whether it was throwing different shapes on the wheel, then altering them into beautiful **forms** inspired by nature, or molding and hand building.

Of course, anyone who is familiar with Jyotsna-ben's works has seen and admired her charming and delightful take on little creatures. Like her Owls, and her impish Cats, simple in form but so full of character. Bringing out an amusing and saucy streak which showed up in the style of these imaginative creatures. Her **forms** are pure and without any needless affectations, while the sculptural forms espoused the earthy and organic. She worked both in Stoneware and Terracotta, choosing a palate of earth colours in her glazes. Subdued tones that reflected her nature and personality.

In the words of Mr. Girdhar Khasnis, Bangalore based art critic and curator who wrote in the Deccan Herald (27th Sept. 2020), "In a long and distinguished career, Bhatt remained prolific and highly committed to the medium of her choice. Her mostly small but evocative pieces of ceramic sculpture revealed a high **degree** of technical proficiency as well as ingenious craftsmanship. Exploiting the gentle flexibility and plasticity of clay, she fashioned a wide variety of pots, urns and bowls in diverse colours, contours and textures."



**Glazed stoneware pots by Jyotsna Bhatt**

Prof. K.G. Subramanyan, an eminent artist and Padma Vibhushan, says this of Jyotsna-ben, "Clay's language is versatile. It can be smooth and abstract, broken and baroque, happy and sensuous, sarcastic or tragic. Jyotsna's work, however, is invariably celebrative. It is taken up with the life around, pots of flowers, birds and beasts, their amusing forms and gestures. She doctors the look of each and comes up with delightful or witty visual metaphors."

A write up on Jyotsna ben would be wanting if Ira di's name was not mention; Ira Chaudhuri, one of India's most eminent ceramists, was not only Jyotsna ben's mentor but also, In her own words, "Five in one"- Mother, Mother-in-law, Guru Patni, Teacher and Friend".

Potters who have been Jyotsna ben's students, P R Daroz, Vinod Daroz, Rakhee Kane, and Falguni Bhatt among many others, are today, well known artists in their own right.

Rajeev Lochan, artist and Former Director of National Gallery of Modern Art, who was also a student of Jyotsna-ben, describes her as a sensitive and creatively-unassuming artist who sought to create, to nurture her inner self rather than worldly recognition. He adds, "Jyotsna-ben was a very warm, kind-hearted and affectionate soul, and her physical presence and subtle smile will be greatly missed". Indeed, her subtle smile and gentle persona will be missed. But this chapter in Indian ceramics and pottery will not close - it will live on in her works.

**By Indu Rao**



## IN MEMORY OF P C GUPTA

Dear Potters Many of you may remember Mr. P.C. Gupta, an inquisitive and amiable soul who didn't lose any opportunity to connect with fellow potters and share what he knew about ceramics.

He had participated in Delhi Blue Pottery Trusts' exhibition-Water, in 2002. He also participated in The All India Studio Potters exhibitions held at Aifacs several times. He was a traveller at heart and lived a full and eventful life leaving his mark on the pottery scene. Some of you may remember his art works: full of reverence for nature, characteristic in its bold and rugged style celebrating life. He left us and went on further in the journey into another life on 13th of February 2020. We feel sad for the departed soul and will always remember his caring and loving presence.

**By Monica and Ambar Agnihotri**



Monica with her father P C Gupta



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