

MADAN GOPAL BHAGAT
(1894–1962)



A pioneer of the ceramic industry, M. G. Bhagat was essentially a creative personality who made a considerable impact on the development of the ceramic industry in our country.

Born in 1894, he graduated in Science from the Government College, Lahore and obtained his Master's Degree in English Literature from the Punjab University in 1917. Science and Technology attracted Madan Gopal Bhagat as much as art and literature. His greatness lay in the rare blending of the two. It was his portrait of Shivaji Maharaj drawn in pencil shades and varnished in appropriate colours, which in the year 1909 was exhibited in an All India Industrial Exhibition at Lahore, the capital city of the undivided Punjab, which won him the gold medal for the best exhibit. He proceeded to Stoke-on-Trent, the centre of the ceramic industry in England, under a scholarship from the Sir Gangaram Trust, where he studied ceramic technology under the world famous ceramist, Dr. Mellor. After qualifying, he gained industrial experience by working with well known bone china manufacturers, such as Aynsley and with high quality porcelain manufacturers in Limoges, France.

On returning to India, he began his career by starting the Department of Ceramics at the Forman Christian College, Lahore. He accepted an offer from the State of Gwalior and took over the management of Gwalior Potteries at Delhi, where he developed its small factory into making most attractive pottery, which at that time in the midst of large imports from England, was admired by none other than the then Viceroy and Vicereine of India, Lord and Lady Willingdon. On a vacation to Calcutta, he visited the Bengal Potteries, the management of which was offered to him by a retired English Colonel, who wanted to return to his home in England. Bhagat, better known to his friends as "M. G.", discussed the proposal with his old family friend, the late Sir Sri Ram and the two together took over the control of the Bengal Potteries. From a tiny unit, the company was developed into one of the largest in the country, producing for the first time in India Fine Earthenware and

later Bone China. Bengal Potteries became synonymous with Fine Dinnerware and eventually became the major producer of Dinnerware in the country.

Perhaps the blending of his training in the humanities and science made "M. G." an idealist and a visionary. He was for self-reliance in the industry and took pride in its products. This can be judged from the fact that before World War II, Japanese and British goods were abundant in the market and Japanese tea sets were being sold at around Rs.2/- per set. Bengal Potteries had to face this competition and they did it with success.

He was the President of the Indian Ceramic Society (1954–55), Founder-President of the All India Pottery Manufacturers' Association and a member of the first Governing Council of the Central Glass & Ceramic Research Institute, Calcutta. The award was first instituted in 1988 and has been given annually.

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