

Synopsis of “Kumbharwada, Bombay (Potters’ Colony)”

Kumbharwada, Bombay (Potters’ Colony) captures the spirit of life in a potters’ colony in Dharavi, Asia’s largest slum, located in the heart of Bombay. These rural potters of Gujarat state came to settle in Bombay about a century ago. Despite their everyday hardships, Kumbharwada not only survives, it thrives.

Filmmaker Rajul Mehta observes Kumbharwada intimately, not as an onlooker but as a participant. This was her natural response to the warmth and hospitality so readily extended by the potters. She is intrigued by their large-heartedness just as she is by the beauty of the pots, both, in stark contrast to their living conditions. She wants to dispel the myth that slums are a place for crime and celebrate the existence of these invisible people.

Rajul draws a clearly positive picture, reflecting her own experience. True to Indian philosophy, she compares the human being with clay. She develops two lines of action simultaneously – one dealing with pottery; the other, with people. The camera restlessly follows one potter after another, one character after another, emphasising the frenetic pace of Kumbharwada. No words frame this visual experience and its richness is enhanced by authentic potters’ music.

Originally made in 1988, *Kumbharwada, Bombay* was 26 minutes in length. It was shot on recycled U-matic (3/4") PAL tapes using a single-tube camera, and edited on Sony RM-440. After a PAL to NTSC conversion, *Kumbharwada, Bombay* was re-edited to 19 minutes in 1996.

Filmmaker’s Profile

Rajul Mehta is a documentary filmmaker and cameraperson with credits ranging from director of photography to art director on many documentary and independent feature projects. Her work includes camerawork for *Marathon Runners of South Africa*, and *Two Way TV: Viewers Talk About Leona’s Sister Gerri* which was broadcast on PBS. Rajul works as a communications consultant, graphic designer, and photographer in New York and Bombay. Her public service campaigns promoting literacy and the empowerment of women, as well as against killing of the female foetus have won national recognition in India. She has also directed a number of successful audiovisual projects.

Rajul’s strong visual sense drew her to work with moving images in late ’80s. She acquired a Master of Design Degree in Visual Communication from Industrial Design Centre at IIT, Bombay in 1988 and participated in the Film Appreciation Course at the Film & Television Institute of India, Poona in 1992. She further specialised in film and video camerawork at New York University in 1993. Her future plans include ethnographic, cultural, biographical, human rights, ageing, children, and women’s issues.