

Chapter # 6

POTTERY & CERAMICS

Pottery is a method of making different pots such as vessels and other objects with ceramic material like tiles. In this process the objects are fired at very high temperature in a kiln to give them a durable hard form. This process is utilized as both the art and a craft. It is practiced in different regions of Pakistan since ancient times. This chapter covers some of the important examples from ancient and contemporary times along with two important artists of this field.

6.1 Pottery & Ceramics from Mehrgarh

Mehrgarh is the oldest and most important Neolithic (6500 BCE to 2500 BCE) sites of the Indus Valley civilization. It is located on the Kacchi Plain of Balochistan, Pakistan.

“Many artifacts as human figurines, pottery and copper items found there show the culture and tradition of the people lived there. Moreover, Mehrgarh is the city, from where the oldest ceramic figurines of South Asia were found.”²⁷

With the discovery of the evidence of potter's wheel in Mehrgarh the archeologists found pottery items in abundance. These pots have animal motifs along intricate designs. Female figurines are elaborated with sophisticated designs. The most common motifs which appear on different pottery are Pipal leaf, fish and geometric patters (Figure 6.1 to 6.3). However, with passage of time the quality and intricacy of designs seem to have suffered due to mass production and due to a growing interest in bronze and copper vessels at those times.²⁸

“In Mehrgarh, ceramic technology had been discovered and largely used. Fine specimens of painted pottery have been excavated, along with detailed terracotta figures and glazed beads. The first terracotta seals also belong to this period.”²⁹

Pottery prepared on potter's wheel and red ware terracotta potteries are hallmarks of Mehrgarh. Apart from the fish motif and pipal leaf pattern this pottery is characterized by rosettes, butterfly patterns, chequer board pattern, geometric designs of dot tip motifs, hatched or plain triangles.



Figure 6.1 Pot excavated from Mehrgarh,
<http://www.thehistoryhub.com/mehrgarh-facts-pictures.htm>

²⁷<http://www.discover-pakistan.com/mehrgarh.html>

²⁸Charles Keith Maisels, *Early Civilizations of the Old World*, (Routledge: 2001), 190–193.

²⁹https://www.academia.edu/8552714/Breaking_ground_at_MEHRGARH_Life_before_the_Indus_Valley_Civilization



Figure 6.2 Pots excavated from Mehrgarh, <https://www.thehistoryhub.com/mehrgarh-facts-pictures.htm>



Figure 6.3 Painted polychrome pottery from Mehrgarh, <https://www.thehistoryhub.com/mehrgarh-facts-pictures.htm>

Terracotta figures of women and animals (Figure 6.4 and 6.5) have also been found along with glazed pottery and glazed faience beads. Female figurines were painted and decorated with ornaments and varied hairstyles.³⁰ These female figurines are considered to be mother goddesses.

³⁰<http://www.discover-pakistan.com/mehrgarh.html> (accessed June 20, 2018)



Figure 6.4 Animal Figurine from Mehrgarh, <https://www.discover-pakistan.com/mehrgarh.html>



Figure 6.5 Female Figurines from Mehrgarh, <https://www.thehistoryhub.com/mehrgarh-facts-pictures.htm>

6.2 Pottery from Indus Valley

A variety of pottery has been found in Harappa and Mohenjodaro. In most of the houses there was a potter's wheel. The vessels are of different sizes and shapes according to their use in the daily life. According to the material used in the making, the pottery can be categorized in two groups, i.e. stone vases and earthenware vases. The unavailability of stone in the Indus Valley region suggests that it was imported from other regions. Stone pottery was used to grind something or as oil jars.

While the earthenware vases are the characteristic artifact of the Indus Valley. The fertile clay from the nearby river was used for the pottery which is found in numerous styles, types, shapes and design. There were two main purposes for which the pottery was used; number one the utilitarian purpose, and number two funerary and ritual purposes. The utilitarian pottery was used to store food, grains, oil and even crops; whereas a great number of funeral pottery has been excavated from the graves which were buried with the dead (Figure 6.6). Moreover, the pottery was also exported to other regions for the trade purpose.

³¹Jonathan M. Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization* (Oxford University Press, 1998).



Figure 6.6 Different Sizes and Shapes of Indus Valley Pottery,
<https://worldciv1team3.weebly.com/blog/chapter-4-the-rise-of-harappan-society>

The pottery consists of the following shapes and styles.

1. Goblets (small glasses)
2. Shallow dishes (plates)
3. Bowls and cups for domestic use
4. Beaker type jar
5. Jar with pedestal
6. Ledge necked jar
7. Vase like pots
8. Heavy based jars with lids
9. Ribbed pottery
10. Storage jars
11. Perforated jars as strainers
12. Kidney shaped designs
13. Miniature vessels to keep perfume
14. Tiny pots with narrow opening to contain eye powder
15. Small trays for liquids
16. Large jars buried in the earth to keep family treasure
17. Jars with narrow neck and elongated shape
18. Small dishes and pots for religious offerings
19. Jars with round or pointed base (used to bury partly in earth).³²

³²Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*.



Figure 6.7 Different shapers of Harapan Pottery,
<https://blogvirasatehind.com/2018/06/26/the-meluha/>

The pottery is ornamented with decorative motifs consisting of floral motifs, geometric motifs and figural motifs. The geometric motifs include squares, chess board pattern, triangles, circles, intersecting circles, scales, diamonds and horizontal bands. The floral motifs comprise of pipal leaves, palm leaves, trefoil and rosettes. The figural motifs include sparrow, peacock, geese, bull, antelopes, reindeers, monkey, goat, fish and simplified human figures. Most of the designs run horizontally around the pottery. The decorations of the pots for secular use and of the funerary vessels differ. Secular pottery was not much decorated. The peacock on the pots is the representation of sacred bird and depicts their belief after death.



Figure 6.8 Pot with bull and plant motifs (left), Pot with fish and geometric motifs (right), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/gemstories/6871619213>

The color schemes used for the decoration of pottery are:

1. Buff or pink

³³Kenoyer, Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization.

2. Red and black
3. White and green.³⁴

“The pottery of Indus Valley civilization is an excellent example of ancient glazed pottery.”³⁵ The pots were shaped on the potter's wheel and sometimes made free hand, after which they were baked in kiln. After painting and decorating, the pot was polished with a bone or stone. The kilns were round with domed tops, while some were in the form of fire-pit. Indus valley people were skilled in baking and had knowledge of controlled firing.³⁶

6.3 Master Ceramists of Pakistan

I. Mian Salahuddin (1938 – 2006)

Mian Salahuddin was among a few ceramicists in Pakistan. He graduated from the National College of Arts and studied ceramics under Japanese ceramist, Koichi Takita Sensei. He had later been linked with NCA as a Ceramics teacher. His works consists of diverse variety of mediums including paper, wood, glass, steel and primarily clay. His ceramic pieces depict the modification of traditional pottery into sculptures representing certain meanings. Among the sources of inspiration for his works, the most important are the words which he wanted to express. Moreover, he took the natural forms which he manipulated in his art work. His subsequent works lack details and are more symbolic. He was of the view that the medium used by the artist influences his personality, so did the clay influence his temperament.³⁷



Figure 6.9 Fired Clay Cones by Mian Salahuddin,
http://indpaedia.com/ind/index.php/Salahuddin_Mian

³⁴Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*.

³⁵<https://www.importantindia.com/15385/brief-note-on-indus-valley-pottery-harappan-pottery/> (accessed on June 25, 2018)

³⁶Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*.

³⁷Salima Hashmi and Quddus Mirza, *50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1997), 100.

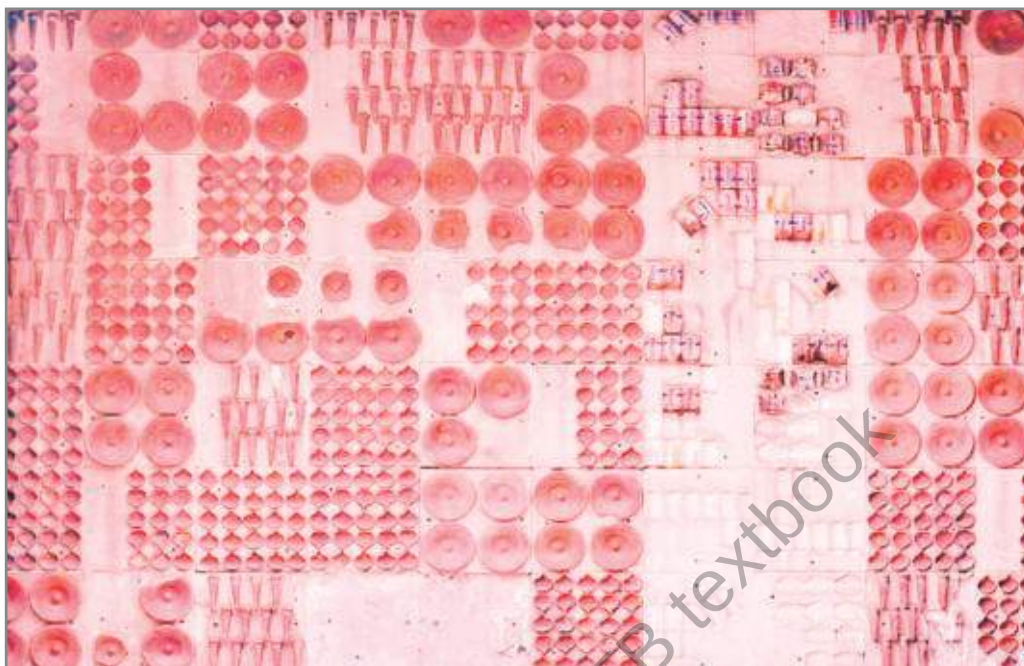


Figure 6.10 Salahuddin Mian's Mural at NCA, Lahore,
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/altamash/2380643930>

“I do not think of an audience, I simply work to please myself. I do not care about who is going to buy it, or like it, or even look at it.”³⁸ After molding and drying, the clay pieces are baked, sanded and then glazed. Mian Salahuddin said,

“When leaves are falling from the trees I collect my materials; leaves and branches, which when burnt leave behind ashes that are used in the glaze. These ashes change the colors to earth tones. I love the colors of the earth, not raw but subtle, mellow tones. Ceramics as an art is unappreciated. There are problems with materials, few outlets and the public generally do not understand non-utility pottery. That is why so few artists and sculptors go into this field. For me it is a labor of love.”³⁹

He was profoundly experimental with different methods, techniques and media. By recycling the nature through the ashes of the fallen leaves, Mian Salahuddin referred to immortality and also the nature-cycle. The forms created by his hands reflect his inner emotions. Most of his artworks are based on ironic ideas. The glazes depict his richness of imagination. Each ceramic piece is a work of visual pleasure consisting of connected parts unparalleled in the art world. “Wall based horses and rams heads, conical paper weights, and a diverse array of forms” all reveal his conceptual approach.⁴⁰

³⁸Mian Salahuddin, http://indpaedia.com/ind/index.php/Salahuddin_Mian, (accessed on July 3, 2018)

³⁹Mian Salahuddin, http://indpaedia.com/ind/index.php/Salahuddin_Mian, (accessed on July 3, 2018)

⁴⁰http://indpaedia.com/ind/index.php/Salahuddin_Mian (accessed on July 3, 2018)

ii. Masood Kohari (1939 – Present)

Masood Kohari's work is mostly in ceramics and he is one of Pakistan's finest ceramic artists. Also, his drawings, paintings and crystal collages are world famous. His endeavors in ceramics started with his visit to Thatta.

“For centuries ceramics have been considered medium of artistic expression in Thatta... The artist in Kohari was deeply fascinated by this medium. Inspired, he made exploratory trip to Hala, another town in Sind, which is traditionally the center of Sindhi pottery. The trip to Hala decided Kohari to work seriously in the new medium.”⁴¹

He took some material from potters and designed some tiles in blue and white illustrating his typical figural style. “In 1964 when he went off to Gujranwala... formed strong ties working with the ceramic craftsmen, learning about clay and beginning a life-long fascination with the qualities of clay and fire.”⁴³

“To learn the age-old secrets of shaping, firing and glazing wet clay into toys, jars and vases, he decided to live with these craftsmen, whose trade had been handed down from father to son, for centuries.”

He became a master in firing and glazing techniques. He experimented by deliberately ignoring the conventional use of oxides and by letting them take unusual patterns. He was used to shape his vases, bowls and jars in distorted non-functional forms, and sometimes even with cracks due to over firing. He carved the life of the craftsmen of Gujranwala on the tiles and pottery depicting the farmers, cows, houses, children and womenfolk (Figure 6.11).⁴⁴

In 1968, he... mounted a spectacular ceramics show at the Karachi Arts Council. It included four brilliantly colored, 8ft tall columns measuring 15 inches in circumference; 70 wall based reliefs, large urns, and a series of tiles he titled: War and Peace.”⁴⁵

“Kohari's desire to work with glass led him to France where he visited established glass studios and workshops, and on to the famous glass artworks center of Marino near Venice in Italy.”⁴⁶

He has been living in Paris since 1969, has been practicing crystal fire paintings and crystal collages. He exhibits in Parisian galleries and Pakistani as well. He claims, “I am not potter, I am painter in clay”.⁴⁷

⁴¹<http://www.caroun.com/Painting/Pakistan/Painters/MasoodKohari.html> (accessed on July 6, 2018)

⁴²http://indpaedia.com/ind/index.php/Masood_Kohari

⁴³<http://www.caroun.com/Painting/Pakistan/Painters/MasoodKohari.html>

⁴³<http://www.caroun.com/Painting/Pakistan/Painters/MasoodKohari.html>

⁴⁴http://indpaedia.com/ind/index.php/Masood_Kohari

⁴⁵http://indpaedia.com/ind/index.php/Masood_Kohari

⁴⁶<http://www.caroun.com/Painting/Pakistan/Painters/MasoodKohari.html>



Figure 6.11 Pot with carved Gujranwala's Women and Children,
<http://www.caroun.com/Painting/Pakistan/Painters/MasoodKohari.html>