

## PAINTING OF INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

In the previous lesson, we learnt the prehistoric paintings of India. In this lesson, we will learn about the painting of the Indus Valley Civilization. The earliest known phase of Indian art belongs to the Indus valley culture from about the middle of 3rd millennium BCE to about 1700 B.C., which was brought to light in the 19th C.E. by the sensational discovery of the great civilization. Harappa and Mohenjodaro are the most important sites where we find traces of the Indus civilization. The culture disclosed at these sites is essentially urban. Advanced building materials were used for the construction of houses. It included a bathroom, upper storeys, walls etc. The existence of temples, assembly halls, granaries, workshops, hostels and market places, and modern drainage systems tell volumes about this advanced civilization. It was natural that arts and crafts flourish greatly in a society so highly developed socially and economically. For the present, we shall confine ourselves to the paintings found on Indus pottery which were largely used for storage and burial purposes. Burial jars containing food grains, ornaments, and utensils for the service of the departed have been discovered.



### OBJECTIVES

After learning the lesson, the learner will be able to:

- write the forms painted in Indus Valley pottery;
- describe in brief the art of the Harappan style;
- state the enlisted paintings on different Harappan jars and potteries;
- explain about the geometrical patterns of Indus potteries;
- identify the motifs used in this period.



### 2.1 ANIMAL FORMS IN INDUS POTTERY

First, we need to know the painting found in the Indus potteries. Most probably, the only source of Indus painting is the Indus pottery discovered from the ruins of Harappa and Mohenjodaro. They depict enormous sensitivity, freedom of expression, love of nature, natural forms and bold geometric patterns. The art forms of the Indus Valley are unique. These motives evolved through the centuries, enriching the language of Indian art. The Indus painting displays some of the most interesting characters of its rich artistic heritage that existed ages back.

#### Basic Information

Painted figures of bulls, tigers, antelopes, snakes, and fishes are found commonly on Indus potteries. Hunting scenes show antelopes with a buster on a pot from a cemetery.

The Indus pottery is bright and dark red or buff in colours. These are sturdy and well-baked. Almost all the potteries are painted with black bands around their surfaces. The potteries of various sizes and shapes are all rendered in round.



**Fig. 2.1:** Serving Pot with Painted Snake Pattern

Pots were used for various purposes in the Indus Valley, e.g. cooking, serving, storage and burial. Most of the painted figures are found in storage and burial potteries because cooking jars would not be able to sustain the mineral colours.

## Painting of Indus Valley Civilization

Title	:	<b>Pot with Snake Pattern</b>
Artist	:	Unknown
Medium	:	Mineral colour on clay
Period	:	Harappan 2500 BCE
Style	:	Harappan Style

### General Description

This pot is Buff in colour with a wide mouth and short height. Most probably, it was used for serving food. The area of the entire bowl is encircled by a motif of a snake. The motif coils around the body or the bowl. The wavy horizontal line in for layer creates a beautiful design.

The pots are made in a potter's wheel and baked in a fire. The skill required to achieve the colour of the pot is very important. The potters of the Indus Valley were masters in this craft.

## 2.2 HARAPPAN POTTERY- STORAGE JAR

Now, let us learn about the painting found in Harappan potteries.

### Basic Information

The potters of the Indus Valley civilisation followed their prehistoric ancestors to stylise the animal figure drawings. The simplification of animal forms is very interesting. Some specialised artisans were appointed to decorate these pots.

It is said that the artists of the Indus valley had a great feel for natural forms and could depict them with marvellous skill. It can be well understood when you look into Indus-painted pottery.

Title	:	<b>Pot with Bull and Antelope</b>
Artists	:	Unknown
Medium	:	Mineral colour on clay
Period	:	Harappan 2500 BCE
Style	:	Harappan Style

## MODULE - 1

Historical Appreciation of  
Indian Painting and  
Sculpture



Notes

## MODULE - 1

Historical Appreciation of  
Indian Painting and  
Sculpture



Notes



**Fig. 2.2:** Storage Jar with Bulls and Antilopes

### General Description

This jar is moulded. Probably, it was used to ship oil, grain and preserve food. This beautiful red jar is decorated with animal forms enclosed between black circular bands all over the body-of-the-Jar. The central portion is occupied by a large bull decorated with criss-cross patterns and bands. The elongated shape of the bull resembles the terracotta bull of Harappa. Bulls are represented as the symbol of power and strength and often are used in art as a motif.

### 2.3 WIDE MOUTH SERVING POT, HARAPPAN POTTERY

Dear learner, now you will understand the paintings on another serving pot with motifs.

#### Basic Information

Different types of pots in many sizes and shapes, are found in the Harappan civilization. These pots are used for different purposes. This pot might have been used as a serving bowl.



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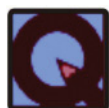


**Fig. 2.3: Serving Pot with Painted Tiger Design**

Title	:	<b>Pot with painted tiger design</b>
Artist	:	Unknown
Medium	:	Mineral colour on clay
Period	:	Harappan
Style	:	Harappan Style

### General Description

This beautiful tiger design is delightfully rendered to suit the width of the vessel. The long slender body of the tiger is adjusted between firm lines forming circular bands around the vessel. The body of the tiger bears crisscross lines, almost covering the entire area. Round dots above the tiger, along its entire length lends an interesting character to the entire design. The rendering of the schematic design to fill the space is amazing. In spite of the abstraction of the form of the tiger, the painter retains the character of the animal.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 2.1

Choose the most appropriate option.

- What are the base colours of Harappan pottery?
  - White and Black
  - Sky blue and blue
  - Red and Buff
  - All of these

## MODULE - 1

Historical Appreciation of  
Indian Painting and  
Sculpture



Notes

2. What animals are found depicted in the pots and jars?
  - (i) Tiger and snake
  - (ii) Bull and fish
  - (iii) Bull and Birds
  - (iv) All of these

### 2.4 GEOMETRICAL PATTERNS ON INDUS POTTERY

You need to know about the geometric design found on the Indus jar.

#### Basic Information

The Indus pottery displays a wide range of geometric designs in storage and burial jars. The earliest known geometric designs were found 3rd millennium BCE. Pots, plates, mugs and cooking vessels show an array of delightful geometric designs. The geometric designs are sometimes adjusted in between animal forms forming interesting patterns. Sometimes they exist as independent designs. Circles, squares and their variants are most commonly used. Other forms include bands of different thicknesses around the jars. The base colours are buff red with black lines on them. The design of the geometrical forms is very attractive and appreciable. Indus Valley cups and jars with geometric designs shown the artist's ability to create powerful symbols through geometrical patterns.



**Fig. 2.4:** Tall Burial Jar with Conical Neck and Flaringrim

## Painting of Indus Valley Civilization

Title	:	<b>Tall burial jar with conical neck and flaring rim and one smaller round jar</b>
Artist	:	Unknown
Medium	:	Mineral colour on clay
Period	:	Harappan 2500 BCE
Style	:	Harappan Style

### General Description

The black geometrical designs are arranged in asymmetrical pattern. The motifs are painted on the jar surface, which is red in colour. This red colour is obtained by the primer of fining. The designs made in black are largely fish-scale (semi-circular) shaped. The occurrence of circular patterns can be associated with the fact that circles could be made using rope and stick on soft clay, unlike other shapes, which are very difficult to draw. The Indus artist implies a sophisticated understanding of the principles of geometry; by repeating the circular patterns and overlapping them with beautiful semi-circular patterns beautiful design is created. The two largest vessels in the above-mentioned picture are painted burial pottery from Harappa. These two vessels chronologically belongs to the earlier period.

## 2.5 SERVICE POT WITH GEOMETRIC FISH MOTIF

Different types of motifs are decorated on the pots, so learners let us learn about them.

### Basic Information

The pottery decoration of Indus Valley pottery reflects the greatness of those painters. These pots are graceful and proportionately shaped. There are a very limited variety of shapes of the pots found in the Indus valley



**Fig. 2.5: Service Pot with Geometric Fish Motif**

## MODULE - 1

Historical Appreciation of  
Indian Painting and  
Sculpture



Notes

## MODULE - 1

Historical Appreciation of  
Indian Painting and  
Sculpture

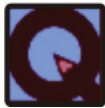


### Notes

Title : **Service pot with Geometric fish motif**  
Medium : Mineral Colour on clay  
Period : Harappan 2500 BCE  
Style : Harappan Style

### General Description

This pot from Mehargarh is wheel-turned, extremely thin and delicate, made from fine high quality clay. This vessel was painted with a black outline before firing and afterwards coloured with yellow, white and red pigments. Indus pottery includes goblets, dishes, narrow-necked vases etc., with beautiful geometric lines and patterns. The serving pot with the fish pattern mentioned in the text is a beautifully painted pattern with a triangular lines forming lovely pattern to indicate scales on the fish's body. The upper section of the pot is also decorated with-triangular black lines. The painter has used triangular shape in different parts of its body. The colour scheme is very sober and harmonious.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 2.2

1. Write about the fish scale pattern in Indus pottery in brief.
2. Write about the serving pot with a geometric fish motif in brief.
3. What Geometric patterns are used in pottery by the artists?



### ACTIVITY

Design any three pots found in the Indus Valley Civilisation, use motifs and symbols as your choice and colour those pots. Also, write the name of the motifs used.

Pots	Name of Motifs



## 2.6 BIRD FORMS ON INDUS POTTERY

You need to know one more form decorated in Indus pottery.

### Basic Information

The beautifully painted bird form seen in Indus pottery, designed aesthetically along with foliage and geometric designs, tell a volume about the aesthetic sensibilities of the Indus painter. The lines used to paint bird forms are flowing yet disciplined. The bird forms are painted with black lines on a red or buff bases. Delightful bird forms can be found on storage jars from the Harappan period. Arranged between foliage and geometric design, the peacock looks alive. The black lines are uniformly thick and have a wonderful flow. The design is simple yet aesthetic.



Notes



**Fig. 2.6:** Storage Jar with Peacock Motif

## MODULE - 1

Historical Appreciation of  
Indian Painting and  
Sculpture



### Notes

Title : **Storage Jar with Peacock Motif**  
Medium : Mineral Colour on clay  
Period : Harappan 2500 BCE  
Style : Harappan Style

### General Description

Delightful bird forms with open-designed wings can be found on storage jars from the Harappan period. Adjusted between geometric design, the birds look alive. The black lines around the neck and bottom of the jar are uniformly thick and have a rhythmic flow. The design is simple. The potters of the Indus Valley civilization worked out a few forms. Each suited the shape of the pot. The painter developed the contour, proportion and decoration.

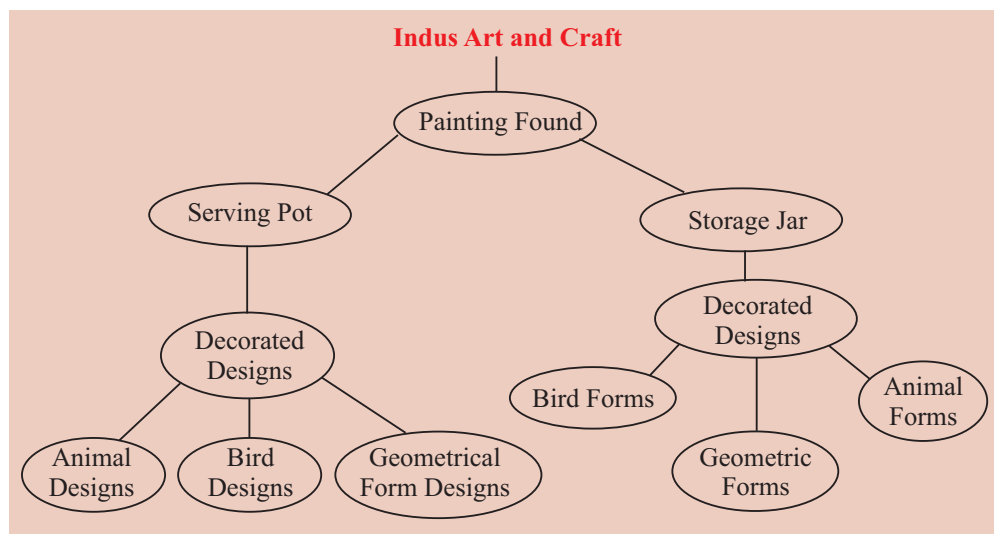


### INTEXT QUESTIONS 2.3

1. Give two examples of two potteries with bird motifs.
2. How are the bird motifs designed between the foliage?
3. Describe in two lines the bird form.



### WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT





**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

The learner

- use the decoration of painted potteries on any other art objects.
- use the motifs, symbols and create a beautiful composition.



**TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

1. Describe the size, shape, and structure of Indus potteries, Are the designs in the pots similar or diversified?
2. Write about the animal forms of Indus pottery.
3. Explain the colour and treatment of the subject in Indus pottery. What are the subjects that the Indus artist painted?
4. Which period do the potteries belong to? Mention the dates. What is the purpose for which potteries were used in the Indus civilization?
5. How were the animal forms fitted according to the different shapes of jars? Give an example.
6. Write in briefly about the serving pot with a tiger motif.
7. Write about the balance and proportion of geometric patterns in Indus painting.
8. When were the earliest painted pottery with geometric patterns found?
9. Which colour is used to paint the designs of the jar?
10. When was the earliest pottery found?



**ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS**

**2.1**

1. (iii) Red and Buff.
2. (iv) All of these

**2.2**

1. Fish scale patterns were the most popular geometric designs used in Indus pottery. These patterns are variants of circles which is supposed to be the most important shape used by Indus artist.

## MODULE - 1

Historical Appreciation of  
Indian Painting and  
Sculpture



### Notes

## Painting of Indus Valley Civilization

2. The geometric serving pot with the fish pattern mentioned in the text is beautifully painted with spontaneous triangular lines forming a lovely pattern inside the fish's body. The upper section of the pot is also decorated with triangular blacklines.
3. Circle, square and triangle.

### 2.3

1. Elongated storage jar with peacock motif and round pot with leaves and birds.
2. Birds beautifully adjusted in between simple delightful floral forms.
3. Elongated storage jar with painted peacock motif having uniformly flowing black lines. Peacock seems to be in action.

### GLOSSARY

Symbol	Sign or representation of an idea in graphic form
Glaze	Shine or polish
Moulded	Making of an object by changing the form of the basic material
Wheel turned	Pottery made on potters wheel
Vessel	Container
Band	Circular lines used as design
Marvellous	Something very beautiful
Polychrome	Lot of colours used together