Pottery Designs as an Evidence of Continuity and Change: Mature to Late Indus

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Abstract: The paper highlights the significance of the study of painted designs on ceramics with special emphasis on their role in understanding the notions of decline or continuity of traditions over time. Through the study of painted designs on ceramics datable to Mature Indus period and Late Indus period at sites such as Amri and Chanhu-Jo-Daro, the study establishes that there appears to be a cultural continuity between the two periods.

Keywords: Ceramics, Painted Designs, Indus Civilization, Amri, Late Indus Period, Pirak, Jhukar

Introduction

Indus Civilization flourished in South Asia between 2500-1800 BC and is widely known for having a standardized material culture and city system which was indigenously developed. The primary core of this civilization is located in modern Pakistan along the Indus River and its tributaries. Some settlements were also found beyond the territories of modern Pakistan, and into the various states of India such as: Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan. The Peripheral settlement extended along the Makran Coast up to the Gulf state and through the passes into Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkmenistan. The settlements are also recorded within the Gangetic Plain (Fig.1). In this paper an attempt has been made to see the changes in the pottery designs during the Mature and the Late Indus Period.

Pottery plays a very important role in archaeological investigations. The archeologists often refer to pottery as an alphabet of Archaeology. It means that this type of artifact provides much of the basic information associated with any type of settlement and several aspects of given society for instance, chronology, trade, manufacturing technology and distribution, sources utilized and use of the items. An archaeologist considers pottery as the main factor for onsite chronology. Different period’s pottery provides different information. Every period’s pottery has a different characteristic which indicates either continuity or change.
Pottery making started from the early times and continued up to contemporary times. In Sindh there are craftsmen who make pottery and they produce it in different ways and decorate with several designs. Here the designs, techniques and motifs of pottery of Indus Period are studied keeping in mind various parameters: with main emphasis on (a) whether early designs continue in the subsequent periods or change and (b) what were the main elements of change between Mature and Late Indus period pottery.

Previous researches has shown that technology of pottery manufacturing during Mature Indus is excellent in all aspects, however, in the later periods the technology of pottery making declined. Some of the decorative designs seen on ceramics datable to the Mature Indus period continued to the Late period, in addition to new designs also
introduced during the later period. This was evident from archaeological research done at several sites viz: Jukhar; Chanhu-Jo-Daro and Mohenjo Daro in Sindh, the Cemetery H in Punjab and Pirak in Balochistan. These sites have furnished evidence of Late Indus period.

Figure 2: Map showing the geographical setting of Pakistan, indicating major Mature Indus and Late Indus Period sites
Jukhar (Majumdar 1934) has furnished evidence of different type of pottery that showed continuity of material culture from one era into another. N. G. Majumdar (1934), during his surveys at Mohenjo Daro observed that based on the occurrence of certain ceramic forms such as, bowls, dishes, dish-on-stand etc. that there are stylistic changes between the ceramics from early periods and later periods.

Later period pottery was also discovered from the sites Mohenjo Daro, Amri and Chanhu-Jo-Daro showed continuity Mackay (1943). When Mackay excavated Chanhu-Jo-Daro and followed closely his work at Mohenjo Daro, he faced difficulty in isolating the Jukhar pottery, as its cultural affinity was yet to be established.

Wheeler (1968:133) later persisted in interpreting Jukhar as representative of a ‘Squatter culture of low grade’, associated with the turmoil following the downfall of the Indus Civilization. Subsequently, Fairservis (1971) attributed Jukhar as a Late appearance of Harappan.

Possehl, (1977) meanwhile viewed this phase as a continuity of cultural tradition, from the Harappan to the historical period. In his view, the decline and abandonment of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa marks not the end of the Indus Valley cultural tradition, but merely the urban phase within it. Allchin (1982:242), further supports the theory of continuity and considered the continuity to be present between Harappa & Jukhar and although they saw a distinct shift in craft techniques, but believed, the population to have remained substantially unchanged. Mughal also explored Jukhar between 1972-74 and concluded that the ceramic forms remain rather unchanged, although it is seen associated with new cultural material.

The clay used by the Jukhar people was the same as by the Mature Indus People and at Chanhu-Jo-Daro the Jukhar Period people fired their pottery in a similar way. They used trenches and pits and these pits were covered or heaped with brush wood and straw and this process of firing is still practiced in present times (Mackay 1943). When they used the straw for the firing, this straw made the slip on the pots disfigure because the curious marks of the straw were found on this. They fired their pottery carelessly as compared to the Harappan people. Un-painted or plain vessels which were found from Chanhu-Jo-Daro were all handmade. It means the handmade pottery of the Jukhar period was mostly un-painted.

Red and black were the two primary colours used in the decoration of the Jukhar pottery. Red was used for broad horizontal bands and black for edging of these bands as well as motifs and patterns (Mackay 1935-36 :107). Comparisons and relations between Harappan and Jukhar period on the basis of the fabrics and style of the decoration shows that the mature period they manufactured pots, which were small and large. The shapes of the vessels continue from the Mature period to the later period on the basis of designs and motifs on the pottery. A few examples in this regard include the Harappan Jar in Plate-XXXIII 68, which resembles the Jukhar vessel in Plate-XLI 38. These two vessels are same in the shape but the designs or motifs are different. Similarly,
from Chanhu-Jo-Daro, a pot of the Mature Indus period (Plate-XXIX 37), is almost identical to that of the Jukhar period vessel (Plate XLI 50). The pedestal dishes were in use by the Indus people from the early period and this type of vessels were found from Jukhar period as well, which shows the people used such vessels, but the designs were entirely different. Incised designs were commonly used in the Harappan period, (Plate-XXXVI 12-34), the same designs continued during the Jukhar period (Plate-XL 17). The use of red polished slip was another link between the two periods; although the patterns employed were entirely different (Mackay, 1935-36:127).
Mature Indus Period

Source: Period-IIB (Amri)
Plate #: 70
Figure #: 277

Description:
- Fish Scale Design
- Design executed with precision
- Not associated with any other design

Late Indus Period

Source: Period-IIIC (Amri)
Plate #: 92
Figure #: 484

Description:
- Fish Scale Design
- Design executed without any precision
- Beside the fish scale design, two vertical lines, between which are horizontal lines present.

Figure 4: Fish Scale Pattern

Mature Indus Period

Source: Chanhu-Jo-Daro
Plate #: XXXVIII
Figure #: 8

Description:
- This design is called the intersecting circle design, and between these circles, a single circle with dot is present.
- This design is accompanied by a floral design.

Late Indus Period

Source: Chanhu-Jo-Daro
Plate #: XLVIII
Figure #: 21

Description:
- Similar representation of the former, but representation appears crude and not accompanied by additional designs.

Figure 5: Intersecting Circle Design
Mature Indus Period

Source: Period-IIB (Amri)
Plate #: 71
Figure #: 297
Description:
- This pottery is called the perforated pottery and such forms occur commonly in sites of the Mature Indus period.

Late Indus Period

Source: Period-IIIC (Amri)
Plate #: 88
Figure #: 431
Description:
- Such forms also continue into the Late Indus Period.

Figure 6: Perforated Pottery

Mature Indus Period

Source: Chanhu-Jo-Daro
Plate #: XXXVII
Figure #: 8
Description:
The sherd is decorated with a chequered pattern. One square is decorated with lines and one square is blank.

Late Indus Period

Source: Chanhu-Jo-Daro
Plate #: XLVI
Figure #: 1
Description:
Same pattern is seen to continue into the Later Period. But in this plate we can see the blank square is designed with crossed lines.

Figure 7: Chequered Pattern
Mature Indus Period

Source: Period-IIB (Amri)
Plate #: 62
Figure #: 276

Description:
- The top and bottom decorated with flying birds and in between them is seen the chequered design.
- The chequered design are painted with precision.
- One square is filled with color and the neighbouring squares are blank.

Late Indus Period

Source: Period-III A (Amri)
Plate #: 72
Figure #: 298

Description:
- Chequered design and flying birds are on the sides.
- The designs are painted without any precision.
- One square is filled with color and the neighbouring squares are blank.

Figure 8: Chequered Motifs

Intersecting Circles

Indus People decorated their pots with this motif (Fig. 5). This design shows the empty petals and the mid portion of the design being filled with dots, cross lines, circle with dot and some part also being left empty. At Amri, this design was found from the Intermediate period and at Kot Diji in the later levels.

Perforated Design

These are some of the diagnostic ceramic of the Harappans (Fig. 6). They are found in large quantities from most settlements of the Indus Period. Though roughly made, they are wheel-thrown and made of red-paste normally coated with cream slip and pierced with holes on the sides. The holes are pierced from outside leaving the rugged edges on the inside. At Kot Diji such ceramics are found from the Mature Indus levels.
Chequered Motifs

It is the basic design in grid pattern decoration. (Fig. 3. 7 & 8) It was first seen in the Quetta Valley at Kulli Gul Muhammad-III, on Kulli Gul Muhammad Black on Red Slip Ware. At Amri, it was represented as a principal design on ceramics and also as a divider and filler with crosses in the blank squares. Evidence from Mohenjo Daro, Chanhu-Jo-Daro and also Jukhar revealed that the chequered motif was used commonly. Mostly one square was filled with cross hatched lines and the second square was black, but in some pot sherds, these blank squares were filled with a secondary element like dot and single or double dot in circle. The Mature Indus people also followed this pattern but they filled the empty square with a ‘Sun Motif’.

Mature Indus Period

![Mature Indus Period](image)

Late Indus Period

![Late Indus Period](image)

Source: Chanhu-Jo-Daro
Plate #: XXXI
Figure #: 19
Description:
- Ladder patterns: This type of design is very common in Mohenjo Daro. This design is mostly applied on the large jars.

Source: Chanhu-Jo-Daro
Plate #: XLVII
Figure #: 23
- Ladder patterns are found in the later period.

Ladder Design

This motif (Fig. 9) was found on big jars and such jars were found from Mohenjo Daro with downward crescent lines. The Same design was also seen on ceramics found at Chanhu-Jo-Daro with thick upwards lines.

Discussion

The study revealed that while the material culture found at Indus sites have undergone change, several of the designs represented on the pottery of the Mature Indus period continues into the later periods. However while the design remains unchanged, the
manner of their execution changes. Such continuities and change are represented by several examples listed in the paper from sites such as Amri and Chanhu-Jo-Daro. In addition, previous studies mentioned earlier have revealed that the potters of the Late Indus period at these sites adopted similar technological processes in the making of ceramics. Such continuities seen in the ceramic traditions further attest the proposition put forth by Possehl (1977) and Allchin (1982), that the decline of the Indus Civilization, merely meant the degradation of the urban way of life and not the civilization.

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