
UNIT 4 HOUSEHOLD AND DECORATIVE OBJECTS

Contents

- 4.1 Introduction
 - 4.2 Household/Shelter of Prehistoric Man
 - 4.3 Household Objects
 - 4.3.1 Artefacts
 - 4.3.1.1 Cutting and Piercing Tools
 - 4.3.1.2 Grinding Implements
 - 4.3.1.2.1 Grinder, Muller, Pounder, Pestles, Saddle Querns, Mace-Heads, Stone Tablets
 - 4.3.2 Artefacts on Perishable Materials: Wood and Bone
 - 4.4 Baskets, Earthenware and Potter's Wheel
 - 4.5 Harnessing of Fire and Flint Box
 - 4.6 Dress and Ornaments
 - 4.7 Summary
- Suggested Reading
- Sample Questions



Learning Objectives

Once you have studied this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the different types of household and decorative objects;
- understand the function of these objects;
- understand methods of use to study the relationship between people and environment; and
- understand the evolution of different household objects from prehistoric period.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

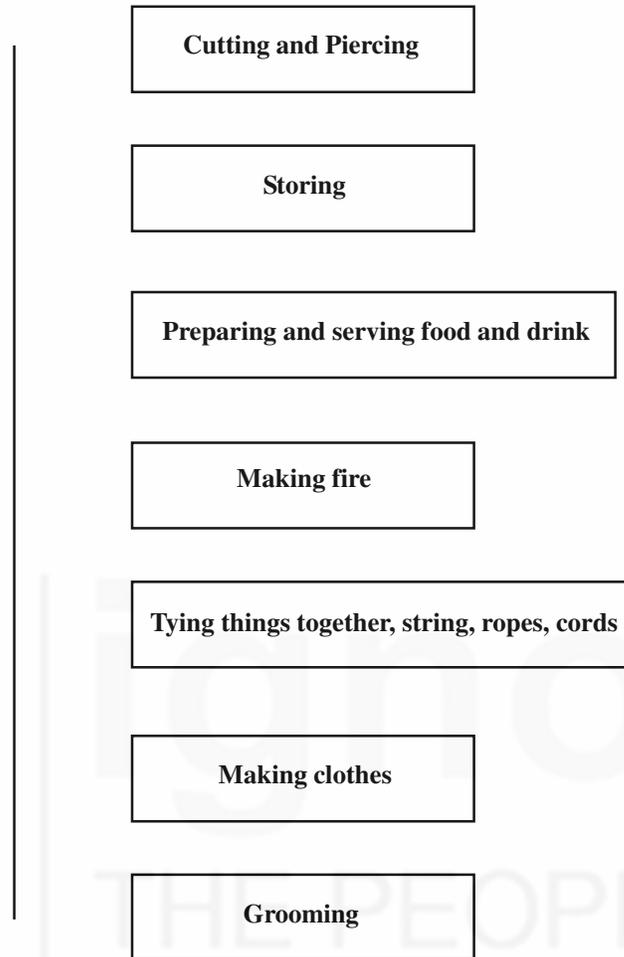
Man is a tool-making animal. Tools made by man to harness the existing environment around him for better survival. Every man either primitive or modern needs material equipment. The tools are made on various materials available in nature. With the tools man harnesses natural resources for his survival. Material culture is a vital component of human subsistence. The fundamental necessities of man to have his existence on this earth are food, shelter and clothing. The study of material culture of people is of great importance because they throw light on values of the artefacts and on the nature of invention and on the patter of diffusion of inventions and ideas. The artefacts have great importance for their relations to the whole economic and social organisation and to religious and other ceremonial practices.

Material culture means all the objects used or made by man for his survival or for supporting and improving his life. A home used to be a bustling centre of

This unit can also be read as Shelter and Material Objects.

economic activity. Utensils for making daily requirements like food, clothing and many other simple things were found in the home and abode of man. Household activities for different purposes may be categorised as follows.

HOUSEHOLD ARTICLES



4.2 HOUSEHOLD/SHELTER OF PREHISTORIC MAN

Household of early man depended on the nature of shelter or accommodation. Type of habitation differed according to the local climatic condition. In a warmer climate early men lived in open air. He needed shelter in cold and rainy weather. Caves were not convenient for habitation because a cave was dark, damp and den of carnivorous animals. Men could only venture into the cave when he learnt to use fire. With fire he could see what is inside the cave, could drive out other occupants of the cave. Prior to the discovery of use of fire most of the bones of early men recovered from the cave are proved to be of those who were prey to carnivores. This has very well proved with evidences from South Africa. Towards the end of Pleistocene times, man conveniently chose to live inside natural housing facilities like caves and rock shelters. Early man was nomadic. He selected natural shelters at different times at different locations. 'The Great Ice Age' during the Pleistocene period made the climate of temperate Europe severely cold and therefore prehistoric man lived inside caves and rock shelters comfortably, only after he discovered the use of fire. You can very well imagine the predicament of early men in bad weathers. However, even as early as Lower Palaeolithic times men could raise a kind of wind break and get shelter from inclement weather. Such evidence is found at an Acheulian site in Bihar, India (Pant and Jayswal, 1991).

With the advent of Holocene age when climate became warm and humid, and it made the man to live in open environment under the direct impact of sunlight and the dark and the moonlit night under the star laden sky. We could see emergence of new thoughts and ideas towards the end of Pleistocene with considerable cultural developments. With new climatic situation during Holocene, man gathered enormous wealth of knowledge about nature and identified cultivable cereals and started to have some kind of sedentary existence. Instead of migrating from place to place they made some kind of shelter to live in.

4.3 HOUSEHOLD OBJECTS

World of the material objects of prehistoric man is certainly too difficult to estimate. Early man used all sorts of material objects available in his surroundings either out of curiosity or for using them to defend him from predators, for food getting and for making shelter. Culture can be divided into two parts, tangible and intangible. Tangible part of the culture is also known as material culture because it consists of materials which can be seen, touched and felt and are used by man for his subsistence. You cannot see or touch the intangible part of the culture but can only feel its existence. This part consists of social behaviour, social organisation, ideas, beliefs and customs. There may be some material representation of them, such as, you may see an idol but the faith and belief connected with is intangible. Upper Palaeolithic men produced art. This has a material existence but you can only imagine the purpose and idea behind such production. Any piece of identifiable objects of prehistoric past irrespective of its material and spiritual affiliation is an essential part of 'Culture'.

Household articles on the basis of their activity may be categorised into: Cutting and Piercing, Storing, Preparing and serving food and drink, Making fire, Tying things together (string, ropes, cords), Making clothes and Grooming.

4.3.1 Artefacts

Any kind of material object made of any kind of raw material, which the early man either made or used is called an 'artefact' or a 'tool' or an 'implement'. Of all the tools made by man mostly stone tools survived the devastation of time.

4.3.1.1 Cutting and Piercing Tools

The tools for cutting and cleaving are among the most early tools invented by mankind. If at first they were only used for butchering animals, they become more varied as people began to make clothes, build shelters and gather possessions. Cutting tools presume primary importance over others because of its efficiency. With these man can exploits its environment and make other tools and devices. Cutting tools may be classified in three major ways: by their function or use, by the material of which they are made and by the techniques used to manufacture them.

In terms of the function and use the cutting tools can be broadly categorised into five groups, namely, Choppers, knives, chisels or gravers, scrapers and borers. Tool types of prehistoric period are usually studied in several ways; first by studying the stone tools, secondly by trying to imitate their function today, thirdly by observing primitive people in a comparable cultural set up making similar

tools and using them. For example a stone blade of upper Palaeolithic period looks similar to a safety razor blade of present day.

Chopper and Chopping tool: These tools are usually round or semi oval with an almost straight cutting edge. The edge is formed by removal of flakes from only the upper surface of the implement or from both the surfaces of the tools. The cutting edge may either be along the side or across the end of the specimen. These tools could have been used for chopping of meat, blocks of wood etc. These are quite heavy and large. This forms a characteristic feature of earliest tools of Palaeolithic culture.

Hand axe: The handaxes are found in various shapes, such as, pear, almond, heart. Also oval or lance like shape. Hand axes are known as multipurpose tools because many works, such as, cutting, scraping, digging and boring could be done with a single tool.

Cleavers: The cleavers are characterised by a broad, transverse cutting edge. It looks like a modern axe head. The tool was probably used for cleaving and cutting.

Scraper: As the name indicates the scrapers are used for scraping such objects as bark of trees, dressing of thin wooden or bamboo shaft and skin of animals as well as for various other purposes. According to the shape of a particular piece and the location and nature of scraping edge the tool is named as Side scraper, End Scraper, Round Scraper, Concave Scraper, Convex Scraper. Scrapers were predominant tool type of Palaeolithic period mainly in Middle Palaeolithic and continued for a longer time period till today in different raw materials.

Blade tools: The blade is a narrow or slender parallel sided flake and its length is at least twice its breadth. Special tool types made from blade are the blunted backed blade, the knives with one blunted edge. These were used for cutting foodstuffs, for carving wood and bone in households.

Some other tools: The burin or graver primarily used for engraving and for making slots in wood and bone, the notched blades were used in the same way as the contemporary spoke shaves, the borer or awl probably used to make holes. Occasionally things had to be stitched together and awls were used to make holes through materials. The blades with one or both ends sharpened were for scraping hides.

Microliths of Mesolithic period were prepared from blades and used as composite tools after hafting in a shaft. Micro-blades were hafted on shafts and were used as 'harvesting knives' or 'sickles'.

The most commonly available tools of early man were primarily made by percussion technique on rocks comprising igneous, metamorphic and indurated sedimentary rocks. Flint was used in Europe and quartzite was used in Africa and India. Quartz, chert, chalcedony, agate, jasper and number of precious and semi-precious rocks were selected for the purpose of making a tool whether it is a core tool or a flake tool, or the microliths or the Celts. Metallic tools appear at later date.

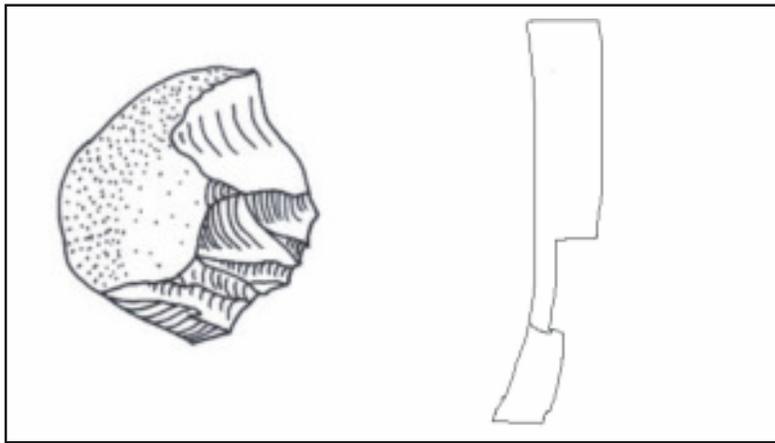


Fig. 4.1: Stone and iron Chopper

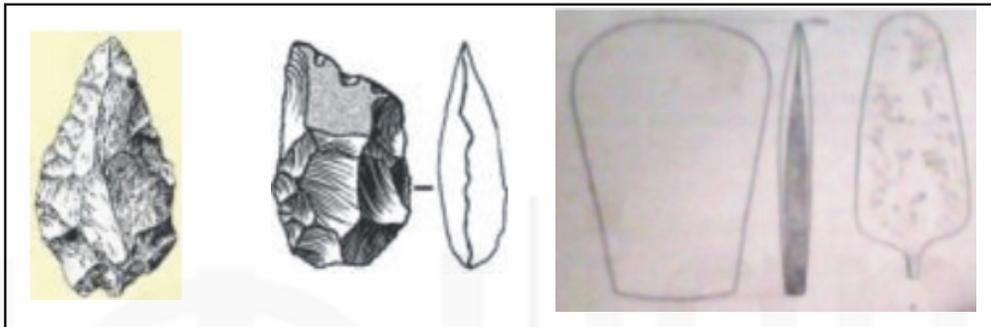


Fig. 4.2: Stone Handaxe, Cleaver and copper axe head



Fig. 4.3: Scraper, Burin, awl

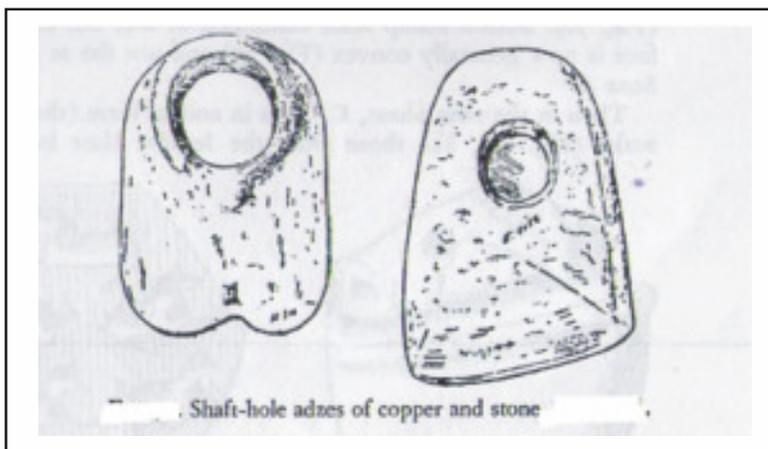


Fig. 4.4: Stone and copper adzes

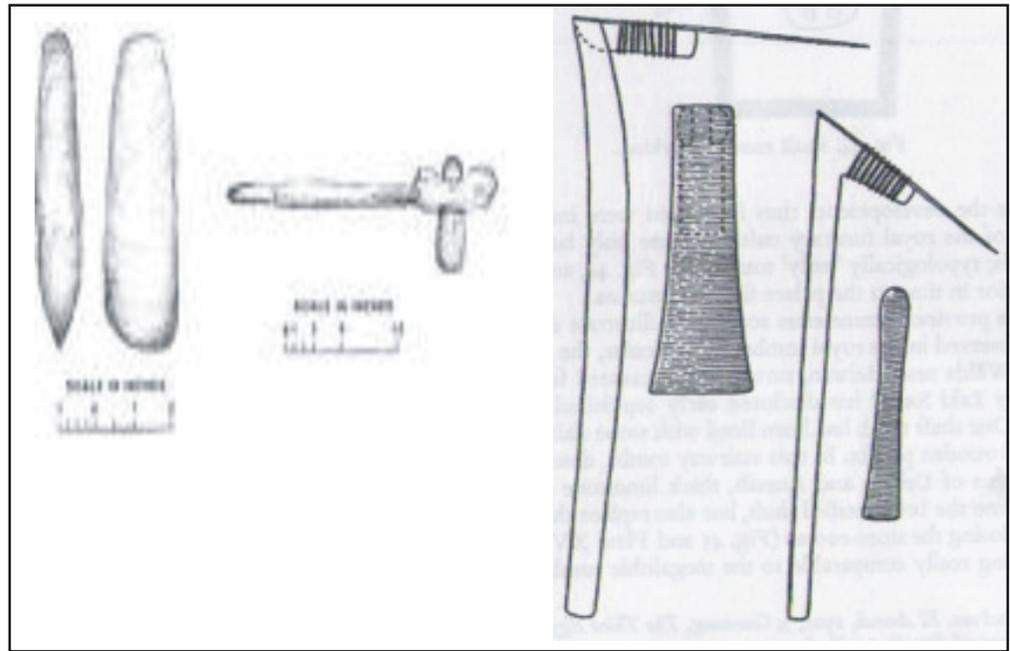


Fig. 4.5: Stone and Metal adze



Fig. 4.6: Stone and copper chisel

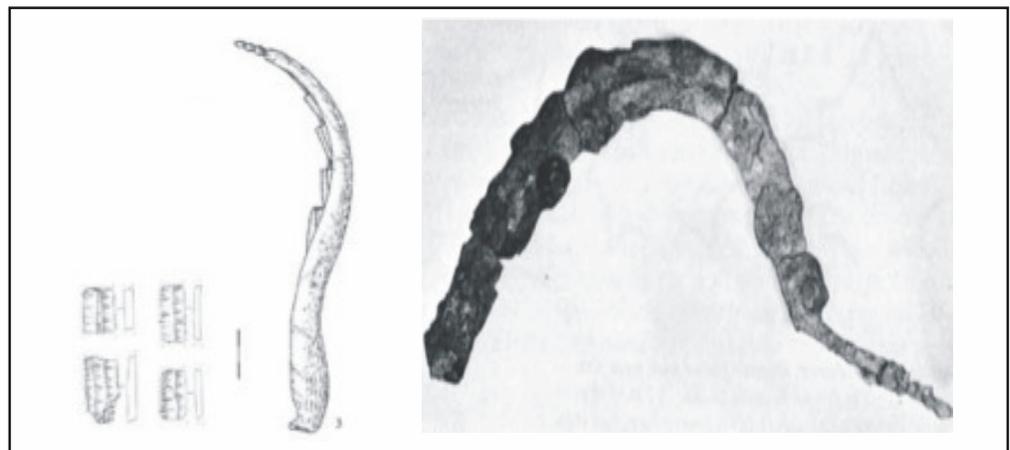


Fig. 4.7: Sickle of stone blade and iron sickle

Sharp edges of cutting tools became blunt for repeated use. Stone knives and axes were generally not ground but knapped. Re-sharpening consisted in hitting the blade near its cutting edge, flaking off small slivers of stone and leaving behind sharp ridge.

Metal blades were sharpened by whetting them with a smooth stone, dents were removed by hammering. The edges of the tools were hardened by annealing, that is, heating the tools and letting them cool slowly and hammering.

4.3.1.2 Grinding Implements

In the natural world, there are resources which may be used for everyday life directly or after some comparatively simple preparation process. Earliest humans hunted various kinds of animals and gathered edible fruits, nuts, tubers etc. Grinding implements used to play very important role in the first step of the food preparation process. It is an interesting fact that almost all the ancient grinding implements devised by humans throughout the history have continued to be used domestically even after the advent of more efficient and specialised ones. The most important achievement of use of grinders was the increase in human food supply. Many wild grass seeds which had been inedible in their raw state became edible by grinding. Cereals, especially wheat, barley, rice, millet required some tedious processing, such as, threshing, hulling or milling. In course of time, the earliest primitive grinding implement was gradually improved, enlarged and specialised for each purpose.

4.3.1.2.1 Grinder, Muller, Pounder, Pestles, Saddle Querns, Mace-Heads, Stone Tablets

Though you may say that there is no clear evidence to tell us what sort of implements were tried, we can easily imagine that man would take one of the following three possible ways according to the characteristics of the grains he used:

- Pounding which would lead to a mortar and pestle and later to a stamp mill.
- Rolling which would lead to an edge-runner.
- Rubbing which would lead to a rubbing stone, a saddle quern, and later a rotary quern.

Different courses of development of implements could be seen at different regions of the world, related to the grain available. As all of you know that rice or millet was not necessarily ground to powder, because they could be cooked after hulling only.

Following are the descriptions of some grinding implements used by early man in prehistoric times:

i) Mullers

Muller is a rubbing stone. As you very well know these are stones used for grinding grains, on a saddle quern. Today these are used all over India. In earlier periods man seem to have used only natural pebble for grinding purposes. Majority of them are made of sand stone or quartzite. The mullers were generally cylindrical stones.



Fig. 4.8: Muller

ii) Mortar and Pestle

The earliest grinding implements found from the remains of the Prehistoric era consisted of a roundish stone which was held in the hands and a larger hollowed stone for a bed stone. The hollowness is necessary for efficient impactation and to prevent grain from falling off the stone. Husks of the grains are hulled. The grains are further ground and powdered on a mortar with the help of a pestle.

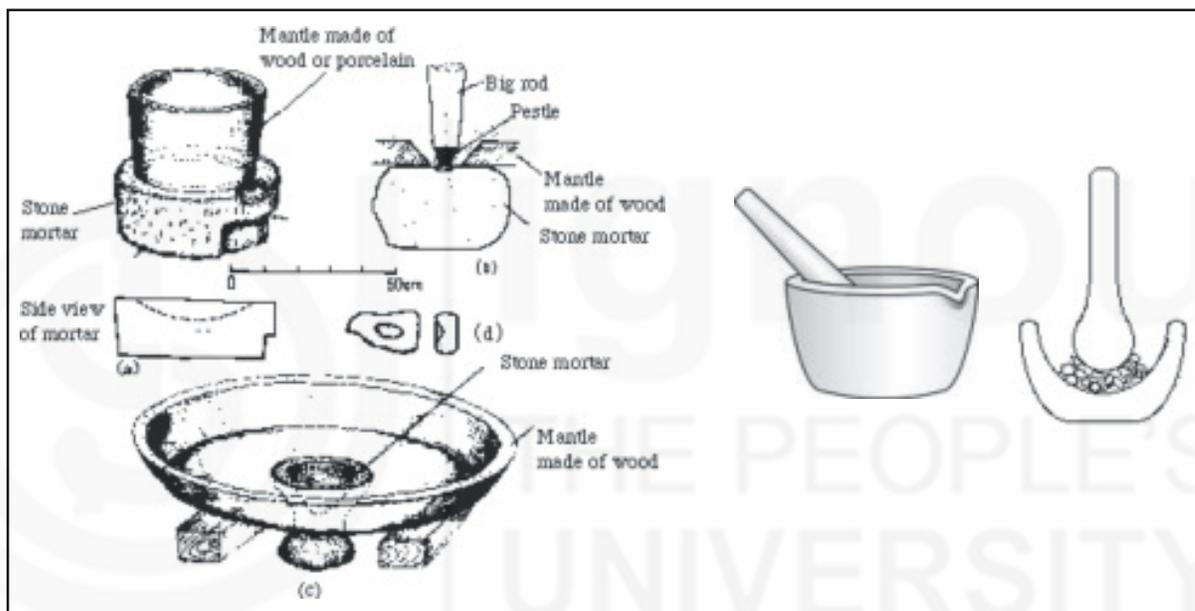


Fig. 4.9: Mortar and pestle

iii) Saddle Quern

Saddle Querns or Mill-stone is a comparatively large, roughly square or rectangular stone slabs with flattish or concave surfaces. These began to appear along with ground stone tools. Since its flat surface have smoothed and or hollowed out, it is supposed that they were used by men for crushing, grinding or milling grains. There are three types of Querns.

- Querns with circular grinding surface brought about by round ball like hammer stone or mullers.
- Querns showing up and down grinding surface with plano-convex mullers.
- Querns exhibiting both these features.

A large number of stone querns have been found both at Mohenjodaro and Harappa for grinding cereals. All these are saddle querns and no specimen of any revolving quern has been found. The two main types were those on which another stone was pushed or rolled to and fro and the others in which a second stone was used as poulder.



Fig. 4.10: Saddle quern

iv) **Rotary Quern**

The rotary quern, consisting of two circular stone discs was the beginning of a new era in grinding technology. Various evidences of fragmented pieces of rotary querns are found from all over Europe, especially Rome, South-East Asia (Taxila, 600B.C.-500A.D) and China.

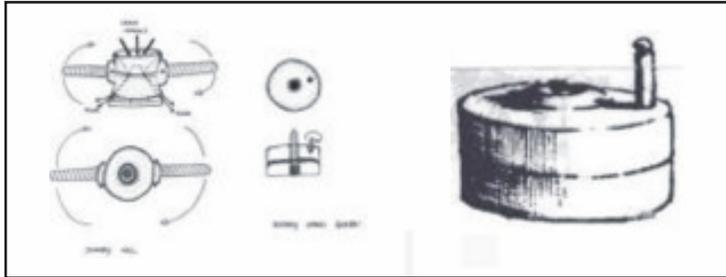


Fig. 4.11: Rotary quern

v) **Mace head**

These are of various shapes but with a drilled hole in the centre. This hole is meant for fixing the wooden haft through it. This is a kind of pounder. This is mostly found in Neolithic culture and is made of polished stone. Some mace heads are found in Mesolithic culture of Europe but those are rough and crude.



Fig. 4.12: Mace head

vi) **Stone tablet**

Small stone tablets also have been found from archaeological sites. On one or both flat sides were gracefully composed stylized zoo morphs or curvilinear geometric designs in deep relief. Paint has been found on some tablets, leading archaeologists to propose that these stone tablets were probably used to stamp designs on cloth or animal hides, or onto their own bodies. These are usually found in the habitation sites of prehistoric man. Some stone tablets found from Upper Palaeolithic caves in Europe could be an artist's sketch pad could be a tablet for writing as is found from the middle east with cuneiform writings.

4.3.2 Artefacts on Perishable Materials: Wood and Bone

You must have seen that many of our present day artefacts are made of perishable materials like wood and bone. In India and other parts of Asia bamboo is used for a large number of purposes. If you go to the villages and other rural areas you will find that bamboo and wood are used for making houses, furniture and even utensils. This is also found in the cities. We can very well say that bamboo and

wood were profusely used in making tools and utensils. Chopper, a heavy duty tool and scraper were used for making tools from bamboo and wood.

Tools made of bone, animal teeth, antler and ivory appear during the Upper Palaeolithic times. These are fashioned in the form of Baton-de-commandement, lance points, dart thrower, spear thrower, needle, harpoons and fish hooks. These implements played a major role in the subsistence economy of the people.

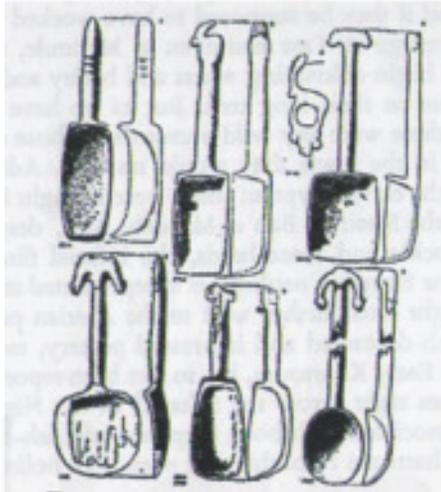


Fig. 4.13: Ivory ladles

4.4 BASKETS, EARTHENWARE AND POTTER'S WHEEL

Can you imagine life without a container? Containers function everywhere as means of transporting and storing food, artefacts and other material possessions. In addition containers are widely used in cooking and particularly in boiling of both liquids and solid food. It is also used for preserving food.

Early man at the very beginning of its evolution was very much like its primate ancestors who were foragers, meaning, they ate whatever and whenever they found anything edible, in the same way as the modern monkeys and apes do. They did not carry food item in a storing device. However, the evolved man is endowed with a foresight. He may collect his food item for sharing with others or may be storing for future consumption. For keeping food and other essential items probably they used leaves, barks of trees, shell etc. which were found in nature. Similar uses of natural objects are still found today. Perhaps he made basket like objects for keeping his things or could have dug a hole in the ground. There are evidences for such thing from various parts of the world. Earth lined baskets dug in the ground for storage of grains is known as silos and is found in many Neolithic sites. In Neolithic Egypt grains was stored in the habitation compounds in silo pits and mud-coated baskets. Gradually man learned to make container from clay. We call them pots. First evidence of pottery comes from Mesolithic culture.

The possession of pottery not only makes the storage and transportation of liquid easier, it can also be used for the storage of small grains, seeds and other materials. Pottery is also used as pipes, ornaments, ladles, lamps and for serving foods.

Sometimes potteries are used for burial. Spoons have been used for eating with since very early times. It is most likely that prehistoric people used shells or chips of wood as spoons.

Knowledge of making earthenware in large quantity is assigned to the Neolithic man who made pots from clay. Initially pots were made by hand and it served the purpose of a container. Potter's wheel was subsequently invented and wheel made earthenware were designed. The potter's wheel later revolutionised the archaic technology and industrial movement during prehistoric and modern times. No form of machinery including the locomotives is possible to move without a wheel and the principle of rotary motion.

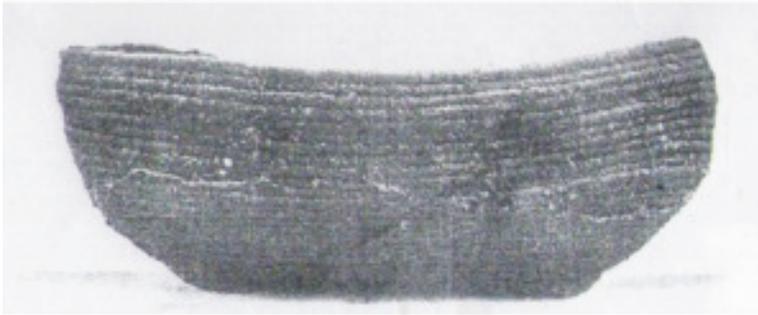


Fig. 4.14: Neolithic Basket

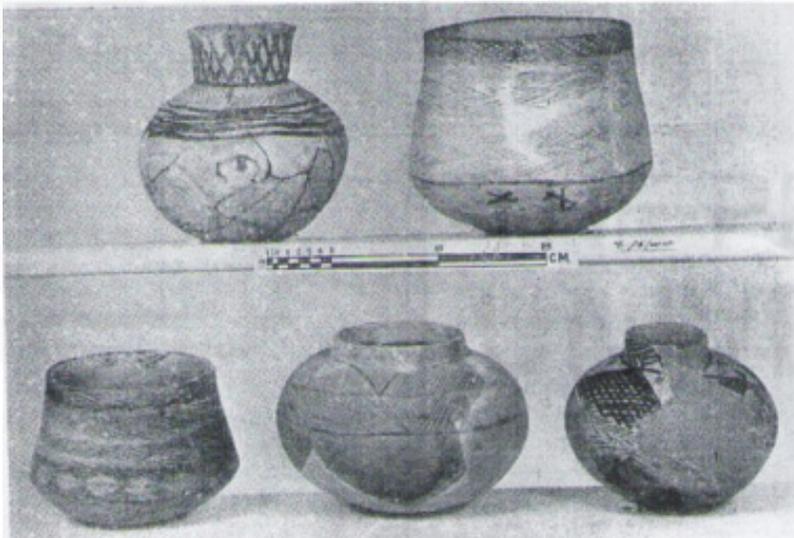


Fig. 4.15: Neolithic Pottery



Fig. 4.16: Indus Pottery

4.5 HARNESSING OF FIRE AND FLINT BOX

The use of fire is almost as old as human life. Before actually making fire, man tamed fire by harnessing it. That means by learning to control it. Like any other animal he must have been afraid of fire but then he used the natural fire and kept it burning by feeding fuel to it. Fire making came later. Possibly man used fire against attack of animals at night. With the discovery of fire they could venture into the caves and live there. *Homo erectus pekinensis* in China used fire. Fire is mainly used to make foods edible by cooking and in cold areas for warming up the body. Dried up branches, dried dung and later charcoal was used as fuel.

Man could discover that at the stroke of a stone against another, fire could be produced from the spark and is called percussion method. Man practiced it to generate fire as one of the earliest methods of producing fire. In another procedure called fire drill, one wooden stick vertically twirled on another stick placed horizontally produces spark which is captured in dried grasses and leaves. In another method known as bow drill in which, a wooden bow the string of which was wound tightly around a spike. With a hollowed out drill cap made of stone or a nut shell the spike was pressed against the fire stick and the bow was rotated back and forth to produce fire. Later on modern primitive communities began to carry a flint box that contained 'a piece of iron', another 'piece of hard igneous rock' with some amount of 'cotton' similar to the safety match box of modern times.



Fig. 4.17: Bow Drill and hand Drill

4.6 DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

As a result of physical evolution, man lost the furry body coat similar to that of Primate. Although human bodily hair is not less than those of the apes, it does not provide a furry coat to protect him from cold. Consequently, there was a need for clothing in the form of dress.

The origin of clothing is obscure. A kind of robe or a cloak made from the skin of large animals was the first to be used by man during Mousterian Culture; however it did not survive in archaeological ruins. Mousterian man lived in Europe during part of Wurm glaciation around 200,000 to 30,000 BC.

Evidence of clothing in Upper Palaeolithic period is supported by the appearance of first eyed bone needle. Needles that originated in the Solutrean culture in France from 19,000-15,000 BC, prominently occur in the later part of Solutrean and in entire Magdalenian culture.

Spinning and weaving is an innovation of Neolithic period. At the Neolithic 'Swiss-Lake dwellings' in Switzerland, evidence of 'Spinning and Weaving' came forth with the existence of spindle whorls. The earliest known woven textiles that came from the Near East is from the fabrics used for wrapping the dead bodies. Presence of spindle whorls at archaeological excavations suggest textile. Early Egyptians cultivated flax for making garments.

The inhabitants of the Indus Valley Civilization used cotton for clothing as early as the 5th millennium BC to 4th millennium BC. Yarn for weaving came from cultivated flax and from animals like sheep.

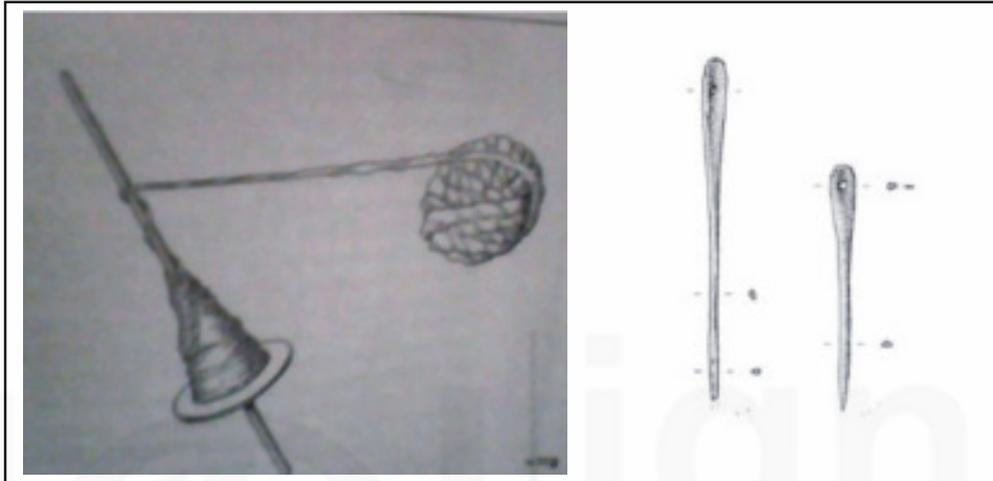


Fig. 4.18. Spindle, whorl and bone needle

Ornaments

The Upper Palaeolithic men decorated their bodies with different kinds of ornaments like necklace, perforated teeth, beads and shell and mollusc.

Beads

Evidence for the use of beads ranges between 33,000 to 45,000 years BP in Later Stone Age in South Africa. Even Neanderthals are known to have made and used beads.

Prehistoric beads were made of softer materials like sea shell, egg shell, bone, ivory, teeth, clay, stone, shale, etc. Even pine nuts, fruit pits and seeds were used as beads. Hard materials like jade were also used in early culture.

As in most ancient civilizations, women of the Harappan civilization decorated themselves with jewellery and probably men also did likewise. Rich people wore ornaments of gold, silver and precious stones. The middle classes used ornaments made of copper, bronze, shell, bones and the poor ones of terracotta and pottery made of copper, bronze, shell, bones and terracotta. A large number of beads of different sizes and shapes and materials have been recovered from almost all the sites of the Harappan civilization. These are mainly steatite and stone beads. Steatite beads are very hard and almost all these beads are white in colour. Majority of these beads were glazed either blue or green. Next to steatite the largest number of beads is made of silicate stones of transparent and opaque varieties. The transparent silicate stones being colourless quartz or rock crystal, amethyst, yellow quartz or smokey quartz and the opaque ones being agate, carnelian, chalcedony, chert etc. The opaque varieties of beads and particularly those of agate are by far the commonest.



Fig. 4.19: Jewellery of Mohejodaro

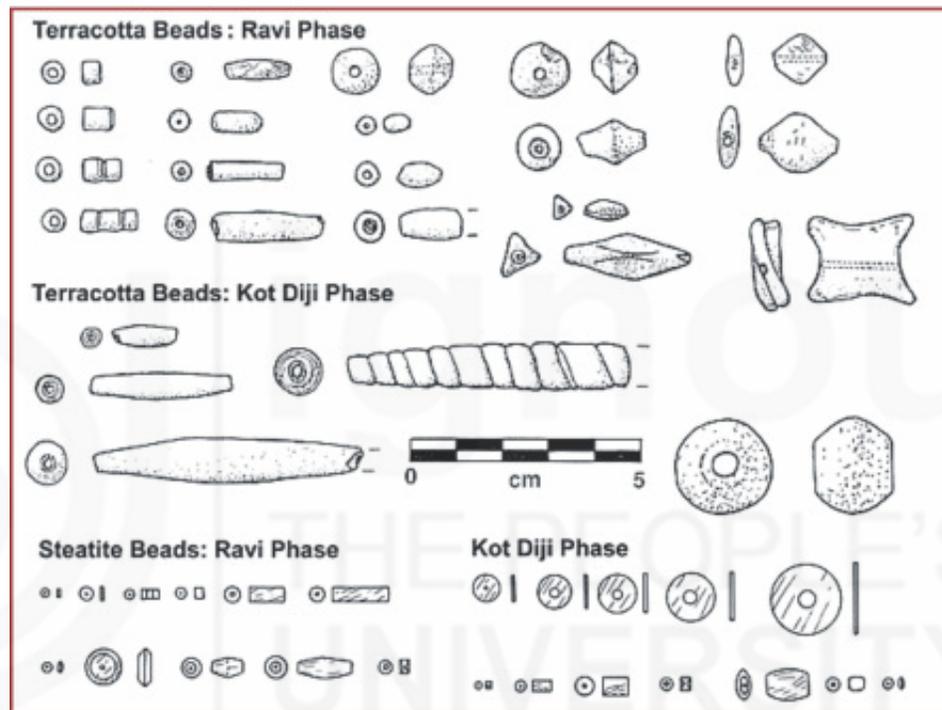


Fig. 4.20: Beads of Harappa

The mirrors of Harappan people are not made of glass but of bronze. They are slightly oval in shape. One of them has the edges of the face raised by 0.17 inch and the polish has completely disappeared. Their handles are rectangular with a hole at the end and it looks the handle were encased in wood. These mirrors are heavy. Such metallic mirrors were used in early Egypt and Sumer. They are either round or elliptical but not oval.

Faience

Faience was used in many countries such as India, Crete, Mesopotamia and China. It appears that Harappan Faience worker manufactured this material out of the paste of quartz-sand mixed with lime and a bit of soda. This paste was put under pressure in moulds of different shapes and moulded objects were dried in the sun. After glazing with sand, soda, borax or lime different coloured faience were produced. Mainly blue coloured faience were used as beads. Besides beads other personal ornaments made out of faience were bangles, rings, amulets, ear-stud, pedants and button.

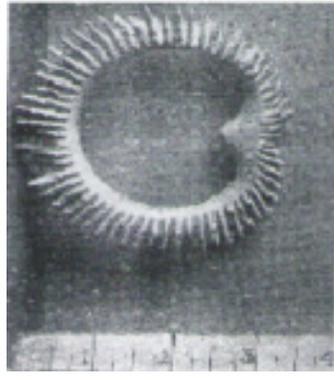


Fig. 4.21: Fayence bracelet from Harappa

Terracotta bangles

Many of the terracotta bangles were originally painted with black or red designs. Terracotta bangles include incised and painted pattern. Terracotta bangles are and were the most sought jewels. Even during the ancient Indus civilizations, terracotta bangles were made and were painted in black and red. In those times people have used them in multitudes, in the same way as the glass bangles of today. Terracotta bangles make a sort of jingling sound as that of glass or metal bangles and are very attractive. Harappan stoneware bangles and high-quality ceramic ornaments are unparalleled in ancient as well as modern world. Stone bangles were unglazed with bright red and pinkish to grey-black colour.

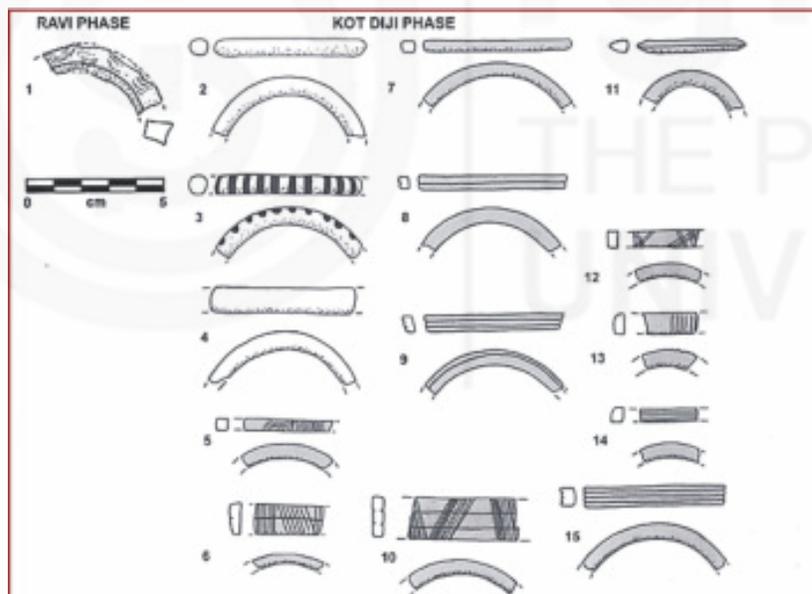


Fig. 4.22: Terracotta bangles of Harappa

Shell bangles

The most common shell object at most of the major Harappan sites is represented by shell bangles. These bangles were produced from *T. Pyrum*, the conch shells. Bangles were prepared with the use of a variety of specialised and unspecialised tools. Most of the finished bangles were perhaps incised with a motif in the form of chevron 'V'.

Metal bangles

Copper and bronze bangles have been found from Harappa and Mohenjodaro. The bangles were made from a round hammered rod bent in a full circle. The

space between the ends of the bangle would be pried apart to slip it over the wrist. Brass bangles also have been discovered from Chalcolithic culture of Orissa.

Ropes and cords

There are some ropes and cords for stringing beads and tying them around their wrists or hung as amulets around their necks. They wrapped their possessions in a piece of cloth and tied it into a bundle. The raw materials for these strings and cords were animal and plant fibres, rawhide, and leather. Fibres were spun into threads, some as fine as measuring a third of a millimetre, and two or more strands were twisted into string. Flax, palm fibre, rush, papyrus, and various grasses were used for making coarse ropes. Two-strand ropes were sometimes doubled and redoubled, resulting in thick rope of eight strands. For making nets they had netting needles, made of wood, bronze or any other suitable material. Brooms and cloths were used to clean houses.

4.7 SUMMARY

Household and decorative objects are studied for understanding degree of craft specialisation, specific artefact classes that were exchanged outside the community, behaviour of people and rough estimate of numbers of people as reflected from the assemblages of artefact types. Without the tools, containers and other implements of daily use our culture would not have flourished. These are part of daily activities of early man. Although people during early times did not have a proper concept of household but artefact found at the living sites suggest household type and activities therein.

All prehistoric people used tools but because of perishable nature of some materials we do not have all evidences of the materials used by man. The most fundamental tools are those which are used for cutting. These are made of stone, either chipped or polished by a variety of techniques, many of which are still in use. First metal tools were made from copper and its alloys like bronze or brass. Iron and steel came later. The early containers were natural products such as bark and leaves. In Egypt there is evidence of basketry before they produced pottery. Pottery containers are used primarily by sedentary farming communities from Neolithic period. Wide use of metal containers seems confined to highly industrialised culture. Containers are essential for storage and to increase the efficiency of transportation.

Suggested Reading

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Sample Questions

- 1) What kind of household was there in prehistoric times?
- 2) What do you understand by material culture in prehistory?
- 3) What is an artefact? What kind of artefacts one may expect at a prehistoric habitation site?
- 4) Why did people need container? Give an account of types of containers present during prehistoric times.
- 5) What is the purpose of a grinder? What different types of grinding implements found in prehistoric households. How these grinders changed the life of people?
- 6) Point out evolution of garments in prehistory.
- 7) Give an account of different types of ornaments in vogue among prehistoric people.