

## A highly Developed Craft Culture

It is believed that the first humans entered Kutch anywhere between 50,000 and 1,00,000 years ago, from the eastern coast of Africa.

What we can say with certainty is that a 5000-year-old footprint of a human being has been found near a well at Dholavira. This excavated city has been established as the second largest city of the Indus river civilization. It sprawled from Mohenjo Daro in Sindh to Harappa in Punjab to Dholavira in Kutch and all the way to Daimabad in Maharashtra. Some scholars suggest that a more accurate name for this civilization would be the Saraswati river civilization.

A 5000-year-old delicate skeleton of a woman with a shell bangle in one hand, and a beautiful bronze mirror held close to her chest with the other, speaks of how crafts were an integral part of this culture.

Artefacts found in the late twentieth century continue the story of Kutch's highly developed crafts sensibility. Excavations in Naani Raayan, a small village near the Rukmavati river, have unearthed several treasures, some of which are 2000 years old. They include exquisitely carved shell bangles and rings as well as stamped pottery with floral, bird, animal and figurative designs.

The very first artefact found at this site was a perfect terracotta bead. A physician on one of his visits to Naani Raayan was shown this bead by a boy who did not know that the doctor was also passionate about archaeology. The boy told him how, according to legend, the bead had once been made of gold - until Dada Dhoramnath, a great saint, had let out an angry cry when his disciple was refused alms. The curse was . . . *patan so datan, maya so mitti* - *the city shall be buried and wealth shall become baked earth!*



A five-foot-tall terracotta pot has also been found on this site. As also a shell ornament called *baajubandh* with a carving of a peacock that is cleaning its tail. There are hundreds of such artefacts. Their creative and technical excellence proves that the artisans of ancient Kutch were not only artists but also masters of the science that informed their craft.

The crafts were for local use. But they were much sought after and sometimes exported to places as far away as Rome, Turkey and Baghdad. A gold Byzantine coin of the late sixth century CE has been found. Another gold coin, from the first series of Arab coins ever to be minted, has also been found in Naani Raayan.

The tradition of excellence in handmade artefacts has continued down the ages. Now it is our turn to understand their value, to preserve, promote and cherish them.