

Design Resource

## Pottery in Bicholim

Small Scale Pottery Industry

by

Rumin Halarnkar with Prof. Ravi Poovaiah

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/pottery-bicholim>



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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/pottery-bicholim/introduction>

## Introduction

Bicholim, a small town in Goa, is rich in the art of pottery and is gifted with a community of craftsmen and artists who have been practicing this craft and passing it on from one generation to another. The story behind the artefacts from this region has been gathered by interviewing various craftsmen who work in these industries. Pottery is one of the oldest known bodies that date back 10,000 years and most widespread of decorative art, consisting of objects made of clay and hardened with heat. [1]

The objects made are commonly useful ones, such as vessels for holding liquids or plates or bowls from which food can be served.[2] Other than this the objects are also used for decorative purposes. The scope of this project is restricted to the study of fired clay vessels in Goa. In this document historical origins of pottery making in the old world and the new world is discussed also raw materials of pottery are covered. Manufacture, trade, decoration and use of pottery among traditional potters today are summarized. The technical characteristics of pottery are described and modern changes in manufacture and use of traditional pottery are covered.

Defining the scope - Pottery can be shaped by a range of methods that include:

Hand building - This is the earliest forming method. Wares can be constructed by hand from coils of clay, combining flat slabs of clay, pinching solid balls of clay or some combinations of these. [3]

The potter's wheel - In a process called "throwing", a ball of clay is placed in the centre of a turntable, called the wheel-head, the wheel rotates rapidly while the solid ball of soft clay is pressed, squeezed and pulled gently upwards and outwards into a hollow shape. [3]

Moulding - As the name suggests, this is the operation of shaping pottery by pressing clay into a mould. [3]

The scope of this project is limited to the one process of making these products which are Moulding.

The story behind the artefacts from this region has been gathered by interviewing various craftsmen who work in these industries.

Clay is a natural product dug from the earth, which has decomposed from rock within the earth's crust for millions of years. [4]

It is the basic material of pottery, and has two distinctive characteristics: it is plastic (i.e., it can be molded and will retain the shape imposed upon it) and it hardens on firing to form a brittle but otherwise virtually indestructible material that is not attacked by any of the agents that corrode metals or organic materials. The firing also protects the clay body against the effects of water. If a sun-dried clay vessel is filled with water, it will eventu-

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ally collapse, but if it is heated, chemical changes that begin to take place at about 500 preclude a return to the plastic state no matter how much water is later in contact with it. [2]

The finished object can be divided into three categories:

- Earthenware, the ordinary pottery dating from primitive times, baked at 700°C or lower.
- Stoneware, fired at up to 1150°C, less porous.
- Porcelain, fired at 1400°C.



Mask.

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Decorative pots.



Woman doing daily work.

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/pottery-bicholim/history-and-background>

## History and Background

Pottery in the Indian subcontinent has an ancient history and is one of the most tangible and iconic elements of regional art. Evidence of pottery has been found in the early settlements of Mehrgarh from the Indus Valley Civilization. Today, it is a cultural art that is still practiced extensively in India and Pakistan. [5] India has a great and ancient tradition of pottery making. The origin of pottery in India can be traced back to the Neolithic age, [1] with coarse handmade pottery - bowls, jars, vessels - in various colors such as red, orange, brown, black and cream. The real beginning of Indian pottery is with the Indus Valley Civilization. There is proof of pottery being constructed in two ways, handmade and wheel-made. Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro cultures heralded the age of wheel-made pottery, characterized by well-burnt black painted red wares. [6]



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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/pottery-bicholim/tools>

## Tools

The tools do not have specific names as they are made locally. Most of them are wood pieces that are shaped in such a way that it is suited to carve the details.



This tool is used for detailing and carving holes or minute details.



Used for smoothening and removing of excess clay.



Used to flatten the object and give bold flat and smooth surface.



Used for smoothening the objects with the help of water

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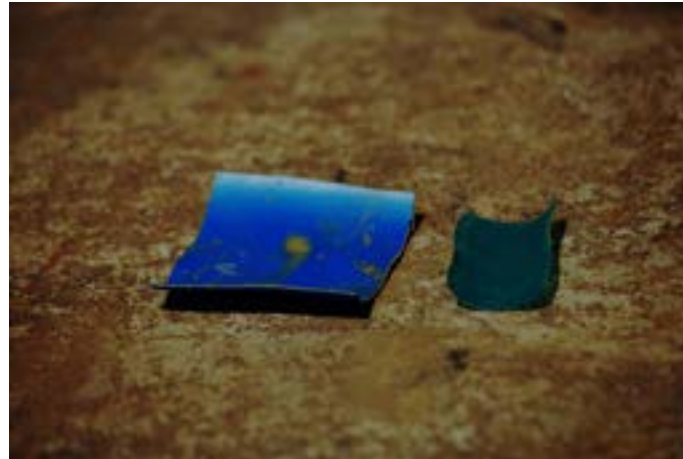
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Used for removing excess of clay.



Knife kind of a tool used for giving finishing touches to the surface.



This tool is used on both sides. Both sides help to carve holes or circles on the body of the clay in different sizes.



Used for smoothing as well as carving details.

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Shows the tools used for detailing the form by the workers.



Shows the workers using the tools to make the detailing of the objects.

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Shows the workers using the tools to make the detailing of the objects.



Shows the workers using the tools to make the detailing of the objects.



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<https://dsource.in/resource/pottery-bicholim/making-process>

## Making Process



Collection of Mud



Preparing and Storing Clay



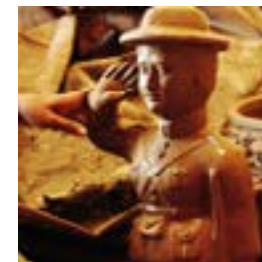
Filling The Moulds



Opening The Moulds



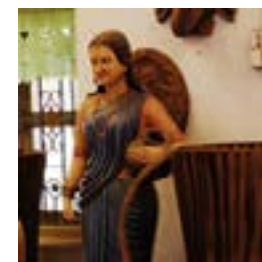
Detailing



Fine Tune



Baking



Painting

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/pottery-bicholim/making-process/collection-mud>

## Collection of Mud

Clay is generally collected from the nearby fields, the bottom of a pond, lake, or other outdoor water sources from the nearby agriculture fields in Bicholim. Mud is found usually deeper below the topsoil. The topsoil is not used as it contains stones, and organic material which would burn off. The clay is taken in huge quantities to the pottery industries and transported with the help of trucks.



Huge fields in Bicholim from where the mud is taken to the industry for pottery.



Wet clay found slightly deeper from the ground level.



Clay is soft and is easily breakable by bare hands.

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<https://dsource.in/resource/pottery-bicholim/making-process/preparing-and-storing-clay>

## Preparing and Storing Clay

Pottery clay is ground into powder. This powder is combined with water and other ingredients to form what's called the clay body. The type of clay, how it's prepared and the amount of water used are all variables in how the final product turns out. [1] This clay is then stored in the workplaces covered in sheets of polythene so that it remains moist. The clay can retain its moistness for more than a year. Pottery clay needs to be moist, durable and exhibit a good amount of plasticity. This means that it's easy to mould and can retain its shape. Chunks are then detached from this huge dump which is then used to make pottery. The removed chunks are mixed and churned evenly by using feet so that the mixture of clay becomes consistent and the water content is distributed evenly. This process takes about half an hour till the craftsmen feel that the material is smooth and uniform.



The clay is mixed with feet by the craftsmen to make it smooth and even.



Huge dump of clay body stored in the workshop.

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Clay ready to go into the moulds.

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## Filling The Moulds

Before filling the mould, they are dusted, so that the excess clay sticking onto the mould is wiped out, and a smooth surface is obtained.

Different parts of the same mould are completely filled carefully with clay by hand in such a way that the inside of it remains hollow once joined. Then, all the parts of the mould are joined together, and finally, the mould is closed. The opening in the mould is then smoothed by fingers using some additional clay and water. The moulds are then kept for drying for one whole day so that the shape of the form can be achieved.



Filling the moulds with the clay by hands.



All the parts are joined together and the openings are smoothed by fingers.

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The moulds are kept for drying.

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## Opening The Moulds

After 24 hours, the mould is dismantled slowly part by part. The clay inside is still soft and workable, but hard enough to retain the shape of the form. The clay has to be soft & workable so that finishing and detailing can be carried out easily.

The images show the opening of the mould part by part. The end form is of a crocodile.

The image shows another example of a form that has been just dismantled from the mould. This form of a pot will then be used for detailing and finishing.



The images show the opening of the mould part by part.



Opening of the mould.

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Half opened mould.



The end form is of a crocodile.



The image shows an example of a form that has been just dismantled from the mould.



This form of a pot will then be used for detailing and finishing.

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## Detailing

Another set of workers work on the detailing of the form, removed from the mould.

There are different styles of detailing one of them is that they make a long tread of clay, which is stuck to the pot with the help of water. Different patterns are then made with the treads. To give different design patterns, the treads are then pressed against the pot with the help of fingers. To make the clay workable and to give a smooth finish little amount of water will be used while detailing. The design is still very rough and needs a lot of finishing.

Images show how the detailing is done by hand to achieve the final design.



Woman artist.



Artists working together.

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Creeper design in process.



Stem of creeper being fixed on the pot.



Artist busy in detailing.



Leaf design being fixed.

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## Fine Tune

Now the finishing and fine-tuning are done with the help of various tools and water for smoothening. The moulds are still a little damp but can be handled without changing their form.

At this point, you can trim off any excess clay and carve details into the model. Pottery at this the stage is called greenware, is very fragile and needs to be handled with care.

Images show how the workers make use of tools to scrape off the extra clay and define the edges and curves to make the form look prominent and attractive.

Different tools are used to carve details into the clay model. Finer patterns are also carved at this stage. These are some of the finished products which showcase the details on the forms.



Statue of Soldier.

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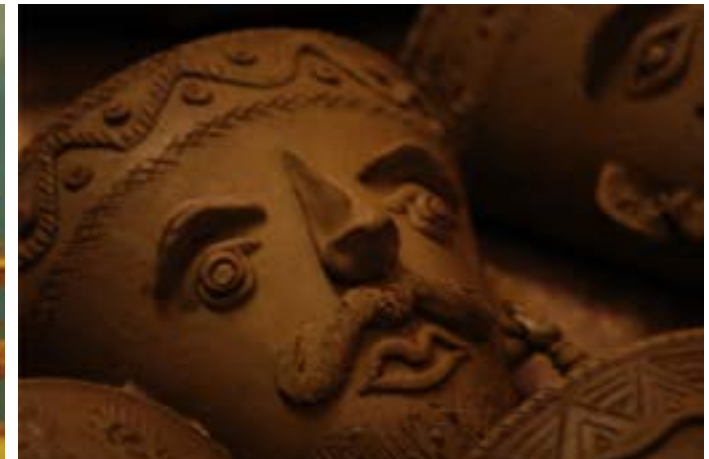
Solder in making process.



Artist busy in work.



Woman artist making pot.



A form of a triangular decorative wall mount on which a face of a man is carved.

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A wide pot on which carvings of leaves are seen.



Decorative plates for wall mounting.



Statue of a man holding a musical instrument.

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## Baking

After the product is ready it goes for hardening. Firing produces irreversible changes in the body. [3]

It is done using a kiln. Both the maximum temperature and the duration of firing influence the final characteristics of the ceramic. These clays require the lowest temperatures for firing, and finished products typically turn out in rich reds, browns and oranges. After the forms come out of baking they become hard.



Shows the objects that are hardened.



Shows the Furnace in which the clay models are baked.

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## Painting

Another set of artists with expertise in painting these models. The finished products can be given either a matt or a gloss finish depending on the demands.

The artists also leave some spaces with their original color and support them with a single color to make them look diverse.



Decorative pots.



Decorative artefacts.

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Conch shaped pot.



Terracotta cock.



Lady carrying water pot.



Decorative pots with creeper design.

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## Final Product

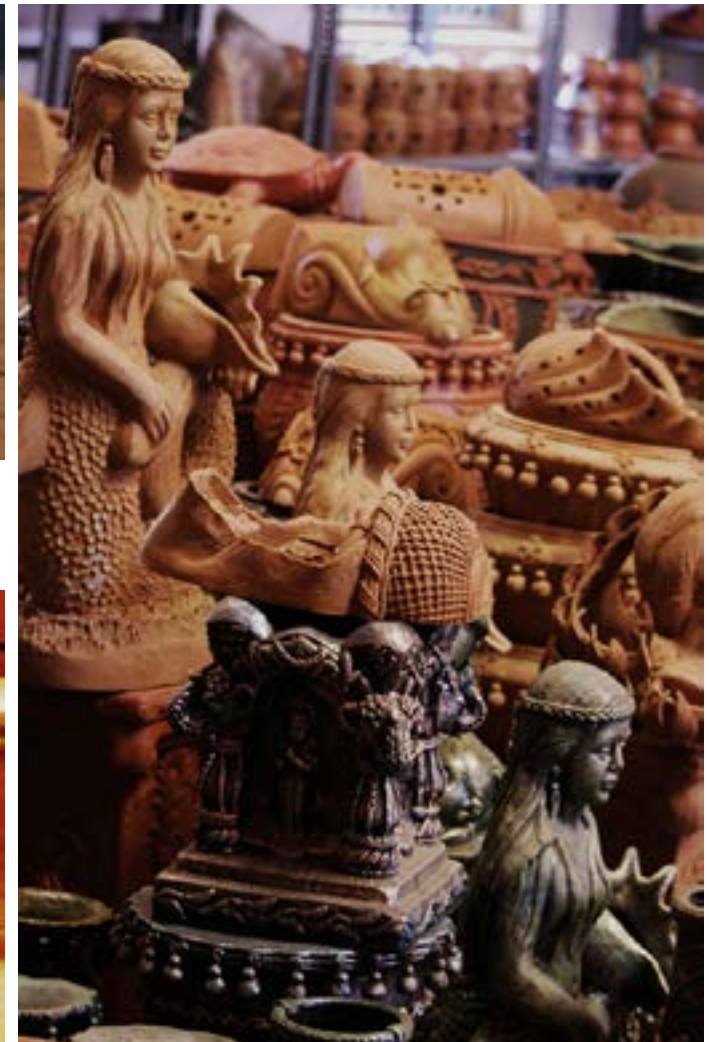
This is how the final product looks after the finishing. The detailed design patterns and paints add a lot of charm to the final looks and the products are then outsourced to various markets or to the consumers directly.



Lamps.



Terracotta cock.



Varieties of artefacts.

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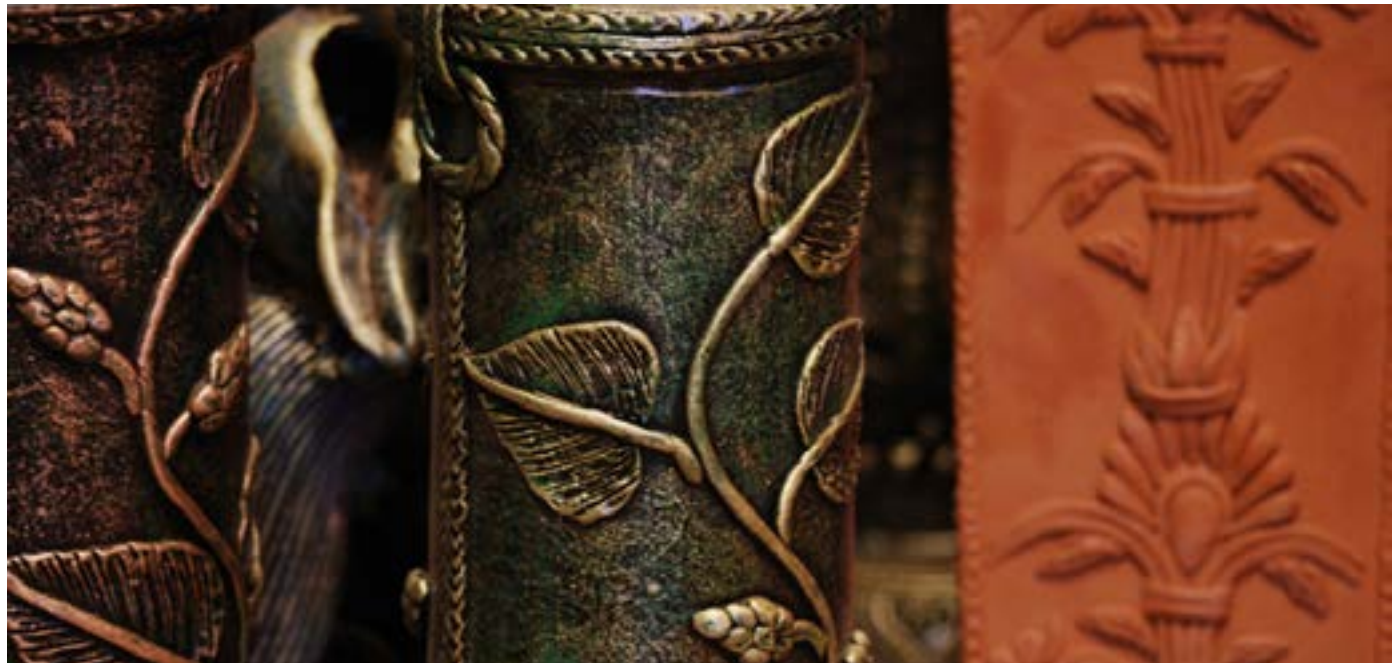


Human face flower pot.



Decorative pieces.

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Standing pot with creeper design.

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## Pottery in Bicholim

Small Scale Pottery Industry

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Source:

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## Recurring Visual Elements / Patterns

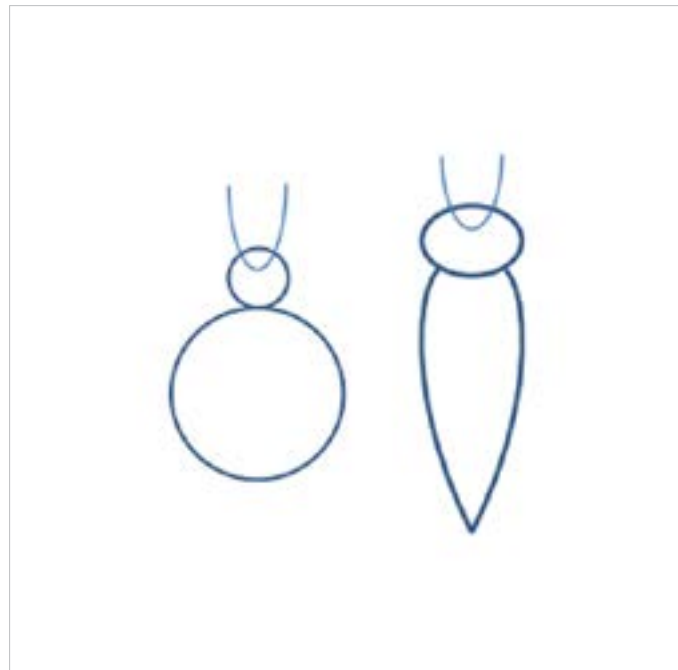
Various recurring shapes and forms are observed in the final products. A lot of products have these small forms which are found hanging which makes the entire product look attractive.

These are the two most common shapes that are found in most of the products.

The images show the use of these shapes in the clay models.

Another recurring pattern is the comma shaped design running along a thread either on one side or both. This pattern is used in either borders or lines that are needed to be defined.

This is another recurring shape carved on the surface of the objects. A creeper runs along with forms of leaves and fruits attached on both sides. This pattern is also observed in most of the models.



These are the two most common shapes that are found in most of the products.



The images show the use of these shapes in the clay models.

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Another recurring pattern is the comma shaped design running along a thread either on one side or both.



This pattern is used in either borders or lines that are needed to be defined.



Side view of pattern on the pot.



Pattern is used to decorate the pot.

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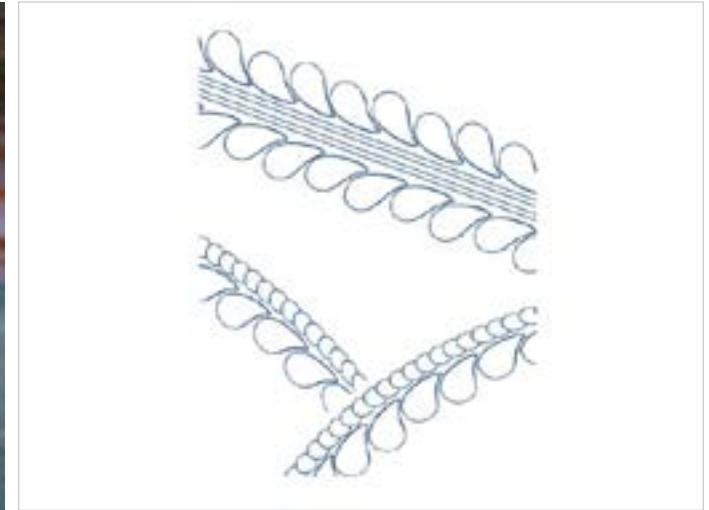
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Source:

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Decorated canopy of idol.



Beautiful borders with leaf pattern.

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The images show the use of these shapes in the clay models as borders.



The pattern is used on trunk of the elephant form.

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The pattern is used to define the neck of the form of the cow. It appears as if the cow has worn ornaments.



It is used as decoration pattern on a pot.



This is another recurring shape carved on the surface of the objects.



A creeper running along with forms of leaves and fruits attached on both sides.

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This pattern is also observed on most of the models.



Decorated artefact.



Decorated artefact.

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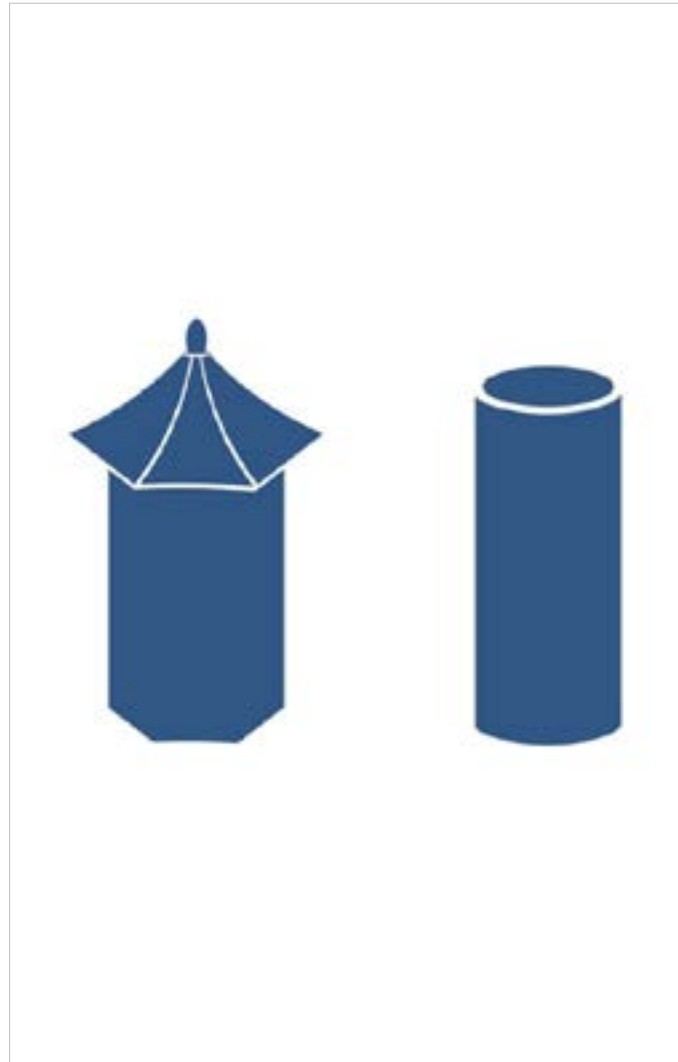
Source:

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## Recurring Forms

Some of the recurring forms which are repeated mostly are either the lamps or the pots which are in cylindrical forms. Both these shapes are made to look attractive by the style in which they are painted.



Recurring shape.



Lamps in recurring forms.



Decorative pots.



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## Classification Based on Themes



Decorative Products



Religion



Culture

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Source:

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## Decorative Products

Other than pots, lamps and animal forms there are also other products that are produced by this industry.



Animal Forms



Lamps



Other Decorative Products



Pots

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## Animal Forms

Another set of items are forms of animals. This style of pottery is followed for a long time. These animal forms are traditionally put to use by people as a form of protector on their main gates where a set of two would be placed on either of the poles. They are also used in revamp of their gardens, interiors of homes, Pots, wall hangings, decorative products etc.



A form of a cock used as a showpiece in homes as well as gardens. Teapots are also made of similar shapes where they have openings at the back and the mouth.



It is a form of a cow.

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It is a form of a horse. This is wall mounted object.



A set of three lions.



Crocodile.

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A set of tortoises.



Form of a frog.



Birds sitting on the bark of a tree.

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## Lamps

Lamps are another major set of production that is exported from this pottery industry. There are different styles of lamps that are produced. The images show the major styles and shapes of lamps that are produced.



Stylist lamp.

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Lamp in recurring forms.



Contemporary lamp.



Lamp in recurring forms.



Wall hanging lamp.

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## Other Decorative Products

Other than pots, lamps and animal forms there are also other products that are produced by this industry.



It is a vessel type of structure used for purposes like keeping keys. This is wall mounted and has a form of a human face carved on it.



Bells made of clay, to be used as show pieces.

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Container derived from a shape of boat.

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Flower/fruits container, this shape was traditionally used by people who used to go to forests to collect flowers.



It is an art work where a child is sitting on a fish. This is used as a decorative product to be put in gardens or public places.

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A container which is carved in a shape of old traditional boats.

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## Pots

The products comprise many attractive things which are used for the purpose of beautifying the interior or exterior of the houses. One of the major sets of production is pots. Pots are used by people for both interior as well as exterior purposes. Majorly they are used for planting blossoming flowers and are placed in a garden that beautifies the set.

The images show the different Styles of pots that are produced.



Pot with tribal motif.

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Beautifully decorated pot.



Big pots.



Planter.



Planter with birds.

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Candle holder.



Human figure planter.



Ganesh idol pot.

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## Religion

A lot of religious art is observed as well. One of the specialities of artists in Bicholim is that they are experts in making idols of Lord Ganesha. Along with that idols of other Gods are also found. Also, structures like Tulsi are made.



Chariot horses.



Conch shape.



Varieties of products.



Ganesha idol.

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## Culture

Also, a lot of work is influenced by the local culture which exists in Goa. A lot of work has gone into capturing the essence of people and their local businesses and styles of living. The artists capture beautifully the minute details of the attire, expressions, ornaments and postures, etc which are seen in the final outcome.



Bride statue.



Lady with water pot.



Lady.



Set of artists.

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## Conclusion

The beauty of this art is that the essence and culture that the craftsmen have still maintained for many years. It becomes a tradition to carry this art form for generations. The art is influenced by the history and past methods used by the craftsmen and has really evolved since then.

It really shows a perspective of life when we observe the hard work and interest that they show in this field. The themes that they use and work on e.g. – religion or culture, are really inspiring. However, it is a little disappointing that art forms such as pottery do not get enough support both socially as well as economically. It is very tough to see such an Art form fade away when it has such a great history associated with it.

Also, there is more scope for educating such artists in both domains of art as well as business. In terms of art, the artists can learn what other experiments they can carry out and what happens in the world that they can absorb and implement. In terms of the business, they can learn how to copyright and sell their products and also implement fast machines and manpower if required.



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2. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/472867/pottery#toc73817>
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4. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/pottery.aspx#1>
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6. [http://www.indianetzone.com/41/pottery\\_indian\\_villages.htm](http://www.indianetzone.com/41/pottery_indian_villages.htm)

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