

Usage and Symbolism of Colour Schemes: A Case study of the Pottery of Gandi Umar Khan

ZIL-E-HUMA MUJEEB, ZAKIRULLAH JAN AND SHABANA RAFIQUE

Abstract

The study of colors in the pottery designing, treatment and paintings is an interesting and important element in Art & Design. Color has different dimensions and one can create a tremendous change in any art object with the use of single or multiple color schemes. The use of colors is helpful in understanding the feeling and mood of the artist while he is working on any art piece including ceramics. However, colors also convey the trends and cultural impact of a society on the artist's work. Here in this paper, the colour schemes reflected from the ceramics of Gandi Umar Khan, a protohistoric archaeological site on the Gomal Plain, has been discussed.

Introduction

Color is a very important and strong element of art, which has the strength to stimulate human emotions and bring changes in the mood. The study of colours shows that each one has its own meaning and psychology. The artistic and psychological study reveals that blue colour gives the feelings of quietness and coldness whereas red gives the feelings of love, warmth, courage and excitement. Orange colour is neither as light as yellow nor as aggressive as red, but it has rather a strong decorating quality (Snow, 1920). Color plays an important role in every type of designing and decoration and in pottery decoration the color has an important place due to its changing effects and psychological impact on human mind.

Properties of Color

Every color has its own properties; some colors are bright and cheerful whereas others are dull and passive. It is very important to understand the characteristics and properties of colors. According to the Prang color system (Beitler & Lockart, 1969) there are three

dimensions in which colors may differ from each other, which are hue, value and intensity.

1. *Hue* is actually the name of the color such as blue, red and yellow, which are normally called as primary colors. When combining any two primary hues in equal amount, they make secondary hues. The combination of two primary hues will result in three secondary colors i.e.

- Blue + Yellow = Green
- Yellow + Red = Orange
- Red + Blue = Purple

The third category of the color is an intermediate hue, which is the result of mixing one primary hue with another secondary one that makes six further intermediate colors.

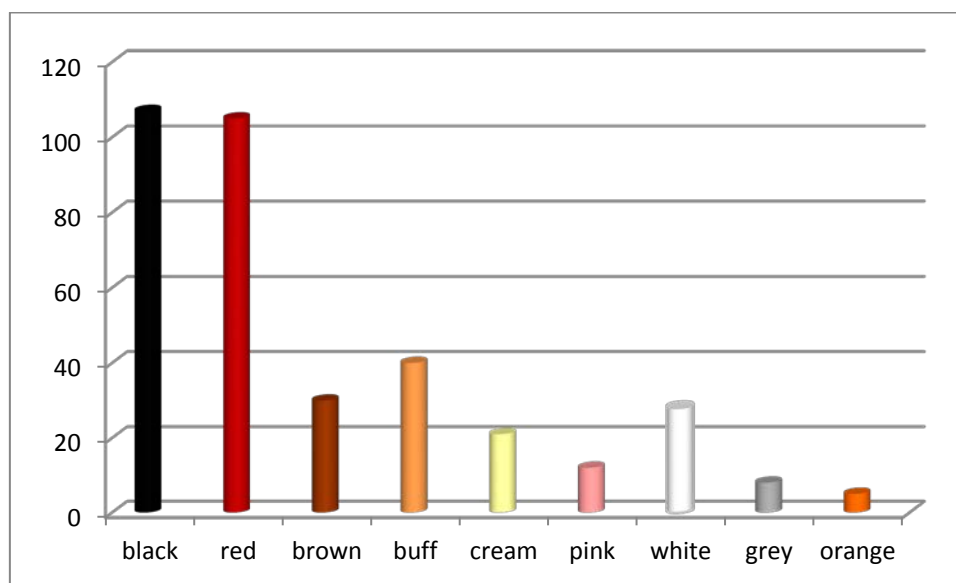
- Yellow + Green = Yellow Green
- Yellow + Orange = Yellow Orange
- Blue + Purple = Blue Purple
- Blue + Green = Blue Green
- Red + Orange = Red Orange
- Red + Purple = Red Purple

2. *Value* is a term used for the variation of color darkness and lightness. It enables a color to speak in a very quiet manner or in a heavy tone. The value of each normal hue may be changed by the addition of white to raise the value or black to lower the value. Thus any value above normal is called “Tint” and below normal is called “Shade”. For example, adding small amount of white in red would produce pink color and addition of little black in red would produce maroon color (Goldstein, 2007).
3. *Intensity* is the variation of brightness and dullness of colors. It is actually the strength and weakness of the color. The effect of brightness and dullness may be varied by use of different textures, because shiny texture reflects light, while a dull one absorbs it very easily.

Colors in the Pottery of Gandi Umar Khan

The Bronze Age archaeological site of Gandi Umar Khan (3300–1900 BC), located in Dera Ismail Khan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, (Rehman, 1997; Ali and Jan, 2005), produced very specific color schemes. Such colors are also noted in the pottery of other sites of ‘Indus Age’. The most common colors used in the pottery of Gnadi Umar Khan are shown in the table as follow:

Table I. Most Common Colors used in the pottery of Gandi Umar Khan

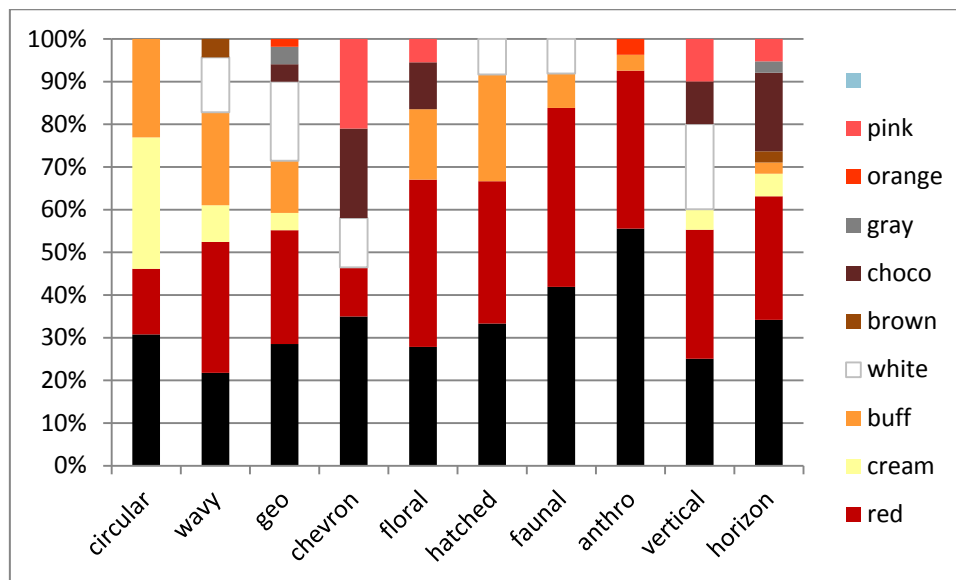


According to the data collected from the site of Gandi Umar Khan, black and red are the most common colors used in all types of pots and vessels. The shades of brown and buff with a combination of other colors such as grey, white, cream, pink or orange are also observed from the excavated pottery. The potters in the proto-historic times have used several styles and colors for the beautification of ceramics such as monochrome, bi-chrome and polychrome styles of decoration. Since Gandi Umar Khan is also a proto-historic site, its pottery exhibits different styles of decoration (Ali & Jan, 2009; Jan, 2008). The colour scheme at Gandi Umar Khan is also selected by the potters according to the designs and patterns on the pottery, which include vertical and horizontal lines, wavy pattern, circular, chevron, floral, hatched, faunal and anthropomorphic designs etc.

Table 2 shows that maximum variety of color are found in simple geometric designs such as vertical and horizontal lines and mixed geometrical like wavy, chevron

and circular designs. In the floral and hatched patterns, the potters also used a variety of colors to enhance the beauty of the design of painting and shape of the vessel. Whereas, in other categories like faunal and anthropomorphic, potter only focuses on the detail work of the design and avoids using bio-chrome color schemes.

Table 2 Color Distribution in Different Types of Design



Conclusion

The use of colors in pottery designing actually enhances the overall impression as well as the use of monochromatic or bio-chromatic color scheme totally changes the apparent look of the pottery and creates a tremendous effect on the viewer. In addition, the use of colors also covers the structural defects and blemishes of the vessels. The variety of colors used on the pottery of Gandi Umar Khan also encourages the future workers to take inspiration from ancient work and create new color combinations, which helps to highlight the ancient work as well as the innovative ideas.

References

- Ali, I., and Jan. Z, (2005) *Archaeological Explorations in the Gomal Valley*, Pakistan, 2003, Frontier Archeology, Vol. III.
- Ali, I, and Jan. Z, (2009), Archaeological Excavations at Gandi Umar Khan 2003: The First Season, *Ancient Pakistan*, Vol: XX-2009, Research Bulletin of Archaeology, Institute of Archaeology and Social Anthropology, University of Peshawar, Pakistan.
- Beilter, E., Jane., and Lockhart, B., (1969). *Design For You*. Pub: John Willy & Sons, Inc. New York.
- Golstein, Harriet, and Golstein, Vetta. (1963). *Art in Every Day Life*. 7th ed. Pub. Macmillan Co. USA.
- Rehman, A. (1997), 'Discovery of a New Cultural Horizon at Jhandi Baber near Dera Ismail Khan', *Punjab Journal of Archaeology and History*, No. I, Directorate General of Archaeology, Govt. of Punjab.
- Snow, E. B., and Froehlich, B., Hugo, (1920), *The Theory and Practice of Color*. 3rd ed. The Prang Company. New York.