



HEMANT PADALKAR/HT

Curator Renu Jathar (left) and Research Assistant Gauri Pitale at the museum's Harappa Gallery.

A new look at the past

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Of the 50,000 exhibits at the city's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (formerly Prince of Wales) museum, the oldest artefacts are from the five-millennia-old Indus Valley Civilisation, the subcontinent's earliest civilisation. Close to a thousand Indus-era sites are known today, spanning an area from Mundigak in central Afghanistan to Daimabad in Nashik, and testifying to highly complex settlements. This week, the museum opened a revamped Harappa Gallery, putting out in a new display close to 500 objects that were created by an ancient, and still enigmatic, people. These range from steatite beads crafted as thin as under 1mm to 3-foot-high kiln-fired storage jars to grains of wheat. Curator Renu Jathar and Research Assistant Gauri Pitale take Chitrangada Choudhury through the display.

Why did the museum alter the gallery?

Pitale: The previous Harappa Gallery had been created over 20 years ago. With advances in archaeology and historiography, the information had got outdated. For example, excavations in the past years have uncovered the importance of Dholavira (a 5,000-year-old Indus city in present-day Kutch in Gujarat rivalling Harappa and Mohenjo-daro), and our gallery needed to incorporate these newer findings.

How has the display altered?

Jathar: We earlier had the exhibits accompanied by a label or a little text. It was very drab. We have redone the gallery in a cheerful

pastel yellow shade. Text has been rewritten in English with an eye at the tourist and Marathi, for all the children who come from the public schools. Graphics, artist's representations and photographs have been added to draw attention, and technical words are explained. Some additions have been made like a photograph from 1925 showing the early excavations at Mohenjo-daro (in Sindh in Pakistan), and the site emerging.

Pitale: The idea is to catch the attention of students and draw them to ancient history. There are several sites to be excavated, perhaps others to be discovered. The Harappan script is still not deciphered. We are hoping some young visitors to the gallery would get hooked, and end up making those findings some day.

There is a whole area devoted to pottery.

Pitale: That is to link the continuities. We have attempted to show how present-day techniques of kneading and firing the clay, even patterns and the use of organic colours, are still practiced by communities across India. Pottery was the Indus Valley Civilisation's great achievement, and techniques were sophisticated enough to have kilns with temperatures going up to 800-900 degrees, and pieces grafted together seamlessly to create large storage jars. The techniques were so good that they are still in use today.

Jathar: We have on display an artefact, a cart whose wheels have no spokes. That practice continues in some parts of north India.