

Reclaiming Traditional Textile Heritage of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Study Background: Traditional heritage associates with manifestation of handing over or passing on, these are culturally significant ideas, and specific practices which are preserved over a long period of time. Designs of traditional textiles are links between people and regional arts; they are reflections of art movements as well as notions of human stages of development. Knowledge of textile heritage is directly involved in the re-birth of the cultural awareness of region.

Aim of the Study: The paper aims to compile the tremendous heritage of traditional textiles of Pakistan.

Methodology: The documented traditional textiles of various techniques are gathered here as result of extensive literature review. Pakistan has been a country with rich textile heritage emerging from various faiths which are reflected in the expression of regional folk textiles.. The rich heritage of Pakistan's textile craft has evolved over a long period of 5000 years.

Findings & Conclusion: Pakistan has been a country with rich textile heritage emerging from various faiths which are reflected in the expression of regional folk textiles. The rich heritage of Pakistan's textile craft has evolved over a long period of 5000 years. In this land, the traditional textile artisans of the Punjab, Sindh, Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Kashmir have been pursuing their skills, as they have done for generations. Admitting diverse craft heritage of distinctive regions of Pakistan, this paper tends to reclaim textile heritage nurtured here.

Keywords: Heritage, Traditional Textiles, Regional Crafts.

Introduction

The word tradition associates with manifestation of handing over or passing on, these are culturally significant ideas, and specific practices which are preserved over a long period of time. Designs of traditional textiles are links between people and regional arts; they are reflections of art movements as well as notions of human stages of development. Knowledge of historic traditional textiles is directly involved in the re-birth of the cultural awareness of a place. Pakistan has been a country with rich traditions emerging from various faiths which are reflected in the expression of regional folk arts. Pakistan lies in an area where not only earlier known human civilizations flourished but it also witnessed continued march of vanguards of various civilizations from central Asia and Near East. The rich heritage of Pakistan's art and craft has evolved over an extended period of five thousand years. In this duration Pakistan became the crossroad of many splendid cultures and enriched the world with an amazing variety

Article History

Received:
July 29, 2023

Revised:
September 20, 2023

Accepted:
September 25, 2023

Published:
September 30, 2023

of cultural, religious, linguistic, and artistic expressions. This intermingling of cultures surprisingly influenced all kinds of arts and crafts, including textile arts. Due to diversified talents, interests and inspiration, different regions have their special identity for unique folk textile crafts. In this land, the traditional textile artisans of the Punjab, Sindh, Pakhtonkhwah, Balochistan and Kashmir have been pursuing their skills, as they have done for generations. Admitting diverse art heritage of distinctive regions of Pakistan, this paper overviews some historic traditional textiles nurtured here.

Design is the backbone of graphic art, design that is a part of art actually a part of our life and personality and influences the enjoyment of everything to do and of everything to select. Textile designs developed from three sources the quality of the fibers, the size and type of yarn and the way they are combined if more than one is used. The process by which they are woven, and any ornament incorporated during the weaving and the ornamentation applied after the weaving. According to Goldstein design is defined as any arrangement of lines, forms, color, and textures. Textile design is classified into two types: **structural designs and decorative designs.**

The first category, called structural design is characterized by construction. In other words, it can be said that the selected design is built into textile material as it is being manufactured. The design layout becomes integral part of the structure incorporated over it after its construction.

The second category of textile design called decorative design is characterized as surface creation which is applied to the prepared surface for its enhancement . Among the textile designs weaving is the most frequent example of textile structural design. On the other hand, the common way of creating decorative textile design includes embroidery, printing, appliqué, dyeing and painting and various other means. At times, some decorative design can be the surface enrichment of some already existing structural design. A wide range of diverse effects is created with the use of a single kind of textile design or creation some unique combinations of both types of textiles design techniques.

The art that is frankly decorative is the art to live with .It is, of all visible arts, the one art that creates in us both mood and temperament. The harmony that resides in the delicate proportions of lines and masses becomes mirrored in the mind .the repetitions of pattern give us rest. The marvels of designs stir the imagination.

Literature Review

The fascinating story of civilization for this period has been divided by historians in number of eras as far as possible textile arts and crafts are concerned.

- **Pre Indus Valley or Early Bronze Culture (5000 – 2500 BC)**

Although no textile specimens belonging to the period seem available ,yet pottery samples obtained through various excavations reveal use of such motifs as geometrical,triangles,rectangle,concentric circles and naturalistic and other,diamonds fishscales checkerboards,chevrons,and scallops.It may be noted that some of these motifs still persist in Pakistan's contemporary arts and crafts.Major colours used were black , white , red , yellow , blue and green.

- **Indus Valley Civilization (2500 – 1500 BC)**

This Indigenous civilization, famous for its town planning and script, cultivated cotton and reared sheep. They spun fiber, wove fabric and dyed them in colors. In addition they have developed the craft of mat making .New motifs introduced included swastika, peacock, other animal and trefoil.

- **Aryan Civilization (1500 – 700 BC)**

Weaving of silk and woolen fabrics was introduced in addition to felted mat Namda.

- **Persian and Greek Invasions (500 BC to 700AD)**

As a result of Persian and Greek invasions geometrical patterns with symmetrical surrounding triangles and squares were introduced. Contact made with China through the Great Silk Route introduced Chinese motifs. Several Central Asian and other nations invaded, migrated to or traded with the region. They included Scythian, Parthians, Kushans and Huns. It was Kushans who introduced the narrow wollen cloth 'patti' and the Chitral caps. Through an intermingling of Persian Greek and Buddhist cultures, The famous Gandhara culture evolved. Motifs introduced were lotus, rosette, paisely and triratna. Textiles included such advancements as twill, satin and basket weave, intricately patterned Pashmina shawls, silk, linen and cotton goods, resulting in exports.

Greek influence on the textile can be traced back in the Swati motif which is preserved in traditional embroidery (fig 1). This includes a particular way of breaking space into geometric patterns. It is mostly used in Northern areas of Pakistan.



Fig.1: Greek Influence in Sawati Embroidery

Decorative Elements of these traditional textiles show major features of organic motifs (fig 2). Symbolic use of Lotus, Pipal leaf and floral garland and scrolls is seen in clothing.

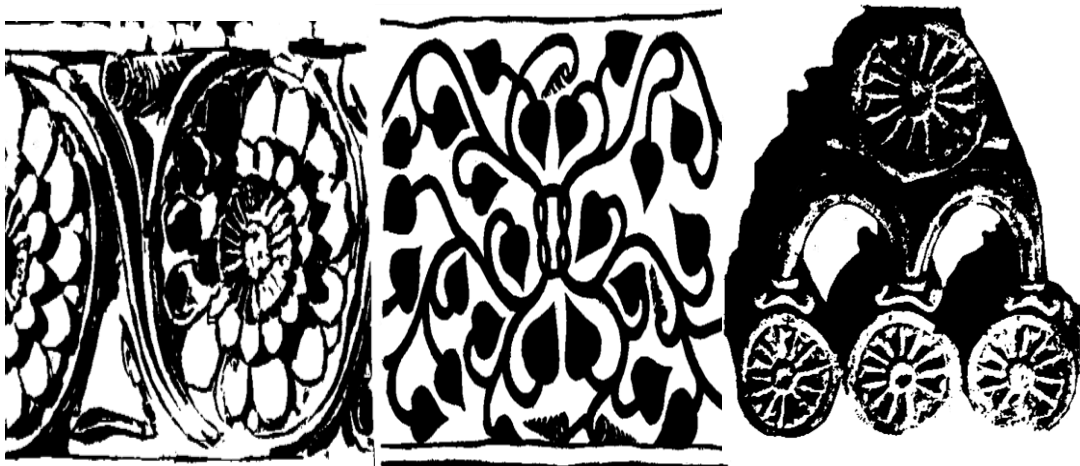


Fig.2: Symbolic use of Lotus, Pipal leaf and floral garland in textiles

The Kairi or the Paisley, is a motif earliest traced to this region (fig.3). Paisley symbolized the power of ancient Trinity. It is frequently embellished with leaves and flowers. Paisley later became very popular in Kashmir as the dominant pattern of Pashmina shawls to save these precious pieces of creation from evil eye.

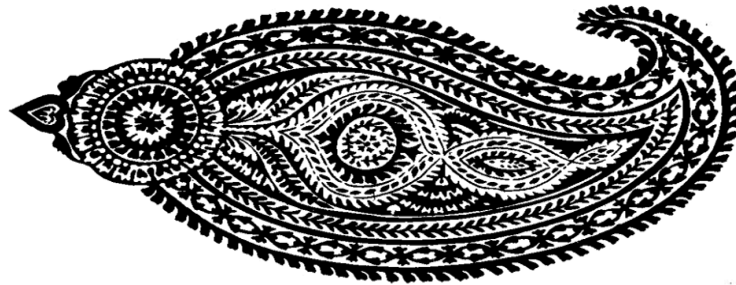


Fig.3: *The Kairi or the Paisley*

- **Pre Mughal Islamic Period (8 – 15 AD)**

Pre Mughal Islamic period is marked with a great synthesis of different cultures ,Arab Byzantian Roman NorthAfrican Egyptian and Central Asian. Angular geometric patterns, reflective of the Central Asian decorative style.The motif of the Cypress tree (leaf) became popular in Iran and Pakistan. New forms of gold and silver thread work emerged. Block printing was also a common craft. Fine tailoring came from Iran to Pakistan. New techniques of embroidery were introduced (fig.4 & fig 5). Islamic colors of Turquoise, blue and green, dominated in mosques as well as in every medium of art as a symbol of faith This practice was a contrast to the pre Islamic color schemes dominated by yellows.



Fig. 4: *Geometrical lay out of Islamic time period*

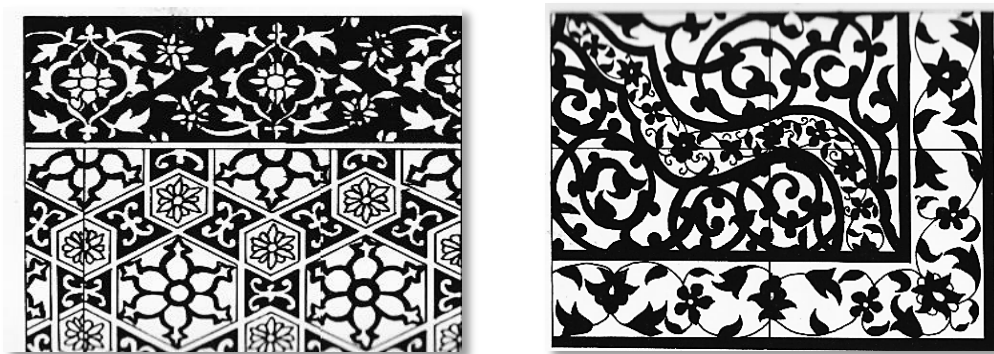


Fig.5: Complex geometrical layouts of Islamic time period

heights. Mughal's tremendous patronage of the arts encouraged and increased the production of most refined textiles. So Persian culture and tastes remained strongly linked with Sub-continent.

- **Mughal Period (1526 – 1856)**

It was during Mughal period that at first Humayum and later Akbar the Great imported Persian artisans and patronized weaving industry. Dyeing evolved to a stage where pre mordanting, multiple mordanting and post mordanting were practiced. They established imperial workshops at their capital cities of Delhi, Agra and Lahore. Lavish clothing, gold and silver thread work, silks, brocades and velvets were among their productions (fig. 6). Their most renown contribution to textile art was their patronage of the knotted carpet industry.



Fig.6: Mughal Textiles

- **British Empire**

The region came across decline of flourishing textile trade by the end of the 18th century due to political instability of region, introduction of machine-made textiles and preference of British to import raw materials from their colonies and export finished product back to them.

Methodology

The paper aims to compile the tremendous heritage of traditional textiles of Pakistan. The documented traditional textiles of various techniques are gathered here as result of extensive literature review. Pakistan has been a country with rich textile heritage emerging from various faiths which are reflected in the expression of regional folk textiles.. The rich heritage of Pakistan's textile craft has evolved over a long period of 5000 years.

Overview of Some Traditional Textiles of Pakistan

A textile is any flexible material consisting of a network of natural or artificial fibers. For every piece of textiles, design is an integral part of its form as well as its embellishment. Textile Design is classified into two types: structural and decorative. Structural textile design is the one which is built into the cloth during the process of its manufacturing, weaving is the most common method of producing structural design. Decorative design is applied to the surface of the cloth to further ornament it. The common method of producing decorative design in the field of textiles includes printing, dyeing, embroidery, appliqué, painting as well as any other surface enrichment.

As a textile decorative technique embroidery has possessed an enormous potential since early days. Some evidence show that embroidery was a craft known to the Indus Valley civilization people. Embroideries from Sind had been known and admired by the visitors since Marco Polo's day. The folk embroideries of Sind are among the richest in South Asia, Tharparker produces some of the most spectacular embroideries (fig.7).

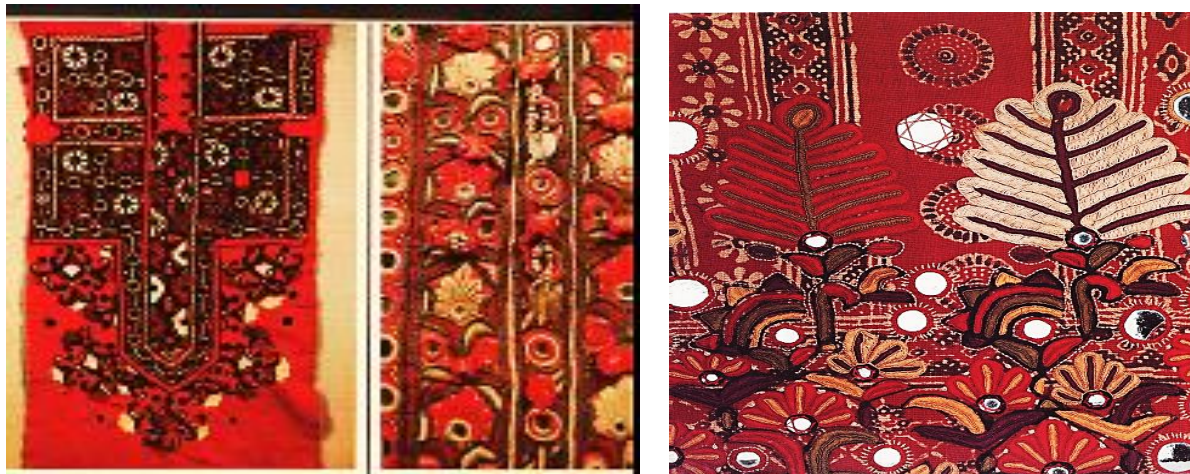


Fig.7: Embroideries of Sindh region

Historic PHULKARI of Punjab consists of Floral patterns abstracted and arranged into geometric motifs indicative of strong Central Asian influence. Dense areas of stitchery often covers the entire ground cloth (fig.8).



Fig.8: Samples of Phulkari of Punjab

The Kashmiri motifs are exclusive in their own way, depicting nature and are strongly influenced by the naturalistic Chinese style. Chenar leaves, fruits such as cherries, plums and grapes, local birds such as the parrot and kingfisher, and a wide range of flowers including lilies, tulips and lotuses are composed into flowing arabesques.(fig.9).



Fig.9: *Kashmiri Embroidery*

The rich variety of appliqué patchwork known as Rilly work is among the finest folk art in Pakistan. Most Rillis are multicolored with the ancient combinations of black, white, red and yellow, sometimes blue and green are added (fig.10).



Fig.10: *Ralli Work*

The handloom weaves of Pakistan have been spinning their magic for generations. Cotton and silk fabrics produced today carry on a century's old tradition in design and craftsmanship incorporating modern quality and design techniques. The weavers are not only expert craftsmen, but artists who capture the spirit of the past in the unique traditional designs through bold use of colors and textures. The wonders of handloom include Sussi, striped and checked material in silk and cotton; Dari and Khais, used in bedcovers or wraps; Brocade and Kumkhuab, a fine handspun creation of silk interwoven with gold or silver thread in a rainbow of colors and designs (fig. 11).

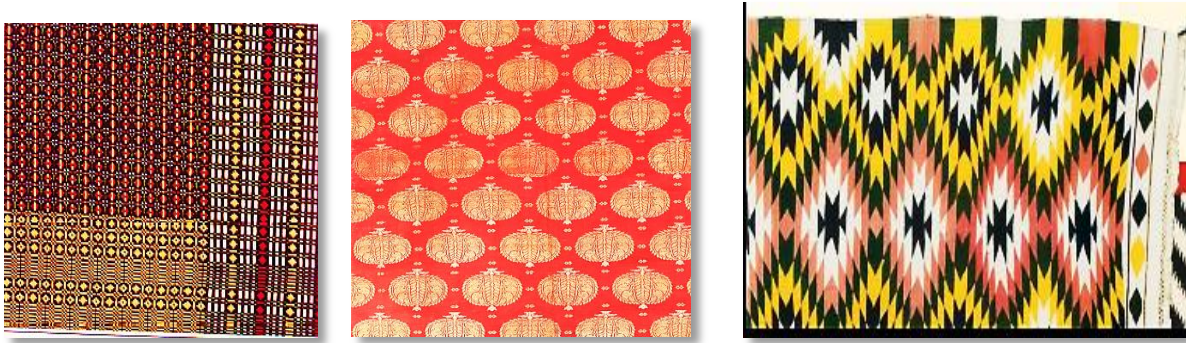


Fig.11: *Hand Loom Weaving Wonders*

Floor coverings were traditionally crafted by the village people for their own use. In Moghul Period the woven floor coverings, became important export products the traditional floor coverings of Pakistan can be classified into three categories: -non woven rugs and mats -woven rugs -knotted carpets (fig.12).



Fig.12: *Hand Knotted Carpets*

The Subcontinent's ancient techniques of applying designs on textiles with pigments and dyes are admired as one of the greatest Block Printing is the essence of Sindh and the crafts that make Pakistan stand out in the world, it is one of the numerous arts and crafts that are slowly dying and so have to be renewed and brought back to life. Ajraks are traditionally used for bedcovers, skirt material, men's turbans and women and men's cheddars (fig.13).



Fig.13: *Hand Block Printing / Ajrak*

Tie and dye is an ancient technique of the Subcontinent. Tie and dye is more commonly termed Chunari / Bandhanna or Leherya (Fig.14). It is traditional to Sind and the region of Punjab which extends between Cholistan and Lahore.



Fig.14: *Tie and Dye textile articles*

Findings

Historic traditional textiles are now a fading cottage industry in Pakistan. It is highly endorsed to embrace our textile heritage as our unique identity. Efforts should be made to enhance the adornment of textile products for these historic traditional textile applications. Traditional textile applications can be used as contemporary designing a, in fashion, and home textiles. There is a great need to establish a well-connected chain of institutes throughout the region to preserve and promote these historic traditional textiles. It is recommended that this is a high time to proudly step in modern world with our textile heritage as our unique identity.

Acknowledgements

None.

Conflict of Interest

Author declared no conflict of interest.

Funding Source

The author received NO funding to conduct this study.

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