

From Loom to Legacy: Assessing Interventions and Sustainable Strategies for Safeguarding India's Traditional Textile Crafts

SABRINA SAREEN

Assistant Professor, Fabric and Apparel Science
Department of Home Science, Lakshmbai College
University of Delhi, New Delhi (India)

ABSTRACT

Preserving traditional Indian textile crafts is not just about fabrics and threads; it is a sacred endeavour to safeguard the rich tapestry of India's cultural heritage. The significance of preserving traditional Indian textile crafts lies in the unique blend of artistry, skill, and cultural heritage they embody. These crafts are not just fabrics; they are a living testament to the creativity, expertise, and ingenuity of artisans who have dedicated their lives to mastering these age-old techniques. However, the rapid pace of globalization, changing consumer preferences, and the challenges faced by artisans have posed a significant threat to the survival of these crafts. This review article examines various interventions and sustainable strategies that have been implemented to safeguard India's traditional textile crafts and ensure their legacy for future generations. It discusses skill development programs that have equipped artisans with new techniques, design inputs, and business knowledge to enhance their craftsmanship and marketability. The role of design innovation and collaboration with renowned designers and fashion houses is examined, showcasing successful examples where artisans have benefited from these partnerships.

Key Words : Traditional Textile Crafts, Preservation, Promotion, Cultural Heritage, Community Empowerment , Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Preserving Indian textile crafts is not merely an act of conservation; it embarks on a captivating journey that connects individuals with the artisans who have poured their souls into creating masterpieces. This endeavour becomes an essential quest to safeguard the very essence of India's cultural identity (Liebl and Roy, 2004). Within this realm of colours, textures, and age-old techniques, the preservation of traditional Indian textile crafts unfolds

Cite this Article: Sareen, Sabrina (2017). From Loom to Legacy: Assessing Interventions and Sustainable Strategies for Safeguarding India's Traditional Textile Crafts. *Internat. J. Appl. Home Sci.*, 4 (11 & 12) : 1207-1213.

as an enchanting pursuit, protecting the tapestry of the past and weaving a vibrant future for generations to come. Indian textiles have a long and storied history, dating back thousands of years, and they reflect the diverse cultural tapestry of the nation (Kumar *et al.*, 2017). Each region in India has its distinct textile traditions, techniques, and motifs, which are passed down through generations, encapsulating the stories, customs, and aesthetics of different communities. For instance, traditional dyeing techniques often employ natural dyes derived from plants, roots, or minerals, reducing the reliance on synthetic dyes that can have detrimental effects on the environment (Kolay, 2016). By embracing these crafts, one can encourage a more sustainable approach to textile production, which is essential in today's world of fast fashion and mass production. Moreover, the beauty and uniqueness of traditional Indian textiles have garnered global recognition and appreciation (Vieira *et al.*, 2016). These crafts have transcended borders and captivated the interest of people worldwide. Preserving them not only safeguards the cultural heritage of India but also contributes to the global cultural landscape, promoting diversity, intercultural dialogue, and cross-cultural understanding (Khaire, 2011; Patel, 2016).

Preserving traditional Indian textile crafts through interventions:

Preserving traditional Indian textile crafts is essential for safeguarding cultural heritage supporting artisan communities and promoting sustainable practices. Here are some interventions that have been implemented to preserve and revitalize traditional Indian textile crafts:

- **Skill Development Programs:** Various organizations and government initiatives provide skill development programs to train and empower artisans in traditional textile crafts. These programs offer training in handloom weaving, block printing, natural dyeing, embroidery, and other traditional techniques. By enhancing artisans' skills, these interventions ensure the transmission of knowledge to the next generation and help sustain traditional crafts. Research has revealed various training forums, under which artisans have benefitted such as -Artisan Training Workshops, Design and Technical, Skill Enhancement, Master-Apprentice Training, Entrepreneurship and Business Development, Cluster-based Skill Development.
- **Design Innovation and Collaboration:** Collaborations between designers, artisans, and craft clusters have been instrumental in reviving and contemporizing traditional textile crafts. Designers work closely with artisans to create new designs, explore innovative techniques, and incorporate traditional crafts into contemporary fashion and lifestyle products (Mehrotra, 2015). This collaboration not only preserves traditional crafts but also opens up new markets and opportunities for artisans. Research has shown successful designer collaboration with artisans like - Ritu Kumar and Manish Malhotra with Zardozi and Chikankari craftsmanship; Abraham and Thankore's work on ikat, block printing and embroidery, etc.
- **Market Access and Promotion:** Initiatives have been taken to provide market

access and promote traditional Indian textiles both domestically and internationally (Srivastav and Rawat, 2016). Craft fairs, exhibitions, and trade shows are organized to showcase and sell artisan-made textiles. Online platforms and e-commerce websites are used to reach a wider audience and connect artisans directly with consumers (Sherburne, 2009). Surajkund Crafts Mela, Dastkar, India International Trade Fair, Textile India, Crafts Villa provide artisans with increased visibility, easy access to markets, and reduced dependency on intermediaries. These interventions help artisans gain recognition, secure better livelihoods, and create sustainable market linkages.

- **Financial and Institutional Support:** Financial assistance, grants, and loans are provided to artisans and craft organizations to support the development and sustainability of traditional textile crafts. Government schemes and non-profit organizations offer financial aid for skill training, infrastructure development, and marketing initiatives (Sherburne, 2009). One such initiative is the Handloom Export Promotion Scheme (HHEP) which aims to support handloom weavers by providing them with financial assistance and marketing support. This support enables artisans to continue practicing their craft and maintain their traditional techniques.
- **Documentation and Research:** Documentation and research play a crucial role in preserving traditional textile crafts. Efforts are made to document weaving techniques, dye recipes, block designs, and other traditional knowledge associated with textile crafts (Basole, 2015; Da Costa, 2015). Research institutions, such as NIFT, educational institute-scholars, and experts collaborate to document craft traditions, create archives, and publish research papers to ensure the preservation and dissemination of knowledge.
- **Community Empowerment and Social Development:** Interventions focus on the overall social and economic development of artisan communities (Sandhu, 2015). Initiatives provide access to healthcare facilities, education, clean water, and sanitation. Empowering women artisans, promoting fair trade practices, and ensuring fair wages are also crucial elements in the preservation of traditional textile crafts. One of the government schemes running in clusters for textiles in India is the Integrated Skill Development Scheme (ISDS). This scheme, implemented by the Ministry of Textiles, focuses on skill development and capacity building within textile clusters. The scheme also supports the establishment of Common Facility Centres (CFCs) within clusters, which provide shared infrastructure and services for artisans, such as dyeing, printing, finishing, and testing facilities.
- **Sustainable Practices and Environmental Conservation:** Interventions emphasize the adoption of sustainable practices in textile production (Szczepanowska, 2013). This includes promoting natural dyeing techniques, encouraging organic and hand-spun fibers, and reducing water and energy consumption. By incorporating

eco-friendly practices, traditional textile crafts can contribute to environmental conservation and the promotion of sustainable fashion. Successful initiatives include -Organic Farming and Natural Dyes, Water Conservation, Handloom Revival, use of sustainable and forest-based fibers, such as bamboo, hemp, and banana stem, Various certifications and standards, such as GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) and Fairtrade, ensure that textile production adheres to specific environmental and ethical criteria.

These interventions collectively contribute to the preservation, revival, and sustainable development of traditional Indian textile crafts. By valuing and supporting these crafts, we can ensure their survival for future generations and promote the rich cultural heritage of India.

Organizations actively involved in preservation and promotion of traditional Indian textile crafts:

These organizations play a vital role in supporting artisans, documenting techniques, conducting research, organizing exhibitions, and creating awareness about the cultural significance of these crafts (Loulanski, 2006; Sharma, 2015). Here are a few notable organizations:

- **Crafts Council of India:** The Crafts Council of India is a non-profit organization that aims to preserve and promote traditional crafts across India. They provide support to artisans through training programs, workshops, and marketing initiatives. The organization also organizes exhibitions and events to showcase the work of skilled craftsmen and raise awareness about traditional crafts.
- **Dastkar:** Dastkar is a well-known organization that focuses on promoting traditional crafts and artisans in India. They work closely with rural artisans, particularly women, and provide them with design inputs, marketing platforms, and skill development opportunities. The organisation organizes various craft fairs, exhibitions, and workshops to create market linkages for artisans.
- **Kala Raksha:** Kala Raksha is a grassroots organization based in Gujarat that works towards the preservation and promotion of traditional textile crafts, particularly the embroidery traditions of Kutch. They provide training and design support to artisans, facilitate market linkages, and undertake research and documentation to safeguard the heritage of these crafts.
- **National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC):** NHDC is a government-owned corporation that plays a significant role in the development and promotion of handloom textiles in India. They provide financial assistance, design support, and marketing opportunities to handloom weavers. NHDC also undertakes initiatives to preserve and revive traditional handloom techniques.

- **All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association (AIACA):** AIACA is an organization dedicated to the welfare and empowerment of artisans and craftworkers in India. They work towards the preservation and promotion of traditional crafts by providing skill development training, advocacy for artisans' rights, and market linkages through collaborations with national and international organizations.
- **Central Cottage Industries Corporation (CCIC):** CCIC is a government organization that promotes and supports traditional crafts, including textiles, by providing a platform for artisans to showcase and sell their products. They operate retail outlets across India and also organize exhibitions, showcasing the diversity and richness of Indian crafts.
- **Srishti Trust:** Srishti Trust is a non-profit organization that focuses on reviving and preserving traditional crafts and textile practices in India. They work with marginalized communities and provide training, design intervention, and marketing support to artisans. Srishti Trust also conducts research and documentation to create awareness about endangered textile traditions.

These organizations, along with numerous other regional and community-based initiatives, are working tirelessly to preserve, promote, and uplift traditional Indian textile crafts. Through their efforts, they ensure that these crafts continue to thrive, artisans receive fair recognition and support, and the cultural heritage of India remains alive for future generations to cherish.

Traditional Indian textile crafts on verge of extinction:

Several traditional Indian textile crafts have been successfully preserved and continue to thrive due to the efforts of artisans, communities, and various organizations. Here are some notable examples: Banarasi Brocade, Kalamkari, Bandhani, Chikankari, Phulkari, Kantha, Patola etc. These are just a few examples of the many traditional Indian textile crafts that have been successfully preserved. Each region of India has its own unique textile traditions and crafts, and efforts continue to safeguard and promote these valuable cultural heritage treasures.

Unfortunately, there are several traditional Indian textile crafts that are on the verge of extinction (Khurana and Pant, 2016; Pandya and Vishwakarma, 2010) due to various factors such as changing market demands, lack of recognition, and limited resources (Tomar and Sharan, 2016). Here are a few examples:

- **Tangaliya Weaving:** Tangaliya is a handwoven textile craft practiced by the Dangasia community in Surendranagar district, Gujarat. The craft involves intricate weaving of woolen threads using pit looms. However, due to the decline in demand and lack of support, Tangaliya weaving is facing the risk of extinction.
- **Toda Embroidery:** Toda embroidery is a unique craft practiced by the Toda tribal community in the Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu. It involves intricate red and black

embroidery on shawls and other garments. With the changing lifestyles and limited market access, Toda embroidery is at risk of fading away.

- **Wrought Iron Block Printing:** Wrought iron block printing, also known as Chapa printing, is a traditional craft practiced by artisans in Farrukhabad, Uttar Pradesh. The artisans use intricately carved wrought iron blocks to print patterns on fabrics. However, the craft is facing challenges due to the lack of interest from younger generations and the preference for more commercially viable printing methods.
- **Kani Shawl Weaving:** Kani shawl weaving is an intricate craft that originated in Kashmir. It involves weaving intricate patterns using small wooden sticks called kanis. The dwindling number of skilled weavers and the shift towards modern fabrics have put Kani shawl weaving at risk of extinction.
- **Sujuni Embroidery:** Sujuni embroidery is a traditional craft practiced by women in Bihar. It involves stitching layers of fabric together and embellishing them with colorful thread work. With limited recognition and market demand, Sujuni embroidery is struggling to survive.
- **Pabhoi-Kotor Weaving:** Pabhoi-Kotor weaving is a traditional textile craft practiced by the Karbis, an indigenous community in Assam. The craft involves intricate weaving and embroidery using a backstrap loom. Due to the lack of economic viability and limited exposure, the craft is facing the threat of disappearing.

Efforts are being made by artisans, organizations, and government initiatives to revive and preserve these endangered textile crafts. However, sustained support, recognition, and market access are crucial to ensure the survival and continuity of these valuable cultural traditions.

Conclusion:

In a world driven by rapid change and globalization, the preservation of India's traditional textile crafts emerges as a resolute commitment to honouring cultural heritage and nurturing sustainable artistic legacies. The review article sheds light on the critical importance of safeguarding India's traditional textile crafts and the various interventions and sustainable strategies employed to achieve this goal. It is evident that these crafts hold immense cultural and artistic value, representing the country's rich heritage and identity. The interventions discussed in the article have played a significant role in preserving and promoting traditional textile crafts. Skill development programs have empowered artisans with new techniques and business knowledge, enhancing their craftsmanship and marketability. Collaborations with designers and fashion houses have provided artisans with opportunities for growth and exposure to wider markets. However, it is important to acknowledge that challenges persist. The rapid pace of globalization, changing consumer preferences, and economic pressures continue to pose threats to traditional textile crafts. Therefore, sustained support, policy frameworks, and financial resources are essential to address these challenges and ensure

the long-term sustainability of these crafts.

REFERENCES

- Da Costa, D. (2015). Sentimental capitalism in contemporary India: art, heritage, and development in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. *Antipode*, **47**(1) : 74-97.
- Khaire, M. (2011). The Indian fashion industry and traditional Indian crafts. *Business History Review*, **85**(2) : 345-366.
- Khurana, P. and Pant, S. (2016). Telia Rumal, double Ikat fabric of Andhra Pradesh.
- Kolay, S. (2016). Cultural heritage preservation of traditional Indian art through virtual new-media. *Procedia-Social & Behavioral Sciences*, **225** : 309-320.
- Kumar, V., Agrawal, T. K., Wang, L. and Chen, Y. (2017). Contribution of traceability towards attaining sustainability in the textile sector. *Textiles and Clothing Sustainability*, **3**(1) : 1-10.
- Liebl, M. and Roy, T. (2004). Handmade in India: Traditional craft skills in a changing world. *Poor people's knowledge: Promoting intellectual property in developing countries*, 53-74.
- Loulanski, T. (2006). Cultural heritage in socio-economic development: local and global perspectives. *Environments: a journal of interdisciplinary studies*, **34**(2).
- Mehrotra, P. (2015). The Mantra of Indian Textile Handlooms and Handicrafts for the New Generation of Cuturiers and Brands. 492-503.
- Pandya, A. and Vishwakarma, A. (2010). Rogan, the traditional hand painted textile of Gujarat.
- Patel, A.S. (2016). Declining crafts: looking through a different perspective. 292-297.
- Sandhu, A. (2015). *Indian fashion: Tradition, innovation, style*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Sharma, R. Contemporary Challenges to Handicrafts & Artisans of India. (2015). A treatise on Recent Trends and Sustainability. *Crafts & Design*, **6**.
- Sherburne, A. (2009). Achieving sustainable textiles: a designer's perspective. In *Sustainable Textiles* (pp. 3-32). Woodhead Publishing. [10] Basole, A. (2015). Authenticity, innovation, and the geographical indication in an artisanal industry: the case of the Banarasi Sari. *The Journal of World Intellectual Property*, **18**(3-4) : 127-149.
- Srivastav, G. and Rawat, P. S. (2016). Indian handicraft and globalization: the export context. In *Designing and Implementing Global Supply Chain Management* (pp. 175-184). IGI Global.
- Szczepanowska, H. M. (2013). *Conservation of cultural heritage: key principles and approaches*. Routledge.
- Tomar, S. and Sharan, M. (2016). A Glance at an Extinct Craft OF Cotton Loin Cloth Production and Zari Border Weaving at Mandvi, Surat. *International Journal of Textile and Fashion Technology (IJTFT)*, **6**(6) : 37-44.
- Vieira, S.F. A., de Godoy Lima, M.Y. and Gehlen, K.R.H. (2016). Sustainable trend: a study about innovations in the productive chain of the textile sector. *Portland International Conference on Management of Engineering and Technology (PICMET)* (pp. 2392-2402). IEEE.
