

Study of Traditional Textile Crafts of Bihar and its Challenges

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Abstract:

This abstract presents a study on the traditional textile crafts of Bihar, specifically focusing on challenges these crafts face while highlighting their resilience and potential for revival. The research explores the rich heritage of Bihar's textile traditions, exemplified by crafts like Khatwa, Kashida, Sujani, and tussar silk acknowledging their significance and cultural importance. It also delves into the contemporary challenges faced by these crafts, such as competition from machine-made textiles and the need for sustainable practices. The study aims to understand the factors contributing to the decline or revival of these crafts and propose strategies for their preservation and promotion.

Keywords: Kashida, Sujani, Tussar silk, Khatwa, Embroidery, Appliqué

Introduction:

Bihar is not only the holy land where Lord Buddha had attained the enlightenment, but it's also a place where different kinds of arts and crafts flourished. The city of Patliputra (currently known as Patna) was one of the great metropolitan centers of the ancient world and its kings and nobles offered patronage to a variety of arts and crafts. Following are the traditional textile crafts of Bihar which is facing multidimensional challenges for its survival.

Tussar Silk:

Bhagalpur, a district of Bihar, which was on the ancient Silk Route that connected India with countries such as China in the east and Europe in the west, is famous for tussar silk. Bhagalpur is major producer of tussar silk in India and contributing 66% of tussar production. This type of silk is renowned for its unique texture, quality and durability. This Bhagalpur tussar silk industry employs thousands of weavers and supports a vast network of people involved in various stages of production, from rearing silkworms to weaving.



Fig. 1. Sunil Das weaving a silk sari using pitloom, Source: The Hindu

There are lots of factors that contribute declining in production and popularity of this textile hub. These include increased competition from silk producing regions such as Bengaluru, product rejections due to high quality inspections, rising material cost, insufficient compensation for weavers and the lack of awareness among potential customers.

Kashida Embroidery:

The *kashida* of Bihar closely resembles the *kasuti* of Karnatka in appearance, is known for its diverse styles, bright colours, and the use of contrasting white, yellow, or green threads on bright material. It is usually practiced to embellish personal garments and house hold items such as blouses, odhanis, sarees, pillow coves, bed sheets, etc. In many regions, embellished items are given to bride as bedding gift which is a symbol of maternal love, care and devotion.

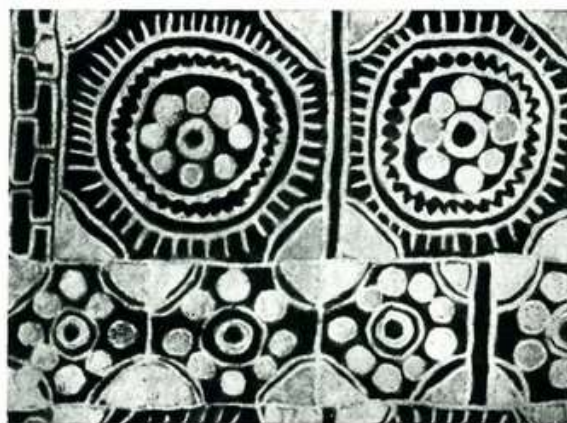


Fig. 2. Kashida Embroidery with Mica Work

It features the jhinkana chain stitch and long and short satin stitches for filling, often combined with appliqué on garments like caps and blouses. Motifs like jewellerys, geometrical shapes, wavy lines, diamonds, floral motifs, flying green parrots, elephants are widely used in this folk stitchery art.

This traditional textile craft has seen a decline due to various factors including modernization, urbanization, and the out-migration of skilled artisans for better living opportunities. Additionally, technological enhancement brings the shift towards mass-produced garments and a lack of awareness and supports for traditional crafts have contributed to its fading popularity.

Khatwa Appliqué Work:

Khatwa, a locally known appliqué work of Bihar, commonly found on wall hangings, *Shamianas*, *Sarees*, *Dupattas*, cushion covers, table cloths and curtains. This traditional textile craft uses waste pieces of cloths as its raw materials and it is usually stitched with white cloth on bright backgrounds such as red or orange to create intricate designs. This technique, which dates back centuries, is particularly renowned in the Bhojpur, Patna, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga districts of Bihar.

The making process involves cutting fabric into desired shapes, sizes and patterns and the entire compositions are assembled together with chain and running stitches. Traditional khatwa appliqué had motifs drawn from nature or geometry. The motifs such as leaves, bees, trees, flowers, birds and animals can be noticed in most of the artwork. These appliqués are used in canopies (*Shamianas*), wall

enclosures (*Kanats*), and tents during ceremonial events. This contemporary appliqué work is used for embellishing *Sarees*, scarves, cushion covers, bed covers, sofa covers, curtains, table cloths and wall hangings.



Fig. 3. Khatwa Applique of Bihar

The appliqué called khatwa work in Bihar declined primarily due to the loss of royal patronage during colonial times, leading to a decline in the demand for lavish tents and canopies.

Sujani Quilts:

Sujani work is an embroidery style practiced in many parts of Bihar such as Muzaffarpur, Madhubani and Patna regions. It had been started as recycling of old and worn pieces of fabrics for making utility products such as baby warmer, thin mattresses for the Khat (cots), etc. for their own uses. It was usually practised by women in their leisure time. The embroidery was carried out on layers of old white cotton saris that are stitched together with simple running stitch in white thread. The motifs are filled-in with rows of running stitch in coloured threads drawn from the old sari borders. The outlines of the motifs were defined with chain stitch.



Fig. 4. Sujani Embroidered Asana

Earlier, the motifs were directly composed on fabric by stitches but now days; the motifs are first drawn

either on fabric using pencil or using tracing sheet and replicate the designs to fabric. The motifs are taken from daily life and the natural surroundings such as flowers, plants, elephants, birds, fishes, deities, etc. The contemporary *Sujanis* can be seen with motifs related to social concerns like women empowerment, girl child education etc. Sujani embroidery work has been awarded a GI tag but its traditional methods and intricate design have been facing strong competitions from modern machines and faster production systems.

Conclusion:

Textile crafts such as Sujani embroidery, Khatwa appliqué, Kashida embroidery etc. were once treated as legacy of Bihar, are now facing many challenges for their survival. All these crafts were the result of a socialization process and to fulfil their household need. Various factors such as technological enhancement, changing preferences of artisans and the users, lack of awareness of current trends, materials, and markets among makers and users, etc. make it challenging for the overall growth of these crafts. In order to preserve this legacy for the next generations, the government has come forward with various initiatives such as the opening of Integrated Textiles Parks, organizing craft-based exhibitions and fairs, GI tags, training programmes, and various financial schemes for artisans, self-help groups and other stakeholders to revive it.

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