

Contemporary Men's Fashion as a Tool to Revive Jharkhand's Sohrai and Khovar Paintings

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ABSTRACT

Traditional art forms are the repository of the cultural memory, ecological knowledge, and social identity of indigenous communities. However, many craft traditions are faced with challenges of limited market visibility, declining transmission and lack of adequate economic opportunities for artisan communities. The integration of indigenous art practices into apparel design has become a potential strategy for cultural preservation, sustainable design development and community empowerment in the contemporary fashion industry. The Sohrai and Khovar paintings of Jharkhand, India are important examples of indigenous mural traditions, which reflect ecological narratives, symbolic motifs and community-based artistic knowledge. Despite their cultural significance, their use in modern fashion remains relatively underexplored.

This study aims to explore the possibilities of incorporating Sohrai and Khovar paintings into modern men's fashion by examining consumer awareness, design preferences, acceptance levels, sustainability perception, and willingness to support artisan communities. The study is exploratory descriptive research using a pilot questionnaire survey among about 50 respondents comprising 15 craft and industry experts and 35 consumers from Ranchi, Jamshedpur and Hazaribagh districts of Jharkhand. Consumer responses about awareness, product preferences, design adaptation and support to artisans were interpreted using percentage analysis.

The study contributes to the address of indigenous craft revival by suggesting fashion as a medium of cultural continuousness, sustainable practice and artisan livelihood enhancement. The research provides insights for designers, craft organisations and sustainable fashion enterprises looking to develop culturally meaningful products.

Keyword: sohrai Painting, Khovar Painting, Indigenous Craft, Sustainable Fashion, Men's Apparel, Cultural Preservation, Artisan Empowerment

1. INTRODUCTION

India is a land of rich cultural drapery and craft. The various folk arts and numerous traditional crafts that are found in the various parts of India, every craft is unique and showcases its region and community.

The state of Jharkhand is famous for its dance forest land and because of this forest this state has been named JHARKHAND. Where Jhar is a local word use for A grove of trees and shrubs and represent forest, Khand is stand for the land. Amongst these forest, the Sohari and Khovar paintings from

Hazaribagh District, State- Jharkhand are unique in their intricate designs, artistic inference and intrinsic associations to the native legacy of the region. These forms of paintings are not merely beautiful expressions but are interwoven with the social and ritualistic practice of the local communities, especially the Kurmi, Munda, Oraon and other tribal groups of Hazaribagh District of Jharkhand.

The Sohrai and Khovar paintings are painted and created by the local Jharkhandi tribal communities to celebrate different aspects of life. Sohrai festival of art is celebrated in the month of October to November next day after Diwali. Khovar festival paintings are done in the new wedding season in home. In 2019, Khovar and Sohrai painting got Geographical Indication which makes them more famous in the global platform.

Sohrai Painting is a beautiful art form that is very much associated with the Sohrai harvest festival. It is renowned for its distinctive murals painted on the old mud walls of village homes and on pots and household goods. These intricate murals feature a rich variety of motifs, such as animals, flora, geometric designs, and religious and mythological themes. Sohrai paintings have an earthy color palette of red, yellow and black, drawn from natural pigments like ochre, charcoal and kaolin from the local surroundings. Interestingly, artists use the twigs of the Sal tree as chewing sticks to make brushes to create these stunning artworks. The paintings often show a strong representation of the bond between mother and child, while also expertly portraying scenes of everyday life

So, art is a tradition that passes from mother to daughter. As daughters marry into other villages, approaches to art have come together over time. Sohrai paintings are distinct from other paintings in that they have a strong matriarchal component, as they are made by women who express their feelings and experiences through this art form on walls.

The Sohrai paintings are not just a decorative art but also a medium to celebrate fertility, prosperity and bounties of nature.

The Khovar painting is associated with the marriage or season of Khovar. which generally begins from the month of January and continues till the onset of the rainy season in June. The word “ Khovar“ is made of two words- “Kho” means cave and “var” means married couple (in local language) This painting art form is famous for its homochromatic designs created using an old comb-cut technique that exposes the intricate patterns against a dark background wall . The themes and motifs are always centered around marital bliss, fertility symbols and mythical stories which reflect the deep cultural philosophy and the festive spirit of matrimonial rituals



Sohrai Painting Figure Reference: - Book - THE PAINTED HOUSES OF HAZARIBAGH written by Mr. Balu Imam and Book -HARVEST ICONS Sohrai Village Murals of Hazaribagh Written By Mr Balu Imam,



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Sohrai Painting, Figure Reference:-



Sohrai Painting, Figure Reference:- BRIDAL CAVES A Quest for the Adivasi Khovar Tradition and Rock Art of Hazaribagh- Both Authored by Mr Balu Imam

Sohrai and Khovar are women dominated crafts and women of this area emphasize the prominent role and are custodians of this cultural tradition.

The Sohrai and Khovar paintings have become popular in recent years and have gone beyond the tribal communities of Jharkhand. They are being increasingly recognized as folk art forms and have been exhibited in galleries and museums in India and abroad. They have also been featured in books and documentaries, helping to raise awareness about the rich cultural heritage of Jharkhand and assisting in the preservation and revival of these traditional art forms.

The Sohrai and Khovar art is a traditional art of painting in vogue for centuries. Native painting began in prehistoric times, when it was painted on cave walls, but it has evolved and been passed down through generations within native communities. However, the rapid urbanization and construction of houses with

concrete walls have challenged the traditional art to be preserved and practiced. Fortunately, attempts have been made to revive and promote this age-old craft. These beautiful paintings have once again come to light in general public with the tag of GI for Sohrai and Khovar art and the efforts of the state government.

Traditionally these paintings were done on walls, but now they are also done on paper, canvas, concrete, wood, and fabric. The sizes of the paintings depend on the surface area, the motifs vary from region to region and from community to community. In cities where mud walls are rare, artists have used acrylic mediums and chemically manufactured pigments to keep the tradition alive. Furthermore, there has been a recent trend of using Sohrai and Khovar paintings on fashion clothes to create more job opportunities for the artisans and help them sustain their income. The study aims to analyze the finer aspects of revival of Sohrai and Khovar painting with an emphasis on its adoption in fashion and other modern forms, thereby ensuring the survival of this lovely art form and the livelihood of the gifted artisans.

1.2. Research Gap

The existing studies on Indian crafts have largely focused on documentation, cultural preservation and issues faced by artisans in their livelihood. While there has been some research on strategies for craft revival, there has been little study on the systematic integration of Jharkhand's indigenous mural traditions in contemporary men's fashion.

The detected gaps are:

1. Research work on the conversion of indigenous sohrai and khovar painting into fashion products are very few.
2. Very few research and exploration has been done for suitable categories of fashion and apparel, the fabric, silhouette. Sohrai and Khovar art pattern, surface development for application.
3. All this kind of indigenous art to empower and sustain the economy requires more research on how fashion can be a tool for the artisan.
4. There was little exploration of how this tradition with tribal language adapted as it is without losing cultural loss.

My study attempts to fill this gap by combining research on mural art, the design process, fashion design, and consumer behavior prospects, as well as the angle of sustainable fashion.

2. Review of the Literature

In this chapter, the researcher has provided summaries of prior research to show the understanding of the existing knowledge, and gaps and areas to be explored. The findings of literature review are discussed in the subsequent sections: -

Historical Background and Cultural Importance 3. Problems of Urbanization Government & NGO Initiatives 4. 4. Integration. Fashion. Economic Impact on Artisans 5. Sustainable Fashion 6. 7. Strategies for marketing and promotion Tribal Art of India 8. Other 9. Prior Work in the Craft Sector Past Initiatives for the Revival for Sohrai and Khovar Painting 10. Craft Commercial Market of India

2.1 Cultural Significance and Historical Background

The Cultural Significance of Sohrai and Khovar Paintings in Tribal Jharkhand," Dr. Rajesh Singh (2022) This work highlights the rich cultural heritage of Sohrai and Khovar paintings. The important cultural heritage of Sohrai and Khovar paintings has generated awareness in this research. It emphasizes the significance of Sohrai and Khovar paintings in the ritual and social life of tribal communities in Jharkhand. Singh (2022) emphasizes that these art forms are not just decorative but are powerful

vehicles of storytelling and cultural expression, strongly integrated into the social structure of Kurmi, Munda, Oraon and other Tribal Groups. Anderson & Weber (2021) in their research article “Indigenous Art as Cultural Narratives: A Global Perspective” in the Journal of Cultural Heritage analyze the global importance of Indigenous art as cultural narratives. They consider the way that indigenous art, particularly Indian art, safeguards the intangible cultural heritage of communities by representing history, mythology and social values. The study is in line with the study of Singh, which shows that the purpose of Sohrai and Khovar painting in Jharkhand is same.

2.2 Urbanization Challenges

In the recent study “The Impact of Urbanization on Traditional Art Forms”, Sharma and Verma (2023) studied the rapid urbanization of traditional areas and the serious challenge it has posed on the continuation of Sohrai and Khovar paintings. This transition from the traditional mud houses to the concrete buildings of today has resulted in the loss of the natural surfaces that were once the canvas for these beautiful murals. Consequently artists have fewer chances to practice their art in traditional settings. This major change has forced artists to look at other mediums to preserve and promote these unique art forms.

2.4 Incorporation with Fashion

Gupta and Roy (2022) in a recent study found that “The integration of Sohrai and Khovar paintings in the fashion sector has emerged as a successful avenue for the revival of these art forms. The research they conducted was on how current fashion designers have successfully incorporated traditional motifs into contemporary apparel, resulting in a harmonious fusion that appeals to urban consumers while maintaining the core essence of these art forms. This growing trend is also supported by collaboration between fashion designers and tribal artists through different platforms like the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED).

2.6 Sustainable Fashion

Incorporating natural materials and environmentally friendly methods for creating clothes with Sohrai and Khovar paintings is a part of the increasing move toward sustainable fashion. The use of traditional approaches with natural dyes and materials can be an important factor in encouraging more sustainable fashion practices, as Kumar et al. (2023) state, which can reduce the environmental

2.7 Previous efforts for the revival of sohrai and Khovar Painting

Dr. Pratima Singh’s thesis “Cultural Significance of Sohrai and Khovar Paintings in Tribal Jharkhand” explored the origins, techniques and cultural significance of the art forms. She emphasised the need to retain the authenticity of the paintings while at the same time provide sustainable livelihood options to the artisans. Singh’s study suggested the potential use of these motifs in modern commercial spaces such as textiles and home decor. Singh also elaborated on how modern design thinking and sustainability principles can be woven into the training of artisans to make art more commercially viable while retaining its cultural essence.

Ms. Jaya Jaitly in her book “The Craft Traditions of India”, has given a detailed description of the craft traditions of India and has also dedicated a section to the tribal arts like Sohrai and Khovar. Jaitly also emphasized the need for community-led efforts in preserving and the role of government and non-government organizations in the revival of these art forms. Her work highlighted the close links between craft traditions and the social fabric of tribal communities in India and stressed the need for concerted efforts to integrate the art forms into tourism, craft exhibitions and government policies.

Dr. Abhinav Mishra did his Ph.D. in 2019 on the evolution of Khovar art and its social impact. His research was about the transformation of Khovar art from a mostly ritualistic and ceremonial art form into a more commercialized tribal art form, and the impact of modernization and urbanization on the livelihoods of

Dr. Shalini Gupta completed her Ph.D. on the topic “Revitalizing Tribal Arts: A Study on the Economic Potential of Sohrai and Khovar Paintings.” Her research focused on the economic dimension of these traditional paintings and challenges faced by tribal artists like limited access to market, underpricing, and decline in traditional painting techniques.

2.8 Craft Economical Market of India:-

Source: Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. (2023). 2022 Annual Report 2023. Source : Ministry of Textiles Website-India’s craft market is very vital for the country’s cultural and economic scenario. It has been a major source of employment and foreign exchange earnings. This overview talks about the craft market in India, contribution to GDP in the last five years and future projections. India has one of the world’s largest and most varied craft markets, with a wide variety of products including textiles, pottery, jewellery, painting, woodwork and metalwork. (Ref: Ministry of Textiles, Govt. of India. (2023). Annual Report 2022-23 Source: Ministry of Textiles Website)

2.9 Projected Growth (2024 to 2029)

There are likely to be many factors that will contribute to a huge growth in India’s craft market in the coming years. The craft sector is projected to contribute 8% to 8.5% to India’s GDP by 2029, underscoring its importance in the economy. The market size is projected to be around \$10 billion by 2029 due to growth in global and domestic demand along with increasing preference for sustainable and ethical products. The Indian craft exports are also projected to grow at a CAGR of around 10 per cent in the next five years with the US, Europe and the Middle East being the key markets. It is projected to reach \$5 billion by 2029, spurred by initiatives like the Indian government’s “Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme” (TIES). The growth of e-commerce platforms is likely to provide a big push to the growth of the craft market as it will give artisans access to global markets. Increased use of technology in craft production and marketing will also be a major factor. These could be use of 3D printing, blockchain for authenticity and augmented reality for consumer engagement. Also, sustainable production practices will be more in focus as consumers are becoming more interested in eco-friendly products. Furthermore, innovations in design, materials and techniques will make the craft market vibrant and appealing to younger consumers.

3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the present research study are to revive the traditional art forms of Sohrai and Khovar paintings and develop innovative products, which combine the unique styles of these paintings to enhance their visibility and to restore the fading tribal arts. One of the key goals is to devise strategies to transfer this cultural expertise to the next generation and to enrich the overall craft ecosystem of Jharkhand.

Purpose of the Research Study

- The study intends to evaluate the present status of Sohrai and Khovar paintings and to find out the major causes of the decline of these tribal art forms.

The primary aim of this research is to create innovative products that assimilate Sohrai and Khovar designs into modern men's fashion apparel and lifestyle accessories. This involves designing new

designs that incorporate these traditional motifs through different techniques like embroidery and applying them on men's shirts, outerwear and other accessories.

- Another objective of this research is to explore the role of digital platforms, e-commerce and social media in expanding market access for Sohrai and Khovar artisans for a new revamped product Range.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Method

A study was undertaken to assess the feasibility of integrating Sohrai and Khovar traditional paintings in contemporary men's fashion apparel and to gather preliminary insights concerning consumer awareness, preferences and market acceptance. The pilot study was an explorative study to test the appropriateness of the research instrument, identify possible challenges and come up with preliminary findings to inform the development of the main research.

The study used a quantitative descriptive research design with the use of a structured questionnaire. This was chosen because this approach makes it possible to collect measurable data about the opinions, attitudes, preferences and purchase intentions of the respondents in relation to fashion products inspired by Sohrai and Khovar paintings.

4.2 Study Region

The Pilot research was conducted in the state of Jharkhand, India, the geographical origin of Sohrai and Khovar paintings, and still practiced by tribal communities. Data were collected from respondents residing in the districts of Ranchi, Jamshedpur and Hazaribagh. These locations were selected as they are significant urban centres with varying levels of exposure to traditional tribal art and also a relevant population to evaluate consumer awareness and acceptance of products inspired by indigenous art forms.

4.3 Selection of Samples

The pilot study involved around 50 respondents from two major stakeholder groups. The first group consisted of 15 industry experts from various craft sectors, including professionals in handicrafts, textile design, artisan development and traditional crafts. They gave expert opinions on the commercial viability, design flexibility and prospects of conservation of Sohrai and Khovar paintings.

The second group was made up of 35 potential purchasers of contemporary men's fashion products. Respondents were selected based on purposive and convenience sampling techniques, with respondents having sufficient contact with fashion products and varying degrees of familiarity with traditional art. Both experts and consumers were included so that the researcher could obtain balanced insights from the supply side and demand side of the proposed product development.

4.4 Tools of research

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed for the purposes of this study. The questionnaire was divided into several sections and it consisted of multiple-choice and multiple-response questions. These sections comprised demographic details of the respondents, awareness about Sohrai and Khovar paintings, previous exposure to the art forms, opinion on cultural preservation, purchase intention, willingness to pay a premium for artisan supported products, preferred design applications, preferred fabrics, apparel preferences, perceived challenges, and preferred promotional methods.

The questionnaire was developed based on a review of relevant literature of traditional textile crafts, consumer behaviour, sustainable fashion, cultural heritage preservation and artisan-based product

development. While preparing the questionnaire, expert opinions were also taken to increase its content validity.

4.5 Process of Data Collection

The survey was carried out through direct contact with the respondents, and, when possible, by delivering questionnaires online. A brief introduction was given to the respondents regarding the objectives of the study and the importance of Sohrai and Khovar paintings in the cultural heritage of Jharkhand before the administration of the questionnaire. Participation in the survey was voluntary and respondents were told that the information collected would be used only for academic research purposes. The aim of the pilot survey was to test the feasibility of the questionnaire, identify ambiguous questions and test the understanding of the respondents and to get preliminary data to develop the research instrument for the main study.

4.6 Analyses of data

The data collected were compiled, coded and analysed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the opinions and preferences of the respondents. The data analyses were presented in tables and charts for easy interpretation.

The pilot study was not designed to confirm any causal relationships but to identify general trends, consumer perceptions and areas that needed further investigation in the main research. The descriptive analysis offered useful insights into market potential, consumer acceptance and design preferences for integrating Sohrai and Khovar paintings into contemporary men's fashion.

4.7 Finding

The findings indicated that the awareness of the respondents towards Sohrai and Khovar paintings was moderate. Somewhat Familiar Very Familiar 17.5% 52.6% About 52.6% of the respondents claimed to be somewhat familiar with these traditional art forms and 17.5% reported being very familiar with them. But almost one third (29.8%) stated that they were not familiar with the paintings, which means that more awareness and educational initiatives should be considered.

Regarding exposure to the paintings, the majority of the respondents (59.6%) had seen them at craft exhibitions and local fairs, indicating that exhibitions are still the primary means of promoting these traditional art forms. A further 24.6% said they had seen the paintings in railway stations, airports or government buildings, reflecting recent public efforts to display tribal art in civic spaces.

When asked in what form they had seen Sohrai and Khovar paintings, 63.2% identified wall paintings or framed artwork, and only 29.8% had seen the motifs applied to lifestyle or handmade products. This finding suggests that while the art is well known in its traditional form, its use in commercial product categories is still limited.

66.7% strongly agreed that incorporation of traditional tribal paintings in contemporary fashion can help in the preservation of dying art forms. This response shows that the public recognizes fashion as an effective medium for cultural preservation and heritage promotion.

Consumer interest in fashion products inspired by Sohrai and Khovar paintings has also been encouraging. 57.9% were willing to buy men's clothing with these traditional motifs while 35.1% would consider purchasing such products depending on the quality of the design and the overall attraction. The findings indicate that there is a positive market potential for the culturally inspired fashion products.

The survey also looked at respondents' willingness to pay a premium for products that support tribal artisans. Nearly half of the respondents (45.6%) stated they would definitely pay a higher price if it would directly benefit the artisans, while 49.1% indicated conditional willingness depending on the

quality, design and price of the product. This indicates that consumers are increasingly demanding ethical and socially responsible fashion as backed up by attractive product offerings.

Respondents expressed a preference for combining traditional motifs with contemporary aesthetics with a preference for the latter. The most preferred designs were mixed modern designs (78.9%), hand-painted application (56.1%), Kantha embroidery (52.6%), placement print (45.6%), appliqué work (43.9%), bead work (33.3%) and overall surface print (24.6%). These results suggest that consumers prefer modern reinterpretations rather than a direct copy of traditional paintings.

Natural colour palette (52.6%), geometric patterns (47.4%) and animal and nature motifs (45.6%) were found to be the most attractive design elements in the artistic characteristics of Sohrai and Khovar paintings. The visual features offer useful design guidance for the creation of modern men's wear collections inspired by tribal art.

The most popular apparel categories were kurtas (71.9%), shirts (70.2%), and jackets (66.7%), suggesting a good inclination to adopt traditional motifs in everyday and semi-formal men's wear. Cotton (75.4%) and khadi (77.2%) were the most preferred fabrics because of their comfort, sustainability and compatibility with handcrafted surface embellishment techniques.

The respondents identified market acceptance (70.2%) as the major challenge in the commercialization of Sohrai and Khovar inspired fashion products. Finally, The respondents suggested promotional strategies such as social media campaigns (38.6%), documentaries (24.6%) and exhibitions (19.3%) in order to raise awareness. These results indicate that good marketing and educating the consumers will be key in encouraging acceptance and sustaining these traditional arts through modern fashion.

3.8 The Function of the Pilot Study

The pilot study successfully proved that there is a huge interest among consumers to incorporate Sohrai and Khovar paintings into contemporary men's fashion. It also confirmed the suitability of the questionnaire for the main research and identified key variables related to consumer awareness, purchase intention, design preference, sustainability, artisan support and market challenges. These results can serve as a strong base for a larger-scale study involving a larger sample size and more advanced statistical analyses to validate these preliminary findings.

Conclusion

The pilot study demonstrated that Sohrai and Khovar paintings have good prospects to be incorporated into contemporary men's fashion. Awareness of these traditional art forms was moderate, but respondents expressed positive interest in clothing inspired by their motifs (kurtas, shirts and jackets in particular).

The findings also revealed a preference for modern interpretations of traditional themes. Especially by means of hand painting, embroidery and contemporary surface applications. Cotton and khadi were the preferred fabrics, indicating opportunities to combine traditional art with comfort and sustainability. The study also indicates that fashion can help promote and preserve the paintings of Sohrai and Khovar and provide opportunities to support the tribal artists. However, for better acceptance in the market, consumer awareness and promotion is required to be better.

In conclusion, the results offer a valuable base for the main study and suggest that Sohrai and Khovar inspired fashion may present opportunities for cultural preservation, sustainable design and artisan empowerment.

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