

Cultural Sustainability And Craft: A Design Intervention Project on Pattu Textiles

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Abstract

Background: Craft and sustainability are two closely linked concepts. Craft represents a way of life that has been passed down through generations and is deeply embedded in the cultural identity and values of a region. It can serve as a powerful means of promoting cultural sustainability. By preserving traditional crafts and techniques, one helps to ensure that cultural heritage is transmitted to future generations.

Purpose: With the understanding that crafts must be sustained for future generations, a research methodology was developed that integrates two ancient Indian skills: Pattu weaving and natural dyeing. The study also uncovered key factors contributing to the decline in sales of Pattu textiles, including a shrinking market, low sales, and a lack of innovation in design and product development.

Methods: A research plan was devised to gather information about the craft and its craftsmen. An interview schedule and participatory observation techniques were included to obtain authentic data on the artisans' profiles, demographic details, and the history and evolution of the Pattu weaving cluster. Additionally, questions were posed regarding the weaving process, motifs, colors, and the raw materials used in Pattu weaving.

Results: Design solutions were suggested through product diversification and design extensions of the existing product line to enhance variety. A collection of contemporary Pattu-woven cushions and curtains was designed and developed. **Conclusions:** The study aimed to expand the market for Pattu textiles by targeting urban consumers and developing designs and finishes that cater to urban market preferences.

Conclusions: The study focused on expanding the market for Pattu textiles by strategically targeting urban consumers. The goal was to introduce modern designs and natural dyes that are appealing and which tend to differ from traditional designs.

Keywords: Pattu textiles, Weaving, Natural dyes, Sustainability, Intervention

1. Introduction

Textile craftsmanship is a part of cultural heritage and has been an important element in building cultural identities. Cultural sustainability is deliberation on what must sustain, what must change, and how this change is to be implemented. Sustainability in craft sector cannot be achieved alone; it requires cooperation and interaction between people. A culture that is genuinely sustainable from the point of view of cultural sustainability is not permanent but rather an ever-changing culture. Handmade crafts are treasure and candidly a proud heritage of our country. For ages, their blistering beauty acclimatized people all over the world and has catalyzed prominence and esteem for Indian dexterity and ingenuity [1]. Deterioration of skills, propelled by loss of markets, and difficulty in catering to incipient market has forced a huge number of craftsperson to switch to another occupation as well as urban centre in search of low, unskilled employment in industries [2]. Pattu weaving, generally practiced by the weavers of Jaisalmer, Barmer, Bikaner, Jodhpur, Phalodi and Jalore district is one of the craft which is on the verge of being a languishing craft owing to low productivity, inadequate design inputs, fragmented and unorganized value chain and lack of enabling environment by way of official neglect. One of the most prominent challenges of the Pattu weaving cluster is the use of synthetic dyes in the manufacturing processes creating life threatening environment, pollution and health hazards to the surroundings [3]. Consequently, need for alternative eco-friendly dyes has been initiated in recent times by researchers and development motivators in order to reduce the excessive use of synthetic dyes [4]. Lately, natural dyes from the natural plants is getting attention as an alternative and is preferred due to its inherited sustainable dyeing property [5]. The attribute of natural dyes where one can attain commercially acceptable fastness with the application of relevant mordant is gaining momentum. Keeping these points in mind, a study was carried out to amalgamate the unique characteristics of Pattu textiles and properties of natural dyes to create visually appealing eco friendly collection of curtains for the urban market. A detailed research methodology was developed where prominence was given on market study and trend spotting for the product diversification. The emphasis was more on exposing artisans to new product ideas and also finding out the possibility of introducing a different color story for the Pattu textiles. A detailed discussion followed with artisans so as to understand the limitations of the ideas proposed.

2. Methodology

A research design was made to collect the information pertaining to the craft and craftsmen. An interview schedule and participatory observation techniques was also planned to conduct and get the authentic information regarding artisans profile, demographics details, history and evolution of the Pattu weaving cluster apart from questions regarding process, motifs and colors and raw material used in Pattu weaving. The respondents were mainly artisans taken from ten families engaged in making of Pattu textile for last 50 years in the region of Thaat and Gomat near Pokhran. The whole research work was completed in the 4 phases which are described below. The study was conducted in four phases:

2.1 Phase 1

This phase began with the identification and analysis of the current situation in terms of available skills, resources, techniques, and materials. It was also intended to document the history, evolution, and process of creating Pattu textiles in their original form. This phase also gathered valuable information about the current state of the craft and craftsmen.



Figure 1: Traditional Pattu textiles with motifs-1

2.2 Phase 2

This phase examined the critical analysis of the Pattu textiles as a craft and the need for modernization. Interaction with artisans was planned in order to better understand the scope of the design intervention and product diversification, with the goal of improving the overall quality of existing products by refining the processes and materials used.



Figure 2: Traditional Pattu textiles with motifs-2



Figure 3: Traditional Motifs of Pattu textiles-3

2.3 Phase 3

The third phase focused on market research and trend spotting for product diversification. It also aims to expose artisans to alternative dyes and product line in order to indicate market and product expansion opportunities.

2.4 Phase 4

This phase focused on developing design extensions of the existing product line for increased variety and to offer a utilitarian and decorative product range.

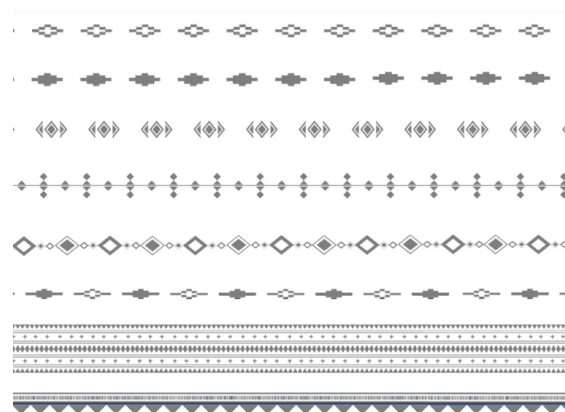


Figure 4: Traditional Motifs of Pattu textiles-4

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Phase 1

The first phase started with identification and analysis of the existing situation in terms of available skills, resources, techniques and materials. It was also aimed at documenting the history, evolution, process of making Pattu textiles in its original form. This phase also collected valuable information related to present scenario of the craft and craftsmen.

As per the information collected, Pattu weaving, a local craft of desert region of Rajasthan is woven by the Meghwal Community. Pattu textiles derive their name from the word Patti which means the narrow band of cloth. Originally Pattu fabrics were woven of about two feet wide bands and then two such panels were joined together lengthwise to make a fullwidth fabric using the interlocking stitch known as Khilan in local language. In this extra weft weaving technique, along with the ground warp and weft yarn, multi-colored extra weft yarns are also used during weaving to give the decorative embroidery-like effect in the fabric [6]. Traditionally crafted in western Rajasthan region, a wide range of products are made using Pattu weaving technique, the most popular being skirts, shawls and blankets. Pattu

textiles is an integral part of the social and cultural living of the Meghwal community that well balances utility with decoration [7]. It was earlier made from locally available wool that helped in protecting from extreme cold in winters supplemented by the use of cotton, merino wool and tussur silk yarns. The Pattu handloom weavers have been working on this century-old art but have not received their rightful dues till date. Today, this age-old heirlooms are finding it hard to survive, with the Covid-19 pandemic only worsening the situation. Consequently, the younger generations of these weavers are forced to discontinue this legacy and seek other employment venues. Therefore, it's high time all stakeholders ensure a transformation in the handloom sector through better market access, innovative marketing drives, enhanced production facilities and solutions for commercial success in contemporary market [8]. Though Pattu weavers, as a part of larger eco-system, have adapted to the changing socio-cultural environment and their craft skills have also evolved according to the social setting and the end-market but a limited variety of geometric patterns are repeated in the Pattu textiles, with the entire cluster of artisans replicating similar patterns. Traditionally, Pattu was woven in



Figure 5: Dyed Yarns for design intervention

colors like black, brown, and white, readily available from sheep wool [9]. However, due to the decline in the use of sheep wool and the advancement of synthetic dyes, bright colors were introduced in Pattu. Today, the colors used are influenced by the vivid shades of Rajasthan, bright red, green, pink, orange, black, and white are some commonly used colors [10]. Usually, the base of a Pattu is of single color with the ornamentation of extra weft done in different colors. Weavers use their looms as their canvas and depict distinctive motifs they see around. Pattu weaving



Figure 6: Raw material used for Natural dye workshop

also provides a source of earning and employment to a lot of households. It was due to the sheer dedication and immense skill of the artisan that they are now very forthcoming in experimenting to recreate about anything onto these textiles. It was observed that it is essential to develop design extensions of the present product line to include a greater variety and a wider range for both utilitarian and non-utilitarian use. This unique art has a potential to flourish and it can draw appreciation from all quarters if properly nurtured. Keeping the above findings in mind, an intervention work was developed which was aimed at creating opportunities for artisans in the Pattu weavers for ensuring sustained income

and employment through contemporary designs, process, design, product development and an exploration of potential market avenues.

- i. The approach of the intervention was envisaged with the intention of introducing a sustainable dyeing practice to dye the yarns used in Pattu weaving,
- ii. The design intervention was planned in a manner that it is not merely a short-term intrusion into an artisan's design sensibility and life but have a long-lasting impact on his or her artisanal creativity and work.
- iii. Intervention was aimed at a holistic approach, where a workshop of natural dyeing will be conducted so that artisans become self-sufficient and sustainable. It should be a process that adds value to the artisan's work, economically and in terms of creative input.
- iv. The intervention was planned so that the artisans is involved in every aspect of research, design process, production, costing and marketing, and also need to understand the adaptations and changes in the form, function and usage.

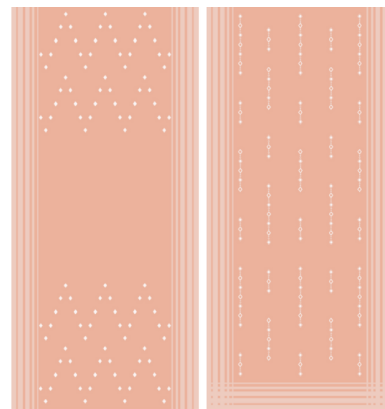


Figure 7: Concepts developed using Pattu weaving techniques and yarns dyed with natural dyes-1

3.2 Phase 2

This phase was planned to understand the scope of the design intervention and product diversification with an objective to improve the overall quality of existing products by refining the processes and materials used. A brainstorming session was conducted to generate a multiple-level concept keeping the needs of both the local and the export markets in mind. Motifs and color combinations were generated in all possible variations. Design drawings and graphs with exact dimensions, proportions and measurements were

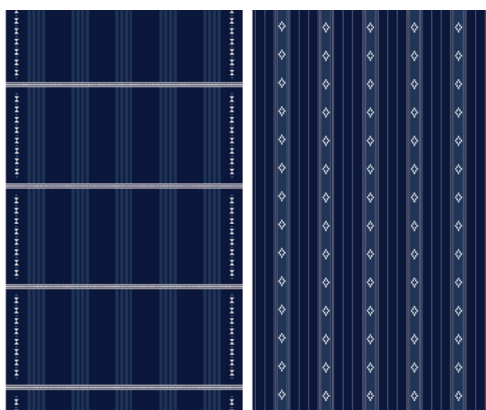


Figure 8: Concepts developed using Pattu weaving techniques and yarns dyed with natural dyes-2



Figure 10: Development of prototype Pattu weaving techniques and yarns dyed with natural dyes-4

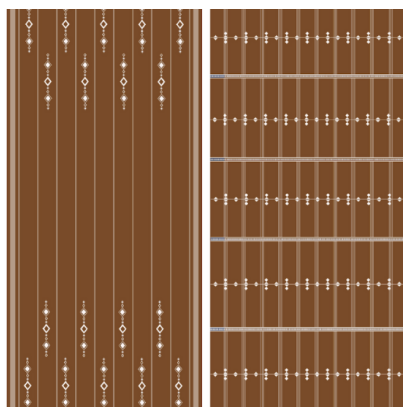


Figure 9: Concepts developed using Pattu weaving techniques and yarns dyed with natural dyes-3

made in this stage which was based on the feedback received during market research. While planning the designs, care was taken that they should not be overtly labour intensive, heavily over-embellished requiring long production schedules to complete. Concept for range of curtains and cushions were developed consisting of a mix of traditional and non-traditional motifs. The patterns selected were contemporized to suit contemporary tastes and lifestyles yet maintaining their links to the existing design tradition. A review of product range of domestic and International brands like Ikea, Bed and bath, Anthropologie, Fabindia, Gaatha, Jaypore etc. was done to get a unified trend and color so that the monotony of over-repeated and limited designs can be avoided. The analysis of the brands shows that muted and pastel shades along with minimal embellishment is commonly used giving emphasis to comfort in all the styles. The feedback received during this phase emphasized on the need for innovation in design and colors according to international forecasts and the necessity of looking carefully at the finer aspects of production and quality at every stage. Image 1-2 suggests the market trends for interiors in terms

of colors, textures and visual appeal.

3.3 Phase 3

This stage involved upgrading of quality, with an emphasis on dyeing techniques. A two day workshop on natural dyeing techniques which were considered more suitable for both the raw material and the end product was conducted for the weavers. 10 artisans were selected from the cluster and they were introduced to the basics of dye extraction, fabric preparation, and various dyeing techniques. The workshop emphasized the importance of sustainability, showcasing how traditional methods can reduce environmental impact compared to synthetic dyes. The artisans were also introduced to the use of shade cards for identifying colour references for natural dyes. This phase also emphasized on choosing a final concept and theme to develop design extensions of the existing product line for increased variety and to offer a utilitarian and decorative product range. A shade chart was developed using natural dyes like Madder, Harda and Indigo.

3.4 Phase 4

A product range was developed consisting of a mix of traditional and conventional motifs which includes ideas pertaining to curtains. The patterns taken from the often repeated geometric and over-decorated repertoire were pared down to suit contemporary tastes and lifestyles, and yet maintained their links to the existing design tradition. Discussions were held on the procurement of good quality raw material and the setting up of a common dyeing facility. Different shades of natural dye palette was created which was directed towards changing it in the current context based on the preferences of the new customer. The products ideas was also directed towards the manufacture of craft items or products

that better satisfy needs of the contemporary market.

4. Findings & Conclusion

Intervention to preserve a heritage, a dying craft, and a way of life is protecting both the intellectual property of communities and regions. Intervention to create visibility for a particular craft or a group of artisans and for the preservation of cultural traditions and heritage is a need of the hour. By bridging the gap between heritage and contemporary demand, traditional textiles can retain their cultural significance while adapting to evolving fashion trends. This not only ensures the preservation of cultural traditions but also provides financial opportunities for artisan communities. Fortunately, a growing trend towards reviving traditional textile-making techniques is emerging, and thus, lot of local organizations and designers are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of preserving and promoting cultural heritage and have initiated programs to support artisan communities and incorporate these textiles into their designs.

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Authorship contribution

Dr. Reena Aggarwal is the only author, managed and drafted the research article.

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Conflict of interest

No conflict of interests.

Similarity Index

I hereby confirm that there is no similarity index in abstract and conclusion while overall is less than 7% where individual source contribution is 4% or less than it.

Data availability statement

Data sharing does not apply to this article as no data sets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

Declaration

This research has been conducted ethically, reporting those involved in this article.

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