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Rogan, the traditional hand painted textile of Gujarat

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The study attempts to rematerialize the traditional art of rogan painting by documenting its glorious textile which has reached the verge of extinction. The major objectives were to document the craft of rogan painting in detail and authenticate the changes that have come across during the manufacturing process, colours, motifs and products. The data regarding the craft was gathered purposively i.e. pertaining to craft documentation was collected from five craftsmen, who were practicing rogan painting in traditional method during the time of data collection. The art of rogan craft is traditional hand painting has undergone tremendous changes in production process, tools and equipments, motif and colours used.

Keywords: Rogan, Traditional crafts, Traditional textile, Gujarat

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India is a country having a diverse culture, which is still deeply rooted in its history and traditions. It has a wide range of traditional textiles and craftsmanship which provide artistic and exotic range of products. Indian craftsman has age old heritage of nearly about 5,000 yrs old especially woven, resist, painted and printed textiles1-4. Throughout the history of art, painting has been the most common means of expression; it possesses an inherent aesthetic appeal that surpasses those of other visual art. Some ascribe it to Chinese, but it is more likely that India and Egypt could claim earlier knowledge in field of painted and printed textiles. The fragment of madder dyed cotton fabrics was found at the sovereignty of Mohen-jo-Daro of the Indus Valley civilization of the III millennium BC5. Gujarat, a cultural state lies between 22.00 North latitudes and 72.00 East longitudes. Rogan painting is one such traditional textile craft of Kutch in Gujarat. It is a conventional art of hand painting influenced by Persian art. The word rogan literally mean oil based Painting in Persia. This art was originated in Iran and was brought to India about 200 yrs ago though there is no historical evidence or records to support this statement. Rogan craft was not confined only to the Punjab frontier, but was also being practiced by Hindus at Ahmedabad and Morvi in the Bombay Presidency6. Rogan painting was earlier practiced in Baroda, Patan, Chowbari, and Khavada of Kutch in Gujarat and Nasik of Maharashtra but now it is only confined in Kutch and Ahmedabad districts of Gujarat. It is a seasonal art used to decorate the garment of bridal trousseau like ghaghara, odhana, chabla, dharajo, and dowry products like bed sheets, pillow cases, quilts, etc. During the ancient times, only indigenous colours were used mainly stones were the source. Rogan painting on cloth gives the impression of embroidery. The effect is generated due to the surface application of paste which has an embossed and shiny look akin to embroidery.

The traditional art in India is being replaced by the western culture thus, it is necessary to ensure that rogan painting a traditional craft is documented for the younger generation to understand their tradition and culture which reaches to the youth for better appreciation before it is completely extinct. A limited range of rogan painted products which are available does not fetch them a respectable income. Since, the cost of per unit was high, limited products were purchased mostly by some foreign tourists. Thus, the craft was no more practiced in most of the mentioned places being, a threat to the craftsmen. Thus, the need of documenting the craft in the interest of preserving and creating an awareness to the younger generations regarding the age old heritage craft. Also it will serve as teaching module in academic institutions. Today,

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rogan painting is on the verge of extinction as only two families in Nirona village of Kutch and three families in Viramgam, Wadhvan and Ahmedabad practices this craft. Due to lack of awareness regarding this craft amongst the Indian consumers, the younger generation is no longer interested in continuing with this craft. It requires not only skill but patience, concentration, a sense of proportion, an aesthetic appreciation and not to mention visual co-ordination. Hence, one of the methods of preserving rogan craft is through documentation pertaining to its history, tools and equipments process motifs, colours, fabrics and products used.

Methodology
The major objective of the study was to document the history, process, fabric, motifs and colours of rogan painted textile of Gujarat. A descriptive research design was planned. To get complete and authentic information the interview schedule and participatory observation technique were undertaken. The data was collected with the help of interview coupled with observation method. The schedule consisted of closed and open ended questions. The questions dealt with demographic details, history of craft, process of producing the craft (both tradition and present), colour, motif, products produced. Purposive sampling method was adopted for selection of the sample. A multi visit, interview method was implemented along with photographic documentation for the collection of authentic data. The sample sizes comprised of five families; two were from Nirona village of Kutch and three families from the village of Viramgam, Wadhvan and Ahmedabad i.e. one family from each village.

Results and discussion
The art of rogan painting on cloth dates back to centuries. According to local legend, this art came into India from the Afridis, originating in Syria; the route was through Persia, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The craft concentrated in the Northwestern parts of India, and was practiced mainly by the Muslim descendent of the Afridis. Later, it was found that rogan craft was practiced not only by the Afridis but also in Peshawar, Lahore and Pathan, where linseed oil was used whereas; in Kutch, castor oil was used for the preparation of rogan paste. The product came to be called as Afridi lac cloth or Peshawar lac cloth. The rogan technique was traditionally associated with the Afridi tribe of Pathans, who lived in the area around Peshawar and Kohat, and this type of cloth was formerly made commercial in Peshawar. In all these centers the craft was practiced by Muslims possibly descended from the Pathan community. Earlier, rogan was practiced in North India and Pakistan, and the people continuing with this art and migrated from Pakistan.

The respondents also clarified that this craft was carried out only by the men belonging to khatri community. The Hindu and Muslim communities of khatris have been practicing the art of rogan painting from generations. Of the total five respondents one claimed that he was the 7th generation in his family, carrying out this craft. The two respondents belong to Muslims khatri community of Kutch and three respondents were Hindus khatris of Ahmedabad district. The demographic data revealed that the age of four craftsmen ranged between 55-64 yrs and only one craftsman was of the age 67 yrs. Only the older generations were into this craft and younger generation had no inclination to pursue and continue with the traditional craft practiced by the family. The Muslim respondents conversed in kutchhi language while Hindus in Gujarati and they lived in their owned cemented house. Four craftsmen were from nuclear family and only one belonged to joint family system. The children in the family were not motivated by the parents to study further with the fear that they would take up other job rather than being involved in the existing craft. However, it was compulsory for their children to learn this craft. All the five respondents had a sole proprietorship type of business. The craft of rogan painting served as a major source of income for all the craftsmen. The women of the household also earned meager amount of money by carrying out the other craft like bhandhani and embroidery.

Tools and equipments
The tools and equipments used for the art of rogan painting was traditionally hand made or they sourced from the local market or from Bhuj. The tools and equipments like Dandi (stirrer), Handio (aluminum container) traditionally containers were made from clay, Suya (iron rod), Dhakni (covering plate made up of mud), Parrat (wide mounted iron vessel), Chulah (furnace), Kanno (plastic bowl used for keeping rogan colour paste) and Kharal (manual stone grinder) were used. During the olden days, they use only mud container for boiling castor oil but now-a-days, they have switched over to aluminum containers.
Ingredients and preparation process

A number of ingredients were used during the entire process of rogan painting and these ingredients were castor oil, wood, kerosene oil, and dyes. The method used traditionally for the preparation of rogan was a tedious process. Rogan took a long time at each successive step in order to have a desirable result. The process was handled by only skilled persons and carried out at a distant place away from the residential area, as it emits bad odour and affects the lungs. The preparation process of rogan paste include; the craftsmen located a suitable place where they could properly dig the mother earth for the preparation of chulah (furnace) which was the first step of this process; after digging the mother earth they gave a proper shape to chulah by keeping the chipiyas on it at the three sides. Then, they cleaned the surrounding area neatly; they adjusted the handio (aluminum container) on the chulah in which the castor oil would be boiled for hrs; then they take one litre castor oil in the handio for the preparation of pastes. The process begins by boiling the castor oil in an aluminum pot on a furnace; after pouring the castor oil in the handio they light the wood with the help of kerosene. This was boiled for minimum 4 hrs depending upon the quantity of castor oil; the craftsmen stated that the chulah was light by only women of the family; when the burning process starts the craftsmen simultaneously clears the surrounding area for proper placement of heated handio to reduce the inside heat; the boiling process starts after about fifteen minutes and the craftsmen properly monitored the temperature by continuously stirring the castor oil inside the handio. The stirring process was continued; after some time the temperature of the oil increased thus, to lower down the temperature it was removed from the chulah and kept on a side for a while; in case the temperature in aluminum vessel increased more than required the excessive heat resulted into flame inside the container. Thus, the temperature was regulated to avoid these flames; the boiling process emits bad odor which affect the lungs of craftsmen at long run as stated by the respondents. During boiling process the castor oil starts catching fire, once the oil catches flame then immediately the handio (oil container) was removed from the chulah and was covered with dhakani. When oil container was uncovered the oil comes in contact with the oxygen due to which it catches fire; during the same time the castor oil gets purified since through boiling process existing impurities were thrown out in form of fumes. There after the oil container was again covered with dhakani to put off the flame. This entire process was repeated number of times until the castor oil transformed in a thick paste like gelatinous substance; after required boiling, white particles were visible during the process on the surface of the oil which gradually begins to change into yellowish colour. At that stage the colour of castor oil turns to yellow colour. And the craftsman checks the consistency with the help of wooden rod; then it was removed from the chulah and kept aside; and after this entire process, the rogan paste was kept for 5-6 hrs in the shade for proper cooling to form the gelatinous thick paste. The entire process of preparing rogan paste was similar in Ahmedabad, while the craftsmen of Viramgam and Wadhvan purchased the rogan paste from them and carries out their work for rogan painting. The only difference was that instead of last process a water bath was prepared and castor oil was mixed and immediately the thick gelatinous paste of rogan was prepared (Figs. 1 & 2). In Ahmedabad, 15 litre of castor oil was used for the preparation of rogan paste at a time. In consumes hours for the preparation of paste.

Dyes used for rogan painting

As stated by the respondents during earlier times, natural sources such as stone was used while later, plant sources were also used to extract dyes. Colours like white, red, blue, yellow, green and orange were used in pure form. But today, they have switched over to synthetic dyes. It was observed that all the artisans were using napthol dye for preparation of the paste. The colours used were locally known as Pavadi (yellow) Lal (red), Vadadi (blue), Safad (white), Leelo (green) and Bhuro (brown). They also used coloured pigments and binding agents. The dyes were available in market in different price range according to the shade of dyes.

Process of preparing of colour paste

Each and every stage of the process was as informed by the craftsmen. The process of rogan painting was very time consuming art and hazardous to health as stated by the craftsmen of Nirona. They stated that for preparing rogan paste the craftsmen needed to be highly skilled (Fig. 3). For the preparation of colour paste, the main equipment used was kharal, the manual stone grinder which helped in mixing the colour paste. The ingredients were napthol
Fig. 1 Preparation process of Rogan paste in Nirona village
Fig. 2 Preparation process of Rogan paste in Viramgam village

Fig. 3 Preparation process of colour paste

Fig. 4 (A to I) Process of Rogan painting on the fabric
dyes, white chalk powder and water used for colour paste. In both the places, the naphthol dyes were used which was purchased from Ahmedabad or Bhuj. Prior to the preparation of the fresh paste the manual grinding stone was cleaned thoroughly such that there would be no residual traces of former paste. This was done in order to avoid the slightest stain of previous colour into the fresh paste. After cleaning the kharal the process of grinding the dye begins and by addition of gradually water to it as required. The grinding process continues till a smooth paste is prepared. A small quantum of gelatinous rogan paste was taken, and added to the dye paste. The process of grinding the dye paste continues till the rogan is thoroughly mixed with the dye paste such that a soft, smooth gelatinous paste was made.

Process of rogan painting on the fabric

The painting process was very tedious and time consuming craft (Fig. 4). The process of rogan painting as stated by the craftsmen was as follows: Initially the fabric to be painted was spread on the floor/ground; then the craftsmen take a lump of colour paste and puts on his palm and mixes vigorously with a suya rod held by other hand. The process of mixing continuous till the rogan coloured paste was stretched to a thread like structure; this paste was then used to paint the fabric with the help of suya; the fineness of painting based on the stretchability of the coloured rogan paste; the fabric to be painted was folded exactly from the centre. The painting was done only on one side of the folded portion of the fabric. This was then again folded from the centre pressed evenly to get an identical impression on the other half portion; then after the fabric was opened to check for getting the mirror image of the design as a whole pattern which is kept to dry under the sunlight for about 6-7 hrs.

Motifs

Traditionally, the floral, geometrical and calligraphy motifs were used for the art of rogan painting (Figs. 5 & 6). The calligraphy motifs were not used by the craftsmen since they did not have any traditional calligraphy motifs. During the ancient period, the calligraphy motifs were used in Persian alphabets. The bird’s motifs were used only by the Hindu khatri craftsmen of Ahmedabad. These motifs were used as all over pattern i.e. covered the whole area. Mainly two layouts were used for motif placement i.e. border and all over (Figs. 7 & 8). The motifs painted by Hindu khatri craftsmen were large with broad outline. They also incorporated bigger motifs of bird which were not seen in rogan painted product of Kutch.

Products

Traditionally, it was found in the different types of products prepared using rogan technique were
Ghaghara, odhana, chaddar, bed sheet, quits and wall hangings. In ancient time, the demand of rogan article was much more in comparison to embroidery and bhandhani. During those days, rogan painted fabric was worn by women throughout the year. These days the rogan painted product were mainly produced as per the consumer demand such as wall hanging and table cover. The craftsmen usually got orders from the foreign tourists.

Conclusion

The craftsmen were aware of the history of the craft. The method has changed to a great extent in order to meet the growing demand of the market. The production process has not changed in the number of stages but there is a change in the natural ingredients used at different stages. Traditionally, rogan painting was used for ghaghara, odhana, chaddar, bed sheet, quilts and wall hangings but today, it is used for wall hanging due to lack of awareness of this craft. There is no organized market established for them hence, they face difficulty in marketing their products. The younger generations have better avenues in learning skill and technical knowledge. They have mostly moved out of the village. Only few less-skilled youngsters are pursuing this profession engaging other labourers.

References

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