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## INDIAN TRADITIONAL MOTIFS

*'Symbolism of Indian culture and heritage with reference to flora/fauna and ancient architectures'*

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**Abstract:** Indian traditional textiles inherit motifs that represent Indian culture. With the development of trade routes have led them to travel world with connotations and custom beliefs. The richness from different geographic regions connect them with the essence of vibrant colours, textures, design, style forms, intricacies and their shapes.

**Key words :** Traditional, Mythology, Symbolism, Motifs, Heritage, Textiles, Craftsmen.

### INTRODUCTION

India has a very diverse textile tradition present in literary text, paintings, monuments and sculptures. It is a country with rich traditions and religions which is reflected in its art forms, textiles and crafts. Origin of crafts can be traced back from Indus Valley Civilization to Mohenjodaro. With such immense talent and inspiration, each region has a special identity that narrate a whole lot of story. Some motifs are rare but carry elegance of Mughal, Persian and even Indus Valley Civilization period. They vary according to place and geographical condition.

A motif is the basic unit of a design which can be inspired from objects present around us, mainly nature, people, stories, religious philosophes and social- cultural beliefs. Motifs carry grace and delicacy of art forms. Every motif is significant in its own way having a heritage value. Motifs have emerged from region influencing artist of that particular area to express their feelings towards their craft and passion. The traditional art reflects the present culture by utilizing the current techniques and resources available. Motif have travelled a long journey in the Indian subcontinent during the 18<sup>th</sup> century as they were meant to be traded with China and Indonesia. England was also printing Its own Indian textile with knew and upgraded machines along with developed synthetic dyes.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The aesthetically appealing motifs of ancient India are wider known in various regions for their endless interpretations and techniques of crafting. Motifs travel time with expression of universal consciousness. The beauty resides in the concept personified as sacred stories.

Today craftsmen are the only link in unbroken tradition of India as the craftsmanship is deeply rooted to its tradition symbolizing the strong bond between the rich heritage in the due course of time. Different motifs have symbolic forms that play important role in textiles of India. The prevailing culture has often demanded familiar forms of design but the origin of motifs have a sophistication right from ancient history. The establishment of trade routes have also influenced motifs in stylized form. Buddhist sculptures have noted the uniqueness of art with the diverse cultural background. They have travelled long back from Vedas without losing their ancestral touch.



Traditional motifs crafted on textiles

Motifs are symbolism and reflection of belief which may vary from one region to another but they are all interconnected with the same essence. Symbols are use of imagination that carry significant value in an artists dream which is ultimately seen in the design of a motif. Signs and symbols endure the intrinsic beauty of motifs. When a motif is crafted on any textile they have representative meaning that is believed to hold a vibe on the person wearing it. The magnificence of Indian patterns has substantially flourished the textile industry. Nature has played a vital role in creation of motifs conveying deeper thoughts and ideas reflected by artistry of craftsmen carrying forward facts and myths of life with ageless beauty.

### SOME TRADITIONAL MOTIFS

Some of common motifs include horse, parrot, fishes, rudraksha, kalasha, mango, shells, creepers, chariots and many other. Traditional textile motifs have been inspired from flora and fauna, sculptures, paintings and architecture.

#### Paisley

Paisley motif has been named after a village in in Scotland, the name came up when Scotland began competing with Indian originals. There was a large scale production in making shawls. But in India it was famous for its beautiful motifs in Kashmiri textiles. Kashmir is known for its beautiful, intricate and delicate designs. They were earlier known as motif resembling mango, popular motif of Central Asia. A paisley is a droplet shape motif also known as mankolam in Sanskrit, ambi in Punjabi, kairi in Urdu and kalga in native language. Their colorful and abstract figures signifies the time of harvest in India, a symbolism of fertility. During the Mughal rule the motif was embroidered on artefacts known for its uniqueness. They are exclusively seen on Kashmiri carpets and Pashmina shawls.

The early motifs include kidney shaped motif variedly seen in Mughal textiles. They were considered rich in spiritual and symbol meaning. The motifs were used in royal garments and to ornate their crowns by giving them a classic look. They have evolved a lot from Afghan, Mughal and Sikh period. During British rule they were quite popular. Paisley is closely associated with rebellion as a statement for print during counterculture of hippies in 1960s. The motif prints were seen on bandanas worn by bikers and hippies. Today paisley motif are widely used in Chikankari and Kantha embroidery.

#### Lotus

Lotus is one of most beautiful and popular motif in Indian art. It is closely associated with mythology. Lord brahma and goddess Laxmi sits on lotus flower symbolizing wealth and prosperity. Brahma sitting on 108 petalled flower depicts elements of earth- air , water, earth, fire, mind, ego, intellect and ether. They are meant to be powers of life. Lord Vishnu also sits on lotus, Goddess Saraswati holds lotus in her hand and also offered as deity to Lord Shiva. Krishna's feet are compared to as pure as lotus.

The opening and closing of its petals depicts the hardships and happiness of life, representing multiplicity of universe. It holds different meaning in different religions, for Hindus it means creation and sun where as for Jainism and Buddhism it means purity and perfection. The lotus flower plays an important role in Indian art and textile. It is believed that lotus motif is often worn by new brides to manifest their marital happiness, being a mother was considered as a blessing for any women that adds her respect in the family.

Lotus motif are seen in Kantha, Kasuti, Phulkari embroideries, in woven textiles- Ikat, Paithani, Chamba rumal and in Pichwai paintings of Nathdwara. The Indian motifs have flower and leaves are raised with strong stem but in Egyptian motif the flower and leaves floats over soft stem.

### Conch shell

A conch is one of the auspicious object, also known as shankh in Sanskrit. It is considered as an attribute to Lord Vishnu, held in his right hand in form of a divine jewel. Also, believed to be brother of goddess Laxmi having power to grant wishes and keeps evil spirits away. It is of utmost importance in Hinduism as ritual to be worshipped in religious ceremony. It is used to produce sound that radiates positive energy in the atmosphere. It serves as a symbol of power and represented as the Ashtamangala in Buddhism.

The parts of shankh has interpretation behind it, spiral shape of the shell depicts the holy waters showering from heaven. In the center resides the moon, goddess Saraswati in front, varuna in womb and prajapati at back. The conch motifs are seen in textiles of Orissa and Kantha embroidery.

### Elephants

An elephant has a special place in Indian mythology, it is vahana of Lord Vishnu symbolizing rain and fertility. They are symbol of wisdom and prosperity as they were used beautifully decorated for royal purposes in festivities, royal attendings. They are known as god of warrior signifying strength and royalty.

Lord Ganesh bears elephant head which has a sacred story behind it. They are first one to be worshiped before beginning any work in Hindu rituals. Elephant motifs were depicted on Buddhist architecture during Indus Valley Civilization. They are used as motif of good luck and earthiness in Gharchola, Patola and Kimkhab of Banaras, often seen in Madhubani paintings, Chikankari embroidery and Banarasi brocades.

### Parrot

A parrot is known as vahana of Kamadeva in India, god of love and desire. It signifies love, courtship and passion. Parrot motifs are depicted in story of Lord Krishna and Radha for their eternal love. A parrot is known by varied names and considered as a propitious symbol.

Parrot motifs are also used in Chinese art as symbol of good fortune. Indians have a separate belief system and tradition. The motifs are not only used in textiles but also used as decorative in household, embellishment, jewelries, upholstery and furnishing as patch work and in lamp decorations keeping the old tradition alive.

The motifs are commonly seen in Patola, Kanchipuram, Paithani, Pochampally, Chanderi sarees and applique work also in embroidered textiles of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Gujarat. The designs are often used in bride and groom attires.

### Jaal

A jaal is a network of geometric patterns called trellis. It is an interconnected vines creating mesmerizing patterns and one of creative foundations of Mughal construction. They were considered as a masterpiece of Mughal architecture in India, inspired from architectures of historical monuments since 8<sup>th</sup> century, and contemplated as important part of Indian architecture based on grids.

They represent unique balance of modernity and classic. It is a combination of principle of art, maths and history, the jaal threadwork of Chikankari is one such example.

The jaal patterns are elementary feature of geometry, stylized with floral and abstract forms. The basic grid is created with imbibing intricate designs in it. Geometric designs are inspired from Turkish and Mughal monuments are found on Indian textiles with little modification. The jaal motifs has evolved over time but has retained the significance attached to it. Jaal motifs are seen in various embroidered textile like Chikankari, Phulkari, Toda embroidery and zardozi, printed textiles like dabu print, bagh print and Saudagiri print. The jaal patterns are found in Jamdani, Tanchoi and Banarasi Brocades.

### Buti

A buti is a part of a flowering plant with curling bud on top or a small motif on its own. When leaves and vines are added it becomes a buta, a large form of buti, when the curving lines with elements like flowers, leaves, buds, insects are added in becomes a bel. The names were originate in Persia but is believed to originate in Kashmir due to shape of chinar tree. A buti earlier comes in almond shape.

According to their shapes, design and style the name of butis change. They are generally marked by their shape formation and are named with its context like chand buti, phul buti, tara buti, pankha buti, ashraf buti, turanj buti, jhardar buti, fardi buti and pan buti. Their motifs are found in Sanganeri and Chamba rumal creating exceptional patterns. Butis are authentic in different style forms known today.

It gives message of life that life on earth is dependent on each other. It is a symbolic tree that means one needs to stay grounded as roots plunges deep down showing bonding, stand erect like its stem depicting mental strength of a person during hardships and at the end soul is released to heaven as the branches move in upward direction. This reflects immortality of life. In Indian tradition, banyan and peepal tree are said to be tree of life as they are worshipped in Hindu rituals, where as peepal tree is pious where Mahatma Buddha got enlightenment. The tree motifs are used in Kalamkari designs and Kantha embroidery with wide variety of colors to show its affinity.

Their motif are designed in Patola, Phulkari and Kantha embroidery, Kathiawar mirror work of Kutchh. They are associated with different meaning in different forms as divine force and virtuous strength. It has played an important role in defining various cultures across Asian countries.



Hansa or goose is known as vahana of Goddess Saraswati and Lord Brahma. They are symbol of purity and spirituality. A hansa motif was found in pottery during Indus Valley Civilization and in paintings of Mughal period, they are also found as wall depictions in the Ajanta caves later disappeared with time.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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3. **Tracing Textile Motifs, Patterns historical to contemporary by Williamson, Textile Society of America, 2016**
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5. **Motif theory for study of biblical narratives by James M. Morgan, April 2015**, a study of how to motifs endure and perform.
6. **Vegatal Motifs in Ancient Indian Imagery with special reference from Harappa to Sanchi by Dr. Anupaman Saxena, Feb 2016**

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research work is undertaken to evaluate how motifs have originated dating back to Vedic era, in Mughal and Gupta dynasties with religious and cultural beliefs. Qualitative research approach was carried out for in depth study of research purpose. Detailed study through magazines, literature texts, internet and referred journals is done to assess the symbolic meaning of motifs that are used as textile ornamentation and embroidery. The study was carried out to get insights about the motif significance with reference to nature and human connect. The basics of research work is done from qualitative point of view to know about the various aspects of Indian motifs. The analysis is considered to be in its primary form to learn the apologue of self expression of an artist.

## RESULT

It was observed that Hindu mythology has a background associated with deeper meanings, patterns are linked with traditional customs, identification of motifs beyond their meanings is seen in the stories of folk people, depicting their sense of idea behind it.

## CONCLUSION

Motifs are not bound to their specific region, they are more open to inculcate variations that may change with the cultural context. The art of developing any motif is a traditional style that takes place in its surrounding. The indigenous motifs in vibrant colours, textures are known for their design integrity. They have flourished the tradition by adding considerable value to Indian textiles. Every motif has a historical background. The weavers and craftsmen have inherited the invaluable art, however with passing time and advancement in technology they are easily created on a broader perspective. They have kept the art form alive and kept as an ancestral asset in modernizing world. The journey may have resulted in their overall evolution but their preservation with changing times lies in our hands.

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