



CONTEMPORARY ISSUES OF FASHION INDUSTRY WITH INDIAN ARTS

REGARDING KANTHA FASHION INDUSTRY OF WEST BENGAL

Rajdev Nayak¹, Dr.Suniti Sood²
¹Research Scholar, ²Associate Professor
Department of Fine Arts
Amity University, Haryana

ABSTRACT

In the apparel industry, the use of traditional aspects in a design enhances its popularity and acceptance. In contemporary times, technology plays a crucial role in the advancement of fashion, although it never serves as a substitute for the traditional aspects incorporated into modern fashion design. Kantha has seen growth and transformation, transitioning from a modest domestic craft to an esteemed art form. The Kanthalabor pattern of rural artisans has remained largely unchanged for decades. The rural landscape remains almost unchanged. The objective of this study is to investigate the current challenges faced by the fashion industry in relation to Indian arts and Kantha embroidery. Through a creative process, the aim is to revive and preserve the unique qualities, legacy, and practices of Kantha embroidery, as well as address the factors contributing to its popularity in West Bengal. The findings of this study demonstrate the current challenges in transitioning from traditional art to modern clothing design by examining the utilization of mind mapping, mood boards, color boards, style boards, accessories boards, fabric swatches, and the final sketch. The research will demonstrate the evolution of traditional Kantha needlework and its integration with Khadi cloth to create a novel design trend in West Bengal.

Keywords: Indian Arts, Kantha, Fashion Arts, Fashion industry, issues, contemporary issues

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, our learners are focused on developing 21st-century capabilities. It is noteworthy to emphasize that it was already integrated into our Indian arts system. Various forms of art are currently being practiced, including dance, music, street art, and fashion art. This article specifically examines the field of fashion arts, with a particular emphasis on the present



popularity of Indian fashion, clothes, and textiles. India possesses a diverse collection of textile traditions and a wide variety of ethnic costumes, including adaptable draped silhouettes and traditional tailoring methods. These traditions have developed across the subcontinent in response to factors such as geography, climate, and the sociocultural influences of different invasions and colonial history.

The fashion system gets impetus from the active involvement of women in the mainstream of society. Indian aesthetics gradually assimilated Western fashion and technology ideas during the course of the 20th century. The Indian fashion industry started gaining recognition and attention in the 1980s. Therefore, this study specifically examines the 1980s (when the economy was closed), the 1990s (when the apparel industry started opening up), and the 21st century to get insights into the Indian fashion system. The new millennium has witnessed profound transformation in the socio-economic landscape of India as a result of significant historical endeavors and globalization (Ranavaade and Karolia, 2016).

The fashion industry emerged as a result of the modern era. Prior to the 19th century, dressmakers and tailors were primarily responsible for the production of clothing. While custom-made clothes continued to hold significance until the 1920s, they gradually yielded to the expanding ready-to-wear manufacturing industry as a result of the emergence of industrialization (Major, J. S., & Steele, V., 2024).

During the 1960s, businesses placed significant emphasis on projecting a distinct 'fashion image'. Fashion design is the artistic process of crafting garments and lifestyle accessories via the application of design principles, aesthetics, and the enhancement of inherent beauty. The field of fashion design undergoes continuous transformation as it is shaped by cultural, social, and political contexts. A fashion designer is an individual who merges their technical expertise with artistic ingenuity to create clothing and lifestyle goods. Their work involves analyzing fashion trends, conceptualizing innovative clothing styles and accessories, and producing design sketches, frequently using both manual and digital methods. Fashion designers also make decisions on the selection of fabrics and patterns, as well as the choice of colors. They



collaborate closely with the production team to oversee all parts of the production process for their designs (fashion design, web). Several fashion trends, particularly in Kantha, have been noted in West Bengal. Kantha, a form of quilted embroidery, has been practiced in the fashion business for generations. It originated in Bangladesh, formerly known as East Bengal. Kantha involves the use of outdated or discarded garment items such as sarees or dhotis (Shop, P. P.-U., n.d., Web). The availability of materials, daily necessities, weather patterns, geographical location, and economic conditions all played a significant role in the development of Kantha. Historically, the practice of repurposing old cotton sarees, kantha silk sarees, lungis, and dhotis as fabric for kantha was common. Additionally, the thread used for embroidery was sourced from these same old garments.

2. RISING OF KANTHA: FROM TRADITIONAL TO CONTEMPORARY

India possesses a vast cultural legacy of embroidery, and its inhabitants are highly knowledgeable about ancient embroidery patterns. Women have always utilized folk embroidery as a means of expressing themselves. It serves as a reflection of their lives, acting as a mirror for their concealed wants and ambitions while also expressing the culture, traditions, and religious beliefs of their community. Every location and country has a unique form of needlework that integrates elements of its culture, history, and tradition. Kantha embroidery utilizes a basic running stitch. The extraordinary aspect lies in the manner in which the embroidery has been utilized. This is a quintessential illustration of how a basic stitch can produce intricate designs. The typical motifs found in this context include deities, animals such as ducks, fish, and peacocks, as well as floral and geometric designs (Anonymous, 2011).

Kantha embroidery is categorized as Lepkantha and SujniKantha based on the intended purpose of the finished goods in the art. The process of embroidery mostly entails delineating ornamental patterns with a running stitch, employing vibrant threads. Multiple patterns can be employed to completely cover the entire cloth. Expert traditional artisans who have inherited the trade from their ancestors and possess exceptional artistry use hand embroidery. Currently, machine embroidery has supplanted hand stitching in the utilization of alternative materials like metal



strips, precious stones, and semi-precious stones. Sequins are employed to enhance this ornamental stitching method. Machine embroidery is employed for artistic endeavors on singular items as well as for the manufacturing of textile items on a large scale. A study conducted on the costumes of the Bishnoi community in Hisar, Haryana, found that the majority of older respondents wore hand-embroidered odhanis. These odhanis were adorned with metallic and silken thread, as well as decorative elements like gota and sitaras. On the other hand, younger and middle-aged females preferred machine-embroidered odhanis (Beth, N., n.d.).

Fashion is inherently mutable and operates in a cyclical manner. The tradition of fashion serves as a significant source of inspiration for new designs and trends. Tradition and culture have a crucial role in shaping the trends and diversity of costumes in modern fashion. The purpose of this study effort is to incorporate traditional khadi fabric and kantha embroidery, together with minimalist line art embellishment techniques, into modern women's clothes. This research has developed a unique invention by utilizing the surface creation process. It is important to note that this technique of combining moderate-line workmanship with kantha embroidery to provide texture to the fabric of clothing has never been used in the history of fashion. The realms of arts and fashion exhibit diminished obstacles, with each region of the world possessing its own distinct traditional culture and fashion. These elements can be amalgamated with contemporary fashion, resulting in an entirely distinctive appearance that caters to the demands of the present era. Khadi is considered organically sustainable due to its absence of hazardous chemicals. According to AhasanulKarim et al. (2021), these kantha embroidery techniques on khadi fabric may offer a fresh and innovative way to depict religious symbolism in contemporary design.



Figure 1: Kantha Quilt (fish and flowers)

The kanthas were exquisitely embroidered, often resulting in the base fabric being completely obscured by the intricate stitching. The majority of the motifs were derived from indigenous plant and animal life, as well as the narratives shown in the renowned Indian epics 'The Ramayana' and 'The Mahabharata'. Figure 1 illustrates kantha designs inspired by aquatic creatures, floral elements, and avian species. The threads utilized were derived from the edges of the previous saris. The Kanthas produced were primarily intended for personal use or set aside as an exclusive present for a close relative (Agrawal R., 2018). The Kanthas were highly valued not for their monetary worth but for the meticulous effort invested in turning a discarded sari into a work of art. This process rejuvenated the worn-out saris, extending their lifespan by several decades.

Both manual and automated embroidery are laborious and meticulous procedures. A recent study has highlighted that the handloom sector is currently facing numerous problems in the context of globalization and rapid technological advancements. One of the major challenges is the replication of handloom items on power looms at significantly reduced costs. Therefore, in order to enhance the strength of this sector, it is crucial to focus on product diversification and the creation of market demand (Maulik, S. R., & Agarwal, K., 2014). The art of fabric painting may produce a similar effect to embroidery on a wide range of fabrics, provided that the appropriate fabric paint and applicators are used. Fabric painting offers exquisite surface embellishment for a shorter duration compared to needlework. This is a long-standing practice in India. Currently,



fabric painting has undergone a significant transformation, becoming a widely practiced form of handcrafted craft. It embodies the vibrant manifestation of textiles. Fabric painting can be accomplished at a highly economical cost using uncomplicated techniques and procedures. Fabric painting involves the blending of captivating hues and applying them in appropriate ratios. Precise control of color and heat is crucial for artists to achieve a specific style of fabric painting. Painting was a highly favored form of artistic expression in ancient India.

The current literature has countless references to painting, indicating that the art of painting has achieved the utmost level of quality in terms of both technical and aesthetic aspects. Painting was regarded as an achievement of princesses, nobles, and high-ranking citizens. It was included in the standard curriculum of study (Dashora, R., & Sharma, A., 2003). Amidst the pressures of time, it is necessary to consider the potential for converting needlework designs into fabric paintings. Individuals involved in the practice of fabric decoration will find it advantageous and efficient, leading to increased profitability. An examination of the historical development of traditional Kutch embroidery reveals that the traditional needlework sector has been significantly impacted by factors such as commercialization and industrialization, which have greatly influenced the lives of artisans. Recording the history of the powerful needle craft of Kutch is crucial to preserving its roots and providing a guiding reference for future generations (Pandya, D. A., & Dhlakia, L. K., 2013).

Utilizing traditional embroidered designs for adaptation into fabric painting will contribute to the revitalization of traditional needlework and imbue it with a contemporary aesthetic in accordance with current trends. Nowadays, jackets have become a fashionable and essential element of winter attire for teenage females. Simply choose a women's jacket that effortlessly embodies both your sophisticated style and unique personality. The jacket that ladies wear for each event is indicative of their social standing and prestige. The less formal designs would reflect your inherent allure, while the more formal ones would enhance your professionalism. It is advisable to seek out the most superior styles and stylish jackets for professional or various events (Karolia, A., & Ladia, B., 2012).



There is a widespread presence of exceptional stitching skills across the country. The practice of embroidery has enhanced the daily lives of artisans, serving as a means of sustenance. However, in order to appreciate the traditional while also embracing novel and contemporary forms of expression that are in line with the aspirations and desires of the country's future citizens. Thus, the current work aims to modify conventional Kantha embroidery patterns by employing fabric painting techniques on a garment. An investigation was conducted into the use of Indian embroidery motifs in fabric painting. Data was collected from markets in Hisar to determine the predominant preference for traditional embroidery and its motifs among the population. The selection was made for Kantha embroidery, including its motifs. Fifteen styled drawings were created by incorporating a chosen motif, and five potential positions for each design were made using Coral Draw software (Jain, R., & Tiwari, A., 2012).

3. REASONS OF RISE OF KANTHA IN INDIA: ESPECIALLY IN WEST BENGAL

India's ascent to prominence in the global textile and fashion arena commenced about six centuries ago, with the acknowledgment of the exceptional quality of Indian cotton fabrics. This resulted in a strong and almost cult-like obsession with various types of fabrics in women's clothing across the European courts, peaking during the 18th and 19th centuries. India's popularity in the global textiles and apparel industry originated from the acknowledgment of the exceptional quality of cotton fabrics produced in India. India Fashion Week and similar events have gained substantial global publicity in the fashion press over the past twenty years. In the last five years, three Indian designers have won the highly esteemed International Woolmark Prize (Gage, K., & Pasricha, A., 2020).

The Kantha was primarily created in response to the need for a covering. The women in Bengal, due to the long periods of rain, had plenty of free time to sew together the numerous layers of fabric that make up the Kantha (Chakarbarti, A., 1996). Kantha, a traditional textile, was historically crafted from worn and washed saris, lungis, or dhotis that had reached a state of unsuitability for further use. For numerous decades, women living in rural districts of West Bengal have relied on kantha stitching as their main source of income. Thus, this needlework



functioned as a kind of communication for them across numerous centuries. Historical events such as the partition of Bengal, the transition via East Pakistan, and the formation of Bangladesh are reflected in the artwork produced by women. This is an additional aspect that pertains to the inner experiences and thoughts of women (Pandit, S., 1976).

Kantha refers to a lengthy and broad ornament, usually crafted from gold and adorned with valuable gemstones. On the other hand, lambanam is a shorter and narrower decorative piece. Armlets, often referred to as baju bands, were commonly crafted from gold and silver beads and worn on the upper arm. At times, these armlets would also be adorned with valuable gemstones. The addition of lavishly embroidered linen belts and Kangan bracelets, frequently made from square or circular gold beads, completed the ensemble. Furthermore, ladies adorned themselves with a mekhala, a type of girdle consisting of a hip belt crafted from many strands of beads. The original material used for its construction was the red seed kaksha, but currently it is crafted using beads made of gold and silver. These beads come in many shapes, including round, square, and oval. Every woman wore rings on her thumbs, fingers, and ankles. The rings were unimpressive and arranged tightly on the proximal phalanges of the fingers. Historically, anklets were predominantly crafted from silver, although there were uncommon instances where gold was used as well (Wang, L., 2009). They can be in the shape of a simple ring, called a Kara, a large chain, called a Sankla, or an ornamental circle, known as a Ghungru, which contains multiple small bells. No historical records or archaeological evidence have been discovered to indicate that individuals wore nose rings during this specific era.

India has one of the lowest literacy rates among women in developing countries worldwide, while being one of the youngest countries in the world (India, g. o., 2016, Web). India's rich cultural past is marked by the important position of the exquisite hand-embroidered work typically done in the country. Women residing in remote regions during the winter months were obligated to create quilts using kantha needlework in order to shield their children from the harsh weather conditions. Several Indian fashion designers have contemporized traditional Kantha embroidery to mirror the increasing affluence of the nation's populace. Previously, the range of goods was limited to basic household items such as bedspreads and furniture protectors, which

were offered at exceptionally low costs. Subsequently, other skilled artisans and designers dedicated their efforts to the development of Kantha, employing expensive materials such as silk to add a novel touch. This strategic approach aimed to cater to a certain market segment by creating high-end products like saris and stoles for discerning consumers. The Kantha stitching technique facilitated the emergence of a vast market that catered to diverse social classes, enabling women to secure employment opportunities. Women entrepreneurs are crucial in the global pursuit of sustainable economic development and social progress. Contemporary women are increasingly receptive to engaging in activities that were conventionally associated with men. Consequently, they have proven that their contributions to economic growth are unparalleled compared to others. Entrepreneurial activity is the act of initiating a new business or rejuvenating an existing one to take advantage of recently emerged opportunities. Women possess the capability to not only establish a well-supported lifestyle within the framework of a family but also to develop a well-structured professional trajectory within the craft industry. They can be recognized at the same level as men (Kumar, H., &Bulsara, P., 2014). The promotion of women and diversity should foster inclusivity and collaboration, promoting a sense of unity and shared goals rather than creating divisions and conflicts.

4. CONTEMPORARY ISSUES WITH KANTHA ARTS: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIAN ARTS

The art of repurposing is best exemplified by Kantha textiles, which come from Bangladesh and the Bengal region of India. Kaviraj first described them in a book about 500 years ago. Kantha textiles were crafted by rural women in Bengal by layering old and ripped saris on top of one another, creating multiple layers of worn-out fabric. The layers were subsequently interconnected using mostly the fundamental running thread, and in certain areas, other stitches such as herringbone and satin were employed. Historically, Kantha was mostly used to create quilts that were appropriate for the mild winters in Bengal (Agrawal R., Sharan M., 2018).

Tradition and culture are a collection of practices that a particular group of people upholds or enforces and which they have inherited from their ancestors through their families and the



society they live in (Banu, L. S., 2009). Ancient civilization exhibits significant diversity across different locations, manifesting in various manifestations. Periodically, it is necessary to observe and participate in certain festivals as part of a chosen religion. Social norms can be defined as the consistent and prolonged adherence to specified patterns of behavior within a society. Tradition, culture, and attire are indisputably emblematic of a nation (Chen, Y., 2016). Clothing is a ubiquitous aspect of every culture's historical narrative. Each culture possesses its own distinct presence and ingenuity within the realm of fashion history. Clothing serves as a means of conveying information from the person wearing it to the person observing it through symbolic messages within the broader or more specific context of fashion and cultural norms. Clothing serves as a means of conveying one's identity, emotions, background, and creative expression, as well as reflecting a person's emotional equilibrium. Throughout the history of fashion, only a handful of fabrics have been created that embody the concept of liberation. Khadi represents the arduous fight for independence. Mahatma Gandhi, the nation's father, was the one who started the creation of Khadi. Introduced in 1920, it served as a political tool to exclude some goods from circulation. This substance, with its distinct characteristics, evoked a strong desire for independence and a sense of self-restraint.

Women frequently practice kantha, a type of embroidery, in rural areas. The classic Kantha needlework was executed on soft dhotis and saris, using a basic running stitch around the edges (Mandal, R., 2014). The finished product is referred to as Lepkantha or SujniKantha, depending on its intended usage. The embroidered cloth serves several purposes, such as being used for shawls, mirror covers, boxes, and pillows. Occasionally, running threads are employed to completely adorn the fabric, incorporating exquisite floral patterns, avian and animal motifs, geometric designs, and even depictions of everyday tasks (Morrell, A., 2011). The stitching on the material creates a subtle, undulating texture. Modern kantha is utilized in a broader array of garments, primarily employing cotton and silk materials, such as sarees, dupattas, men's and women's shirts, beds, and other upholstery fabrics.



5. CONCLUSION

In recent years, the world of fashion has been actively embracing technology and artificial intelligence. However, this trend may inadvertently lead to a disregard for cultural legacy and history. This study aims to examine the current challenges and concerns related to kantha, a form of fashion art. Research has revealed that, according to Bengali tradition, old cloth is believed to have spiritual protective qualities. It was believed that babies wrapped in worn, soft cloth were safeguarded from the malevolent gaze of the evil eye. Furthermore, it is true that when rags are brought together, they signify the act of becoming a cohesive entity. Kanthas were originally crafted as ceremonial presents to commemorate significant family events such as births and marriages. These textiles were specifically designed to shield a family member from the cold and were woven together. Kantha serves as a vessel of intricately woven significance. Research has shown that the fashion industry is currently experiencing contemporary challenges in transitioning from traditional to modern fashion, particularly in the utilization of effective Indian arts such as Kantha. This change serves as a significant source of inspiration for new designs and trends, not only in West Bengal but also globally. Tradition and culture have a crucial influence in shaping the trends and variations in costume design employing Kantha in modern fashion. The arts and fashion have become more accessible globally, with each region having its own distinct traditional culture and fashion. By blending these traditional elements with contemporary fashion, we may create a really distinctive style that caters to the demands of the present, which has been a significant concern. Khadi is considered organically sustainable due to its absence of hazardous chemicals. These kantha stitching techniques on khadi fabric can be used to depict religious symbolism, potentially introducing a new trend in contemporary fashion.



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