



A Glorious Journey of Roghan Painting from Kutch, India

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Abstract

The study was carried out to create awareness on the exquisite value of the ancient art of Roghan painting on fabric. This traditional art is slowly losing its value and is on the verge of extinction. This report would be a step towards improving the economic and social status of the people and help to preserve the cultural heritage of our country. Traditional method was compared with the method used today by craftsmen. The objectives of the study were to analyze various aspects of the art of Roghan painting on fabric, practiced in the past and present, in terms of its origin, raw material used, motifs and designs used, preparation and application of Roghan paste in traditional style. Purposive sampling technique was used where all the craftsmen involved in Roghan painting, were interviewed during a survey at Nirona village in Kutch (Gujarat). Information regarding historic background of Roghan painting and its evolution was collected through literature and museum exhibits. With the passage of time, this traditional art has undergone many changes in raw material, its preparation, tools, fabric, colour, designs and the end products.

Keywords: Painting, Roghan, Nirona, Traditional craft.

Introduction

The tradition of Indian painting rests in antiquity. These designs created through Roghan painting, are well known for their beauty, in which each single motif signifies an important aspect of life. Unlike the Madhubani paintings of Mithila and Pattachitra of Orissa, Roghan painting in Nirona has not yet been explored till date. With the passage of time this traditional art is slowly losing its value and is on the verge of extinction.

Use of Roghan paste for producing designs on fabrics is an ancient tradition not known to many people. It was reported in the India magazine of her people and culture that Roghan, however, was always a marginal-tradition, never widely known in India. Since Roghan oil was associated with hides and leather, traditionally a raw material for low caste occupations, it seems likely that Roghan in any form was unpopular with high-caste Hindus and never found much respect as an art form.

History of Roghan painting: The art of Roghan painting on cloth goes back to centuries. It probably had its origin in Persia, as the style exudes images of the Middle East. Sir George Watt in 1930 found that a similar craft form was practiced not only by the Afridis but also in Peshawar, Lahore and Pattan where castor oil was used and in Kutch linseed oil was the base. In all these centers the craft was practiced by Muslims, probably descended from the Pathans.

To quote from T.N. Mukherji's Art Manufacturers of India, published for the Glasgow International Exhibition, it was another curious variety which though not cotton-printing, is the lac and colour painting on red and blue cotton fabrics which

were produced in the Peshawar district. Blocks were not used, but red, yellow and other colours in a thick sticky pigment were applied in bold semi-barbaric patterns, on which, as they dried, abrak or powdered talc was sprinkled.

At Peshawar, it was noted that the technique followed was a little different. The work was traced with a stick, there was no use of stamps or cylinders, and the quality of the colours used was very good.

Yacopino F. had stated in her book, 'Thread lines Pakistan', that Afridi wax cloth was sold in the bazaars of Peshawar, Lahore and Karachi where it was known as "khosi", from the word "khosai" referring to the dress of the Afridi women. (The India magazine of her people and culture, 1995).

Methodology

Main objective of the study was to analyze various aspects of the art of Roghan painting on fabric, practiced in the past and present, in terms of its origin, raw material used, motifs and designs adopted, preparation and application of Roghan paste, in traditional and present styles. A descriptive research design was planned. Nirona village in Gujarat is the place where the art of roghan painting somewhat remains and is therefore, identified as area of study. All the craftsmen involved in roghan painting, at different stages of work were interviewed and personal investigation technique used. The interview schedule consisted of closed and open ended questions. The questions dealt with demographic details, history of craft, and process of producing the craft (both traditional and contemporary), colour, motif and products produced. Observations were recorded by taking

photographs. National museum, New Delhi, National Handicraft's and Handloom museum, New Delhi, Kutch museum and Aina Mahal, Bhuj. Other agencies like offices of the Development commissioner (Handicrafts) at Delhi and at Bhuj were also visited to collect the data.

The study was carried out to understand the changes that have taken place in Roghan painting in the present days. Various parameters have been considered: i. Back ground information of artisan, ii. Raw material – oil used for making resin, pigment colour, tools, fabric and storage, iii. Preparation of Roghan gel, iv. Mixing of dye paste with Roghan gel, v. Method of Achieving the right viscosity, vi. Making design on Fabric, vii. Flattening of applied paste on fabric, viii. Design used, ix. Products made.

Results and Discussion

Background information of the artisan: Roghan painting was earlier practiced in Baroda, Patan, Chowbari and Khavada of Kutch in Gujarat and Nasik of Maharashtra. This craft was practiced by 4-5 families in Nirona village (Kutch) since 40 years.

Presently there is only one family at Nirona who is practicing Roghan art. Six members of this family comprises of an uncle, his son and four nephews. They are the sixth and seventh generations in the family who continue to practice this craft successfully. Khatri Abdul Gafoor Daud was given the National Award as Master Craftsman for Roghan in 1997 by the Government of India.

Raw material used in Roghan paste: Oil used for making Roghan-According to George watt, wild safflower or poli seeds were crushed to extract the oil and boiled for 12 hours after which they were put in water. As a result of this, it became a gelatinous substance called roghan.

In the Kutch region of Gujarat, castor seeds or khardi seeds were used for the oil-extraction and that this process was difficult. Presently due to high level of skills and dexterity, craftsmen used to procure castor oil directly from market (Ahmadabad) as it is readily available.

Colour: Earlier, colour was extracted from natural sources like flower, plant, soil, rocks. But with the passage of time and availability of colour, artisan bought a readymade pigment colour which are cheaper and make the Roghan making process simple and faster.

Fabric used: During early days Roghan was limited to thick cotton fabric called khaddar but now due to customer demand and availability of various fabrics, craftsmen began to paint on cotton, silk, wool, polyester and denim.

Tools used: Chula: After an interview it was found that they used to dig the place to lit fire for preparing Roghan gel. But now days, they are using iron chullas which are available in market. By this, they are trying to compensate the time of digging and making chulla in field.

Vessel: Going through the history, to make bold and big motifs and design, large quantity of resin was made in big earthen pot vessels. Since the process of making resin is quite dangerous as temperature used is above 200°C, sometime it leads to accident where earthen pot at such temperature burst and the whole process of making resin was repeated. Due to this reason and availability of other metal vessel now the craftsperson has shifted to use Aluminum vessel; at least, it does not burst out of high temperature.

Stylus: The main equipment used for painting is the Kalam, an iron stylus¹. It measure about 6 inches- 7 inches in length and had a pointed working end. It was found that design created on fabric were bold and big. It indicates that stylus used was big and having a thick tip to apply the colour on fabric for making large motifs, designs and patterns. But now the pattern has completely changed. To get fine and intricate design, small and pointed tip stylus has been used.

Storage bowl: Once the Roghan gel is formed, roghan gel has to be stored in container filled with water to avoid air exposure so as to prevent from drying. On comparing the previous method of storage where big earthen pots were used due to large quantity of Roghan gel. Now due to small intricate design, small amount of resin was prepared and is stored in small plastic bowl containing water which is quite easy to store and consume less space.

Preparation of Roghan gel: Oil is boiled in earthen pot for 12 hr. on boiling, oil emits a strong odor, and hence heating process is being done outside village area. Matka² is filled with castor oil to about half its capacity and processed at high temperature i.e. 200°C. Viscosity of the paste is then checked with a wooden stick (at regular intervals till the required viscosity is achieved). This paste can be stored safely for about one and a half months to two months, after which it dries up.

Mixing of dye paste with Roghan Gel: The next stage was adding colour to prepare a roghan paste. The proportion of pigment colour and roghan is approximately 2:1. little amount of lime (filler) was added to make the smooth paste. The ready colours paste was kept in bowl containing water. Water prevents it from getting dried. This method of mixing Roghan gel with pigment is still followed by the artisan.

Method of achieving right viscosity: The artisans are still following the same way of achieving the working viscosity where they take a lump of the colored roghan in the palm of his left hand. He holds the kalam in his right hand. Craftsman's left palm is used for warming, softening and mixing the roghan gel.

He then draws out fine threads from the prepared gel, by means of a stylus or a kalam. When roghan is in a perfectly workable state and can be drawn out into threads of the required thickness, the thread adhering to the cloth and drawn finer and finer to form the design.

Making design on the fabric: Design is painted on the cloth, with the support of left hand fingers placed beneath the cloth. Fingers of the hand move along the design lines from below while the roghan thread is being applied on the surface of the cloth and then dabbed with wet fingers. This dabbing makes the thread sink into the surface of the cloth and adhere to it. No major changes have been found in making design.

Flattening of applied paste on fabric: The design is skillfully worked out using stylus on one half of the cloth, which is then folded very carefully on a central line, and pressed slightly with the palm thus effectively stamping the design on the remaining half of the cloth. This process is same as earlier.

Articles and designs: Earlier, the designs ranged from simple geometrical motifs to a great variety which included floral, plants, animals, birds, human and abstract motifs, drawn from the natural world and religious association. The traditional floral motifs were small flowers like chauphulla, tik, ghonta (Mari gold flower) and keyri (mango). The floral borders include panfarei, single farei (seed pod and flower), kangsi or phullivel (comb like pattern and phulvels), popat gulvel (with parrots and flowers)

Motifs drawn from animal kingdom are popat (parrot) occurring in stylized forms, haathi (elephant) – a royal animal occurring with or without ambadi (howdah and rider), other figurative motif are mahiyarin – two women wearing ghaghara and chunaris, churning curd using ravirya (churner) and a garud or angel.

But now on customer demand, artisan are more focused on the motif called Tree of life, a typical bye product of oriental craftsmen catering to cultivated western taste.

Products: Products made by the ancestors of Roghan artisans were Ghaghara, Odhana and wall pieces. These were sold within the community and to the traders. Presently, roghan artisans make cushion covers, odhana, wall pieces, silk sari, bed cover, table cloth and some other dress materials.

Conclusion

Roghan becomes expensive because of the process it undergoes. The process of making colour motifs with hand is laborious and time consuming. Other than raw materials and labour cost, roghan artisans also add a cost for explaining the craft. Craftsperson from Kutch, practicing this art, has been forced to take up other occupations, due to almost negligible demand for Roghan painting. But artisans also feel that their work is sustainable and do not want to stop or discontinue their work, as they were aware of the history of thecraft. Something has to be done to make process of making Roghan painting simpler, shorter and economical. People should make aware of this traditional craft for its revival Table-1.

Table-1
Comparison between traditional and present methods of Roghan painting

Material/Methods		Traditional	Present
Raw material	Oil	Linseed oil, castor oil extracted from plants	Castor oil(bought from market)
	Dye	Pigment colour(natural sources)	Pigment colour(natural and synthetic)
	Additive used	Lime	Lime
	Stylus	Thick and broad at the tips and 7 inches long made of iron rod	Fine and narrow at tip and 4to 5 inches long, made of iron
Preparation of gel	Utensil used	Earthen pots were used	Metal pots are used(Aluminium)
	Fuel	Wood	Wood
	Amount of Oil Taken	2kg(because bold design were made earlier so consumption was more)	1kg (designs are smaller and fine.)
	Storage Of Roghan gel	Medium size earthen pots were used to store the gel with water	Plastic container having 6-7 small bowls to store the roghan gel with water
	Colour ranges	Limited number of colours were used	Many varieties of dyes are available for good combination.
	Colour used	Red, black	Red, black, orange, green, blue, etc.
Fabric	Material	Cotton(khaddar)	Cotton, silk, polyester, georgette, chiffon
Articles made	-	Ghaghara, odhana.	Saris, Wall hanging, Toran, Tablecloths, Folder, Purses, Cushion cover.
Customers	-	Localities	Mainly tourist and local people
Awareness	-	Limited to local areas	Known at international levels.

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