

INTERGRATING SOHRAI AND KHOVAR TRIBAL ART MOTIFS FROM JHARIKHAND, INDIA INTO SRI LANKAN BATIK HOME FURNISHINGS

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ABSTRACT: Sri Lanka is one of the major countries that practice the batik technique. Therefore, it is essential to support traditional batik designers by providing them with innovative, value-added designs and motifs. The study focused on introducing *Sohrai* and *Khovar* tribal art motifs from Jharkhand in India into Sri Lankan home furnishing products. During the Covid-19 pandemic, SriLankan government took steps to develop and revive traditional batik art. Thus, this study aimed to revive both Indian tribal art and the Sri Lankan traditional batik industry while introducing value-added products that meet modern consumer needs and preserve lesser-known *Sohrai* and *Khovar* tribal art. The experimental study involved conducting a comprehensive literature survey to explore *Sohrai* and *Khovar* motifs followed by a survey conducted for selected 25 batik designers, artists, and manufacturers from Sri Lanka to gain comprehensive insights into the designs. Due to limitations during the pandemic, the survey was conducted online. 25 experienced batik designers were selected with the support of the National Craft Council. Based on the findings, 25 *Sohrai* and *Khovar* tribal art motifs were selected for designing different layouts suitable for Sri Lankan batik home furnishings such as wall hangings, cushion covers, tablecloths, bed runners, and bed sheets. The main colours utilized were black, white, yellow ochre, and brownish red. The study will have a significant impact as it will contribute to the global exchange of cultural heritage while supporting SriLankan batik designers and preserving lesser-known tribal arts.

Keywords: home furnishings, *Khovar* tribal art, Sri Lankan batik industry, *Sohrai*

1. INTRODUCTION

Batik, an ancient textile craft originating over two millennia ago, involves applying designs on fabric by masking areas to prevent dye absorption (Sreenivasam, 1989). Today batik textile manufacturing in Sri Lanka is deep-rooted into the local culture and many local artists have embraced it as one of our own, developing unique wax resist and dyeing techniques to create batik designs that are unique to Sri Lankan batik artists (Sri Lankan Export Development Board, 2015). Wickramasinghe (2020) has explained the steps taken by the government to develop and preserve the traditional batik art. A proposal was tabled to encourage state sector employees to embrace Sri Lanka's Batik and local textile culture with a mandatory wearing of batik or handloom apparels once a week, as a step to promote local apparels.

A separate ministry was formed in Sri Lanka during the Covid pandemic to revive the dyeing industry and to encourage improvements in the batik industry (Hussainmiya 2020). As per the Sri Lankan Export Development Board (2015), the growing interest of tourists in batik was sufficient to keep the art alive as a cottage industry in the nooks and corners of Sri Lanka. It is the government backing provided through the National Crafts Council, Sri Lanka Handicrafts Board, Institute of Textiles & Apparel (SLITA) and Sri Lanka Export Development Board which encouraged a generation of batik artists to create and experiment with new form and techniques in batik, giving a local flavour to a global tradition. To address the above requirement, the researcher aimed to introduce innovative and culturally rich batik designs to Sri Lankan batik industry. As a result, this study focuses to explore the integration of Indian tribal motifs into Sri Lankan batik designs.

India is home to over 2500 tribes and their diverse cultures are vividly reflected through crafts such as *Warli*, *Tanjore*, *Madhubani*, *Saura*, *Bhill*, *Gond*, *Pattachitra*, *Kalamazethu*, *Sohrai*, and *Khovar* paintings (Xavier, 2012). Among these, *Sohrai* and *Khovar* art from the *Birhor* tribes of Jharkhand involves decorating walls with nature-inspired motifs and is less known outside the region (Cheng, 2002). This approach seeks to create innovative batik designs and to support Sri Lankan batik designers while preserving lesser-known traditional tribal art. Besides, the study opens opportunities for global exchange as it introduces the culturally rich heritage of tribal art into the Sri Lankan batik industry through home furnishing products such as wall hangings, cushion covers, tablecloths, bed

runners, and bed sheets. The primary objectives of this study are to study about *Sohrai* and *Khovar* tribal motifs and to develop new designs with more aesthetic appeal and adapt these designs in creating distinctive batik home furnishing products to support Sri Lankan batik artists and manufactures.

2. METHODOLOGY

As this study was conducted during the COVID pandemic in 2020, due to travel restrictions, a comprehensive literature was conducted referring to books, websites, and interviews on *Sohrai* and *khovar* tribal art forms and colours. Then, general information on Sri Lankan batik home furnishing products was gathered through designers and manufacturers. 25 designers, artists, and manufacturers with over five years' experience were selected with the help of the National Craft Council and a survey was administered to gather information on product selection, motif sizes, and design preferences. Additionally, an online form was employed for the same sample to identify and categorize the products that best suited as home furnishing products focusing on motif selection from *Sohrai* and *Khovar*. During the product design development phase, 25 designs (5 per category) were created, and those designs were digitally edited to standard sizes available sizes. From these, 5 final designs (one per category) were selected based on respondents' preferences, with the highest-scoring designs chosen for further development.

3. RESULTS

Initially, the motifs and colours of the *Sohrai* and *Khovar* tribal wall paintings were deeply observed which are suitable for the design process. The theme of those paintings includes wild animals in their natural habitats and domestic animal forms such as cow, bull, fowl, pigeon and various types of other animals dwelling together in forest and other nature inspired designs painted on mud walls. The figures in these paintings are drawn with bold outlines (see Figure 1). Even though these motifs are associated with specific meanings, their aesthetics and suitability for batik technique was only considered. Based on the traditional colours used in *Sohrai* and *Khovar* tribal art, the researcher selected a colour palette consisting of black, white, yellow ochre, brownish red to develop new designs.



Fig. 1. Sohrai and Khovar Tribal Paintings on Walls

The researcher identified a total of 25 motifs from wall paintings, which were broadly categorized into three styles: floral, birds, and animals. Specifically, this included 8 floral motifs, 9 bird motifs, and 8 animal motifs for screening. (see Fig. 2)

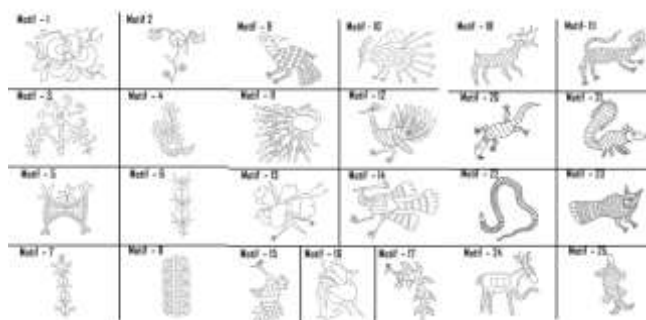


Fig. 2. Selected 25 motifs identified for screening

The responses of 25 participants on their preference of motifs were obtained for the selection of final motifs. Preference choices were given to the designers and manufacturers about the sizes and the appearance of motifs. According to this fact, motif sizes were classified into extra-large, large, medium, small. As per the results of the survey it was noted that the Sri Lankan designers and manufacturers preferred to incorporate a mix of motif sizes and mix of bold and subtle figures for product designing. The motif sizes and appearance of motifs as recorded by the respondents are shown in Fig. 3.

Out of the 25 collected motifs, 10 motifs for design development were selected (3 florals, 4 birds, and 3 animal motifs) based on their aesthetic appeal. The distribution of motif category and their preferences are shown in Fig. 4. Most preferred 10 motifs by the designers (Motifs no. 1, 4, 8,9, 13, 15, 16, 20,23 and 25) along with a description of each layout are shown in Table 1.

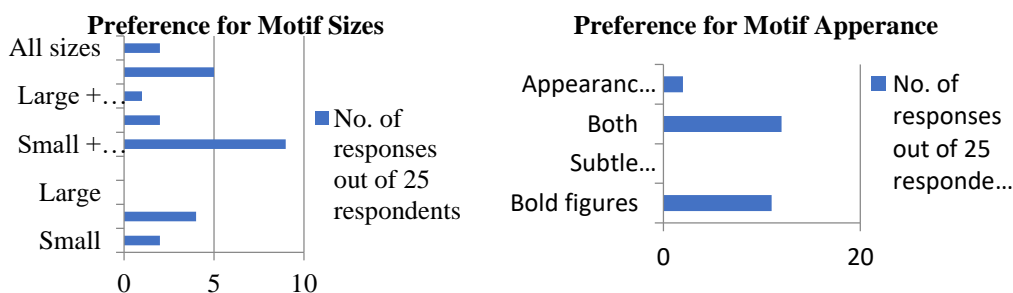


Fig. 3. Preferences for Motif Sizes and Appearance

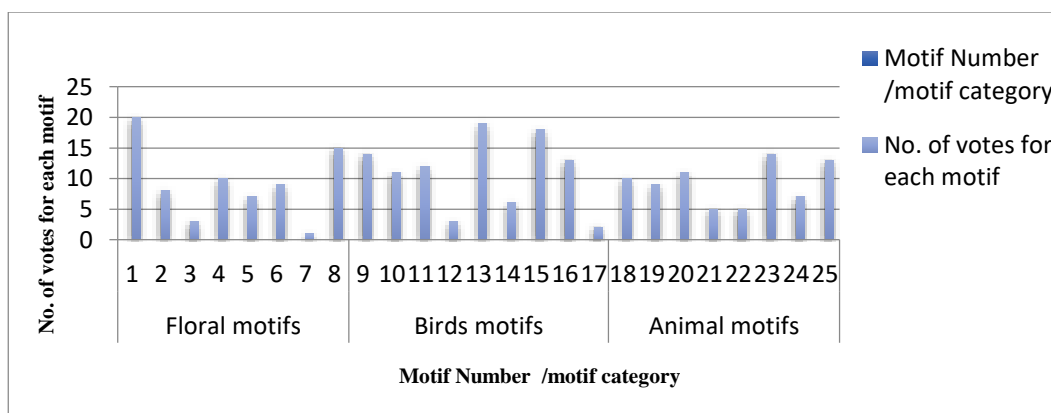


Fig. 4. Preference for Each Motif Category

Table 1. Details of Selected Motifs

Motif No.	Design details	Motif No.	Design details
Motif no. 1	Wide petals with leaves	Motif no. 15	A bird like a peacock
Motif No.4	A big flower with multiple small sections	Motif No.16	A bird like the Sri Lankan peacock
Motif No. 8	Extended design with many repeats	Motif No.20	Animal design with four legs and scales
Motif No. 9	A bird motif with an action	Motif No.23	A bird like an owl with so many feather-like structures
Motif No.13	A bird motif with huge feathers with many designs	Motif No.25	A fish with many scale designs

Further, the selection of home furnishing products was done after analysing the results of the initial survey. The researcher analysed and categorized the products that have a higher demand as home furnishing products in terms of acceptance. Among the respondents, 60% opted for wall hangings, 56% of the respondents for bed cover and 44% for tablecloth. 24% and 8% respondents voted for cushion cover and bed runner respectively. Table runner, lamp shade and tablemats were found to have a lesser demand. After evaluation of the above results according to the percentage value of responses, first five products in higher demand including wall hanging, bed cover, tablecloth, cushion cover, and bed runner were chosen as final product items for further development.

Based on the data collected from the survey on product category and motifs, a total of 25 design layouts were prepared with 5 designs (one design for each category) for product development. The evaluation was conducted by the same 25 respondents who selected their preferred designs. The designs with the highest number of votes in each category were then finalized for product development as layouts 1, 8, 11, 16 and 25 with a score of 32%, 52%, 32%, 32% and 44% respectively.

Article 1 (Wall hanging) - The selected design layout (Layout: 1) which got the highest responses had bird and floral motifs designed in only two colours black and yellow ochre placed within one-inch black colour frame.

Article 2 (Bed cover) - The design layout (Layout: 8) was arranged with two extra-large sized bird motifs and designed in mainly black, white and yellow ochre colours.

Article 3 (Tablecloth) - The layout (Layout: 11) was selected for tablecloth design as it was the most preferred by the respondents. The background of this selected layout was kept white with a multi-coloured floral border on all four sides. The centre portion of the layout had bird motifs in yellow ochre outline placed in black background.

Article 4 (Cushion cover) - In this layout (Layout: 16) stylized floral motif inspired from *Sohrai* and *Khovar* art was arranged diagonally in white, black, and yellow ochre colours.

Article 5 (Bed runner) - The background of this layout (Layout: 25) was yellow ochre. Medium sized motifs of two birds facing each other were placed in the middle of the design layout and two flowers were kept at the opposite corners of the bed runner in black colour.

Finally, the selected designs were incorporated into home furnishing products using batik techniques (see Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Final products

4. CONCLUSION

Batik industry in Sri Lanka has developed into a large form of textile business exclusive to the country. Batiks in Sri Lanka incorporate many motifs and colours, some traditional, others highly contemporary and stylized. Thus, there is a growing interest for batik products and the Sri Lankan government is providing ample support to increase the demand and encourage the artists to create and experiment with new forms giving a local flavour to a global market requirement. Today, consumers always look for exclusive products with novelty. Hence, adapting Indian motifs to Sri Lankan home furnishing designs have given a proper direction to how this need can be satisfied with the creation of value-added products without changing unique traditional features. It is recommended to continue this study to get new insights about the product acceptability and cost evaluation for both local and export market. Also, it can be recommended that the developed designs may be used in various other products such as saris, shawls, sarong, and curtains.

5. REFERENCES

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