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Revitalizing traditional craft: Integrating thewa jewellery motifs in men's ethnic kurtas through surface ornamentation techniques

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Abstract

This research investigates the application of traditional Thewa jewellery motifs an intricate Rajasthani craft combining gold filigree with coloured glass in the design of men's ethnic kurtas using surface ornamentation techniques. The study aims to document Thewa motifs, develop design prototypes using hand embroidery (zari work), and evaluate their aesthetic and commercial viability. Conducted in Jaipur, India, the research followed a five-stage methodology: technique selection, literature review, motif digitization, CAD-based design development, and acceptability evaluation through surveys. Fifteen kurtas were designed digitally, of which five were prototyped and assessed by 50 respondents aged 20–25 years. Results revealed a clear preference for design D1, especially with motif placements at the sleeve and corner. Profitability estimates indicated a viable margin of 25–30% for mass production. The study underscores the value of integrating heritage crafts with modern apparel design and highlights new avenues for culturally rooted product innovation in ethnic menswear.

Keywords: Thewa jewellery, surface ornamentation, ethnic wear, men's kurtas, cad design, traditional motifs, textile design

1. Introduction

India's artistic traditions are deeply embedded in its cultural fabric, with jewelry playing a significant role not only as ornamentation but also as a medium of storytelling, identity expression, and ritual symbolism. Across centuries, Indian jewelry has reflected social hierarchy, religious beliefs, and regional craftsmanship. Thewa, an intricate jewelry art from Rajasthan, epitomizes this cultural depth. It fuses 23-karat gold filigree with vibrant coloured glass, creating motifs that depict flora, fauna, and mythological scenes. Despite its delicate artistry and cultural significance, Thewa has been confined largely to the domain of women's jewelry.

Despite its legacy, Thewa remains underutilized in modern design applications beyond ornaments. Particularly in the realm of men's fashion, surface ornamentation in ethnic wear is often limited to generic embroidery or repetitive machine patterns. This leaves a critical gap in the integration of regional, story-driven, and artisanal motifs in men's ethnic fashion. While women's ethnic garments frequently showcase traditional crafts, men's apparel design lacks a similar cultural richness. This research seeks to address that gap by exploring the possibilities of incorporating Thewa motifs in men's kurtas a garment category that offers both cultural symbolism and design adaptability.

The selection of Thewa for surface ornamentation is also relevant in the context of evolving fashion trends. The global fashion industry is gradually shifting toward sustainable practices, craft revival, and cultural authenticity. As consumers increasingly value handcrafted textiles and regional storytelling, garments that represent traditional techniques are gaining ground. By translating Thewa motifs into embroidered surface designs via hand embroidery and CAD (Computer-Aided Design), the study responds to this growing demand while simultaneously supporting endangered crafts and artisan livelihoods.

Situated in Jaipur, Rajasthan - a cultural hub known for both its jewelry and textile legacy this study adopts a multidisciplinary approach that blends ethnographic motif documentation,

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digital design processes, and empirical consumer evaluation. The methodology involves identifying and digitizing Thewa motifs, developing design sheets, fabricating kurta prototypes using surface ornamentation techniques, and finally, evaluating consumer acceptability. Through this framework, the study demonstrates how heritage can be transformed into wearable narratives, especially in categories like menswear that lack such cultural infusion.

In essence, the study proposes a bridge between the traditional and the contemporary by developing a line of kurtas that balance aesthetic heritage with modern sensibilities. It aims to contribute to both academic discourse on design innovation and practical applications in the textile and fashion industry. The integration of traditional art into modern clothing not only extends the life and relevance of such crafts but also enhances the visual and cultural appeal of fashion garments in today's market.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the integration of traditional Thewa jewellery motifs into men's ethnic kurtas through surface ornamentation techniques. The study aims to systematically document authentic Thewa motifs sourced from local markets, literature, and digital archives, and to reinterpret these motifs through Computer-Aided Design (CAD) for apparel application. It also seeks to develop a range of kurta prototypes using hand embroidery (zari work) and evaluate their aesthetic appeal, motif placement, colour combinations, and overall consumer acceptability. By doing so, the research intends to assess the potential of reviving a traditional art form within a contemporary menswear context, offering new directions for culturally enriched and commercially viable fashion design.

2. Review of Literature

The study aims to integrate traditional Thewa jewellery motifs into men's ethnic kurtas through surface ornamentation techniques, utilizing Computer-Aided Design (CAD) for motif reinterpretation and hand embroidery for prototype development. This approach seeks to revive traditional art forms within contemporary menswear, offering a culturally enriched and commercially viable fashion design. The integration of traditional motifs into modern apparel has been explored in various contexts, highlighting the potential for cultural heritage to inspire contemporary fashion.

While the integration of traditional motifs into modern fashion offers a pathway for cultural revival, it is essential to balance innovation with authenticity. The challenge lies in maintaining the cultural significance of traditional designs while adapting them to meet contemporary fashion trends and consumer preferences. This approach not only preserves cultural heritage but also enriches the fashion industry with diverse and meaningful design elements.

India's artistic traditions are intricately woven into its cultural identity, with jewelry serving as a vital medium for storytelling, identity expression, and ritual symbolism. Thewa, a unique jewelry art from Rajasthan, exemplifies this cultural richness through its combination of gold filigree and coloured glass, depicting various motifs. Despite its delicate craftsmanship and cultural significance, Thewa jewelry has predominantly been associated with women's adornment, reflecting broader societal norms.

Cultural significance of jewelry: Jewelry in India symbolizes social hierarchy and religious beliefs, often reflecting the wearer's status and community. Thewa's motifs often depict flora, fauna, and mythological scenes,

showcasing the region's craftsmanship and storytelling traditions (Untracht, 1997; Victoria et al., 2008).

Gender and Jewelry: Traditionally, jewelry has been linked to women's roles in society, particularly in rituals such as weddings, where gold jewelry signifies wealth and status (Fernandez & Veer, 2004). The association of Thewa with women's jewelry limits its recognition as a broader artistic expression, despite its intricate artistry (Satpathy, 2017).

Ritualistic and symbolic dimensions: Jewelry serves as a medium of symbolic communication, representing cultural heritage and identity (Satpathy, 2017). In Hindu weddings, gold jewelry plays a crucial role in rituals, symbolizing the bride's transition into her new family (Fernandez & Veer, 2004). While Thewa jewelry is primarily viewed through a feminine lens, it also holds potential for broader artistic appreciation, transcending gender boundaries and inviting a reevaluation of its cultural significance.

Methodology

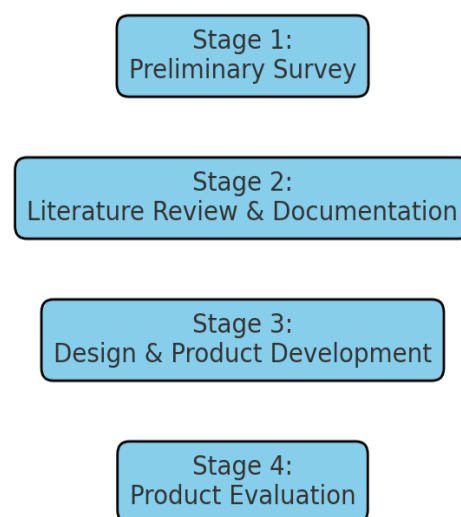


Fig 1: Research methodology flowchart

This research followed a structured, three-phase methodology that integrated primary and secondary data collection, motif analysis, digital design development, and product evaluation to study the application of Thewa jewellery motifs in men's ethnic kurtas.

Phase I focused on data collection and motif documentation. The locale of the study was Jaipur, Rajasthan recognized for its Thewa art heritage and textile production. Primary data was gathered through field visits to local jewellery markets and artisan workshops to observe traditional motifs and their application. In parallel, secondary sources such as books, journals, and online archives were consulted to supplement and validate the findings. A total of 50 motifs were collected and digitally documented. From this pool, 15 motifs with the highest visual clarity, thematic richness, and adaptability for fabric surfaces were shortlisted for further exploration.

Phase II involved the design and product development stage. The 15 shortlisted motifs were transformed into digital illustrations using CorelDRAW software to enhance precision, resolution, and motif symmetry. Using Computer-Aided Design (CAD), 15 kurta illustrations were created, each integrating different placements and combinations of the selected motifs. A panel of five fashion design experts evaluated the illustrated designs based on a five-point ranking

scale using criteria such as silhouette appropriateness, motif placement, aesthetic harmony, and overall appeal. Based on the scoring, the top five designs were selected for actual product development.

Fabric selection was a critical step in this phase, as the fabric needed to support the zari hand embroidery used for surface ornamentation. A comparative evaluation of different fabric types Taffeta Silk, Jam Silk, Bambi No Silk, and Upada was carried out using a five-point Likert scale, assessing texture, durability, visual compatibility with motif intricacy, and drape. After finalizing the fabric, five men's kurtas were constructed using hand embroidery (zari work) to replicate the digital designs.

Phase III focused on product evaluation and consumer acceptability analysis. The five final kurtas were evaluated by 50 male respondents aged 20–25 years, residing in Jaipur. A structured evaluation form was used to collect feedback using a five-point Likert scale, measuring attributes such as motif placement, design originality, aesthetic appeal, colour combination, and perceived cost-effectiveness. The goal was to assess not only aesthetic acceptance but also the commercial feasibility of integrating traditional Thewa motifs into ethnic menswear.

This phased approach enabled a systematic transformation of heritage art into functional fashion products, grounded in user-centered design and empirical validation.

Results and Discussion

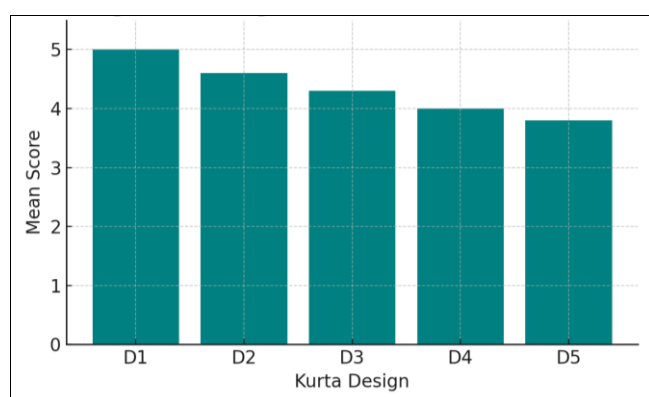


Fig 2: Design preference scores (D1–D5)

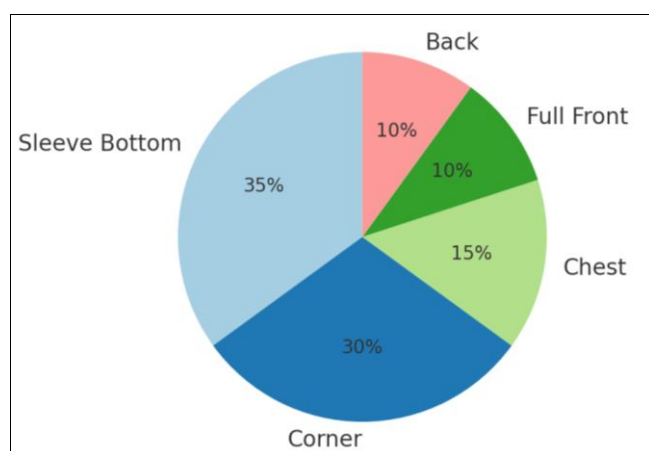


Fig 3: Preferred motif placement

This study was conducted in three systematic phases, from motif documentation and digital design development to kurta production and consumer acceptability assessment. The results of each stage are described below:

4.1 Documentation of thewa jewellery motifs

A total of 50 motifs were collected from primary sources (field visits to Jaipur jewellery shops) and secondary sources (books, journals, magazines, and online databases). These motifs included elements from necklaces, rings, earrings, bangles, and bracelets. After digital enhancement using CorelDraw, a panel of academicians specializing in Thewa art evaluated these motifs. Using a preferential choice index and mean score ranking system, 15 motifs were selected based on clarity, intricacy, and design potential. Among these, Motif M6 received the highest weighted mean score (4.8), followed by M10 (4.4), M14 (4.0), and others like M1, M3, and M11 with scores around 3.6.

4.2 Design and product development

Using the top 15 motifs, 15 kurta designs were created digitally via CorelDraw. These designs varied in motif placement center, sleeve, pocket, corner, and all-over layouts. A panel of five academicians assessed the designs on three criteria: placement of motifs, silhouette compatibility, and overall appearance. The evaluation revealed that Design D11 received the highest weighted score (14.4), indicating excellence across all three dimensions. This was followed by D1, D3, D5, and D4, each scoring above 13.2.

Four fabric types were also evaluated by the expert panel using a five-point Likert scale: Taffeta silk, Jam silk, Bambi No silk, and Upada. Taffeta, Jam, and Bambi No silk each received a weighted mean score of 3.8, while Upada lagged behind at 2.4. Based on texture, compatibility with embroidery, and drape, Jam silk was selected for final product development.

Five kurtas corresponding to the top-ranked designs were developed using hand embroidery (zari work) for surface ornamentation. The base and motif colours varied across the designs, including combinations like black-gold, maroon-gold, green-gold, sky blue-gold, and navy blue-gold.

4.3 Evaluation of acceptability

A total of 50 male respondents, aged between 20–25 years and residing in Jaipur city, evaluated the developed kurtas using a five-point Likert scale based on several parameters. In terms of overall design acceptability, Kurta D1 received the highest mean score of 5.0, followed by D2 (4.8), D5 (4.7), D4 (4.8), and D3 (4.4). When assessed for design suitability, D1 again ranked first (5.0), with D5 (4.9), D4 (4.7), D2 (4.8), and D3 (4.3) following. For motif placement, D1 emerged as the most aesthetically pleasing (5.0), followed by D4 (4.9), D2 (4.8), D5 (4.6), and D3 (4.2). Regarding colour combinations, respondents favored the high-contrast design of D1 (5.0), with D2 (4.9), D5 (4.8), D4 (4.6), and D3 (4.2) receiving slightly lower scores. Aesthetic appeal also positioned D1 as the most attractive design (5.0), trailed closely by D2 and D4 (4.8 each), D5 (4.7), and D3 (4.2). Lastly, the cost acceptability of D1 was rated highest (5.0), with D2 (4.8), D5 and D4 (4.7), and D3 (4.9) indicating overall positive responses across all dimensions of product evaluation.

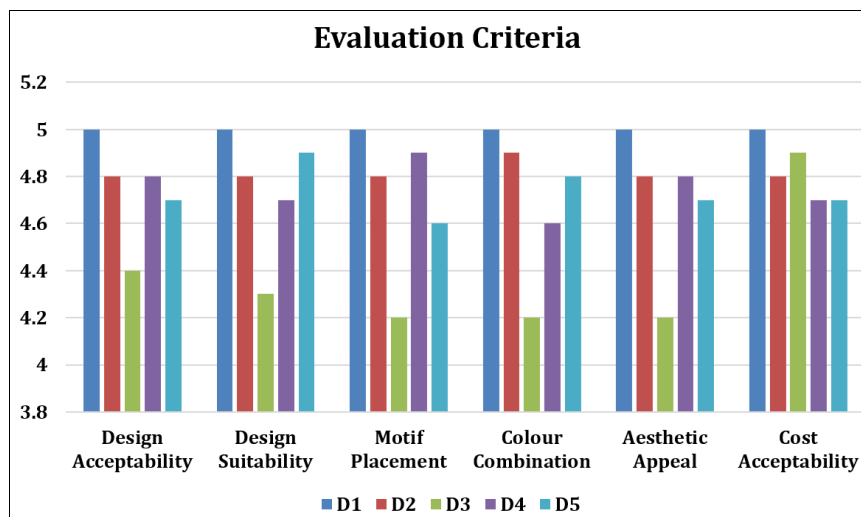


Fig 3: Evaluation criteria

4.4 Cost analysis

Cost sheets were developed for each of the five kurtas. The material and labour costs ranged from ₹935 to ₹1118. A 20% mark-up was added to calculate the final retail price, resulting in prices ranging from ₹1122 to ₹1342. The lowest cost was associated with Kurta D5, while the highest was for Kurta D2. The average profit margin was found to be 25–30%, affirming the commercial viability of mass-producing these designs.

5. Conclusion

The study demonstrates the potential of integrating heritage arts like Thewa into contemporary fashion through textile innovation. The fusion of traditional motifs with modern CAD and embroidery techniques yielded highly acceptable kurta designs. This cross-disciplinary exploration paves the way for further experimentation with other traditional Indian crafts and promotes sustainable fashion rooted in cultural identity.

6. Future scope

A promising direction for future research lies in conducting a comparative analysis between Thewa-inspired textile applications and other traditional Indian jewellery art forms such as Meenakari, Kundan, or Temple jewellery. Each of these crafts embodies distinct motifs, materials, and cultural narratives that offer unique aesthetic and design possibilities for textile adaptation. By comparing their integration into apparel through techniques like embroidery, digital printing, or appliqué, researchers can evaluate their visual impact, consumer acceptability, and commercial viability. Such comparative studies would not only deepen the understanding of India's rich jewellery heritage in textile design but also aid in identifying which traditional art forms are most suitable for specific fashion categories, thereby contributing to more targeted and meaningful craft revival initiatives in the fashion industry.

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