

Subject : Textile Arts And Crafts

Unit 1: Introduction to Textile Arts and Crafts

Quadrant 1 – E-Text

Learning Objectives

The learning objectives of this unit are:

- Describe the development of textile arts and crafts.
- Identify the classification of textile arts and crafts.
- List the techniques of textile arts and crafts.
- Examine examples of textile crafts.

1.1 Introduction

Textiles have been a fundamental part of human life since the beginning of civilization. The methods and materials used to make them have expanded enormously, while the functions of textiles have remained the same. From early times, textiles have been used to cover the human body and protect it from the elements; to send social cues to other people; to store, secure, and protect possessions; and to soften, insulate, and decorate living spaces and surfaces. The term textile is derived from the Latin “*texere*” that means, “to weave,” and it originally referred only to woven fabrics.

It has, however, come to include fabrics produced by other methods.

Thus, threads, cords, ropes, braids, lace, embroidery, nets, and fabrics made by weaving, knitting, bonding, felting or tufting are textiles.

Most of the textile arts begin with twisting or spinning and plying fibers to make yarn. It is called *thread* when it is very fine, and *rope* when it is very heavy.

The yarn is then knotted, looped, braided, laced or woven to make flexible *fabric* or *cloth*, which can be used to make clothing and soft furnishings.

All of these items – felt, yarn, fabric and finished objects – are collectively referred to as *textiles*.

The textile arts also include techniques, that are used for embellishing or decorating textiles such as, dyeing and printing to add color and pattern; embroidery and various types of needlework.

Construction methods such as sewing, knitting, crochet, and tailoring, as well as the tools employed (looms and sewing needles), techniques employed (quilting and

pleating) and the objects made (carpets, hooked rugs, and coverlets) all fall under the category of textile arts.

One can define craft as “an activity involving skill in making things by hand” whereas, art is defined as "the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form, such as a painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power".

This definition of *craft* and fine art is applied to textiles as well.

Textile arts and crafts use plant, animal, or synthetic fibers to construct practical or decorative objects using creative hand skills.

The earliest form of textiles were nets - produced from one thread and employed a single repeated movement to form loops, and basketry - the interlacing of flexible reeds, cane, or other suitable materials.

The production of net, also called limited thread work, was practiced in many ancient cultures.

Examples of prehistoric textiles are extremely rare, because of the perishability of fabrics. The earliest evidence of weaving, closely related to basketry, dates from Neolithic cultures of about 5000 BCE. Weaving preceded spinning of yarn; woven fabrics probably originated from basket weaving.

Cotton, silk, wool, and flax fibres were used as textile materials in ancient Egypt.

Cotton was used in India by 3000 BCE, and silk production is mentioned in Chinese chronicles dating to about the same period.

The discovery of cloth fragments, terracotta spindles and bronze needles at Mohenjo-Daro dating between 2500-1500 BCE, indicates the antiquity of weaving, dyeing and patterning on fabrics in the Indian sub-continent.

The earliest fabrics excavated, display striking beauty and sophistication in terms of their design and art forms in a wide range of patterns and colours, from different parts of the world and bear distinctive local features.

Yarns and cloth were dyed and printed from very early times. Specimens of dyed fabrics have been found in Roman ruins of the 2nd century BCE.

Tie and dye effects decorated the silks of China in the Tang dynasty (618–907CE); and there is ample evidence of production of woven and printed textiles in India during the 4th century BCE.

Textiles found in Egypt also indicate a highly developed weaving craft by the 4th century CE, with many tapestries made from linen and wool. Between the 5th and 7th century AD, Indian textiles had achieved a degree of refinement as seen in numerous Ajanta frescoes that features the resist techniques of printing, tie-dye, *ikat* and brocade weaving.

By the early Middle Ages, some Turkish tribes were skilled in the manufacture of carpets, felted cloths, towels, and rugs. Lyons in France had a thriving silk weaving industry by the 8th century CE.

Many areas in UK and France, between the 12th and 14th century CE, specialized in textiles woven with wool.

Indian textiles of the medieval era reflect Turkish, Afghan and Persian influence brought by the various conquerors that came and settled the region during this time.

The organisation of crafts as a commercial activity under “*karkhanas*”, (factories), was established during the Delhi Sultanate period.

Many textile fragments, discovered at Al-Fustat in Egypt dating to the 13th and 15th century CE, are of Indian origin. They consist of block printed and resist painted textiles.

In Mughal India, Indian textile arts and crafts reached their commercial and aesthetic zenith.

During the 16th to 18th centuries, textile arts and crafts such as the Kashmir shawl, fine muslins, brocades, *zari-zardozi* work and painted and printed calicoes, referred to as “chintz” in the English language, were patronized by the Mughal royals.

In Europe however, the textile industry, although highly developed as a craft, remained essentially a cottage industry, until the 18th century.

The Industrial Revolution brought a revolution of textiles technology. The cotton gin, the spinning jenny, flying shuttle and the power loom mechanized production.

The Industrial Revolution, at its height between 1760 and 1815, greatly accelerated the growth of the mill system in textile production.

The first power loom was developed in the first part of the 19th century, which firmly established, the factory system first in England, and later in Europe and the United States.

The Industrial Revolution brought uniformity to production, as everything was being mass-produced, and art and crafts seemed to have taken a backseat.

In response, a regeneration of interest in arts and crafts was initiated. This was called the Arts and Crafts Movement, an aesthetic movement of the second half of the 19th century, that represented the beginning of a new appreciation of the decorative arts throughout Europe.

A prominent figure of this movement, was English designer William Morris, who, in 1861, founded a firm of interior decorators and manufacturers — Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, and Company. Renamed as Morris and Company in 1875, this firm dedicated itself to recapture the spirit and quality of medieval craftsmanship.

To this date, many of the company's designs provide a source of inspiration for textile designers, and furniture manufacturers worldwide.

The end of the 19th century, proved to be detrimental for Indian crafts as the Indian subcontinent, became a dumping ground for machine made goods from England under the colonial rule.

Indian craftsmen found it difficult to compete with cheap imports from Europe, and eventually, this led to the establishment of factories in India.

Now, that we have seen how textile arts and crafts developed across the world, let us move on to look, at the different techniques of textile arts and crafts.

1.2 Classification of textile arts and crafts

The classification of textile arts and crafts can be defined by the following two broad categories, encompassing handcrafted techniques per se:

Fabric Production Methods, Fabric Ornamentation Methods and Additional Methods.

The term fabric as used here comprises of all the products of textile techniques that consist of the basic elements (threads / group of threads), which have been inter worked by manual or mechanical means, to obtain the necessary coherence.

Fabric production methods comprise of the various techniques of textile arts and crafts, that are employed for creating the basic fabric structure. These techniques can be applied as different forms of interworking and interlacing during production.

These techniques can be further distinguished as – Primary methods and Advanced methods.

The primary methods such as knitting, crochet, lace making and knotting employ no or very simple implements.

Advanced methods such as weaving require, complex tools and equipment.

Fabric ornamentation methods are further classified as, ornamentation by additional elements during fabric production, and ornamentation implemented post fabric production.

The first group consists of the embellishments done while making the fabric, but do not form the basic structure of the fabric.

Often, it becomes difficult to classify specific techniques into this group, as the basic fabric forming technique, becomes more complex and the distinction between the fabric production technique, and the ornamentation technique, becomes obscure.

The additional materials used for ornamentation could be soft, pliable or stiff.

The second group of ornamentation, implemented post-fabric production, consists of techniques that use solid materials, such as beads, metal threads etc., and application methods, such as applique', quilting and embroidery, or liquid materials, such as dyes, pigments and colors as well as methods, such as printing, dyeing and painting.

Fabrics are ornamented during the production of fabric or after the production of fabric.

During fabric production the ornamentation methods are: Pile formation or Tuft Fabric, Beadwork and Borders and Fringes.

Ornamentation methods post fabric production are: Appliqué and reverse appliqué, Quilting, Embroidery, Printing, Dyeing and Resist Dyeing.

Additional Methods include, the special textile production techniques. These include the resist dyeing (ornamentation) of yarns or threads before weaving, such as *ikat*, and the technique of joining of fabric through various means, to form a new continuous textile, such as patchwork.

The popular methods of fabric production are:

Linking, Looping, Knotting, Tatting, Needlepoint Laces, Crocheting, Knitting, Plaiting and Braiding, Warp and Weft Twining, Sprang, Tapestry, Weaving and Felting.

Fabric ornamentation is done during fabric production and post-fabric production.

Ornamentation during fabric production includes: Pile formation or Tuft fabric, Beadwork and Borders and Fringes.

Ornamentation done post-fabric production includes: Appliqué and reverse appliqué, Quilting, Embroidery, Printing, Dyeing, and Resist Dyeing.

1.3 Conclusion

To summarize, in this unit, you have followed the development of textile arts and crafts since the beginning of civilization, and understood how the methods and materials used to make textiles have expanded enormously.

You have learnt about how textile arts and crafts are classified, reviewed various techniques and viewed examples of textile craft.