

Legendary Textiles and Their Stories of Continuity

SAREEKAH AGARWAAL

Context

- ❖ Textiles are a universal part of various human domains.
- ❖ Creation of exquisite textiles consumes thousands of hours of human labour and are often woven with stories of the makers, wearers and owners.
- ❖ Several effective initiatives have been taken since the early days to document and preserve the rich textiles particularly those of the affluent.
- ❖ So far, its mostly the economic symbolism and material properties of textiles that have been documented and little attention has been paid to the emotional value evoked through them.

Context

Most of us must also be having a few valuable textiles worthy of preservation as they may hold deep associations with our lives and may often have some fascinating stories which makes them even more meaningful.

Do you think it's important to document the textile treasures and their stories that are lying unnoticed, in the closets of proletarians?

To have a clear and concise answer to our question, I bring to you some stories from India of the valuable textiles owned by select families...

The most memorable part of my wedding is the *lehenga* that I wore on my special day. It actually belonged to my mother who wore it for her wedding in 1930! It's a prized heirloom that makes me feel her presence whenever I see it, so very her - strong and real. I would want to pass it on to my daughter-in-law with the hope that she too would cherish it the way I did!



Dr. Veena Gupta

Former Professor, Delhi University, India

#as_1.2022 Gold *Kimkhab Lehenga*



- ❖ **Age of the Object:** 92 years
- ❖ **Category:** Heirloom
- ❖ **Manufacturing technique:** Hand weaving (Brocade); Hand embroidering (*Zardozi*)
- ❖ **Condition of the object:** Good



Dr. Veena Gupta wearing the Gold *Kimkhab Lehenga* (skirt) on her wedding day in 1974



This pashmina stole is an extremely important piece of family history for me as it's a common thread that connects four generations! I have cherished this luxury wrap for years along with my daughter and daughter-in-law who lovingly embrace the modern interpretations of the legendary pashmina. I will continue to cherish the emotions and vivid memories woven into it all my life but I'm worried who shall I pass it on to as there are no takers in the family.



Mrs. Renu Kapur
Homemaker, India

- ❖ **Age of the Object:** 77 years
- ❖ **Category:** Heirloom
- ❖ **Manufacturing technique:** Hand weaving; Hand embroidering (*Kashida*)
- ❖ **Condition of the object:** Fair



Modern interpretation of the legendary pashmina shawl that Renu gifted to her daughter-in-law

There is no dearth of collections in Indian families. But these collections are worth only when they are noticed. Whatever is 'Made in India' should remain in India but must be preserved and shown to the world!



#as_3.2022 Red Block Printed Women's Odhani

- ❖ **Age of the Object:** [80 years]
- ❖ **Category:** Vintage
- ❖ **Manufacturing technique:** Hand weaving; Block printing (*Khari* printing)
- ❖ **Condition of the object:** Fair



#as_4.2022 Red Block Printed Girl's Odhani

- ❖ **Age of the Object:** [80 years]
- ❖ **Category:** Vintage
- ❖ **Manufacturing technique:** Hand weaving; Block printing (*Khari* printing)
- ❖ **Condition of the object:** Very Good



Mr. Kheemraj Nandlal Rathi
Award winning craftsman, India

FRONT



BACK



#as_5.2022 Soof Embroidered Rumal (kerchief)



Cushion covers embroidered with patterns inspired from the Soof Embroidered Rumal (kerchief)

- ❖ **Age of the Object:** [70 years]
- ❖ **Category:** Vintage
- ❖ **Manufacturing technique:** Hand weaving; Hand embroidery (*Soof*)
- ❖ **Condition of the object:** Very Good



No matter what the craft is, old pieces of art give subtle clues that enable me to create interesting motifs and designs in appliqué and embroidery that breathes new life into my creations. They are a huge inspiration that consistently guide my design aesthetic.

I always shared a special bond with my beloved grandfather not just because I was his first grandchild but also because we had one thing in common - the 'blue *makhmal* dress'! It's a reminder to me of his unconditional love and affection. My mom has stored the dress with much love and care. Probably, she might also pass this legacy to the next generation to bring the old and the new together!



Anya on her first birthday wearing the Blue *Makhmal* Dress



#as_6.2022 Blue *Makhmal* (chenille) Dress



Anya with her grandfather Mr. Satya Narain Agarwal and great grandfather Mr. Triloki Nath Agarwal on the day of the ceremony when the golden ladder was offered to the great grandparents!



Ms. Anya Agarwal, Chicago, USA

- ❖ **Age of the Object:** 82 years
- ❖ **Category:** Vintage
- ❖ **Manufacturing technique:** Hand weaving; Hand embroidering (*Zardozi*)
- ❖ **Condition of the object:** Very Good

The sentimental value of these pieces is worth a great deal for me. With every piece I own, I take a trip down memory lane and celebrate the nostalgia. Since they are not of much practical importance now but certainly are historic pieces of academic value, I have decided to donate my prized possessions to the Clothing and Textile Department Museum of Maharaja Sayajirao University in Vadodra, Gujarat - my alma mater!



Dr. Kusum Chopra
Former Professor & Chairperson, Fashion Design
Department, NIFT, New Delhi, India



#as_7.2022 Peach Pakistani Shalwar

- ❖ **Age of the Object:** [92 years]
- ❖ **Category:** Vintage
- ❖ **Manufacturing technique:** Hand weaving; Hand embroidering (*Zardozi*)
- ❖ **Condition of the object:** Poor



Dr. Kusum Chopra wearing the Peach Shalwar on one of the family weddings

#as_8.2022 Phulkari Bagh Odhani



- ❖ **Age of the Object:** [92 years]
- ❖ **Category:** Vintage
- ❖ **Manufacturing technique:** Hand weaving; Hand embroidering (*Phulkari*)
- ❖ **Condition of the object:** Good



This elegant sari featuring *benarasi* weave is one of my most loved piece in my almira. It witnessed one of the biggest celebrity weddings of the decade that offers a rewarding experience whenever I see it. I would want to pass on this sartorial classic to my daughter and would want her to do the same telling the story and boast about its past. It's not an heirloom but certainly has all what it needs to be an heirloom!



Sareekah Agarwal
Textile Archivist, India



#as_9.2022 Isha - The Off white and
Pink Tussar Sari

- ❖ **Age of the Object:** 10 years
- ❖ **Category:** Retro
- ❖ **Manufacturing technique:** Hand weaving
- ❖ **Condition of the object:** Very Good



Sareekah Agarwal at Isha Ambani's
Reception with Shloka and Akash Ambani

I'm passionate about my collection and am confronted with the dilemma of what to do with it. May be I'll just give them away as there is no other option. Alas! There are no museums where I can donate my cherished pieces. If people like me are struggling to find a new home for the valuable pieces we possess, what about others who may also have some treasured keepsakes which need to be preserved for posterity. Food for thought!



Dr. Ruchira Ghose
Former Chairman & Director, National
Crafts Museum, New Delhi, India

#as_10.2022 The Checkered *Kanjeevaram* Sari



- ❖ **Age of the Object:** [30 years]
- ❖ **Category:** Vintage
- ❖ **Manufacturing technique:** Hand weaving (*Kanjeevaram*)
- ❖ **Condition of the object:** Very Good



Some pieces in Dr. Ruchira Ghose's collection from
the Kalingavastra exhibition

NOTABLE OUTCOMES

Every human has a story and so do textiles.



Documentation of textiles when combined with storytelling can make their worth last longer.



Narratives enhance the understanding of the role of textiles in traditional culture and family history.



The archives accompanied by narratives, photographs will make the content worth reading and infuse a sense of belongingness amongst people. This may lead to new born interest in them to preserve the textiles they have if they have not been doing so in the past.



Both women and men can contribute in preserving the heritage textile pieces.



There are no set guidelines being followed for storage.



Restoration, repurposing and up cycling of age old textiles is a potential area as people are awakening to the fact that 'whatever is not used is abused'.



People are concerned about the loss of heirlooms or personally prized possessions and the loss of indigenous textile knowledge due to lack of inheritance, changing lifestyle and lack of preservation.



WELL, THEN

If the treasures in your closet are rich traditional textiles valued for their craftsmanship, soaked up with stories of your family members or connected to some significant events of your lives

Let textiles do the talking...

and

Let's preserve them before they are gone!

THANK YOU!