

## Appliqué & Patchwork:

Traditional craft of  
ornamenting fabric on fabric



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## Abstract

Textile crafts of India are well known around the world due to its variegated techniques of ornamentation which have been used since ages. Appliqué and patchwork are such widely used techniques for decorating the fabric for various end uses. The craft being excellent example of recycling fabrics is often combined with embroidery and other ornamentation techniques to obtain a final decorative and functional artefact. India's diverse culture, climatic conditions and availability of the raw material are responsible for regional artefacts variegated in aesthetic as well as functional value. An effort has been made to enlighten these regional styles of the craft around the country, its origin, utility, similarities and variations. Literature survey was conducted to understand the craft

## Introduction

India's centuries old tradition of ornamenting fabric has survived with the ravages of time and preserved local crafts, which reflects ample testimony to this great culture. Changes with the time have not withered the beauty & dynamic diversity of India's traditional textile crafts. Stemming from centuries of exquisite craftsmanship, they are the colourful statement of the integral life force amongst an ancient people. Cross-cultural influences in religion and utilitarian trades have produced a range of gorgeous crafts that add colour and creativity to their lives. **Appliqué** and **Patchwork** are two methods which have been traditionally used by women all over the world to create simplest objects from worn and torn pieces of used textiles.

Appliqué comes from the French term *appliquér* which means to "put on". It is a technique by which the decorative effect is obtained by superimposing patches of coloured fabrics on a base fabric, the edges of the patches being sewn in some stitchery. It can also be explained as an art of decorating a textile product by applying fabric on fabric with the edges sewn down by stitching. A coloured piece of fabric cut into various snowflakes like forms or abstract rendition of birds and animals or simple linear patterns is sewed on the surface of a different colored fabric. The composing of forms on fabric surfaces adds in a quality of dimensionality while providing visual depth and surface richness to the negative and positive design background. Appliqué is created by two different techniques and its origin can be identified by the style of fabrication, color usage, composition and the kind of forms or patterns used.

## Technique in general

There is a streamline difference between an Applique and a Patchwork. The simple Appliqué is created by cutting fabric in any desired form or shape and then stitching it on the surface of the textile product. Symmetrical or asymmetrical stylised and abstract forms are created in varied shapes and sizes. Quite often the appliqué technique is

accompanied by range of stitches adding more value and further embellishing it. Another method is known by the name of 'Reverse appliqué', in which the surface fabric forms the shape and design contrasted to the top fabric in appliqué. Unlike Appliqué in a Patchwork small fabric pieces are joined together to form a relatively larger piece and in some cases the patch work is done to cover up or repair a damaged fabric.

### **Historical references**

In India no example of Appliqué work survive from before the nineteenth century and it is believed that the technique was introduced into the area through trade contacts with either Europe or Middle East. The legend says that, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, rolled himself on the beautifully appliquéd floor covering of Kashmir. During the Mughal period, the art of appliqué became a royal medium of fashioning elegant and delicate textile products. In northern part of the country mainly in Uttar Pradesh it was done on 'shalukas' worn by the begums of *nawabs*.

### **Regional styles**

[Table 1](#) describes techniques practised in various parts of the country. These techniques are known by its regional nomenclature and traditional traits.

Appliqué and patch work hold a significant importance as a means of decorating fabric, from royal class to rural class. The craft is known by various names at various regions. Various sources of the local name of appliqué and patch work includes the article on which it is applied, name of the region from where the craft was started, the motifs and material used, size of the motif and the transition of pronunciation from English to vernacular. How and why the craft was initiated leads to various purposes of its utility but, by and large the major reason for origination of the craft is, need to decorate the base fabric and thereby to obtain richness in appearance as well as in strength. From its origin a wide variety of motif styles have enriched the craft. Motif styles ranging from geometrical and natural to abstract and stylized have been implemented to execute the craft. All these styles are implemented on the motifs inspired by flora, fauna, human life's daily chores and also influenced by other country's motifs. The size and placement of the motifs varies according to the article on which it is going to be placed and its end uses. It can be a minute *Patti* that is a leaf motif to create delicate effect on the Shalukas, or a bold flower motif to ornament a large article like tent. Across the country the craft is being used to embellish objects which are having numerous end uses. These objects are floor coverings, wall hangings, door hangings, home furnishings, quilts etc. The craft is used to ornament apparels for the people of all classes and the costumes decorated by these techniques are generally worn during occasions such as wedding, and play a pivotal role during matrimonial exchange for the rural people. In the regions like Orissa and Tamilnadu this craft is mainly carried out to decorate the articles used during religious ceremonies to worship deities. Large articles such as tents are also manufactured using the craft which can be used during festival occasions as well as to make tents in battle field during wars. Appliqué and patch work is also implied on the articles which are being used to decorate or cover animals such as animal wraps, to decorate their foreheads and horns etc. The cover for the quilts and mattress stack is also made using this viable yet vibrant craft. Base material as well as the material used

for ornamentation varies according to the availability and end uses. It ranges from handspun hand woven *Khaddar* to fine transparent Organdie. It can be a soft Satin or glossy *Gota*. The craft can be carried out on a new fabric or a flamboyant surface could be created using worn out pieces which could actually serve as a recycling of the worn out fabric pieces. Appliqué and patchwork are always combined with embroidery since earlier times. Type of embroidery varies from basic chain or stem stitch to the elaborated mirror work or Zardozi work.

Appliqué and patchwork as a craft has stretched attention of a large population of individuals and organizations in India as well as globally, thus, ensured sustainability. The craft's enthralling beauty and easy applicability has diversified its scope by experimenting with vast varieties of raw material such as Chiffon, Mul-mul, Organza, Poplin, Satin, Brocade, Tissue etc.. New motifs from various inspirational sources and an impressive range of end products have been introduced to strike the prospective market. As a result products are divided mainly in two categories- for domestic market and for international markets. The end products include the range of furnishing items such as curtains, bed spreads, upholstery materials, table and kitchen linens etc. Apparels include number of categories such as salwar kurta, dupatta, saree, tank tops, shirts, skirts etc. and various styles of bags, purses, lamp shades, wall hangings, door hangings in the category of lifestyle accessories are also being produced using the appliqué and patchwork.

## Conclusion

According to the literature records, the craft has been introduced in India through trade contacts with either Europe or Middle –East. Though not originated in India, the local people have excelled in this creative way of ornamenting fabric on fabric. Appliqué and patchwork being an economic still enchanting craft has attracted both masses and classes. The artisans are passing the inheritance of craft from generation to generation and they also decorate the products for urban market. Recently, a change has been observed in all the regions in term of motifs, base materials, type of embroidery with which the craft is combined. The probable reason for these changes is urbanization, industrialization and technological development. The artisans who are the pioneers of the craft have still maintained the authenticity of the craft and also balanced it with changing cultural patterns and market demand. However, the fact cannot be undermined that, like all other handicrafts of India, Appliqué and Patchwork is also posed to a threat of getting diluted and change of identity due to the changes that occur during the process of diversification. It is high time, every designer or organization should sensitize themselves towards changing format of craft and preserve the traditional identity of the craft as originated in respective regions of the country.

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**Table 1:** describes techniques practised in various parts of the country. These techniques are known by its regional nomenclature and traditional traits.

Region	Regional name	Regional name derived from	Motifs	Raw material	Colour combination	Traditionally Articles produced
Kashmir	<i>Gabba</i>	From the name of floor covering	Persian, stylized floral and geometric	Torn woolen blanket or shawl	Yellow, Red, Green, Black, White	Floor covering
Uttar Pradesh	<i>Patti-ka-kaam</i> <i>Khatao</i> or <i>Khatava</i>	Local terminology used for leaf and flower Bukhia (shadow work in Chikankari embroidery)	Flora-fauna, fruits	Organdy  Fine muslin, cambric	No restriction  White	Veil
Orissa	<i>Pipli</i> work	From the village name	Mythological motifs	Markin, Shalu	like red, yellow, white, black	On temple decoration and car festival decoration products, such as decorating chariots, umbrella, hangings for the temples etc.
Manipur	-	-	Not specified	Floss silk	Red and yellow	Dance costume
Bengal & Bihar	<i>Khatava</i>	-	Animal and floral	Cotton	White	Banners, wall hangings, bedspreads, flags, canopies, tents Pillow covers
Tamilnadu	-	-	Mythological	Cotton	Red, white, blue, black and yellow	Tubular pieces like pillars
Gujarat & Rajasthan	<i>Katab</i>	English word –cut-up	Stylized floral human, animal, bird, landscapes, composite motifs	printed Cotton, Bandhani, Mashru, Satin	Red, green, orange, white	Quilts, home furnishing articles such as wall hanging, door handing, canopies
Rajasthan	<i>Gota patti/Gota kinari</i>	<i>Gotu</i> means fullness in Bengali and Oriya* <i>Kinari</i> means border in local language	Geometric floral motifs, creepers	Golden and silver satin weave border On cotton, silk, chiffon background		Apparels such as skirt, blouse ( <i>kanchli</i> ), veil cloth, male's kurta, turban etc.

\*As origin of gota work is said to be from these places.

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