



Textile Heritage Through the Museum Lens: Preserving Indian Tradition

Ms. Swati Sohoni

Research Scholar

Department of Clothing & Textiles, Faculty of Family and Community Sciences,

The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara

Abstract:

The history of textiles offers a window into the artistic expression, craftsmanship, and heritage of diverse societies. Museums serve as crucial custodians of this cultural legacy, playing a vital role in the preservation, promotion, and revitalization of textile crafts. Through their exhibitions and collections, museums provide a platform for showcasing the artistry and traditions associated with textiles. This paper explores the pivotal role that museums play in the conservation of textile heritage. It examines case studies from prominent Indian institutions, including the Baroda Textile Museum, LLDC Srujan, the Bhopal Tribal Museum, and Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, Pune. These institutions have been instrumental in not only preserving historical textiles but also in promoting contemporary textile art and craftsmanship. By studying these institutions, we gain insight into the methods and strategies employed by museums to protect and promote textile heritage. From conservation efforts to educational programs and community engagement, museums are at the forefront of ensuring that textile traditions are passed on to future generations. Their work not only preserves the past but also fosters an appreciation for the beauty and cultural significance of textiles in the present day.

Keywords: Museums, Textile Heritage, Preservation, Indian Tradition, craft, community engagement, India



Introduction:

Our cultural heritage is the culture passed down to us from our ancestors. Cultural heritage includes all aspects and values of culture passed down from generation to generation. It is cherished, protected, and maintained with unbroken continuity; people take pride in it. Examples can help clarify the concept of heritage. Ajanta and Ellora Caves, Maharashtra, Hampi, Karnataka, Khajuraho Temples, Madhya Pradesh, Mehrangarh Fort, Jodhpur, Rani ki Vav, Gujrat, Fatehpur Sikri, Uttar Pradesh, Golconda Fort, Charminar, Hyderabad, Victoria Memorial, Kolkata, Brihadeeswarar Temple, Thanjavur, Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu, Ranthambore Fort, Chittorgarh Fort, Kumbhalgarh Fort, Mount Abu, Rajasthan are few examples of heritage architecture and important to the history of India¹. Satpathy, B. B. (2015).

India is defined by its cultural past, and the textile and handicrafts sector is an important component of that tradition. The textiles and handicrafts industry has provided a source of income for millions of craftspeople while also representing the nation's cultural identity. They thereby embody the diversity, liveliness, and depth of Indian culture, and are valued and admired by people all over the world. Both textile and handicraft work exhibit the skill's originality as well as the sturdy foundation of tradition-based legacy, which celebrates the versatility of Indian heritage. <https://www.drishticuet.com/blog/detail/indian-textiles-and-handicrafts-a-legacy-of-skill-and-tradition>

Traditional textiles are handcrafted using techniques passed down over generations, carrying not just aesthetic appeal but deep emotional and symbolic significance within communities. However, modern technological advancements and globalization have led to the decline of traditional textile manufacturing and consumption. With the rise of mass-produced, synthetic fabrics in the fashion industry, many of these traditional techniques and the knowledge behind them risk being lost. <https://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/9697/revival-of-indian-traditional-textiles-bridging-the-gap-between-heritage-and-modern-demand>



Museums play a vital role in preserving cultural heritage by collecting, researching, interpreting, and displaying artifacts of historical and cultural significance. They serve as repositories of knowledge, allowing the public to connect with their cultural past while fostering an understanding of different civilizations. Through curated exhibitions, educational programs, and outreach initiatives, museums help bridge the past and present, ensuring the continuity of cultural practices across generations. <https://medium.com/@jaafarshaikh2573/-preserving-history-the-role-of-museums-in-safeguarding-cultural-heritage-539620ba2636>

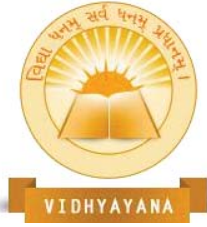
Objectives of this study include:

1. Analyzing how these museums contribute to preserving traditional textile techniques and knowledge.
2. Investigating the role of museums in educating the public and promoting awareness of textile heritage.

Review of Literature

• Textile Preservation Techniques -

This literature review explores different preventive and restorative methods of textile conservation. Indian traditional textiles have long fascinated people worldwide, with the artistry and craftsmanship of ancient artisans capturing the history, culture, and techniques of their time. Some of these masterpieces have survived and are housed in museums both in India and abroad, where they serve as a testament to the legacy of textile art. Museums play a critical role in conserving these textiles for future generations, ensuring they can be appreciated and studied. Textile conservation involves both **preventive** and **curative** approaches, with **cleaning** being a key aspect of curative conservation aimed at extending the lifespan of textile artifacts. This paper offers a comprehensive overview of the various cleaning methods employed in museums for preserving textiles. Singhal, Divya & Bhagat, Simmi. (2020).



Textiles, whether ancient tapestries, delicate garments, antique quilts, or historic banners, are invaluable cultural artifacts that require specialized care to ensure their longevity. Restoration efforts focus on stabilizing and repairing damage without erasing the signs of age, preserving the authenticity and character of the textile. The following are essential techniques used in textile preservation:

1. Cleaning

Cleaning is often the first step in the preservation process. Textiles accumulate dust, dirt, and pollutants over time, which can cause discoloration and damage to the fibers. Depending on the textile's condition, conservators employ different cleaning methods:

- **Vacuuming:** A gentle vacuum with a specialized nozzle is used to remove surface dust.
- **Dry cleaning:** Certain fabrics may benefit from solvent-based cleaning that avoids water exposure.
- **Wet cleaning:** This involves using mild detergents and water to remove ingrained dirt from textiles, though this method is employed cautiously to avoid damage to delicate fabrics.

2. Mending and Stitching

Over time, textiles often suffer from frayed edges or tears. To restore stability, conservators use delicate stitching techniques, carefully selecting threads that match the original fabric in color and texture. The goal is to reinforce the textile without altering its historical integrity. These stitching methods aim to halt further damage while remaining as unobtrusive as possible.

3. Support and Stabilization

Fragile textiles, especially those that are damaged or weakened by age, require support to prevent further deterioration. Conservation experts may:

- **Attach a fabric backing:** This helps to support the textile without placing strain on its fibers.



- **Use conservation-grade netting:** This evenly distributes the weight of the textile, reducing stress on vulnerable areas and preventing further wear.

4. Humidity and Temperature Control

Textiles are particularly sensitive to fluctuations in humidity and temperature, which can cause fibers to expand or contract, leading to damage such as warping or tearing. To mitigate these effects, museums maintain **climate-controlled environments** for both storage and display. Ideal humidity levels are typically between 45% to 55%, while temperatures are kept stable to avoid environmental stress on the textiles.

5. Ultraviolet (UV) Protection

Exposure to UV light can cause fading and deterioration in textiles, particularly those with natural dyes. To protect these artifacts, museums often use **UV-filtering glass** or **protective screens** in display cases. These measures help to limit the textiles' exposure to harmful light, ensuring their colors and integrity remain intact over time.

<https://www.gartexindia.com/the-art-and-science-of-textile-restoration-and-preservation/>

- **Museums as Custodians of Cultural Heritage -**

This literature review examines the role of museums in the current scenario. Museums play a crucial role in achieving sustainable development by integrating culture, the economy, society, and the environment. This creates an ecosystem in which museums serve as both resources and destinations at different stages. Local communities provide funding for museums, and in return, museums contribute to the cultural vitality of the community. The cycle begins with society investing money and resources in a museum. The museum then acquires, conserves, preserves, and researches cultural heritage artifacts. Subsequently, the museum uses this heritage to foster cultural vitality, drive economic development, and promote pro-environmental and socially responsible behaviors among its visitors. The value created by the museum encourages continued support from authorities, sponsors, donors, and other stakeholders, thus perpetuating the cycle. Pop, I. L., Borza, A., Buiga, A., Ighian, D., & Toader, R. (2019).



Museums play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage by acquiring, conserving, researching, interpreting, and displaying artifacts and artworks of historical and cultural importance. They act as storehouses of knowledge and history, providing visitors with opportunities to engage with the past and learn about various cultures and civilizations. Through carefully planned exhibitions, educational programs, and community outreach efforts, museums connect the past and present, encouraging conversations and mutual understanding across different generations and cultural backgrounds.

<https://medium.com/@jaafarshaikh2573/preserving-history-the-role-of-museums-in-safeguarding-cultural-heritage539620ba2636#:~:text=The%20Role%20of%20Museums-%20as,across%20generations%20and%20cultural%20boundaries.>

- **Role of Museums in Education and Public Engagement -**

The evolving role of museums emphasizes their crucial function in education and community participation. Modern museums go beyond traditional duties of acquiring, preserving, researching, and exhibiting to create interactive learning environments that prioritize visitor interaction and understanding. Museums utilize various teaching methodologies and technologies to provide meaningful experiences that enhance understanding and respect for cultural and natural heritage. Inclusive programs for disabled individuals demonstrate a commitment to accessibility and diversity. As educational institutions, museums play a vital role in passing on information to future generations, ensuring that tradition and history remain alive and relevant in today's society. Suboohi Nasrin* and Abduraheem K. (2021)

Museums serve as valuable educational tools that offer a genuine learning environment, visual and sensory stimulation, hands-on learning, and connections across various subjects. They involve students with genuine artifacts, specimens, artworks, and historical objects, enriching their understanding and knowledge. Museums provide interactive displays, workshops, guided tours, and group activities, encouraging active participation and exploration. They establish a contextual framework for learning, promoting critical thinking, analysis, cultural understanding, and empathy. Museums also support independent learning and research, fostering autonomy, information literacy, and research skills. By capitalizing on these unique



attributes, teachers can enhance students' learning experiences, nurturing curiosity, critical thinking, and a lifelong passion for learning.

<https://www.janaaastha.com/story/155449#:~:text=Museums%20offer%20interactive%20exhibits%2C%20workshops,%2C%20cultural%20understanding%2C%20and%20empathy.>

• **Integration of Technology in Textile Preservation-**

The literature reveals the use of AI in documenting, preserving, and conserving cultural heritage sites and artifacts has proven to be immensely beneficial in India for several reasons. Firstly, it has saved a significant amount of time and cost in the restoration and preservation of heritage sites and artifacts. In the past, developing such a preserve required a major cost and a vast amount of time to complete the process. Additionally, advancements in technology and AI have provided new ways to share information with visitors at heritage sites. Through the use of virtual reality and 3D scanning, viewers can now experience an immersive representation of our ancestors' lives. Furthermore, AI is being used to replicate and repair broken artwork, allowing for the restoration of damaged objects and making the best use of these pieces possible. Khan, Zaiba. (2024).

This review highlights that Digital museums and repositories play a crucial role in promoting and preserving Indian textiles and crafts. They provide valuable learning experiences and help generate interest and appreciation for Indian textile traditions, especially among the younger generation. The online database of artisans available on digital repositories has increased visibility for the creators. These platforms also facilitate support and engagement from researchers, crafts enthusiasts, and designers in their efforts to preserve fading craft practices and sustain artisan livelihoods. Digital museums and repositories for textiles and dress are essential for the future. The pandemic has prompted museums, academic institutions, and cultural organizations to digitize their rich heritage for global access. However, it's also recognized that textiles can't be fully experienced through a virtual mode alone. Therefore, the future is expected, where both digital and physical spaces coexist. The digital platform will enable a large audience to quickly discover objects and inspire them to plan physical visits for better understanding and appreciation. Ruby Kashyap Sood and Sudha Dhingra (2022)



Methodology:

The methodology employed in this research is qualitative, involving in-depth case study analysis. Data were gathered through a review of museum archives, and observational fieldwork at each institution. The paper also examines secondary sources, such as reports and publications on museum conservation techniques and textile heritage. Through this approach, the research highlights how museums not only conserve physical artifacts but also foster public engagement and promote sustainable practices in textile heritage preservation. This study concludes by identifying effective strategies employed by these institutions and offering recommendations for enhancing museum-led initiatives to ensure the long-term sustainability of textile traditions.

Choosing these four museums **Baroda Textile Museum, LLDC Srujan, Bhopal Tribal Museum, and Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum** is strategic and meaningful due to their unique contributions to textile heritage preservation. Here's a rationale for why these museums stand out over others:

1. **Diverse Approaches to Preservation:** Each museum represents a different approach to textile conservation royal and historical textiles (Baroda), community and artisan engagement (LLDC Srujan), indigenous and tribal representation (Bhopal Tribal Museum), and private collection preservation (Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum). This diversity allows for a broader understanding of how textile heritage is preserved across different contexts.
2. **Geographical and Cultural Representation:** By selecting museums from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra, the study covers a wide geographical and cultural spectrum, ensuring representation from both western and central India. This provides a more holistic view of India's textile heritage.
3. **Specialized Focus:** These museums specialize in different aspects of textile heritage royal textiles, artisan-led preservation, tribal textiles, and regional collections. Their specialization allows for a more in-depth analysis of specific preservation challenges and strategies.



By choosing these four museums, this paper discusses various preservation models, highlights diverse textile traditions, and explores institutional and community-led efforts in conserving India's rich textile heritage. This selection ensures a well-rounded study that addresses multiple facets of textile preservation.

Discussion on Case Studies:

Baroda Textile Museum, Vadodara, Gujarat:

History: The Baroda Textile Museum is part of the Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery, established by Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III in 1894 to promote education on art and craft, particularly royal textiles. The textile section was developed in the early 1900s.

Number of Garments and Collection Details: The museum houses over 500 textile pieces, including rare and intricately woven fabrics from the royal collections of the Gaekwad dynasty. It features rich textiles such as silk brocades, embroidered garments, and zari work that reflect the cultural heritage of Gujarat's textile industry.

Special Features: Known for its collection of royal garments, it also showcases traditional weaving techniques like Patola and Bandhani. The museum provides an extensive insight into Gujarat's historic and luxurious textile craftsmanship.

Contribution to Textile Preservation: By conserving these royal textiles, the museum ensures the continuation of Gujarat's traditional weaving techniques and educates visitors on their historical significance. Its detailed documentation and conservation methods have helped preserve delicate fabrics for future study.

LLDC Srujan, Bhuj, Gujarat:

History: Established in 2016, LLDC was established by the Shrujan organization to support artisans in the Kutch region, specifically in embroidery and weaving. This museum and center focus on the living traditions of the region and integrate education with preservation.



Number of Garments and Collection Details: LLDC exhibits more than 1,500 pieces of traditional textiles, primarily embroidered garments from Kutch's artisan communities. The collection highlights the diverse styles of Kutch embroidery, which is known for its intricate designs and vibrant colors.

Special Features: The center serves not only as a museum but also as a training ground for artisans, with workshops and exhibitions that promote the revival of Kutch embroidery and weaving techniques. Artisans actively participate in the creation and display of textile works, ensuring that the craft continues to evolve.

Contribution to Textile Preservation: LLDC's artisan-centered model has rejuvenated the textile crafts of Kutch by providing a sustainable platform for artisans to pass on their skills. The living nature of the center ensures that traditional textiles are not only preserved but actively practiced and innovated. LLDC Srujan takes a community-based approach to preservation, working directly with artisans from the Kutch region to sustain and promote traditional crafts, especially textiles. It is unique because it not only acts as a museum but also as a living craft center, offering training and education to artisans.

Bhopal Tribal Museum, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. –

History: Established in 2013 by the Madhya Pradesh Tribal Welfare Department, the museum focuses on the cultural and artistic expressions of the state's tribal communities, particularly textiles.

Number of Garments and Collection Details:

The museum holds over 1,000 textile pieces, including traditional garments from tribes such as the Gond, Bhil, and Baiga. These include handwoven fabrics, embroidered items, and tribal attire that showcase the spiritual and social significance of textiles within Indigenous communities.



Special Features: The museum offers immersive exhibits that integrate tribal textile traditions with their cultural narratives. It emphasizes the ceremonial and everyday uses of textiles in tribal life, ensuring that visitors understand the deep connections between fabric and identity in indigenous societies.

Contribution to Textile Preservation:

By focusing on the lesser-known tribal textiles, the museum ensures the preservation and celebration of these rich yet often overlooked traditions. It plays a vital role in promoting indigenous textile techniques and educating the public about their cultural importance.

Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, Pune, Maharashtra:

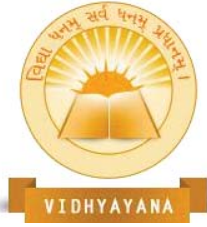
History: Established in 1962 by Dr. Dinkar G. Kelkar as a personal collection, the museum has grown to house over 20,000 artifacts, with textiles being a major component. The museum showcases traditional Indian art forms, particularly emphasizing Maharashtra's textile traditions.

Number of Garments and Collection Details:

The museum has over 500 textiles, with a strong emphasis on Paithani sarees—a famous handwoven silk saree with intricate designs that is a hallmark of Maharashtra. It also houses other regional garments, such as traditional navvari sarees and embroidered fabrics from Maharashtra and neighboring states.

Special Features:

The museum is renowned for its private collection of textiles from across India, with a particular focus on the rich textile traditions of Maharashtra. It also has a comprehensive display of folk textiles from different parts of the country, making it one of the most diverse collections in India.



Contribution to Textile Preservation:

Through its extensive collection, the museum has helped preserve Maharashtra's iconic textile traditions. It offers scholars and the public alike a window into the evolution of regional textiles, ensuring that these crafts are appreciated and studied. The museum also sheds light on how private collectors contribute to heritage conservation.

Conclusion:

1. These four museums not only house large and diverse textile collections but also represent different approaches to textile preservation. They conserve royal garments, engage with artisans, and promote indigenous and regional textiles, contributing significantly to preserving India's traditional textile heritage. By displaying garments, facilitating artisan education, and promoting awareness of textile traditions, they play a crucial role in keeping India's rich textile legacy alive.
2. Museums are not just passive repositories of artifacts; they serve as active centers of cultural engagement and preservation. By creating spaces for education, dialogue, and innovation, these institutions make heritage accessible and relevant to contemporary audiences. Through exhibitions, artisan workshops, and interactive displays, museums not only safeguard traditional crafts like textiles but also inspire future generations to appreciate, learn, and evolve these traditions. They bridge the past with the present, ensuring that cultural heritage remains vibrant and significant in modern society.
3. Adapting preservation methods to modern challenges is crucial for safeguarding cultural heritage in the face of digitalization, environmental changes, and shifting audience demographics. Digitalization offers new avenues for cataloging and sharing artifacts, making them accessible to a global audience while reducing the risk of physical damage. Climate control technologies are essential for preserving delicate textiles and materials in the face of fluctuating environmental conditions. Additionally, engaging younger generations with heritage through interactive exhibits, virtual experiences, and educational programs ensures the relevance of traditional crafts and cultural practices in an increasingly digital world, fostering a deeper connection with their cultural roots.



Recommendations

1. **Strengthening Community Collaboration:** Building partnerships between local artisans, museums, and cultural institutions can promote the transmission of traditional textile knowledge, fostering a deeper connection with heritage through collaborative events and initiatives.
2. **Enhancing Public Engagement through Technology:** Utilizing digital platforms and virtual exhibits can expand access to textile heritage, allowing broader audiences to engage with historical fabrics and techniques from anywhere in the world.
3. **Developing Education and Outreach Programs:** Introducing workshops, lectures, and interactive learning experiences centered around traditional textiles can educate diverse audiences, from students to craft enthusiasts, creating awareness and appreciation for the craft.
4. **Innovating Preservation Techniques:** Adopting new conservation technologies, such as advanced textile preservation methods, ensures the longevity of fragile fabrics while maintaining their cultural integrity for future generations.
5. **Policy Support for Textile Museums:** Governments and institutions can offer financial and regulatory support to museums, enabling them to implement these initiatives effectively, preserving both tangible and intangible textile heritage.



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