

A Case Study :

Indian craft - sanji (Art of paper cutting)

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A part from being a cornerstone of our culture and heritage, crafts represent a major economic activity in terms of people employed and the value of goods produced. Crafts are as old as human history. Nearly every craft now practiced can be traced back many hundreds or even thousands of years. Originally fulfilling utilitarian purposes, they are now a means of producing objects of intrinsic aesthetic appeal. Crafts, awareness of crafts and craft appreciation has definitely grown tremendously and there has been a great spurt in craft growth and development.

Along the river Jamuna in North India are two, virtually contiguous, towns—Mathura and Vrindavan—which are important centers of Hindu pilgrimage. The region around and containing these two towns, known traditionally as Vraja or Vrajbhoomi, is the legendary place of the god Krishna.

Full paper:

“Thy life so short, the craft so long to learn...”

‘Sanjhi paper cutting’ is an ancient craft of paper stenciling, found in Mathura and Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh of India. These stencils were used to make rangoli patterns on walls and floors, known as ‘Sanjhi’. This craft is always linked to ‘vrajbhoomi’ because its subject matters have traditionally been the stories and motifs of the ‘Krishna Radha legend’. It is an art form that is in very much of the spirit of Mathura and Vrindavan. Walking along the streets of Mathura and Vrindavan one can easily recognize the motifs and designs that appear in the traditional Sanjhi paper cutting, whether it is the peacock or the cows, the monkey or the kadamba tree or the river flowing past the temple.

They later broadened to include a number of Mughal motifs -jali patterns and animals and flowers.

A basic meaning that captures the essence of various practices is ‘sajavat’ which means decoration. Other meanings linked with ‘Sanjhi’ is ‘sanjha’ which means evening and ‘sancha’ which means mould.

Legends of ‘SANJHI’ craft:

The legends related to the ‘Sanjhi’ craft are of two forms:

- Folk tradition
- Temple tradition.

Folk tradition:

Underpinning the tradition is a legend that states ‘Sanjhi’ practices involve creation and decoration of designs on the walls using stones, mirrors, colored stones on a cow dung base. These non-temple ‘sanjhis’ are made by the unmarried girls who offer prayer to the goddess ‘Sanjhi’ for ‘a husband and many children’. The motifs of this ‘Sanjhi’ comprises of very intricate flowers, creepers, and various images of ‘Sanjhi and sanjha’. This prayer also involves offering of food and lighting of lamps by the unmarried girls seeking the wish.

Goddess ‘Sanjhi’ is believed to be the mind-born daughter of ‘Brahma – the creator’, who was granted three wishes which included commitment to a one husband, many child and the third one was that who so ever worshipped her would have their wishes fulfilled.

Temple tradition:

In the temple tradition, ‘Sanjhi’ is created every evening during the ‘Pitra Paksha’ or the dark fortnight of waning moon in the month of ‘Ashwin’, in September or October. During ‘Pitra Paksha’, the ancestors are remembered

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