

Exploring the Cultural and Aesthetic Significance of Textile Crafts from Dera Ghazi Khan

Iqra Aimen

iqra.aiman.1997@gmail.com

MS Scholar, Faculty of Art & Design, Superior University Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

Dr Umer Hameed

National Textile University Faisalabad, Pakistan

umerhameed@ntu.edu.pk

Dr Nabeel Amin

Dean Faculty of Art & Design, Superior University Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

Nabil.amin@superior.edu.pk

Asna Habib

MS Scholar, Faculty of Art & Design, Superior University Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

asnahabib@hotmail.com

Corresponding Author: * Iqra Aimen iqra.aiman.1997@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Kacha tanka embroidery is a vibrant and intricate craft that combines traditional techniques with cultural symbolism, resulting in visually captivating designs that reflect the rich heritage of Dera Ghazi Khan. The study of kacha tanka craft of D. G. Khan comprises documentation and study of continuity and revival of this art. For this purpose mixed research methods i.e. qualitative methods (in depth interviews, field visits etc.) and qualitative method (statistical analysis) for study of continuity and revival were considered. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed. The study is grounded in craft theory, particularly drawing from Glenn Adamson's perspectives on the material, cultural, and social meanings of craft. Additionally, concepts from visual culture studies and design theory were applied to interpret the motifs, composition, and techniques using elements and principles of design. The second part of study was related to continuity and revival of art. Hypothesis was developed "the greater the cultural significance attached to the kacha tanka craft, the higher the likelihood of its continuity". To test the hypothesis a survey questionnaire was given to same 12 participants and it is found that there is a strong positive relationship between the cultural significance of Kacha Tanka and its continuity (measured by the number of artisans practicing the craft). The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.85$) and regression analysis (slope = 0.6) indicate that higher cultural significance is linked with greater numbers of artisans continuing the craft. The data strongly suggests that cultural significance plays a key role in the continuity of the Kacha Tanka craft, supporting the hypothesis that a higher perceived cultural value is linked to greater sustainability and practice of the craft. The revival and modernization of kacha tanka embroidery require a concerted effort from design educators, cultural policymakers, and the fashion industry.

Keywords: Dera Ghazi Khan, Embroidery, Balochi tanka, Kacha Tanka, Stitch Types, social and economic significance.

INTRODUCTION

Dera Ghazi Khan, located in southern Punjab, Pakistan, was founded in 1476 AD by Mir Ghazi Khan Baloch. Its position at the meeting point of Punjab, Balochistan, and Sindh provinces near the Sulaiman

Range makes it an important center for trade and cultural exchange. This study explores the traditional hand embroidery called Kacha Tanka of Dera Ghazi Khan, particularly in Choti Zareen, Kot Chutta, and Gadai. These areas maintain complex embroidery methods passed down through generations of skilled women artisans. Their work in Rilli, Phulkari, Bandhani, Sindhi embroidery, and handwoven Khes and Durries shows local artistic style and cultural identity. Though valuable historically and artistically, these textile arts lack proper documentation and face extinction due to modern changes and insufficient preservation.

This study examines how hand embroidery reflects the visual expression of Dera Ghazi Khan's people. By studying local kacha tanka stitch styles the research aims to record unique regional techniques rarely mentioned in current literature. These stitches carry special meanings and are often used in ceremonies and community events, strengthening bonds among rural women. Textile craft remains an important source of income for many families, especially in rural areas. As these crafts gain wider recognition, there's a growing need to properly document them as part of Pakistan's cultural heritage. While previous studies focus mainly on mass production and economic data, few examine the specific regional aspects and storytelling elements of Dera Ghazi Khan's hand embroidery.

This research aims to fill this gap through a detailed study of cultural identity, innovation, and social-economic importance in these textile arts. This research will try to meet this research objective and help future generations to understand the rare arts and crafts of the world and attempt to conserve it for generations to come.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- i. To document the history, motifs, and techniques of Kacha Tanka embroidery in Dera Ghazi Khan.
- ii. To assess the cultural and economic role of Kacha Tanka in local artisan communities.
- iii. To explore ways to adapt Kacha Tanka for contemporary fashion and design.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Textile Crafts

The work of scholars like **Rosemary Crill (1997)** and **Mary M. Brooks & Dinah D. Eastop (Editors, 2011)** has highlighted how textiles in the region are more than utilitarian objects; they are mediums of religious expression, social stratification, and cultural continuity. For example, **Crill's (1997) research** into Indian sub continental textiles identifies intricate linkages between textile practices and ritual symbolism, arguing that textile arts are historical documents in themselves. **Vogelsang-Eastwood & Vogelsang (2021)** explores how craft traditions reflect localized knowledge systems, environmental adaptations, and regional identities. These theoretical perspectives are crucial when analyzing the crafts of Dera Ghazi Khan, where fabric becomes a living language that communicates stories of belonging, nature, and change. Craft theory, particularly in the context of South Asia, provides a valuable lens through which the significance of textile traditions can be understood. **Adamson, G. (2007)**, crafts operate at the intersection of materiality, labor, and meaning-making. They are not merely objects of beauty but also sites of resistance, survival, and continuity. Scholars such as **Rozsika Parker (1984)** and **Judy Attfield (2000)** have argued that traditional crafts, especially those practiced by women, offer insight into alternative histories often left out of official narratives. Scholars like **Nasreen Askari & Rosemary Crill (1997)** have documented Pakistan's diverse textile landscapes, from Sindhi Ajrak to Punjabi Phulkari. Yet, Dera Ghazi Khan's crafts are frequently excluded from these national narratives. This marginalization may stem from the region's rural status or lack of academic documentation, despite its active participation in textile production and innovation.

In conclusion, the textile crafts of Dera Ghazi Khan offer a rich tapestry of cultural, aesthetic, and historical meanings that deserve deeper scholarly attention. By examining these practices through the combined lenses of craft theory, cultural studies, and textile history, one can appreciate their complexity and importance. These crafts are not merely products; they are dynamic expressions of identity, memory, and resilience. Bridging traditional knowledge with modern platforms could ensure that the textile heritage of Dera Ghazi Khan continues to thrive in both local and global contexts.

Kacha Tanka Embroidery

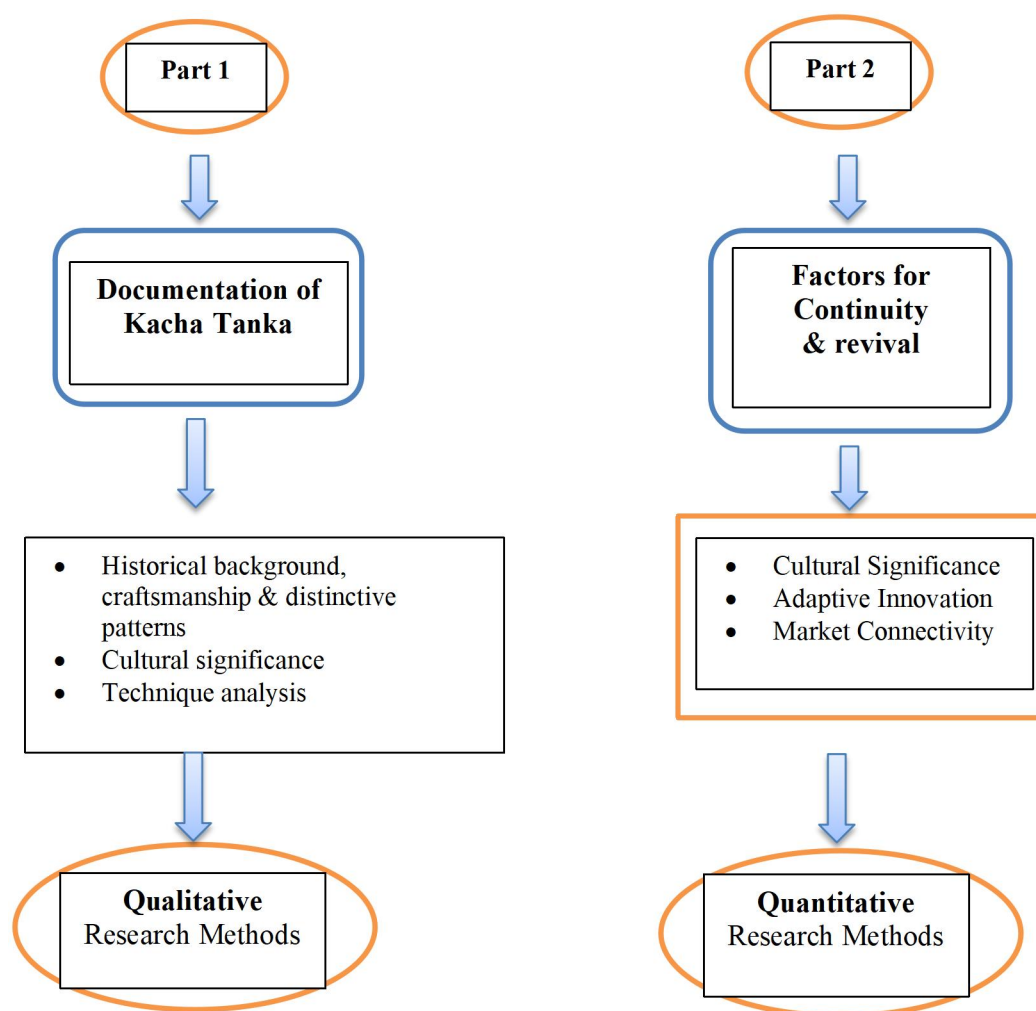
One of the prominent traditional hand embroidery styles is kacha tanka—literally meaning “raw stitch.” Kacha tanka is famous as a local specialty of Dera Ghazi Khan, a district of South Punjab, known for its delicate running-stitch technique and handmade aesthetic. This style of embroidery is normally practiced by women in rural areas. This embroidery tradition has been passed down through generations as both a creative expression and a source of supplementary income in the region. Despite its cultural importance, economic challenges and modernization threaten these traditions. Kacha tanka is regarded as an integral part of local heritage.

The research is conceptually rooted in the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) framework, defined by **UNESCO (2003)** as “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills... that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage” and which are “transmitted from generation to generation.” Kacha tanka, with its deep communal ties and evolving practice, qualifies under this definition and therefore merits both recognition and protection. As **Kurin (2004) and Blake (2009)** suggest, the documentation of ICH is not just a technical exercise—it is a vital step in safeguarding community identity, and ensuring continuity in traditional knowledge systems. **Citalli and Shanley (2009)** emphasize that many traditional crafts remain vulnerable due to limited state support and lack of awareness among policymakers. **Dana (1999)** similarly highlights how the survival of small-scale artisan traditions depends on active cultural and economic support from government and NGOs.

Studies like UNESCO Report **(2011)** on Women and Crafts demonstrate how embroidery enables women to participate in local economies while preserving heritage. Documentation here plays a dual role: both as cultural preservation and development strategy, helping to legitimize women’s labor in policy and market frameworks. Lastly, the research treats kacha tanka as a textile-based archive of knowledge—a “material language” through which women narrate identity, memory, and social values (**Turney, 2009**). **Yang et al. (2018)** emphasize in their study of Pakistani crafts, documenting such heritage is essential not just to preserve the past, but also to create sustainable futures for artisan communities.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In the current study Mixed-method approach is most suitable, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to gain a deeper, holistic understanding of the topic.



Data Collection

Collection of data via Ethnographic Fieldwork: Spend time with artisans in workshops/homes. Observe the entire production process, from designing the motifs to stitching and finishing the textiles and Participated in local event where Kacha Tanka is used (e.g. weddings, or community gatherings) to understand its social relevance.

Collection of data via Semi-Structured Interviews: o Conduct interviews with elder artisans who have deep knowledge of traditional techniques as well as younger artisans who may bring a contemporary perspective.

Collection of data via Visual Ethnography / Photography: To visually document the process and end products of Kacha Tanka. Capture high-quality images of the embroidery techniques, patterns, motifs, and finished pieces.

Collection of data via Survey Questionnaire: To gather numerical data on the economic impact of Kacha Tanka and the social relevance of the craft. In this method of research we Design a survey questionnaire

targeting artisans, local businesses, and consumers of Kacha Tanka products. The outcome of survey was the statistical analysis of the data to understand economic trends, demand, and the viability of the craft.

DATA ANALYSIS

The research methodology includes field interviews, observational data, and secondary source analysis to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the craft practices. A purposive sampling method was used to identify knowledgeable participants directly involved with textile crafts. This included experienced local artisans, embroidery practitioners, designers working with regional textiles, and cultural historians familiar with the area's craft heritage. A total of 12 participants were selected based on their expertise, years of experience, and active engagement in preserving or promoting traditional textile techniques. Snowball sampling further helped in identifying other valuable informants through initial contacts. The participant group consisted of 08 women artisans from rural villages known for their work in Rilli and Pakki Karhai, 02 textile designers integrating traditional motifs into contemporary collections and 02 academics specializing in South Asian craft history. Artisans ranged in age from 30 to 70 and had intergenerational knowledge passed down through family traditions. Many of them had no formal training but possessed deep, embodied knowledge of local craft practices.

Basis of Study

The study is grounded in craft theory, particularly drawing from Glenn Adamson's perspectives on the material, cultural, and social meanings of craft. Additionally, concepts from visual culture studies and design theory were applied to interpret the motifs, composition, and techniques using elements and principles of design. A feminist ethnographic lens was also integrated to highlight the gendered labor and cultural role of women artisans. Triangulation was used to validate data by comparing interview narratives with secondary literature, visual documentation, and museum archives.

RESULTS OF STUDY

PART 1: Documentation of Kacha Tanka

Historical Origins

The exact origins of kacha tanka are not well-documented; however, its close resemblance to Balochi tanka embroidery indicates a shared cultural lineage. Balochi tanka is known for its unique motifs and vibrant colors, often incorporating geometric patterns and symbolic representations. These designs are typically created using silk or cotton threads on coarse cotton fabric, a technique that has been passed down through generations.

The 1901 Census of Baluchistan notes that regions like Dera Ghazi Khan have long been centers of cultural exchange, with Hindu and Muslim communities sharing religious sites and cultural practices. This environment likely facilitated the blending and evolution of various embroidery techniques, including kacha tanka.

Cultural Significance

The act of embroidering kacha tanka is traditionally a communal activity, often involving women gathering to work on pieces together. This practice not only strengthens social bonds but also serves as a means of preserving cultural heritage and passing down skills to younger generations.

Visual Characteristics

Kacha tanka is characterized by its bold geometric patterns, vibrant color schemes, and use of reflective elements. The embroidery often features motifs such as diamonds, flowers, and stars, arranged in

symmetrical layouts. Colors like red, green, yellow, and blue are commonly used, with mirror work (known as sheesha) sometimes incorporated to add a reflective quality to the designs. These visual elements not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of the garments but also serve to communicate cultural narratives and beliefs through their symbolic representations.

Defining Techniques

- i. Stem Stitch (Dandi Tanka): A fundamental stitch that forms the backbone of kacha tanka, creating linear patterns and outlines.
- ii. Running Stitch: Utilized for filling spaces and creating delicate, continuous lines that add texture to the design.
- iii. French Knots: Employed to add dimension and texture, often used in floral centers or decorative elements.
- iv. Mirror Work (Sheesha): Incorporation of small mirrors into the embroidery to enhance the visual appeal and reflect light, adding a dynamic element to the designs.

Motifs and Visual Elements

- i. Geometric Patterns: Symmetrical designs such as diamonds, stars, and zigzags are prevalent, reflecting the influence of regional aesthetics.
- ii. Floral Designs: Stylized flowers and vines are common, symbolizing nature and fertility.
- iii. Symbolic Colors: Vibrant colors like red, green, yellow, and blue are used, each carrying specific cultural meanings.
- iv. Border Embellishments: Decorative borders featuring repetitive patterns are applied along edges of garments and textiles.

Visual Characteristics

- i. Bold Color Palettes: The use of contrasting colors creates striking visual effects, making the embroidery stand out.
- ii. Symmetry and Balance: Designs often exhibit a balanced arrangement, reflecting harmony and order.
- iii. Textural Contrast: The combination of different stitch types adds depth and texture to the fabric.

Alignment with Contemporary Design Principles

- i. Balance: The symmetrical arrangement of motifs creates a sense of equilibrium.
- ii. Contrast: The use of vibrant colors against the neutral fabric backdrop provides visual interest.
- iii. Pattern and Repetition: Recurring motifs and color schemes establish a cohesive design.
- iv. Unity: The consistent use of design elements ensures a harmonious overall appearance.

Divergence from Contemporary Design Trends

- i. Minimalism: Contemporary design often favors minimalistic aesthetics, whereas kacha tanka is characterized by intricate and dense patterns.
- ii. Material Innovation: Modern design frequently explores new materials and technologies, whereas kacha tanka predominantly utilizes traditional materials like cotton threads and mirrors.
- iii. Functionality: Contemporary design often prioritizes functionality and usability, whereas kacha tanka emphasizes decorative artistry.



Figure: 1 example of Kacha Tanka embroidery showcasing traditional geometric and floral patterns hand-stitched with vibrant threads on cotton fabric



Figure: 2 Traditional attire featuring vibrant mirror and thread embroidery

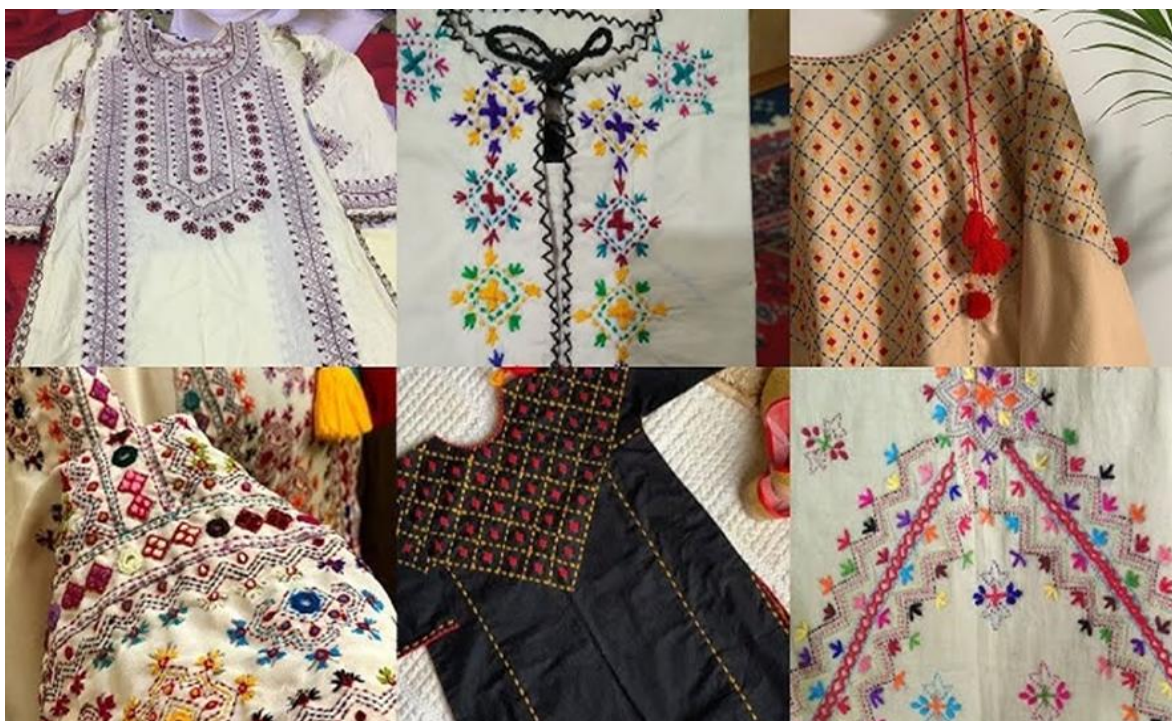


Figure: 3 A vibrant collection of traditional garments featuring Kacha Tanka embroidery. This hand-stitched craft is known for its intricate geometric and floral motifs, colorful threadwork, and cultural symbolism—reflecting the artistic legacy and identity of the region’s female artisans.

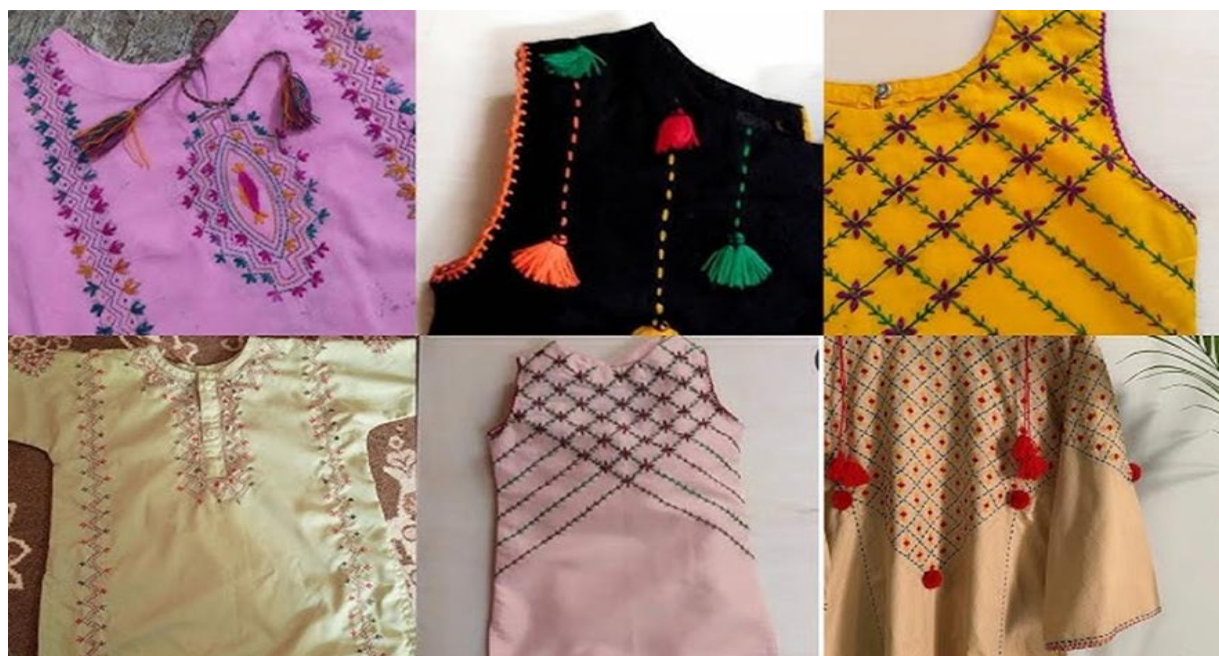


Figure: 4 A diverse showcase of Kacha Tanka embroidery highlighting the craft’s distinctive use of colorful threadwork, geometric patterns, and decorative tassels.

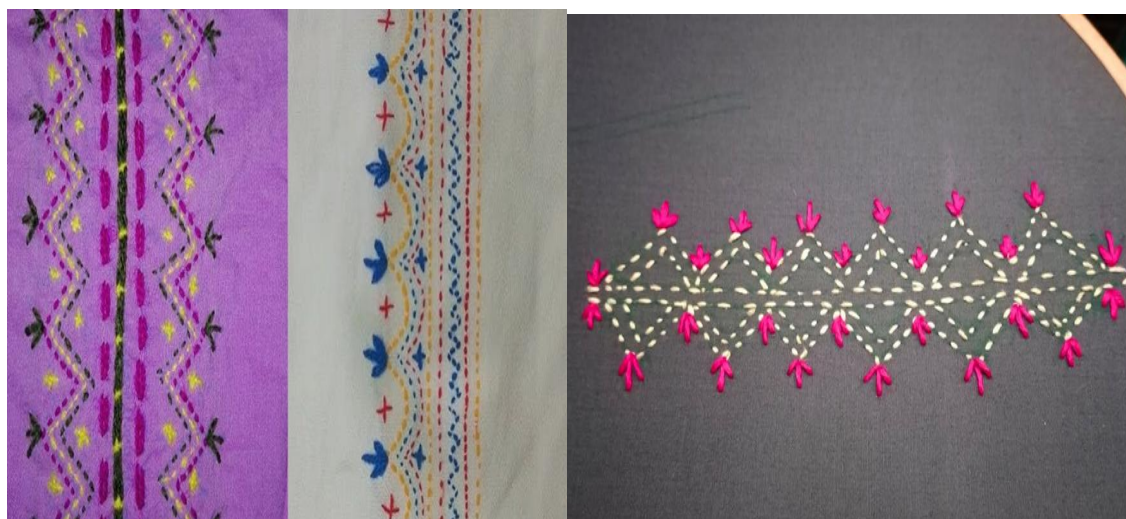


Figure: 5 Close-up details of Kacha Tanka embroidery, showcasing delicate hand-stitched geometric and floral motifs in vibrant colors



Figure: 6 A vibrant floral design in progress, showcasing *Kacha Tanka* embroidery



Figure: 7 Maroon floral motif on delicate fabric



Figure: 8 Artisans meticulously working on Kacha Tanka embroidery featuring detailed threaded patterns embellished with sequins & mirrors



Figure: 9 A female artisan engaged in crafting Kacha Tanka embroidery in Dera Ghazi Khan, skillfully stitching white floral motifs onto vibrant pink fabric



Figure: 10 A skilled artisan from Dera Ghazi Khan creating vibrant Kacha Tanka embroidery, stitching multicolored floral patterns onto pink fabric



Figure: 11 an artisan carefully crafting geometric motifs using the Kacha Tanka embroidery. The vivid, multicolored threadwork on deep pink fabric



Figure: 12 A woman artisan from Dera Ghazi Khan working on Kacha Tanka embroidery, stitching vibrant floral patterns with precision onto deep blue fabric.



Figure: 13 A close-up of Kacha Tanka embroidery in progress by an artisan from Dera Ghazi Khan, featuring a bold floral motif stitched in red and maroon on mustard fabric.

Part 2 of Study: Revival & Continuity of Kacha Tanka Art

“The greater the cultural significance attached to the kacha tanka craft, the higher the likelihood of its continuity”. In this regard a survey questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire was based on the Likert Scale of 5 and 20 Participants submitted the questionnaire from various regions of DG Khan.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

There is a strong positive relationship between Cultural Significance of Kacha Tanka (question 1.1-1.8) and the Continuity of the Craft (question 2.1-2.10, Number of Artisans Practicing). The detail is as follows.

Table 1: Demographic Information

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group		
31-40	6	50.00
41-50	4	33.33
51 & Above	2	16.67
Gender		
Male	2	16.67
Female	10	83.33
Nature of Work		
Artist in Rural Area	8	66.67
Designer	2	16.67
Academics	2	16.67

Table 2: Results of Survey Questionnaire

Sr	Question	Response				
Cultural Significance of Kacha Tanka						
1.1	How would you rate the cultural significance of kacha tanka in your community?	Not Significant	Very Less Significant	Less Significant	Significant	Very Significant
		0%	0%	8%	32%	60%
1.2	To what extent do you think kacha tanka represents the cultural identity of Dera Ghazi Khan?	Not at all	Less Represents	Represents	Very Represents	Strongly Represents
		0%	16%	22%	18%	44%
1.3	In your opinion, how often is kacha tanka	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently

	showcased in cultural or community events (e.g., festivals, exhibitions, markets)	0%	25%	30%	20%	25%
1.4	Do you believe that younger generations in your community are interested in learning or practicing kacha tanka?	Yes	No	Unsure	-	-
		35%	65%	0%	-	-
1.5	How important is it to preserve the kacha tanka craft for future generations?	Not Important	Very Less Important	Less Important	Important	Very Important
		0%	0%	10%	12%	78%
1.6	How would you describe the pride that local people take in the kacha tanka craft?	No pride	Low pride	Moderate pride	High pride	Very high pride
		8%	16%	26%	20%	30%
1.7	What role do you think the kacha tanka craft plays in shaping the local cultural heritage?	No role	Minor role	Moderate role	Significant role	Central role
		8%	8%	16%	61%	7%
1.8	Have you personally been involved in any cultural programs or initiatives that promote kacha tanka?	Yes	No	-	-	-
		30%	70%	-	-	-
Continuity of Kacha Tanka Craft						
2.1	How many artisans in your community still practice kacha tanka embroidery?	None	Few (1-5 artisans)	Some (6-15 artisans)	Many (16 or more artisans)	-
		0%	27%	65%	8%	-
2.2	Over the past 5 years, have you noticed an increase, decrease, or stability in the number of artisans practicing kacha tanka?	Increase	Decrease	Stable	-	-
		15%	70%	15%	-	-
2.3	How would you rate the economic viability of kacha tanka as a livelihood for artisans?	Not Viable	Very Less Viable	Less Viable	Viable	Very Viable
		0%	10%	10%	35%	45%

	Are kacha tanka products (e.g., garments, accessories, home décor) being sold or marketed beyond the local community?	Yes, widely sold	Yes, limited market	No, only locally	No market at all	-
2.4		20%	30%	50%	0%	-
	Do you think the demand for kacha tanka products has increased or decreased in recent years?	Increased	Decrease	Stable	Not sure	-
2.5		10%	45%	35%	10%	-
	How likely are you to recommend kacha tanka as a profession to younger people in your community?	Very Unlikely	Very Less	Less	Likely	Very Likely
2.6		%	20%	35%	35%	10%
	In your opinion, what are the main factors that contribute to the continuity of kacha tanka in your community? (Select all that apply)	Strong cultural value and pride	Economic incentives & market demand	Support from local or national institutions (e.g., NGOs, government)	Learning & passing on the craft to younger generations	Inclusion in modern design or fashion
2.7		24%	16%	16%	12%	16%
		Availability of resources (e.g., materials, tools)	-	-	-	-
		16%	-	-	-	-
	Have you or anyone you know ever participated in workshops or training programs to learn or improve kacha tanka skills?	Yes	No	-	-	-
2.8		70%	30%	-	-	-
	How would you describe the role of contemporary design trends in ensuring the continuity of kacha tanka?	No role	Minor role	Moderate role	Significant role	Central role
2.9		0%	16%	24%	45%	15%

	How likely do you think the kacha tanka craft will continue to be practiced by future generations?	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Less likely	likely	Highly likely
2.10		0%	8%	23%	45%	24%

RESULTS

A **Pearson correlation** of 0.85 suggests a strong positive relationship, meaning that as the cultural significance of Kacha Tanka increases, the number of artisans practicing the craft also increases. This is a statistically significant finding.

The **Regression Analysis** shows that positive slope of 0.6 indicates a strong positive relationship between cultural significance and the number of artisans. If cultural significance increases by 1 point (e.g., from “Less Significant” to “Significant”), the number of artisans increases by 0.6 (on a 5-point scale).

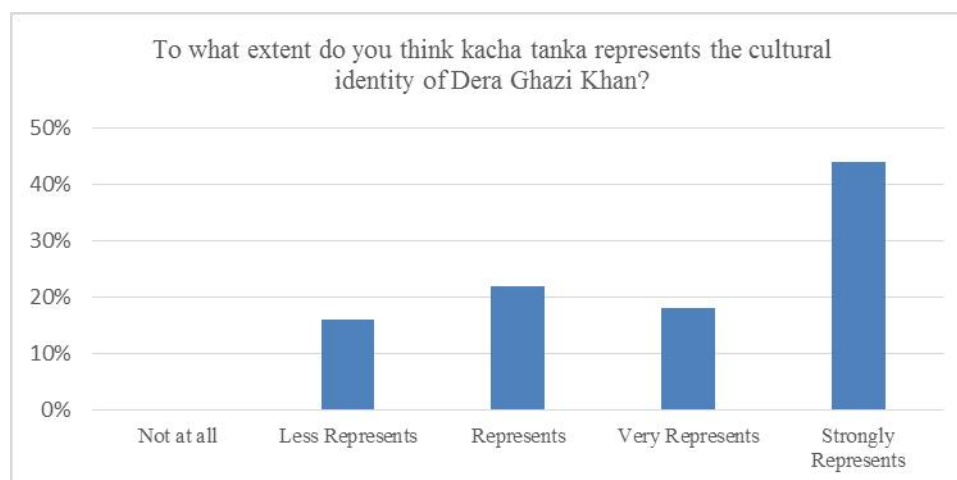
This result confirms that cultural significance plays a strong role in maintaining and growing the craft, with higher perceived cultural value leading to greater participation in the craft.

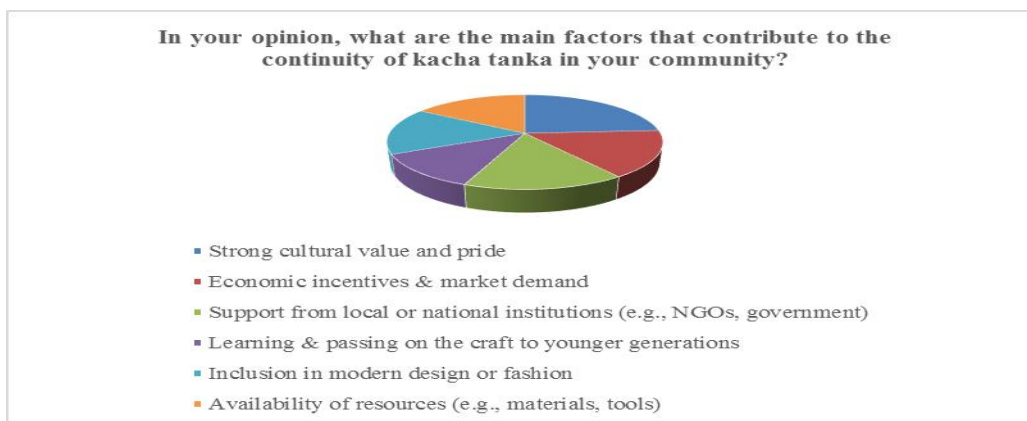
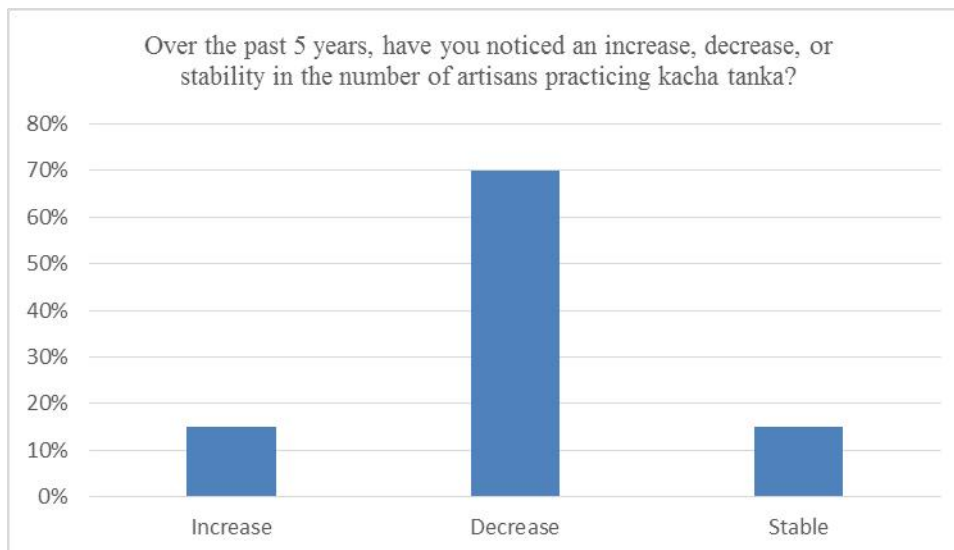
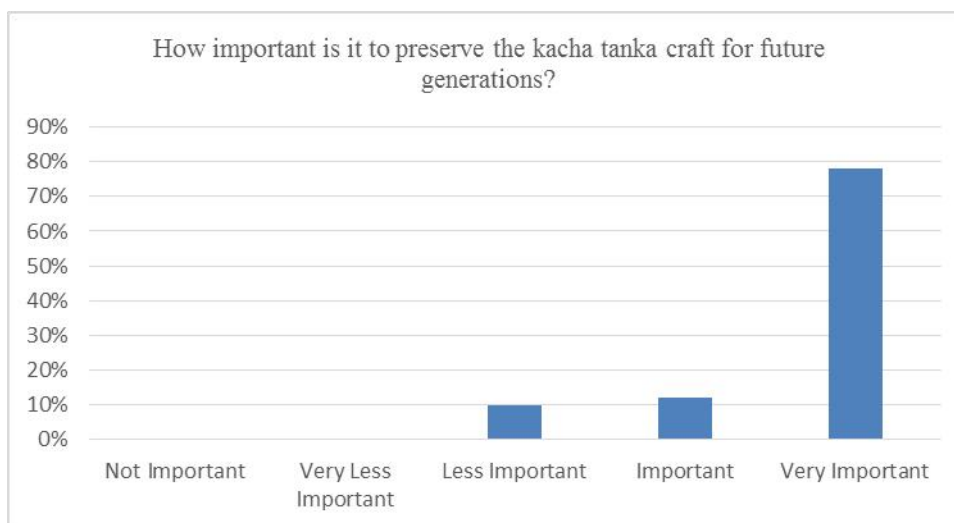
Challenges faced by local artisans

Limited Profit Margins, Market Competition, Limited Online Visibility, Absence of Branding, Traditional Learning Methods, Limited Access to Formal Education, Electricity Supply Issues and Poor Working Conditions.

DISCUSSIONS

Following are the results of response of participants during questionnaire. The graphical representation of major question are detailed below.





CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the revival and modernization of kacha tanka embroidery require a concerted effort from design educators, cultural policymakers, and the fashion industry. Through collaboration and innovation, this traditional craft can be preserved and celebrated in the modern era. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including economic support, skill development, infrastructural improvements, and cultural preservation initiatives. By fostering an environment that supports traditional artisans, the rich heritage of kacha tanka embroidery can be sustained and promoted for future generations. This research highlights the cultural and historical value of Dera Ghazi Khan's traditional textile arts. Though significant, these crafts lack proper documentation and use in modern contexts. Through recording their development, patterns, and techniques, and studying their design elements in modern terms, this study shows how they can be used today. It suggests focused efforts to preserve and adapt these textile traditions. These steps can protect local heritage while creating new business opportunities in fashion and interior design.

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