

A Study of Patterns of Needlework in the Bajestan Region from an Ethnographic Perspective

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Introduction

The art of embroidery and needlework in Iran dates back to several thousand years, and its evidences have been found in the excavations of Susa and works from the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanid eras. Embroidery motifs initially included images of animals, geometric shapes, and symbolic flowers; but with the arrival of Islam, due to religious considerations, they mostly included plant motifs and Indian trends. In the Safavid and Qajar periods, this art was evolved influenced by other cultures and became a symbol of national and ethnic identity. In addition to its aesthetic aspects, embroidery has played an significant role in the economy and social relations of women. Bajestan, a city with a historical and artistic background, has a variety of unique needlework shown in the clothes and handicrafts of the region. This study aims to introduce and revive Bajestan needlework and examine its features and applications.

Research Method

This research was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method and an ethnographic approach. Field data were collected through interviews with needlewomen in the Bajestan region and the observation of their works. The writers first collected preliminary data from villages around Bajestan in November 2018 and, then, analyzed the data by observing samples and conducting in-depth interviews. Simple random sampling was used and at least four samples were selected from each village to represent the statistical population properly. A questionnaire containing questions about the history, application, roles, and social impacts of needlework was designed and used in the interviews. For illiterate individuals, the questionnaire was completed by the researchers. At the same time, some photographs were taken of the samples and their thematic and formal classification. Library resources were also used in this study. This research analyzed the symbols, transmission of tradition, and the social application of needlework.

Research Findings

This study analyzes the embroidery motifs of the Bajestan region using the theories of traditionalism, aesthetics, functionalism, and cultural study. Plant motifs form an important part of this art, including five-petaled, six-petaled, eight-petaled flowers, tulips, lilies, and pine trees. Inspired by the nature of the region, especially pomegranate and apple orchards and tulip plains, artists have created realistic and abstract designs. The pomegranate motif, which is a symbol of blessing and immortality in Zoroastrianism and Islam, is abundant in these embroidery motifs,

indicating the profound influence of religious culture on the art of the region. Animal motifs are also of particular importance and include domestic animals such as horses, donkeys, camels, chickens, and roosters, and wild animals such as deer, mountain goats, and moose. These motifs are also common in the carpets and kilimrugs of the region; in these works, birds are also depicted with symbols such as purity, consciousness, and beauty in combination with plant motifs. These combinations convey not only visual beauty but also cultural and symbolic meanings.

Other motifs include limited and symbolic human images, poems, mementos, and holy names that reflect the religious and cultural beliefs of the artists. Human motifs such as dolls and girls and boys holding flowers are symbols of love, purity, and intimacy. Poems by great poets such as Ferdowsi and Rumi are engraved on some curtains and convey mystical concepts and Iranian wisdom. Also, the use of rhythm in repeating motifs has created beauty, dynamism, and diversity in the works.

The coloring of these needleworks is mainly based on experience and inspiration from nature. Thus, black is rarely used. Some motifs include symbols such as crowns, swords, and flags, which reflect the Iranian monarchy and historical cultural influences. Overall, Bajestan needlework is a combination of aesthetics, culture, history, and spirituality that well reflects the indigenous identity of the region and demonstrates the deep connection of artists with their environment, history, and beliefs. In addition to its aesthetic aspects, this art plays an important role in preserving and transmitting local culture and identity.

Conclusion

The embroidery of Bajestan, with patterns rooted in the nature, beliefs, and history of the region, has been passed down from generations to generations as a proof of identity. These patterns reflect the concerns, aspirations, and mental interpretations of female artists about the world around, manifested in the form of plants, animals, and symbolic designs. Some of these patterns such as Paisley have their roots in the Sassanid traditions, which have evolved over time with creative combinations of patterns. This innovation has not only increased artistic richness but also preserved local identity.

Rural women, as the main creators of these works, use simple fabrics and traditional tools to create delicate and emotional patterns that combine naturalism and realism with traditionalism. Plant and animal motifs are the most frequent elements, sometimes inspired by carpet and kilim rug designs. Aesthetic features such as symmetry, color balance, and the proportion of shapes add to the appeal of these works, although in some cases the asymmetry caused by hand stitching enhances the sense of authenticity. Needlework is mainly used to decorate clothing, backs, towels, hangers, shelf edges, baby carpets, and prayer mats with differences in coloring and designs between regions. The use of same sewing technique (topstitching and stem embroidery) and materials demonstrate the stylistic unity of this art. An ethnographic approach has revealed the deep connection of this art with the cultural, historical, and social identity of the region. According to the theory of functionalism, needlework, in addition to meeting practical needs of its time, has served as a means of transmitting local culture and of strengthening local identity. Supporting innovation in designs and paying attention to global markets are essential for the dynamism of this art so that future generations can also benefit from this rich heritage.

Keywords: Iran handicrafts, Traditional sewing, Bajestan needlework, Ethnography, Needlework patterns.