

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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146
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TEXTILES AND ORNAMENTAL ARTS OF INDIA ON VIEW AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Nearly a thousand examples of brilliant saris, shawls, precious jewels and jades, rugs and temple hangings from India will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from April 13 through June 12 in an exhibition, TEXTILES AND ORNAMENTAL ARTS OF INDIA, the most comprehensive showing of these traditional and contemporary native crafts ever presented in this country.

The exhibition, directed by Monroe Wheeler, Director of Exhibitions and Publications, was chosen from material selected here and abroad by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., formerly of the Museum staff, and installed by the well-known architect Alexander Girard. Rare historic fabrics and ornaments from Museums and private collections in India, England and this country are included as well as contemporary textiles and jewelry from today's bazaars in India. The exhibition was assembled under the auspices of the Museum's International Exhibitions Program, directed by Porter McCray and has been installed in the Museum's entire first floor by a large Museum staff under the technical supervision of Robert Faeth.

The exhibition installation, designed by Mr. Girard, is in the form of an imaginary bazaar or market-place. Twelve gold columns surround a fifty-foot long pool of water over which hang scores of fanciful saris made during the past two hundred years, in a profusion of colors and patterns. They include rich gold and silver brocades, intricately handwoven and tie-dyed silks, gossamer cottons, feather-soft wools and beautifully patterned embroideries ranging from those made by the hereditary artisans of former rulers to the traditional folk-embroideries still made today. Adjoining this space is a special display of the shawls of Kashmir whose elaborate designs have enjoyed world prestige for centuries.

In a separate treasure room, under a multicolored canopy, are displayed hundreds of pieces of the finest jewelry, many set with rubies, emeralds, pearls, diamonds and crystal in settings which vary from hammered gold to minute gold and silver filligree, together with rare 16th and 17th century enamels and vessels of carved and inlaid jade.

Another room is devoted primarily to folk-crafts: rugs, embroideries, objects of steel inlaid with silver, vessels of brass and copper, a brilliantly laquered cradle, toys of painted wood and clay, ornaments used in religious celebrations, bouquets and wall decorations of pith and paper kites.

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147

Hand-printed temple hangings adorn some of the walls in the exhibition while others are hung with lengths of contemporary silk and cotton fabrics available for export. One of the most bizarre objects is a 19th century sculpture in wood of a tiger devouring an Englishman. This is equipped with sound effects unfortunately no longer operative, rendering the roar of the tiger and the Englishman's groan.

As many of the fabrics in the exhibition were designed to be worn by women, 10 wax manikins have been placed in the show wearing saris and the adornments which are the necessary complements of Indian fabrics. The manikins were dressed by Miss Nargis Irani.

Monroe Wheeler, who conceived the exhibition during a visit to India more than a year ago, is editing an illustrated book on the exhibition which will be published by the Museum later this year, with texts by Mrs. Pupul Jayakar of Bombay, a specialist in Indian textile design, and by John Irwin, Assistant Keeper of the Oriental Collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, from which several hundred objects have been borrowed.

Mr. Wheeler explains the scope of purpose of the exhibition as follows:

"Although I had first visited India twenty years ago, I felt when I returned last year that a country which had then been mysteriously somnolent and apathetic had, since its independence, come amazingly to life. I encountered everywhere an enthusiastic desire to improve living standards and provide better educational facilities. The capitol of New Delhi has transformed the former Viceroy's Palace into a National Museum; there is also a new National Museum of Modern Art, and a Crafts Museum is in formation.

"One of the most significant new enterprises is the All India Handicraft Board, under the chairmanship of Mrs. Kamaladevi Chattapadhyay, without whose assistance this New York exhibition could never have been realized. Its purpose is to guide the millions of skilled native craftsmen in the way of traditional design and to publicize and market these folk arts in India and other countries.

"The major creativity of India in the past has been shrines and temples with a fantastic profusion of architectural sculpture, impossible to move from the original site.

"But many a visitor to India, when asked what has given him the greatest pleasure, after speaking first of the beauty of the temples and their sculpture, will then point out the beauty of the multitudes of people in their fairy-tale raiment of all the colors of the rainbow. Perhaps nowhere else in the world is there a folk art so representative and symbolic of the nation as a whole.

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"It seemed clear that the artistry made available by the Government of India, through its museums and Mrs. Chattapadhyay's organization, as well as by private collectors, together with a corresponding representation of prototypes of the past, gave us our best opportunity to present the esthetic of India to the American public.

"A triangle of this earth as large as all Europe, snow-capped in the north, steaming hot in the south, India is inhabited by 360 million people who use a dozen different languages and about 150 vernacular tongues, and who worship according to many different religions. It is therefore natural that there should be a myriad of sources for the designs used in their textiles and ornamental arts. It is above all skillful workmanship and the harmonious use of vivid and contrasting colors which most strongly appeals to those in other countries.

"As far back as history informs us, a great part of India's textile production has been exported. We know that Indian fabrics were worn in Rome, and the earliest examples in our exhibition were found in a tomb in the Egyptian city of Fostat where they had been imported in the 7th century. Their influence in our own country is evidenced by the number of Indian words in our language; sash and shawl; pyjama and dungaree; calico, chintz and khaki; gingham and bandanna.

"To a profusion of these fabrics and many kinds of weaving and embroidery, we have added a treasure-trove of the work of jewelers, goldsmiths and silversmiths: fire-bright enamels; precious stones strung as prodigally as beads; jewel-like glass in exquisite settings, and silver enobled by perfect workmanship.

"It is hoped that this exhibition, in furtherance of the ideals of the Museum's International Exhibitions Program and its International Council, will enrich the American esthetic experience, and at the same time give recognition and stimulus to the great crafts of India."

The textiles in the exhibition can be generally divided into two main classifications; court fabrics and village fabrics. Many of the contemporary textiles in the show are exported and available in this country. The fabrics made under court patronage or influence include the gold and silver brocade saris from Benares, shown with delicate and massive gold jewelry and precious stone ornaments in intricate settings. The village fabrics include the famous Bandhana-work or tie and dye fabrics, ikat fabrics, and painted and printed cotton, all made by skilled professional weavers and dyers working near large market towns.

Embroidery is also done in the villages, usually by women, and regional differences in techniques, color and design are still apparent. Sometimes copies of the "alponas" designs, drawings made in rice paste by women for ritual purposes, are

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also embroidered, thus giving the fabrics an added symbolic significance.

The court clothes found their richest expression in the great craft schools which sprang up around the Moghul courts at Delhi and the Imperial courts of Golconda. Heavy gold cloth was used as end pieces on saris of the finest muslin. Floral motifs were most commonly used and were spaced across the length of a cloth. The great love the Moghuls had for flowers and gardens is reflected in these designs.

The techniques used in the weaving and coloring of textiles in India are the same as those used in other parts of the world. Some of the principal methods are:

1. Block-printing, in which the color is applied with blocks cut in wood and stamped on the cloth.
2. Resist-dying, in which parts of the cloth are treated with a substance which prevents the cloth from absorbing the dye.
3. Ikat; a process in which the thread is colored before the cloth is woven, so that as the weaving proceeds, the final design appears.
4. Tie-dying, in which waxed or starched thread is wound many times around the portion of the cloth not to be dyed.
5. Mordant-dying, in which the pattern is applied to the cloth in chemicals which, when immersed in another chemical, brings out the desired colors.

The vivid background colors of the walls and ceilings in the exhibition have all been inspired by those used in India. For thousands of years India has excelled in the use of color and in knowledge of color chemistry. Using "Al" root or lac for red, indigo for blue, iron shavings and vinegar for black, turmeric for yellow, and pomegranet rind for green, the Indian artisans have made the colors of their fabrics famous throughout the world.

And just as the textiles and adornments have a special symbolic significance, so are the colors used in them symbols of various moods and feelings. Red is the symbol of the "sohag," the early days of marriage, saffron is the color of the ochre earth and of the yogi who renounced the earth, yellow is the color of spring, maroon and black, of mourning. Blue is the color of Krishna God and red of Brahman, white of Shiva. These colors when worn by peasant or householder were but a projection of the colors and clothes worn by the god enshrined in the temple, so that costumes and colors were another link between man and his god.

"On behalf of the Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art," Mr. Wheeler said, "I wish to extend profound thanks to Sir Leigh Ashton and John Irwin of the Victoria and Albert Museum, in London, who have placed a large part of their great Indian

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Collections at our disposal, to Dr. Stella Kramrisch, and to the following people in India who have given their invaluable support to this undertaking:

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LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

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 Chicago Natural History Museum
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 The Metropolitan Museum of Art
 The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
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 Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw,
 Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York.

NOTE: Information on importing any of the contemporary fabrics or objects in the exhibition can be obtained from the Indian Trade Center, 19 East 49 Street, New York City.