

Tales Below the Heels

India Design Language – Footwear

National Seminar &
Exhibition on the **Footwear Heritage of India**



BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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Tales Below the Heels

India's design traditions have long transcended borders, shaping global aesthetics in textiles, jewelry and decorative arts. Today, this influence is visible on international runways, where luxury brands reinterpret Indian forms. Prada's recent sandals, reminiscent of the traditional Kolhapuri chappals, are one such example bringing to light both the enduring appeal of Indian craftsmanship and the debates around cultural appropriation and authorship.

"Tales Below the Heels" positions Indian footwear within this wider conversation. Far more than functional objects, shoes in India are carriers of meaning: the sacred padukas referenced in mythology and sculpture, the finely embroidered juttis and mojaris of royal courts, and the rugged Kolhapuris woven into everyday life. Each form embodies regional artistry, social identity and ritual value, while continuing to inspire contemporary designers across the world.

This exhibition and seminar invite visitors and participants to trace the remarkable journey of Indian footwear its histories, its living practices, and its global resonances. By doing so, it connects the story of what we wear to the larger narrative of India's design heritage: inventive, resilient and ever relevant.

INDIA DESIGN LANGUAGE (IDL) - FOOTWEAR

A National Movement to Preserve, Document & Globalize India's Footwear Heritage

The **India Design Language (IDL) - Footwear** initiative by the **Footwear Design & Development Institute (FDDI)** is a landmark national mission to celebrate and globalize the richness of India's traditional footwear. Aligned with the vision of the Hon'ble Prime Minister **Shri Narendra Modi**, and the philosophies of **Vocal for Local** and **Atmanirbhar Bharat**, IDL aims to build a unified design identity that showcases India's cultural diversity to the world.

Rooted in research, craft revival and collaborative innovation, the initiative connects artisans, designers, educators and **students** to safeguard traditional knowledge while creating contemporary, globally relevant design.

Key Goals

- **Build a National Identity:** Create a unified vocabulary for Indian footwear rooted in regional character.
- **Preserve & Revive Crafts:** Document techniques, materials and traditional forms through research and education.
- **Empower Artisans:** Recognize artisans as co-creators and support sustainable livelihoods.
- **Collaborative Learning:** Facilitate workshops, academic projects and hands-on craft engagement.
- **Create Signature Collections:** Design capsule collections reflecting heritage and modern sensibilities
- **Showcase Globally:** Present curated collections on major national and international platforms
- **Promote Sustainability:** Encourage ethical production and eco-friendly innovation.

IDL & *Tales Below the Heels*

The *Tales Below the Heels* seminar and exhibition strengthens the IDL mission by bringing together scholars, artisans, designers, historians and students to explore India's footwear legacy. It fosters:

- Rigorous academic documentation
- Amplification of artisan voices
- Exploration of historical, sculptural and cultural narratives
- Dialogue on contemporary challenges such as GI misuse and craft decline
- Research-driven and heritage-led design innovation

IDL is more than an initiative, it is a national movement to preserve heritage, inspire innovation, and shape the future of Indian footwear design. A celebration of India's creativity, diversity and resilience, it empowers the next generation to walk forward with pride in the traditions beneath their heels.

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A Journey of Footwears in Indian art; with reference to Sculpture & Painting

Keynote speech by

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Footwear, - as has been known as paduka, pada raksha and many more such names have been used for the footwear. The history of footwears goes back to the days of civilizations. In ancient literature of India, such as Ramayana and Mahabharata, several references to the use of Padukas are found. One of the most important event of the Ramayana is, Bharata collecting footwear of Rama, as token of his deep respect to Rama. He also decide to administer Ayodhya on behalf of Rama with Rama's padukas, as Rama's representation. Here, Rama was represented symbolically through his Padukas.

In India, footwear has multiple representations. First one is Footwear's religious affiliation where Footwears depicted in the images of Gods. Second worn is the padukas worn by the pontiffs. Third category of the footwears, worn for daily uses. Even within this, in religious context, foot wears also represented as ceremonial entities. However, artistic making of footwear always has its depictions in in the art of painting and sculptures.

Unfortunately, In India, no foot wear has been survives the way Egyptian Pharaoh's. The papyrus and golden as well as leather with golden made footwears have been found in tombs of New Kingdom and Tutankhamen. Artistically rendered, exquisitely done foot wears exhibit the high skill of the artists of the Egyptian Era. Greco-Romans also have had exceptionally artistic footwear, both functional and also ceremonial. Varieties of footwear such as sandals, shoes, full calf length shoes, half shoes and many more designs have been found depicted in sculptures and paintings. It becomes clear, having foot wear was an essential aspect of the daily life since the beginning of the proto-historical civilizations.

In the context of Indian foot wear, though much varieties are not found as seen Greco-Roman, but have been very significantly developed as functional, and ceremonial and more than these metaphorical. For instance, Buddha paduka were always metaphorical. Padukas will have symbols of the various auspicious symbols such as swastika, tripurvata, triratna, srivatsa etc. These symbols indeed create a kind of designs etched on the paduka. Similarly, Bharata carrying Rama's paduka and worshipping them has been an epical depiction.

As per art history, earliest examples of foot wears appear in Sunga period's sculptures at Chandraketugarh. Depiction of single bar footwear was quite common feature in terracotta figurines. Kushana sculptures further began to have shoes. Kings like Kanishka and

Huvishka as well as Surya sculptures of the period were depicted with shoes. It should be noted that beginning of covering foot up to knee possibly began during this period.

Medieval Indian sculptures have the depiction of footwear. In India, more than designs, it was mainly ceremonial like forms. Paduka with single knob, and high heels. Mostly the padukas used made out of wood. Leather was used for daily functional for soldiers, officers etc. Padukas were also used for sculptures like Bhairava and Bhairavi and even Bhikshatana Shiva. While Vishnu sculptures have never depicted with footwear. Paduka variety was the only form that was shown in visual depiction. However, very few sculptures with sandals, shoes may be seen in late medieval period sculptures.

With Islamic rule, once again variety of footwears began to emerge in day to day life. In painting also there are good variety of depictions. Shoes, sandals and alike have been delineated. Overall, the lecture addresses socio-cultural and artistic development of the foot wears in art historical context.

Stepping Through History: Analyzing Depictions of Footwear in Ancient Indian Coins and Sculpture

Ashutosh Sunil Patil
MGM University, Chh. Sambhajinagar

While ancient India is often popularly imagined as a land of barefoot ascetics and royalty, a closer examination of its visual culture reveals a nuanced and complex history of footwear. This paper argues that depictions of footwear on ancient Indian coins and sculptures were not mere stylistic embellishments but potent signifiers of social status, ethnic identity, military authority, and cross-cultural exchange. The study moves beyond literary descriptions to analyze tangible iconographic evidence from the Mauryan to the Gupta period. This research employs a comparative analytical framework integrating two principal material sources: numismatic evidence and stone sculptural remains.

The study examines coinage from the Indo-Greek, Scythian, Kushan, and Gupta dynasties, with particular attention to iconographic representations of rulers and deities featured on these monetary artifacts. For instance, the distinctive boots prominently depicted on coins bearing portraits of Kushan monarchs, notably Emperor Kanishka, underscore significant Central Asian sartorial influences and deliberate projections of martial imperial identity through material culture. This numismatic corpus is systematically juxtaposed with sculptural representations excavated from major archaeological sites, including Bharhut, Sanchi, and the Gandhara cultural sphere. The carved depictions of footwear worn by yakshas, foreign emissaries, military personnel, and various social categories within these relief sculptures constitute a rich iconographic encyclopedia. These visual records illuminate not merely the physical morphology of distinct footwear types but also the cultural taxonomies and social significations through which different forms of footwear were perceived, categorized, and encoded with meaning across ancient Indian society.

By tracing the appearances of sandals (*paduka*), boots, and other strapped footwear across these media, the paper will demonstrate how this seemingly mundane accessory played a crucial role in constructing and communicating identity in ancient India. This research contributes a new perspective to the study of Indian material culture, highlighting footwear as a vital lens for interpreting the subcontinent's historical and social dynamics.

Keywords: Iconographic analysis, Ancient coinage analysis, Identity construction

Footwear Depictions in Kakatiya Temples of Telangana – Madanikas and Design Narratives

Tanya Srivastava

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The Kakatiya temples of the Deccan, particularly the Kakatiya Rudreshwara (Ramappa) Temple at Palampet and the Ghanpur Group of Temples, stand as exceptional testimonies to medieval Indian artistry and material culture. Among their sculptural highlights, the Madanikas—celestial female figures carved in intricate postures—embody both divine beauty and human sensibility. While their grace and ornamentation have been widely studied, the depiction of footwear among these sculptures has received little academic attention. This paper explores how the representation of footwear in Kakatiya temple art reflects the technological, aesthetic, and cultural sophistication of the 13th century.

Through detailed photographic documentation, stylistic analysis, and iconographic interpretation, the study examines the variety of footwear forms—from delicate sandals and embroidered soles to patterned toe-rings and anklets—depicted on the Madanikas and other sculptural figures. These carvings not only highlight the craftsmanship of the Kakatiya ateliers but also indicate regional material practices, trade networks, and social hierarchies of the time. The research situates these representations within the wider context of Indian footwear traditions, linking them to symbolic expressions of divinity, gender, and ritual practice.

By analysing the aesthetic vocabulary and sculptural precision of Kakatiya artisans, the paper underscores how footwear—though modest in scale—serves as a powerful lens to understand cultural identity, ritual symbolism, and artistic innovation in medieval Deccan art. Ultimately, it situates Kakatiya temple sculptures as vital repositories of design heritage, bridging traditional craftsmanship with contemporary discourses on cultural preservation.

Keywords: Madanikas, Cultural identity, Ritual symbolism, Artistic innovation, Medieval Deccan art

Footwear Fables in Bengal Terracotta: Artistic Expression and Social Symbolism

Rohit Dutta

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Art echoes the ethos of the society and serves as a vital source for understanding our forgotten past. Numerous aspects of human life that remain unwritten in texts find vivid expression through sculpture. Similarly, Bengali terracotta sculptures provide invaluable insights into the evolution of accessories over the past nine centuries. This study focuses specifically on the representation and significance of footwear within this artistic tradition and its symbolism. Footwear forms an essential part of any attire. Just as traditional clothing reflects a community or region's cultural identity, footwear is also closely associated with heritage. It has been an integral part of human life since ancient times.

At Chandraketugarh in West Bengal, ancient bas-relief terracotta images depict sandals worn by both men and women, indicating the region's long-standing tradition of representing footwear in art. This practice continued in later periods, with temple decorations across Bengal providing ample evidence of its persistence. Various types of shoes are represented in these artworks: low boots, ankle-length boots, calf-length boots, high boots, and the Indian jutti-type shoes with upturned toes, the latter appearing in a few temple panels. These depictions offer indispensable data related to Bengal's patterns of attire, craftsmanship, and evolving aesthetic sensibilities over the centuries.

Moreover, the portrayal of divine figures such as Lord Shiva, Lord Rama, and Lord Parashurama wearing different kinds of footwear suggests a more profound iconographic significance, blending the sacred with the everyday. Through these artistic expressions, Bengal's terracotta tradition not only preserves its visual heritage but also serves as an enduring record of the history and symbolism of footwear in the region.

Keywords: Bengal Terracotta, Bengali Terracotta Figures, Visual Heritage

The evolving story of Indian footwear

Prateek Khanna

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India's heritage of footwear is a reflection of its deep cultural, artistic, and regional diversity. Indian footwear has evolved over the millennia from sacred symbolism to contemporary fashion. The earliest known Indian footwear, the 'paduka', consisted of wooden soles with a toe knob, often crafted from teak, ebony, or sandalwood. These were not merely utilitarian objects but held spiritual and social significance—associated with saints, royalty, and religious rituals. Over time, each region in India developed distinctive styles rooted in local materials, climate, and craftsmanship.

The 'Kolhapuri chappal' of Maharashtra, known for its durability and vegetable-tanned leather, and the embroidered 'jutti' or 'mojari' of Rajasthan and Punjab, richly decorated with silk and metallic threads, are notable examples of this diversity. In colder northern regions, footwear like the Kashmiri 'pulhor' was made from grass and wool, demonstrating adaptation to geography and environment. The Mughal era added refinement to indigenous designs, introducing fine embroidery, velvet, and gold work that transformed footwear into a symbol of elegance and royal taste. Later, British colonial influence introduced Western shoe forms and industrial methods, leading to a blend of traditional motifs with modern manufacturing. Today, Indian handcrafted footwear continues to hold global appeal, with artisans preserving age-old techniques and sustainable practices through vegetable tanning and eco-friendly materials.

The conferment of Geographical Indication (GI) tags to traditional footwear like the Kolhapuri chappal underscores its enduring cultural value. Beyond craftsmanship, footwear in India carries social and ritual significance—symbolizing respect, humility, and purity when removed before entering temples or homes. The heritage of Indian footwear represents both aesthetic mastery and regional identity. It is a living continuity of cultural expression that bridges antiquity and modernity.

Keywords: Footwear evolution, Cultural heritage, Social significance, regional identity

Role of Footwear in Folk Literature, Folk Tales and Folk Myths across the world and India (A Socio-Cultural Understanding of Belief to Superstitions to Ecology)

Vikram Sridhar

Independent Researcher

From Ramayana, where Bharatha places Rama's paduka on the throne as a consecrated emblem of a rightful heir, footwear has functioned as a latent literary device for the representation of human behaviour, power dynamics, and psychological states across different narrative branches. This paper attempts to explore the representation of footwear as the central motif within myths, legends, and oral narratives, spanning children's literature to vernacular tales across global cultures.

The widely disseminated tale of Cinderella employs the glass slippers as a marker of bodily distinctiveness, where size and fit become the determinants of identity and social transformation. The protagonist's shifting social positioning is encoded in her footwear; barefoot domestic labour within the household contrasts sharply with shiny, sparkly glass slippers that signal her entrance to the aristocratic society. Similarly, "The Elves and the Shoemaker," though familiar in children's literary canon, rewards deeper examination as socio-cultural commentary on European artisanal economies and class relations, particularly as preserved in the Grimm Brothers' anthology. Indian mythological traditions contain parallel narratives: one tale attributes the invention of footwear and umbrellas to Lord Surya, the Sun God, who created these protective layers after sages complained that his fierce rays burned human feet. This etiological myth establishes footwear as a divine intervention safeguarding subsequent generations from environmental harm.

Regional folklore further demonstrates footwear's symbolic entrenchment in cultural practice. In Coorg, Karnataka, households traditionally place rubber chappals (Hawaii slippers) at doorways as protective objects warding off the evil eye (drishti)—a custom ingrained in local oral tradition that reveals footwear's talismanic properties beyond mere utility. This study ultimately surveys diverse literary and oral sources depicting footwear across the Indian subcontinent and beyond, illuminating how material culture objects acquire layered symbolic meanings, social, spiritual, and protective, within narrative imagination and lived cultural practice.

Keywords: Spiritual symbolism, Folk Literature, Folk Tales, Folk Myths, Socio-cultural reading

Footwear used in warfare and military activities: A study on materials used and regional significance

Shambhavi Rege

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Globally, footwear is considered an integral part of our outfit, and mismatched footwear can affect one's social image. On the contrary, in the Indian context, footwear is considered more than just a fashion statement; it is an indispensable part of our cultural history, religious symbolism, and societal status. Its sacredness proliferated through the worship of sandals of venerated monks and kings, and Bharata's placement of Rama's paduka on the throne. From the even marble floors of the royal palaces to the uncharted, uneven territories of battlefields, Indian footwear has travelled through places worth documenting. The design and materials of these footwear pieces were to change based on the geographical necessities.

The evolution of other types of footwear is well-documented, but the footwear worn on the battlefields is yet to be explored. This study analyses footwear worn in wars, focusing on material composition, battlefield functionality, and the regional-dynastic variations that illuminate shifting military and artisanal practices.

The study integrates available literature on Indian traditional footwear and draws some information from scriptures. The findings of this study provide a fundamental plinth to develop more critical research on the Indian martial footwear legacy. Shifting from the known territories of traditional footwear, this research explores footwear worn by Indians during military expeditions. From the pious pages of epics to historical records, this research paper traverses the evolution of ancient and medieval India's martial footwear, worth discussing.

Keywords: Warrior footwear, Martial footwear, Indian martial footwear legacy, Traditional footwear

A Jatara centers around ‘Uddalu’(Footware)-A case study of Kurumurti Jatara

Sriramoju Haragopal
Kotha Telangana, Charitra Brundam

Uddalu refers to the sacred footwear of Lord Kurumurthy. The devotees of Vaddeman village in Chinnachintakunta Mandal, Mahabubnagar District, have been following this sacred tradition of making these sacred sandals with profound reverence and devotion for generations. Once prepared, the sacred sandals are offered to Kurumurthy Swamy and Ammavaru, the kind goddess, as a symbolic act of reverence and devotion. These divine sandals are crafted by the Madigas of the village, and the shoemaker—who fashions the new pair from fine leather sourced from Rayalaseema—observes a strict ritual fast, subsisting only on milk throughout the preparation period. Before these sandals are taken to the temple, the devotees organize an elaborate and vibrant ritual for sanctification. They are placed inside a specially crafted palanquin under a chata crafted by the Medara castes of Pallamarri village. This craftsmanship, passed down through generations, represents the community’s devotion and contribution to the sacred festival. The chata is beautifully adorned before the grand procession begins, marking the commencement of a spiritual journey filled with music, chants, and collective faith.

The present study explores this centuries-old tradition and presents a case study on the Uddalu jatara. Based on its findings, the paper infers that Uddalu, for the people of Vaddeman village, is not only a pair of sacred shoes offered to their revered deity but also a powerful emblem that ties devotees across different social strata, weaving a timeless tale of devotion, continuity, and harmonious community building.

Keywords: Spiritual symbolism, cultural heritage, Uddalu jatara, community building

Footwear as Cultural Heritage: Bridging Past and Future “Heels and Healing: Footwear Ergonomics and Its Indigenous Knowledge Systems”

M.D. Prince Joseph

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Historically, footwear in India has been more than just a fashion statement or functional tool. The rich legacy of Indian Footwear underscores the profound and precise understanding of the human foot's anatomical requirements and the body's kinetic needs. This study investigates the dual significance of footwear as both a cultural heritage artifact and a functional tool for health and well-being, focusing on the intersection of traditional craftsmanship and ergonomic design. Centered on indigenous knowledge systems, the research explores how historical footwear practices incorporate principles of ergonomics and healing, reflecting deep connections between material culture and holistic health.

By analysing the design features, materials, and symbolic meanings of various traditional footwear forms, the paper highlights how these practices contribute to physical comfort and therapeutic benefits. It advocates for the integration of indigenous ergonomic insights into contemporary footwear design to promote cultural preservation, enhance user well-being, and inspire innovation in sustainable fashion.

This interdisciplinary approach bridges past wisdom, i.e., ancestral craftsmanship and contemporary ergonomic insights, with future applications, emphasizing the importance of respecting and revitalising ancestral knowledge in modern health-conscious design.

Keywords: Indian footwear, Revitalising ancestral knowledge, Health-conscious footwear design

The Story of a Cobbler

Dr. E. Sivanagi Reddy,
CEO, Pleach India Foundation

A good number of donors range in between the royalty, traders, wealthy people and commoners made gifts in terms of sculptural panels to decorate the Buddhist Stupa at Dhanyakataka-Amaravati right from the 3rd century CE to the 7th century CE. It is interesting to note that a cobbler (Charmakara) of Dhanyakataka by name Vidhika, made a meritorious gift of a lime stone slab carved with an overflowing Vase (Punaghataka pato), the son of a teacher Naga (Nagaupajhaya putasa), in the presence of his mother, wife, brothers, son, daughters and his paternal cousins during the Satavahana period, 2000 years ago. The panel bears significance because of the fact that the Purnaghata motif was adopted as an emblem of the Government of Andhra Pradesh. The Paper deals with the historical significance of the gift by a Cobbler and how it became the emblem of a state Government.



The Prakrit inscription:

1. *Sidham Chamakarasa Nagaupajhayaputasa Vidhikasa samatukasa sabhayakasa sabhatukasa putasa ca Nagasa sama dutukasa sanatimita bamdhuvasa deyadhamma.*
2. *Punaghatakapatato*

Keywords: Amaravati stupa, Satavahana, Sculpture, Doners, Charmakara, Purnaghata and Emblem.

North East Indian inspired Leather and Textile combinational Footwear

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The North Eastern states of India—renowned for their vibrant hand-woven fabrics such as Naga shawls, Mizo puan, Manipuri phanek, and Assamese eri silk—offer rich visual and tactile elements that reflect deep-rooted ethnic identity and ecological sensitivity. These textiles, born from generations of inherited artisanal wisdom and intimate knowledge of local flora and fauna, embody narratives of community, ritual, and place. Each weave carries within it the philosophical underpinnings of indigenous cosmologies and the adaptive ingenuity of mountain cultures. Accordingly, this study explores the fusion of the traditional North East Indian textile craftsmanship with contemporary leather footwear design, creating a unique synthesis of culture, sustainability, and modern fashion aesthetics. By integrating these indigenous textiles with ethically sourced leather, the project aims to design footwear that balances durability with cultural authenticity, while honouring the materiality and symbolic resonance intrinsic to both mediums.

The research further examines traditional weaving techniques, motifs, and colour symbolism, translating them into modern design expressions suitable for global markets. Through experimentation with form, material juxtaposition, and ergonomic design, the outcome aspires to promote local craftsmanship, empower artisans economically and culturally, and encourage sustainable, regionally inspired design practices in the contemporary footwear industry.

Based on its findings, this research concludes that the proposed hybrid design approach not only preserves cultural heritage but also positions North East Indian artistry within a modern, wearable context.

Keywords: North Eastern Textiles, Footwear Design, Cultural heritage Inspiration

From Handcrafted to AI-Generated design: A Study on Digital Archive and Design Acceptance of Pulla Footwear

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In the snow-clad valleys of Himachal Pradesh, where mountain ecology determines the material culture, Pulla footwear has sustained for centuries as both cultural emblem and practical necessity. Worn predominantly across the districts of Kangra, Chamba, Mandi, and Lahaul, these handcrafted shoes, woven from wool and richly adorned with region-specific motifs, represent a living repository of Himalayan artisanal knowledge. Yet, like many indigenous craft traditions, Pulla-making now stands at a critical juncture: threatened by mechanization, changing consumer preferences, and the gradual erosion of intergenerational knowledge transfer. This paper responds to that precarity through an innovative methodology, employing digital technologies not as replacements for human craft but as instruments of preservation, analysis, and adaptive evolution.

The study pursues several interconnected objectives: First, it seeks to digitally preserve the unique motifs, intricate designs, materials, and detailed processes involved in Pulla-making. It also aims to document the various tools utilized by artisans, drawing on both written records and direct interviews with craftspeople to compile a comprehensive historical account. Additionally, the research delves into the innovative potential of AI-generated designs, evaluating how modern technology could complement or enhance traditional aesthetics. To gauge contemporary relevance, the study surveys fifty customers spanning young to middle-aged demographics, capturing their market preferences and emotional connections to Pulla footwear. Sustainability is another crucial focus, with an examination of environmentally conscious practices in both traditional and AI-driven design approaches. Ultimately, the paper provides valuable insights into how digital technologies and artificial intelligence may impact the preservation, appreciation, and evolution of Pulla footwear, ensuring the craft remains vibrant for future generations.

Keywords: Pulla, Pulla-making, Endangered craft, Digital interventions for preservation

Cultural Threads: A Handmade Traditional Jutti Design Inspired by Rajasthani Heritage

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In Rajasthani culture, handmade stitching holds deep cultural meaning. Techniques such as Taanka, Zardozi, and Kantha are employed not merely for functionality but as an expressive art form. These stitches tell stories of Rajasthan's royal legacy, desert lifestyle, and festive spirit through elegant motifs and patterns. Each pair of juttis thus becomes a wearable canvas, reflecting centuries of artistic evolution and human connection.

Building upon this legacy, this design project introduces a handcrafted Rajasthani-inspired jutti that embodies the region's rich cultural, artistic, and ecological values through a harmonious fusion of traditional craftsmanship and modern sustainable design. These motifs are realised through a hybrid technique of hand-painting and fine embroidery, reflecting both the aesthetic finesse and skilled precision of local artisans. The design emphasises eco-conscious material innovation. The upper portion is crafted from eco-tanned, plant-based leather, ensuring minimal environmental impact, while the inner lining uses organic cotton for enhanced breathability and comfort. The hand-woven silk brocade, dyed with natural vegetable pigments, adds vibrancy, texture, and authenticity. The sole, made of soft buffalo leather, provides ergonomic flexibility and durability, while fine cotton stitching along the seams reinforces the handmade essence of the footwear.

This jutti represents more than a piece of footwear; it is a material manifestation of cultural continuity meeting contemporary ecological consciousness. By incorporating Rajasthan's revered stitching traditions with eco-friendly material innovation, the design demonstrates how indigenous craft knowledge, when thoughtfully adapted, can inform ethical fashion paradigms without diluting cultural authenticity.

Keywords: Rajasthani heritage, Rajasthani-inspired Jutti, Sustainable footwear design

Lutipono, Khulbudho, and Romongjarab: The untold story of the footwear of Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh

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Lutipono, Khulbudho, and Romongjarab were the traditional footwear worn by the inhabitants of Kinnaur centuries ago. These footwear types now discarded and lost to history, used wool, leather, and animal hair in their making. Accordingly, the present study attempts to shed light on this lost legacy by bringing attention to a) the items used in making Lutipono, Khulbudho, and Romongjarab, and their continuity and change, b) the tools used to make these traditional pieces of footwear c) the usage of these traditional footwear pieces according to seasonal change. The study uses live coverage of traditional shoe-making by a ninety-year-old indigenous woman, oral narratives, and field surveys to observe continuity, discontinuity, and change of footwear.

The study infers that a) with the turn of the century, Lutipono, Khulbudho, and Romongjarab lost their significance in society. b) From feather to leather, ancient shoemaking techniques involved a symbiotic relationship of man and animal. c) Artisans could not continue the legacy of traditional shoemaking due to a lost societal interest in these shoes. However, if these traditional shoemaking techniques are not well-documented, their antiquity will be forever lost.

This research adds significant value to the study of Indian footwear heritage, given its comprehensive approach in bringing light to the lost legacy of centuries-old indigenous shoemaking techniques. With the live coverage of the traditional shoemaking, this research essentially becomes a means to document and preserve a lost indigenous heritage.

Keywords: Lutipono, Khulbudho, Romongjarab, Footwear of Kinnaur

Jutti –A blend of cultural heritage, style and comfort

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Jutti, the renowned traditional Indian footwear, has been a refined symbol of elegance, royalty, sophistication, and glorious, rich cultural heritage across diverse regions of the Indian subcontinent for centuries. Intricately handcrafted with embroidery, embellishments, and region-specific motifs, jutti represents not merely footwear but an artistic expression deeply rooted in community identity and artisanal excellence. However, it is essential to assimilate modern design principles and contemporary aesthetics into traditional Jutti construction, which can assist in elevating both comfort through ergonomic innovations and fashion statements, thereby making it a staple in evolving Indian fashion landscapes that navigate between heritage and modernity.

This study essentially focuses on the comprehensive exploration of the craftsmanship techniques, the cultural contexts that have shaped jutti's symbolic meanings, and the analysis of existing jutti designs. This study further explores how jutti can be developed and reimagined in unique ways by thoughtfully blending traditional craft elements with current fashion trend elements, including aesthetics, and versatile designs that appeal to contemporary consumers.

Furthermore, It also investigates how jutti's evolution from a ceremonial and regional footwear to a popular and accessible footwear choice for both traditional and modern outfit ensembles, thus ensuring its endurance and relevance in a dynamic fashion ecosystem while preserving its traditional ethos.

Keywords: Jutti, Traditional Indian footwear, Jutti construction, Traditional and modern outfit

Sensorial comfort of Rajasthani Mojari

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Sensorial comfort is most important comfort of wearer. Sensorial comfort provide different sensation related to softness- harshness, smoothness- roughness, itchy- soothe, comfortable – dis-comfortable. These are criteria's and factors which is known as sensorial comfort .It is closely related with body comfort of wearer garment & shoe. So the present study asses the sensorial comfort of Rajasthan pure leather Mojari which is designed in different pure leather. This study was taken 5 pair of pure leather Mojari in different size and 5 responders were taken . This study was assess the above mentioned criteria through wear trial of pure leather Mojari. The results shows that pure leather Mojari is soft, smooth, soothe and comfortable in wear. The study has concluded that pure leather Mojari is long lasting choice of wearer in Rajasthan. Because of leather comfort, their traditional design and softness treatment, which was done on pure leather material. This study described the legacy & elegance of Rajasthan Mojari through the sensorial comfort.

Keywords: Sensorial Comfort, Mojari, wear trial, Comfort & Discomfort

Future Coded in the Past: Heritage Practices as Pathways to Sustainable Footwear in India

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This paper explores how India's ancient cultural practices, heritage, and artisanal knowledge systems have inherently created sustainable footwear ecosystems, offering valuable and scalable lessons for contemporary environmental challenges faced by the footwear industry. Through an analysis of traditional Indian footwear forms, including padukas, Kolhapuri chappals, juttis, and mojaris, this work underscores how cultural heritage embeds principles of sustainability within material selection, production processes, and consumption patterns. The study also examines several interconnected dimensions of Indian footwear traditions, for instance, the cruelty-free design philosophy of padukas that minimizes environmental degradation and the centuries-old vegetable tanning processes using natural materials. These traditions reveal refined circular economy principles predating modern sustainability discourse, where durability, reparability, and biodegradability are fundamental cultural values. Further analysis demonstrates that emotional and cultural attachment to footwear, fostered through repair culture ethnographies, naturally extends the lifespans of products, and reduces waste, leading the path to circular economy. Furthermore, community-based production systems of traditional artisans exemplify how decentralized, skill-intensive manufacturing can balance economic viability with environmental responsibility. As the global footwear industry confronts its substantial environmental footprint, Indian heritage offers dynamic solutions in a holistic framework where spiritual values, cultural meaning, and artisanal excellence converge to create truly sustainable products.

By correlating these heritage practices with life-cycle and socio-economic outcomes, the review identifies actionable research and policy priorities, digitized craft archives, artisan–science co-design pilots, standardized LCA of bio-leathers, and governance mechanisms for equitable benefit sharing that could bridge India's cultural past with low-impact footwear futures.

Keywords: Traditional Indian footwear, Circular economy principles, Modern sustainability, Low-impact footwear

A Sustainable Reinterpretation of Material Innovation in Traditional Embroidered Leather Products

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Animal-sourced leather is becoming difficult to obtain, and knowledge of natural preparation and tanning is depleting. This necessitates a sustainable reinterpretation of the traditional embroideries, merging regional heritage with contemporary eco-conscious innovation. It is important to emphasise material circularity and biodegradability, integrating traditional artisanal skills and exploring the strength of the material to withstand the intense density of different traditional embroideries.

The products are constructed from biodegradable vegetable-extract-based leather, produced through eco-friendly vegetable tanning processes that replace chromium salts with natural tannins derived from tree bark and plant polyphenols. This technique not only reduces chemical effluents but also enhances the leather's natural breathability and biodegradability. In place of synthetic foam padding, biodegradable wool fibres are used for cushioning, capitalising on wool's intrinsic elasticity, moisture regulation, and biodegradability. The lining material, developed from biodegradable plant-based textiles, provides softness, elasticity, and comfort comparable to synthetic alternatives while supporting compostable end-of-life behaviour. The use of traditional embroideries and embellishments —Taanka, Zardozi, and Kantha—reinforces both aesthetic and functional durability through low-energy, manual techniques. The stitch density of the embroideries, like herbeja, salwali, and chain stitches, was tried on biodegradable leather. The compatibility of stitch against turns, piping, and edge colouring was also checked.

Each component of leather products designed with sustainable design principles in mind—biocompatibility, renewability, and reduced carbon footprint was explored to be executable. This can further extend to the principles of bioavailability of leather manufacturing ingredients, depending on the location of birth and growth of the craft. Amalgamating ethnic craftsmanship with modern biodegradable material science, carrying a lineage of traditional embroidery, the product embodies the principles of cultural continuity and ecological responsibility. It stands as a model for sustainable heritage design, proving that tradition and material innovation can coexist to create leather that is culturally rich and environmentally regenerative.

Keywords: Biodegradable, sustainable heritage design, vegetable tanning, embroidery.

Preserving Tradition Through Technology: CAD Innovation in Kora Grass Mat Craft

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Kora grass mats, once an everyday item along with jute and palm-leaf products in every traditional Indian household, have become increasingly rare to see now, given dynamic technological shifts and industrialisation. Lost to the forces of the modern era, these sustainable objects used to play a crucial role in our daily lives. Now, the usage of these eco-friendly products has taken a significant dip over the past decades. This study explores how Computer-Aided Design (CAD) can be integrated within traditional Kora grass craft-making, bridging indigenous knowledge and digital technology to develop zero-waste products, including baskets, mats, and packaging accessories.

Additionally, this research also highlights how CAD can streamline cultural preservation while fostering eco-friendly design practices. The researcher has carried out a pilot study in local craft markets in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, including Rayadurgam, Gachibowli, and Film Nagar, focusing on craft availability, design adaptation, and artisan engagement. The findings of this study offer a replicable model to digitally document endangered craft-making practices, ensuring effective knowledge transmission and possible pathways for design innovation rooted in traditional knowledge.

This piece of research brings our attention to the endangered legacy of the Kora grass products. This study is especially relevant today with an ongoing discussion on sustainability. Accordingly, in the dynamic cross-section of traditional knowledge and digital interventions, this research explores how we can integrate more zero-waste practices by transitioning to Kora Grass crafts.

Keywords: Kora grass craft, Computer-Aided Design (CAD), Indigenous craft, Sustainability

New advancement in vegan leather

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The rise of vegan leather has been taking the global footwear industry by storm, fundamentally remodelling material choices, design philosophies, and consumer demands. It is no longer merely a material gatekept by niche vegan brands or relegated to alternative fashion circles. With the skyrocketing demand for more sustainable, cruelty-free, and eco-friendly product lines driven by growing environmental consciousness and ethical concerns, the integration of vegan leather in contemporary footwear design has emerged as a viable and increasingly mainstream alternative to conventional leather footwear made from cattle hides. This shift reflects broader transformations in how consumers, designers, and manufacturers conceptualise responsibility, materiality, and innovation in the fashion ecosystem.

Nonetheless, several complex ethical, economic, and practical issues complicate the incorporation of vegan leather within the Indian footwear industry specifically. These challenges include questions about the true environmental impact of synthetic alternatives (particularly petroleum-based materials, PVC), the socio-economic implications for traditional leather-working communities whose livelihoods depend on conventional tanning and cobbling practices, concerns about durability and performance compared to genuine leather, and the cultural significance of leather craft in India's artisanal heritage. The present study explores all the multifaceted issues associated with the integration of vegan leather and proposes possible solutions that balance innovation with social responsibility.

Additionally, it provides a detailed comparative analysis of vegan leather's prospects in the modern footwear world, examining material innovations such as mushroom leather, pineapple fibre, and lab-grown alternatives. The recent consumer demands for sustainability and eco-friendly materials, exploring vegan leather as a potential solution for the usage of conventional leather, demand rigorous and context-sensitive research. Accordingly, this research adds significant value to the national seminar by proposing innovative frameworks for responsible vegan leather integration that honour both ecological imperatives and India's rich cobbling heritage.

Keywords: Vegan leather, mushroom leather, pineapple fibre, Responsible vegan leather

An Exploration of Traditional Foot Anthropometry and Functionality Aspects in Rajasthani Mojri: A Gap to Bridge Ergonomically

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Rajasthani Mojris, characteristically embellished, flat-bottomed footwear fashioned from locally-cured leather, have transformed into a coveted global fashion artefact from a mere utilitarian necessity. From safeguarding the feet of warriors in uneven terrains of wars to adorning the feet of celestial beings carved on the temple walls, Mojris are marked by their distinctive curled toes. Following the Mughal era, the Mojri diversified, with distinct styles emerging from various princely states, each ascribing regional identity to the craft. While the tradition was sustained by skilled Mochi communities, its modern chapter delineates a powerful revival.

Rajasthani Mojris are generally constructed without a last or with non-standardized lasts. Originally custom-made, the gradual shift toward retail necessitated a sizing system. The traditional method determined standard sole length as 3.5 times the length of four fingers, ensuring optimal fitment. Lately, Mojris have adopted modern footwear lasts; however, meta-tarsal head and heel dimensions are ambiguously measured. Consequently, readily available variants have elicited complaints of disrupted toe splay and heel cuts, relegating Mojri to collectable, fashionable traditional footwear with compromised comfort and usability.

Design interventions, such as open-toed Mojris and fully backless mules, have circumvented these issues while preserving the embroidered upper. The outer sole, traditionally made of buffalo leather and stitched with waxed thread, was designed to meet occupational demands: work intensity determined stitch density for sole durability. This traditional knowledge of sole crafting has eroded, rendering contemporary soles slip-prone. The inept upper construction, hard insole, and soles with inadequate grip and strength in Rajasthani Mojri require restoration through the revival of traditional knowledge and subsequent ergonomic interventions, a synthesis essential to reclaiming both heritage authenticity and functional integrity.

Keywords: Rajasthani Mojris, Traditional Foot Anthropometry, Ergonomic interventions

Integrating Nirmal Art Aesthetics and Ergonomic Innovation into Traditional Kolhapuri Chappals

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Considered a hallmark of Indian footwear craftsmanship, Kolhapuri chappals are celebrated for their durability, hand-stitched leather construction, and cultural identity across the world. However, in contemporary contexts, users face discomfort during extended wear due to the hard leather insole. To address these growing concerns and preserve the ethos of Kolhapuri chappals, this study proposes a dual innovation: aesthetic enhancement through Nirmal art integration and ergonomic improvement through a foam insole.

A centuries-old painting tradition originating from Telangana, Nirmal art is renowned for its natural pigments, golden hues, and floral, faunal, and mythological illustrations. The meticulous hand-painting process not only enhances the visual appeal of the chappals but also revitalises declining indigenous art forms by providing a new means, market, and application. Concurrently, the addition of a soft foam layer beneath the leather insole elevates cushioning, shock absorption, and overall comfort without compromising traditional aesthetics, thereby addressing modern consumer demands.

This research proposes an innovative model to rejuvenate a traditional declining art form while also solving the hard insole issues faced by the users during extended wear. Accordingly, the discussion of this dual innovation model garners the research with much-needed visibility and further strengthens the possibilities of future research in this field.

Keywords: Nirmal art aesthetics, Ergonomic innovation, Traditional Kolhapuri Chappals

The Modernization and Preservation of Ladakhi 'Papu' Footwear

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Pabu (also known Papu) is a traditional Ladakhi thick, felted boot made from yak wool and hair and ornamented with yak leather. The tops of the Pabu stockings are made with locally sourced Nambu (worsted wool). Made to adapt to the cold climate of the region, Pabu provides necessary warmth and protection from snow, which makes it a vital part of everyday Ladakhi life. People of Ladakh have been making Pabu for a long time, known as Thikma. Before that, there were other design types such as Khulu and Lapul Pabu used by Ladakhis, but later, people of Nubra Valley made Thikma Pabu, which is now majorly used by the traditional dancers of Ladakh. Nonetheless, Pabu is used in Ladakh on a daily basis, and it is also a symbol of regional culture and identity. The traditional, entirely handmade Pabu takes 2-3 days to be completed.

However, the craft faces an array of challenges because of the rapid modernisation in the region. Apart from younger generations leaning towards imported shoes, its time-intensive nature of production, coupled with a lack of standardised sizing system, threatens the sustenance of the craft. Accordingly, this research proposes an innovative framework to solve scale and standardisation processes by integrating technological interventions. This framework implements a 'last' process to develop an appropriate sizing system and faster production, resulting in reduced manufacturing time. The integration of these modern interventions scales Pabu production more competitively and durably, appealing to younger generations without sacrificing its core functionality.

Moreover, this framework also focuses on the human element and proposes upskilling of artisans by blending traditional methods and cutting-edge technologies. Lastly, it concludes that the harmonisation of traditional expertise with digital efficiencies can scale up the production and manufacturing of Papu, making it a sustainable choice and ensuring its cultural and functional integrity.

Keywords: Papu, Modernisation of Papu, Preservation of Papu

Sole Stories: Reimagining Indian Craft Narratives through Contemporary Footwear Design

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The rich tapestry of India's craft heritage speaks through its textures, colours, and hands of the unnamed artisans who weave it. Inspired by that spirit, this study explores how traditional footwear such as mojri, jutti, and kolhapuri can be reimagined as a means of cultural storytelling in the arena of modern design. Essentially, it aims to bridge the gap between craft and contemporary aesthetics by infusing indigenous techniques with modern materials and silhouettes.

Beyond this, the study focuses on translating folklore and regional identity into wearable narratives that retain authenticity but also embrace modern functionality. Putting the motifs, patterns, and local craftsmanship under an analytical lens, the paper attempts to ascertain pathways to preserve cultural memory in design without freezing it in the past. Specifically, the paper also conceptualises a design language that celebrates imperfection, values the artisan's touch, and adds an emotional layer to mass-produced footwear.

The approach advocated by the paper not only focuses on the revitalisation of ancient traditions but also reinterprets them. It envisions footwear not as an accessory but as a storytelling means where each sole, stitch, and surface becomes a canvas that narrates a tale of belonging, adaptation, and resilience. The project also illuminates how thoughtful designs charged with traditional wisdom can empower artisan communities, sustain heritage, and inspire global appreciation for the refined legacy of Indian craft.

Keywords: Indian craft design, Reimagination, Regional identity, Heritage sustenance

Craft as Cultural Memory: Documenting the Decline of Traditional Cobbler Practices in Hyderabad

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The stainless steel modular iron tin sheds painted yellow along Hyderabad's roadsides- shops characteristically bearing the suffix 'cap' and housing small shrines dedicated to Sant Ravidas- are undergoing profound change. These modest establishments, run by local cobbler craftsmen, once formed crucial nodes in the city's artisanal economy. Laxman Mankikar operates one such shop in Miyapur, positioned on the left side of the main road. Trained meticulously by his forefathers in the complete art of footwear construction, he learned under his father's tutelage to build shoes entirely from raw materials. Today, however, he no longer creates footwear from scratch as demand for handcrafted shoes from local craftsmen's shops has all but disappeared.

Hyderabad, as a Tier-I metropolitan centre dominated by franchise and brand culture, has witnessed a decisive shift toward ready-made commodities and e-commerce convenience. The city's consumers increasingly bypass tactile, face-to-face transactions in favour of algorithmic recommendations and doorstep delivery. This infrastructural and cultural transformation has precipitated the decline of urban craftsmanship. In an era saturated with mechanised, artificially optimised services, handmade goods carry prohibitively high price points compared to mass-manufactured equivalents. Economic precarity thus compels craftsmen to abandon hereditary vocations for anonymous wage labour, for trades that offer substantial income but strip away cultural recognition, community identity, and the spiritual dignity historically associated with artisanal work. This research investigates the lived realities of Hyderabad's remaining cobbler craftsmen, tracing the materials, tools, and historical trajectories that constitute their practice. Through ethnographic documentation of cobbler shops and their evolving relationships with urban society, the study examines traditional footwear-making methodologies and the embodied knowledge systems they represent.

The analysis argues that intensifying capitalist urbanisation systematically erodes the spiritual and philosophical dimensions of *Shilpa*—the sacred conception of craft as devotional practice rather than mere commodity production. Industrialisation, coupled with the proliferation of accessible yet culturally deracinated employment options, poses existential threats to craft survival in the twenty-first century, transforming centuries-old knowledge traditions into endangered cultural heritage within a single generation.

Keywords: Hyderabad traditional cobbler practices, Industrialisation, Capitalist urbanisation, Traditional footwear-making methodologies

From Functionality to Validation- From Appropriation to Understanding!

Sai Charan Palakurthi

Deccan Heritage Foundation

Beyond its pragmatic status, footwear in India has been significant historically; it is a mundane object pulsating with nuanced responses to climatic conditions, geographical landscapes, and cultural practices. From archaeological findings and iconographic depictions to anthropological evidence, traditional Indian footwear manifests a profound understanding of durability, material adaptability, comfort, and craftsmanship. Nonetheless, in contemporary contexts, the cultural logic underpinning this heritage has undergone a consequential transformation. India has witnessed the displacement of the functional and contextual relevance of indigenous footwear traditions amid growing global fashion influence and aesthetic conformity. The increasing adoption of footwear as a marker of fashion statement by contemporary consumers, rather than a means of lived experience and cultural memory, has become a prominent marker of this transformation.

Paradoxically, while Indian consumers gravitate towards Western trends, international designers and brands have begun to revalue and reinterpret India's local footwear traditions—such as the mojari, kolhapuri chappal, and paduka—within narratives of sustainability, craftsmanship, and authenticity. This reversal reflects earlier trajectories witnessed in the cultural appropriation of Indian textile arts such as chintz, Madras checks, and Indigo. The model of cultural extraction and then rebranding underscores the immediacy for India to reclaim, represent, and recontextualise its own material heritage before it is reshaped by the Western creative economies.

Using a critical scholastic lens, the paper will foreground the historical evolution, material culture, and socio-economic dimensions of Indian footwear, while engaging with issues of cultural appropriation, identity politics, and sustainable heritage. By reflecting on precedents from the textile industry, the seminar aims to advocate for an informed and self-representative approach to preserving and narrating India's rich footwear legacy.

Keywords: Traditional Indian footwear, Socio-economic dimensions of Indian footwear, Preservation of Indian footwear legacy

How Sacred Footwear Traditions can lead to Social Welfare: India's Siddhidatri Paharwala Temple Model

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Indian footwear transcends mere utilitarian function, embodying profound spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions that shape both individual identity and community well-being. This qualitative study examines the sacred footwear tradition at the Siddhidatri Paharwala Temple (Pahadi Mata Mandir) in Bhopal, where devotees ritually offer shoes and slippers to the goddess—a practice revealing a distinctive convergence of religious devotion, cultural expression, and social welfare. The tradition exemplifies how spiritual customs harbor dormant mechanisms for community cohesion and mutual care, demonstrating their potential adaptability as resources for addressing contemporary social challenges. By investigating this living ritual, the research illuminates how material offerings rooted in faith can simultaneously fulfill sacred obligations and pragmatic communal needs, suggesting that inherited religious practices contain embedded wisdom relevant to modern contexts of social equity and collective responsibility.

The research demonstrates how the Siddhidatri Paharwala Temple tradition transforms devotional shoe offerings into a structured social welfare mechanism ingrained within ritual practice. Donated children's footwear undergoes systematic redistribution to economically marginalized women and girls, simultaneously addressing practical mobility needs and upholding human dignity within vulnerable communities. This reciprocal system exemplifies how inherited religious customs function as lived frameworks for communal solidarity, spiritual expression, and cultural transmission—while simultaneously encoding principles of social responsibility and gender justice. The practice effectively constitutes an indigenous grassroots support network, operating outside formal institutional structures.

The study's concentrated focus on a single temple site in Bhopal, necessitated by resource constraints, circumscribes the generalisability of findings to India's broader landscape of footwear-related ritual behaviors, which vary considerably across regional, sectarian, and caste contexts. Ultimately, this research interrogates the dynamic intersection of footwear tradition, spiritual devotion, and gender-inclusive social welfare in contemporary India, revealing how sacred material culture can serve simultaneously as a theological expression and a pragmatic instrument of social justice.

Keywords: Sacred footwear traditions, Siddhidatri Paharwala Temple, Footwear symbolism, Communal solidarity

Mochadu: The story of the crafted footwear of Chamba in Himachal Pradesh

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Mochadu, the indigenous term for footwear in Himachal Pradesh's Chamba district, embodies a refined craft legacy spanning its historical production processes, distinctive vocabularies of design, and recent recognition through Geographical Indication (GI) tagging as Chamba Chappal. This study focuses on three interconnected dimensions: first, the historical trajectory of mochadu (Chamba Chappal) from the nineteenth century onward, exploring the patterns of continuity and transformation; second, the tools, materials, and technical methods employed in the making of mochadu; and third, the artisanal communities sustaining this centuries-old hereditary craft. Within Chamba's vernacular song traditions, the term mochadu encapsulates cultural resonance across social strata- from royal patrons to commoners, mirroring its profound embedding in regional identity.

Methodologically, the research integrates an interdisciplinary approach, synthesising available literature, oral narratives preserved in indigenous songs, and persistent traditional practices in footwear production. The study examines leather processing in its varied forms and configurations, alongside supplementary materials including silk thread and leather cord used in construction and embellishment.

The findings reveal the following insights: first, Chamba chappal (mochadu) has undergone subsequent developmental phases, representing an ongoing process of adaptive evolution responsive to changing consumer preferences and market demands. Second, while contemporary production has integrated new tools and techniques, especially in tanning and leather cutting, the craft retains fundamental elements of traditional mochadu-making methods, demonstrating technological layering rather than a complete replacement. Third, Chamba's artisan families continue to transmit generational knowledge systems, preserving hereditary craft lineages. The GI tagging has proven instrumental in establishing global market recognition while simultaneously safeguarding the craft's cultural authenticity and historical integrity, ensuring both commercial viability and heritage preservation.

Keywords: Mochadu, Chamba Chappal, Interdisciplinary approach, Indigenous footwear

Semiotics of the Soles: Travellers, Wayfarers and Itinerant Subjects in Leather Puppets of Karnataka

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Togalu Bombeyaata, the tradition of leather puppetry in Karnataka, is a living heritage that intertwines tangible craftsmanship with intangible cultural expressions. Made by the nomadic Killekyata/Shillekyata community from treated cattle hides and painted with vegetable colours, the puppets animate tales from Hindu mythology, epics, and local folklore. Togalu Bombeyaata holds deeper socio-cultural significance. Historically marginalised within the caste hierarchy, the Killekyata community transforms leather, a material marred by ritual impurity, into sacred mediums for storytelling.

While the puppets portray diverse characters, a clear visual distinction separates divine figures from mortals. The gods are typically barefoot; mortals are seen wearing stylized footwear. Footwear signifies worldliness and movement; its absence denotes sanctity and divine status. This visual scheme carries a complex semiotics of purity, mobility, and social order.

This paper argues that these decisions are far from ornamental but are loaded with palimpsestic meanings. On the primary level, footwear is metaphor for the social and cosmic order, a pragmatic need for mortals to traverse difficult topographies. Gods and goddesses being otherworldly can move effortlessly without any protective barrier. On the second level, it symbolizes mobility, encounter, exchange, drawing parallels with the geographies of trade, migration, and the nomadic nature of certain professions (traders, soldiers, performers, messengers, soothsayers). Thus, footwear reflects the itinerant lifestyle. On a reflexive level, by depicting human figures with footwear, Killekyata craftsmen may also be making a comment on their own restricted social mobility. The paper demonstrates how footwear in leather puppets becomes a marker of social distinction and identity.

Keywords: Togalu Bombeyaata, Indigenous puppetry practices, Semiotics of leather, Occupational identity, Caste-based marginalization

Influence of Folk Art and Heritage on Global Footwear Design Trends

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The contemporary footwear fashion has undergone rapid changes in recent years, given the surge of sustainability and a retrospective journey to traditions. This research paper explores the evolving influence of folk art and cultural heritage on global footwear design trends, foregrounding how traditional aesthetics are being redefined within the framework of current fashion ecosystems and dynamic technological innovation. It investigates the robust intersection of heritage-inspired motifs, indigenous craftsmanship techniques, and contemporary design practices that collectively shape current global footwear markets and consumer preferences.

Through the integration of a qualitative and comparative methodological approach, including in-depth case studies of international brands and artisan collaborations across different geographical contexts, the research examines how designers strategically integrate folk elements—such as hand-painting, embroidery, weaving, and regional symbolism—into modern footwear silhouettes and constructions. These findings further underscore that the incorporation of cultural narratives and traditional craftsmanship not only elevates brand identity and differentiation but also deepens consumer engagement and perceived authenticity across diverse markets. Additionally, sustainability-driven innovations and digital reimaginations of folk patterns are literally reinterpreting how heritage is preserved, disseminated, and commercialised in current fashion economies. While international brands tend to stylise and adapt cultural motifs primarily for trend relevance and mass appeal, localised and artisan-led initiatives focus more authentically on craft preservation, community empowerment, and cultural integrity.

The study concludes that the convergence of heritage, design innovation, and ethical production practices not only strengthens cross-cultural appreciation and dialogue but also drives meaningful differentiation and long-term economic value in the increasingly competitive global footwear industry, suggesting that culturally rooted design represents both a commercial opportunity and a responsibility toward heritage stewardship.

Keywords: Contemporary footwear fashion, Sustainability-driven innovations, Craft preservation

A Tale of footwear with Resin art

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Resin art is a recent trending art. Resin art is recently uses in end use application. A form of art that use a liquid epoxy resin mixed with colorants to create a variety of artworks, which then harden to a durable glossy artistic finished. Resin art commonly used in artified home décor products, show pieces abstract painting on canvas, wood panels, functional item, Jewellery, Coaster, cutting boards and decorative home goods etc. Resin can be poured over existing artwork like painting, photos or alcohol ink to create high gloss protective layers. The present study design a resin art footwear with the use of basic sole as a component of sole making then and sustainable material for upper material. The strips are formed using resin to add both strength and aesthetics. Addition research also shows that resin provides durability, shine, making it suitable for experimental fashion concepts. It's can concluded that resin art is a good material for designing creative and unique footwear model. Resin art footwear is development of beautiful and elegant art, which inspire many in future footwear design in the footwear industry.

Keywords: Resin art, footwear, artwork, designing & sustainability

The Sacred Sole: Cultural and Religious Perspectives on Feet and Footwear in Indian Tradition

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This research paper explores the cultural, religious, and historical significance of feet and footwear in Indian society, underscoring how the foot is venerated across generations and revered in religious and artistic contexts. References to feet and foot worship permeate Indian cultural traditions, with the feet of elders, teachers, idols, and even innocent persons occupying special places in rituals, forgiveness, and romantic symbolism. The study investigates India's longstanding characterization as a "barefoot country," considering how restrictions on footwear among Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain communities reflected deep spiritual meanings and social norms. Drawing on the extensive documentation inspired by The Bata Shoe Museum Foundation, the paper examines examples of traditional Indian footwear, from toe-knob sandals favored by mendicants to opulent embroidered shoes of the wealthy. Rare archival materials and field research illuminate lesser-known Buddhist and Jain regulations on monastic footwear and profiles regional craftsmanship, such as Kolhapuri chappals, Jodhpur juttis, Indo-Tibetan felt boots, and Ladakhi fibre shoes. This interdisciplinary study emphasizes the intricate interplay between religious devotion, social customs, artistry, and the evolution of footwear in India.

Keywords: Footwear traditions, Religious significance, Traditional Indian footwear, Cultural symbolism, Village craftsmanship

Consumer Perception of Tradition-Inspired Contemporary Footwear in the Indian Market

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With the growing dominance of global franchises and brands in the Indian market, traditional footwear stands at a critical crossroads between revival and oblivion. This study investigates how Indian consumers perceive tradition-inspired contemporary footwear, specifically examining the interplay between modern design interventions, artisanal craftsmanship, and cultural referencing in shaping purchasing behavior. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research surveys one hundred urban and semi-urban consumers across three geographically distinct locations, analyzing key variables including perceived authenticity, aesthetic appeal, affordability, sustainability consciousness, and the influence of brand narrative on preference formation.

The findings reveal that consumers respond positively to footwear that transparently integrates historical motifs and artisanal techniques with contemporary silhouettes and clearly articulated value propositions. Several factors emerge as critical purchase determinants: perceived authenticity of craft heritage, tangible comfort and durability, and transparent storytelling regarding origin and production methods. While price remains a barrier to mass-market adoption, its impact diminishes significantly among niche, design-conscious consumer segments. Generational differences surface in sustainability priorities as younger consumers demonstrate heightened receptivity to environmental claims and global brand visibility. Regional variations indicate a stronger preference for locally recognisable craft expressions, suggesting the importance of geographic specificity in design language.

Based on these insights, the study offers strategic recommendations for designers and marketers: prioritise collaborative co-creation with traditional craftspeople, balance heritage aesthetics with contemporary functionality, and adopt tiered pricing strategies to address diverse market segments while preserving artisan livelihoods.

Keywords: Contemporary footwear, Consumer surveys, Consumer perception, Contemporary functionality

Contemporary Sneakers as Carriers of Tradition: Exploring Consumer Perception and Design Integration of Indian Embroidery in Modern Footwear

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Contemporary design in India is witnessing a renewed focus on integrating traditional crafts into modern lifestyle products, creating innovative expressions of cultural continuity. This study investigates how Indian embroidery techniques are being incorporated into contemporary sneakers, blending heritage aesthetics with functional and global appeal. A mixed-method approach, combining visual documentation and a consumer perception survey, was employed to assess user attitudes towards embroidered sneakers in terms of aesthetics, comfort, cultural relevance, and purchase intent.

Findings indicate a strong positive response to embroidered sneakers as culturally expressive and aesthetically unique products, though concerns remain regarding durability and maintenance. The study highlights the potential for sustainable, craft-based innovation in the footwear market, bridging artisanship with contemporary global trends.

Keywords: Embroidered sneakers, contemporary footwear designs, mixed method approach

Footwear as living heritage: Integrating traditional designs into global fashion industry

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As contemporary consumers increasingly gravitate toward sustainability and cultural rootedness, the global footwear fashion industry has turned to cultural heritage as a vital source of creative and ethical inspiration. This transfiguration has further invited a renewed appreciation for traditional craftsmanship and indigenous design practices. Inspired by this shift, the present study explores footwear as living heritage, emphasising how traditional designs, materials, and artisanal techniques can be integrated into global fashion. Additionally, this paper also examines how conventional footwear- a powerful multifaceted symbol of cultural identity, regional aesthetics, and sustainable practices can be reinterpreted for modern consumers while preserving its originality.

In order to achieve that purpose, this study has integrated an array of case studies of brands and communities that have successfully amalgamated heritage with innovation. Based on the findings, the research devises strategies for promoting cultural preservation through design changes, ethical sourcing, and effective storytelling. Additionally, the research also addresses challenges of commercialisation, cultural appropriation, and the need for fair recognition of the unnamed artisans in global value chains.

The study concludes that reinterpreting and redefining traditional footwear as living heritage can help build a sustainable fashion ecosystem in which cultural continuity, creativity, and commerce can coexist. Resultantly, adherence to this approach can lead to economic empowerment and cultural resilience in an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: Footwear as a living heritage, Traditional designs, Cultural preservation

Designing of Cord Footwear for Girls

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Cord is a form of represent the visual effects. Cord is symbolic designing of footwear. Cord is visual communication through the designing of footwear. The present study design a pair of footwear, which is footwear modal design with 100 % conversion method & sustainable practice for girls. Jute & palm is taken as an eco-friendly material. Material procurement of Jute & Palm is done in FDDI Jodhpur. Palm tree available in campus and Jute available in campus as a seconds in store. Palm trees is a perennial plant often with a tall single trunk and a cluster of large, evergreen leaves called fronds at the top, belongs to arecaceae family, common in warm climate, palm grows as trees shrubs or vines and produce a variety of fruits such as coconuts dates and betel nuts. Palm trees provide long leaves which is utilised as a material for construction of products. Palm tree leaves uses to design plates, bowls, handicraft, decorative items, roofing , housing material, historically writing material, packaging material, composed and mulch, toy making etc. It means palm tree leaves are flexible and durable to design and weave. So present study has design a footwear modal, with jute material design the sole of footwear and upper part design with palm tree leaves then design and construct. This study concluded that sustainable designing is fruitful for current scenario and continue practice of market.

Keywords: Cord- Design, Jute yarn, and palm tree leaves, eco-friendly design, and sustainable practice

Multifunctional footwear with essence of traditional Rajasthani art form

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Multifunctional footwear is the demand of present world. But adding a Rajasthani folk art creates an essence of cultural beauty, depicting the history describing the importance of the folk art even today also. It is the method of conserving the traditional heritage art of Indian artisans. Multifunctional footwear is the need for today's running world where the importance of time is the best way to stand out. It saves time, investment in multiple footwear and tensions to carry multiple foot-wear for different occasions. Just inserting a block will give you a block heels while removing the heels can give you comfortable flats any moment. For party you can go with the pencil heels, for festive occasion put on the detachable brooch, add ones like embroidery belts, beaded brooch creates an Indo-Western effect with the essence of Rajasthani folk art. It highlights the story behind the footwear describing its roots and India the cultural heritage of the world with existence of artforms for more than 700 years. Thewa- the traditional art form originating from Pratapgadh Rajasthan, involves fusing an intricately hand-carved sheets would emboss in footwear would give it another level of royalty and expression of heritage. The present study designs a pair of multifunctional footwear for different purpose with the use of traditional art of Rajasthan Thewa art. This study has created a beautiful pair of footwear. The study concluded that multi-functional footwear with traditional art creates an elegant design provide to market.

Keywords: Multifunctional footwear, Designing, purposeful, Mixture of traditional art and art preservation

Role of Historical Costume in Footwear Designing

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This study traces the evolution of footwear across distinct historical periods, revealing how classical design vocabularies continue to inform contemporary footwear aesthetics and offer modern designers a rich repository of inspiration. Beyond mere function, historical footwear operates as material culture, encoding social hierarchies, cultural values, and the broader sartorial systems of their respective eras.

The present study undertakes a cartographical comparison of costume traditions from Aryan to Dravidian civilisations, examining how contemporary designers engage with ancient aesthetics: the elongated silhouettes of medieval poulaines, the dramatic elevation of Renaissance chopines, or the ornamental complexity of 18th-century buckle work. Through close analysis of original artifacts, the research illuminates traditional materiality, silk, velvet, specialised leatherwork, and construction techniques that modern practitioners reimagine, whether as homage to heritage or as springboard for innovation. Chronologically, the study begins with ancient footwear traditions: the elegant simplicity and social codification evident in Egyptian sandals and Roman caligae. Progressing through the medieval and Renaissance periods, it examines status-bearing forms like the poulaine and the towering chopine, analysing how these extreme silhouettes prefigured subsequent platform trends. The investigation then turns to the structural refinement of heeled footwear in later centuries, tracing the deepening relationship between shoe design and the overall architecture of dress. The analysis demonstrates that footwear has historically functioned as a visual indicator of status and social position. Equally significant, however, are the periodic counter-movements throughout history, moments when practicality and comfort challenged ornamental excess, ultimately reshaping the trajectory of design innovation.

Keywords: Historical Costume, Periods, Footwear & Conclusive

Footwear of the Hills: The Craft, Culture, and Continuity of Konghlan Boots in North Bengal

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ICOMOS

Historically, shoes in India have served more than a utilitarian purpose: they have been a rich symbol of geography, material culture, and social identity. The innumerable regional variations in design and craftsmanship over centuries have shown how diverse the Indian climate, artisanal legacy, and communal practices are. From Punjab's embroidered Juttis to Maharashtra's leather Kolhapuris, every region has developed its own distinct design of shoes. These differences further underscore the profound connection between craft, environment, and cultural expression. In the broader context of India's rich footwear legacy, the lesser-known footwear traditions of Bengal stand out for their practical design, use of sustainable materials, and detailed craftsmanship. This paper primarily focuses on the regional styles, materials, and craftsmanship of traditional Indian footwear, and specifically emphasises Konglan, the hand-stitched leather boots of West Bengal.

Originating from the Northern hills of the state, especially Darjeeling and Kalimpong, these knee-high boots are made of leather, wool, and silk brocade, expertly crafted by the Bhutia and Tibetan communities. The making of Konglan places a strong emphasis on resilience and climate adaptation, designed to withstand the region's harsh and frigid climate. These shoes are versatile in design, with fur-lined interiors and uppers richly adorned with floral embroideries. Significantly, the craft embodies both usefulness and a rich cultural legacy bequeathed over generations, becoming a symbol of Himalayan Workmanship.

This study aims to examine the Konglan as both a material artifact and a cultural representation, exploring how its design, production methods, and functional attributes reflect the ecological context, socio-economic conditions, and artisanal knowledge systems characteristic of Bengal's rural and tribal landscapes.

Keywords: Konglan, Regional variations, Footwear of the hills, Himalayan Workmanship

Cultural Identity and Craftsmanship in Indian Regional Footwear: An Analysis of Kolhapuri and Jodhpuri Styles

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Regional footwear from India reflects the country's people, culture, and geography uniquely. In order to comprehend how traditional craftsmanship continues to affect India's fashion identity, this study focuses on two classic styles: The Jodhpuri Juttis from Rajasthan and the Kolhapuri Chappals from Maharashtra.

The study highlights the close ties between artists and their local heritage by tracking their historical origins, materials, skills, and design features. It also looks at how, while maintaining their authenticity, these age-old crafts have changed to suit contemporary preferences and global markets. Through comparative analysis, this research reveals how distinct environmental conditions and socio-economic contexts have modified divergent aesthetic vocabularies: the richly decorated and embellished character of Jodhpuri jutti versus the minimalist, utilitarian elegance of Maharashtra's agrarian landscape embodied by Kolhapuri Chappals.

The study also explores the potential brought about by ethical and sustainable fashion movements, as well as the difficulties local artisans confront, such as commercialization, copying, and the loss of traditional skills. This study ultimately demonstrates that Jodhpuri Juttis and Kolhapuri Chappals are eternal representations of India's creative spirit, dedication, and sense of cultural pride that go far beyond simple footwear.

Keywords: Cultural identity, Indian Craftsmanship, Kolhapuri Chappals, Jodhpuri Juttis

Beyond Barefoot: Tales of Footwear in Ancient Indian Sculpture

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India has often been depicted as a barefoot country owing to its climatic conditions, religious and cultural practices. In India, being barefoot is not just a mere choice or habit, but it is also influenced by inherent and profound beliefs rooted in traditions, comfort, and practicality. The Sanskrit word Pāda literally means foot, and in ancient religions such as Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, Pāda is a symbol of veneration and spiritual reverence. From the timeless tales of the epics and centuries-old sculptures to the recorded histories, worship of paduka and footprints is a common ancient practice embedded deeply within ritual life.

However, this paper attempts to move beyond the dominant "barefoot tales" to identify and analyse the shod figures that appear prominently through archaeological and iconographical evidence spanning from the Mauryan to Gupta eras. The study integrates an investigative methodological approach to comprehend how religious symbolism, social status, occupational identity, and cultural contact shaped ancient Indian footwear practices and their visual representations. In order to do so, the study has systematically examined sculptures, panels, and figurines from major archaeological sites such as Bharhut, Mathura, and Sanchi. Based on the findings, the study infers that in ancient India, footwear was not just an indispensable part of everyday outfits but carried a larger, more complex narrative imbued with layered cultural and religious symbolism, thereby providing profound insights into India's enriched and multifaceted cultural heritage and the nuanced ways material culture expressed identity, belief, and belonging.

Keywords: Ancient Indian footwear, Religious symbolism, Systematic examination, Cultural symbolism

From Paduka to Philosophy: An Archaeological Exploration of Footwear and Holistic Health in Indian Tradition

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In ancient India, footwear served far more than the utilitarian purpose of protecting feet from rugged terrain and climate. It functioned as a material embodiment of philosophical thought, cultural beliefs, and holistic well-being, reflecting a civilisation's nuanced comprehension of the interconnectedness between body, mind, and spirit. This paper examines how traditional Indian footwear, especially the wooden Paduka, embodied sophisticated ideas of balance, health, and spirituality that were vital to everyday life and ritual practice across the subcontinent.

Drawing on ancient scriptures such as Ayurvedic texts and the Dharmashastras, temple engravings, sculptural representations, and archaeological evidence from sites spanning different historical periods, this study identifies how the design and materiality of footwear were intricately intertwined with the body's physiological needs and the mind's ethical and spiritual discipline. For instance, the characteristically elevated soles and knob-like toe grips of Paduka were not merely stylistic choices but deliberate design interventions that assisted in maintaining correct posture, stimulating pressure points aligned with Ayurvedic principles, and ensuring comfort during long hours of standing or walking. Meanwhile, their minimalist form, devoid of excessive ornamentation in most traditional contexts, symbolised profound philosophical values: humility before the divine, detachment from material excess, and the innate sanctity associated with barefoot walking, translated into portable form.

Concurrently, the study explores regional variations in materials (sandalwood, teak, bamboo) and craftsmanship techniques, revealing how communities adapted footwear design in response to local geographies, climatic conditions, and ways of living. By weaving archaeological insights with philosophical knowledge systems embedded in classical texts, this research interprets ancient Indian footwear as a significant manifestation of a holistic vision of design, one that bridged the physical realm to the spiritual, the earthly to the transcendent, serving as a reminder that even the most mundane objects can express intricate connections between human body, mind, and the sacred when charged with profound philosophical wisdom.

Keywords: Paduka, Analysis of ancient scriptures, Craftsmanship techniques, Ancient Indian footwear

Threads of Elegance: Integrating Kantha Embroidery into Men's Formal Leather Footwear

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This study explores the amalgamation of Bengal's traditional Kantha embroidery with contemporary men's formal leather footwear to create an elite and culturally rooted design intervention. The research aims to reinterpret the centuries-old craft of Kantha—traditionally practiced on fabric—by translating its intricate stitches, motifs, and narrative symbolism onto leather, a medium associated with durability, sophistication, and timeless value. The project particularly focuses on conventional men's formal silhouettes such as Oxford, Derby, and Monk shoes, elevating them with handcrafted Kantha embellishments that embody both artisanal authenticity and modern luxury.

From a methodological standpoint, the study employs qualitative research through fieldwork-based primary data. Direct engagement with local women artisans in rural Bengal facilitated first-hand understanding of their traditional embroidery processes, material adaptability, and perceptions toward working with leather. Complementary survey forms, interviews, and process documentation provided insights into product feasibility, aesthetic appeal, and consumer acceptance in the premium formalwear segment. Beyond design innovation, the paper situates Kantha's integration within a larger cultural and socio-economic framework. It discusses how this initiative contributes to the preservation of a regional heritage craft, empowers artisans through skill diversification, and opens new employment and market opportunities in the luxury footwear industry.

By positioning leather footwear as a sustainable, long-lasting alternative to fast fashion, the research also reinforces notions of conscious consumption and cultural continuity. In conclusion, this study demonstrates how design can serve as a bridge between tradition and modernity—transforming a vernacular embroidery technique into a contemporary expression of elegance, heritage, and craftsmanship for men's formal footwear.

Keywords: Kantha Embroidery, Men's Formal Leather Footwear, Fast fashion alternatives

The God Who Walks: Chappal Offerings and the Rakhandar Traditions of Western India

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The paper deals with the ritual and cultural significance of footwear offerings within the Rakhandar traditions of Western India, spanning Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Goa. In these regions, protective deities—known as Rakhandar, Shetrapal, Kshetrapala, or locally as Betal, Vetoba, Bodgešwar, Ajoba, Bhathiji Maharaj, Ramapir (Ramdev Pir), and Bhoot Mama—are believed to traverse their territories, safeguarding communities, livestock, and ecological spaces. These guardian figures, often enshrined in open-air shrines or beneath sacred trees, receive chappals or mojaris as offerings, reflecting the belief that the deity requires footwear for their nightly journeys across the land.

Through field observations, oral narratives, and ethnographic documentation, the paper examines how footwear functions as a ritual object imbued with agency, mediating the relationship between human devotion and divine mobility. Particular attention is given to locally crafted leather footwear, especially Kolhapuri chappals, which serve both as utilitarian objects and symbolic extensions of the deity's presence. The study highlights how these offerings encapsulate notions of protection, movement, and reciprocity, and how material objects in ritual practice reflect the interplay between folk religiosity, spatial guardianship, and the tangible expression of devotion.

By focusing on these preliminary observations, the paper situates footwear offerings as a distinctive feature of Western India's folk religious practices, revealing how even everyday objects like shoes are transformed into instruments of sacred utility and cultural memory.

Keywords: Cultural significance, Kolhapuri chappals, Devotional offering, Folk religious practices

A Detailed Exploration of Contemporary Design Innovations in Footwear Inspired by Tradition: A Systematic Review

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The incorporation of traditional crafts and cultural patterns into modern footwear is reshaping the industry by blending innovation with legacy. Digital fabrication and sustainable materials are used to reinterpret traditional methods, but this also raises concerns about intellectual property, cultural appropriation, and the recognition of artisans. The integration of traditional craftsmanship and cultural patterns into contemporary footwear design is a dynamic process that fosters a beneficial relationship between modernisation and heritage preservation. Though it also introduces complex ethical considerations, this fusion is redefining the industry by creating innovative and sustainable products that resonate with global consumers. This study used a literature review to examine recent developments in footwear design inspired by traditional craftsmanship and cultural heritage. Databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, and ResearchGate were searched for 2015–2025 using keywords such as “Footwear design,” “Traditional craftsmanship,” “Co-design,” and “Material technology,” with Boolean operators “AND/OR.” Only peer-reviewed English-language studies relevant to the topic were included; non-English and irrelevant articles were excluded.

Out of 828 studies, 42 studies met the inclusion criteria. The findings highlight a robust global movement toward integrating traditional craftsmanship with modern footwear innovation. Seventeen studies focused on creative modification of traditional designs—including gulf sandals and kolhapuri chappals—for urban and global markets. Designers increasingly utilise traditional silhouettes as foundations for contemporary shapes, colours, and motifs, maintaining an equilibrium between cultural authenticity and current appeal. Twelve studies introduced eco-friendly leathers and 3D-printed components, and digitally embroidered textiles while preserving authenticity and cultural identity. Recycled leather, plant-based dyes, and biodegradable materials were used in various projects to match conventional practices with sustainability goals.

This study concludes that integrating traditional, low-waste craft methods with modern materials and technological innovations offers a sustainable pathway to reducing the environmental footprint of the global footwear industry.

Keywords: Traditional footwear, Low-waste craft methods, Technological innovations

Integrating Traditional Indian Footwear Designs with Modern Biomechanical and Smart Sensor Technologies: A Scoping Review

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Maharishi Markandeshwar DU

The remarkable morphology of Indian footwear —encompassing Paduka, Kolhapuri chappal, Mojari, and Jutti—manifests how structural ingenuity, material selection, and ergonomic considerations converge to embody a profound cultural legacy. In recent decades, there's been a growing interest in combining traditional designs with smart sensors for monitoring postures, gait, and pressure distribution, as wearable technology aggressively steps into biomechanics and health. This scoping study aims to map the existing evidence on the integration of contemporary biomechanical and sensor-based technology with traditional Indian footwear designs in a systematic manner.

Accordingly, a systematic search was carried out throughout PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar for papers published between 2000 and 2025, following the PRISMA-ScR standards and the methodology developed by Arksey and O'Malley. Inclusion criteria included research on biomechanical analysis, sensor-based gait and posture evaluation, and conventional shoe designs. The JBI approach for scoping reviews, summarising study features, sensor technologies employed, biomechanical results, and cultural design elements was followed during data extraction. Out of the 612 records found, 28 research studies satisfied the requirements for inclusion. Most of the research (n=18) used various wearable or in-shoe sensors such as IMUs, accelerometers, and pressure mats to analyse plantar pressure and gait. Three studies looked at user perception and cultural acceptability, whereas seven studies investigated ergonomic modifications of conventional footwear.

Results demonstrated that integrating smart sensors within conventional designs augments foot biomechanics monitoring while preserving cultural and aesthetic integrity. However, only a limited number of studies have validated long-term durability or practical functionality in real-world contexts. Consequently, this scoping review reveals a growing yet constrained body of research at the intersection of biomechanical and sensor-based technologies with traditional Indian footwear designs. Available evidence suggests that embedding smart sensors into culturally rooted footwear such as Paduka, Kolhapuri chappal, Mojari, and Jutti can effectively monitor gait patterns and postural dynamics without compromising their heritage value.

Keywords: Traditional Indian footwear, Scoping review, Digital interventions, Ergonomic design

The Paduka in Early Indian Sculpture: Morphological Development and Symbolic Transformation, 3rd Century BCE – 7th Century CE

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This paper examines the pādukās, a traditional wooden sandal characterised by a hardwood sole and toe knob, as represented in early Indian sculpture from the 3rd century BCE to the 7th century CE. The study traces the morphological and symbolic evolution of pādukā representations across Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain sculptural traditions. The research reveals a transformation from simple footprint markers to elaborate footwear representations, reflecting broader changes in Indian religious art and devotional practices. Early representations functioned as markers of divine presence and absence, serving "polyvalent" symbolic functions across different religious contexts.

The pādukā's rudimentary form, featuring a hardwood sole and knob for the big toe, required balanced walking that symbolically represented dharmic principles of mindfulness and spiritual discipline. Analysis of sculptural evidence demonstrates the pādukā's evolution from utilitarian footwear worn by ascetics to a complex religious symbol embodying renunciation and spiritual authority. This transformation parallels the development of formalised worship practices, where pādukās became objects of veneration representing the presence and teachings of spiritual masters. The study posits these developments within the broader archaeological context of Buddhist monastic sites and their artistic traditions.

The findings contribute to understanding how material culture intersected with religious symbolism in early Indian art, demonstrating the pādukā's significance as both a practical object and a spiritual metaphor. This research illuminates the role of footwear iconography in expressing concepts of divine presence, spiritual hierarchy, and devotional practice across South Asian religious traditions.

Keywords: Padukas, Early Indian Sculpture, Morphological development, Symbolic Transformation

Footwear in Ancient Indian Epics: The Cultural Symbolism of Sandals in the Ramayana and Mahabharata

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Indian epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, are laden with emblematic storytelling elements, and footwear emerges as a recurring motif that pervades these timeless narratives. This study combines epic passages with leading Indian scholarship to reveal how sandals—particularly paduka and upanah—serve as powerful cultural symbols embodying kingship, divine presence, devotion, ascetic renunciation, and ritual purification. Through close readings of Sanskrit critical editions and insights from museum studies on traditional Indian footwear, the research explores how these objects transcend their functional role to reflect profound social, ritual, and spiritual meanings in ancient Indian culture. The methodology stays within a literary and interpretive framework, selecting relevant passages and cross-referencing them with Indian academic sources to establish recurring patterns.

In the Ramayana, Bharata's act of enthroning Rama's paduka transforms sandals into symbols of royal authority and divine presence. The Mahabharata adds another dimension, linking specific footwear types to social roles—crafted sandals for rulers and warriors, simple bark or bare feet for ascetics—expressing both hierarchy and moral worth. These sandals, often made of wood or bark, represented humility and sacred power simultaneously. What emerges is a clear pattern: sandals in both epics go beyond their role as mere objects—they symbolise duty, legitimacy, humility, and sanctity. The act of removing or venerating footwear before rituals or sacred spaces demonstrates how these objects were deeply tied to ideas of respect, purity, and spiritual order.

The study offers a structured understanding of how footwear functioned symbolically in India's epics, connecting literary images to cultural functions of authority and purification, while opening pathways for future research in design history, traditional craftsmanship, and heritage footwear conservation.

Keywords: Paduka, Upanah, Indian epics, symbolism, cultural heritage, sandal worship, literary analysis

Footwear in literature, performing arts and visual culture

Aakash

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Beyond its utilitarian purpose, footwear has served as a powerful cultural symbol across literature, performing arts and visual media, functioning as a repository of collective memory and individual aspiration. From Cinderella's glass slippers—embodying the transformative power of destiny, desire, and social transcendence—to the expressive movement encoded in ballet flats that speak of discipline, grace, and the corporeal language of performance, footwear operates as far more than mere protective covering. The present study explores how this everyday object reflects identity, status, emotions, and transformation across diverse visual media, serving as a material witness to the narratives we construct about ourselves and others.

Apart from tracing the varied narratives and aesthetics of footwear across artistic traditions, the present study also examines how different cultural contexts and artistic interpretations have imbued this seemingly mundane object with profound symbolic weight. From the gilded shoes of courtly miniatures to the weathered sandals of pilgrims in devotional art, from the bare feet depicted in Buddhist scrolls to the military boots of colonial portraiture, footwear emerges as a storytelling device laden with palimpsest meanings.

It marks physical and metaphorical voyages—migrations, pilgrimages, conquests, and journeys of self-discovery. It delineates class distinctions with striking clarity, distinguishing the shod from the barefoot, the bejeweled from the functional, and the imported from the indigenous. It encodes gender roles and expectations, revealing how societies have literally and figuratively shaped women's mobility through footwear. And it charts cultural transitions, capturing moments of hybridity, resistance, and transformation as communities navigate changing social landscapes. In doing so, this paper bridges the worlds of fashion, art, and human experience, demonstrating how material culture becomes a language through which we articulate the complexities of social life, power, and belonging.

Keywords: Footwear in literature, Cultural symbolism, Indian traditional footwear

Unveiling the Cultural and Spiritual Symbolism of Footwear Across Traditions

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Footwear transcends mere functionality to embody profound cultural, legal, and spiritual meanings that have evolved across centuries and civilisations. Adorned with intricate motifs such as beading, embroidery, appliqué work, and sacred symbols drawn from cosmological and mythological vocabularies, footwear encapsulates both personal and collective identities, serving as tangible receptacles of ancestral blessings, protective energies, and spiritual intentions. These decorated objects become repositories of intergenerational wisdom, carrying forward not just aesthetic traditions but also the philosophical and devotional frameworks within which they were created and consecrated. Although previous studies acknowledge footwear's functional and ritualistic roles within specific cultural contexts, there remains a clear research gap in systematically synthesizing how these ritualistic motifs carry forward cultural memory, identity formation, and spiritual connections across diverse traditions—including indigenous practices, Buddhist monastic customs, and Hindu devotional contexts. This study addresses this gap through a focused ethnographic literature review and critical anthropological analysis enriched with relevant scriptural context and interpretive frameworks.

By examining diverse sources, including the Manusmriti—which prescribes footwear removal as a symbol of purity, reverence, and hierarchical respect—and Buddhist doctrines emphasising detachment, humility, and mindfulness through ritual shoe practices, this research contextualises footwear ornamentation's layered spiritual significance. Anthropological perspectives further demonstrate how motif-adorned shoes function as cultural artefacts that enable spiritual continuity, encode cosmological understanding, and preserve ancestral memory across generations, acting as bridges between the temporal and the eternal.

Expected outcomes include a comprehensive typology of ritual footwear motifs and their embedded symbolic meanings, highlighting their role in embodying spiritual status, lineage authenticity, caste or community affiliation, and communal identity. The study's implications contribute significantly to heritage preservation efforts, inform contemporary craft revival initiatives, and enrich interdisciplinary discourse on material culture as an expressive medium of spirituality, cultural resistance, and identity reaffirmation in an increasingly globalised world.

Keywords: Footwear symbolism, Cultural identity, Spiritual motifs, Ethnographic research

Fusion with Heritage

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As a designer, my objective is not merely to present aesthetics but to express the confluence of tradition and modernity. This project, “Indian Tea – Kulhad Inspired Footwear Design”, embodies this philosophy. It aims to transform a profound cultural element into modern fashion, validating its place in the Fusion Heritage category. The inspiration for this design comes from the emotional and cultural role of tea in India. Tea is not just a beverage; it symbolizes conversation, warmth, and connection. This sentiment led me to the traditional kulhad—a clay cup that embodies simplicity, the earthy fragrance, and the authenticity of Indian craftsmanship.

In my design, I incorporated the kulhad’s round shape, texture, and earthy colors into the footwear’s foundation. The shoe’s heel is molded in the form of the kulhad, serving as the central motif and a strong statement of cultural identity. The fusion element is reflected in the heel’s material composition. The traditional form is paired with modern technology, blending durable rubber molding with a wood-like finish. This combination ensures both comfort and durability while preserving the traditional beauty of clay in a refined, contemporary form. The gradient of brown and terracotta colors evokes the warmth of freshly brewed chai and the essence of the earth.

This design is not just a shoe, but a moving story rooted in Indian heritage that awakens cultural spirit with every step. The project is a journey from clay to modernity, where the essence of Indian-ness shines through every form and texture. I aim to create a product that advances fashion while cherishing the fragrance of our roots.

Keywords: Fusion heritage. Kulhad, Reimagination, Indianness

The Journey of Sumerpur Heritage Through its Traditional Footwear

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This research investigates the jutti-making tradition of Sumerpur, located in District Hamirpur, Uttar Pradesh, within the culturally renowned Bundelkhand region. Both Sumerpur and Hamirpur have received national recognition for their handcrafted juttis, with Sumerpur specifically earning the title “City of Shoes” (Juton ka Nagari) due to its culturally rich footwear heritage. The region’s artisanal ecosystem specialises in producing juttis from genuine leather, distinguished by exceptional durability and craftsmanship that commands demand across major Indian metropolitan cities, including Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Bengaluru. Acknowledging this unique local craft legacy, the Uttar Pradesh Government designated the Sumerpur jutti industry under its One District One Product (ODOP) scheme for the Hamirpur district, positioning traditional footwear as the region's flagship artisanal identity.

The craft of jutti-making in this region traces back centuries, with technical knowledge and aesthetic sensibilities transmitted intergenerationally through lineages of skilled artisans. These juttis are characterised by intricate hand embroidery, remarkable longevity, and design vocabularies that authentically embody Bundelkhandi cultural aesthetics and material traditions. The production process remains entirely manual. From initial leather selection and pattern cutting through stitching, dyeing, and decorative embellishment, this craft preserves embodied craft knowledge resistant to mechanization. Artisans produce diverse jutti typologies for both male and female consumers, skilfully synthesizing traditional Bundelkhandi motifs with contemporary design sensibilities to address evolving market preferences. This study focuses specifically on the Hamirpur artisanal cluster, incorporating consultation with multiple craftsmen, small-scale manufacturers, and industry stakeholders. The research particularly examines how Sumerpur artisans are being encouraged toward design innovation and decorative experimentation, including the incorporation of sequins, zari work, and other contemporary embellishments while maintaining structural and cultural integrity. The primary objective of this study is to amplify national and international recognition of Sumerpur-Hamirpur's jutti heritage, positioning this regional craft tradition within broader discourses of Indian artisanal excellence, cultural economy, and sustainable design practice.

Keywords: Sumerpur-Hamirpur jutti heritage, Bundelkhandi culture, City of Shoes, Jutti-making tradition



11th century CE
Cotton University,
Kamarupa District, Assam