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“A JOURNEY OF FINE MUSLIN FROM HARAPPA CIVILIZATION TO MODERN WORLD” TANA BANNA

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Abstract

South Asia is blessed with a large number of ancient sites, rich traditions, values and culture. The history of clothing can be traced back to Harappa Civilization and people at that time knew the art of growing, spun and woven. Pakistan's journey in the field of textile is long and chequered and obviously there is no doubt the cotton cloths were used in Harappa civilization. Moreover, due to its comfort and versatility make it the most demandable fabric not just in Pakistan but the entire world as well. So, this paper intends to shed light on some samples of cotton materials unearthed during excavation at Harappa civilization and also to collect the Muslin references described in early literature.

This paper will provide the summary of the most important Muslin cotton fiber and fabric from the site of Harappa in the Punjab. New insight on the past will be highlighted in this research, as well as to see the contributions from the past that are adopted by the modern people of the Punjab. The way of growing, spinning and weaving at Harappa is still practiced in Pakistan and India with little advancement that clearly evident the continuity of the culture from Harappa civilization to the modern world.

To explore this study qualitative research method will be utilized which is based on observation and surveys. This study will not only explore the old ancient art of *Tana Banna* but also help to analyze how artistic textile evolved with extended influences in other regions and embedded in the contemporary world.

Key word: Muslin, *Tana Banna*, Weaving, Journey, Adaptation

Introduction

According to the scholars, the entrepreneurial history of handloom textile production is as old as the history of mankind and the archeological evidence can be traced back to the cities of Indus Valley civilization (Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro) approximately 7000 years ago. Such as, the earliest cotton evidence found attached to a silver vessel in an excavation in Harappa clearly showed that the production of cotton fiber and fabric in the sub-continent, has been practiced dated to around 1750 B.C.¹ Here is an ancient example of Textile impressions on a toy bed made during the Harappan Phase (c. 2600-1900 BCE) show finely woven cloth made of uniformly spun threads. This example surely indicates a fairly tightly woven normal weave. (See Figure No. 1).²

¹ Woven Textile, Photocopy

² Harappa .com, "Empire of Cotton," December 7th, 2015. <https://www.harappa.com/blog/empire-cotton>.



Picture 1: Toy Bed with Textile Impression

Since ancient times woven textile is not just used to cover the bodice but also used in countless ways and marked as a status symbol of every region. There are some visuals showing that each region has its own tradition and culture and is appreciated by others. I took the example from Egyptian, Indus and subcontinent weaving. (See Figure No. 2, 3).

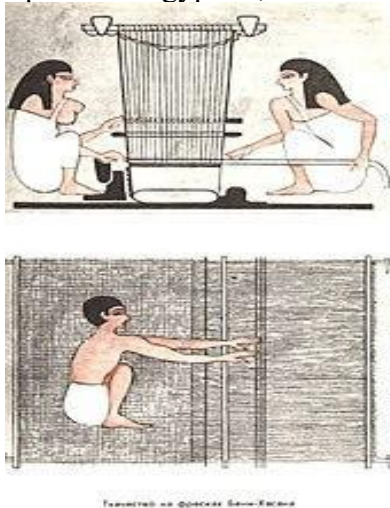


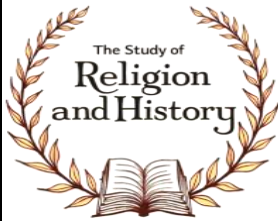
Figure No 2 & 3: Egyptian weaving & Sub-continent

Origin and Importance of Muslin Fabric

However, the woven textile has been practiced since ancient times but it is no wrong to say that it was the Mughal who developed artistic intellectual status and produced splendid luxurious textile. In Mughals' time period the production of Muslin fabric reached its peak, which is pretty evident from these miniature paintings (See Figure No.4).³

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Dr. Haridas B. Jogdankar, *World's Economic And Commercial Geography* (2019), <https://www.lulu.com/en/au/shop/dr-haridas-b-jogdankar/worlds-economic-and-commercial-geography/paperback/product-1495qky.html?page=1&pageSize=4>



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Picture 4: Mughal Emperor Akbar wearing a Translucent Muslin.

Similarly from these visuals we can see the journey of Muslin from Mughal to European Empire and noticed that these textured fabrics were also valued by Europeans for centuries due to its design influence, inspiration, and manufacturing process. It was during the Mughal time when the fine muslin was reserved for the courts and used by the sultans and the wives of great nobles and it is said that at that time merchants were not allowed to export. (See Figure 5, 6).



Figure No. 5 & 6: Zeb-u-Nisa and Mughal emperor wearing Fine muslin choga.

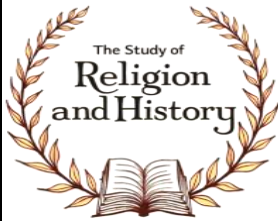
If we talk about the word Muslin, The word ‘Muslin’ is believed to derive from the name of the Indian port town *Machilipatnam* which was more commonly known as Maisolos in the ancient times, Muslin is a cotton fabric of plain weave. (See Figure No. 7).



(Caption)
Provenance: Morchhalabad, Bengal, probably from the court of Mir Jafar, Nawab of Murshidabad (1763), Paris
Date: mid-eighteenth century
A full-skirted muslin jama, decorated with delicate chikankari ('white-on-white embroidery'). It has a gold *gota* strip which shows through the hem of the garment, and is finished with very fine *gota* work. The lapels are also edged with *gota*.

Figure 7: Plain weave Muslin fabric

Not just in the 17th and 18th century, hence today’s world Muslin is known for its high level of intricacy and not just practicing in south Asia but also added value by expanding it to the far-fetched regions. It is said that the mostly weavers (*karigar*) were Muslim and the motifs



which were produced in the Akbar's reign were highly inspired by nature. At that time, the Muslin fabric was identified as Karkhanas (See Figure No. 8). Basically the art of Muslin manufacturing is itself having a great legitimacy. Thus it is no wrong to say that Muslin making is an art and to achieve the art on the loom highly skilled craft person were hired which we called masters or karigars.

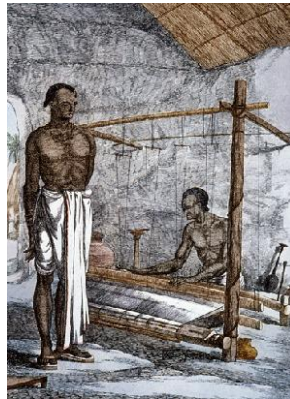


Figure 8: Weaving in Private *Karkhanas*.

The Making of the Muslin Fabric

Let's talk about the fabric nature and stories through manufacturing process,

There are numerous fables and stories which describe the Excellency of the fabric through their quality and pattern making and in the sub-continent, cotton fabrics hold a prominent place and produce rare types. These fabrics were given fancy names just like 'Evening Dew' Running Water, *Sherbati*, and Air woven etc.⁴ As, Jhon Forbes Watson, list these fabric in his account in the sequence of Superiority. As, Muslin was so light it was known as woven air, so thin that those who wore it were sometimes accused of indecency. Some said that the cloth was so fine that it could pass through a ring.



Figure No. 9: Muslin passes through a ring.

While focusing on the manufacturing process, the process is not so complicated but laborious to weave. And somehow the knowledge of how to make it has since been lost. However, there are many researchers worldwide are working to revive the enigmatic fabric.

⁴ Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *The glory of Indian Handicraft*: (Indian book company, 1976), p1-10.

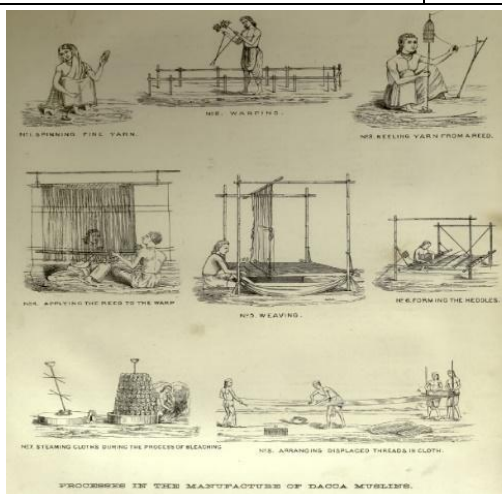


Figure No.10: Making of Muslin fabric on Pit Loom.

For this process, pit loom was used as you can see through these visuals. The pit beneath the loom accommodated the weaver's leg. And also this picture showed that labor was divided by gender. Spinning was done by women while men did weaving. So this picture totally narrates the story of fine weaving. The process of delicate weaving is still the same and deals with the same delicacy but it is said that the British destroyed this. Because they wanted to sell their own goods at a low cost. Some researchers said that the British cut off the thumbs of the weavers so that they couldn't make muslin anymore and the local industry was damaged with great loss. (See Figure NO. 10).

Types and Traditional Design of Muslin

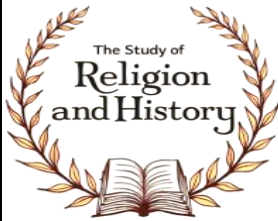
When we talk about the fabric types and designs, the cotton and fine muslin are not just limited to plain woven fabric with 1 by 1 weave design. It is made in a wide range of weights from delicate sheers to coarse sheeting. And the fabric is named according to the nature of the fabric.

Here is a look at the most prominent ones named according to the manufacturing process and nature of the fabric, For instance: *Mal, Jhuna, Rongo, Arawn, Khassa, shubnam* and more.

Mal: When we talk about the Mal fabric, *Mal kash* is basically a fine muslin designated cloth for the emperors and the royal families. It is used for a special clothing purpose. (See Figure No. 11).



Figure No. 11 : *Mal Kash*



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Jhuna: Another type of fabric is *Jhuna*, which has a gauze-like structure, highly transparent, preferred for the dancers. The word *Jhuna* comes from the Hindi word, *Jhina* which means thin. For this manufacturing low thread numbers as per thread count refer to the number of Horizontal and vertical threads per square inch 100. It is said that this similar fabric was also used by the wives and harem members and due to its high transparency it was banned to export. (See Figure No. 12).



Figure No 12 & 13: *Jhuna* wore by a Dancer, Similar To *Rongo*

Rongo: Quite similar to *Jhuna*. (See Figure No. 13).

Abrawan: The *Abrawan* was extremely thin and delicate woven fabric, even transparent compared to the flowing stream. (See Figure No. 14).



Figure14: *Abrawan*

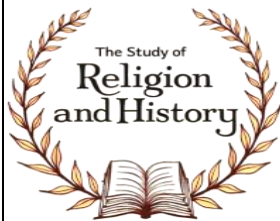
Khassa: This type of fabric was plain and famous for its thick weave having a count of 1400-2800. *Khassa* means very fine and thin muslin. (See Figure No. 15).



Figure No 15: *Khassa*

Surband: Another type of cotton is a *surband*, which comes from a Persian word, *Sur* referred to head and *bund* is tie. It was used for basically a head attire or cover heads as a turban. This fabric having a thread count about 2100. This fabric were used by the English as a scarves. (See Figure No. 16).





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Figure 15: Surband

Jamdani: Jamdani is a type of floral or figured muslin fabric. According to researcher *Jam* meant flower and *dani* meant a container thus forming a flower vase of sorts. *Jamdani* had many designs and great varieties and always in demand due to its intricacy and extremely expensive due to its unique manufacturing process. (See Figure No. 16).



Figure 17: Jamdani

Dooria: a type of striped Muslin is called *Dooria*. It was done by twisting two or more threads on the loop using three parts cotton and two parts silk. Basically it is a mixed fabric with cotton and silk. It was used by both men and women and had a thread number that varied from 1500-2100. (See Figure No. 18).



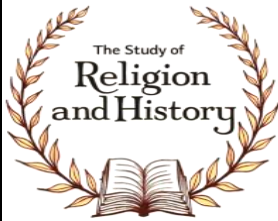
Figure No 18: *Dooriya* and its types.

Lahore Museum Collection

To collect evidence of Muslin of the 18th century I visited the Textile gallery of Lahore Museum. While visiting I have seen the surviving example of plain fine muslin or somehow with floral pattern. These swatches originally a central Asian type from coarse to very fine muslin used in the 18th century time period. (See Figure No. 19).



Figure 19: Muslin Fabric Displayed in Lahore Museum



Current scenario of cottage industry in Punjab

Pakistan has always been at the forefront of the textile industry and known for its immaculate craftsmanship. Our country is majorly based on the traditional weaving cottage industry in terms of employment. Moreover, cottage industry is the holder of tradition and culture of Pakistan.

The Punjab and south Punjab is the main center for the production of cotton weaving. Although the craft of textile was enriched in the state of *Bengal* and *Dacca* but at the same time *Lahore Multan* and *Haiderabad* were also the producers of skilled weaving craft. Kamalia city of Punjab is the main center for woven manufacturing not just producing durries, towels and carpets but the weavers famous for the intricate handloom woven Muslin fabrics production with the same traditional delicacy (See Figure No.20).

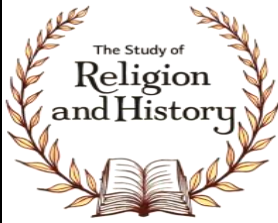


Figure 20: Fabric made from Traditional Method

Online Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1081872/textile-kamalia-weaving-its-magic>

Somehow, the handloom products lost their identity and became the golden past. There is the need to preserve this craft and to promote it worldwide. It is no wrong to say that there is tremendous rivalry in the textile market between the Power loom and the handloom fabrics. There are many renowned retail brands and industries that manufacture woven textile for apparel, work wear and home furnishing, on the jacquard loom and exported to Germany, Turkey, Spain and UK.

The Muslin fabric is still in demand as a spangled outfit with the same feel as old times but changed a lot according to fashion and is still in the process of change. Muslin has invaded even the home accessories as bed-room curtains, especially with white or grey ground colors. All in all, Muslin weaving craft, which has been on the decline, is again showing a very promising trend. All credit should be given to the Villages of handlooms weavers and designers who kept alive the art of traditional weaving. (See Figure No. 21, 22 & 23).



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Figure No. 21, 22 & 23: Formal wear, casual and Home accessories

Conclusion

As I study and analyze, in today's modern world everyone demands unique and stylized form for textiles as earlier (In Mughal Time). So, This art should be underpinned and revive just because from this step, we could provide employment to the people of ruler area with the expansion of such cottage industry and by developing the cottage industry into modern lines will be the good initiative for socio-economic growth along with increase in foreign exchange.