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A Review On The Status Of Punja Durrie Weaving In Salawas

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Abstract : India has a diverse cultural heritage, with a time honoured tradition of handloom and handicraft craftsmanship. Each state has its unique art forms, yet amongst this rich heritage, certain crafts, like the durries originating from Salawas, Rajasthan remain overshadowed. This paper aims to shed light on the intricate art of durrie weaving in Salawas. Furthermore, it explores potential avenues for the elevation and development of this traditional art form. The research method includes literature reviews and oral statements. It is hoped that this study will recognize the importance of durrie weaving and lay the foundation for basic resources for the conservation and succession of the weaving techniques of these textiles.

IndexTerms - Salawas Durries, Punja Durries, Durries, Traditional Crafts, Weaving

I. Introduction

Punja durries are one-of-a-kind rugs that are famous for their high quality, sturdiness, and long-lasting nature. These durries are handwoven and the design is perfected with the use of the Panja, a metallic claw-like tool used to beat and set the threads in the war.

These durries are made of cotton or wool and showcase colourful tradition & heritage from its primitive form of weaving in Salawas. Every durry is handcrafted using geometric patterns, motifs, and colours inspired by the local landscape, flora, and fauna. These durries go beyond utilitarian purposes; they are woven narratives that contain the cultural fabric and values of the region. Another notable fact about these durries is that they are made during the summer season. The artisans engage in agriculture as it is a reliable and their primary source of income.

The old city of Jodhpur is surrounded by the walls of the colossal Mehrangarh Fort. These forts are like strong guards, surviving numerous battles and showing the strong spirit of the region. These solid walls were built with a lot of thought behind its structural integrity. The builders drill holes into the centre of the bricks. These bricks, layered one upon another using a mixture called 'chunna', embody an interlock technique that has defied the ages. Rods are inserted into these holes, forging an unbreakable bond between the elements. These walls have stood the testament of time. This same interlocking technique is used in making these durries, which will be discussed in further sections. (Outlook India 2022)

The forts and durries also have a connection to trade caravans from the 14th century. These wandering traders might have introduced local artisans to new techniques which led to new ideas and the creation of beautifully crafted durries. (Singh 2013)

22 kilometres on the outskirts of the blue city of Jodhpur lies Salawas. It is home to families of weavers who have been involved in making durries since generations. There was a time when every family belonging to the Prajapat community used to make durries. But, as of today's date, there are only 4 families in Salawas who are involved in this craft.

A shadow hangs over the future of the durries made with this ingenious interlocking technique. The artisans no longer hold the same fervent hope of passing it on to their children. Whether due to the changing tides of time, dwindling economic incentives, or a general shift in interests, a reluctance has crept in, threatening to sever the thread that connects a proud past to an uncertain future. Durrie making has become a secondary source of livelihood for them. This study aims to examine the traditional textile weaving technique of these durries.

Fig.1 Interlock weaving in Salawas Durrie

II. Need of the Study

Traditional crafts in India have been extensively documented with detailed records about the different kinds of durries. However, the specific tradition of durrie weaving from Salawas lacks comprehensive documentation. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the history, unique weaving techniques, and current status of Salawas durries.

This study will provide an in-depth look at the specific weaving techniques employed by Salawas weavers. By documenting these methods, we are aiming to preserve the knowledge of traditional practices that might be lost otherwise. By interviewing artisans and observing their work, we hope to provide a comprehensive picture of the contemporary state of this craft.

III. Methodology

The aim of this study is to gain knowledge and understand the current state of durrie weaving in Salawas. To achieve this, a combination of narrative enquiry and archival research design was used. Ethnographic study has been adopted. Primary data was gathered through direct observation, photography, and interviews with straightforward questions, allowing for in-depth conversations between researchers and artisans. This approach facilitated the collection of detailed information and the clarification of any doubts. Secondary data was sourced from journals, books, and online resources.

IV. History of the craft

For centuries, people in Jodhpur have been making durries in their homes or fields. There are different versions of how the craft evolved on the internet, but the weavers of Salawas have their own stories to tell.

Following its origin in the 14th century, this craft found its roots among the tribal inhabitants of Mewar. These individuals, who once sought shelter within temples, gradually embraced the practice of weaving durries for their own practical purposes. They took inspiration from the intricate designs carved on the pillars of Ranakpur Jain temples. At that time, the Prajapats of Ranakpur used to practise this craft. (Arroyo 2021)

Durrie weaving in this state owed its popularity to cotton durries since earlier times. As cotton was more conducive to dry, hot, sandy, desert environments it was said that durries were initially laid beneath the carpet. Reason of putting a durrie under the carpet was to give extra life to the carpet since cotton durries were able to absorb moisture from the floor. As the weather got warmer, the carpet got removed and the durries stayed. ("Chapter-4" 2023)

In Salawas, they started with making *'Jaat pattis*' made from goat hair which were used to filter oil in the Arab oil fields. In the 70s, the head of the Pukhraj family used to give Bishnoi village safaris, when he met the proprietor of an esteemed hotel in Jodhpur, who held kinship ties to the royal lineage. Their display of their artisanal skill made a lasting impression on the royalties. This led to them receiving orders from royalties to make these durries. Then, they started making durries in the late 1990s. The weaving technique is the same for both *'jaat pattis'* and durries. According to the oldest member of the community, this skill has been passed down since generations from father to son. Presently, this practice extends to daughters as well.

In the beginning, approximately 200 families residing in Salawas were engaged in the production of durries. However, the current scenario reveals a considerable reduction, with only 4 families within Salawas and an additional 43 families in the vicinity of Salawas continuing this tradition.

A renowned name in this craft is Mr. Shyam Ahuja. He emerged as an artist with his design and colour palette. Despite having no formal training in the field the entire design direction of S.A. Pvt. Ltd. (Shyam Ahuja Private

Limited) is totally his own. He has maintained each one of his designs on record. They are catalogued to the minutest detail, alongwith the colour combinations. All specifics are noted for posterity. He names all his designs exotically like Cardoba, Textile, Valencia, Kismet or even Kavita.

V. Manufacturing Process

The making of Salawas durries reflects detailed craftsmanship and cultural heritage, preserving traditional weaving techniques passed through generations. Every stage, from material selection to weaving, contributes to the overall finished product.

LOOMS

The looms used by the artisans have resemblance to pit looms. These looms consist of two horizontal wooden beams thoughtfully positioned at a specific distance from each other, tailored to the desired loom size. The initial beam, known as the *'kaamri*,' marks the starting point for warping. Suspended from the upper beam, a movable heald shaft is established along this *'kaamri*,' capable of traversing the entire length of the loom.

The heald shaft is made with a continuous cotton yarn wound around the upper layer of the warp beam, forming what is referred to as the *'badh*.' This 'badh' is regulated by a wooden beam called the *'khichna*.' A distinctive aspect of this process is that two individuals are typically required to manage the *'khichna*.' Initially, it's pushed away from the artisans, and after completing a weft layer, it's pulled closer. To mitigate the need for constant two-person operation, an ingenious tool called a *'ghoda'* can be introduced. Placed atop the wooden beam along with the heald shafts, the *'ghoda'* is linked with cotton yarn. It's alternately pulled towards and pushed away from the artisan, inducing switching the layers of the upper and lower yarn.

Creating the shed involves the insertion of two *'khaptas'* from either side between the upper and lower yarn layers, culminating in the rhythmic up-and-down shedding motion termed *'joda-jodi*.'

Traditionally, Salawas Durries are woven on wooden looms, although iron looms are gaining traction nowadays. An interesting hybrid solution involves an iron-framed loom with wooden components. These wooden looms are predominantly fashioned from neem or babool wood, chosen for their termite-resistant qualities. The *'khaptas*,' crucial elements in this weaving process, are crafted from wood sourced from *'aak ke phool'* trees.

Creating a wooden loom from scratch is a meticulous process demanding around 2-3 days of labour. Once established, the loom is securely affixed to the workspace, known as *'adda*,' using a combination of rocks, yarns, and *'geeli mitti*' to prevent any unintended shifts during weaving. It's worth noting that the dimensions of a loom, once constructed, remain unalterable.

Fig. 2 Loom with wooden frame

Fig. 3 Khapta

TOOLS AND EQUIPMENTS

1. PUNJA

A pivotal tool known as a *'punja'* or *'kunga'* plays a crucial role in the crafting of *punja* durries. This tool is designed featuring a metal comb- the *punja*, affixed to a wooden handle. The primary function of this tool is to vigorously beat and compact the newly introduced weft threads during the durrie weaving process. The *punjas* are not readily accessible in the market, instead, artisans must commission carpenters to create them.

The weight of a *punja* depends on the type of fibre used. For camel wool, the *punja* carries a weight of no less than 1 kilogram. The *punja* used for cotton durries is lighter. When working with goat wool, the *punja* size is bigger as compared to the standard tool used for other materials.

Fig. 4 Punja

2. LOOM

The loom, either one with a *'khichna'* or a *'ghoda'* is used for the weaving process.

Fig. 5 Horizontal loom with khichna

Fig. 6. Ghoda

Fig. 7. Pinich

3. PINICH

'Pinich,' is a tool crafted out of two wooden beams, interconnected with fabric or rope in the shape of an X. Both beams are etched with grooves that match the width of the durries.

The practical application of this *'pinich'* is to maintain the uniform size of the durrie and prevent shrinkage while weaving. Affixed to the woven portion of the durrie through the placement of nails, it accomplishes this without puncturing the fabric due to the intricacies of the interlock weaving technique. This tool effectively curbs the tendencies of the durrie to skew or bow, resulting in a more uniform and aesthetically pleasing end product. As the work progresses, the artisan shifts the position of the 'pinich' along with the weaving.

4. KAICHI

In the final stages of the durrie-making process scissors are used. This tool is used to trim any excess yarns and neatly snip off the ends of the durrie.

5. CHURRI

Knives or *churri* serve the purpose of precisely removing any surplus yarns.

RAW MATERIALS

Salawas Durries' come together from blending natural fibres, dyes, and skillful craftsmanship together. The artisans also consider the market demand and feasibility of the materials. These are the following raw materials that are used by the artisans to make durries:-

1. Undyed cotton yarn

Machine-twisted undyed cotton yarn is used in the warping process to prepare the reed. Usually, yarn with 20 count is employed, though, for specific products, yarn of 10 counts can also be used. In all communities, cotton was originally hand spun with a charkha wheel, a wooden spinning wheel. In India both men and women did the spinning as it was laborious and time consuming. (Arroyo 2021)

2. Dyed cotton yarn

For the weft yarn, normally hand-twisted dyed yarns of 20 count with S twist are used. Depending upon the product, yarn of 10 counts can also be used. As for the types of dyes used in the dyeing process, artisans opt for either natural, vegetable or azo-free dyes.

Natural dyes used on durries were commonly extracted from indigo or *neela* (Indigofera tinctoria) and walnut husks.

The need of the durrie export market was well served by these synthetic dyes as the standardisation of colours became increasingly important. Regrettably when these dyes were introduced to India, traditional colour sense seemed to have been temporarily abandoned. Weavers experimented artlessly with parrot greens, garish pinks, harsh reds and blinding yellows (Arroyo 2021).

3. Camel wool

Camel hair can be sheared only once a year i.e. in the month of March and April because that period is the breeding season for camels. Therefore, it has seasonal availability. The length of camel hair is typically about 1- 2 inches and the quantity obtained in one season is about 200 to 300 grams from one camel. Earlier, 100% camel hair was used to make durries, but due to a major decline in camel rearing by the shepherd community, there is a steep reduction in the availability now. As an alternative, camel hair is now used in a blend with coir. Camel herders, known as *Raikas*, weave their coarse rugs from camel hair. (Arroyo 2021)

4. Coir

Coir isn't used in its natural composition instead it is used in blended form. It is blended with camel hair to create the yarn. This blend contains a ratio of 70% coir to 30% camel hair.

5. Goat hair

Goat hair or *patik* was initially used with camel hair as a mixed material. Alternatively, it can also be used on its own. There were only three colours of goat hair available naturally- black, brown, and white. Each of these colours has carried distinct significance for different communities. Brown goat hair was sometimes used with camel hair to make *'ganda'*. Black goat hair was considered inauspicious by some communities. It was obtained from the local shepherds.

6. Jute

Durries crafted entirely from jute, at a 100% composition, offer a lightweight and cost-effective option. The texture of jute durries might not be as smooth as those made from other materials.

7. Silk

Silk is an expensive raw material to source, which subsequently impacts the pricing of silk durries. It is a delicate material to handle. Currently, none of the artisans in Salawas engage in making silk durries. The *punja* used for silk durries was lighter in weight compared to those intended for other materials. Silver and Gold, or other metal threads are also used, often in combination with silk for certain ceremonial durries. (Arroyo 2021)

PRE-PRODUCTION PROCESS

Pre-production processes are all the activities essential to be completed before starting the production process. It includes sourcing of raw materials, deciding various factors related to the product like- size, material, design and motifs, colour scheme. It also includes setting up the loom and warping.

SOURCING OF RAW MATERIALS

In some cases, the local shepherds provide camel and goat hair. Only in March and April do the shepherds shear the male camels, which is where the camel hair comes from. It is combined with coir at a ratio of 70:30:: camel hair to coir ratio ,coir is sourced from kerala.

The majority of the sourcing is done in Jaipur and Jaisalmer; cotton and silk are sourced from Jaipur, which

comes from Gujarat, while camel, sheep, goat hair and jute are sourced from Jaisalmer. When a smaller quantity of cotton is needed, a small supplier in Jodhpur may also supply cotton.

HOW THE DESIGN IS DECIDED

Initiating a new durrie project involves a systematic and thoughtful approach for the artisans. The process unfolds with a series of decisive steps.

1. The choice of materials comes into focus. For the warp, machine-twisted cotton yarn is a consistent selection, offering reliability and uniformity. However, the weft material is a variable element, subject to deliberation and consideration.
2. The size of the durrie is determined, serving as a foundational parameter. This size directly influences the ensuing design. At the same time, the artisans engage in discussions to finalise the design.
3. Once the design has been decided, the palette of colours is planned. Only after this step is completed do the artisans proceed to the subsequent stages of the durrie-making process.

WARPING

In the process of warping, the undyed cotton yarn is parallelly arranged from one end to the other end of the loom in a continuous manner, forming an oval shape. The distance between two warp yarns is equal to the distance between two grooves of a *punja.* Two people are required at a time for this process.When the warp thread runs out, it is knotted once more which further gets hidden under the weft threads.

To ensure that the yarns don't move while weaving operation, *geeli mitti* is applied on the opposite end of the *kaamri* in the warp beam.

After this, to make the heald shafts, a continuous cotton yarn is individually wound through every yarn of the upper layer with a suspended wooden beam from the loom in an oval pattern known as *Bhaan* It is to be ensured that no yarn from the upper layer of the warp beam is left.

This whole process usually takes 3-4 days of work.

Fig. 8 Warping

WEAVING

After deciding the material, size, design and colour, the weaving process starts. The weaving technique used for making these durries is called Interlocking. The first 2 or 3 wefts are of undyed cotton yarn, despite whatever material is to be used. It goes one up and one down. The first weft is inserted and knotted at the ends. This knotting technique is called *joke*. The shedding motion needs a *khichna and khapta,* picking is done by hand, and beat-up is done by a *punja.*

Weft insertion is done between the layers, so that the durries are reversible. After the first weft, the *khichna* is pushed away from the artisans to lock the yarns. When the upper layer goes down and the lower layer comes up, at that time, the yarns in the *badh* form an 8-structure. This locks the last weft layer and enables the artisan to work on the next one.

Fig. 9 Correct posture to hold a punja

After inserting the second weft, the beating-in is done with a *punja*. The next weft will start the design. Small packages of different coloured yarns are knotted and arranged on the warp beam according to the design. The yarn goes between the two layers through a specific number of warps and is supposed to be in a semi-circle shape after insertion. The beating-in is done with a *punja* after weft insertion for that layer is complete. The '*khichna'* is then pulled towards the artisans to lock the weft. In every weft insertion, one extra thread from each side will be taken every time, so that there's no break in colours or patterns.

To make the edges of durries, a fixed number of warp yarns are bound together and then woven to make the binding. This results in a thin, raised line which runs lengthwise on both edges of the durrie.

There is a specific way to hold a *punja* while working. It is to be held from the top of the wooden part and the wrist is used for movement. The artisan's fingers should completely wrap around the *punja* easily. Preferably, the elbow should be at a 90 degree angle.

If a yarn package finishes while working, another can be attached to it by a basic knot after matching the colour shade. These knots are not visible after weaving because of the tight construction of the durrie.

In the last weft, the yarns are left as it is.

The archetypal cotton durrie is woven with a cotton warp and weft in a weft faced plain weave with dovetail joints. This structure is also referred to as 'tapestry weave'

The description 'weft faced' indicates that the warps are concealed by the wefts which form the rug's visible surface. Dovetailing is one method of joining discontinued wefts of different colours within the same horizontal pass. Both wefts share and turn around the same warp, one weft immediately above the other, forming a join which appears slightly blurred. Used for the commercial manufacture of geometric, curvilinear and stylized floral designs, this technique results in floor covering which is structurally very sound ("Chapter-4", n.d.).

POST PRODUCTION PROCESS

Post production processes are all the activities essential to be completed after the durrie is made on the loom. It includes taking the durrie off the loom, making sure that there are no faults or issues in the durrie, and finishing it off. It also includes washing.

TAKING THE DURRIE OFF THE LOOM

Taking the durrie off the loom is a very delicate process because we need to make sure that there's no harm to the product. First step is to remove the '*pinich'* by taking out its nails. Next, when the heald shaft reaches the end, after the last weft, the corner yarns are knotted with the technique called *'jog'*. The warp beam is cut from the loom after leaving about 4 to 6 inches of yarns on both sides of the durrie.

FINISHING AND INSPECTION

The undyed cotton yarns are tied together to form tassels and knotted fringes. It is done on both sides of the durrie. This secures the yarns and gives aesthetic appeal. The durrie is inspected and unwanted threads are cut using a knife or scissors. These tassels or fringes prevent the durrie from fraying.

After the smaller size durrie is cut from larger durries, the selvedge of the durrie is hand stitched to provide an appropriate finish. This process is known as binding.

Binding is also done to durries to give proper finish to the durries as well.

Fig. 10 Loose threads in durries

WASHING

Washing is done to remove any dirt from the durrie. The artisans get it washed at home, or stone washed. They even send the durries for washing in Jaipur.

Yarns which are dyed using natural dyes have poor colour fastness so they go through a colour fixation process. A sodium silicate wash is preferred for colour fixation followed by a potassium permanganate wash.

VI. Design and Motifs

Each Salawas durry is a one-of-a-kind masterpiece, with its own story woven into its unique design.

MOTIFS

Salawas durries, by virtue of being a handicraft, are also a part of the history of a community. Designs that weavers choose to create in their durries may reflect local flora and fauna, traditions, history and even the artisans' own beliefs. There has been a shift in designs, from more traditional, to simpler geometric designs.

GEOMETRIC DESIGNS

These are the most common designs currently. Geometric designs have become increasingly popular both in domestic and export markets. They can vary from weaver to weaver, but there are some common designs, an a lot of geometric designs can also be traced back to other West and Central Asian carpet designs. Geometric designs include diamonds and feathers.

STRIPES

Stripes are a significant geometric pattern. Different types of stripes have different symbolic meanings, like thin stripes are mainly used for bed coverings and the broader ones for floor coverings. Blue and white coloured stripes are used in making prayer mats for muslims, while small squared shaped prayer mats, called asanas are for hindus. ("Chapter-1" 2023)

Fig. 11 Geometric designs

Fig. 12 Flora and Fauna

FLORA AND FAUNA

A common theme in durries also appears to be the local flora and fauna. Birds, plants and flowers are some of the common motifs created by weavers in their durries. Camels, tigers, peacocks and birds of prey are some of the more commonly depicted animals in durries. Animals like horses may also be depicted, but those are usually reserved for durries of historical figures riding them.

TREE OF LIFE

The tree of life is a motif that seems to be common to several cultures across the world, with each depicting the tree in their own unique way. In Salawas durries, the tree of life is often depicted as a single main stem, with symmetrical branches, some with leaves of a single colour, and flowers of several colours.

Fig. 13 Tree of life

Fig. 14 Historical Figures

HISTORICAL FIGURES

Rajasthan is a state with a rich and storied history, and this history is reflected in their craft. Weavers will often include various historical figures in their designs. These kinds of durries are becoming less and less common due to their complexity, and the changing demands for different designs from weavers. Such designs were more popular when families received the patronage of royal families.

RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

Religious symbols are not very common in durries as they are generally used as floor coverings. Important Hindu symbols like the *Swastika* may be woven into the carpets, but these durries are usually made on order, as there is no real demand for them.

EVOLUTION OF MOTIFS

Over the years, there has been a marked shift in the kinds of motifs that weavers have been using and the designs that they've been creating in their durries. When the weavers were under the patronage of the royal families of

Rajasthan, traditional motifs like the tree of life, plants, animals, traditional geometric designs, and depictions of royalty were much more common. However, the clients that the weavers now cater to are completely different. The royalty, along with their demand for those traditional designs are practically non-existent. These days, clients from within the country and outside of it prefer simpler geometric designs, both for their lower cost and the fact that it is something that would not look out of place in most homes. Although, there still is a group of people who prefer the traditional designs .

Fig. 15, 16, 17 Village scene durrie, Birds Durrie and Striped Durrie

COLOURS

Traditionally, weavers used to get yarns dyed with natural dyes, and were limited to certain colours available because of it. The colours that weavers use now are generally restricted by factors such as dyeing cost and availability in inventory. The more commonly used colours include shades of red, pale yellow, light blue and green. In recent years, with the increase in the demand from the foreign lands, they have started incorporating pastel and soft hues in their designs.

PRODUCT RANGE

The main product categories defined by artisans is as follows:

1. Durries
2. Table tops
3. Table runners

All durry udyogs have a set of standard sizes that they make. The smallest size of they have is 2*3 feet. Some other common sizes are 4*6, 3*5 and 6*9 feet. The largest durrie size they have made was 35*17 feet. Sometimes, if the customer wants smaller sizes, they make a bigger sized durry on the loom and cut out the desired size from it.

Fig. 18, 19, 20 Durrie, Table Tops and Table Runner

PRODUCT QUALITY AND QUALITY DEFECTS

Defining the criteria for quality in durries presents a challenge to blend the artisans' skill with the unique touch of their craft. While imperfections can add an exclusive character to each piece, maintaining specific quality parameters is important for durable and visually appealing durries.

- The fundamental determinant of a well-crafted durrie lies in the density of its composition. It is advised that a minimum of seven to eight weft yarns be woven into a single square inch of the fabric. This attention to detail is crucial, as inadequate yarn density can compromise the overall uniformity and aesthetic of the durrie.
- Another key indicator of quality in handloom durries rests in the visibility of warp yarns. The manner in which the artisan manipulates the punja during the pivotal beat-up motion plays a decisive role here. Excessive visibility of warp yarns may indicate inadequate interlocking of the fabric's structural components.
- While some may perceive the distinctive appearance of prominently displayed warp yarns as a unique trait, it often serves as a telltale sign of compromised structural integrity.
- The aesthetic appeal of a durrie is influenced by the presence of knots and loose threads. These seemingly minor details, if left unaddressed, can substantially detract from the overall allure of the product.

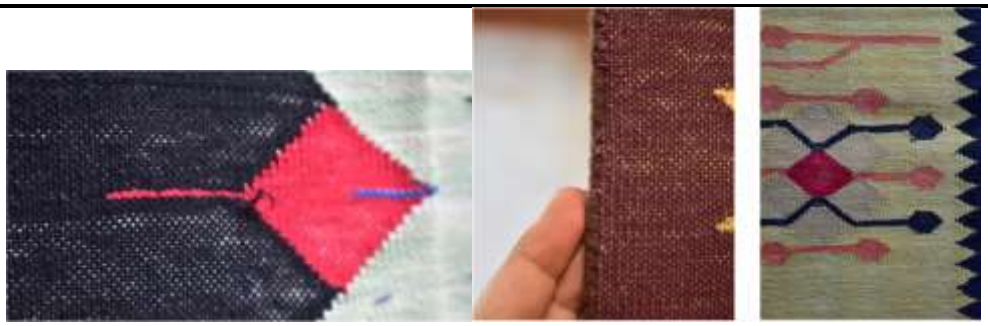

Fig. 21, 22, 23 Loose threads and visible warp, Binding done by hand and Visible Warp

Thus, navigating this balance between artistic freedom and quality control requires a discerning approach. Recognizing and appreciating the inherent uniqueness of each handcrafted durrie while ensuring adherence to established quality parameters is crucial.

VII. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper highlights the rich heritage of Punja Durrie weaving in Salawas, Rajasthan, and emphasises the need for its preservation and promotion. The evolution of motifs, raw materials, and weaving techniques reflects the dynamic nature of this traditional art form. While facing challenges such as changing client demands and quality control, it is important to recognize the inherent uniqueness of each durrie while ensuring adherence to established quality parameters. Furthermore, it emphasises the critical role of acknowledging and appreciating the cultural significance of durrie weaving, and it lays the groundwork for the conservation and succession of this timeless craft. By acknowledging the intricate artistry and historical significance of Punja Durrie weaving, we can pave the way for its continued relevance and prosperity in the modern world.

VIII. Acknowledgement

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