

Sensory Silhouettes: Experiencing South Asian Garments, May 25, 2024 - Dec 8, 2024

Garments are meant to be worn and therefore felt. When they are presented behind glass in a museum, our experience is limited only to seeing them. In this collaboration between RISD's Virtual Textiles Research Group (VTRG) and the RISD Museum's Costume and Textiles Department, the textures, colors, and histories of South Asian textiles converge. Centering cultural associations, memories, and place-based details, we selected four garments in the museum's collection for their distinctive sensory properties and richness of hand, as well as the stories of cultural exchange and collaboration embedded in their making. We encourage you to contemplate these historical textiles, consider the material modeling and garment simulation in the projected video, access audio narrations via the QR code, and gently touch the examples provided at the ends of the cases.

Kate Irvin, curator, Costume and Textiles, RISD Museum

Joy Ko, critic, Textiles and Industrial Design, RISD

with label texts by Yukti V. Agarwal, Brown / RISD Dual Degree 2024.5

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In collaboration with Catherine Andreozzi, professor, Apparel, RISD, and Sheela Lunkad, founder, DirectCreate

Touchable bandhani made by Studio Medium / Riddhi Jain in collaboration with Alexandra Soiseth, RISD MFA 2023, Textiles

CLO3D: Jim Simon, academic lead, US Design Team, and Lindsay Laffoon, specialist, 3-D design and implementation

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Chinese makers for Parsee community (Surat, India)
Akho Garo Sari ca. 1875-1900
Sali ghaj (silk) satin weave, embroidered
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich **55.286**

This embroidered silk sari depicting songbirds, trees, lotus flowers, and peacocks would have been worn by a wealthy Parsee woman, possibly for her wedding. *Gara* saris are associated with India's Parsee community—Zoroastrian religious exiles who fled Persia in the 700s to settle in west central India. As traders, the Parsees imported ornately embroidered Chinese silk satins that were made for the Indian market. The word *garo* eventually became exclusively associated with Chinese embroidered saris. Parsee women wear *gara* saris in the traditional Gujarati manner: wrapped around the waist, with the *pallu* end brought from the back over the right shoulder. These garments are treasured as family heirlooms.



Salvi makers (Patan, Gujarat, India)
Patolu Sari with Zari Border ca. 1875-1900
Silk plain weave, double ikat dyed; zari (metallic-wrapped silk yarn) border
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich **55.292**

The makers of this sari possessed tremendous skill, laboring at least eight months to complete it. Generations of weavers in the Salvi community in the western Indian city of Patan have passed down the double-ikat technique. In this process, both warp and weft yarns are dyed in specific patterns. As these dyed yarns are woven together, motifs emerge, resulting here in the sacred fig and leaf at center and nari-kunjar-popat-ful bhat (dancing girl–elephant–parrot–flower) in the border.



Often worn by the mother of the bride at weddings, saris like this one are kept as family heirlooms. They are traditionally believed to ward off evil and protect the wearer. Look closely to find areas of wear, including many small mended areas.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Possibly Khatri makers (Kutch or Saurashtra, Gujarat, India)
Bandhani Odhani (Head Scarf) 1900-1925
Silk gajji (satin weave); *bandhani* (tied and resist-dyed)
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich **55.470**



This woman's head covering features tree designs in the medallions in the main field and ornate green borders. It also includes dots tinted black to mimic the appearance of mirror embroidery. It was made using the *bandhani* technique, commonly practiced in the western Indian states of Gujarat and Rajasthan. In this process, parts of the textile are tied into knots with yarn to resist the absorption of the dye, resulting in spotted patterns. The finished fabric is highly textured and, in this case, lightweight and vibrantly colored.

Punjabi makers (pre-Partition India; present-day India or Pakistan)
Thirma Bagh Phulkari; Bagh Phulkari (Woman's Embroidered Shawl)
1875-1900
Chaunsa khaddar (handspun, handwoven cotton plain weave) with
patt (silk-floss yarn) embroidery (darning stitch)
Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund **2011.45.7**



Worn by women during sacred rituals connected to childbirth, death, and marriage, phulkari are characterized by embroidered geometric patterns representing the natural world. When embroidery completely covers the cloth, as here, it is called *bagh* (garden).

Thirma phulkaris were embroidered by Hindu and Sikh women using silk floss imported from Afghanistan, Bengal, and China. They applied this embellishment to a foundation of coarse, unbleached cotton (locally spun, woven, and dyed), which symbolized purity. Their craft was passed down over generations, with young girls beginning embroidering phulkaris for their dowries. In the political upheaval following the 1947 division of the Punjab region into India and Pakistan, *phulkari* traditions were largely discontinued.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Studio Medium, apparel and textile design studio
New Delhi, India, 2016-present
Riddhi Jain, designer; lives and works in New Delhi
Alexandra Soiseth; RISD MFA 2023 Textiles, designer; lives and works in
New York, NY
Touchable Bandhani 2024
Silk chiffon; tied with thread
Courtesy of Virtual Textiles Research Group (VTRG)



NO IMAGE
AVAILABLE

This undyed *bandhani* textile hanging offers a sensory reference to the historic *Bandhani Odhani* inside the case to your left. Knots of varying sizes and densities move in linked circles to form a motif loosely represented in the historic textile. Inspired by the dynamic landscapes created by complex textile surfaces, Jain and Soiseth collaborated on this piece to demonstrate the spectrum of sensory stimulation this ancient South Asian tie-dye technique has to offer.

Please touch

Caroline Silverman; RISD BFA 2018, Textiles; Critic, Textiles
Textile Hanging 2024
Embroidered and quilted cotton; batting
Courtesy of Virtual Textiles Research Group (VTRG)



NO IMAGE
AVAILABLE

This textile offers a tactile accompaniment to the embroidered *Akbo Garo* Sari mounted inside the case to your right. Mechanized embroidery, quilting, and freehand sewing come together to create topographies to be discovered through touch. Inspired by Yukti Agarwal's description of the historic sari (see the QR code), this piece is designed to be handled gently.

Please touch