

# Heritage of the Indian Traditional Rogan Art of Cloth Printing, its Uniqueness and Present Innovative Commercial Aspect

## Introduction:

Painting, sculpture, music, literature, and other forms of visual and performing arts are frequently regarded as repositories of a society's collective memory. In ancient India, good art symbolized the wealth of several empires. The majority of the artworks promote religious activity.



Figure 1, Abdul Gafur Khatri at work at his residence in Nirona

Rogan painting is an art of cloth printing practiced in Gujarat, Peshawar and Sindh. In this craft, paint made from boiled oil and vegetable dyes is laid down on fabric using either a metal block (printing) or a stylus (painting). The craft nearly died out in the late 20th century, with Rogan painting being practiced by only a few families in Gujarat of India and Peshawar in Pakistan. The name itself means oil.

## Traditional Rogan Art:

The Rogan Art, an ancient textile art, with its origins in Persia, came to Nirona Village Kutch Gujarat around four centuries ago. Traditionally, the craft Rogan Art defies this logic: the rod "pre-manipulates"; the strand of colour in the air to create intended motifs before it hits the fabric; the fingers under the fabric help shape the final form into the fabric. In this sense, there is a dialogue between the two hands. Rogan art is produced by boiling castor oil for about two days and then adding Pigments Mineral Colour and a binding agent; the resulting paint is thick and shiny.

The cloth that is painted or printed on is usually a dark colour, which makes the intense colours stand out. In Rogan painting, elaborate designs are produced "free hand", by trailing thread-like strands of paint off of a stick. Majority of the time, half of a design is painted, then the cloth is folded in half, transferring a mirror image to the other half of the fabric. Yellow, White and red and Blue, green are the most frequently used colours. In ancient times Persian alphabets were used as calligraphic motifs. Traditionally in floral and geometrical motifs are used in Rogan art. Rogan art is very well known for its "Tree of life" and happiness concept work. These motifs evoke a once-sublime culture and its understanding of beauty. It is only when one witnesses the time, agility, and the utmost control required to draw a simple flower, that one begins to understand the virtuosity behind these highly intricate pieces such as the tree of life. The uniqueness of Rogan art form is that, there in its painting process "No need

*of drawings and no required any prier planning, the magic this art comes from the heart, to head, to hands."*

### **Founder of Rogan Art in India:**

“Rogan” means clarified butter or oil in Persian, or “red” in Hindi, and “josh” refers to passion – fiery or hot – so this dish is all about cooking in an oil-based sauce with an intense heat. Rogan josh was introduced to Kashmir by The Mughals, whose cuisine was influenced by Persian cuisine.

“Today, when the name of Rogan art comes, then the design of Tree of Life is famous in the world, but **Abdul Gafur Khatri** and his younger brother **Sumar Daud Khatri**, who invented this "*Tree of Life*" design.” The Khatri family has practised the art for eight generations now.

### **Historical Background:**

Rogan is indeed an art heritage, which we let die, almost. Why is it so hard for us to uplift our own craftsmanship over branded contemporary designs from the Western world? The process of applying this oil-based paint to fabric began among the Muslim Khatri family, a community in Gujarat.

Although the name Rogan (and some of the traditional designs) suggests an origin in Indian culture, there are no reliable historic records to prove this. The word Rogan comes from Persian or Sanskrit, meaning oil and rang-kaam.

Rogan painting was initially practiced in several locations in the Gujarat region. The painted fabric was mostly purchased by women of the lower castes who wanted to decorate clothing and bed coverings for their weddings. Therefore, it was a seasonal art, with most of the work taking place during the several months when most weddings take place. During the rest of the year, the artisans would switch to other forms of work, such as agriculture.

With the rise of cheaper, machine-made textiles in the late 20th century, Rogan-painted products became relatively more expensive, and many artists turned to other occupations. Ultimately, the Khatri families in the Gujarat, continued the craft.

A Kutch Khatri family that has kept alive the traditional Rogan art form. The artisans of this family and details of their awards & recognitions are given in the below table.

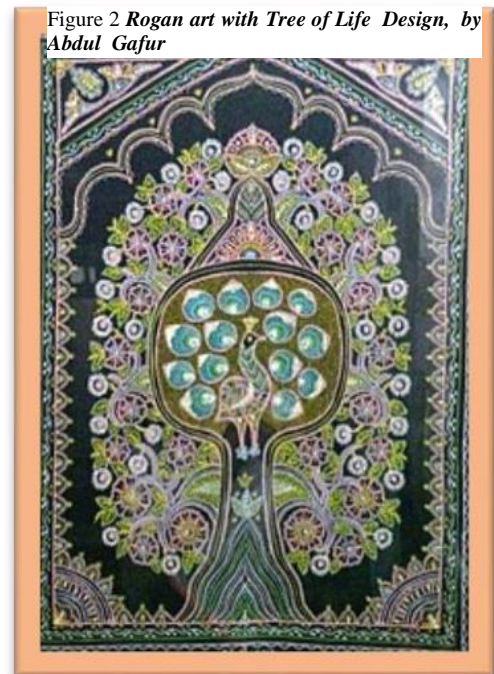


Figure 2 Rogan art with Tree of Life Design, by Abdul Gafur

## Traditional Story of Khari's:

**Abdul Gafur Khatri** is a famous name in Rogan Art. He has worked all his life to keep alive the precious Rogan Art of pigment painting on textiles creating livelihood opportunities through art and craft in a remote village of Kutch. He has single handily led to the revival and revitalization of unique Rogan Art of painting on textiles. At the most crucial point in its history of more than 400 years, when the Art was going to become extinct for won't of markets, he explored new avenues by reinterpreting their traditional skills for creating products for new markets outside of their local communities, sustaining their art.

Abdul Gafur Khatri was born in Nirona Village, Kutch District, Gujarat to a family of Rogan Artists. While many textile crafts are practiced in India, Rogan Art is unique dueto the nature of its technique known Utley to a handful of Muslim Khatriis who specializedin this craft for many centuries. It is one of the most difficult and complex textile craft forms. Each pince has to be uniquely created. There is no scope for creating multiples by standardizing the production process using tools such as blocks or stencils. For many generations, Rogan art was the source of livelihood for the Khatriis of Nirona. Local communities around them bought Ragan painted fabrics for their clothing and other uses.

They were traditionally making Skirts, Quilt covers, big size bags, Table cloths, Odani and Ghaghara- Choli used by women etc. from Rogan art. When machine-made industrial textiles prevailed over handmade Alter 1950s, cheaper mill made and synthetic fabrics started coming into Kutch.

Local customers who patronized this craft for generations shifted to buy these cheaper fabrics. By 1980s, this art craft was on the verge of extinction due to these reasons. The Abdul Gafur Khatri family who had been practicing this craft for many generations had no more work.

They had no other livelihood options available around their village making it difficult for them to survive with the declining prospects, Abdul Gafur Khatri and his younger brother Sumar Daud Khatri was one of them. It was a difficult beginning for both of them. "The Abdul Gafur Khatri and his younger brother Sumar Daud Khatri did not even get the opportunity to study 4 Gujarati, I had to leave school to do other work." Abdul Gafur Khatri initially decided to take up a job in Ahmedabad and Mumbai around 1980s to support his family. During this period, Kutch was facing severe droughts making it all the more difficult for the Khatriis to find even rasual labour work around. He realized that his family would not get other livelihood opportunities due to their age and lack of other skills or education. Due to his dedicated work over years.



The traditional Rogan Art of Kutch has been saved from extinction. He successfully redefined a traditional art that had lost relevance in its local context to create products that have an international appeal. He raised the Rogan from the level of a craft once used to embellish fabrics for local communities to the level of Art. It is now globally recognized as a rare textile art among Art and Crafts lovers. Rogan is a unique art practised with minimal tools. It requires minimal water and a small stylus for painting the fabric. Hundreds of people have been able to improve their livelihoods through the direct and indirect contribution of the Abdul Gafur Khatri, his journey was cut short when he received a letter from home after two years. The Gujarat government had a project for the family and he was needed back home. Family actively participates in conferences, exhibitions and workshops to spread awareness about Rogan Art.

Visiting Abdul Gafur Khatri house, Nirona Village which is about 40 km from Bhuj, to see his work. A true revival of the art occurred in

2014 when Indian Prime Minister Modi gifted former US President Obama and recently gifted to orange colour Rogan art tree of life to Denmark queen Margret the Rogan art piece made by Abdul Gafur Khatri and his younger brother Sumar Daud Khatri that depicted the tree of life. After that, tourists began pouring into Kutch to see the Khatri family work on their art.

“Not just Khatri, even his brothers are acclaimed artists of Rogan art. “My entire family is engaged in this at present. All of us are award winners. We have Padma Shri Award and International craft Awards and National Award and three National Merit Certificates and State Awards in my family. Although the methods and processes of Rogan art are known by others today, the real know-how is hidden in the intricate details that only the Abdul Gafur

Khatri family knows. The family has been continuing this four-century-old tradition for eight generations.

### **Cultural Significance of Rogan Art:**

Cultural arts, such as music, arts, drama, creative writing, photography and dance, are tools that help develop the mind and body, refine feelings, and thoughts and reflect and represent our customs and values as a society. Cultural arts help to explain the world in which we live through an exploration of creativity.

The Rogan painting craft stems from agriculture, which is a major occupation of the village. Castor being the major cultivation draws the natural connection to the craft as the main ingredient of the colours that are manually prepared.

### **Motifs Used in Rogan Art:**

Traditionally the use of **floral**, **geometrical** and **calligraphic motifs** exemplifies the preeminence of the art of ‘**Rogan paintings**’. Calligraphic motifs were used in Persian letters in ancient times. Similarly, **bird motifs** were used only by the Hindu Khatri craftsmen of Kutch region of Gujarat state. The details of the motifs, which are used as a whole pattern, are as follows:

### Various Types of Motifs:

1. Plant Motif.
2. Floral Motif (flower).
3. Traditional Motif.
4. Geometrical Motif.
5. Abstract Motif.

### Materials Used in Rogan Art:

In the entire process of art form of painting on cloth required basic two materials as mentioned in the following table no. - 2

Sl. No.	Material	Description of Material
1.	<b>Eco-friendly Colours</b>	This set includes 3 colours used in Rogan art that are handmade by the artist Rizwan Khatri. The colours included in this set are Blue, Red & Yellow.
2.	<b>Basic Fabric</b>	These pigment colours are added to castor oil gel to get Rogan colours for painting. Earlier, Rogan painting was done only on a thick cotton cloth called Khaddar. But now it is customized.

### Traditional Rogan Art Process, Technique & Tools:

Rogan is a form of textile painting which uses a rich, brightly coloured paint made from castor oil and natural colours. The term Rogan means ‘**Oil-based**’ in Persian and refers to the thick substance formed by heating and then casting castor oil in cold water. The making of the Rogan paste is done in the jungle where the artisans mix oil and natural colour. After it is mixed with natural colours, the paste is drawn out into a fine ‘**thread**’ with a metal stylus or ‘**Kalam**’. The Artisans then place a small amount of this paint paste into their palm and at body temperature, the paint is carefully twisted across the cloth into motifs and patterns using the ‘Kalam’. Next, the artisan folds the fabric thereby printing its mirror image. The finer details are then added thus completing the Rogan painting.

*“Today, when the name of Rogan art comes, then the design of Tree of Life is famous in the world, but Abdul Gafur Khatri and his younger brother Sumar Daud Khatri, who invented this "Tree of Life" design.”*



## Printing Process of Rogan Artworks:

Rogan is a type of textile painting which uses a rich and panoramic contrast colour schemes. The artisans of Rogan art use special type self-prepared colours and they made these colours from castor oil and natural pigments. The complex geometric motifs, floral patterns, peacocks format designs, or nature inspired motifs, the tree of life, etc. are sketched from the history and traditional culture of the Kutch region of Gujarat.

The preparation of the 'Rogan mixture' takes place in the outside of the Nirona village where no one lives, due to its high risk of inflammation. The first and the foremost step is to boil the castor oil in a metal pot in the furnace. In local parlance, this metal vessel is called "Handio". The temperature has to be controlled because if it rises result in flames inside the container. The process of preparing the mixture takes about 3 to 4 days. During fabric painting process, the artisan firstly clips the fabric next to back cloth, to his pants, so when he wants the fabric to stretched, he simply stretches his leg. The craftsman directly begins to use the paste to a pre-decided design pattern in their mind or customary motif without any pre-drawn sketches, or traces. The craftsman uses only one hand for working with 'Kalam', while the index finger leads to roll of the paste from underneath the fabric, the fabric is turned up and pressed against the outline motif to get a mirror image. Drying—once the sketches are done the fabric is dried under the sunlight for almost 4 to 5 hours. This confirms that the colour is dried onto the surface of the fabric. The rest colours from the Kalam or pen are rolled back and stored with water in small vessels.

## Resurgence of the Art:

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, several factors came together to bring about renewed interest in Rogan art, especially painting. First, after the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, when much of the region was devastated, the water and electricity infrastructure was improved, new roads were built, and the number of flights into the region was increased, all of which led to an increase in tourism. Second, local cooperatives and non-profit groups helped local artisans, including Rogan artists, to increase their market by selling in urban settings and online. Third, many artisans won state and national awards for their art, thus increasing the prestige of their work. Finally, in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the U.S. White House, and gave President Obama two Rogan paintings including a tree of life. They were painted by Abdul Gafur Khatri, a national award winner.

Artisans in Gujarat have introduced contemporary products to appeal to tourists, such as God's Portrait, Raja Ram Darbar, bags, cushion-covers, table-cloths, wall hangings, and pillow-covers. The tree of life continues to be a major motif. The number of tourists to the artisan's workshop increased steadily in the 2010s to as many as 400 people per day, causing traffic jams in the village. In an attempt to keep up with increased demand, in 2010 the artisans began to train women for the first time. Previously, it was feared that women would spread the secrets of the craft when they married out of the family. In 2015, twenty women were working with the family in Kutch Gujarat.

Traditional art forms of India have such unique qualities that separate one art form from another. Centuries ago, art travelled with people and moved from its place of origin to new foreign lands. Thanks to such movements, India is now home to one of the rarest forms of art, the Rogan Art.

Rogan art is a centuries-old unique style of art. The Persian art form now settled in Nirona Village of Kutch in Gujarat is a migrant art form that has become a cultural asset for India. Rogan Art is so distinctive that only one particular Khatri family has practised it since it arrived in India. The story of the artist's practice and survival of the art is equally remarkable. In this article, we will try to present the history, practice, techniques, and survival of Rogan Art. Without further ado, let us begin.

## Techniques of Performing Rogan Art

The art form's survival and uniqueness are still intact because of the Gafur family's dedication to preserving the art form. The family has been practicing the art form with all its original techniques and styles.

Rogan Art's brief history and etymology give a clue that a lot of technique goes into making this art. The patterns of Rogan Art, like other art forms of India, have many intricate details. But even before starting



Figure 4, Artisan demonstrating painting Method

the painting, the formation of the paint itself requires a particular process. Let us find out all the techniques that go into the formation of Rogan Designs.

### **Paint Used in Rogan Art:**

The paste of the Rogan Art paint is made from castor oil. The colour pigments are all natural. The process of making the paint's paste starts with boiling the castor oil. Artists burn the oil in the jungle. After a long period of cooking the oil, it is placed to cool. Once the grease cools down and the oil texture is in the desired rubbery form, the following pigmentation begins. If the surface is not flexible enough, the oil is again put to boil until the required consistency is attained.

On the other hand, the colour pigments are made into a fine paste by adding water to them. The mixing of the colour paste with the boiled oil is done with a stone. Once the colour doughs are made, they are put in containers with water. The water ensures that the paste does not harden.

### **Patterns Used in Rogan Art:**

Rogan Art has its origin in Persia, is typically in association with the Islam tradition. AbdulHamid Gafur, the present carrier of the baton of the Rogan Art, describes the prevalent Islam themes in the patterns. According to the Islam community, human figures are not permissible as motifs. The typical ways of the Rogan Art are flowers, geometric shapes, and the most famous, the 'Tree of Life' motif.

Hamid Gafur said in interviews that the pattern works in Masjid's of Delhi is also a source of inspiration for the designs. Staying true to the original work, the motifs carry the essence of the age-old tradition of the Rogan Art.

## **4. MOTIFS USED IN ROGAN ART**

Motifs traditionally, the floral, geometrical and calligraphy motifs were used for the art of Rogan paintings. During the ancient period, the calligraphy motifs were used in Persian alphabets. The bird motifs were used only by the Hindu Khatri craftsmen of Ahmedabad. These motifs were used as all over pattern.

### **4.1 Types of Motifs**

- 4.1.1 Plant Motif.
- 4.1.2 Floral Motif (flower)
- 4.1.3 Traditional Motif.
- 4.1.4 Geometrical Motif.
- 4.1.5 Abstract Motif.

## **5. MATERIALS USED IN NATURAL ROGAN ART**

**5.1 Colours:** This set includes 3 colours used in Rogan art that are handmade by the artist Rizwan Khatri. The colours included in this set are **Blue, Red & Yellow**.

**5.2 Fabric:** These pigment colours are added to castor oil gel to get Rogan colours for painting. Earlier, Rogan painting was done only on a thick cotton cloth called Khaddar. But now it is customized.

## **6. TRADITIONAL ROGAN ART PROCESS, TECHNIQUE & TOOLS**

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paste is done in the jungle where the artisans mix oil and natural colour. After it is mixed with natural colours, the paste is drawn out into a fine 'thread' with a metal **stylus** or '**Kalam**'. The Artisans then place a small amount of this paint paste into their palm and at body temperature, the paint is carefully twisted across the cloth into motifs and patterns using the 'Kalam'. Next, the artisan folds the fabric thereby printing its mirror image. The finer details are then added thus completing the Rogan painting.

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## **7. PROCESS OF ROGAN PRINTING**

Rogan paint is produced by boiling castor oil for about two days and then adding vegetable pigments and a binding agent; the resulting paint is thick and shiny. The cloth that is painted or printed on is usually a dark colour, which makes the intense colours stand out.

In Rogan printing, the pattern is applied using metal blocks with patterns carved into them. In Rogan painting, elaborate designs are produced freehand, by trailing thread-like strands of paint off of a stylus. Frequently, half of a design is painted, then the cloth is folded in half, transferring a mirror image to the other half of the fabric. The designs include floral motifs, animals, and local folk art.

## **8. RESURGENCE OF THE ART**

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, several factors came together to bring about a renewed interest in Rogan art, especially painting. First, after the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, when much of the region was devastated, the water and electricity infrastructure was improved, new roads were built, and the number of flights into the region was increased, all of which led to an increase in tourism. Second, local cooperatives and non-profit groups helped local artisans, including Rogan artists, to increase their market by selling in urban settings and online. Third, many artisans won state and national awards for their art, thus increasing the prestige of their work. Finally, in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the U.S. White House, and gave President Obama two Rogan paintings including a tree of life. They were painted by Abdul Gafur Khatri, a national award winner.

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### **HISTORY OF ROGAN ART**

Rogan Art hails from the land of Persia. The art form crossed many borders and came to India some four hundred years ago. An hour's drive from Bhuj, Nirona of Kutch is now home to this intricate art. The art form became instantly popular because of its different styles, technique, and patterns. Rogan Art is made by hand, purely out of one's imagination without any blueprint as reference.

