

# THE EVOLUTIONARY JOURNEY OF DURRIES ART OF MALWA REGION, PANJAB.

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**Abstract**–This paper examines the evolutionary journey of Durries Art (handwoven Rugs) from its folk roots in the Malwa Region, Panjab, to its current social and cultural manifestations. The purpose of this study is to trace how Durrie's art, originally intended for the base sheet of a bed (Manja) and floor mattresses, has transitioned to contemporary spaces while retaining its cultural and social significance. Durries have evolved beyond their utilitarian function to become expression of identity, heritage, and artistic excellence. Using historical analysis and visual investigation, the research explores the intricate patterns and vibrant motifs of Durrie's art, such as geometrical designs, animal motifs, flowers, peacocks, asymmetrical designs, and various other figures, and their symbolic meanings. All reflecting the aesthetic sensibility and socio-cultural narratives of rural Panjab. The methodology includes a review of literature and fieldwork which involves interviews with artisan, and documentation of weaving practices to understand both the tangible and intangible aspect of this art form. The findings reveal the challenges faced by artists due to tools, raw materials, and modern machinery involvement and propose strategies for conserving this traditional art form. This study concludes that despite modernization, Malwa durrie art continues to thrive, reflecting its adaptability and enduring appeal. Finding reveals the major challenges faced by artisans today, including scarcity of raw materials, declining manual skills, competition from mechanical production, and lack of financial support. Despite these challenges, the reliance of local artisan and going on efforts in design innovation and sustainable practices signify hope of revival. This study concludes that, even amidst modernization and globalizations, Malwa Durries art endures as a living tradition- retaining its adaptability, cultural symbolism, and timeless aesthetic appeal. (abstract)

**\*\*Index Terms\*\***Durrie weaving, Malwa region, Panjab folk art, textile heritage, cultural evolution, Punja technique.

## **Introduction**

The art and craft of Punjab reflect the prosperity of its land, which reflects a deep cultural heritage. Artisans in Punjab are not only producers; He is a storyteller, weaving stories of tradition in his work clothes. Their expertise is only spread beyond aesthetics, embedding cultural narratives in everyday objects. For example, shoes are not only functional in Punjab; This is an art form. The complex designs and vibrant colors are trademarks, reflecting the festive spirit of the region. Daily clothes are no less expressive. Prepared with care, they are canvases for traditional motifs, a useful combination with cultural expression. The carpets of Panjab, the Durries told a similar story. Each knot and color choice are deliberately performed; centuries old techniques are passed through generations. These Durries are not just home decorations; They are pieces of the soul of Panjab, which are placed in threads and patterns. Durries hold immense cultural significance in India. They not only serve as functional floor and bed coverings but also act as symbols of heritage, craftsmanship, and storytelling. Each pattern, color, and design often carry a narrative that connects generations and preserves cultural traditions.

## Historical and cultural significance

In India, Durries have long been used as woven floor mats, bed mats and wall decoration are still found in many homes today. They are very useful and can be used as bedding, for wrapping items, or mainly as floor coverings. Durries come in many sizes, from small ones for tables to large ones for big gatherings. While they were mainly used on Manja, beds, tables and floors, their beautiful designs have also made them popular as wall decorations.

During the Mughal period (16<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> Century) Malwa was under Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire, with the Ferozepur serving as provincial capital. The Mughal courts patronized various textile arts, including carpet and durrie weaving, which influence local durrie production.

The Sikh empire early 19<sup>th</sup> century under the Maharaja Ranjit Singh further encourages artisanal crafts, with Patiala merging as a significant center for arts in Malwa. While durries were primarily utilitarian, their design began to reflect the aesthetic sensibility of the time, incorporating geometrical patterns and vibrant colors inspired by Mughal and Sikh arts.

The British colonial periods (19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century) brought economical changes that affected traditional crafts. The influx of machine-made textile from Britain disrupted the local weaving industries, including durrie production. However, Malwa's rural economy helps to sustain the craft for domestic use.

The Partition of India in 1947 significantly alter Punjab's cultural and economic landscape. The division of Panjab led to migration of artisans, particularly Panjabi Muslims, to west Punjab (Pakistan), affecting the continuity of crafts traditions in Indian Panjab, including Malwa. However, Malwa's Sikh and Hindu communities continued the traditional craft, adapting it new economic realities. Programs like All India handicraft Board (1952) and later initiatives under ministry of textile provided training, marketing support and access to modern technology for durrie weavers in Panjab.

**Panjab** – Rich in geometric, floral, bird, and animal motifs, often handwoven by women for home use, at weddings, and gurdwaras. Dhurries are affordable, easy to clean, and are not easily damaged by pests like silverfish, which often harm carpets. Cotton durries are comfortable year-round; they keep you warm in winter and cool in summer. In the past, people saw durries as a poor man's carpet, but over time, they became more popular because of their modern and artistic patterns.

Since they are woven, durries can be used on both sides, making them even more practical. The way they are woven also allows for more design variety than regular carpets. Traditionally, women in the household made durries. To start weaving, they only needed a simple tool called a 'Punja', a pit loom, or even just two wooden bars. With this setup, they could begin weaving quickly.

Here are two main methods of making dhurries: the 'Punja' technique and the 'pit loom with fly shuttle'. The Punja loom is simpler to set up than the pit loom. Usually, women spin the cotton, and men dye the yarn.

Panja durries are closely linked to the Punjabi tradition of dowry, which includes bedding items. When a bride goes to live with her husband, she brings eleven special bedding pieces that she makes herself by weaving and embroidering. In richer families, people would give yarn grown in their village to the local weaver, called a *julaha*, who would dye the yarn and weave it into durries and *khes* (blanket-like cloths). The bedding of the bride's bedding includes several handmade items: a durrie (floor mat), a thin padded mattress called a *tallai*, an embroidered mat called a *chatai*, quilt covers with embroidery, and handwoven *khes* (coverlets). These items show both the family's social standing and the bride's skill in weaving and embroidery.

The durrie is placed under the mattress and often decorated with bright, colorful designs. These might include big red flowers, purple eggplants on an orange background, or symbols of good wishes like a car, jewelry, or a healthy baby. Some durries also show lucky images, such as the mother goddess Sanjhi Devi.

Even today, bridal durries are still made, especially in the cotton-growing Malwa region and in villages near Jalandhar. Besides weddings, durries were also made for gurdwaras (Sikh temples), often woven by groups of women working together.

Symbols and motifs along with importance:

Durrie weaving was a common craft in many villages of Punjab. It became a bigger industry after weavers from Sialkot (now in Pakistan) moved to places like Nakodar, Noormahal, and nearby villages. In Nakodar, two main types of cotton dhurries are made. One is the bed

durrie, woven on a pit loom with colorful stripes. The other is the floor durrie, made on a simple floor loom (called an *adda*) using two contrasting colors. The patterns in both types often include birds, animals, plants, and designs inspired by *phulkari* embroidery.

Geometrical Shapes:



In Punjab, many traditional durries feature bold **geometric patterns**. These designs are made using straight lines, angles, and shapes like triangles, diamonds, squares, and zigzags. The use of geometric motifs is not just for decoration—they also reflect cultural meanings and local traditions.

#### Common Designs:

- **Triangles and Diamonds:** These are often arranged in rows or repeated to form larger patterns. They may represent strength, stability, or balance.
- **Stripes and Zigzags:** These are used to add rhythm and movement to the design. Stripes are often woven in bold contrasting colors.
- **Checkerboard Patterns:** Squares arranged in a grid give a modern and clean look, though this style has been used for generations.

#### Symbolic and Ceremonial Patterns

- **Fertility symbols** – like mango leaves or vines
- **Sanjhi Devi** – the mother goddess, shown in stylized forms
- **Auspicious motifs** – such as lotus flowers or temple arches

These durries reflect the artistic sense and creativity of rural Punjabi weavers. The simplicity and precision of geometric patterns show the weaver's skill and attention to detail.

#### Durrie weaving as an intangible cultural heritage

UNESCO defines intangible cultural heritage as living traditions and skills practiced daily, including crafts, customs, and expressions  [\(saddapind.co.in+4asiainch.org+4asiainch.org+4\)](http://saddapind.co.in+4asiainch.org+4asiainch.org+4)

**Durries as Heritage** — Hand-woven dhurries represent regional identity, folk art, and the intimate knowledge of women artisans passed through families .

#### A Living Tradition

- **Homegrown skill** – Historically, dhurrie weaving was taught by elders at home, mainly among women in rural Punjab.
- **Techniques & Tools** – Weaving is done on simple looms—pit looms, floor (*adda*) looms, or vertical looms—with tools like the *Panja* tightly pack weft yarns

**Intergenerational link** – Suits familial knowledge transfer—especially among women—preserving memory and context.

**Cultural expression** – Reflects Panjab's identity, environmental connections, and role in community rites.

**Economic resilience** – Offers home-based livelihoods, low entry barriers, and scope for modern adaptation.

## Types of Durries in Panjab

### 1. Bed Durries

- Woven on pit looms with **multicolored horizontal stripes**.
- Used traditionally as bedding or for dowries.

### 2. Floor Durries

- Woven on floor looms using **two contrasting colors** and more detailed motifs.
- Used under mattresses, in prayer areas, or as decorative pieces.

### 3. Bridal Durries

- Include complex, colorful motifs symbolizing marital bliss, fertility, and domestic prosperity.
- Brides often wove or embroidered themselves as part of **dowry tradition**.

## Economic Impact

### 1. Livelihood Generation

- **Primary income source:** For many rural families, especially in Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka, weaving dhurries is a **main or supplementary income**.
- **Women-led income:** Dhurrie weaving is often done at home by women, allowing them to **earn money without leaving their households**.
- **Affordable setup:** Basic tools like the *Panja*, pit loom, or floor loom require little investment, making it **accessible for poor and low-income households**.

### Rural Economy Boost

- It helps support **local economies** by using regional cotton and wool, engaging dyers, spinners, and traders in the value chain.
- Communities like Nakodar (Panjab) or Navalgund (Karnataka) have become **craft-based micro-industries**, sustaining multiple families through weaving.

### Women's Empowerment

- Durrie weaving offers rural women a chance to **gain financial independence**, learn skills, and contribute to family income.
- Many women form **self-help groups (SHGs)** to produce and sell together, fostering leadership and confidence.

### Preservation of Heritage and Identity

- Weaving keeps generation-old cultural knowledge alive, passed from mothers to daughters.
- It connects families and villages to their **regional identity**, storytelling traditions, and spiritual beliefs (like motifs of Sanjhi Devi or peacocks in weddings).

### Community Building

- Durrie weaving is often done in **shared spaces**, like courtyards or community workshops.
- It promotes **collaboration and solidarity**, especially when groups weave together for festivals, gurdwaras, or markets.

### Education & Skill Transmission

- Craft skills are often taught informally at home, passing on **hand skills, patience, and discipline** to younger generations.

- Where NGOs and schools are involved, children also gain exposure to **heritage education**, adding pride and value to their roots.

## Craft Techniques of Durrie Weaving in Punjab

### 1. Weaving Tools and Setup

#### a. Pit Loom (Khadia)

- Traditional dhurries in Punjab are woven on **pit looms**, where the weaver sits in a pit dug into the ground.
- The loom consists of a frame with warp threads stretched vertically, while the weft is passed manually.
- This technique allows for **tight weaving and even tension**, suitable for thicker, durable floor dhurries.

#### b. Adda or Floor Loom

- Floor dhurries are also woven on simpler **horizontal floor looms** called *adda looms*.
- These are portable, more flexible, and often used by women within their homes.

#### c. Panja Tool

- A **metal comb-like tool** called the *Panja* is used to beat the weft yarns into place tightly.
- This technique ensures a **flat, firm weave**, making the durrie durable and reversible.

### 2. Materials Used

- **Cotton yarn** is most used in Panjab, especially in regions like Malwa, known for cotton production.
- In some cases, **wool or jute** may be added for texture and strength.
- Yarns are often **locally spun and dyed**—traditionally by men in the community.

### 3. Weaving Techniques

#### a. Weft-Faced Weaving

- In this method, only the weft (horizontal thread) is visible.
- Patterns are created by switching colors in the weft, using a technique like tapestry weaving.

#### b. Kilim Technique

- This method involves **interlocking wefts** at the color boundaries, forming sharp, clean shapes—ideal for geometric designs.

#### c. Striped Weaving

- Stripes in various widths and colors are created by changing weft threads in straight bands—commonly seen in **bed dhurries**.

#### d. Split Weaving

- Used for complex patterns, where color areas are woven separately and “split” at the join, forming clear-cut edges for shapes like birds or flowers.

## Contemporary Trends in Durrie Weaving in Panjab

### 1. Design Innovation and Aesthetic Shift

Modern Color Palettes: Traditional bright colors are being replaced or blended with subtle, pastel tones.

Fusion Designs: Integration of contemporary geometric patterns with traditional motifs.

Customization: Increased demand for bespoke designs catering to urban and international tastes.

## 2. Technological Integration

Semi-mechanized Looms: Artisans are shifting from entirely manual weaving to semi-automatic looms to increase efficiency.

Digital Design Tools: Use of CAD (Computer-Aided Design) for prototyping and replicating patterns.

## 3. Material Experimentation

Sustainable Fibers: Rise in the use of organic cotton, jute, hemp, and recycled fabrics.

Blended Yarns: Use of wool-cotton and polyester-cotton blends for durability and texture variety.

## 4. Market Diversification

Home Decor: Durries are now used as wall hangings, table runners, cushion covers, and yoga mats.

Export Growth: Expansion into global markets like the US, Europe, and Japan through online platforms.

## 5. Artisan Empowerment and Branding

Collective Brands: Cooperatives and NGOs creating collective brands to promote the identity of Punjab's weavers.

Geographical Indication (GI) Push: Efforts are underway to get GI tagging for "Punjabi Durrie" to safeguard cultural heritage.

## Future Directions

### 1. Digital Platforms and E-Commerce

Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) models through platforms like Etsy, Amazon Handmade, and craft-focused Indian startups.

Virtual Exhibitions: Use of digital galleries and metaverse spaces for showcasing craft.

### 2. Sustainable and Ethical Practices

Zero-Waste Design: Emphasis on minimal waste in weaving and dyeing processes.

Eco-Certifications: Seeking certifications like GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) to boost trust in international markets.

### 3. Skill Development and Youth Engagement

Design Schools Collaboration: Partnerships with institutions like NIFT, NID, and local polytechnics for curriculum modernization.

Entrepreneurial Training: Encouraging youth to treat weaving as a viable business, not just a craft.

### 4. Cultural Tourism and Experiences

Weaving Villages: Promoting durrie weaving through tourism (e.g., live demos, craft trails).

Craft Residencies: Inviting global designers to collaborate with local artisans.

### 5. Policy Support and Institutional Aid

Government Schemes: Leveraging schemes like the Hathkargha Samvardhan Sahayata (HSS) scheme provides support for looms and accessories. The National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP) also supports weavers with raw material, design inputs, technology upgrades, and marketing assistance. SFURTI, PMEGP, and Handloom Weavers' Comprehensive Welfare Scheme.

[https://handlooms.nic.in/assets/img/Handloom%20Schemes/NHDP\\_English%20Compendium\\_2024.pdf](https://handlooms.nic.in/assets/img/Handloom%20Schemes/NHDP_English%20Compendium_2024.pdf)

Cluster Development: Establishment of durrie-specific clusters with training and marketing support.

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