

Introduction: Histories, Identities and Innovations

Textiles occupy a distinguished place among the various creative practices that have evolved in the Indian subcontinent. The magnificent corpus of handcrafted fabrics produced across the region over thousands of years are shaped by its diverse geographies and embody rich histories of visual and material culture. These form a part of living traditions that reflect a mastery over complex techniques, and are deeply integrated with the socio-cultural dynamics in the country.

From serving as intimate objects to expressing grandeur at monumental scales, textiles are embedded in spiritual beliefs, interpersonal relations and expressions of power. The history of South Asian textiles is also inseparable from the history of the world, and learning about how they have been desired and consumed globally enables us to bridge connections between diverse cultures. In fact, we can trace the movement of techniques, designs and people through the journey of textiles across vast geographies from time immemorial, right up to the present day.

Our approach

This course introduces some of the multifaceted narratives surrounding the subcontinent's expansive textile history. Our selection of thematic lessons provides diverse entry points into this rich subject, exploring it through the lens of artworks, artefacts, photographs, documentary footage, literature and even oral traditions.

Our explorations begin with an introduction to the raw materials, processes, and the traditions and functions associated with the region's textiles. We then examine how textile practices are tethered to the identities of their makers, and map out how they embody religious and spiritual symbolism. We also study how South Asian textiles and their practices are linked to commercial, cultural and political interactions that have altered the course of world history. Finally, we look at how textiles can serve as vehicles of power, taste, self expression and creative innovation.

From covering the basics of how fabrics are made and used, to examining how they are deeply integrated with history, culture and daily life, these different perspectives enable us to appreciate this ever-evolving field. It is this dynamism and contemporary relevance that makes the study of textiles from the subcontinent essential and exciting. Thank you for choosing to take this Course – let's begin our journey.

This transcript is part of an online course on Textiles. Click [here](#) to access.

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