

Original Research Article

Pattern and Color in Art and Architecture: Symbols of Baloch Ethnic Identity

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Abstract

Introduction: The region of Baluchestan, due to its architectural diversity and handicrafts, shapes a distinct identity for the Baloch people despite regional variations. This study aims to identify the meanings and concepts of the colors and patterns used and to analyze their role as identity symbols of the Baloch people, which helps in better understanding the values and rich culture of this region. Thus, the research questions are, «What is the meaning and concept, origin, and source of inspiration for the colors and patterns in the handicrafts and traditional housing of Baluchestan?» And «How are the patterns and colors used in the handicrafts and housing of this region introduced as identity symbols of the Baloch people?»

Research Method: The present research was descriptive-analytical, and data was collected through library resources, databases, and field visits to various types of arts. The statistical population includes local housing and traditional arts of the Baluchestan region, and the selection of samples was purposeful based on the research objectives. The research findings were analyzed qualitatively.

Findings: Investigations show that the colorful patterns in Balochi art, especially needlework, are unique cultural symbols of this ethnic group and share common roots with neighboring cultures, particularly India. The colors in Baluchestan's architecture create a vibrant atmosphere, and the geometric patterns reveal the Baloch people's resilience in the face of adversity. Thus, these elements constitute both decorative aspects and the foundation of their cultural and social expression.

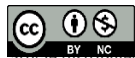
Conclusion: The Baloch people's interest and commitment to using simple geometric patterns and bright colors in handicrafts and local clothing, as well as in the interior and exterior decorations of their local homes, have created a unified cultural identity and landscape for them despite their diversity. This indicates that the art and architecture of Baluchestan, through the use of these specific patterns and colors, elucidate the cultural identity of the Baloch people.

Keywords

Pattern, Color, Art and Architecture, Identity, Baloch Ethnic Group

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Introduction and Problem Definition

Artworks in any society reflect the thoughts and beliefs of the people. The patterns and colors used in the art of the people of Baluchestan are the result of the beliefs and convictions of the artists from this region, the needs of the society for which these artworks were created, and the capabilities of the materials, resources, and facilities available throughout the history of this area. Each material, such as clay, stone, wood, etc., has its own unique capabilities and characteristics. These capabilities will influence the dimensions, size, and quality of the artwork. Meanwhile, the cultural and historical background of the society in which the art is created should not be overlooked, as it creates a kind of uniformity and coherence in the thematic and formal content of the target society's artistic productions. Thus, in various forms of art, if the beliefs and convictions of the artists, especially the society in which the art is formed, are unified, the different arts in that geography and region will have common characteristics. This steadfast unity in beliefs, traditions, and cultural customs can be well observed in the greater region of Baluchestan. For this reason, for example, in needlework, pottery, and architecture of the region, although the scales, materials, and artistic resources are generally different from each other, common thematic and formal characteristics can be found; such as proportions, motifs, colors, and other attributes that result in a shared spirit in the various arts of the region. On the other hand, cultural and social research in the Baluchestan region is very nascent, with further studies focusing on traditional Baloch housing, Baloch folk motifs and designs, techniques and tools in the productions of Baloch nomads, the life and adaptation of Baloch tribes to the environment, Baloch astronomy, and the examination of Baluchestan's festivals and celebrations. The needlework on Baloch women's clothing, with its diverse patterns, is the pinnacle of Baloch women's art; however, there has been little research on the indigenous housing of Baluchestan, and even less on the relationship between indigenous housing and the traditional arts of the region. Although it is now clear to everyone that the needlework on the clothing of Baloch women, with its diverse patterns, or the Kalporagan pottery, which is a product of the thoughts and ideas of Baloch women and embodies the material and spiritual culture of the Baloch people, hold a significant place and importance in the ecosystem of the region's inhabitants, the main question pertains to the nature and reasons behind the cultural themes that have shaped the common characteristics of clothing, handicrafts, and specific types of housing in Baluchestan. These features create a shared emotional response to the various indigenous arts of the region in the observer. These characteristics may result from cultural commonalities in the understanding of color and form, the source of inspiration, or shared meanings and concepts of artistic elements. In this research, after a brief review and introduction to the clothing, needlework, and housing decorations of Baluchestan, a comparative analysis of the colors and patterns used in clothing, handicrafts, and housing decorations will be presented based on the findings of the subject. This comparison is worth examining both in terms of appearance and sources of inspiration, as well as in terms of meaning. In the final analysis, based on the cultural history of the Baloch people, the main research questions are addressed: «What are the meanings and concepts, origins, and sources of inspiration for the colors and patterns in the handicrafts and indigenous housing of Baluchestan?» Additionally, «How are the patterns and colors used in the handicrafts and housing of this region introduced as identity symbols of the Baloch people?» The hypothesis is that the colors and patterns used in the indigenous art and architecture of Baluchestan share numerous similarities, which can be considered one of the identity markers of the Baloch people. These colors and patterns hold meaning

and significance for the people of this region, who have drawn inspiration from nature based on their spirit and taste.

Research Method

This research has been conducted using a qualitative method based on field studies, photography of works, and examination of library texts. The statistical population includes handicrafts, clothing, and traditional architecture of Baluchestan. The sample studied was selectively chosen based on the research objective, the role of color, and the influence of these arts on each other. The data analysis was conducted using a descriptive-comparative method based on the cultural history studies of Baluchestan.

Research Background

Among the notable research conducted within the cultural context of Baluchestan, the following can be mentioned: «Beyhaghi» (1986) introduced Baloch art and culture in the article entitled «Art and Culture of the Baloch». «Mahmoudzahi» (2013) examined Baloch art in the sixth volume of the Encyclopedia of Culture and Civilization of Sistan and Baluchestan Province. In the article entitled «Local Clothing of the Baloch and Its Affiliation to National Identity», «Mousavi Haji, Mahmoudi, and Ghasemi» (2014) concluded that Baloch clothing is directly related to their life and culture and is a clear testament to the formation of Iranian-Islamic identity in various regions of Iran. Regarding indigenous motifs on the facades of buildings in the Baluchestan region, one can refer to the article by «Torshabi, Narouei, and Abdi» (2014) entitled «Evaluation of Designs of Baloch Needlework and Its Impact on the Building Facade in Baluchestan», which discusses the connection between motifs and symbols on the facades of some residential buildings in Zahedan and Baloch needlework. In the article entitled «Capabilities of Indigenous Housing in Sistan and Baluchestan Province (Generalizing the Capabilities of Native Housing along the Sarbaz River in Today's Housing)», «Torshabi» (2022) has addressed not only the technical features but also the role of color and its impact on the structure and facade of buildings, as well as the mysterious decorations of houses in the Sarbaz region of Baluchestan. Finally, in the article entitled «Analyzing Decorative Facades in the Villages of Central Baluchestan and Searching for their Connection with Handicrafts of this region (Case Study: Patan Village)», «Dadgar and Ghasri» (2023), have pointed out the formal similarities in the decorations used on the exterior walls of buildings and those used in the local handicraft art of this region. Since there has been little research on the role and color in the art and architecture of Baluchestan and the examination of role and color as indicators of Baloch ethnic identity in a structured manner, this research is essential for understanding and introducing the artistic features of Baloch culture and identity.

Literature Review

In this research, concepts such as culture, identity, sign, and ethnic art have been used, and it is necessary to address the definitions of these concepts at the outset.

1. Culture: Culture is a collection of values and beliefs encompassing the ideals of a group of people, such that the transmission of these values and beliefs among the members of a culture is similar from one generation to the next (Rapoport, 1980). Therefore, the culture of each ethnic group is intertwined with experiences and mental images, shaping the subjective interpretations arising from symbols (Fereydounzadeh, et al., 2019). Cultural identities are also influenced by various factors such as aesthetics, beliefs, relationships,

skills, family, and history. These factors contribute to the development and deepening of identity (Shaari, 2015).

2. Identity: Identity is a conceptual, value-based, and normative notion that finds meaning in response to the question of «who» (Mirmoghtadaei, 2005). Humans have always sought an identity to understand their being and essence (Hojjat, 2005). Ethnic identity is related to a feeling that gives meaning to life. Ethnic identity helps form a cohesive identity (Syed & Jung, 2014). Representation of cultural products plays an important role in creating and reflecting cultural identity (Shaari, 2015).

3. Sign: Signs, motifs, and decorations are one of the manifestations of the thoughts, beliefs, and emotions of communities (Dadgar & Ghasri, 2023). All signs somehow relate to culture (Fereydounzadeh, et al., 2019). «Caller» considers the semiotics of things and relationships within a culture as 'signs' and seeks to identify the rules and regulations that the members of that culture have consciously or unconsciously accepted and used to ascribe meaning to phenomena (Caller, 2001). «Signs» become meaningful with the concepts they acquire, and following physical and objective «signs», the human mind is directed towards history, culture, ideology, and identity.

4. Ethnic Art: Ethnic art, as a symbol and form of visual, auditory, behavioral, spatial, relative, and causal communication, serves as a platform for the tangible manifestation of human thoughts, actions, ideas, and desires, and can be defined within the framework of cultural beliefs and values (Ghanbari, Soltanzadeh, & Nasir Salami, 2016, 94). Indigenous people have developed and transmitted indigenous knowledge from generation to generation throughout their lives. This knowledge has been institutionalized in society, relationships, and rituals. Indigenous knowledge always carries creativity, identity, inspiration, interaction, and innovation (Shaari, 2015). Indigenous arts can be observed in all aspects of the lives of indigenous people. These people seem to be born artists, and art is a necessity of indigenous life. «The Baloch artist primarily creates art to meet the needs of their life and reflects their thoughts and aspirations related to their life through these motifs» (Nazari et al., 2014). Artists in each region primarily create works of art based on the natural resources available in their area; for example, in Baluchestan, due to the abundance of the Daz tree (wild date palm), this community expresses its artistic talent through the pish (branches) of the wild date palm.

Baluchestan and Its Cultural Characteristics




Due to its strategic location, unique climate, and ancient civilization, the Sistan and Baluchestan province lies between the cultures of Iran and India and is influenced by both. Civilization in Sistan and Baluchestan has a long history and has sometimes preceded other ancient Iranian civilizations; for instance, the «Shahr-e Sukhteh» civilization in the 4th millennium B.C. was culturally rich and competed with significant civilizations such as the Indus Valley and Mesopotamia (Ebrahimizadeh, 2009). The history of human settlement in Baluchestan dates back at least one hundred thousand years to the Paleolithic era, with numerous petroglyphs supporting this claim (Mahdavi nejat, 2014). needlework, handwoven textiles, and Balochi pottery designs have preserved their authenticity from ancient times to the present (Ebrahimizadeh, 2009). The cultural and identity characteristics of the Baloch people are manifested in the geometric patterns of their needlework, which are linked to their nomadic heritage (Keshavarz & Javadi, 2016). The Baloch, as an ethnic group, belong to a specific lifestyle in the land of Baluchestan, and due to the mixing of various immigrant tribes, it is not easy to distinguish these groups from one another. The influence of early Aryan civilization on these tribes has led to a greater sense of belonging


among the Baloch (Naserinia, 2009). Throughout history, the Baloch have adhered to their traditional clothing and indigenous art, characterized by simplicity, modesty, and artistic embellishments. The Baloch are accustomed to living in deserts and mountains, and the Balochi proverb «Vay Vatan Hoshkin Dar» signifies the importance of attachment to their land. Baluchestan's culture significantly impacts the people's survival, peace, cooperation, and unity, and these principles are evident in the clothing, architecture, handicrafts, and art of the region.

1. Clothing of Baluchestan: Clothing is an important cultural element for identifying an ethnic group (Yaghoubi, 2014). The clothing of the Baloch people has specific characteristics that distinguish them from other Iranian ethnic groups. This clothing, in addition to being in harmony with the climate, includes simplicity in men's clothing and decorations, as well as the colors and embroidered patterns in women's clothing. By preserving their cultural values in their clothing, the Baloch have also maintained their cultural heritage, and the minor changes in it indicate the continuity of their ethnic identity (Mousavi Haji, et al., 2014). Baloch clothing is rich in coverage and aesthetics, and the art of needlework with diverse patterns and colors is manifested in it.

2. Handicrafts of Baluchestan: Local artists and craftsmen in each region create works that their community needs based on the available resources. Handicrafts are considered an inseparable part of Baloch life (Nazari, et al., 2014). The handicrafts of Baluchestan include needlework, coinwork, mat weaving, pottery, and so on, which are summarized in Table 1.







Table 1. Handicrafts of Baluchestan. Source: Authors.









| Figure | Descriptions |
|---|--|
|  | Fig 1. Baluchestan Needlework. Needlework is the most prominent art among Baloch women, prevalent in various regions of Baluchestan, also known as «Balochi needlework». The patterns of Baloch needlework are not complex; each pattern is formed by the combination of lines (Yaqoubi, 2014, 77). |
|  | Fig 2. Coin Work. Coin work is used for decorating bedding, wall decoration, and room curtains. The art of coin work in Baluchestan has a long history, similar to needlework, and is common among the people in almost all regions. Source: ISNA. |
|  | Fig 3. Pottery. The villages of Kalporgan in Saravan County, Kohmitag in Sarbaz County, and Holanchakan in Nikshahr County are among the main centers of pottery in Baluchestan. «Visual qualities such as balance, proportion, rhythm, and symmetry are the strengths of the Kalporgan pottery designs» (Nazari et al., 2014). |

| Figure | Descriptions |
|---|---|
|  | Fig 4. Mat Weaving. Various products with diverse designs and patterns are produced from the leaves of the Daz tree (wild palm). Mat weaving can be considered a part of the history and economic anthropology of Baluchestan. The products made from the leaves of the wild palm exceed a hundred types of goods. Among the most important types of products are mats (Tagerd), baskets, and ropes (Mahmoudzahi, 2013). |

3. Architecture of Baluchestan: Contrary to the common belief, the Baluchestan region has a less recognized and introduced architectural identity. This architecture can be seen in structures such as the forts of Baluchestan and various types of indigenous housing in the area, such as mud houses, stone houses, black nomadic tents (Siah Chador), round tents (Gerd Toop), and different kinds of huts (Kapar) (Table 2).

Table 2. Architecture of Baluchestan. Source: Authors.

| Figures | Descriptions | |
|---|---|--|
|  <p>Fig 5. The Sib Castle in the Sib and Suran County.</p> |  <p>Fig 6. Naseri Castle in Iranshahr County.</p> | <p>Castles: Among the most important indigenous structures of Baluchestan, one can refer to the castles of this region, including Sib Castle, Kont Castle, Hidouj Castle, Naseri Castle, and others. What is observed in the architecture of the castles in this region is the use of cultural symbols in the facades of the buildings.</p> |
|  <p>Fig 7. Indigenous housing in the Sharak village.</p> |  <p>Fig 8. Indigenous housing in the Sarbaz region.</p> | <p>Ban: Ban is the housing of a family, and all biological functions are summarized within it. The dimensions of the space, the dimensions and layout patterns of openings and niches, the form of the fireplace, the chimney, and the decorations present in the interior and exterior of the building are patterns that are prevalent with limited changes, similar to the architectural tradition in the region.</p> |
|  <p>Fig 9. The interior of a round tent.</p> |  <p>Fig 10. The exterior of a round tent.</p> | <p>Round Tent (Gerd Toop): Round Tent, as a primary dwelling, is constructed with a circular plan, cylindrical walls, and a dome-shaped roof using materials like wood and palm branches or mud bricks for the walls, with minimal cost and in the shortest time.</p> |







| Figures | Descriptions |
|---|---|
|  |  <p>Black Tent (Siah Chador): The black tent is a dwelling that is compatible with the nomadic lifestyle and the climatic conditions of the region in every way. Its covering is made from goat hair, and its supporting structure is a combination of compressive elements such as wooden beams and columns, and tensile elements like ropes.</p> |
| <p>Fig 11. The interior of a black nomadic tent (Siah Chador).</p> | <p>Fig 12. The exterior of a black nomadic tent (Siah Chador).</p> |
|  |  <p>Hut (Kapar): Kapar, as a type of indigenous housing in this region, features a prominent structure and utilizes the structural capabilities of palm branches, flexible walls, and a spacious interior. The decorations inside the kapar, with their very simple architecture, reflect the richness of Baluch life.</p> |
| <p>Fig 13. The interior of a hut (Kapar).</p> | <p>Fig 14. The exterior of a hut (Kapar).</p> |
|  |  <p>New Architecture: Most of today's architecture in the region of Baluchestan, like in other parts of the country, lacks functionality, identity, and acceptance from the people. In some areas of Baluchestan, efforts have been made by the people to create an identity in architecture, such as designing facades with colored bricks and traditional patterns.</p> |
| <p>Fig 15. The facade of the new house in the city of Khash.</p> | <p>Fig 16. The facade of the new house in the city of Nikshahr.</p> |
|  |  <p>Mausoleums: In Baluchestan, due to religious beliefs, mausoleums are rarely constructed. In the historical monuments of this region, mausoleums can be seen in the cities of Golshan and Chabahar. These structures, in terms of their harmony with the local culture, exhibit distinctive features such as the use of local materials and geometric patterns in their facades.</p> |
| <p>Fig 17. A mausoleum in Jalq of Saravan.</p> | <p>Fig 18. A mausoleum in Jalq of Saravan.</p> |

Pattern and Color in the Handicrafts, Clothing, and Architecture of Baluchestan

In the formation of any artistic work, various factors are influential, including materials and techniques, the beliefs and convictions of the artist, as well as the society in which and for which the art is created (Moghbeli & Shiraliyan, 2016). One of the characteristics of Baluchestan's art is the use of geometric patterns and bright colors in various forms of art from this region. These patterns and colors are evident in clothing, architecture, and handicrafts, reflecting the aspirations of the artists. Geometric patterns and bright colors are seen in women's clothing, interior furnishings, and architecture. Visual elements such as form, color, texture, and symmetry are also considered distinctive features of Baluchestan's

art, contributing to its beauty and visual unity. The handicrafts of these areas influence the patterns and architectural decorations in rural Baluchestan (Dadgar & Ghasri, 2023) (Table 3).

Table 3. Pattern and Color in the Handicrafts, Clothing, and Architecture of Baluchestan. Source: Authors.

| Figures | Descriptions | |
|---|--|--|
|  <p>Fig 19. Entrance of the house In Khash.</p> |  <p>Fig 20. Pendants in the Wall (Abu al-Hasan Sharaki).</p> | <p>The use of simple and diverse geometric colors and patterns in the entrance facade of the house, along with similar patterns and colors in the interior decorations, indicates a shared taste and interest in the use of color and design in this region.</p> |
|  <p>Fig 21. Beds. Source: Malekzadeh, 2017.</p> |  <p>Fig 22. House facade.</p> | <p>The use of warm and cheerful colors in the building facade, room decorations, and decorations on the camel bridle and gear indicates a shared taste and interest in the use of color in this region.</p> |
|  <p>Fig 23. Needlework.</p> |  <p>Fig 24. House facade.</p> | <p>Simple and repetitive patterns with distinct rhythm and harmony in the facades of housing and handicrafts of Baluchestan have given it an identity and distinguished it from other regions. These patterns are rooted in the history of the Baloch people and hold special value and meaning.</p> |

Color Analysis in Baluchestan Art

Warm and cool colors are distinguished from each other in terms of their psychological effects on the viewer. Local colors are a source of cultural identity differences (Johnny, 2017). The choice of color and its application depend on the tastes and beliefs of the people of each culture. Even the impact that color has on individuals varies across cultures. Location, climate, and culture can determine how color is used and its subsequent associated experiences. It is also possible to imagine people who have different perceptions of colors (Holl, 2015). A large part of communication is carried out with the help of colors. The way colors are used in Baluchestan is influenced by two main factors: The environment and local beliefs (traditions and customs). Colors and patterns in the indigenous art of Baluchestan are a manifestation of the aspirations of the artists from this region (Torshabi & Hasanpur, 2024). Colors shape identity in clothing, housing (especially the interior space), and generally in the social and family life of the Baloch people. Warm colors from the red and orange spectrum are abundantly used in Baloch needlework (Fereidonzadeh, , et al., 2019). Color is widely used not only in clothing but also in other applied arts of this ethnic group, including carpets. «Nouraei» considers the diversity and authenticity of color schemes to be the distinguishing feature of Baloch carpets compared to others (Nouraei, 2007). In Baloch art, warm colors as well as green are used as a cool color, especially the combination

of red and green, which is widely observed in this art. The colors in Baloch architecture and clothing reveal the identity of this tribe and bring a sense of vitality and tranquility to their living environment. Red symbolizes bravery and happiness, while white and green symbolize health and life (Interview, Askari, 2024).



Fig 28. Use of warm colors from the red spectrum alongside green. Source: Authors.

The Motifs Used in Baluchistan Art

In the artistic works of Baluchistan, such as needlework, pottery, mat weaving, interior decorations, and building facades, geometric patterns like lines, circles, triangles, quadrilaterals, crosses, and shamsa are used, each with specific names. These patterns, characterized by simplicity, uniform form, texture, and repetition in Baluchistan's art, especially in clothing and housing, have become an essential element in shaping the identity of this region. Each geometric pattern in needlework has a specific meaning. Narmashiri, a researcher in this field, categorizes Balochi patterns into two main types: Tak (complete lozenge or circle) and Kap (secondary patterns like triangles) (Interview, Narmashiri, 2024). Some researchers have proposed other names like Sohr, Jalar, Chapras, and Mosum for these patterns and classified them into three categories: Plant, human, and animal (Table 4).

Table 4. Classification of needlework patterns. Source: Authors.

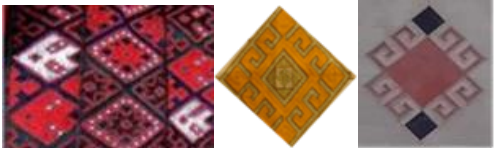



| Motif Type | Motif Name |
|------------|--|
| Animal | Fish Eye, Zoomak, Black Snake, Kachak, Tavous, Panje Palang, Marg punch (Mobaraki & Mobarak, 2016; Shirazi & Norouzi, 2023). |
| Plant | Tulip, Mosum, spring seed flower, bush, Sohr flower, Irkash flower, wheat flower, eight-leaf flower, and Sarvak (Keshavarz , et al, 2020). |
| Human | Taj Shah, Ashk Aroos, Sheyda, Del Bandeh, Joke, Goorchak, and Titook Banovan (Mobarak, 2016; Shirazi & Norouzi, 2023). |

Sources of Inspiration for Patterns and Colors in Baluchistan Art

Nature and its changes over the years have been the most important teacher and source of inspiration for the people of Baluchistan. They observe colors and patterns in nature and draw inspiration from them to give identity to their lives. Geological nature, flowers, water, vegetation, animals, and the beliefs of the Baloch people influence the patterns in Baluchistan's arts. Due to religious beliefs, human and living creature patterns are less

emphasized (Shahbakhsh, 2005). The sources of inspiration for colors and patterns in Baluchestan are nature, environmental and social realities, reflecting the beliefs, imaginations, desires, myths, and customs of the artist and their community. Baloch handicrafts and indigenous architecture patterns are mostly geometric, created by combining simple lines and shapes. These patterns are divided into four categories: Floral, cosmic, animal, and marginal. Inspirations from natural elements such as mountains, trees, water, moon, and sun, along with concepts like growth and simplicity, are the main sources of inspiration for Baloch artists. In Baluchestan's art, human and animal figures are rarely seen in their entirety, and when they do appear, they are depicted in geometric and abstract forms (Table 5).

Table 5. Source of inspiration for the motifs used in Baluchestan art. Source: Authors.

| Figures | Descriptions |
|---|--|
|  | <p>In Baluchestan art, many motifs are inspired by living creatures such as humans, butterflies, fish, rams, camels, deer, birds, and peacocks. These motifs are artistically and abstractly used in various local arts of the region.</p> |
|  | <p>The still life of Baluchestan, including mountains, the sea, rivers, and the sky, is a source of inspiration for the people of this region. In Baluchestan's art, natural elements such as stars and rivers are manifested through geometric patterns like triangles and squares.</p> |
|  | <p>Water: It is recognized as a valuable symbol of life and blessing. In the motifs of this region, water is depicted as a divine gift and a source of goodness, although it can also act as a devastating flood. The people of Baluchestan consider water a sacred blessing from God.</p> |
|  | <p>Flowers, leaves, and trees: Flowers, leaves, and trees are symbols of life in nature in Baluchestan, and in years with adequate rainfall, various types of flowers can be seen. Trees, especially palm trees, are sacred and valuable in the culture and life of the Baloch people. The tree is recognized as a symbol of the connection between earth and sky and a symbol of stability and resilience in nature.</p> |


| Figures | Descriptions |
|---|---|
|  | <p>Mountain: Contrary to popular belief, Baluchestan is a mountainous region that includes the Taftan, Bzamān, and Birk mountains. In various cultures, including Baluchestan, mountains are recognized as symbols of closeness to God and as connectors of the human mind with concepts such as transcendence and growth.</p> |





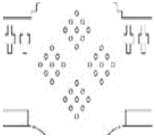








Fig 30. The crenelated geometric patterns allude to peaks and are inspired by the region's mountains.

Meanings and Concepts of Motifs and Colors in Baluchestan Art

Colorful motifs in Balochi art, especially in needlework, are ethnic symbols that distinguish the Baloch people from their neighbors. The use of colors in the indigenous arts and architecture of Baluchestan shares common roots with its neighbors, including India, due to historical interactions. In India, colors in temples have profound symbolic meanings, and primary colors such as red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and white are used explicitly in these temples. These colors are significant in temple architecture, daily life, and religious ceremonies, reflecting the cultural and spiritual richness of Indian civilization (Shoukhi Bidhendi, et al., 2013). In both cultures, colors are used to convey meaning, as well as religious, social, and natural symbols. In the Baluchestan architecture, colors are used mainly on walls, doors, and windows to create a cheerful atmosphere and reflect environmental conditions. Warm colors like red and yellow indicate a connection with the region's nature and are also used as social and cultural symbols in buildings and religious sites. These features are similar to southern India's architecture, where specific colors are also used to decorate buildings, and the choice of colors in India is based on religious concepts related to life and death (Masson, 1844). These similarities naturally indicate the cultural and commercial exchanges throughout history between Baluchestan and India, which have occurred through specific trade routes such as the Silk Road. Regarding the semantic origin of motifs and colors in Balochi art, it should be noted that the Baloch people believe that «in their land, all natural phenomena have risen against them» (Kasraian & Arshi, 2001). Therefore, the Balochi artist used more geometric patterns to express this idea. Identical geometric patterns can be seen in the smallest geometric structures, such as clothing, to the largest ones, such as buildings (Balilan & Hasanpour Lomer, 2019). The continuous and cohesive structure of motifs in various Baluchestan arts is believed to represent meanings such as unity and togetherness of the Baloch people, which is the key to their survival against adversities (Nazari, et al., 2014). In a general view, the decorative motifs in the Baluchestan architecture represent unity in diversity. The simplicity, while being attractive and rich in content, is one of the capabilities and values of Baloch art. These decorations, with simple geometric motifs such as lines, circles, triangles, squares, and crosses, and combining these motifs with each other, create rhythm, diversity, movement, and continuity that attract and engage every viewer, making them think. For example, an isosceles triangle with its apex pointing upwards symbolizes life, while an isosceles triangle with its apex pointing downwards symbolizes death. A line passing through the middle of the triangle signifies fire, and a cross on the triangle signifies danger (Riki & Shamili, 2021). Sometimes, even shapes like flowers, leaves, and paisleys are drawn with a simple line. For instance, in Baluchestan needlework, night and day are represented by white and black threads. Both threads are threaded simultaneously into the needle, and during sewing, one time the white thread is brought to the front and the next time the black thread (Interview

with Askari, 2024). As mentioned in Tables 4 and 5, most of these motifs symbolize the struggle against evil and wickedness, birth, and renewal (Table 6).

Table 6. Patterns used in Baloch art and their meanings. Source: Authors.

| Figures | Descriptions |
|---|---|
|   <p>Fig 31. Straight line in the Baluchestan art.</p> | <p>Gurcham and Jalar pattern: A combination of vertical and horizontal lines, alternating black and white lines, symbolizing the warding off of the evil eye and day and night.</p> |
|   <p>Fig 32. Zigzag lines in the Baluchestan art.</p> | <p>Chapras Pattern: Broken and angular lines are the most important aesthetic features in Baloch visual culture (Fereydounzadeh et al., 2019). To create movement and diversity in artworks, various zigzag lines are seen in Baluchestan art.</p> |
|    <p>Fig 33. Circle in the Baluchestan art.</p> | <p>Flower motif, circle: The circle, in small dimensions and sizes, is seen in combination with other motifs to form a unique geometry in various arts of Baluchestan. In Baluchestan culture, the circle symbolizes life and the changes of time and the different seasons of the year.</p> |
|    <p>Fig 34. Triangles in the Baluchestan art.</p> | <p>Triangle: This motif in Baloch needlework represents the warrior spirit and demeanor of the Baloch people (Riki & Shamili, 2021).</p> |
|    <p>Fig 35. Quadrilateral in the Baluchestan art.</p> | <p>Quadrilateral and Square: The most common pattern derived from the quadrilateral in Baloch art is the women's titok pattern, which contains a square inside it, also known as the bride's eye (Riki & Shamili, 2021).</p> |



| Figures | Descriptions |
|---|--|
|  | <p>Shamsa and Flower: In Baluchestan, the science of astronomy is used for navigation, weather forecasting, harvesting crops, and migration. For this reason, star-shaped geometric patterns in the decorations of this region hold great significance and symbolize the use of stars in the local culture.</p> |
|  | <p>Stepped Motifs, Green Design: The stepped motif and ziggurat convey messages of movement, growth and development, sanctity, worship, and perfection. Source of the right section of the figure (Malekzadeh, 2017).</p> |

Fig 36. Shamsa motifs in the Baluchestan art.

Fig 37. Ziggurat motifs in the Baluchestan art.

Baloch artists, in their choice of colors in their art, have gone beyond aesthetic aspects to realize cultural and social meanings. The motifs and colors used in Baluchestan's art carry messages closely related to the culture and daily life of the people in this region. They primarily use warm colors and green, which help create a cultural identity and evoke a sense of vitality and tranquility in daily life. Red symbolizes courage and joy, white represents health, and green signifies life and nature. Other colors also carry broader meanings, including brightness, happiness, birth, unity, respect for the creator and humanity, and sustainability. Baloch artists also draw on their knowledge of nature and environmental conditions to express these concepts through simple geometric patterns and combinations. The primary source of inspiration from nature comes from elements such as water, mountains, plains, sky, and living beings, which are essential for expressing artistic thoughts and feelings.

Discussion

This research examines the role of colors and patterns in shaping the cultural identity and artistic unity of the Baluchestan region. Various arts in this region, despite differences in materials and scale, share common features stemming from the people's culture and beliefs. For example, the patterns and colors used in needlework, pottery, and architecture of Baluchestan reflect a common spirit derived from the beliefs and culture of the Baloch community. Motifs such as Chapras, Sohr Flower, and Gorcham are observable in needlework, as well as in architecture and pottery, and the remnants of historical village architecture in Baluchestan, such as Firozabad and Patan, clearly demonstrate this influence. Before the invention of glazed bricks, geometric patterns were created using simple materials like raw bricks, and with the introduction of glazed bricks, color was added to these patterns. The replication and persistence of these motifs in Baloch culture, in addition to their aesthetic aspects, indicate deeper meanings and concepts in the people's beliefs. These motifs can symbolize protection against evil, war, and birth. The use of diverse colors and geometric patterns in indigenous arts, including interior furniture and handicrafts, reflects the cultural and aesthetic influences in this region and connects to the identity and traditions of this ethnic group. Various geometric patterns and bright, diverse colors can

also be observed using different materials in the exterior facades of local buildings in this region. «The Baloch artist is realistic and strives to reflect the reality of life, the environment, and the people around him and their beliefs in his works» (Beyhaghi, 1986). In Baloch art, color and pattern play a significant role, and the most important means for a Baloch artist to express their beliefs and aspirations is through pattern and color. «In examining Baloch art, the specific climatic conditions, tribal lifestyle, nature, beliefs, and values of this tribe must be considered, because the existing conditions somewhat influence their art» (Nazari et al., 2014). The geometric patterns used in handicrafts and the needlework on Baloch women's clothing have also been employed by architects in building facades. Using these patterns and colors in architecture and clothing reflects the cultural roots and the people's affinity for these designs and colors. Geometric patterns with plant, human, and animal origins, along with warm colors, are seen as cultural values and capabilities in various local handicrafts, women's clothing, interior furnishings, and even architecture, which have been prevalent in this region since ancient times. Color and pattern in the art of this region are not merely decorative elements or even complements of a work, but are the foundation and essence of creating a piece. As mentioned, patterns with various meanings, such as warding off evil and bad luck, valor, alongside colors like red and its shades, black, and white, have formed a deep meaning for avoiding natural and supernatural disasters. These patterns and colors, with their meanings, reflect the thoughts and culture of the Baloch people. Despite the diversity and extensive application of patterns in various arts, there is a unity in their simplicity and the hidden thought within them that reflects the thoughts and identity of the Baloch people.

Conclusion

The art and architecture of any ethnic group are considered one of the most important cultural factors of that group. Among the Iranian ethnic groups, the Baloch people have a strong commitment to their indigenous art and have managed to preserve their art and architecture throughout history, characterized by simplicity, modesty, artistic decorations, and other distinctive features. The Baloch people's attachment to their art and architecture, especially their traditional clothing and houses, is very valuable. The patterns and colors used in the art and architecture of various regions of Baluchestan, while having many differences, share a common spirit; everywhere, bright and lively colors and simple geometric patterns such as broken lines, triangles, squares, circles, crosses, and polygons are used with a unique and artistic combination. By studying these colors and patterns, one can trace their original source, nature. These motifs and color schemes, which are evident in all the arts of the indigenous Baloch people, emphasize the deep connection and dependence of the people of this region on the pristine nature of their habitat. This relationship, intertwined with the unparalleled artistic creativity of the indigenous people and manifested through their continued existence in this natural environment, has created an identity that is now recognized as the essence of Iranian Baluchestan. From the geometric patterns and colors used in Baloch women's clothing to the designs and colors employed in the architecture of their homes, it reflects the cultural roots, affection, and loyalty of the people of this land to their nature and environment, and the identity that the Baloch people are known for. Therefore, by studying the colors and motifs used in various aspects of the lives of Baluchestan, one can understand the tastes, preferences, and especially the identity of the Baloch people. Thus, to preserve the identity and authentic culture of the artistic and art-loving Baloch people, it is essential for designers of art and architecture in this region to be aware of the artistic colors and motifs of the indigenous Baloch people as inseparable

artistic and identity-forming elements of this land and to incorporate them into their designs. In this regard, the role of architects, especially home designers, is of special importance to these people.

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This research was written with the participation of all authors, and all authors discussed, reviewed, and approved the results.

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The author (s) declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest related to this research, in writing, and publication of this article

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