# CRAFT REFINED: MAPPING INDIGENOUS TACIT KNOWLEDGE IN SRI LANKAN CRAFTS FOR SUSTAINABLE FASHION AND TEXTILE DESIGN

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**Abstract**

Craft is not only a material practice; it is a living system of cultural identity, skill, memory, and indigenous knowledge. In Sri Lanka, many traditional crafts have been sustained through occupational communities, where knowledge is often passed through practice, observation, and family-based training. Although individual Sri Lankan crafts have been documented and studied, limited attention has been given to mapping the tacit knowledge embedded across craft practices and the value of this knowledge for contemporary textile design. This study aims to analyse indigenous tacit knowledge in traditional crafts, focusing on surface development and design applications for fabric materials. A qualitative, literature review-based investigation was conducted using journal articles, books, research publications, historical records, and archival sources. The sources were screened to trace design development knowledge documented in Sri Lankan written craft histories from the medieval period (11th–17th centuries). Given the study's limitations, textile-based crafts were excluded, while traditionally practiced community-based crafts, including clay craft, laksha, metal carving, and Rush and reed, were prioritised based on their continuity into the present and the availability of knowledge. The selected material was analysed thematically through an iterative inductive–deductive process, examining material handling, colour making, surface development, tools used, and the links between craft and design application. Based on studio feasibility and raw material availability, potential techniques were experimented with through a practice-led investigation. These exploratory outcomes resulted in contemporary textile design prototypes. The study concludes that documenting and translating craft-based tacit knowledge can support cultural continuity, ethical innovation, and stronger links between artisans, designers, and creative industries. It also highlights the need for future practice-led research to test how traditional material knowledge can be responsibly integrated with contemporary design technologies and high-value fashion markets.

**Keywords:** Indigenous tacit knowledge, Sri Lankan crafts, sustainable fashion, Design innovation, Textile design prototypes