

The Taxonomy of Traditional Surface Design Patterns in Patang

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ABSTRACT:

The Patang is considered the most advanced kind of kites when it comes to expert opinion. The professional kite players consider the Patang as a hallmark of expertise in kite flying. Given this importance, the Patang is prepared with exquisite surface design patterns and color schemes that refer to a thriving tradition of the Subcontinent. The design patterns range from basic to complex combinations with use of symbols and motifs and the reflect in the titles of Patangs. Moreover, the surface design patterns and their taxonomy are expressive of the Muslim and Hindu culture and show strong cultural influences. This study describes various surface design patterns used in the Patangs in terms of their intricacies and calculations.

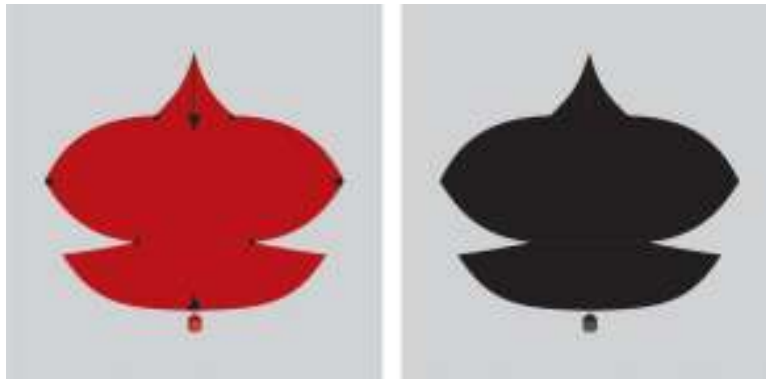
Introduction

The tradition of kite flying is one of the oldest in the world. Almost every culture developed the tradition in its own unique way and therefore nurtured a body of knowledge that goes into making of kites. In cultures where symbols and design patterns gained importance, the tradition of kite flying also absorbed aesthetic preferences. The preferences range from the shape of the kites on a macro level to exquisite surface design patterns at the micro level. The surface design patterns are both calculated and intricate. The basic design schemes are intermixed to create more complex variants and therefore we find a growing repertoire of surface design patterns. In the culture of the Subcontinent, surface design patterns have occupied the domains of art and design with a diversity that is seldom witnessed in other cultures. The main emphasis comes from Islamic tradition where lines, shapes and forms expressing the themes of unity, rhythm and harmony sync with aesthetics derived from religious sources. The fascination with calculated designs is however older than Islamic civilization as a clear emphasis is found in the

Egyptian and Greek cultures. With Islam, geometric patterns as visual manifestations of mathematical considerations assumed a new value that involved considerations regarding the sacred. For Muslim scholars, such patterns meant a reflection of the divine order. The symbolic surface design patterns are mostly associated to the Hindu culture of the Subcontinent which preferred the symbolic. The signs and symbols had a unique religious importance. With the arrival of Mughals in the Subcontinent, the two traditions assimilated to a new aesthetic in which both drew significance from same sources.

The above assimilation is clearly visible in the art and craft traditions of the Subcontinent. The kite making tradition that belongs to the craft repertoire expresses the creative mix in unique ways. Through oral transmission of knowledge, the kite makers have preserved a fund of practical knowledge in which various basic designs were standardized. The names of the Patangs suggest that they have been used to reflect the surface design patterns. The age old standardization continues to this day giving a unique outlook to the kites. In the following study, various design patterns of Patang are discussed. These design patterns follow a strict discipline in which basic elements combine to create complex designs. Unlike the Rhombus shaped kites, the designs are never horizontally or vertically inverted; they are a product of unique design tradition which remains isolated in terms of design preferences. The aesthetic preferences of a culture are clearly manifest in the kite making tradition of the Subcontinent and they are certainly a blend of Muslim and Hindu design repertoires. The following is an account of the various types of surface designs used in the Patang often reflected in their names.

The Surface Design Patterns of Patang



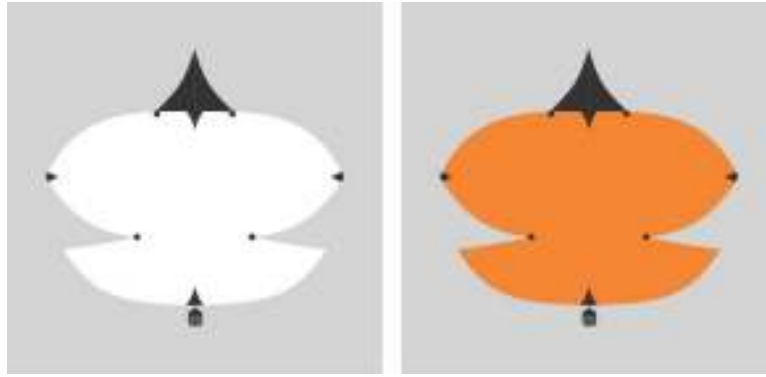
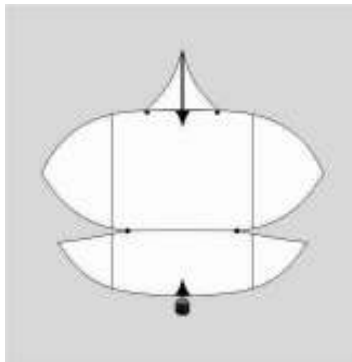


Figure 1. The basic Patang without geometric and non-geometric designs

The Patang without design patterns is usually made in dark colors to enhance visibility. However, light colors are also used particularly for night-time flying. The kite players prefer white Patang for night-time flying. When it comes to design patterns there are various kinds that are described as follows:

1. Tira



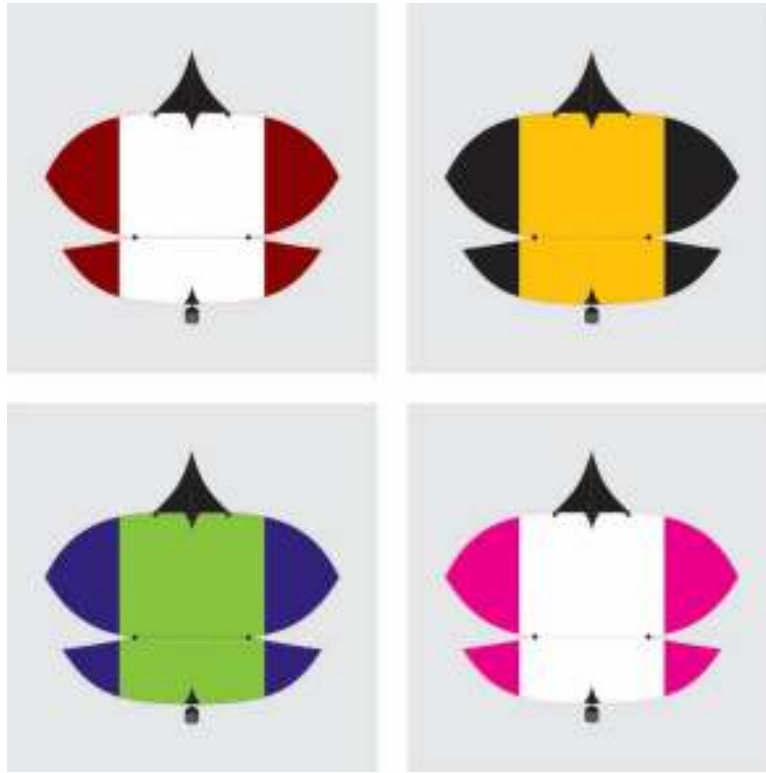


Figure 2. *Tira*

The word *tira* is probably derived from the number 'three' since the Patang is divided into three vertical columns. Another opinion is that it is derived from the word *tir* which represents arrow. Probably due to extremely stable and directed flight capability of Patang it is associated to an arrow. The three vertical sections of Patang are not always equal in size. Usually, the central section is wider than the sections on either sides. In some cases, the division is equal. Moreover, in most of the Patangs, the central wider section is made in different color as compared to sections on either sides, which are always kept equal and in same color.

Sometimes, the *paindi* is made in a different color particularly on the either sides, which make the whole Patang appear in two different color schemes, however, the central vertical part which is greater in width carries the same color. This color scheme unites the upper and lower part due to same color of the central column but variation of color on in the columns of either sides adds variety. This variation in color also reflect in the name of Patang as it becomes the *Jangi Tira*.

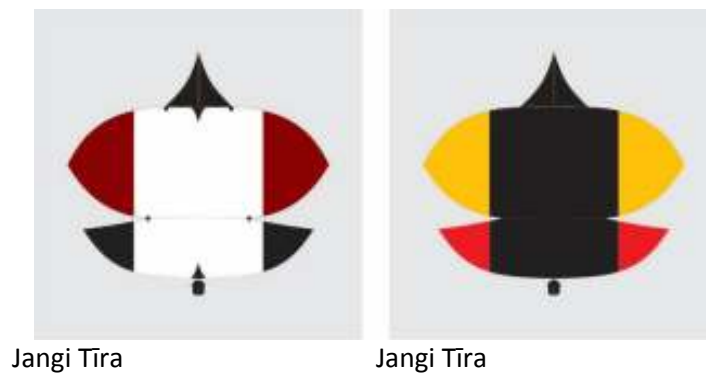


Figure 3. The design scheme of Jangi *Tira*.

2. Shistru

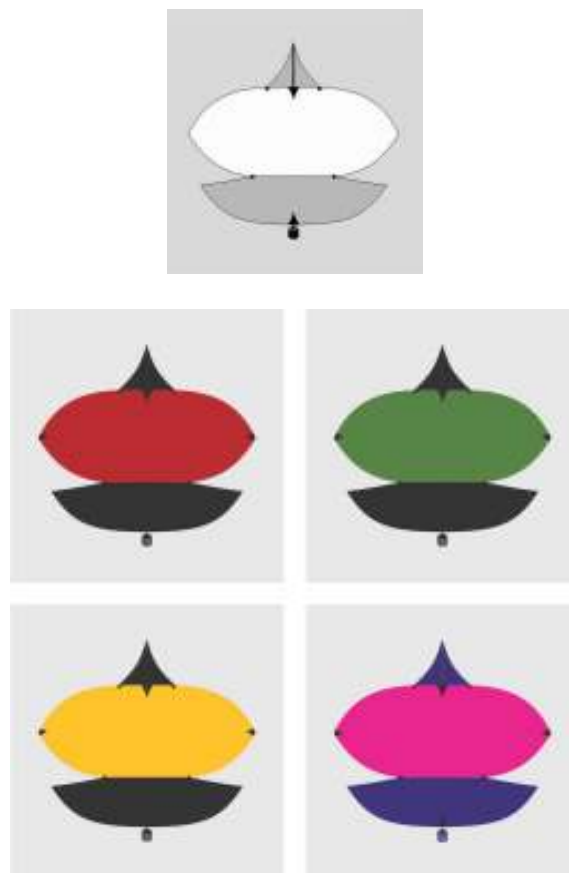


Figure 4. Design pattern in Shistru.

Shistru is one of the most popular design pattern in which the dhol and paindi are made in contrasting solid fill colors without any bands or columns. The word probably developed from the Sanskrit 'Shastru' which is associated to invisible.¹ The upper part is usually kept lighter while the lower part carries a darker tone. It is the contrast which gives this kind of Patang its glamour. The combination of colors such as yellow and black, and pink and purple add a unique aesthetic dimension to the color scheme. The nukka and dum are kept black since these two parts help the kite players to see the direction of the Patang and therefore assist in controlling the flight.

3.Gulair



¹William Ward, *A View of the History, Literature, and Mythology of the Hindoos: Including a Minute Description of Their Manners and Customs, and Translations from Their Principal Works* (Kingsbury, Parbury and Allen, 1822), 251.

Figure 5. Gulair design patterns

The design pattern known as Gulair comes from the name 'Gulehri' (Squirrel). It carries carries a same color in paindi and dhol but within the paindi, above the dum, a vertical strip of a contrasting color is added. The strip is 4-8 inches in length and 2-4 inches in width depending upon the size of the Patang. Usually, the width of the strip is kept narrower than that of the nukka. The strip divides the paindi into two vertical sections and adds a focus to the design. The strip also expresses different variations. Sometimes a triangular motif is used instead of a vertical rectangular one. The triangular motif is sometimes added with strips of color within the triangular framework in a way that the base of the motif expands but all the colored bands converge at the point where paindi and dhol are connected. These colors add unique flavors to the design. The addition of this motif also reflects in the name which becomes *tirchhi gulair*.



Figure 6. Variations within the Gulair design

4. *Chitardhāri*

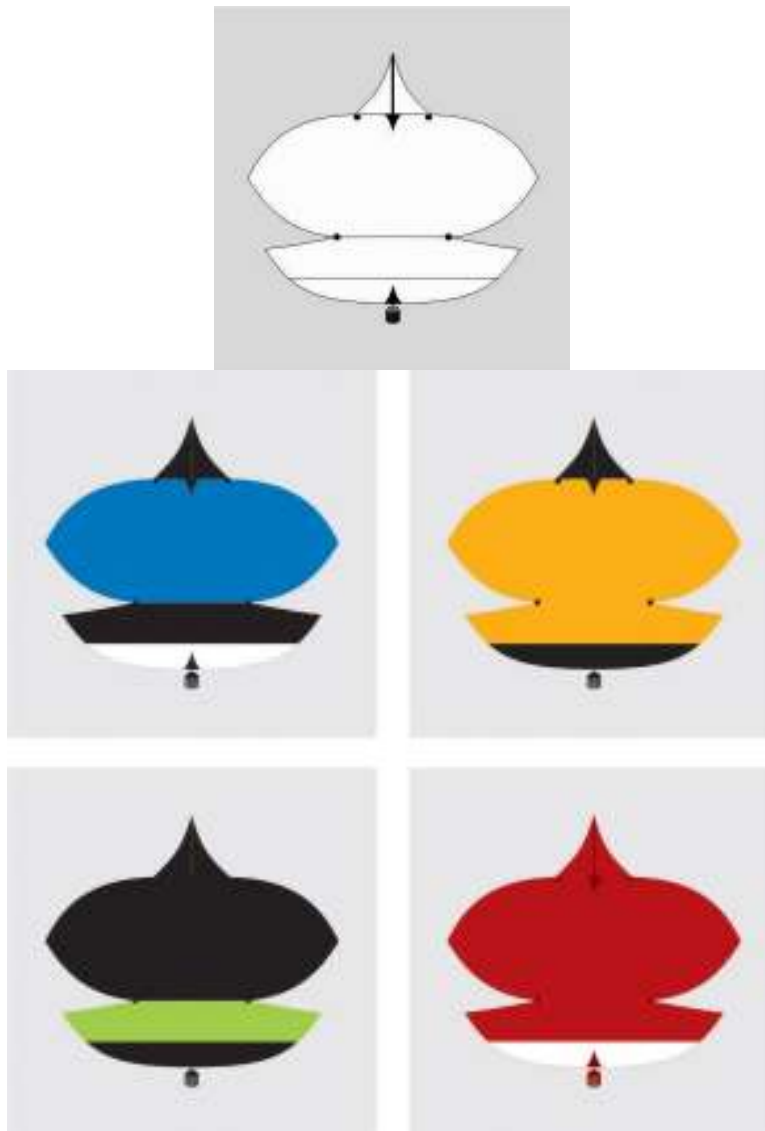


Figure 7. *Chitardhāri* design patterns

Like *Shistru*, the *Chitardhāri* design also develops in horizontal bands. The name is a combination of two words Chitra (Picture) and Dhara (flow). The colors of dhol and paidi are kept contrasting however particularly in the lower part a greater variation of color in horizontal bands is visible. The color of the

dhol and the base of the paindi are kept same while the intermediate band is made in contrasting color. The nukka and dum are usually made in same color as found on dhol. In some variations the color of the dhol is not repeated in the base but instead the base is made from horizontal bands of contrasting colors other than that of the dhol.

5. *Chātidār*

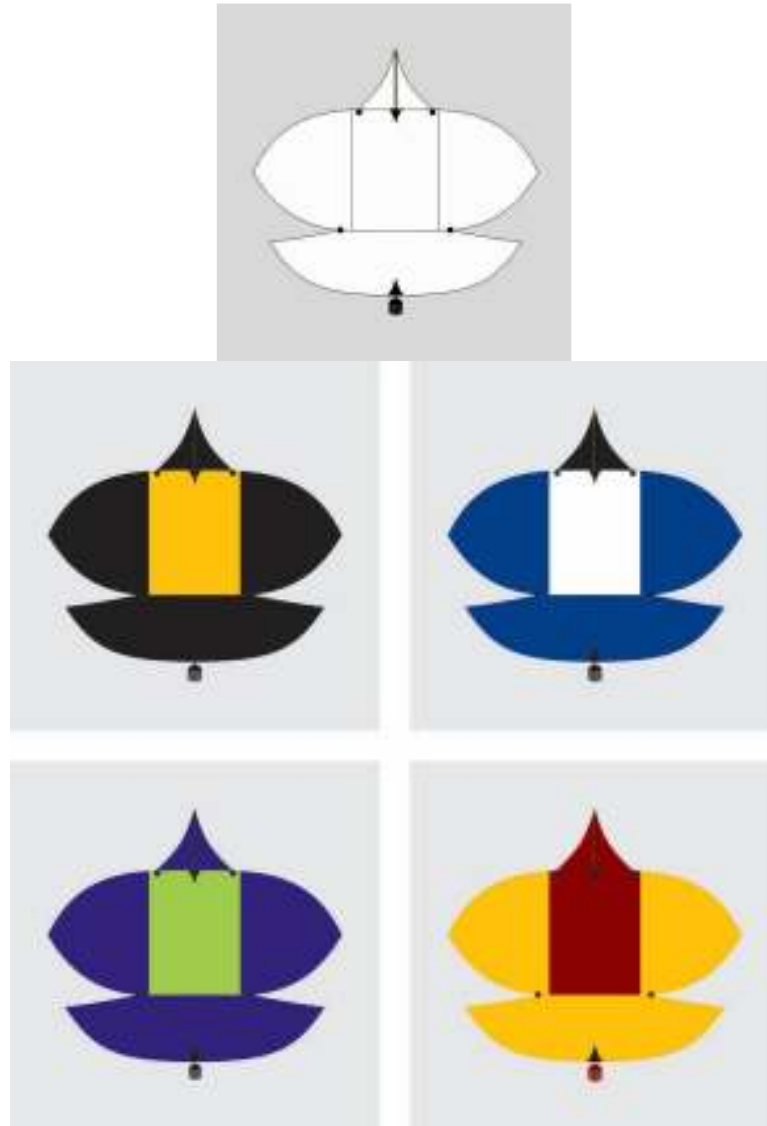


Figure 8. *Chātidār* designs of Patang

Another popular *Patang* design is the *chātidār* Patang. *Chati* denotes chest and therefore in this design it is the dhol where a vertical band is created. Unlike *Tira*, the vertical band does not extend to *paindi*. The width of the central band is almost equal to the vertical sections on either side. The width of the central band is kept slightly wider than the base of the *nukka*. Usually a highly contrasted color is used in the central vertical band.

6. *Kail* (Sāloidār)

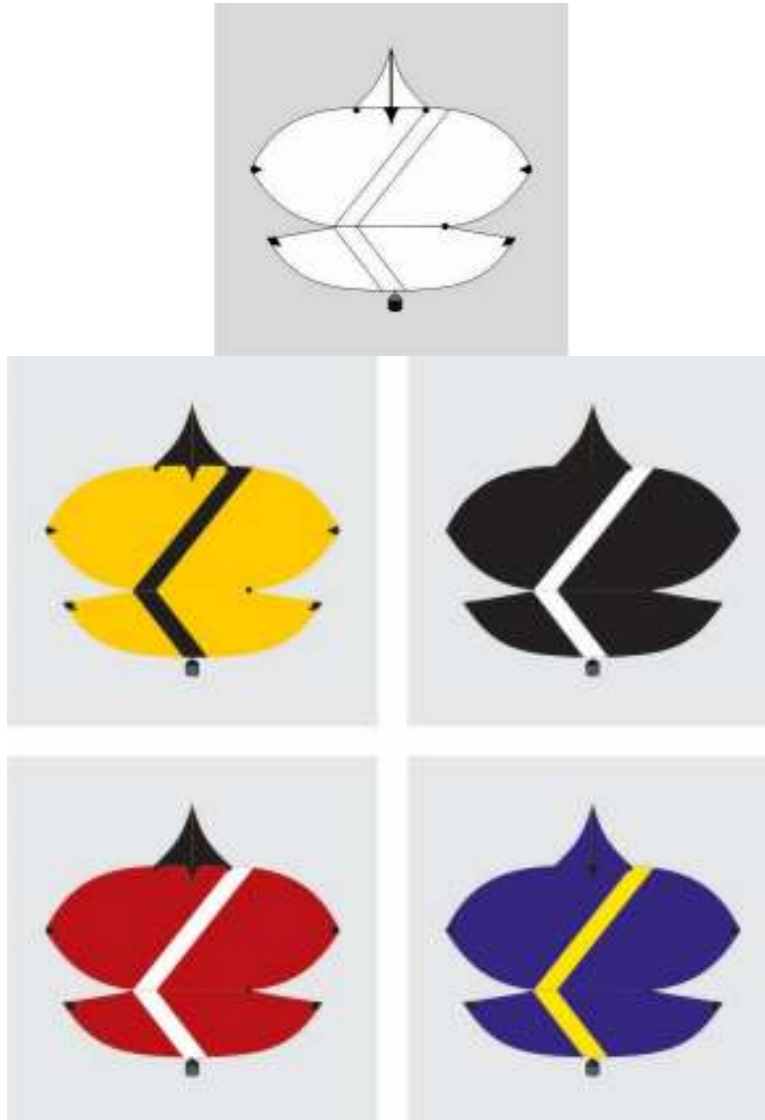


Figure 9. The design formations in *Kail*

In this design a diagonal strip of narrow width and contrasting color runs through the whole body of patang. In the upper part, it cuts across at a 45 degree angle and extends till the joining point of paidi and dhol. The further extension on the paidi is in reverse direction in a way that an L-shape is created. The diagonal strip reaches the dum at the base. Usually this diagonal strip is 2-3 inches wide. This is the only design which can be called asymmetrical but the balance is achieved since on both sides of the diagonal strip the total surface area remains the same. The asymmetrical balance creates a powerful visual impact.

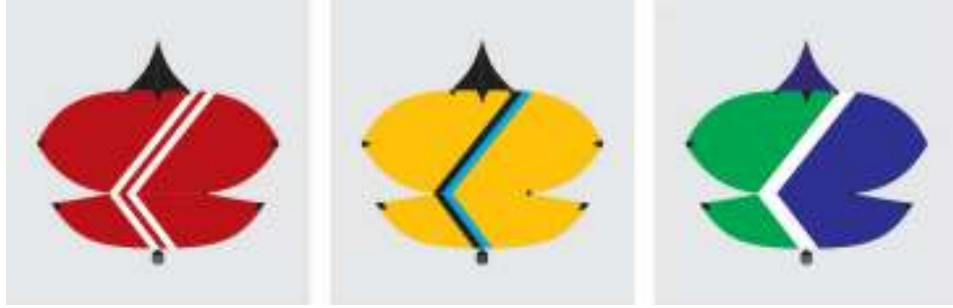


Figure 10. Variations of design and color combinations *inkail*.

7.Pari and Machli

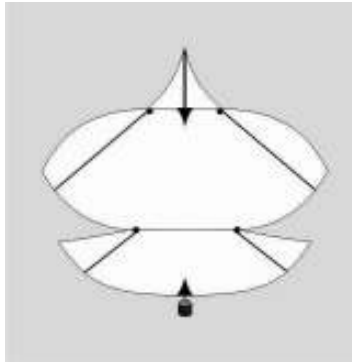




Figure 11. The design schem of *pari* and its color combinations

This design is a relatively complex one. The shoulders of *paindi* and *dhol* are adorned with triangular bands of colors. The bands on the *dhol* are larger in size to compensate the size of the *dhol*. The upper triangles are not exact triangles as the outer sides are curved in line with the upper *kaman* of the *dhol*. The lower sides of the triangular bands make the central surface area of *Patang* resembles the square kite. If the outer triangular bands are lighter in color then from a distance the *Patang* appears like a fighter kite. In another way the triangular band also appears as wings and therefore it is called *Pari* design or *Fairy* design. The central part of the *dhol* sometimes combines with the *nukka* in terms of color and the color extends to the base of *Paindi*. In other cases, the color of the *nukka* is kept same with the triangular bands. In the former case the central portion appears like a fish and is therefore reflects in the name *Machhli* design.

In other words, in central *dhol*, this division starts from the upper curve, right from the point where the thread of the *nukka* is attached, at the both side and goes down diagonally towards the lower curves of the *dhol*, and end at about 1.5 to 2.5 inches down to the lower right and left curves of the central

dhol. In *paindi*, this division starts from the point where the thread knot point of the *paindi* and run across diagonally at the both ends of the *paindi*, down to the corner at 1.5 inches to 3 inches. The size of the diagonal design and the strip is based on the total size of the *patang*. Traditionally this shape has the following colour schemes:



Figure 1 Variations on the theme in Pari

8. Duopilak

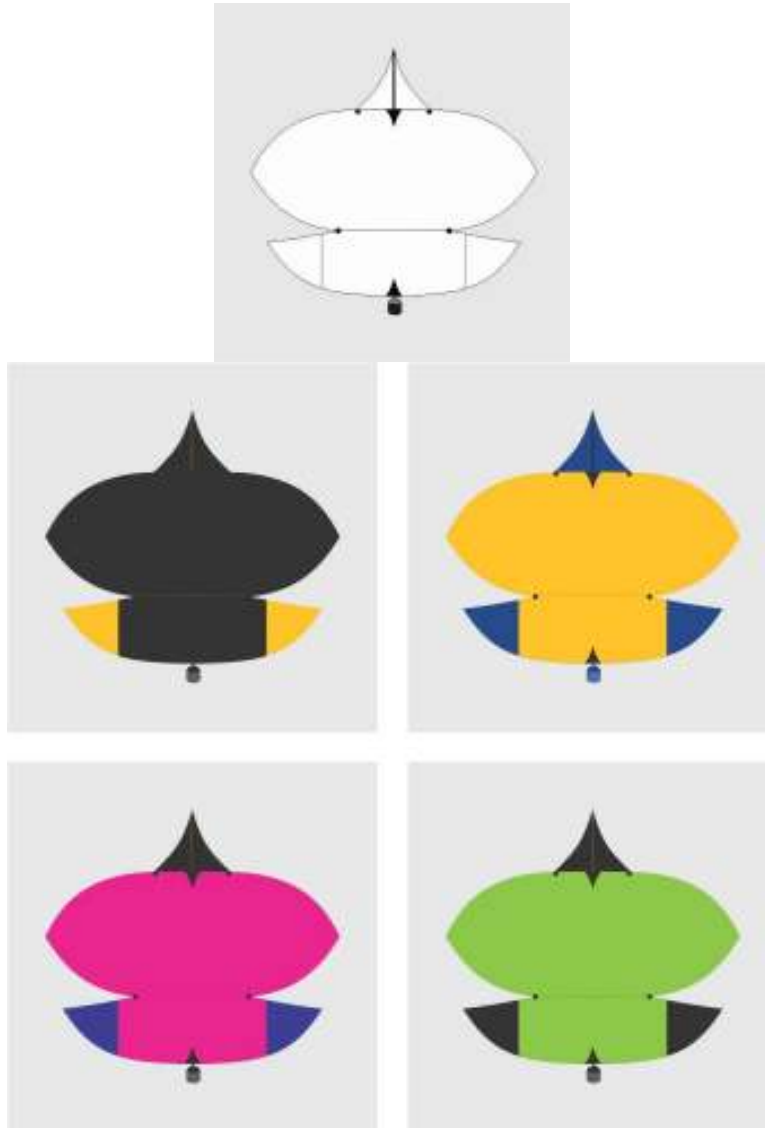


Figure 13. The Duopilak design patterns

In this design the colors of the dhol and paindi are kept same however the corners are of the paindi made using contrasting colors. This shape is called the simple *Duopilak* or *sādi duopilak*. The design comes in two variations, i.e. diagonal and cross. The diagonal design comes in color bands which range from 1-3. The nukka and dum are sometimes crafted in the same color that adorns the corners of paindi.



Figure 14. Variations within *duopilak*.

9. *Dandaidār*



Figure 15. Design pattern in *dandaidār*.

The *dandaidar* design as the name suggests is a design that appears as a collection of sticks. In this design the dhol is usually made in one color while the lower part or *paindi* carries the design which is made from vertical strips of contrasting colors. These vertical strips can range from 8-12 depending upon their width, with a central one larger in size giving the whole design an odd number of strips. There are two versions of this design. One is in which a repetitive pattern is created through the use of two colors usually black and white. In the other variant, different tones of a single color together make up the bands. Both of the designs have their own distinct visual appeals.

10. *Salāra*

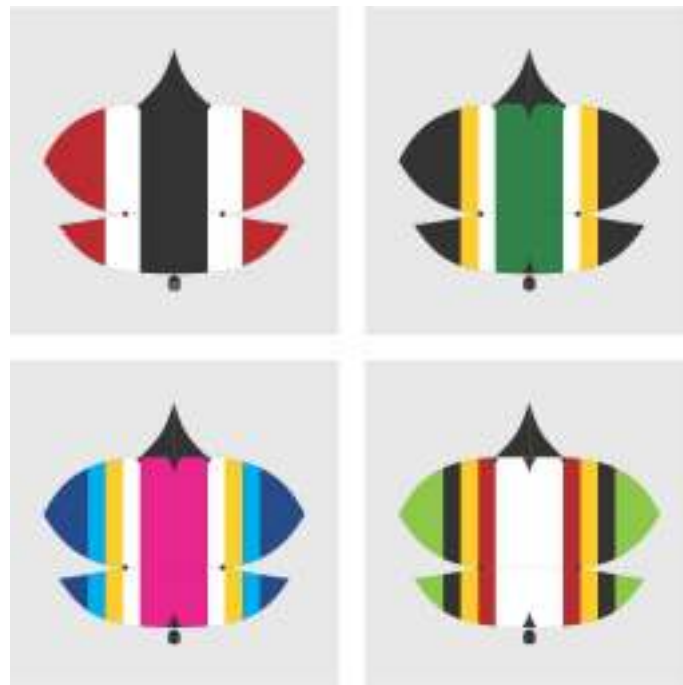
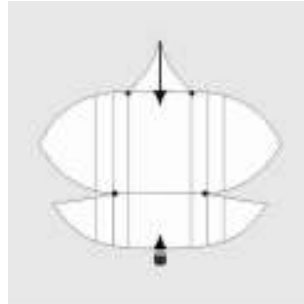


Figure 16. The Salāra variations

The Salara design is a complex version of tira design, wherein, instead of three vertical columns, five, seven or nine vertical columns are used. The central strip is wider than the rest. The vertical strips are crafted in beautiful combinations of colors. The vertical strips on either sides carry the same color combination and extend to the whole surface area of Patang. The central part is usually kept equal to the base of the nukka.

11.Pāna

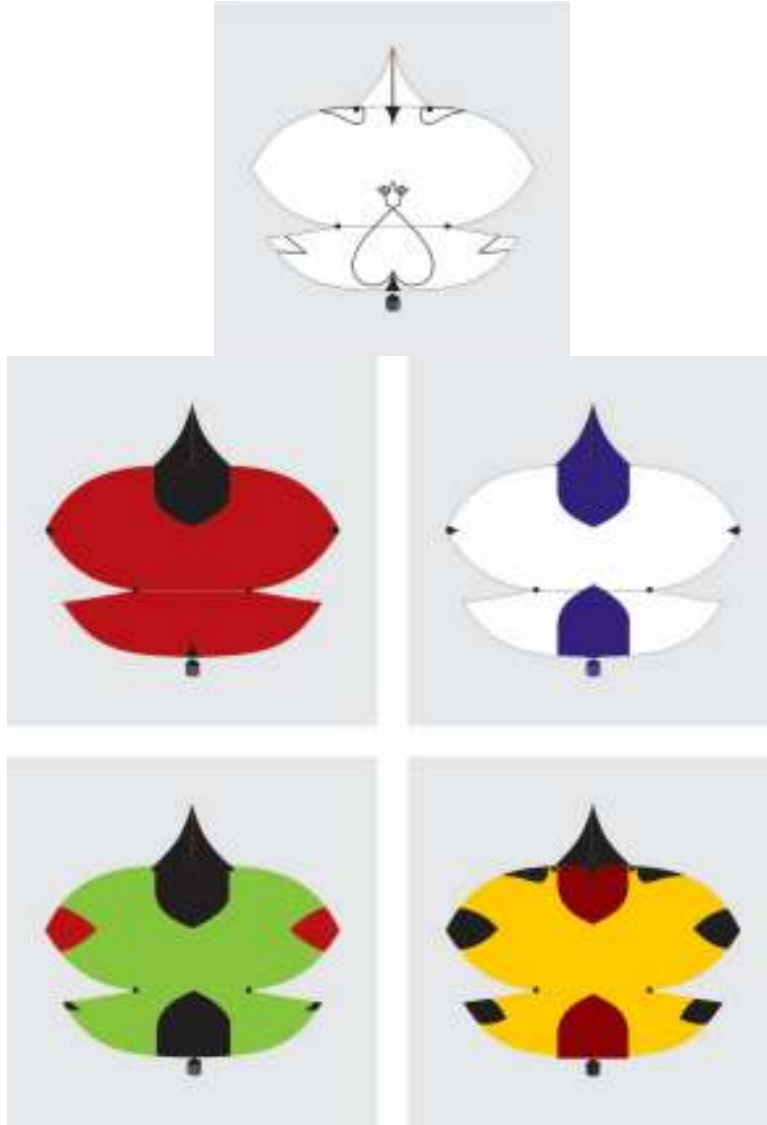


Figure 17. The symbolic design of *pāna*.

Pana refers to beetle leaf in local dialect and as the name suggests this design draws inspiration from the beetle leaf. The beetle-leaf or *pān* is a chewable leaf which is popular in the subcontinent served with other ingredients like tobacco, *elāichī*, *sonf* and other spices. The design that uses beetle leaf as principal motif is expressed in a colorful variety. The beetle leaf motif is used on the upper part of the dhol and lower part of the paindi to create symmetrical balance. Similarly, this motif is placed on the extreme left and extreme right corners of dhol and paindi again in same sizes and colors. Sometimes these motifs are crafted using silver foil and golden foil for decorative purposes.

The *pāna* could be designed in categories like *dopāna* (two-motif), *Chaipna* (four-motif) and *chāipna* (six-motif). In addition to these designs and motifs, various other motifs such as crescent and stars are used for decorative purposes. In India, the motifs assume more complex shapes to reflect religious and mythological symbols. These designs are non-geometric and are used to aesthetically uplift the design, therefore the price tag of Patangs with these designs remains higher.

12. Decorative Designs



Figure 18. Decorative Patangs with mixing of geometric and non-geometric patterns

The tradition of kite making assumes a new direction on festivals as the kite makers also prepare sets of kites with complimenting design patterns. Kites with highly ornamented designs are also made with unique motifs and design details. Usually silver and golden foils are used as materials for motifs. Similarly, complex geometrical patterns are also used on kites, which are developed separately and then pasted on the body of kite. The special kites with exquisite design patterns are sold at a much higher price. Although the details in design are not visible from distance but on a closer look one cannot deny the expertise gone into the making. The intricate designs are not popular as such, they have a somewhat ceremonial value.

Blended Surface Design Patterns

The 12 types of designs that have been described in this study multiply into many new variations as the basic design formations are intermixed to create

new permutations and combinations. The resultant design is labelled in the light of the design patterns that were mixed.

Many popular designs are created by inter-mixing the basic design patterns of *patang*. When two basic designs are intermixed, the newly created third design is the combination of both basic designs. Therefore, the name of the third design is also the combination of intermixed basic design pattern names. For example, when *chātidār* and *gulair* designs are intermixed, the newly created design is *chātidār gulair*. Similarly, when *chātidār* and *chītardāri* design patterns are intermixed, the newly created design is called *chātidār-chītardāri*.

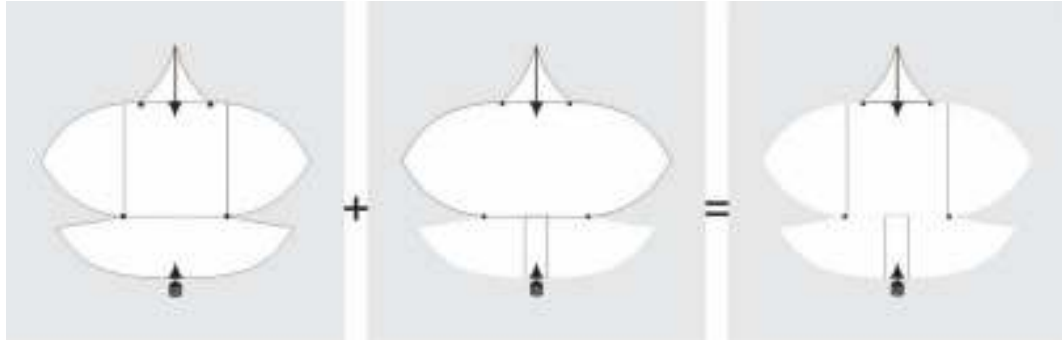


Figure 19. Blending of *chātidār* and *gulair* to make *chātidār-gulair* or *dubāz*.

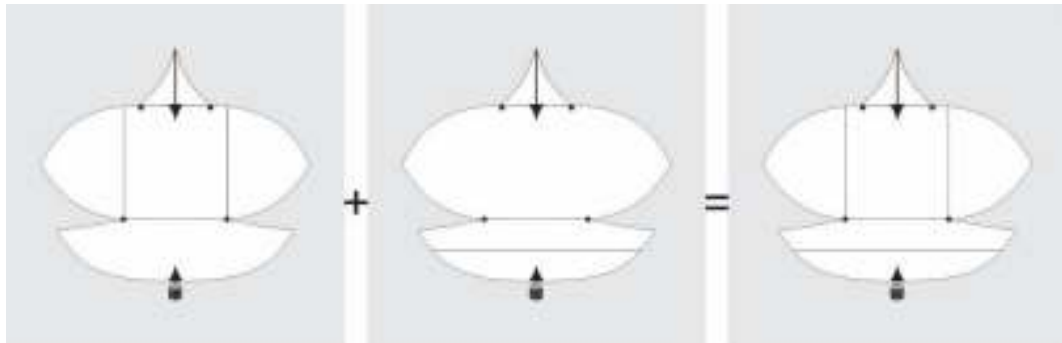


Figure 20. Inter-mixing of *chātidār* and *chītardāri* to make *chātidār-chītardāri*.

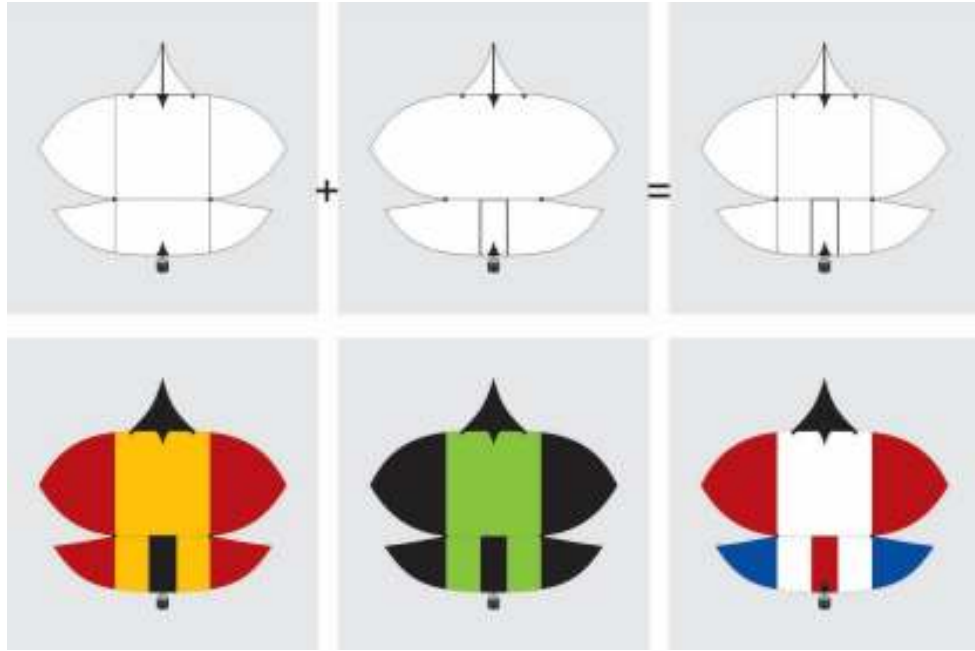


Figure 21. Blending of *tīra* and *gulair* to make *gulaira-tīra* or *tīra-gulair*.

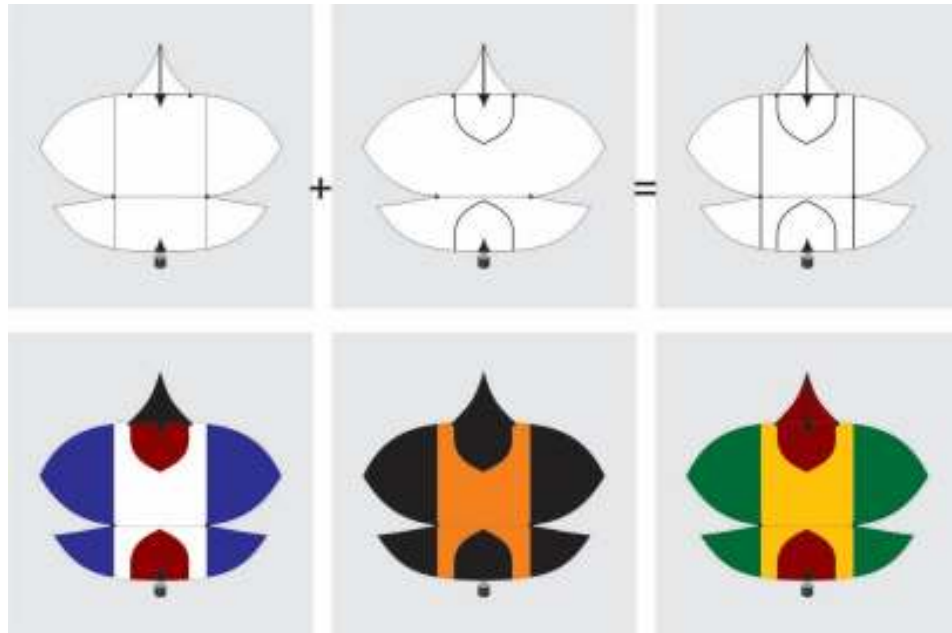


Figure 22. Blending of *tīra* and *dopāna* to make *dopāna-tīra*

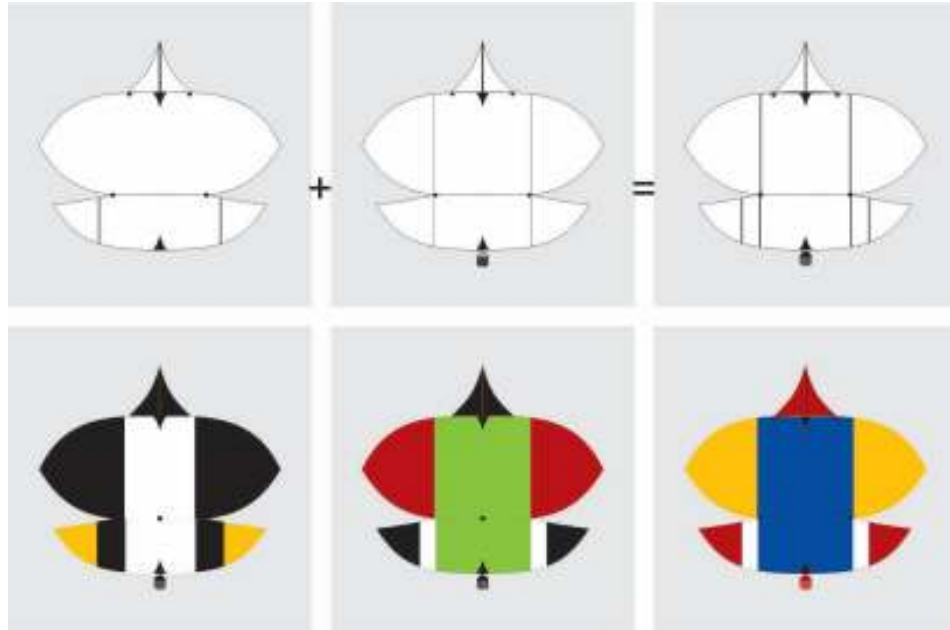


Figure 23. Blending of *duopilak* and *tirato* make *Duopilak-tira* dandaidar

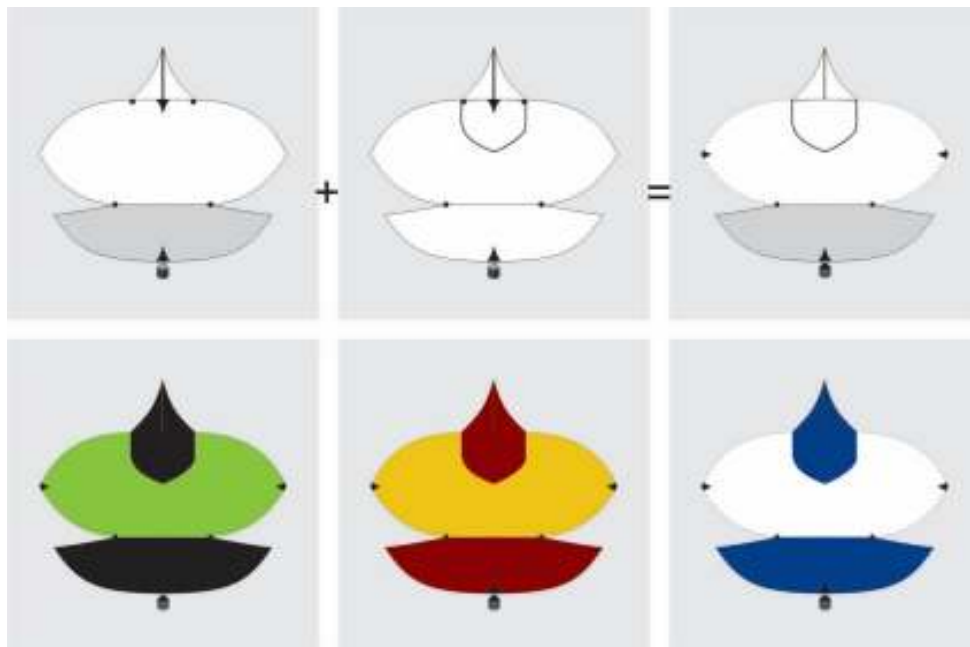


Figure 24. Blending of *Shistru* and *pana* to make *pana-shistru*

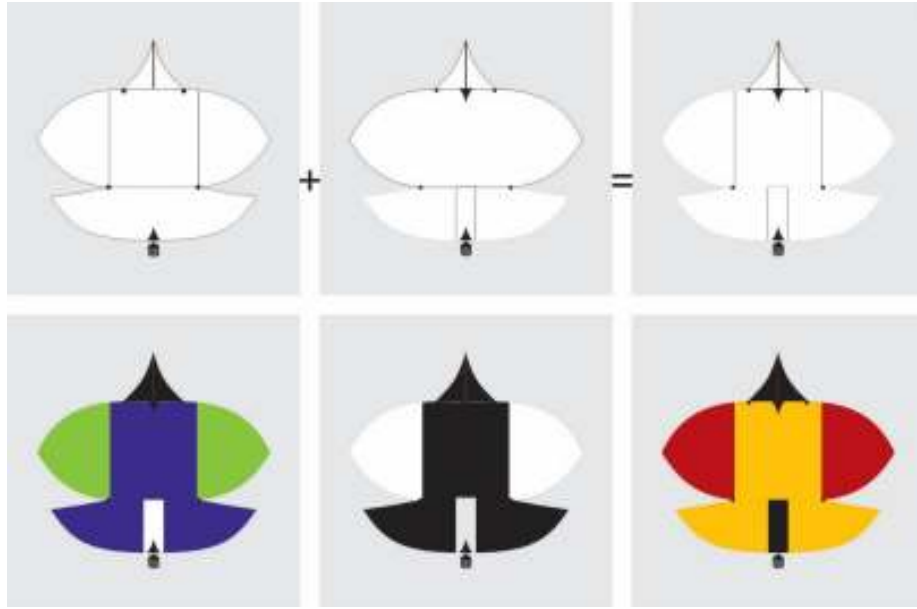


Figure 25. Blending of *chātidār* and *gulair* to make *chātidār-gulair*

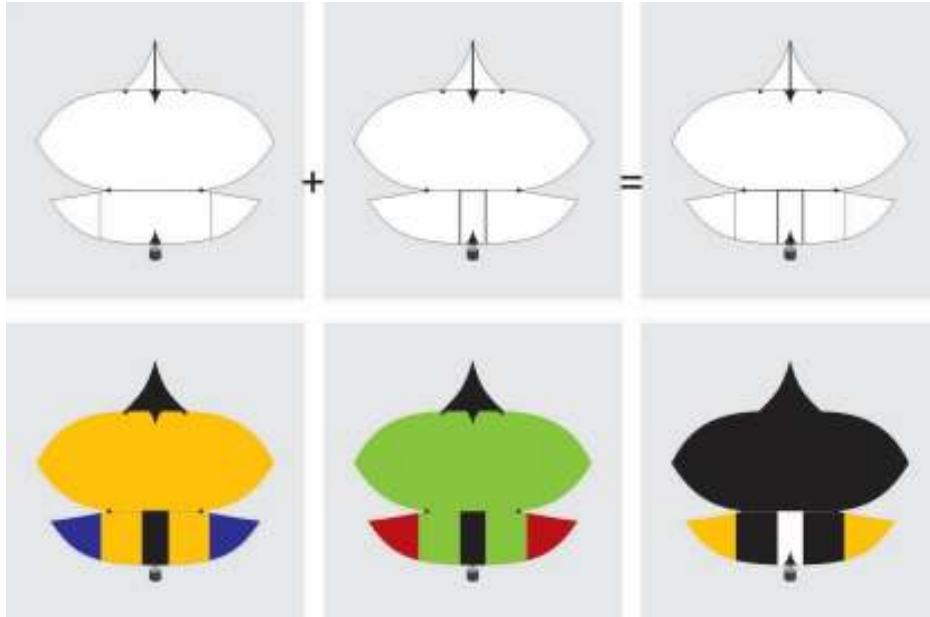


Figure 26. Blending of *duopilak* and *gulair* to make *duopilak-gulair*

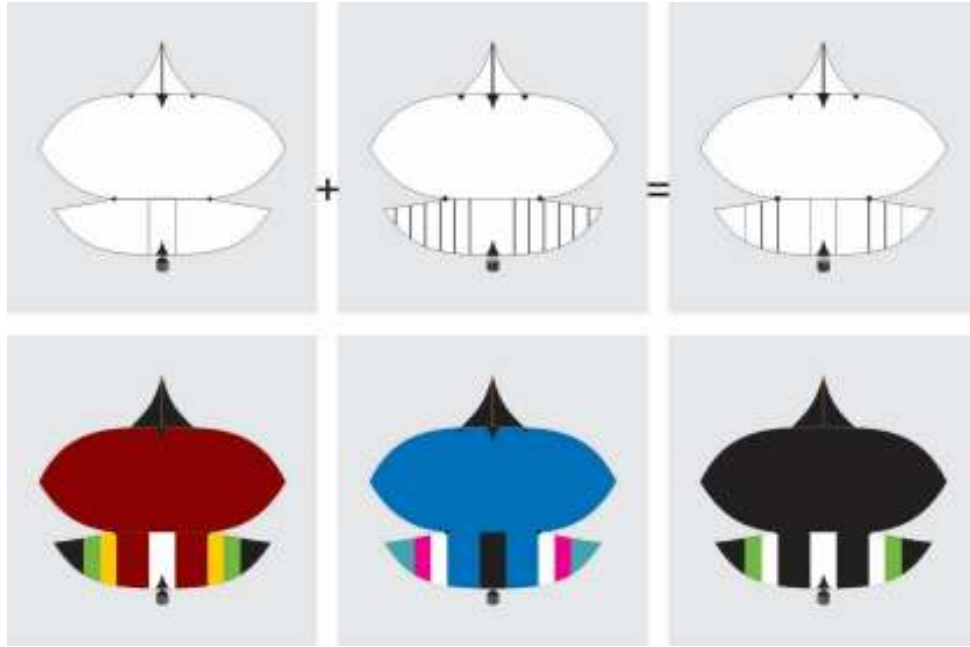


Figure 27. Blending of *gulair* and *dāndaidār* to make *dāndaidār-gulair*

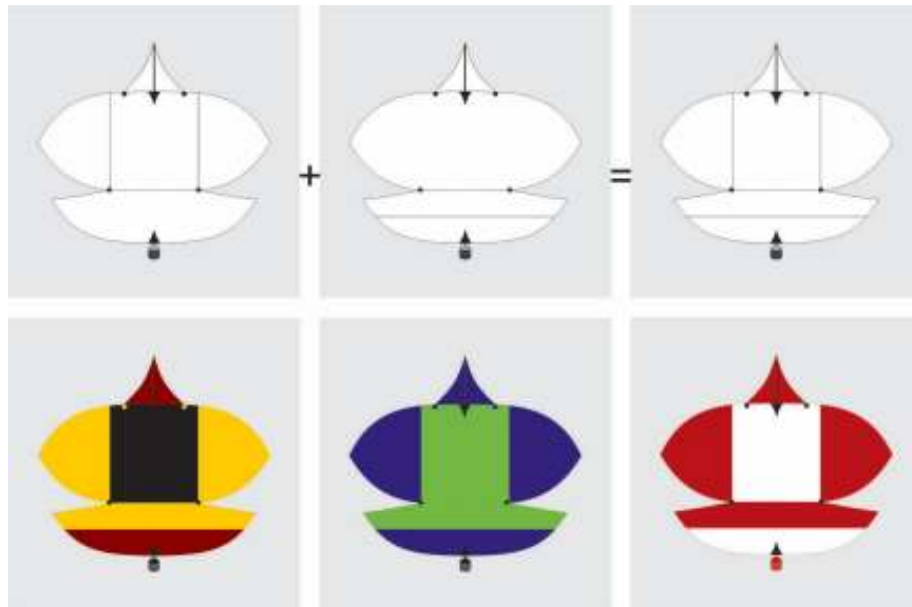


Figure 28. Blending of *chātīdār* and *chīterdāri* to make *chatidār-chīterdāri*

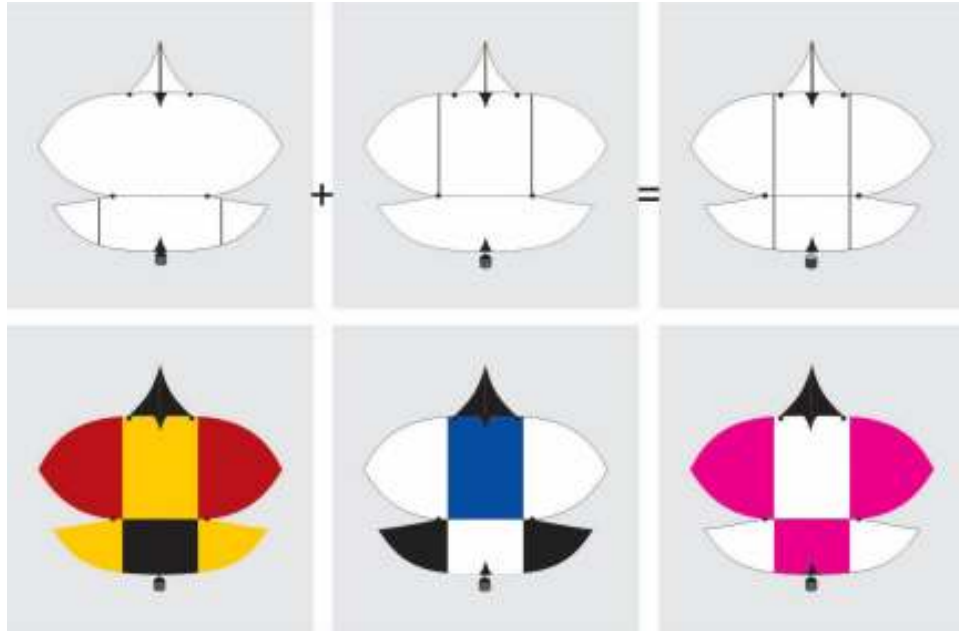


Figure 29. Blending of *duopilak* and *chatidar* to make *chatidār-duopilak*

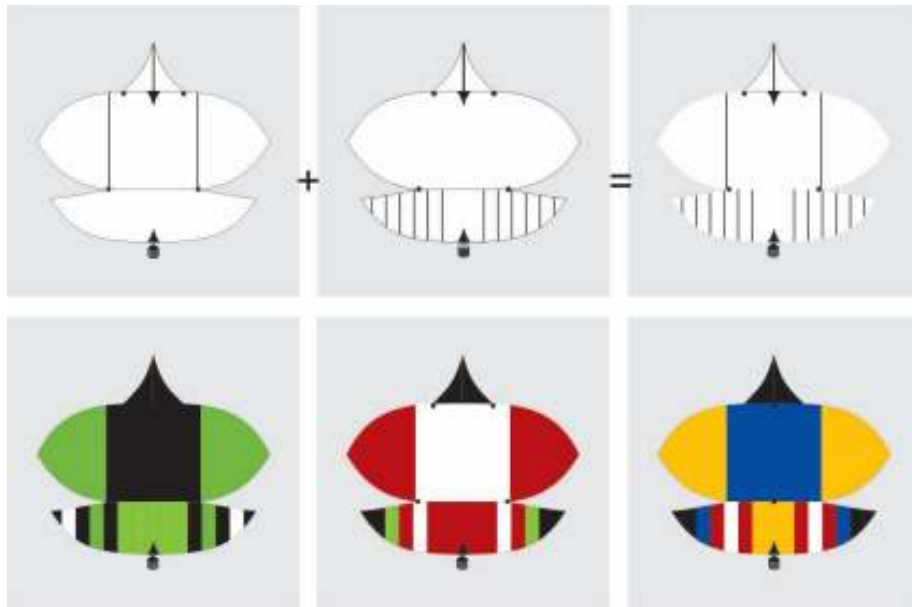


Figure 30. Blending of *chatidār* and *dāndaidār* to make *chātīdār-dāndaidār*

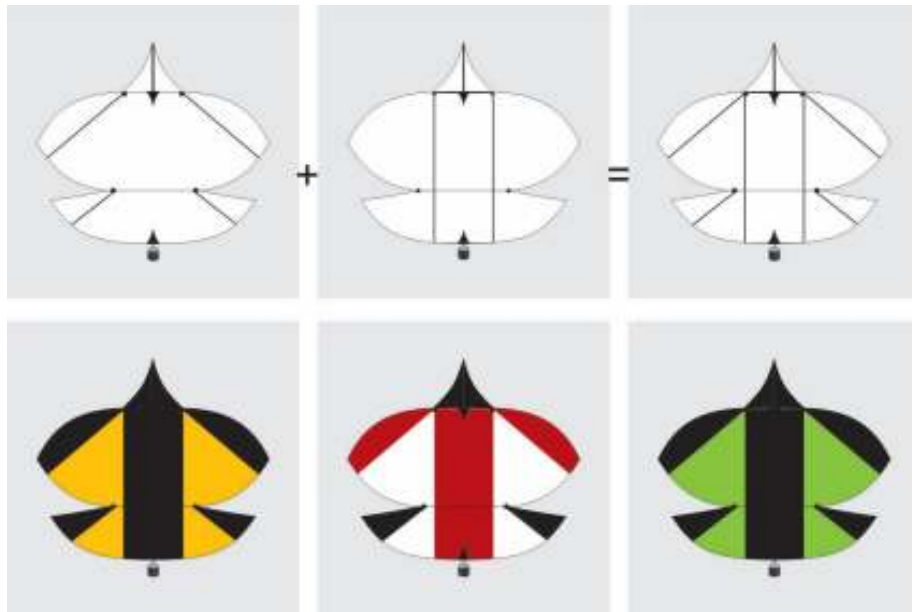


Figure 31. Blending of Pari and Tira to make Pāri-tira

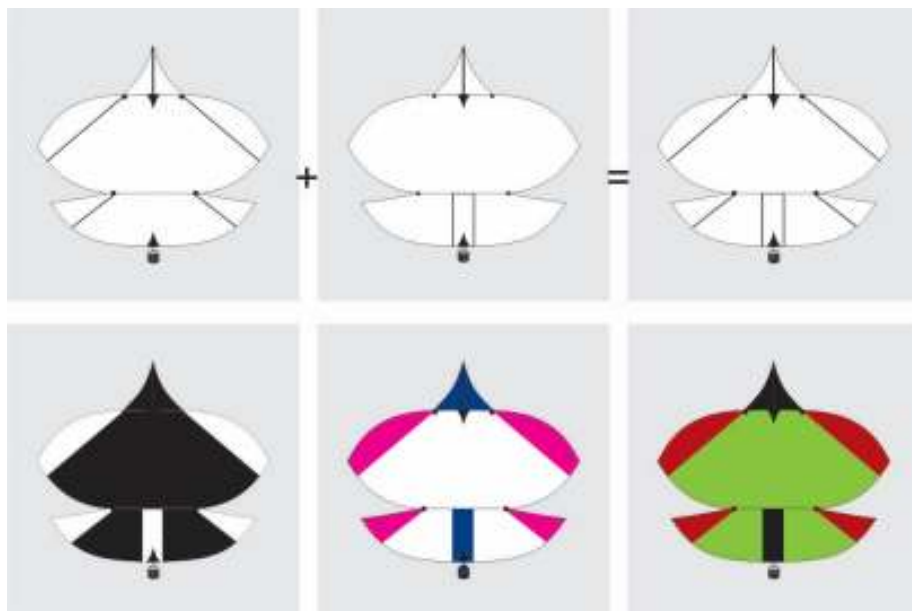


Figure 32. Blending of *pari* and *gulair* to make *pari-gulair*

Conclusion

The craft of a region expresses the underlying aesthetic currents of a culture that belong to the masses. The aesthetic conventions and practical knowledge is reflected in the making of the artifacts. The craftsmen preserve a tradition of knowledge that evolves alongside culture and forms a continuous relationship to the dynamic of customs and traditions. The kite making tradition of the Subcontinent is a unique blend of aesthetic values and practical knowledge of design making. The aesthetic values derive their substance from the Islamic and Hindu traditions as both the non-symbolic and symbolic patterns are visible in the local Patang. The Patang is the most sought after kite in the culture when it comes to the real art of kite flying. It is undoubtedly the most refined product of kite making tradition and is a signature choice of the great kite players and fighters. The study has described more than a dozen varieties of Patang classified on the basis of design formations. The design patterns used to create these formations are basic and fixed however, the resultant combinations express the creativity of the designer within the tradition. The most important finding is that these design patterns do not have a functional value as such, their presence in the tradition of the kite making is an expression of the aesthetic taste of a culture that has grown and diversified with changing modes of customs and traditions. The oral knowledge has communicated a variety of aesthetic preferences to generations and these preferences now contribute to the economic value of the Patangs. The Patang with complex patterns are relatively more expensive than the simple ones. The most expensive are those which have symbols and motifs exquisitely crafted from kite papers with decorative emphasis. The question that needs to be investigated is that how the perception of these design patterns varies amongst the kite makers? How do they rate these design and how do they relate them to their sources? Which designs are difficult in terms of precision and accuracy? These questions need a separate study.

