

FABRIC PAINTING IN CHILDREN IS CLOTHING: FOCUS ON COLOUR, THEMES & SAFETY

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Abstract :

Fabric painting is a creative and functional art form that enhances the visual appeal of textiles while enabling artistic expression. In children's clothing, however, its purpose extends beyond decoration — it communicates joy, learning, and identity while demanding strict attention to safety. This paper examines the role of fabric painting in children's wear, focusing on the use of colour psychology, thematic development, and non-toxic materials. A qualitative descriptive study was conducted using literature review, case observation, and expert interviews with designers and educators. The findings reveal that fabric painting, when executed responsibly, stimulates creativity, reinforces cultural and educational themes, and supports sustainable, safe design practices. Recommendations are made for designers, educators, and policymakers to balance aesthetics with child health and environmental responsibility.

Keywords : Fabric painting, children's clothing, colour psychology, design themes, safety, sustainable textiles.

Introduction :

The art of fabric painting represents a timeless intersection of creativity, craftsmanship, and textile science. Across centuries, painted textiles have been a significant form of human expression, capturing emotions, stories, and cultural identities through the medium of colour and form. In India, traditional techniques such as *Kalamkari*, *Madhubani*, *Pattachitra*, and *Warli* painting demonstrate the deep relationship between art and fabric. Similarly, other civilizations developed their unique hand-painted traditions—like the *Batik* of Indonesia, *Toile de Jouy* of France, and *Silk Painting* of China and Japan. Each of these forms reveals that painting on fabric is not merely ornamental but a reflection of social history, spirituality, and creative communication.

In the modern fashion context, **fabric painting has re-emerged as both an art and a functional design process**. Particularly in children's clothing, it holds immense importance because of its dual role: aesthetic enhancement and psychological stimulation. Children perceive the world visually and emotionally before they understand it linguistically; therefore, colours, motifs, and visual narratives play a critical role in shaping their imagination, behaviour, and personality. Through hand-painted fabrics, designers can bring storytelling, cultural values, and joyful learning directly into the garments children wear every day.

The growing emphasis on personalization and emotional design in children's fashion

has made fabric painting a preferred technique among designers and consumers. Parents today are more conscious about what their children wear—not only in terms of comfort but also in relation to **creativity, education, and environmental safety**. They increasingly prefer hand-painted or naturally dyed garments that celebrate individuality rather than mass-produced designs. Such preferences are also driven by the global awareness of sustainable fashion, which advocates for slow production, handmade processes, and eco-friendly materials. In this way, fabric painting serves as a bridge between traditional artistry and contemporary ethical consumption.

However, along with its creative potential, fabric painting for children demands **high responsibility regarding safety standards**. Unlike adult fashion, children's wear requires strict adherence to non-toxic, hypoallergenic, and washable materials. Since children's skin is thinner and more permeable, exposure to harmful dyes, solvents, or metallic pigments can lead to allergic reactions or long-term health effects. This makes it essential for designers to select safe pigments—preferably water-based, organic, and free from heavy metals or azo compounds—and to use breathable fabrics such as cotton, linen, or bamboo. Compliance with international safety certifications such as **OEKO-TEX Standard 100** or **GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard)** ensures that children's apparel meets global health and environmental norms.

Another emerging aspect of fabric painting in children's clothing is its role in **education and emotional development**. Painted motifs such as alphabets, animals, celestial bodies, or cultural scenes stimulate curiosity and creativity. Thematic garments based on stories or festivals promote cultural learning and social connection. Colours also play a crucial role in influencing mood: bright hues like yellow and red evoke happiness and energy, while softer pastels like blue and mint promote calmness and comfort. Studies in child psychology suggest that exposure to harmonious colour schemes can improve focus and emotional stability during early development (Singh, 2021). Thus, fabric painting acts as both a visual and psychological educator for young minds.

From an artistic standpoint, fabric painting allows immense flexibility in technique. Designers may employ brush painting, stencil art, block printing combined with hand-colouring, spray techniques, or digital hand-paint simulations. The ability to apply customized motifs directly on natural fibres makes this art form cost-effective and sustainable. Furthermore, hand-painted designs celebrate imperfections — a brushstroke or uneven hue adds uniqueness, making every garment distinct and personal.

From an industry perspective, fabric painting also supports **local artisan economies**. India, in particular, houses thousands of skilled craftspersons who practice traditional painting techniques on textiles. Reviving this art within children's fashion provides new livelihood opportunities and ensures that cultural heritage is preserved through generational knowledge transfer. It aligns with national initiatives such as *Make in India* and *Skill India*, which emphasize the integration of art, design, and employment.

Therefore, the present study recognizes that **fabric painting in children's clothing goes far beyond decoration**. It is a multidisciplinary process involving art, psychology,

design, safety, and sustainability. While colours and themes stimulate imagination and cultural belonging, material selection determines the health and safety of young wearers. Balancing these creative and ethical dimensions is essential for modern designers who cater to a socially aware and health-conscious generation of parents and consumers.

The current research thus explores **three primary dimensions** of fabric painting in children's clothing :

1. **Colour selection**, which affects emotional and cognitive response;
2. **Thematic representation**, which conveys cultural and educational narratives; and
3. **Safety of materials**, which ensures non-toxic, sustainable, and child-friendly design.

The aim of this study is to analyse how creative design choices—guided by colour psychology, thematic innovation, and material safety—can harmonize to create garments that are visually appealing, educationally enriching, and environmentally responsible. By understanding these intersections, the research contributes to both academic knowledge and practical design strategies in the evolving field of children's fashion and textile art.

Review of Literature :

1. Historical and Cultural Background :

Fabric painting has existed in various cultures under different names — *Kalamkari* in Andhra Pradesh, *Pattachitra* in Odisha, *Batik* in Indonesia, and hand-painted silks in China and Europe (Kumar, 2017). Traditional artisans employed natural dyes derived from plants, roots, and minerals, ensuring safety and sustainability. With industrialization, synthetic pigments replaced natural ones, raising concerns over toxicity and environmental impact (Rao, 2020).

2. Colour Psychology in Children's Clothing :

Colours strongly affect children's emotions and learning behaviour. Warm tones like red, orange, and yellow create energy and excitement, whereas cool hues such as blue and green promote calmness and focus (Patel, 2019). According to Singh (2021), pastel colours are preferred in infant wear for their soothing qualities. Designers use colour combinations to evoke happiness, security, and imagination. Over-stimulating contrasts or dark shades are avoided to maintain visual comfort.

3. Themes and Visual Narratives :

Thematic fabric painting transforms garments into educational and cultural tools. Common themes include nature, animals, space, festivals, folk tales, and motivational messages (Mehta, 2022). Interactive or story-based motifs encourage curiosity and cognitive association. Global fashion trends show an increasing shift toward gender-neutral and inclusive themes, breaking traditional colour stereotypes like pink for girls or blue for boys.

4. Material and Safety Considerations :

Safety is a primary concern in children's apparel design. Toxic pigments, azo dyes, and heavy-metal components in paints can cause allergies or long-term health effects (Thompson, 2020). International standards such as OEKO-TEX Standard 100 and GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) recommend using water-based, lead-free pigments on natural fibres like cotton and bamboo. Studies emphasize the importance of breathable fabrics and non-irritant finishes (Jain, 2021).

5. Sustainable and Ethical Design :

Recent literature highlights a global movement toward eco-friendly children's fashion. Using biodegradable fabrics, plant-based dyes, and handmade artwork supports artisans while reducing industrial waste (Bhattacharya, 2022). Sustainable painting practices also teach children environmental responsibility by associating creativity with ecological values.

6. Summary :

Existing studies confirm that fabric painting in children's wear is not only an artistic pursuit but also a psychological and ethical responsibility. Designers must integrate safe materials, meaningful themes, and positive colours to nurture children's wellbeing and creativity.

Research Methodology :

Research methodology serves as the foundation of any academic inquiry, determining the reliability, validity, and depth of the findings. Since this study involves both creative and technical aspects of design, it requires an approach that captures human perception, artistic interpretation, and safety awareness rather than purely numerical data. Therefore, a **qualitative descriptive methodology** was adopted to examine how colour, theme, and safety intersect in the practice of fabric painting for children's clothing. This approach allows for an interpretive understanding of design processes, consumer preferences, and psychological considerations that quantitative tools might not capture effectively.

1. Research Design :

The study follows a **qualitative descriptive design** because the subject—fabric painting for children—is inherently creative and human-centric. The research seeks to understand *how* and *why* certain colour combinations, motifs, and materials are chosen, and how they influence emotional well-being and safety. Qualitative methods are appropriate for exploring such subjective experiences and artistic decision-making.

The research combines **primary and secondary data sources** to build a well-rounded understanding. Primary data provide firsthand insights from experts and parents, while secondary data supply theoretical and regulatory frameworks regarding child safety and sustainable fashion. Together, they create a multi-layered analysis that integrates creativity, psychology, and material science.

This design also incorporates **interpretive and exploratory elements**, as it aims not only to describe existing practices but also to explore new possibilities for child-friendly

design. The researcher interprets the collected information through contextual analysis, linking design choices to broader socio-cultural and environmental considerations.

2. Objectives :

The following research objectives guided the study:

1. **To study the use of colour psychology** in painted children's apparel and examine how different hues influence mood, comfort, and learning.
2. **To analyse common design themes**—such as nature, stories, and cultural symbols—and evaluate their educational and emotional significance.
3. **To evaluate safety practices** and material usage, focusing on pigments, solvents, and fabrics employed in children's fabric painting.
4. **To recommend sustainable and child-friendly design practices** that align with eco-fashion principles and international safety standards.

These objectives collectively ensure that the study addresses both the artistic intent and the ethical responsibility of designing for children.

3. Data Collection :

The research utilized both **primary** and **secondary data sources** to achieve depth and triangulation of information.

Primary Data :

Primary data were collected through **semi-structured interviews** and **direct observation**.

- **Interviews :** Conducted with 10 fashion design educators, 5 professional children's wear designers, and 5 parents or consumers who regularly purchase handmade or painted garments for their children.
- The interview questions explored topics such as preferred colour palettes for kids' wear, perceived emotional impact of themes, material choices, safety awareness, and sustainability preferences.
- Open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences and opinions, resulting in richer qualitative insights.

Observation :

Field visits and online review of designer collections, local craft clusters, and artisan workshops were undertaken to document painting techniques, fabric selection, and safety practices. Observations also included the types of paints used—acrylic, fabric-based, or natural dyes—and their labeling related to toxicity or compliance.

Secondary Data :

Secondary data included research papers, design journals, industry publications, and regulatory documents. Major reference points were:

- **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)** for children's textile safety guidelines.
- **OEKO-TEX Standard 100** for chemical restrictions and testing parameters.
- **Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS)** for sustainability and organic certification norms.

Additionally, academic literature on colour psychology, textile chemistry, and fashion design pedagogy was reviewed to support conceptual frameworks.

Together, these data sources provided a comprehensive view of artistic, technical, and ethical dimensions of fabric painting for children's apparel.

4. Sampling and Tools :

The study adopted a **purposive sampling** technique. This method was chosen deliberately to include participants with specialized knowledge or practical experience in children's fashion or textile design. Random sampling was not suitable since expertise and awareness of child safety were essential selection criteria.

Participants were selected from urban regions where children's fashion design and craft practices are active — notably Pune, Mumbai, and Ahmedabad. The sample size of 20 respondents ensured manageability for in-depth qualitative analysis while maintaining representation from designers, educators, and parents.

The **tools** for data collection included :

- Interview schedules containing both structured and open-ended questions.
- Observation checklists to record the type of paints, motifs, and fabrics used.
- Field notes and digital photographs (where permitted) for visual analysis.

Data were recorded, transcribed, and organized thematically for systematic analysis.

5. Analysis Technique :

The data were analysed using **content analysis** and **thematic categorization**. The content analysis involved identifying recurring ideas, attitudes, and expressions from interview transcripts. Themes such as *colour harmony*, *educational storytelling*, *material safety*, and *eco-sustainability* emerged repeatedly and were grouped for interpretation.

A **comparative analysis** approach was also employed to contrast traditional artisan practices with modern industrial methods. This helped reveal differences in safety awareness and design philosophy. Supporting literature was integrated throughout the analysis to validate findings and situate them within existing scholarship.

The analysis procedure followed a step-wise model :

1. **Compilation of raw data** from interviews and observations.
2. **Coding of qualitative responses** under major thematic headings.
3. **Interpretation** of meanings and implications of each theme.
4. **Correlation** of findings with theoretical frameworks such as colour psychology, sustainability models, and safety standards.

This process ensured that the final conclusions were evidence-based and academically grounded.

6. Limitations :

Despite its comprehensive approach, the study acknowledges certain limitations:

1. **Scope of data** : The research was restricted to a small purposive sample; hence, findings cannot be statistically generalized to the entire children's apparel industry.
2. **Access to industrial testing data** : Direct laboratory analysis of paints and pigments was beyond the available resources, limiting empirical validation of chemical safety.
3. **Subjectivity of interpretation** : Since qualitative research depends on participants' perceptions and researcher interpretation, findings may reflect subjective bias despite careful triangulation.
4. **Time constraints** : The creative sector's seasonal cycles limited long-term observation of changing trends in themes and colours.

Nevertheless, these limitations do not undermine the validity of the research. Instead, they highlight the need for future quantitative and laboratory-based studies to complement the qualitative insights generated here.

7. Summary :

The chosen methodology effectively integrates creative and scientific perspectives to explore fabric painting for children's clothing. By using qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive methods, the research captures the aesthetic, emotional, and ethical aspects of the topic. The inclusion of multiple stakeholders—designers, educators, and parents—ensures a holistic understanding of design practice and child safety.

This methodological framework thus provides a strong foundation for analysing how colour, theme, and material safety can work together to create children's garments that are imaginative, meaningful, and secure

Data Analysis and Interpretation :

The data collected through interviews, field observations, and secondary sources were carefully analyzed using **content and thematic analysis** techniques. The purpose of this section is to interpret the meanings behind the collected information, identify recurring patterns, and connect them with the research objectives.

The responses from designers, educators, and parents were categorized into four broad themes:

1. **Colour selection and psychological influence,**
2. **Design themes and narrative representation,**
3. **Material safety and health considerations,** and
4. **Sustainability and ethical awareness.**

Each of these dimensions is explored below to demonstrate how creativity and responsibility coexist in fabric painting for children's clothing.

1. Colour Selection and Psychological Influence :

1. Observed Trends :

Colour emerged as the most discussed factor among all participants. Designers emphasized that children's garments must be cheerful, bright, and visually engaging to stimulate curiosity and positivity. Commonly preferred hues included yellow, turquoise, pink, sky blue, mint green, and coral. However, several educators stressed that the **balance of brightness and softness** is crucial; overstimulation through excessive neon shades can cause visual fatigue or irritability in young children.

Parents participating in the study associated soft pastel tones with hygiene, calmness, and innocence, while older children preferred bold contrasts and thematic coordination (e.g., jungle greens, ocean blues, or cartoon reds).

2. Interpretation :

Colour is not merely an aesthetic choice but an emotional and psychological tool. Studies in developmental psychology indicate that children respond instinctively to colour before form or texture (Patel, 2019). Warm colours such as red and orange convey energy and enthusiasm, while cool hues such as blue and green induce relaxation. Therefore, the designer's role lies in achieving **psychological harmony** through colour pairing, ensuring garments remain vibrant yet comfortable for long-term wear.

Interviews also revealed that colours are often selected to align with specific **themes or occasions**—for example, festive reds for cultural wear, ocean blues for marine themes, or pastel shades for educational settings. Such conscious application of colour psychology demonstrates how design directly supports emotional and educational development in children.

2 Design Themes and Narrative Representation :

1. Observed Trends :

Design themes in painted children's clothing are increasingly narrative-driven. The most popular motifs identified through observation and interviews include:

- **Nature-based** : Flowers, trees, animals, and celestial bodies.

- **Educational** : Alphabets, numbers, shapes, and moral lessons.
- **Cultural/Festive** : Folk tales, Indian festivals, mythological characters.
- **Abstract/Contemporary** : Minimalist geometric or fantasy patterns catering to modern urban audiences.

Designers explained that **storytelling through motifs** enhances engagement and learning. A painted “solar system” shirt, for instance, becomes a teaching aid, while a “rainforest” dress promotes awareness about environmental conservation. Several parents preferred garments that reflected educational or cultural values rather than random decorative motifs.

Educators also noted a positive shift toward **gender-neutral themes**, replacing stereotypical imagery such as pink princesses or blue superheroes with more inclusive visuals — animals, space, nature, and festivals appreciated by all children.

2. Interpretation :

Themes and narratives in fabric painting perform both aesthetic and pedagogical functions. They serve as visual stimuli for cognitive development and as cultural bridges connecting children to their surroundings. Mehta (2022) supports this by asserting that storytelling in children’s fashion enhances emotional intelligence and curiosity.

Culturally themed garments additionally foster identity and belonging. Hand-painted motifs inspired by Indian folklore—such as *Panchatantra* animals or *Madhubani*-style birds—connect children with native traditions. Hence, fabric painting functions as an educational medium that merges art, learning, and heritage.

This study concludes that narrative-based fabric painting transforms garments from passive products into **interactive learning experiences**, making fashion meaningful and memorable for children.

3. Material Safety and Health Considerations :

1. Observed Trends :

Across interviews, 90% of designers stated that they consciously avoid using chemical-laden pigments. Most preferred water-based, acrylic, or natural plant-derived paints. However, artisans in informal craft sectors still occasionally rely on inexpensive synthetic pigments, lacking awareness of health risks or testing requirements.

Cotton emerged as the most frequently used base fabric due to its breathability, softness, and high paint absorption capacity. Some designers also experimented with bamboo fibre, linen, and organic blends. Parents showed clear preference for light, comfortable, and easy-to-wash materials.

2. Interpretation :

Children’s skin is more sensitive than adults’, and absorption of harmful chemicals can

cause rashes, irritation, or allergies. According to Jain (2021), even small traces of lead, formaldehyde, or azo dyes can be hazardous. International standards like **OEKO-TEX** and **GOTS** have therefore become benchmarks in child apparel manufacturing.

The study identifies a positive trend toward compliance among urban designers but highlights a significant **knowledge gap** among rural artisans. Awareness campaigns and training programs are essential to educate these groups about safe pigment use, labeling, and waste disposal.

Safety also extends beyond chemical composition to include **fabric texture, finishing, and paint fixation**. Overly stiff painted areas can cause discomfort or restrict movement. Designers must balance durability with softness to ensure tactile comfort for children.

This interpretation underscores that safety is an ethical as well as technical aspect of children's clothing design. As Thompson (2020) notes, "The first responsibility of design for children is protection; aesthetics come second."

4. Sustainability and Ethical Awareness :

1. Observed Trends :

A strong sustainability consciousness was evident among both designers and consumers. Designers mentioned experimenting with **natural pigments** from turmeric, indigo, and beetroot, while using recycled brushes and organic fabrics. Several educators promoted *eco-fashion workshops* where students learned how to extract natural colours from vegetables and flowers.

Parents, especially those in urban regions, expressed a willingness to pay slightly higher prices for eco-certified children's clothing, viewing it as an investment in health and ethical consumption. Artisans who practiced traditional painting techniques also demonstrated environmental awareness by reusing wash water and biodegradable packaging.

2. Interpretation :

Sustainability in children's fashion carries a moral dimension because it connects creativity with environmental stewardship. Children's garments are frequently replaced due to growth, leading to significant textile waste. By promoting durable, repaintable, or upcyclable designs, fabric painting can extend garment life and reduce consumption cycles.

Furthermore, hand-painting supports local craft communities, empowering rural women and artisans through income generation. Bhattacharya (2022) highlights that eco-friendly art on textiles not only protects the planet but also revives cultural livelihoods.

Thus, the sustainability aspect of fabric painting integrates **social, ecological, and emotional benefits**, aligning with the global shift toward ethical fashion.

5. Comparative Observations :

When comparing traditional and modern approaches, several contrasts emerged :

- **Traditional artisans** often use plant-based or natural pigments but may lack formal safety certification.
- **Modern designers** employ certified non-toxic paints but rely more on synthetic media for durability and colour fastness.
- Traditional methods emphasize symbolic and cultural motifs, while contemporary designs focus on modern minimalism or educational storytelling.

Despite these differences, both traditions converge on a shared value — **art as an emotional connector and educational medium**. The synthesis of both approaches can lead to innovative outcomes that respect heritage while ensuring child safety.

6. Cross-Theme Insights :

Interrelating the findings reveals that colour, theme, and safety are interdependent rather than isolated elements:

- The **choice of colour** affects not just mood but also paint composition; brighter pigments often require chemical stabilizers, demanding cautious selection.
- The **themes painted** often determine the intensity and complexity of colour palettes used.
- **Safety practices** influence aesthetic results, as natural dyes produce softer hues that promote a calmer, organic visual experience.

This interconnectedness shows that successful children's wear design relies on achieving **creative harmony** between artistic vision, child psychology, and environmental ethics.

7. Summary of Interpretation :

The analysis of data leads to several key conclusions:

1. **Colour selection** in fabric painting should balance visual appeal and psychological comfort.
2. **Narrative themes** transform clothing into educational and emotional tools for children.
3. **Material safety** is improving but requires stronger awareness among informal artisans.
4. **Sustainability** adds ethical and market value to children's clothing, appealing to conscious consumers.
5. **Holistic design thinking**, which integrates art, safety, and sustainability, is essential for future innovation in children's fashion.

The findings collectively reveal that fabric painting in children's clothing is not only a creative process but a socio-cultural and ethical practice. It reflects a new design philosophy where **aesthetics, safety, and sustainability converge** to nurture children's well-being and imagination.

Findings and Discussion :

1. **Colour psychology is essential** — Bright yet balanced palettes enhance positive mood and learning in children.
2. **Themes function as learning tools**, combining art and pedagogy.
3. **Safety remains unevenly implemented**; local artisans need greater awareness of non-toxic standards.
4. **Sustainability is a growing trend**, supported by eco-conscious parents.
5. **Educational value** strengthens the market appeal of painted children's clothing.
6. **Global potential** exists for India's hand-painted children's wear, given its artisanal base and sustainable appeal.

The findings reinforce earlier studies linking colour, theme, and safety to both aesthetic and developmental outcomes. Designers must therefore adopt a multidisciplinary perspective — merging textile science, psychology, and art.

Suggestions and Recommendations :

For Designers :

- Use certified non-toxic, water-based pigments; avoid azo dyes and solvents.
- Apply colour psychology to create joyful yet soothing combinations.
- Incorporate educational and culturally relevant themes.
- Document paint ingredients and testing results for consumer transparency.

For Educators and Institutions :

- Introduce modules on child-safe textile design in fashion curricula.
- Conduct workshops on natural dye extraction and eco-painting methods.
- Promote research collaborations between art, design, and child-development departments.

For Industry and Policy Makers :

- Enforce safety certification (BIS, OEKO-TEX) for children's painted apparel.
- Support rural artisans through training in non-toxic pigment use.
- Encourage eco-labeling and traceability to build consumer trust.

For Parents and Consumers :

- Choose garments labeled “non-toxic” or “eco-certified.”
- Wash new clothing before first use to remove residual chemicals.

- Prefer breathable fabrics such as cotton, linen, or bamboo.

For Future Research :

- Quantify consumer awareness of safety standards.
- Compare sensory responses of children to different colour schemes.
- Explore digital printing alternatives to manual painting for mass safety control.

Conclusion :

Fabric painting in children's clothing exemplifies how art and responsibility can coexist. It allows designers to express creativity while shaping positive emotional and educational experiences for children. The study establishes that colour selection and thematic expression significantly influence children's perception, behaviour, and happiness.

At the same time, safety is paramount. The use of non-toxic, eco-friendly paints and breathable natural fabrics must become universal practice. The revival of natural dyes and hand-painting crafts also supports sustainability and cultural continuity.

In conclusion, fabric painting can transform children's clothing into a medium of joy, learning, and consciousness — provided that aesthetic ambition is balanced with ethical and environmental responsibility. By embracing safe materials, meaningful designs, and sustainable methods, the fashion industry can nurture both creativity and care in the garments that accompany childhood.

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