

Research article

Reinterpreting Buddhist Iconography: A Study of Craft Meanings and Uses in Everyday Living Architectures through 'Iconic Interactionism'

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Abstract

This study takes a unique approach, focusing on the iconography and psychological use of Buddhist handicrafts in everyday life. Through qualitative methods, we delve into the interpretation and meanings given to a series of Buddhist handicrafts, such as a Buddha statue, prayer wheel, flag, and other symbolic craft. Our aim is to examine how the assigned symbolic meanings of craft correlate with the interpreted meaning given to craft by respondents as an activity in relation to their well-being. The paper is grounded in the theoretical implications of iconography and reception analysis. The outcomes reveal the therapeutic nature of craft as a meaningful symbol of living architecture for those involved in the interpretation and consumption of handicrafts. The significance and symbolic meaning of handicrafts are defined as the meaning and value, the feelings and experiences of use, and the social and cultural dimensions associated with craft as a stress-relieving, mind-calming activity and in maintaining well-being. Finally, the study's outcome leads to the development of the theoretical contribution of 'Iconic Interactionism' detailed in the paper's last section.

Keywords: Culture, Meaning, Handicraft, Symbolic, Narratives.



Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Introduction

Richie (2015) claimed that "The iconography of the Buddha has been transported from his human condition" and into his spiritual hypostasis". In Asian statues of the Buddha, each part of the statue is highly symbolic and contains physical articulations or meanings of religious ideals. Art may have either a literal or a symbolic function; it may depict meanings or narratives in symbolic form. According to her, in iconography, there is a link between representational characteristics and

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otherworldly concepts, which is like a code (Richie, 2014, p. 33). In this study, we apply the concept of 'Iconic Interactionism' to the interpretation of handicrafts and artifacts. This theory posits that when individuals are exposed to and actively engage with handicrafts, they give diverse interpretations and derive deeper meaning, thereby enriching their well-being.

These handicrafts and sculptures are created with the intention that devotees will view, engage in, and enhance internalising the meaning to enlighten. These handicrafts are created to serve empirical functions for the devotee. The depictions of handicrafts and artefacts translate across nations and dialects (Richie, 2014, p. 33). Engaging with symbols or icons, particularly in the context of handicrafts, involves a systematic interaction that can be understood as a process of encoding and decoding. Iconic Interactionism is an approach to understanding the process of encoding and decoding in the way individuals engage with symbols or icons, the process of involvement in interpreting handicrafts as a language or text, and how they are drawn to handicrafts with their knowledge and experiences to construct their own meanings. Subsequently, Iconic Interactionism claims that individuals construct meaning from these interactions, decoding handicrafts as a form of language or text. Within this context, it can be important to understand how great consistency allows meaning to be centralized to the handicraft's unchangeable and changeable location instead of contextualized to the place of origin or display (Richie, 2014, p. 33).

The deeper meaning bursts forth from the statues to reveal the narrative. The syntactic meaning signifies the hope of transformation. A corresponding emotion or idea is evoked in semiotics when a certain motion is made. In Asian statues of the Buddha, the hands signify a higher spiritual meaning, and the use of mudras contextualises the Buddha and his teachings (Richie, 2014, p. 36). If engaged actively through the language of gesture, the individual (worshipper) might read not only the special powers and attributes but also be able to personify their importance and uses in everyday living architecture. For instance, in 'The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols', Robert Beer provides an understanding of symbols and attributes that appear within the complex iconography of Tibetan Buddhism, focusing on the drawings that reveal the origins, meanings, and functions of these symbols. Iconography defines a diverse and complex set of symbols and their significant meanings (Beer, 2003). There is a meaning behind the icon, which is the semantic meaning or denotation implied within icons or handicrafts; therefore, this paper aims to reveal the meaning and values of spiritual and cultural symbols through iconic interactionism in Buddhist handicrafts and artefacts.

In addition, Saraswat and Raheja (2015) claimed that narrative is a universal phenomenon and exists everywhere, even in interior architecture. It is indicative of its culture and its people; every architectural and associative object has a story to tell. The readings and meaning of craft as a text can be significant areas of inquiry in the fields of iconography and cultural studies. To measure how handicrafts carry forward and deliver meaning or narratives. This is where the need for a medium arises. The theory of "Iconic Interactionism" hypothesises that icons and artefacts serve as symbolic forms of interaction through which individuals derive meaning in their lives. It explores how these icons become significant codes of interpretation, shaping personal and collective identities. The theory suggests that individuals actively engage in the process of assigning meaning to artefacts, which act as a language of communication within their cultural environment.

This interpretation and reinterpretation of cultural icons are influenced by personal experiences and cultural contexts, forming deep connections with everyday life.

Moreover, every craft has a narrative framework and a narrative structure underlying it that contribute to visual language and semantic meanings in interior architecture. Craft means objects that can be functional. Every craft is a piece of communication and can be like a word, adding to the overall syntax of the structure (in this case, handicrafts). Every architecture has a story to tell, and every craft has the inherent possibility of being integral to the structure, forming a discourse, and structuring or creating a narrative or meaning, just like human language. A phenomenological perspective considers architectural objects as a medium of communication. Crafts are linked with meanings or narratives because they are constituted within a field of discourses (such as psychological, sociological, and cultural studies) (Saraswat and Raheja, 2015). Within this framework, iconic interactionism will understand craft as a form of meaning or narrative in the context of the meaning-making process and everyday use in accordance with their belief systems or frame of reference to the interplay between craft and the cultural setting. Every handicraft and artefact gives meaning to social narratives that seem to influence the behaviour associated with everyday architecture or objects. Thus, it is important to understand handicrafts and their meanings through iconic interactionism, understand the multiple meanings or narratives manifested in handicrafts, and realise the potential and significance of craft traditions and their everyday use in the present context.

In late art tradition, the iconography of various art forms has been discussed so far, almost exclusively with respect to 'anthropomorphically' (Chapin and Coomaraswamy, 1935, p. 3). Iconography is an interpretive aspect of religious art forms and religions such as Buddhism, which provide a rich symbolic pattern of handicraft and art with a large cultural influence. Buddhism includes thirty-two major signs and eighty minor signs that indicate the nativity and presence of Buddha in symbolic forms. Referencing the Indian wall paintings of Ajanta, which feature floral, geometrical, and other motifs, Ikvir Kaur illustrated that "these paintings represent various aspects of the life of Buddha symbolically" (2017, p. 215). She claimed that the images of Buddha are painted specifically in "golden yellow for the semiotic reason that yellow is the symbol of earth" (Kaur, 2017, p. 220). Kaur's work was incorporated to gain depth and specificity in examining craft meanings and their everyday applications in architecture. By discussing how the choice of colours, such as golden yellow for Buddha or the Tibetan flag, has iconic significance in meanings that are fixed. This introduces the idea that intentional choices are made in the craft that go beyond aesthetic considerations in everyday living. It helped me in discussing how these crafted symbols may influence the daily lives of individuals. How they might be evident in architectural elements, and aimed to explore how these crafted representations find meaning and application in everyday life and architecture.

This paper proposes that the Iconic Interactionism theory establishes a framework that delves into the complex relationship between cultural icons, perceptions, and everyday interactions, particularly focusing on Buddhist artefacts and handicrafts. Studies focusing on how icons serve as symbolic forms of interaction, shaping identities, influencing behaviours, and finally contributing to overall well-being. Further, it represents the functional correlations between key concepts and factors of iconic interactionism, providing a roadmap for understanding the complexities within the study. By systematically detailing the theory's key concepts, such as

interactions with icons, shaping the self, influence on actions and behaviours, and the core of well-being, the paper establishes a comprehensive framework for analysis. It highlights the dynamic process of interpreting icons based on personal experiences, social interactions, and cultural contexts. It emphasises how cultural icons serve as tools for negotiation, and interpretations are useful in influencing individuals's behaviours and contributing to their spiritual, mental, and social dimensions of well-being in everyday living architecture.

Review of Literature:

Robert Beer logically structures and introduces various numerical concepts associated with Buddhist teachings into text form. He mainly covers the main groups of auspicious symbols, offerings, and emblems, many of which appeared as the symbolic motifs of early Indian Buddhism (Beer, 2003). He used the term 'symbol' throughout the text specifically to refer to the intrinsic meanings ascribed to a particular object or attribute. Emphasising Beer's use of 'symbol' to denote inherent meanings associated with objects, my study aims to explore the complex craft meanings behind these symbols in everyday life and architecture. By analysing the symbolic meanings of early Indian Buddhist iconography, this research aims to interpret their practical implications and contemporary significance in influencing the everyday aesthetic of individuals and cultural factors of modern living spaces.

Further, according to Beer, accurately assigning interpretation to these objects should perhaps be 'purity', as he believes these objects ultimately represent the qualities or puritanism of the deities (Beer, 2003). Given that this object does not stem from uncertainty about a symbol's meaning or depictions, Robert Beer used terms (such as frequently, usually, frequently, generally, and traditionally) to define or describe a specific symbolic object because he believes that these symbols frequently have iconographical variations that depend on different traditions or cultural origins (Beer, 2003). Beer also detailed that these symbolic meanings are "essentially inspirational, and as subjects of contemplation, they continually deepen in significance to accord with the practitioner's emotional, mental, psychological, philosophical, and spiritual capacities" (2003, p. xii–xiii). Looking back over two and a half thousand years into Buddhist tradition and the art of living gave rise to the idea that several scholars, philosophers, and practitioners have dedicated their time and research practices to the field of Buddhist art and culture. They have explored that Buddhism's cultural teachings are "perfectly integrated as they are and need no alternative interpretation" (Beer, 2003, p. xiii). The present study explored how Beer's use of terms like 'frequently,' 'usually,' and 'traditionally' reflects the variations in iconography among respondents across different traditions and cultural origins. My study delved into how these symbols, with their diverse interpretations, serve as ongoing sources of inspiration, evolving in significance based on respondents' emotional, mental, and spiritual capacities. My research aims to find out the transformative potential inherent in Buddhist symbols and their influences on perceptions and personal growth.

Wang claimed that Tibetan ancestors crafted various products and later gave them decorative meaning and artistic aesthetics, forming various styles of decorative art (Wang, 2020, p. 543). Discussing the Baoxiang flower pattern that is used in Tibetan carpet decoration art, Li Wang explained in his study, 'A Study on the Baoxiang Flower Pattern in the Decorative Art of Tibetan

Carpets' that Tibetan carpets are the product of the combination of various flowers that have symbolic meanings in nature. While focusing on the practicality and aesthetics of carpet products, Wang claimed that they have a deep artistic origin that can be traced back to Buddhism and other cultures. In addition, he analyses the pattern composition of the Baoxiang flower and the precious-phase patterns on Tibetan carpets and interprets the aesthetic and cultural connotations expressed by the patterns (Wang, 2020, p. 543).

Wang claimed that the flower shape does not really exist in nature. He explained that "the lotus has a mythological colour" and that many scholars and writers "praised it for its characteristics of being made of silt and not muddy. Its flower shape is soft and perfect, the flower colour is elegant, and it has noble qualities, which are the same as the Buddhist philosophy." He insists on the ideology that Buddhism requires people to be like lotus flowers, which are free from evil spirits in the muddy world (Wang, 2020, p. 543). Wang's context is highly valuable to my study for several reasons. His assertion that Tibetan carpets are a product of combining flowers with symbolic meanings in nature establishes a foundational understanding of the craft's origins for my study. Wang's emphasis on the practicality and aesthetics of these carpets aligns with the broader theme of this study, which delves into craft meanings and uses in everyday living architecture. Furthermore, Wang's claim of a deep artistic origin traced back to Buddhism and other cultures connects the study to broader cultural and religious contexts, providing a framework for interpreting the symbolic significance of the craft.

Paul Tillich (1998), in 'Myth and Symbol', described symbols as 'figurative quality' and 'perceptibility'. According to him, 'figurative quality' refers to those inner attitudes that are developed not as a symbol but as what is symbolised in it. Secondly, 'perceptibility' he defines as something that is in and of itself 'hidden' (the idea of symbol) or unknown but is made perceptible (noticeable) in the symbol and is, in this way, given objectivity or meaning. Building on Tillich's foundation, Ikvir Kaur extends the discourse, asserting that "the power is inherent or lies within the symbol, and it becomes representative of reality; it also differentiates it from the sign as it is powerless" (Kaur, 2017, p. 222). Tillich's framework guides my study in exploring how handicrafts as icons elicit inner attitudes and make otherwise hidden aspects noticeable, thereby giving them meaning and objectivity. This serves as a conceptual presenter for analysing iconographic roles in representing abstract concepts. On the other hand, Kaur's extension of Tillich's ideas adds practical significance by asserting the inherent power within symbols, differentiating them from signs. Her perspective contributes to the study's exploration of symbols as potent representations of reality. This distinction becomes crucial in understanding the ionic dynamics in a similar way within artistic contexts and in finding out why art and craft objects, as iconography, as opposed to mere icons, hold profound meaning and influence.

Prasetyo explained that the Vihara Lotus consists of symbols such as statues, images, and ornaments close to the Buddhist tradition. He claimed that such symbols cannot be directly interpreted, especially by visitors who are not members of the temple. Thus, it must be a qualitative study to understand the meanings of the symbols in Buddhist handicrafts. According to the same explanation, some authors use semiotics theory to reveal the meaning and values of the spiritual and cultural symbols in the Vihara Lotus because semiotics defines signs to express the meaning behind the signs implied within the symbols (2019, p. 60). Therefore, in accordance with semiotics and iconography, various symbols imply the meaning of richness contained in both

spiritual values of Buddhism. Prasetyo's statements provide a basis for investigating the iconographic language within Buddhist handicrafts. Prasetyo's claim also highlights the need for a qualitative study. This justifies the chosen research approach and emphasises the importance of delving into complex and cultural contexts to comprehend the iconographic meanings accurately. Moreover, using iconography theory aligns with the study's methodological direction. Iconography is used as a systematic framework for decoding the meaning and values embedded in handicrafts and artefacts. By incorporating iconography, the study gains a methodological tool to analyse the depth of meaning within the context of art and handicraft.

The Buddhist art and handicrafts in this study are read and interpreted as icons and symbols that have meaning and value derived originally from the teachings of the Buddha dharma, and iconography has been assigned meanings. Stuart Hall (2001) described preferred, negotiated, and oppositional meanings as 'encoding and decoding.' Art and handicrafts are cultural icons and symbols influenced by local cultures, religions, and traditions. Within this context, this study is important and can contribute insights and knowledge in iconography to the reading and meaning-making process, especially in religious semiotics and cultural studies of handicraft as an icon of text. Prasetyo claimed that it can add to the field of Buddhist studies and enrich the literature of Buddhist semiotics such as statues, carvings, ornaments, and so on (2019, p. 60). Prasetyo found and claimed that society uses the symbol agreed upon by the members of society to represent their ideas. There is no limitation to what the form or shape of the symbol is; it can be in any form (such as art, craft, sculpture, words, or behaviour) (2019, p. 63). Stuart Hall's framework of 'encoding and decoding' helped in understanding the dynamic nature of interpreting artefacts as icons. It suggests that meanings are not fixed but negotiated, allowing for a complex analysis of how Buddhist art and handicraft are understood within various cultural contexts. In addition, Prasetyo's arguments helped highlight the potential scholarly impact. His insight into society's use of symbols in diverse forms facilitates the study of the varied expressions of Buddhist icons and symbols. Together, these frameworks guide the study of the complex meanings inherent in Buddhist art.

"Symbols hold definite significance in both art and religion, yet limited symbolical religious studies within the realm of semiotics exist in India. Recognizing handicrafts as cultural expressions" (Dabadi et al., 2021), this paper employs iconography to investigate tourist engagements with Buddhist handicrafts, exploring their interpretations and everyday applications in cultural modifications within living architecture for well-being. While Buddhist art and craft in everyday life architecture have been quantitatively studied (Bond, 2011; Bell & Collins, 2014; Saraswat and Raheja, 2015; Bhavani and Shrivastav, 2020; Marjianto, 2021; Bhandarkar and Birajdar, 2021), this study addresses a gap in qualitative research, delving into the significance of people's engagement with and interpretations of symbolic meanings for well-being. This research uses qualitative approaches and the theoretical perspective of iconography to explore respondent interpretations of Buddhist handicrafts and their role in daily life. By examining how Tibetan handicraft symbols contribute to cultural narratives and influence consumption patterns, the study aligns with Stuart Hall's assertion that symbolic perception enhances our understanding of how people integrate symbols into their daily lives.

According to Erwin Panofsky, iconography concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art as opposed to their forms. Seeing something from a formal perspective is nothing

more than the change of certain details within the configuration that form part of a general pattern that constitutes a world of vision. When we identify it, it becomes an object and enters the first sphere of subject-matter meanings. The meaning thus perceived is of an elementary and easily understandable kind, called by Panofsky 'factual meanings' (Panofsky, 1939, p. 3). Panofsky's statement is significantly helpful in shaping the theoretical framework of this study, in the context of iconography and the interpretation of Buddhist handicrafts, with a focus on the cultural meanings embedded in art and handicraft. By emphasising that iconography concerns itself with the meaning rather than the form of works of art, this study provides a complex analysis of the symbolic content within the handicrafts. The idea of 'factual meanings' provides a starting point for understanding the primary aspects of meaning in handicrafts that guide the study to move beyond formal analysis and delve into the subject-matter meanings of Buddhist handicrafts. It examines the cultural and symbolic significance rooted in these artefacts, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of how individuals engage with handicraft and interpret them as icons used in their daily lives.

Panofsky elaborated that the object identified will naturally produce a certain reaction inside the interpreter, which he defined as 'psychological nuance,' that acquaintance with additional meanings that he called 'expressional,' and it differs from factual meaning because it is apprehended not by simple identification but by 'empathy' (1939, p. 3). As he believes that 'psychological nuance' comes from sensitivity that is part of personal experiences, both factual and expressional meanings together constitute the class of primary or natural meanings (1939, p. 4). Panofsky's concept of "psychological nuance" is useful in this study in understanding how respondent personal experiences and sensitivity play a significant role in the interpretation and meanings assigned to identify handicrafts. In addition, his concept of "expressional" meanings was useful to understand the deeper, more empathetic connections that respondents have with the cultural and symbolic meanings embedded in the handicrafts. The assertion of factual and expressional meanings provides a theoretical basis for the foundation and development of iconic interactionism that is rooted in complex meaning within Buddhist handicrafts.

In the context of meanings, German sociologist Stuart Hall provides a useful perspective on the role "interpretation plays within the overall process of constructing meaning. Hall says that encoding a message is merely the first step in the process of creating meaning, and the process is not complete until the message is decoded" (2001, p. 205). Hall's research had a significant impact on communication studies by establishing that "if meaning-making was to be understood, then it was necessary to look" (2001, p. 205) at the emergence of meaning, namely, interpretation, and that interpretation arose from the subjectivity or judgement of individual participants (Hall 2021, p. 207). Applying Hall's perspective allows the research to recognise that the creation of meaning involves a dynamic interaction between the encoded cultural symbols and the interpretations of decoded meanings made by individuals. In the context of this study, which explores the cultural and symbolic meanings of Buddhist handicrafts, encoding and decoding theory guides the study in understanding how respondents decode and interpret these artefacts within their cultural contexts.

The Halls approach helps in finding how respondents bring their unique perspectives, cultural backgrounds, and subjective judgements to the interpretation of icons and artefacts. It also helps in exploring the diverse and subjective dimensions of meaning-making. This study positions

Buddhist handicrafts as cultural icons and understands them through iconography with assigned meanings, similar to encoded messages in need of interpretation. Drawing parallels to the encoding and decoding processes in communication, the research asserts that the meaning-making journey for these handicrafts remains incomplete until they are read as preferred or hegemonic codes. It approaches how people understand and find meaning in Buddhist handicrafts and emphasises the diverse way in which respondents interpret these artefacts and how cultural influences, like prevalent codes or iconography, shape what these items mean to them.

Research Objectives

1. This study aims to investigate psychological behaviour's role in the meaning-making process within the iconography of Buddhist handicrafts, exploring its connection with respondents' daily lives and living architecture.
2. The research aims to find out the transformative potential inherent in Buddhist symbols and their influences on perceptions and personal growth.
3. The study will explore the assigned meanings to Buddhist handicrafts based on iconography, and subsequently, it will examine how tourists interpret and attribute symbolic meanings to these handicrafts.
4. Drawing on Erwin Panofsky's iconography theory (1939) and Stuart Hall's concepts of meaning (2001), this study will emphasise the reading and interpretation of Buddhist handicrafts and analyse the meanings attributed by respondents using Hall's framework.

Research Questions

1. How are symbolic meanings assigned to handicrafts in Buddhist culture?
2. How do people interpret Buddhist handicrafts? What meaning do they assign to such handicrafts?
3. Is there a correlation between the assigned or factual meanings of Buddhist handicrafts and their expressional meanings?
4. To what extent do engagements and meanings related to Buddhist handicrafts influence psychological well-being and the architecture of living?
5. Do respondents encounter challenges or difficulties in interpreting and assigning meaning to Buddhist handicrafts?
6. How do Buddhist symbols contribute to perceptions and personal growth, and what is their transformative potential in individuals' lives?

Methodology

This study follows an inductive approach to analysing data. The process involved systematic coding, identification of patterns, and validation of themes to ensure consistency and reliability.

To develop an initial understanding of data, researchers immerse themselves in transcripts by thoroughly reading them. The present study engages in a form of inquiry that supports an inductive style, focusing on the individual meaning given in certain situations. Adopting the qualitative research approaches outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018), this study explores and understands the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to handicrafts and artefacts. Using a qualitative approach allows this study to delve into the significant yet complex meanings that respondents attribute to handicrafts. Focusing on everyday life settings helped gather rich, context-specific data. The inductive approach to data analysis, progressing from particulars to general themes, facilitates the development of significant findings. This methodology helped to interpret the significance of the gathered data, enhancing the depth and validity of this study.

Qualitative research helped this study in several ways, such as using cultural themes in developing ethnographic projects to investigate specific aspects of handicrafts and their cultural interpretations. It also offers a roadmap for understanding the behaviour and attitudes of individuals in specific contexts. In addition, Erwin Panofsky's iconography theory (1939) helps in investigating how individuals attribute symbolic meanings to Buddhist handicrafts. Stuart Hall's 'encoding and decoding' and meaning-making framework (2001) helped in examining the active process by which respondents interpret and ascribe meanings to these artefacts within cultural and social contexts. To "understand the meaning of that behaviour" as suggested by (Seidman, 2006, p. 10), interviewing techniques were used to gather data. Further adopting interviews as a research method offers direct access to understanding respondents' behaviour. By engaging with participants in this manner, I gain a unique insight into the underlying meanings shaping their actions. This approach not only facilitates a deeper understanding of behaviour but also enables me to capture respondents' live experiences. Therefore, in-depth interviews are conducted with local residents, craftspeople living in Dharamshala, and tourists visiting McLoadgunj to determine the assigned and intended symbolic meanings associated with such handicrafts. The interview was recorded in audio-visual mode, and transcripts of the recorded interviews were later drafted; some of the interviews were recorded in Hindi and translated into English.

The open-ended and flexible checklist of questions was used to facilitate significant responses from participants. The questions were designed by gaining insights from the literature review, ensuring alignment with existing theories, frameworks, and themes related to iconography, cultural interpretations, and the meaning-making process. The questions were designed using inductive research to allow participants the freedom to express their views. To respect the local context and to ensure the participant's comfort, the questions were phrased with cultural sensitivity. To adapt to the flow of the interviews, the checklist was kept flexible. Before collecting the data, the checklist of questions went through pretesting to ensure the clarity and appropriateness of the questions. A small pilot study was conducted with a subset of participants who shared characteristics similar to those of the intended study population. The feedback gathered from the pilot study was relevant in rephrasing and refining questions.

McLoadgunj Monastery in Dharamshala was selected as an area of research. Dharamshala, located in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, has become a global hub for Tibetan Buddhism. In recent years, it has also attracted practitioners, scholars, and tourists seeking spiritual enrichment. Selecting McLoadgunj monasteries in Dharamshala as the area of research that will help the study theme because of its rich cultural and spiritual significance associated with Buddhist art and craft.

They play a central role in the Tibetan Buddhist community and serve as important cultural and religious landmarks for this study.



Source: Department of Media Studies, Gurugram University

McLoadgunj is home to several prominent monastic institutions. Including Namgyal Monastery, Tsuglagkhang Complex, and Gyuto Monastery, they hold historical significance. They also serve as living embodiments of Tibetan Buddhist traditions. The spiritual ambiance, intricate rituals, and presence of revered spiritual leaders contribute to Mcloadgunj's unique cultural landscape. It is also known for its vibrant arts and crafts scene, with intricate Buddhist handicrafts being a notable aspect. The convergence of spirituality, craftsmanship, and the daily lives of residents makes Mcloadgunj an ideal setting for investigating the meanings assigned to Buddhist handicrafts. The intertwining of cultural practices and spiritual beliefs in this locale provides a distinctive backdrop for understanding the psychological and symbolic dimensions of Buddhist handicrafts in everyday life. The diverse population of Mcloadgunj, including local residents, craftsmen, and tourists, offers a microcosm of cultural interactions. This diversity of cultural interaction allows for a significant exploration of how different respondents, with varying backgrounds and perspectives, interpret and assign meanings to Buddhist handicrafts. Investigating the connections between handicrafts, everyday life, and spiritual practices within the life-world of unique settings of monasteries provides validity and reliability for data. Understanding the role of handicrafts within the context of assigned meanings and well-being becomes particularly relevant in live settings. Therefore, the insights gained from this study can contribute to a broader understanding of how the cultural and spiritual contexts in live settings shape the interpretation of handicrafts.

The purposive sampling technique was employed to select fifty respondents (including local residents, craftsmen, and tourists) based on specific criteria to ensure the relevance of the data. Individuals residing in the Mcloadgunj area were selected to provide perceptions of the cultural and everyday significance of Buddhist handicrafts within the local community. Their experiences were considered critical for understanding how these artefacts and their meanings are assimilated into the fabrication of daily life. Craftsmen living in Dharamshala were included to offer an understanding of the intentions and dimensions of the handicrafts. Tourists visiting Mcloadgunj were chosen, and their interpretations and meanings were gathered to contribute to an overall

understanding of the artefacts and their cultural significance. Respondent selection faced challenges related to accessibility and potential language barriers. To address this problem, local interpreters were engaged to facilitate communication with participants so that language differences did not obstruct the seriousness of responses.

The initial codes were assigned through open coding. Then, the repeated themes were identified through selective coding. The identification and development of themes are critical components of qualitative research. In the present research, the two specific themes, "Handicrafts, Meanings, and Everyday Life" and "Craft and Instruments: Notions of 'Sadhana' (meditation) and Well-Being," were derived through a systematic and inductive process based on the qualitative meanings gathered from the respondents. Themes were developed based on a diverse range of perspectives and interpretations related to Buddhist handicrafts emerging from the respondents' responses during in-depth interviews. The theme "Handicrafts, Meanings, and Everyday Life" was chosen to describe responses that emphasised the incorporation of Buddhist handicrafts into the daily lives of individuals. How respondents interpreted the role of handicrafts in routine activities, rituals, and the overall fabric of their daily existence. The theme "Craft and Instruments: Notions of 'Sadhana' (meditation) and Well-Being" developed from responses highlighting the benefits associated with handicrafts. The selection of themes considered both consistency and variation across participant responses. Cohesions in meaning were clustered under central themes, while variations and unique perceptions were prominent. This approach ensured that the identified themes had diversity in interpretation.

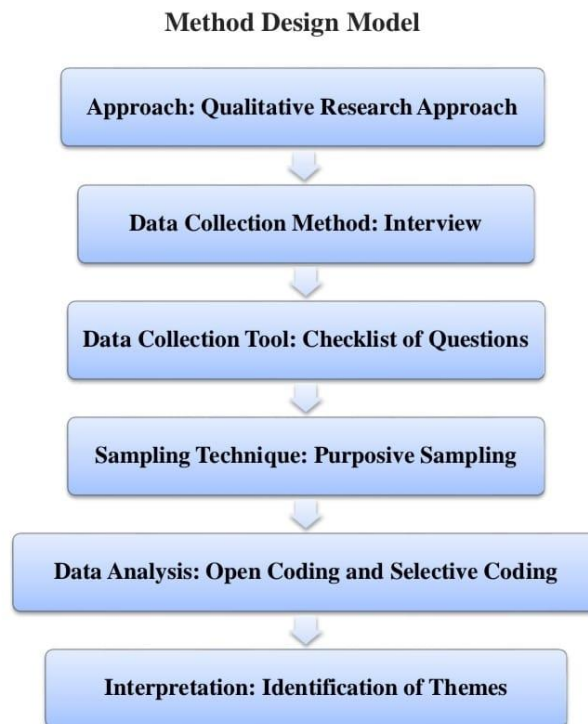


Figure 1 represents the step-by-step method design followed in this study based on Creswell and Creswell's (2018) framework.

Handicrafts, Meanings, and Everyday Life

Tibetan crafts are a set of symbol systems that are innovative and creative practices influenced by Buddhism. It includes art media that depict Buddhist figures, narrative scenes from the lives of all of these, mandalas and alternative graphic aids, and physical objects related to Buddhist practice (such as *vajras*, bells, *stupas*, prayer wheels, offering water bowls, and Buddhist temple design) (Bhavani and Shrivastava 2020, p. 1819). Buddhist culture not only gives life to silence, peace, and meditation but also provides livelihood to the families of the majority of craftspeople residing at Mcloadganj Dharamshala.



Source: Department of Media Studies, Gurugram University

Beaded necklaces, metal jewellery, and other accessories crafted by the locals and available in unique designs and styles at street markets are a centre of attraction for youth fashion statements. The majority of the ornaments discovered are made in traditional artistic designs and Buddhism-inspired jewellery, primarily in the bohemian style, and are difficult to find elsewhere. As a result, visiting monasteries always inspires tourists, particularly younger generations, not only to adopt, follow, and perpetuate these crafts but also to style their interiors after them.



Source: Department of Media Studies, Gurugram University

These metal crafts are popular among tourists nowadays, particularly the embellished silver that creates the metal item (such as an anklet or a type of jewellery piece) that appears appealing to women and girls. During a conversation, a 37-year-old stall owner named Tiezang explained that, according to Buddhism, there are some scientific reasons for wearing silver anklets.

"He said, '*Shareer ko energy milti hai, aur dard mai aram milta hai*' (The body receives energy, and relief from pain is experienced). It helps women's bodies to revive their energy and gives pain relief in situations such as leg pain, numbness, lower back pain, and specifically sciatica. *Payal apko madad karega agar aap aisi kisi pareshani main hain* (an anklet will help you if you are facing any such trouble). An anklet is a solution for people who are suffering from such painful problems. It will also give you more positive energy."

Wearing anklets allowed for better energy flow. According to science, energy is never wasted but only transformed into another form, and a silver anklet assists the body in re-calibrating the energy. "Wearing a silver anklet may keep a woman's body active for a long time and charge it." Personal and cultural use of ornaments conveys multiple meanings, but according to Green, the social and scientific dimensions of ornamentation are to protect and safeguard against supernatural forces and outside harms (Green, 2007, p. 285). It seems from Tiezang's explanations of 'senate and ideational cultures' as defined by Sorokin (1957) are not always contradictory to each other. Culture and science are not diametrically opposed and thus can be related to the interpretation-making process. Tiezang's response, rooted in the cultural context of Buddhism, provides valuable explanations regarding the scientific reasons behind wearing silver anklets. His statement emphasises the synthesis of cultural beliefs and practical health considerations, highlighting the complex relationship between cultural practices and their perceived impact on physical well-being. That can be adopted as a cultural tradition in shaping individuals' health-related choices. Moreover, Tiezang's specific references to pain relief, energy revival, and positive well-being offer a significant perspective on how these anklets are perceived as universal solutions to common health issues. Further exploring the factual interpretations and use of anklets as explained by respondent Tiezang, some women and girl tourists, for instance, say that they wear them because they adorn their feet beautifully, but that they also work like magic on their bodies as an immunity booster, a fact that they were not earlier aware of. For instance, Kajal, a twenty-two-year-old Master's student from University who visited the monastery for an educational tour and visited the market for casual purchasing, said that she did not know that wearing an anklet is related to numerous health benefits,

"*Pahle mujhe pata nahi tha ki payal pahanne ke itne fayade hote hain* (Earlier, I didn't know that there were so many benefits to wearing anklets). I wear it in singles for fashion, just to adorn it and make a statement with my ankle-length dresses. My mother always wears anklets, as it is part of traditional Hindu culture to wear them as a sign of being married, but even she doesn't know the scientific reasons for wearing anklets. '*Meri maa ki payal ke ghungroo*' (jingles of my mother's anklet) occasionally made us aware of her presence or proximity."

Kajal's acceptance of being unaware of the health benefits associated with wearing silver anklets, despite wearing them for fashion, provides a unique perspective on the potential gap in knowledge even among those who engage in the cultural practice. This insight helped in understanding the disconnect between traditional practices and their underlying scientific or health-related aspects. Kajal's response to her mother's constant use of anklets for cultural reasons, seemingly without knowing the scientific benefits, highlights how cultural practices are often deep-rooted without a comprehensive understanding. As Green has suggested, anklets and bracelets are closely linked to the physical growth and benefits of the body (2007, p. 295).

However, the multiple meanings of adornment are structured, maintained, and negotiated by individuals within the cultures reproducing them (2007, p. 303).

Additionally, Kajal's reference to the melodious sound created by her mother's anklets contributes to the multi-sensory and cultural significance of these accessories. Thus, Kajal's perspective explores the intersection of cultural traditions, individual perceptions, and the potential knowledge gaps within the context of wearing anklets. Apparently, "the changing fashions have seen increased experimentation with such distinctions" (Green, 2007, p. 285) among many young girls like Kajal who socially constructed, understood, formulated, and expressed their style through dress and ornamentation within a framework that acknowledged her own style. It seems from Kajal's conversations that many Indian women traditionally wore these ornaments for their beauty value without understanding the significance such ornaments had on their health. Just like Green's arguments about focusing on a single ornament, such as the anklet, some tourist women see it as a reductionist, as described by Meskell (1999), and relate the anklet to just one aspect of bodily experience rather than witnessing its benefits. Johan DM Green emphasised the significance of ornaments in expressing gender, specifically relating to wearing an anklet as a symbolic representative in marking life stages as a restriction for the social reproduction of gender roles, possibly symbolising asymmetrical relationships between men and women (2007, p. 283). In addition to its socially constructed value, the anklet as ornamentation appears to have a different meaning for respondents than just pretty things, where gender interpretation plays an important role in construction and transformation.

Bhavani and Shrivastava detailed in their study that Buddhist culture is becoming part of the interior of many Indian houses and items (such as tea pots, Chang pots, teacup stands, trays, lids, and sculptures of deities made out of metal like silver, brass, and copper), as well as ancient vessels created out of iron and brass and Byzantine floral and hand-pattern squares that are used for domestic and non-secular purposes (Bhavani and Shrivastava, 2020, p. 1820). In a similar context, it was observed that local Tibetan handicrafts such as painted decorative bowls, wind chimes, carved boxes, wall hangings, cushion covers, lamps, foot mats, and other colourful items that incorporate and describe Buddhist cultures are among the perfect handicrafts to take home and can be found at the McLeodganj Central Square. Except for these handicraft pieces, 67-year-old local resident Kalsang said that they still have the oldest shop in McLeodganj, which was established in 1960 and is famous for metal crafts and wooden masks. He further added that these handicrafts are not merely made or purchased for interior decorations; in fact, in Buddhism, they have specific spiritual meanings associated with positive energy and well-being.



Source: Department of Media Studies, Gurugram University

According to Prasetyo, the symbol system is used as a communication tool between human-cosmic communication and inner-outer religious communication. For instance, he explained that in Buddhism, the Vihara Lotus '*Surakarta*' contains symbolic modes in the form of architecture, ornaments, buildings, carvings, and so on. Prasetyo believes that these symbols can convey life values to their users. The values may be embedded in the meaning of spirituality and in everyday culture (2019, p. 63).

According to Kalsang, "These handicrafts provide an endless sense of peace and calm. '*Khastor pai jo fooldaan aur doosri sajawat ki cheje hoti hain wo dusron ki bhalai ka message deti hai*' (Especially the items of decoration and other embellishments convey a message of goodwill towards others). Specifically, decor accessories like vases, wall hangings, and wall plates gave a message of others' well-being. Buddhist culture is crafted in these sculptures and hangings with special messages that are not only made to buy for decoration, but '*uska matlab bhi pata hona chahiye tabhi uska fayeda milega*' (one should also understand its meaning to truly benefit from it)."

Kalsang's mention that these handicrafts extend beyond mere interior decorations introduces the spiritual and cultural significance rooted in Buddhist crafts. His articulation of these handicrafts, which carry specific spiritual meanings associated with positive energy and well-being, allows for an exploration of how these artefacts serve as conduits for a sense of peace and calm. Kalsang's statement about decor accessories like vases, wall hangings, and wall plates conveying messages of others' well-being helped to develop the communicative nature of these crafts and the importance of understanding the meanings behind these handicrafts for reaping their benefits. He provides insight on the necessity of cultural awareness and knowledge for a more meaningful engagement with these artefacts.

Preeti Oza detailed that in Asian sculptures of the Buddha, each piece of the sculpture is profoundly representative and contains the actual enunciation of strict goals. The craftsperson is aware of the profoundly figurative subtleties they have created while creating such sculptures (Oza, p. 2021). According to Richie, in Asian statues of the Buddha, each part of the statue is highly symbolic and contains physical articulations of religious ideals and meanings. In the creation of such statues, the artist is aware of the deeply figurative meaning they have created (Richie, 2014, p. 33). On asking about the figurative meanings and benefits of paintings and handicrafts, Kalsang further detailed that each Buddha painting "*alag tarah ka sakaratmak urja se juda hai* (connected with different types of positive energy). We have different paintings for different rooms, such as the one in which he said the Laughing Buddha statue should always be placed in the entry area. Buddha sitting in meditation pose on a lotus should be placed in the drawing room; for the bedroom, we use a reclining or sleeping pose, and Buddha face painting is good for the study room." In explaining the figurative meanings of placing these paintings at home, he said, "If we use them as decor in the right way, then it will definitely boost positive energies, reduce our stress, and relax our minds, but if any of the handicrafts are placed in the wrong position and direction, then it will release negative vibration." Paintings are an alternative to the statue and are suitable for small spaces. He has lived in McLeodganj for the past twenty years and believes that people of all religions visit the monastery and market as tourists; some of them return because they found some connection with Buddha's philosophy.

"It doesn't matter in what form they bring Buddha to their houses in memories, photographs, videos, or some handicraft, may be paintings or statues, '*lekin ek bar wo apke ghar mai aa jaten hai to sara environment divine ho jata hai*' (but once they come to your house, the entire environment becomes divine), he politely added. Vastu and Feng Shui recommend that the presence of Buddha in any mode can bring prosperity and positivity."

Kalsang's detailed explanation of how each Buddha painting is associated with distinct positive energies introduces the intentional placement of these artworks in different rooms for specific purposes. In resonance, Saraswat and Raheja (2015) claimed that the face of a Buddha image is always peaceful, as it created inspiration and the divine vision was born. This practice reflects the assimilation of cultural beliefs, spiritual meanings, and practical considerations within the architecture of everyday living. The figurative meanings assigned to placing these paintings at home and using these artworks as decor in the right way seem to boost positive energies, reduce stress, and relax minds, which contribute to well-being through cultural practices.

The cautionary note about the potential impact on the atmosphere if the handicrafts are placed incorrectly highlights the importance of cultural understanding and thoughtful placement of these artefacts. Emphasising the significance of creating a harmonious ambiance or enhancing aesthetic appeal through the proper arrangement of handicrafts to utilise their positive energies. Kalsang's acknowledgment of the diversity of ways, in which people bring Buddha into their homes, whether through memories, photographs, videos, or various handicrafts, explores the adaptability and universal appeal of Buddhist philosophy across different forms of representation. The transformative effect of having Buddha in one's home align with the cultural and spiritual impact of incorporating Buddhist symbols into personal spaces. The reference to Vastu and Feng Shui further connects traditional beliefs about the placement of Buddha with broader concepts of prosperity and positivity.

Iconography serves as a powerful means of communication. It facilitates the exchange of ideas and emotions across different cultures and contexts. While its interpretation may vary depending on cultural backgrounds and individual perspectives, the visual language of symbols remains a persuasive tool for articulating complex concepts. The artistic depictions of Buddha statues and paintings translate across nations and dialects. Because of the high degree of consistency, meaning can be centred on the unchanging location of Buddhist arts themselves rather than being contextualised to the country of origin or display. Once these assigned meanings of Buddhist art are understood, the Buddha's life and culture can be more readily assimilated into everyday life (Richie, 2014, p. 33). Within these notions, it is clearly indicative in the polite suggestions of respondent Kalsang that if Lord Buddha is rightly placed, he can create an aura of peace. As he said, they never place the Buddha statue on the floor; it should face inside the room, and the area around the Buddha should be clean. They always follow these rules, and their homes, they say, are blessed by Lord Buddha. Respondent Lobsang, who is running his shop in one of the street markets at Dharamshala, for instance, says that Thangka paintings are also very popular among those who practice meditation. According to him, they are Tibetan Buddhist paintings made on cotton that symbolize 'mandala' (a divine being of the Buddha) that have both aesthetic and spiritual meaning and are used in meditation classes that help practitioners to concentrate and forge a link between the soul and the divine. Richie explained that these artistic crafts surround

the enlightened one and are created to serve a heuristic function for the devotee (Richie, 2014, p. 33), which resonated with the meanings. In addition, Lobsang says incense boxes and sticks are in heavy demand by tourists, specifically those who revisited the Dharamshala, who demand more boxes and share their experiences from the previous purchase. '*Agarbatī jalana to Hindhu dharmā ka ek religious practice hai*' (burning incense is a religious practice in Hinduism); however, it also has significant importance in Buddhism.

"Agarbatī jalane se sab shudh ho jata hai (burning incense makes everything cure) is practiced to purify the space and shift the mood. But in Buddhism specifically, three sticks burn together that represent the concepts of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. People used to come into my shop on a regular basis to buy Tibetan incense boxes and sticks to give as gifts to their loved ones."

Lobsang's emphasis on the popularity of Thangka paintings among meditation practitioners brings about the intersection of art, spirituality, and mindfulness. The interpretation of Thangkas, signifying mandalas and serving both aesthetic and spiritual purposes, establishes linkages between the visual arts and meditative practices, highlighting the complex nature of these cultural artefacts. The observations about the demand for incense boxes and sticks among returning tourists contribute to the stable appeal and significance of certain handicrafts. The exchange of experiences from previous purchases reflects a sense of engagements and connection with these items. The practice of burning incense as a religious practice in Hinduism, with its significance in purifying space and shifting mood, provides a valuable argument about the cross-cultural influences and shared practices in the region. The three sticks representing Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha in Buddhism highlights the sacred and representational dimensions of incense burning. It focuses on the social and gifting aspects of these cultural artefacts and the role these handicrafts play in building connections and expressing sentiments within the community. These arguments deeply contributed to the interconnectedness of art, spirituality, and cultural practices.

Furthermore, he explained that the Tibetan Bell, Dorje, and Tingsha bells each have their own significance in meditation practice, and those who have been practicing meditation for a long time sometimes ask for Tibetan Bell and Dorje, and sometimes old age Hindu tourist women are drawn to Tingsha bells because it resembles the instrument they called '*ghanti*'¹ that they used to play in their prayers called '*kirtans*,'² but they are not in high demand because they are small instruments. According to some respondents, while visiting markets, one can find many different types of Buddha paintings, handicrafts, statues, and other things available at various prices; most of these handicrafts are portable and easy to install, but the only thing that requires prior knowledge of the meanings associated with these art and crafts is prior knowledge of the Buddha's meanings. The resemblance to the *ghanti* used in prayers called kirtans is an intriguing argument about the cultural and religious connections that influence individuals' preferences for specific handicrafts. The reference to the *ghanti* and its use in prayers highlights the

¹ Ghanti is a Hindi word that translates to bell in English. In various religious and cultural contexts, bells hold symbolic significance and are often used in rituals, ceremonies, and worship.

² The word kirtan is derived from the Sanskrit root kirt, which means 'to praise' or 'to glorify.' In a kirtan session, participants typically gather together to sing and chant the names of divine beings, such as gods and goddesses, or recite verses from sacred texts.

iconographical dimensions embedded in these cultural artefacts. However, these are not in high demand because of their small size, which contributes to the factors influencing the popularity of handicrafts, considering elements such as size, practicality, or aesthetic preferences. Also, cultural familiarity may attract individuals to certain artefacts, while other practical considerations may impact their overall appeal.

Craft and Instruments: Notions of 'Sadhana' and Well-Beings

In Buddhist practice, two types of prayer wheels are used: a large one that is moved by hand, wind, or a handle, and a smaller one that is hand-operated and twirled around in motion. According to Winder, the idea of a large prayer wheel is derived from the Chinese invention of the octagonal Tripitaka (2012, p. 25). The '*lag-khor*' (hand wheel) and '*chos-khor*' (*dharm*a wheel), also known as the '*mani-khorlo*' (*mani* wheel), are employed in the meditation '*sadhana*' and are inscribed with the mantra '*manl*' commonly known as '*om mani padme*'³ (Martin, 1987, p. 14). According to the Tibetan Buddhists, spinning the wheels gave blessings equal to chanting the mantras and was very effective for spiritual well-being. When discussing the significance of using the Mani wheel, a hand prayer wheel, a sixty-two-year-old Norbu local resident of Dharamshala who used to visit monasteries regularly and participate in shadhana, for example, says that yes, it is an instrument of attraction for tourists; "*jo bhi pahli baar atian hain poochte hai ye kya hai* (those who come for the first time ask what this is), similar to the Hindu practice of mantra chanting with garland".

"It is the hand prayer wheels, which you get to, see mostly inside the monasteries. It releases positive energy inside the body and brain and helps us gain spiritual wisdom and insight. '*Agar thora bhi ghumaten hai* (just a few turns) of the wheel '*maan ko shant karta hai* (calms down our mind) and is going to purify our soul."



Source: Department of Media Studies, Gurugram University

³ It is a mantra in Sanskrit, a sacred language in Hinduism and Buddhism. It is commonly associated with Tibetan Buddhism. 'Om' represents the universal sound, the essence of consciousness. 'Mani' means jewel or bead, often interpreted as the jewel of enlightenment or compassion. 'Padme' means lotus flower, symbolising purity and enlightenment.

The Norbu belief that spinning prayer wheels is equivalent to chanting mantras presents an argument about the diverse ways in which cultural and religious practices contribute to spiritual well-being. These concepts show a significant and complex understanding of how specific artefacts, such as the mani wheel, are adapted and linked to spiritual practices and the pursuit of wisdom. The comparison of the hand prayer wheel to the Hindu practice of mantra chanting with garlands offers an interesting parallel, offering the universal appeal and curiosity these cultural practices propose to tourists. This observation contributes to the transcultural elements embedded in certain religious practices, showcasing how they become points of attraction and inquiry for individuals from diverse backgrounds. The positive energy released by the hand prayer wheel, calming the mind and purifying the soul, reflects the perceived impact of these cultural artefacts on individuals' mental and spiritual well-being, offering various benefits associated with their use.



Source: Department of Media Studies, Gurugram University

In another conversation with a tourist, Ravi, who was visiting the monastery for the first time, was spinning the large prayer wheels with curiosity, and when asked if he knew the importance and significance of spinning the wheel, he enthusiastically explained that after visiting the monastery, he learned that these wheels were inscribed with mantras, and if we spun them, we would receive peace and positive energy. He further added that since childhood he had seen his mother doing '*mantra jaap*' (chanting a mantra) with the help of a spiritual garland.

"We should adopt prayer wheels in our '*Sanaatan Dharam*' temples as well, as I found it an easy and interesting way of chanting mantras. Just imagine that by spinning a few wheels, you will get the same blessings as you would if you spent time doing mantra jaaps. '*Is tarah se*' (in this way), we can also divert the attention of Hindu youth to mantra sadhna and dhayan."

Ravi's explanation of the large prayer wheels, inscribed with mantras, emphasises their significance in providing peace and positive energy. His argument overlooked the cultural and spiritual impact of specific artefacts and how they resonate with individuals and contribute to their well-being. The suggestion of adopting prayer wheels in '*Sanaatan Dharam*'⁴ temples introduces the potential

⁴ Sanatan Dharma is an ancient term used to describe the spiritual, religious, and cultural traditions of Hinduism. It signifies the eternal or timeless nature of Hindu principles and practices. '*Sanatan*' means

cross-cultural exchange of religious practices. It also encourages the adoption and universal appeal of certain spiritual rituals and goes beyond specific cultural or religious boundaries. The comparison of spinning prayer wheels to traditional mantra chanting reflects the interactive ways in which individuals engage with spiritual practices. Spinning wheels could serve as an accessible and interesting method for chanting mantras, shifting traditional practices to contemporary contexts. In addition, the adoption of a prayer wheel can divert the attention of Hindu youth to *mantra sadhna* and *dhayan*. In these ways, cultural artefacts can play a significant role in shaping spiritual engagement, especially among younger generations. It provides opportunities for engagement in religious practices and their integration into modern lifestyles.

Green has defined that socially and religiously reproduced cultures and values are very significant in the construction and transformations of identities and behaviours as symbolic expressions of instruments, and humans can be sensitive indicators of social-religious changes (Green, 2007, p. 284). Apparently, respondent Ravi recognises the prayer wheel as a symbol of such religious beliefs that influence intercultural exchange and social-religious change because he believes that it will contribute to the religious practice of Hinduism. Moreover, such intercultural exchange will encourage youth to strengthen mutual understanding through meditation sadhana and will also enhance the Hindu practice of mantra jaap. Thus, socially and religiously reproduced cultures play a significant role in the construction and transformation of identities and behaviours. The respondent's interest in spinning the large prayer wheels and their subsequent recognition of them reflect the influence of culturally embedded practices on individual behaviour. Resonating Green's perspective, cultural symbols, such as prayer wheels inscribed with mantras, serve as 'Iconic Interactionalism' by instruments that shape individuals' behaviours and identities. The positive energy released by spinning the hand prayer wheel and its calming effect on the mind line up with Green's idea that humans can be sensitive indicators of social-religious changes.

Furthermore, exploring marketplaces and interviewing some shop vendors turned out to be sources of information that the prayer flag and Kala Chakra have a special symbolic meaning that brings good luck. A Sangye (local shop owner) described the prayer flag as the small, colourful cotton square block printed with the prayers. Many of them believed that the prayers were disseminated by these flags through the wind. According to him, in Buddhism, every colour block represents an element (for instance, red is for fire, green is for water, white is for air, yellow is for earth, and blue is used to symbolise wind).

"Agar kisi ko gift karte hain to acha hota hai (if someone receives a prayer flag as a gift, it is considered lucky). 'Kuch tourist puchte hai ye kis liye hota hai,' (some tourists inquire about its significance, such as what this is for), and some take it because it appears attractive. He added that kala chakra is placed at house entrance doors, offices, and mostly as car hangings because 'hamara Buddhism main aisa maana jata hai ki ye hamen buri shaktiyon se bachata hai' (we believe in Buddhism that it protects us from evil forces) while also offering good luck."

eternal or everlasting and '*Dharma*' encompasses principles, duties, laws, and righteousness. Therefore, 'Sanaatan Dharam' or 'Sanatan Dharma' refers to the eternal path or way of life as perceived in Hinduism.

In the framework of cultural anthropology, these findings provide a complex understanding of the cultural practices and beliefs within the community, shedding light on iconic interactionism embedded in everyday life and its connections between spirituality and everyday life architecture. It seems that people do not stay in one place at home; they visit and thus travel, and they have different spiritual crafts and accessories to protect themselves everywhere. To cross-check the facts and information given by respondent Sangye, an interaction was done with respondent Pawan (a tourist), who was purchasing prayer flags at three shops later. According to Pawan, prayer flags were all-time favourites of monasteries' visitors. In addition, he says that most of his friends have prayer flags and 'kala chakra' symbols hanging in their cars, and whenever they visit Ladakh, Dharamshala, or other places of Buddhist culture, they bring such accessories to give to each other. The significance of prayer flags and the kala chakra in both local and tourist contexts highlighted their popularity among visitors with Buddhist cultural influence. Many of the respondents possess these symbols in their cars and exchange them as souvenirs of cultural and spiritual significance beyond their original context. This cross-checking of information provides a more comprehensive understanding of the widespread adoption and appreciation of these spiritual crafts and accessories.

Wandering from the monastery to the market in search of answers, it was also observed that Mcleodganj is well known for its drinking cultures, such as tea, reading habits, such as books, and other stationery items, such as handmade paper and diaries. They say that the Tibetan and Buddhist cultures are unique and have space for various hobbies. Some tea lovers, for example, claim that it is "the must-buy place for tea," as one elderly tourist puts it. Rajender Singh's statement: "*Jab bhi yahan aayen chai jarur khariden* (Whenever you come here, you must buy tea) before returning home, they offer various delicious and aromatic teas, but I specifically buy green tea." Investigating the drinking culture, reading habits, and stationery traditions in Mcleodganj, particularly within the context of Tibetan and Buddhist cultures, offers a complex assessment that spans several disciplines. Specifically, in the context of cultural anthropology, understanding the significance of tea consumption rituals provides insights into social interactions and cultural practices. Psychologically, examining the influences of tea consumption and reading on individuals' well-being offers valuable insights into stress reduction, cognitive development, and emotional health. Finally, discussing traditional practices related to tea ceremonies, book reading, and stationery production contributes to the safeguarding of cultural heritage, ensuring the continuation of these rich traditions for future generations.

Findings:

It was found that Tibetan handicrafts, such as paintings, sculptures, prayer flags, and prayer wheels, are deeply immersed in cultural and spiritual meanings given by respondents. These artefacts and handicrafts not only serve as items of interior decoration but also as symbols of channelling the transmission of positive messages on well-being, positive energy, and spiritual wisdom among respondents.

The significance of wearing silver anklets has been found in cultural beliefs and practices that are intertwined with everyday health benefits and relate to the practical practices of women's lifestyles. In these variations of meanings, it has been found that there is a significant relationship

between cultural traditions and their perceived influences on individuals everyday physical well-being.

The statements suggest that the complex and significant symbolic and figurative meanings associated with Buddhist art and handicrafts, such as Buddha paintings and sculptures, were recalled as a site of deeper understanding of spiritual concepts and values among some respondents. Evidential notions of respondents suggested that these artworks serve as a state of 'iconographic interactionism' with religious ideals where individuals engage with crafts and make meanings. It also provides possibilities for how spiritual engagement and its meanings contribute to perceptions and personal growth.

The adoption of Tibetan handicrafts, such as prayer flags and kala chakra symbols, extends beyond the local community to involve tourists and visitors from diverse cultural backgrounds. Research showed that this cross-cultural exchange promotes the universal appeal and significance of these artefacts in promoting spiritual well-being and cultural understanding.

An investigation established that Tibetan handicrafts are significantly integrated into the everyday life practices of tourists, such as home decoration, meditation, and spiritual rituals. These artefacts are indicated as a significant factor in creating a sense of peace, tranquillity, and positivity within the personal spaces and communal settings of respondents.

Handicrafts' use and the meaning derived from these indicate that they serve both aesthetic and social and religious purposes within the different communities that actively engage with handicrafts. These engagements were found to facilitate social interactions, gift-giving traditions, and religious rituals, fostering a sense of community interrelationship.

The assimilation of Tibetan handicrafts showed adaptability and universality across cultural and religious limitations to appeal to individuals from diverse backgrounds. It has been found that they offer platforms for spiritual investigation, communication, and cultural exchange, influencing the lives of consumers.

Data indicated that the popularity of Tibetan handicrafts had a significant economic impact on the lifestyle of local communities. The demand for these handicrafts supports local artisans and sustains livelihoods.

The outcome of the study Theory of "Iconic Interactionism"

"Iconic interactionism" theory claims that icons and artefacts serve as symbolic forms of interactions that individuals engage with to derive meaning in their lives. It explores how icons become significant codes of interpretation and meaning in shaping identities. The theory proposes that individuals actively engage in a process of assigning meaning to artefacts. These icons act as a language through which they communicate within their cultural environment. It suggested that the process of interpreting and reinterpreting cultural and traditional icons is based on the personal experiences and cultural contexts of individuals' everyday lives. "Iconic Interactionism" sees cultural and religious icons as products of cultural exchange. It suggests human interaction with iconographic forms that lie within or relate to certain cultural practices and artefacts. "Iconic Interactionism" claimed individual engagements with the iconography as

active participants and their interpretations of iconography and artefacts as icons that symbolise profound meanings and uses in everyday lives. It explores the ways different artefacts, as icons of readings, meaning, and uses, become powerful agents in shaping personal and collective identities, influencing behaviours, and contributing significantly to overall everyday architecture and well-being. There is a deeper and more meaningful understanding or connection associated with the handicrafts.

Key Concepts of Theory:

1. **Interactions with Icons:** Individuals actively participate in the interpretation of Buddhist icons within cultural practices and act as a visual language through which people communicate their cultural environment.
2. **Shaping the self:** icons play a central role in shaping and negotiating collective identities. The interpretation of these icons contributes to the process of shaping the self.
3. **Influence on actions and behaviours:** It examines interpretations of iconic shapes that shape everyday actions, decision-making processes, and interpersonal interactions.
4. **Core of Well-Being:** Engagement with artefacts contributes to spiritual, mental, and social dimensions of well-being, emphasising the integral connection between cultural interactions and wellness.

“Iconic Interactionism” highlights the significance of handicrafts as icons and symbolic forms of interaction that shape the personal and collective identities of individuals, influence behaviours, and contribute to their overall well-being. However, there are some potential negative influences associated with the beliefs surrounding these icons. Such as cultural misinterpretations, social divisions, cultural hegemony, and fundamentalism.

1. **Cultural misinterpretations** refer to certain interpretations of Buddhist icons that may lead to misunderstandings or misrepresentations of the culture or religion, perpetuating stereotypes.
2. **Social Division:** Different interpretations or beliefs regarding Buddhist icons could potentially lead to social divisions within communities, as individuals may observe or follow varying interpretations, leading to conflicts.
3. **Fundamentalism:** Extreme interpretations of icons or artefacts could lead to fundamentalism, where individuals rigidly follow specific beliefs and may reject alternative interpretations, leading to conflict.
4. **Cultural Hegemony:** Dominant interpretations of Buddhist icons or artefacts within certain cultural or social groups may marginalise alternative interpretations and meanings, disseminating cultural hegemony and limiting the diversity of meanings.

Theoretical Propositions: Individuals actively engage in a dynamic process of interpreting icons based on personal experiences, social interactions, and cultural contexts. Cultural icons serve as

tools for individuals to merge and negotiate their identities. The theory explores the mutual relationship between identity construction and the formation of icons. The reading of icons significantly influences individuals' behaviours. This includes the agreement of cultural practices, adherence to cultural values, and the appearance of identities in daily life. Finally, the theory of iconic interactionism positions engagement with Buddhist artefacts and icons as an interconnection between diverse dimensions of well-being. The theory contends that a deep understanding of icons contributes to spiritual fulfilment, mental resilience, and positive social interactions.

In this section, I develop a structured model to represent graphic correlations between key concepts and factors of the process of "Iconic Interactionism." Below is a proposed model structure and a detailed description. Theory plays a role in shaping and guiding the research process, as it is an abstract concept that provides the foundation for the work and helps to make sense of the complexities within the study. It is a roadmap for my study that enables me to explore relationships, draw connections, and derive insights in a systematic manner. In this research paper, I have carefully crafted a theoretical and structural model of "Iconic Interactionism" that serves as a comprehensive framework for understanding meanings and interpretations in my study. This structural model is a visual representation of my theoretical outcome. This structured approach not only aids in communicating the theory of "Iconic Interactionism" to my readers but also provides a roadmap for my own research process.

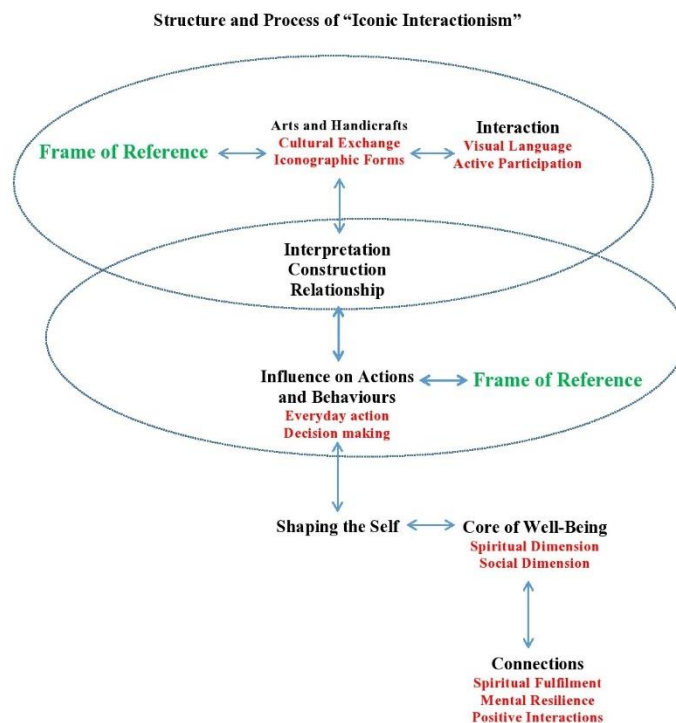


Figure 2 represents the step-by-step functional model of Iconic interactionism.

The mediation component offers two different elements: cultural exchange and iconographic forms. Cultural exchange is the condition that is an effect of the occurrence of reading cultural and religious icons. In this study, I claimed them as Buddhist handicrafts and artefacts. Iconographic forms are the symbolic representations within claimed cultural practices and artefacts. Interaction as a component claimed elements such as active participation and visual language. Where respondents actively interact with Buddhist icons and read them by using visual language in the form of negotiated communications within a cultural environment or life-world with a shared frame of references, they are involved in a dynamic process of interpretation of icons that is based on and influenced by their personal experiences, social interactions, and cultural contexts. Cultural icons serve as tools for assimilation and negotiating the construction of identities. Further, a link between identity construction and the formation of icons leads to integration and relationships. In addition, shaping the self directs towards iconic interpretation, which contributes to the process of shaping individual and collective selves. That is an outcome of influence on actions, behaviours, the decision-making process, and positive interpersonal interaction. Thus, reading Buddhist artefacts and handicrafts leads towards forming a core of well-being in respondents' everyday lives in the form of a spiritual dimension that contributes to spiritual well-being and a social dimension that influences positive social interactions. Likewise, that has an influence on everyday life, well-being, and architecture. Connect with their spiritual fulfilment connected with a deep understanding of icons, mental resilience, and the respondent's ability to fight stress, thus giving them the ability to participate in positive everyday interactions. Icons contribute to positive social interactions. Finally, the frame of reference plays a significant role in interpretation, construction, and relationships as icons become a tool for agreement within cultural practices, meaning relates to cultural values, and everyday architectures are shaped by the reading of icons.

Applications and Implications: The theory of iconic interactionism holds practical implications for various fields, including cultural studies, studies of iconography, behaviour, and psychology studies. Researchers and practitioners can use this to understand the complex correlations between iconic interactions, cultural engagement, and individuals in diverse cultural landscapes. It provides a framework for exploring the visual and symbolic aspects of reading and interpreting within the context of artefacts and handicrafts as components of iconography.

Conclusion:

The examination of Tibetan crafts, cultural practices, and their significance in everyday life architecture provides significant outcomes into the intertwining of spirituality, tradition, and well-being. Through interviews with locals, tourists, and shop owners, this study delved into the cross-cultural and complex meanings associated with handicrafts, ornaments, and spiritual artefacts. The study emphasised the mediated relationship between Buddhist culture and craftsmanship, representing how items like silver anklets, paintings, and statues carry aesthetic appeal and deep spiritual significance as a mediated medium of iconic interactionism. Incorporating Buddhist symbols into everyday objects reflects a collective approach to well-being, where physical ornamentations and interior decorations serve as channels for positive energy and peace of mind.

It emphasised the role of cultural awareness in understanding the meanings behind these artefacts through iconic interactionism. While some individuals may engage in cultural practices without decoding their significance, there is a growing interest in learning about the health benefits, handicraft meanings, and proper usage of these artefacts. The study explored the transcultural appeal of certain artefacts, such as prayer wheels, prayer flags, and Kala Chakra symbols, which attract visitors from various backgrounds. The exchange of these symbols as gifts and souvenirs reflects a broader trend of cultural appreciation and cross-cultural dialogue, contributing to mutual understanding and the development of everyday architecture.

Finally, the study contributes to the dynamic interaction between culture, tradition, and community well-being. By delving into the meanings behind crafts and artefacts, it offers perceptions of cultural richness and its relationship with well-being embedded in everyday life practices. Iconic Interactionism within the context of Buddhist artefacts and handicrafts represents the correlation between cultural symbols, individual interpretations, and everyday practices. Through a thorough exploration of cultural exchange, iconographic forms, active participation, and the shaping of the self, Iconic Interactionism highlights the profound impact that icons have on shaping identities, influencing behaviours, and contributing to overall well-being. The proposed theoretical model offers a structured framework for understanding the complexities inherent in the process of interacting with and interpreting cultural icons. It highlights the dynamic nature of cultural engagement, in which individuals actively negotiate meanings based on personal experiences and cultural contexts. It explains how these interpretations influence actions, decision-making processes, and interpersonal interactions, ultimately contributing to spiritual fulfilment, mental resilience, and positive social engagement. Iconic Interactionism contributes to the significant relationship between cultural symbols, individual interpretations, and everyday practices. It is also important to recognise the significance of Buddhist artefacts and handicrafts as powerful agents in shaping identities and promoting well-being.

Implications and Future Research:

This study sheds light on the intricate relationship between cultural artefacts, spirituality, and everyday life. It opens avenues for further research into the psychological impact of these artefacts on individuals, exploring how they influence mental well-being and overall quality of life. Additionally, understanding the economic dynamics of the handicraft industry and its impact on local communities could be an area for future exploration.

In essence, Tibetan handicrafts transcend their material forms; they are bridges connecting cultures, carriers of tradition, and symbols of spirituality. As they find their way into homes and hearts, they continue to tell stories of peace, positivity, and the enduring power of cultural symbols.

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