

ISA ONLINE GUEST LECTURE

LIVING FABRIC – WEAVING IN LADAKH

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Situated in the high reaches of the Himalayan and Karakoram Mountain ranges, Ladakh has a diverse textile tradition that reflects its physical, socio-economic and cultural environment. Fabrics used extend from elaborate prestige garments made from imported textiles to simple homespun materials woven from local wool and pashmina. While weaving is practiced throughout the region, differences exist between agricultural and nomadic pastoral communities.

Weaving has strong symbolic representations and interpretations that resonate throughout Ladakhi life. The craft engages with Ladakhi society, beyond the making of cloth, to uphold values and determine gender roles. The act of weaving is closely connected to birth and life; the making of cloth is seen as an expression of a family network. Such strong associations resonate within the craft and have implications on its continuity.

This presentation will explore weaving traditions in Ladakh, discussing the history of fibres and textiles, their use and transformation over time. It will examine changes to the tradition first by the Moravian Missionaries and government Handicraft Centres, and more recently by Ladakhi fashion designers. The presentation will look at how the transformations in the making and use of textiles have impacted on the crafts engagement with Ladakhi life, and if the next generation of Ladakhis will continue to recognize this importance.



Dr. Monisha Ahmed is an independent researcher whose work focuses on art practices and material culture in Ladakh. Her doctoral degree from Oxford University developed into the book *Living fabric – Weaving among the Nomads of Ladakh Himalaya* (2002), and received the Textile Society of America's R L Shep award in 2003 for best book in the field of ethnic textile studies. She has co-edited *Ladakh – Culture at the Crossroads* (2005), collaborated on *Pashmina – The Kashmir Shawl and Beyond* (2009, 2017), and published several articles on textile arts of Ladakh. Monisha is co-founder and Executive Director of the Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation (LAMO).

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