

CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION BY DESIGN: A STUDY ON TRADITIONAL TEXTILE DESIGNS IN GUJARAT

Shrinivasa K R¹, Avinash Kate²

^{1a}*Research Scholar, School of Design, Media, and Creative Arts, Jain University, Karnataka, India*

^{1b}*Associate Professor, NIFT, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India*

Dean, School of Design, Media, and Creative Arts, Jain (DEEMED-to-be University), Bengaluru Karnataka, India

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ABSTRACT

The paper highlights the rich history of Gujarat's karigars (artisans) who have produced exquisite projects for daily and ceremonial uses for centuries, blending indigenous skills and techniques with imagination. The paper also discusses the challenges faced by the handmade industry, such as adapting to market expectations and globalization, and throws light on the initiatives taken by the Government to preserve and foster the development of traditional crafts. The paper focuses on various textile crafts of Gujarat, including Patola, Saudagiri Fabrics, Ajrakh, and Tangaliya, Rabari and their unique characteristics, design aesthetics, and community involvement. By shedding light on the cultural heritage of Gujarat's traditional textiles and crafts, the paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the artistic expressions deeply embedded in the religious and traditional fabric of Gujarat, India

KEYWORDS: *Design, Culture, Heritage, Tradition.*

INTRODUCTION

Like all the other states of India, Gujarat has a rich tradition of folk arts, crafts and literature. Gujarat has been a pivotal hub for textile exports, evident from the 15th-century records and textile discoveries in Egypt, showcasing its production of vibrant block-printed textiles. There are totally 25 recognised crafts in Gujarat. Gujarat's traditional textiles and crafts play a predominant role in the apparel and visual identity of the State and it's people. The form itself is the amalgamation and continuity of human potential, which is demonstrated by the glorious *Karigiri*, the craftsmanship of the natives of Gujarat. For centuries these *karigars* (artisans) have produced exquisite textiles for daily and ceremonial uses. They source their materials locally and create products that are a perfect blend of indigenous skills and techniques with the right imagination. Natural resources like clay, wood, stone, metal, cotton yarn, animal hide and various flowers have been adopted and fashioned into multiple designs. What exists, as a result, is a fascinating balance between nature and humans, form and function.

Gujarat boasts a diverse array of rich crafts, encompassing embroidery, beadwork, woodcraft, printed and woven textiles, pottery, and tribal art. Reflecting the region's folklore and festivals, these crafts showcase the unique social and cultural essence from which they originate, embodying originality in both nature and craftsmanship. The products from Gujarat's artisans have not only gained recognition within the country but have also garnered acclaim in overseas markets (DHAMA, MANIKA. THE HINDU. 10 march 2018. webpage2023.). This paper, we have discusses five famous

traditional textile designs.

1. PATOLA

Patola is a fusion of weaving and dyeing technique. Originating from North Gujarat, it is mainly produced and consumed by the Jain weavers of Salvi community. Traditionally it holds a deep cultural and ritual significance. It is considered auspicious and sacred, especially by communities like the Nagara Brahmins of Saurashtra, the Anvils in Patan, the Jains, traders, Vaisnavas, and the Bohra community of Surat. Symbolizing good luck, it is highly valued during weddings, pregnancy, and in various religious or ritual practices across different regions. (jain, Arpal. Rural handmade. 6 July 2023. web page. 2023.)

The design used would be representative of the community using it. The design has geometrical forms, leaf forms, floral forms and creepers, architectural forms, animal and human figures. There are at least 11 categories of designs in Patola.

It is a complex double-Ikat fabric where both warp and weft yarns are individually tie-dyed before weaving, ensuring that the dyed sections align precisely to create predetermined designs. This process requires exceptional precision, and is often described as "exquisite poetry in colorful fabrics." Patola is a remarkable creation by Indian craftsmen, represents a unique blend of weaving and dyeing techniques in the form of a double Ikat fabric. The intertwining of dyed warp and weft threads produces intricate and unmatched patterns, reflecting the mastery and secrecy maintained by a small community of weavers. Its traditional patterns and intricate weaving techniques infuse an air of mystique, ancient charm, and sanctity. Patola has acquired symbolic significance, often associated with good fortune, joy, and prosperity.

Patola's usage extends beyond ceremonial garments, finding applications in temple hangings, covering temple elephants in South India, and being employed in tantric rites in Kerala. Historically, it was also utilized for medicinal purposes, particularly in treating burns. Today, Patola has evolved into a symbol of wealth and family lineage, transcending religious and communal boundaries. (Patola The Mystery Craft: A Case Study of the Salvi Community of the Patan, Western India." Asian Art, Culture and Heritage. Shri Lanka: International Association for Asian Heritage Centre for Asian Studies University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka., 2013. Document).

Figure 1 is shown as a legendary motif (Tiger) of Patan Patola and figure 2 is shown as final surface finishing by manual technique (Sahir, Dolly. Craft of Gujarat Textile. newyour: Mapin international ink, 1985).



Figure 1: Patola Saree with Border (Credit: Shrinivasa K R, NIFT, Gandhinagar)



Figure 2: Weavers Weaving Patola (Credit: Shrinivasa K R, NIFT, Gandhinagar)

2. SAUDAGIRI

Saudagiri fabrics, a significant regional expression in India's textile trade, were widely recognized by early travellers and scholars. ("Saudagiri prints, Textiles for far off Siam." The India magazine. Ashok H adawani, october 1985. Printed Magazine.) These textiles were crafted in Gujarat and exported to Siam (modern-day Thailand). Documented evidence found in Egyptian tombs and resemblances to Indian and Islamic designs signify their extensive export history from the Middle Ages to the 19th century. ("Saudagiri prints, Textiles for far off Siam." The India magazine. Ashok H adawani, october 1985. Printed Magazine.)

Saudagiri cloth featured intricate geometric and floral designs were variations of a base pattern in three to four colors. The patterns were altered by adding or subtracting flower motifs, lines, or decorative dots. Geometric forms were initially drawn for block designs, further divided into intricate patterns to incorporate floral motifs. Blockmakers employed various chisels and geometric instruments for carving and used hundreds of iron punches to emboss motifs deeply onto the blocks

This fabric, known as "phentiun," was worn by Siamese men and women, consisting of an unstitched strip of cloth approximately five yards long. The original design samples were imported from Siam (currently Thailand), inspiring the creation of blocks for fabric production, reflecting a fusion of Indo-Siamese designs. ("Saudagiri prints, Textiles for far off Siam." The India magazine. Ashok H adawani, october 1985. Printed Magazine.)

Chhipa dyers and printers in Ahmedabad, blockmakers from Pethapur, and trade families provide primary insights into Saudagiri textiles. Maneklal Gajjar, a descendant, traces his family's origins to Champaner near Baroda, highlighting the transition to Pethapur. Maneklal's father mastered the craft of block making. The blocks are made of teak wood and are hand-carved. The Saudagiri commerce ceased around 1940, spanning about 80 years of production. Despite being part of the Gajjar caste, the Pethapur blockmakers were not formally organized into a guild. Around the period of Maneklal's father, there were approximately sixty Gajjar families in Pethapur, primarily working as carpenters. The corporate life of blockmakers was shaped by caste-based communities rather than an organized guild structure. The Gajjars, traditionally carpenters, received farms from the prince of Pethapur during the height of the Saudagiri trade.

Saudagiri was at the centre of attention in 2008 when Mr. Yasiun Savaijiwala won the UNESCO-South Asian Seal of Excellence for the hand block printed stole in the saudagiri form. He is making all the attempts to revive and

preserve this traditional block printing style and the textile.

Figure 5 is shows Block Printed Geometric Pattern on Base and Fig 4 shown as Block Printed Border with Geometric Pattern ("Saudagiri prints, Textiles for far off Siam." The India magazine. Ashok H adawani, october 1985. Printed Magazine.)



Figure 3: Block Printed Geometric Pattern on Base
(Credit: Shrinivasa K R, NIFT, Gandhinagar)



Figure 4: Block Printed Border with Geometric Pattern
(Credit: Shrinivasa K R, NIFT, Gandhinagar)

3. AJRAKH

Traditionally it is worn by the men of the Muslim Maldari community who are cattle herders based in Kutch and the musician communities of Langhas and Mangnyars. Therefore, Kutch's Khavda and Dhamadka villages are renowned for crafting Ajrakh, distinguished by its striking blue and red hues. Legend attributes the beginnings of Ajrakh to Mohammad Siddiki's family in 1586, inviting relocation from Sind to Dhamadka in Kutch. The historical roots of Ajrakh are traced back to Sindh, Pakistan, crafted by artisans from diverse backgrounds in the Khatri community. Currently, the primary locations for Ajrakh production are Dhamadka, Khavda, and Ajrakhpur. While synthetic dyes have replaced natural indigo and madder, production methods remain rooted in ancient practices.

Ajrakh's intricate production involves a blend of resist and mordant printing, requiring multiple immersions in indigo dye and careful buffing. Highly esteemed Ajrakh fabrics feature identical prints on both sides, offering versatility

from men's headwear to women's garments like skirts and veils. Ajrakh fabrics, typically rectangular, serve a diverse range of purposes from men's clothing to household items like covers, curtains, and floor coverings. The designs predominantly feature geometric patterns such as squares, stars, circles, and ellipses symmetrically arranged, highlighting shades of strong blue and crimson with subtle touches of white and black. The textiles we know today as Ajrakh have emerged from an organic development, drawing in part from the highly advanced mathematical and geometric design principles lent by Islamic Settlers, in harmony with the Indian craftsman's mastery of cotton cloth and dye. Since it was almost exclusively worn by Muslims it was important that these designs must conform to the anionic nature of Islamic Design principles, thus they must not depict human or animal figures. There are hundreds of variations of designs. (www.wanderingsilk.org)

Globalization has influenced Ajrakh, leading to changes in techniques, designs, materials, product categories, and markets. For eg. Since water is needed in large quantities for printing Ajrakh a number of printing, families have started sharing common washing areas to save labour and water. Despite these adaptations, Kutch's Ajrakh printers maintain enduring design themes while responding to evolving trends.

Figure 5 is shown as Ajrakh Block Printed fabric and Fig 6 shown as Ajrakh Block Printed fabric with border



Figure 5: Ajrakh Block Printed Fabric (Credit: Shrinivasa K R, NIFT, Gandhinagar)



Figure 6: Ajrakh Block Printed Fabric with Border (Credit: Shrinivasa K R, NIFT, Gandhinagar)

4. TANGALIYA

Tangaliya is a 700 year old craft with origins from Kutch and Surendranagar regions of Gujarat. This is also known as Daana weaving, probably it used dots to form the designs. Distinct consumer communities such as Rabaris, Bharwads, Patels, and Ahirs exhibited unique patterns and color preferences, creating distinct visual markers within their textiles. The Tangliya craft, also known as the Dana carrying craft, primarily thrives in Gujarat's. The craft's unique design interpretation and composition are woven on looms, with historical records spanning 700 years, particularly significant for the Dagasiya weavers of the Bharward community.

The Bharwad pastoral community traditionally utilizes tangaria fabric as a wrap on woolen skirts, but the global demand for this craft has declined significantly, impacting its utilization. Efforts have been made within the Indian craft industry to revive and sustain Tangaliya. The craft's growth is linked to its functionality and economic aspects, particularly in meeting the special needs of nomadic Bharwad pastorals.

Skilled artisans utilized fly-shuttle pit looms, displaying variations in motif vocabulary across textiles produced in different regions. The Tangaliya craft continues to employ traditional tools and equipment, demonstrating the artistry's resilience. Tangaliya weaving draws inspiration from nature, incorporating motifs like peacocks, mango trees in geometric patterns. Creating these intricate designs demands the weaver's patience, skill, and significant time investment, as each dot in the pattern is individually twisted onto the warp, secured with a running weft thread, and formed spontaneously without a predetermined design.

The complexity of patterns relies on the weaver's ingenuity. However, due to financial constraints, Bharwad women now reserve Tangaliya wrapped skirts for special occasions like weddings. This technique allows immense creative freedom in pattern creation, enabling easy translation of graph-based designs onto fabric. A few designers collaborate with Tangaliya weavers to explore new design surfaces. The possibility of a revival exists if consistent efforts are made, considering the knowledge transfer from experienced artisans to the next generation. An intricate connection was observed among weavers, traders, cooperative societies, and independent weavers, all playing crucial roles in preserving and evolving the craft. NIFT, Gandhinagar formed the Tangaliya Hastakala Association in 2007 which included more than 200 weavers from five villages as its members. This art form received the GI tag also in 2009. However, stakeholders were found to overlook the future of this craft.

Figure 7 is shown as Motif of traditional Tangaliya and Fig 8 shown as Motif of traditional Tangaliya with Different Colour



Figure 7: Motif of traditional Tangaliya (Credit: Shrinivasa K R, NIFT, Gandhinagar)



Figure 8: Motif of traditional Tangaliya with Different Colour (Credit: Shrinivasa K R, NIFT, Gandhinagar)

5. MATA NI PACHEDI

The Vagharis of Gujarat were cultivators and workers in agricultural farms on the banks of river Sabarmati. As a community from the marginalised, probably when they were not permitted to enter temples of worship, they evolved this art form which is at the intersection of religious / sacred practice and an art form. The word ‘Mata’ denotes the ‘Mother’ form of worship and this word means ‘Behind the Mother Goddess’

Mata ni Pachedi, involves the painting or printing of religious motifs on fabric, serving as temporary wall hangings in goddess shrines. The motifs, primarily depicting the goddess and her various forms, are typically adorned using off-white, black, and maroon colors. The art form employs natural dyes made from rusted iron shavings, alizarin, and other organic materials to create these shades.

Skilled artisans from Vasna and Mirzapur clusters in Ahmedabad specialize in creating Matani Pachedi. These artisans meticulously follow a production process involving fabric procurement, washing, mordanting, color preparation,

painting/printing, and dyeing. Additionally, these clusters have expanded their repertoire to include modern products such as bed sheets, cushion covers, and dress material.

Mata ni Pachedi holds deep religious and cultural significance, being employed as a sacred wall hanging on the walls of the homes of this community depicting the goddess shrines. Notably, it adheres to eco-friendly practices by utilizing natural dyes and materials, preserving its traditional and cultural importance.

The historical evolution of Matani Pachedi can be traced back to traditional clothing like patkas and sashes, with its forms continuously developing over time. The craft's continuity is a result of cultural exchange and the manifestation of community identity. However, contemporary challenges like religious conversions and educational barriers have impacted the craft's continuity in various districts across Gujarat.



Figure 9: Story of Mother Goddess (Credit: Resource centre, NIFT, Gandhinagar)



Figure 10: Story of Mother Goddess with monochromatic Colours (Credit: <https://artisanscentre.com/products/painted-mata-ni-pachedi-amba-mata>)

6. CONCLUSIONS

Cultural heritage is an expression of the way of living developed by a community and passed down from generation to generation. It includes tangible cultures such as buildings, monuments, landscapes, books, art and intangible cultures such as folklore, traditions, language and knowledge. The paper explored the cultural heritage of Gujarat's traditional textiles and crafts, which play a predominant role in the apparel and visual identity of the Gujarat and its people. The researcher is moving further into micro level research towards textile designs of colour, motif, and symphony of lines

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