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Varso: An Essay on Textile Heritage of *Saurashtra* region of Gujarat

Textiles

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ABSTRACT

The skilled hands of the Indian craftsman is most important and yet most invisible resource. Indian crafts present both the widest canvas of creative activity and the broadest spectrum of development. The artisans and craftspeople are tucked away in the narrowest lanes and remotest villages. It is to be perceived with concern and with a precise understanding of its value. Once, lost nothing can replace it. The state of Gujarat has many small pockets enriched and abundant with numerous craft production talents and the region of Saurashtra is one such. The local village pond surrounded with organized semi pakka houses, the planning and designing up of interiors based on both aesthetics and needs, production of local textiles crafts namely single ikats, khadi, bandhani, tangaliya, pachedi, dabhlas and Khes, bead work, embroideries etc, , makes the district of Surendranagar alone culturally wealthy. The place needs intervention and immediate attention so as to not only preserve past heritage but also for generating employment opportunities, promoting skill based earning and instilling thoughts of equality amongst local communities. The paper here is an attempt to throw light upon the rich reservoir of existing textile crafts of the region.

Introduction:

Craft activities, being myriad in India go far beyond, the purely economic needs of the craftspeople. Spirituality is an intrinsic aspect of their lives even while they are expressed with utmost simplicity and down-to-earth ways. The gods, in-turn, dwell through the hands of those who use craft objects for prayer or daily use. They enter the households of those who invoke them through art and craft and accept as a form of prayer the skilled and careful efforts of craftspeople to achieve the Ideal form, i.e. the divinity, through the skilled work of their hands (Jaitley, 2009).

Being a country where craft is intimately linked to tradition and religion, the tradition was always held together by means of art and craft as a unified whole, whereas, in the west, design emerged as a reaction to mass production. Tolerance being its hallmark, Indian society has always been open to new ideas and influences. With the advent of improved communication system, European trends began to affect the customs and lifestyles of urban Indian residents followed by rural societies. Awareness of Industrial art spread in India in the second half of the 19th century when the formal teaching of arts and crafts, based on methods practiced in European school was introduced. Gradually, this remarked the onset of craft and skill extinction in the country. Somehow, rooted traditions have fostered the co-existence of traditional and modern practices. The ingrained beliefs and sentiments of the people have led them to adopt some age old practices in compliance with technology (Balram, 2011).

Gujarat is considered to be the one of the best amalgamation of the continuity of human potentials even in the present mechanized period. The state constitutes four distinct cultural zones- North Gujarat, Kachchh, Saurashtra and south Gujarat- each displaying the uniqueness in topography, folks, and practices. Thus the paper has been pulled out to highlight the existing textile heritage of Saurashtra region of Gujarat.

Methodology:

A descriptive type of study was planned out and data was collected by means of both primary and secondary source of information. Field visit was undertaken in Limbdi, Lakhtar, Wadhwan, Chuda blocks of Surendranagar district and villages falling on the territories of Ahmedabad and Surendranagar District. Some of the villages were identified with the help of District Industries Center and hence stratified random sampling was chalked out. The data was qualitatively analyzed and supported with the retrieved review.

Results and Discussions:

Before the introduction of machinery every article of domestic use was produced by hand. If a craftsman did his job perfectly, he could easily acquire a patron who normally used to keep him in continuous employment. In a gradually extending world the craftsman became the keystone of a developing commerce. He organized guilds which absorbed his sons in his trade, for there is a strong tradition of continuity by inheritance in the history of craftsmanship. Particular techniques passed down in families for generations, and even apprenticeship was a quasipaternal relationship (Pal, 1977). The crafts in *Saurashtra* had developed out of necessity. These crafts are majorly textile based inclusive of both fabric production and their enhancement by means of surface ornamentation. The textiles produced in the region of *Saurashtra* are *Dhabla, Pachedi, Khes, Tangalia, Dhurries, Khadi* and *Patolas*. The essential features of each are as discussed below:

Pachhedi and Khes weaving:

Moti Chandra highlights that *pachedis* were the coloured calicoes, exported mainly to the Malay Archipelago. These were similar to the calico still produced in Surendranagar and Ahmedabad district called *pachedi. Pachedis* are produced in plain fields- while, red or maroon with plain border called *Kor*. The prominent features of *Pachedis* are the cross borders produced in



Figure 1: A section of Bori Pachhedi

various widths. These cross borders are difficult to achieve on powerlooms. The *pachedis* occur in two widths- the narrow widths are used as shoulder clothes and when the two narrow fabric widths of 26" are sewn together to make a wider width cloth, they are used as dhotis. In the 14th -15th century, these were also used as bedspread called *sakhatta* or *khatta Pachedi*. Those which had closely printed patterns were called nijhari and those which had golden stripes were termed *sonadori*. *Pachedis* were also tie dyed and were called

chunadi. These are still popular amongst pastoral communities of Gujarat and Rajasthan namely *bharwads* and *Rabaris* and are also doned by *ahirs, patels, charans* and *satwara* communities of Gujarat.



Figure 2 Khes Pachhedi being woven on loom, Shiyani village, Surendranagar

Depending upon the age of the wearer and community, these textiles are further classified *as Laal cheda ni pachedi, Sontiyo Pachedi, Angothia pachedi, Chappan derdi, Katwa* and *pachrangi pachedi. Khes (Chowkdi-bori)* are woven by the same community and are similar kind of textiles woven in cotton. But these have chequered field in black and white or brown and white. These are used as shoulder wraps by both *Rabari* and *bharwad* community. Apart from *Khes* and *Pachedi*, these cross border textiles were traditionally used as *pagadi* by both *Rabaris* and *Bharwads*. All forms of *Pachedis, Boris* and *Khes* are woven by the *shudh vankar* or *mayavanshi vankar* community residing in *Saurashtra* region and in some parts of north Gujarat (Figure 1 and 2).

Khadi and Dhurrie weaving:

The statistics of KVIC explained that there were more than 300 registered khadi cooperative societies in the district of surrendranagar alone. Every weaver in the district has been cotton weaver and has woven khadi for generations. This was further augmented by Gandhiji in 1920 for swadeshi movement. The khadi weavers weave *assan pattas*, towels, wrappers, shirting fabrics, yardages, dhurries etc in variations of basic plain and twill weaves. Some people have also started to weave doormats and floor covering out of old worn out scrap fabrics. The old fabrics are torn into stripes and these stripes are used as wefts for weaving multipurpose mats. The KVIC has introduced various aiding technologies in the region which is inclusive of circular warp beam, warping frames, peg frames and motorized bobbin winders. Some of which were also found to be adopted by other textile weavers.

Tangalia and Dhabla weaving:

Both *tangalia* and *dhabla* are the woolen textiles worn by the bharwad community. These textiles were woven traditionally by the *Dhangasia* community of weavers that received wools from the shepherds and customized textiles for them. *Tangalia* was a form of a loin cloth worn by the ladies while *dhabla*- a shoulder wrap was used by males. *Tangalia* weaving craft was the first craft to receive Geographic Indication in Gujarat. Nonetheless, being woven on a basic two shaft pit loom, the textile has unique attribute of being conceived in yarn twisting method of pattern generation.



Figure 3 A section of Tangalia textile on loom, Godavri village, Surendranagar

Method includes winding coloured fibers across definite countable spots on laid warp yarns. The technique produces neat dotted patterns that are secured in place on battening shots of base weft yarns. The dotted pattern was colloquially termed as *dana* work or bead work.



Figure 4: Dhabla weaving in progress at Balada village, Surendranagar

The textile was found to be practiced in various rural pockets of Wadhwan, Muli and Chotila blocks of Surendranagar district and the district itself has a society of weavers called Vastadi where the weaving community resides. These days, *dhabla* was found to be used by males and females of almost every local community. The practice of weaving of *dhabla* has been found to be increasing amongst the khadi and cotton weavers also due to hike in its demand among the local communities. In place of wool, people have started to use acrylic for weaving both *tangalia* and *dhabla* that are intended for local use. *Tangalia* has been diversified and the new range of products is being produced for the contemporary market whereas *dhablas* are produced in large numbers in bright colours for local markets (Figure: 3 and 4).

Ikat weaving and Bandhani craft:

The craft of ikat weaving was introduced in *Saurashtra* region of Gujarat as a part of Government training scheme. The *salvis*- original Patola weavers from Patan were hailed to train artisans of the region in single ikat textiles in order to generate market and achieve sustainable economic development. The weavers were trained at Rashtriya shala, Rajkot in 1960s and slowly the craft proliferated in the villages of Surrendranagar and Rajkot districts. People who adopted weaving were amazed by the patterned textiles produced on insertion of weft yarns. Moreover, the initial adopters of craft

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expressed that the weaving required only investment in the pure silk yarns which yielded more than fifty percent profit to them. The relatives, cousins and nephew were trained and employed by the trained artisans who later branched out and hence the craft sporadically spread in the *Sayla, Muli, Wadhwan, Limbdi, Dasada and Lakhtar* blocks of the district. The art of tie-dye was found to be practiced in *wadhwan taluka*. Ladies in the *wadhwan* taluka worked as wage workers for tying designs which were then dyed by the appointed labours in the workshops of merchants. As one walks past the streets and narrow lanes of *wadhwan*, coloured water gushing through the gutters can be seen.

Bead work, Patch work and embroidery:

Chaklo and *chandarvo* were the traditional wall panels that were embroidered by the *Kathis* of *Saurashtra*. The stitches used were herringbone, chain stitch, darning and chain stitch that got popularized among various communities likes *charans, ahirs* and *rabaris*. *Bharwads* even today would ornament their upper garment *kediyu*, sometimes *kabjo* and *pachedis* with embroideries. The textiles today are majorly ornamented by machine embroideries and the trend of hand embroideries are leaching out. Bead work is still practiced in various homes and *torans, kalvo* and *indodi* are still being produced and sold in local markets (Mirza and Mallya, 2012).

Conclusion:

Craft practices are the strong repositories of Indian culture and the practitioners are the diffusers of its conventional acumens, ingenuity, practices, skills and legends. The finesse of the cultural techniques, know-how and human adaptations to the environment has steered the footing for the modern technical advancements. Such, skills and product outputs are rare and unique and hence reassuringly needs promotion, identification and reverence. Saurashtra, like various Indian regions, have accommodated array of interesting textile traditions. Such, traditions may not thrive with the passing time but their unique sensibility obliges development of knowledge reservoir while they thrive, decline or evolve with the changing times.

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