

Traditional Textiles: Its Variegated Charm in Royalty of Kachchh



Textile

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ABSTRACT

The remarkable diversity of traditional textiles, both in technique and style, has survived to the present day. It forms the basis for further innovation in pattern and design, defining the aesthetics of the region and representing evolving social and cultural values of its people. One of the princely state of Gujarat state, Kachchh, has always been a state of textile richness on Indian map. The present paper focuses on the textiles used by the royal era of Kachchh from 19th century till now. The personal interview method coupled with observation was followed to collect the data pertaining to the use of different textiles in royal costumes of Kachchh. The results revealed that the varieties of cotton and silk were used during the period of Maharao Shri Desulji II to Maharao Shri Pragmulji III i.e from early 19th century to early 21st century. The ornate fabrics such as varieties of expensive brocades were always used for the ceremonial and festive purpose. Fascinating designs of mashroo and bandhej had their on significance in the royalty.

Introduction:

Regal costumes of different states have always been a part of the individual's curiosity. The uniqueness, the elegance of costumes and textiles has always attracted human nature. Textiles of Rulers of Kachchh are a gauge of taste, a fashioner of personality and a mirror of royal life. Gujarat has been known for its costumes with many details. The researcher was keenly interested in knowing the rich traditional textiles of Gujarat state-Kachchh, the place where various ethnic groups have survived over centuries with the Royal legacy.

The arts of Kachchh continually exhibit a manifestation of cross-culturally inspired design. Its sea-coast location encouraged and enabled contact with the outside world, its internal land barriers prevented easy contact with the rest of the subcontinent, and its climate and resultant agricultural limitations tamed a prosperity that would have made a more generic cultural tradition attainable.

The princely state which resulted from these circumstances enabled Kachchh to exhibit further unique qualities- through its arts' distinctive amalgamation of outside influences. Contact with Sindh, by way of trading and conquest from the medieval and later periods, led to strong influences upon the textile production.

The design influence of thirteenth century Muslim settlers, and then the princely court's unusually early and intense fascination and contact with the West and its artistic techniques, all combine to create the singular character of the arts in this region. The research explores the spectacular material culture of Rulers of Kachchh.

Methodology:

For the collection of data the researcher followed the personal interview method coupled with observation to collect the data from the members of the royal family of Bhuj as well as the tailors and persons engaged in royal court for the study. Costume does not only involve the user but it involves many more people at different stages of its development. For documentation several National award winner and other artisans, traders too were interviewed for the textiles for specific purpose. Data collected from the old account books and old fabric catalogue preserved at Kachchh Archive Center, Bhuj were analysed carefully to extract details of the textiles.

Results and discussion:

It was found that rulers of Kachchh were fond of textiles and variety of textiles were used by them. The results have been divided into two broad categories of i) Textiles for general use and ii) Textiles for specific purpose. The first category discussed about the fabrics in general that were used by the royalty of Kachchh for costumes if general purpose where as second category talks about the specific textiles that were used for ceremonial and festive purpose.

(a) Textiles for general use:

The fabric commonly used by the royals had some symbolism and social influence. The range of fabrics used included Khadi, mulmul, poplin, khaki, gabardine, jean, corduroy, satin, georgette, embroidered, velvet and zari woven fabric. The varied range of fabrics from basic cotton to royal brocades were part of royal attire from the period of Maharao Shri Desulji II to Maharao Shri Pragmulji III i.e from early 19th century to early 21st century. The use of fabrics gradually changed but never loosed its richness. The present members of the royal family uncovered almost similar facts regarding the variety of fabrics used for traditional royal costumes of Kachchh.

Mrs. Postans in her book wrote that embroidered velvet and satin were used by Maharao Shri Desulji II in his wardrobe for garments.

Mughal influence was seen more after the period of Maharao Shri Desulji II; costumes were made of more zari woven fabrics. Later on during the period of British raj; after late 19th century, the use of zari was decreased.

According to present ruler Maharao Shri Pragmulji, the khadi fabric was the symbol of equality between the Maharao and common people. At the birth, the newborn prince or princess was wounded in a length of hand woven khadi fabric which was woven by *harijan*. The same tradition of wearing clothing made from the fabric woven by harijan people was followed by all the Maharao of Kachchh during the coronation ceremony as the symbol of equality.

Textiles were selected according to the season and occasion. As told by the members of the royal family Maharaj Kumar Shri Raghurajsinhji and Maharaj Kumar Shri Dilipsinhji,

cotton and mulmul fabrics were the fabrics for summers where as silk was the fabric of winter. Synthetic fabrics were not included as the part of royal wardrobe. The poplin, khaki, jean, gabardine and corduroy were used for the construction of the hunting clothes. Generally, the colour for the hunting dress was kept khaki as it had an earthy shade that merged well with the ground and grass concluding in creating difficulties for animals to identify humans in a forest. The khaki cotton fabric was used for the *paagh* while going on hunting.

Zari woven fabric and georgette was more in use during ceremonies. Georgette was not so encouraged for *paagh* as it could not be twisted more due to its already high twisted yarns. Compared to it cotton and mulmul was the first choice of fabric as it can be twisted highly according to the requirement of Kachchhi *paagh* with more number of twists. Also, the *zari* woven *paaghs* were in trend for the ceremonial purpose. It is interesting to note that *zari* from the some old textile pieces and garments had been removed and used for making a new *zari* cloth.

Mashroo being comfortable and having royal appearance, was very popular for royal clothing earlier and pre-dominantly used. Velvet, *kinkhab* from Benaras were used for *kachchhi kediya* by Maharaoas during occasions. *Kinkhab* was further embellished with *kaam* means *zardozi* work on it. Generally cotton and silk were used to made the *jama* and *kediya*.

Mulmul fabric was used to tie *bheth* around the waist and *laheriya* fabric was used for *paagh*. The fabrics were purchased from local market of Bhuj as well as Benaras in which included cotton for daily wear and brocade for formal wear which indicates the social and business relation between the two. Satin and brocade were the fabrics for festivals and occasion. The cotton, silk and brocades were main fabrics for the royal attire. *Mashru*, silk, cotton fabrics were also used.



Plate 1: Front, back and inside examples of booklet of Hoar and Co. catalogue, 1879.

(From left to right)

Credit: Kachchh Archive Center, Pragmahal Trust, Bhuj, Kachchh

French chiffon and pure georgette were used for draped garments as well. Evidences were found for Maharao Sahebs, the fabrics were ordered from Mumbai and Kolkata based German Company Hoar & Co. Also, their garments of daily wear were made of gauze fabric with "*Theta*" finish purchased from the same company ; which made garments smooth, soft, durable and unshrinkable. Hunting garments were made of tweed textiles. (Plate 1)

(b) Textiles for specific purpose:

1. Brocade

Brocades were used in royal family for the *kanchalis* and *ghaghra*s of the Maharanis and for the *kediya*, *jama* and *paagh*

of the Maharao Shri. The brocades were specially woven at Benaras with real silk and *zari*. *Kinkhab*s were the first choice of the royal family. *Asavali* brocades were in vogue for the *ghaghra*s of Maharani and *aadiyu*, *bheth* and *paagh* of the Maharao Shri. Various flora and fauna with traditional mango motifs were combined to create all over designs. The brocades were also woven in Kachchh, at Mandvi itself. The sarees, known as *selas*, were less than five meters of length used as the half saree by the royal lady to drape her *odhana*. It had gold-checked body and elaborated *pallu*. These were worn with the *mochi kaam* or brocaded *ghaghra*s by the royal women.

2. Mashroo

The only *mashroo* weaving company at Mandvi, Mamtara weaving company wove the warp faced satin weave *mashroo* fabric. Mamtara weaving company's owner Shri Kishorebhai Mamtara and Dineshbhai Mamtara mentioned that his grandfather had once controlled the *mashroo* trade and his family had owned 110 looms. This cotton and silk fabric was earlier woven with real silk *resham* and now a days rayon has taken place of it. With the reference to the royal family of Kachchh, Dineshbhai said that *mashroo* was used in abundance by the royal family at Bhuj in earlier times. There was a set pattern of purchasing *mashroo* fabric by them where trader visited the royal palace with the wide range of designs of *mashroo* fabric and than the royal women made their selection from the catalogue and placed the order for their choices. *Mashroo* was used for their *kanchalis* and *ghaghra*s worn during the ceremonies and festivals and also for the daily purpose. Today with the loss of royal patronage, *mashroo* has lost its charm in the royalty. Shah A had mentioned that Dineshbhai's wife's grandfather wove satin-faced *mashroo* fabric with gold thread.

As briefed by Shri Dineshbhai for the designs of *mashroo* fabrics that were popular in royalty, *saat daani* was termed as *asal ni* design meaning old design with seven dots or *dana*. There were around 22 popular designs of *mashroo* that named according to the colour combinations and pattern on it. The *saat daani* had red background and dots *daana* in white, *Gudo saatdani* had maroon background and seven dots or *daana* in white. The other popular designs of *mashroo* included *Kelafari*, *Jod katari*, *Karmal*, *Fuldi* with design of a small flower instead of seven dots of *saat daani*, *Vel* and *Katari* with red and white or blue and yellow tie-dyed *ikat* pattern. *Lakhashahi* which had red and white broad bands was used in *ghaghra* of Maharanis. The name *Bharashahi* suggested that it was used by Rao Shri Bharmulji as the *paagh*. The designs reflected the colours used in too. *Pachrang*i was made of five different colours, *Kali khumri* had black stripes, *Raati kamkhi* was made of *rati* means red bands and five bands were woven in *Panch patto*. Green was considered as *nilo* colour and hence *Nilo elaicho* and *Nili kamkhi* were made of green stripe design. (Plate 2)



a. Jod katari 1



b. Lakhashahi



Plate 2 : Various types of mashroo fabrics used in royal wardrobe of Kachchh

Credit: Shri Dineshbhai Mamtara and Shri Kishorebhai Mamtara
Mamtara Weaving Company, Mandvi

Dineshbhai also mentioned that the *mashroo* was not used for the *paagh* of Maharao as the fabric thickness was more and it was difficult to wound with the required amount of twists to tie the *paagh*. The smaller widths of *mashroo* fabric was used for *kanchalis* where as the wider widths were used for *ghaghras* of royal women.

Trader for the special *bandhej* fabric atlas also, Dineshbhai recalled that *atlas* was used for the *odhna*, *kanchali* and *paagh* by the royal family. This fabric was a variety of pure silk and handwoven at Kachchh. *Mor zad*, *jaifal*, *fulaabhaat*, *char dani*, *gulzar* were few of designs which was used in *atlas* to tie-dye it. 40-45 years ago it costed around Rs. 13 per meter

whereas now it costs Rs. 500-600 per meter. (Plate 3)



Plate 3: Atlas

3. Bandhej

As narrated by Khatri Alimamad Isha and as also written by Shah A, there was a story behind the *bandhej paagh*. The ruler Khengarji Rana, wanted a new *paghadi* (a turban cloth) for a festival. He had an adopted a sister who was married to a *Khatr*, so he requested her to get him something special and new. The *Khatr* was confused, as all he knew was how to dye fabric in different shades. But he was an enterprising man and after many trials he wrapped a string around the fabric before dyeing it. The tied areas resisted the colour penetration, creating a new pattern. The king was happy with the design and wore a new *paghadi* presented by his sister, for the festival. This looked different from everything else, and was greatly appreciated. In fact, it created a new trend, and the style became very popular. The *Khatris* are traditional dyers who came to Kachchh many years ago on the invitation of Maharao Khengarji.(6)

Several generations of the Alimamadbhai's family have produced *bandhanis* and simple *laherias* (striped fabric created by rolling and tying the material before dyeing) for *paghadis* (turbans) worn by the ruling Jadeja family and the affluent mercantile families. (6)

The National award winner *bandhej* artisan Khatri Hanif Daud recalled that the *Kabootarkhana*, meaning pigeons enclosed in a trellis design was widely used for the *paagh* of the Maharao Shri. The design was created using tie and dye technique only.

Ali mamadbhai shared that several traditional designs were popular in the past for the *paagh* of Maharao Shri especially made of *bandhej*. *Kamariya paagh* was filled with *bandhej* checks, each of them was known as "*kamra*" meaning a room. Each square was made of yellow *bandhej* dots and filled with *saat dana* (seven dots) design depicting a flower. The center dot was of red colour and the encircling six dots were of white colour.

Veerboot paagh was earlier known as *veer bhet paagh*. As the name *veer bhet* meaning gift for a brother suggests, Maharao's sister presented this *paagh* to him while going to war. Than name changed to "*veer boot*" from the *bandhej* floral buta that was used in *paagh*. The background of this *paagh* was of green colour. The *saat dana* design on it was enclosed in a diamond grid made of red colour.

The designs of *bandhej* fabrics were named according to the motifs used in it. It was observed that the geometrical, animal, bird and floral motifs were the favourable motifs for the *bandhej*. It was also named according to the colour used in it. Many traditional designs have been procured and displayed at the Kachchh Museum, Bhuj. The *popat maidan* had parrot motif arranged in a rhythmic manner whereas *mor vel ambadal* had peacock motif with creeper. *Raas man-*

dal ambadal comprised of motifs of dancing dolls with creepers, *chakli ambadal* was the design where sparrows were seen with creepers. *Ek dani* and *chofully* was a single dotted design scattered allover across the fabric. *Nav khandi gharchola* and *gharchola aada* had tie dyed animal, floral and bird motifs enclosed in squares. *Veer boot* was made with red tie dyed diamond motifs. (Plate 4)



a. *Veer boot batvari*



b. *Veer boot*



c. *Chofully*



d. *Ek daani*



e. *Kabootar khana*



f. *Mor vel aambadal*



g. *Gharchola aada*



h. *Navkhandi Gharchola*

Plate 4: Various types of bandhej fabrics used for royal costumes of Kachchh Credit: a-d, f-h: Kachchh Museum; Bhuj, Kachchh e: Khatri Hanif Daud, Mundra, Kachchh

Conclusion:

The geographical region of Kachchh was more suitable to grow cotton crops. Climate of this region varied from extreme cold during winters to extreme hot during summers. Cotton was the fabric for summer and silk and wool were

for winter. Cotton being breathable and absorbent in nature, was more appropriate for their clothing for leisure and routine. Silks, velvets, *mashroos*, *kinkhabs* and brocades were used enough to express the royalty and power of wealth. Variety of silk fabrics such as *gajji silk*, *atlas* and *chirmin* fabrics were used as textiles for general purpose. Intricate and bold woven designs of gold and *zari* in *kinkhab* brocades were observed for the textiles used for special occasions.

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