

REVITALIZING TRADITIONAL THREAD WORK IN KUTCH: OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE ARTISAN LIVELIHOODS

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Abstract

Indian culture has its own story deep rooted in the traditions and craft of areas marked by wealth of their talents. Hand embroidery is diverse, based on the regions where it is practiced. Every stitch, motifs, styles has a flavour of their heritage passed by ancestors. Every embroidery talks about the distinct identity of community and their status in the society.

Independency of women and their way of carrying the immense love for ancestral skills inspired me to look forward this craft. This paper talks about the Kutch embroidery and essence of this craft for creating a source of livelihood for the practising artisans. The research was done by data collection of traditional embroideries and stitches. The embroidery of Gujarat has many variation which was classified by people and regions. The embroidery has gone through many change over the period of time. We hope this document fulfil the purposed of informing the about traditional embroidery of the region of Kutch.

Key words: Traditional embroidery, Craft, Kutch, Thread embroidery

Introduction

Craft and culture is one of the invaluable treasures of India. Indian craft tradition has no parallel in the world through its diversity as well as in technique and use of materials (www.india-crafts.com). The artisanship and uniqueness is not only praised in modern century but also admired from the ancient era. The crafts are the integral part in the life of an Indian where he/she get to witness innumerable scenes of culture, art and mother nature. These have been preserved since ages despite the rapid social and technological changes that are taking places around the country.

As India has been greatly blessed by having a many-layered, culturally diverse, rich heritage of craft skills imbibed through the ebb and flow of historical events that rest upon societal practices and religious (Jaitly, 2012). These changes and enrichment have taken place from trade movements, wars, revolts and even influenced by local topography, climate, and religions. These craft traditions have withstood the ravages of time and numerous foreign invasions and continue to flourish till date owing to the assimilative nature of Indian culture and broadmindedness of the craftsmen to accept and use new ideas.

Literature Review

Craft is the vehicle for expressing vision and the visible edge of art. It makes us feel rooted, give us a sense of belonging and connect us with our history. The Indian craft history has grown over thousand years around its religion, common people and the ruling elites.

Importance of Crafts

Handicraft plays an important role in representing culture, heritage and tradition of that region which are associated with people's lifestyle and history.

It provides ample opportunities for employment with low investment and also in export of traditional products.

Handicraft industry is a major source of income for rural communities women and people belonging to the less privileged section of the society.

Handicraft industry is highly creative, flexible and can even manage in low expenditure.

As Craft is never more than one generation away from extinction, so artisan always pass it to next generation like bloodstream which continuous its uniqueness in market.

Presently, raw material used for the craft is easily available to that region, so craftsmen can practice it without hesitation of cost.

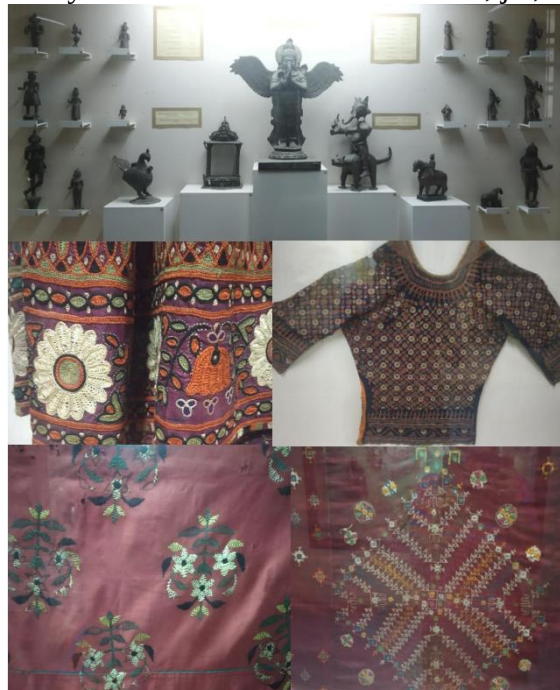
Gujarat and its Crafts

Gujarat has a rich and colourful legacy of weaving and handicrafts. Situated on the west coast of India, the state has cultivated trading partnerships with people from lands across the Arabian Sea for generations. Traders, invaders, colonisers, migrants and refugees have landed here with riches, dreams, and skills that have become part of the heritage of the state. The palaces, forts, havelis, mansions, mosques, temples, and mausoleums that dot different parts of the state reflect the richness of crafts and skills nurtured from medieval times. There are varied crafts in this region like *Sadeli*, *Tangaliya work*, *Bandhani*, *Ajrakh* etc.

Kutch Embroidery

A heritage art of Kutch, that survived from the trails of time to give an exceptional intricate and exquisite thread work. All this embroideries are the strings of Kutch culture. These tribes either migrated or spread all around, as they always carry the essence of their own culture.

Other then these embroidery, many other stitches are also practiced like gulab Tanka, tibh etc. The Kutch embroidery is not a single but amalgamation of many tribal embroideries. As Kutch is a home of many tribal communities like rabaris, jat, harijans, Muslims communities,



Rajput, kanbis and ahirs. The community noble families cultivate their craft into next generation. Embroidery is a passage beyond those broken roads & muddy paths lead by gas lamps to the village, where culture survives depicting every aspects of their livelihood by embracing own specialised embroidery. The different communities practiced different types of embroidery are: Rabari, Soofi, Ahir, Kanbi, Sindhi etc.

Fig 1: Customs, culture and embroidery of Gujarat

Methodology

The raw materials are those materials which are used either in natural or modified form to develop an ordinary into bewitchingly beautiful products with their skills and craftsmanship. The raw material generally used are :-

Fabric :- The embroidery is a drawing from the memory to the surface such as cotton, silk or khaddar.

Threads :- This complex and miniature embroidery is generally done by silk threads or silk floss, cotton, woollen ,metallic and sometimes satin threads. Vibrant colours are use to do embroidery.

Enhancing Material :- mirrors are the special element in the Kutch embroidery. It is believe that it ward off evil eyes.



Fig 2: Raw materials used for product development

Tools and Techniques

Tool used for embroidery are :-

Pencil & tracing paper - to draw design or pattern on tracing paper

Needle or sewing machine - to create dotted outline on the design

Khaka - the dotted design on tracing paper is khaka. It is used to transfer design from paper to fabric.

Colour mixture - kerosene and chalk power or colour or Neel are mixed together to trace the design. This mixture is a medium to transfer design from khaka to fabric.

Frame - to keep the fabric tight for the embroidery

Needle & thread – it is used to embroider different design on the fabric , through different stitches

Thread cutter & Scissors – to cut thread and fabrics

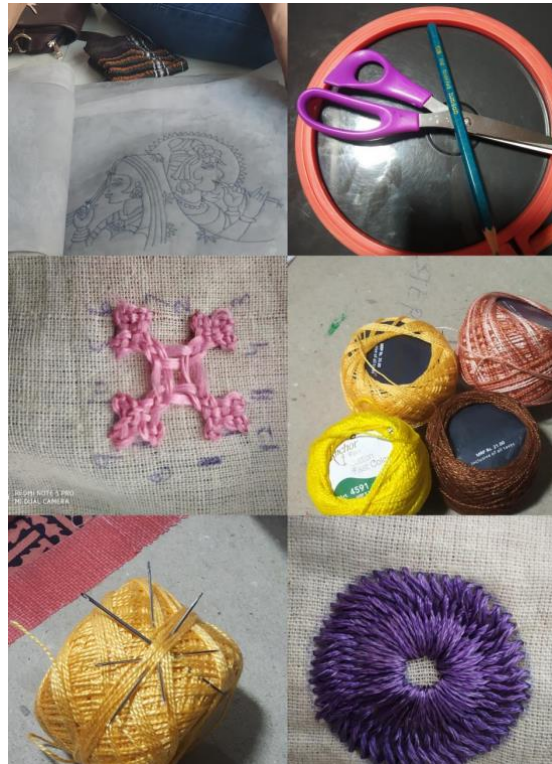


Fig 3: Tools and Techniques

Results – Product Development

Stitches used

- Tibh / Darning Stitch

Tibh is a local name of running stitch. It is the oldest and simplest of all stitches. The needle is passed back and forth regularly without overlapping of threads. This stitch is used for outline or creating simple line effects.

- Sankli

Sankli is also called chain stitch. It is of two types i.e. open chain stitch and close chain stitch. Sankli plays an important part of Kutch embroidery. The stitches are formed by the loops that are connected like the link of chains. The stitch can create curved and flowing line patterns also.

- Peencho tako / Mor pinchh

Mor pinchh is a local name of feather stitch. This stitch is made up of a series of loops, placed to the right and to the left, each one holding the previous loop in place.

- Polo tako

The term polo in Gujarat means “hollow”. This embroidery is in the form of loops. It is also known as lazy daisy stitch. This embroidery is mostly used for making flowers and leaves.

- Desi Bharat

It is a local name of herringbone stitch. It is also addressed as ankhadiyo vakadiyo. The stitch is made of crosses that are not cut exactly in the middle but quarterly. It resembles with the bones of herring fish.

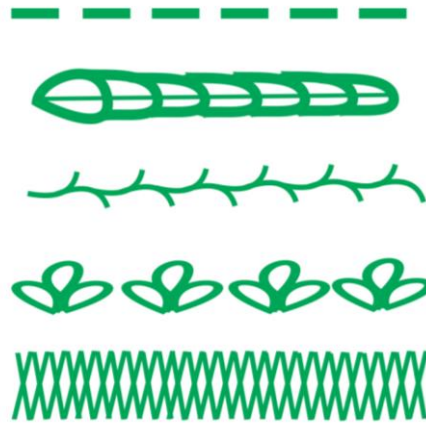


Fig 4: Tibh, Sankli, Mor Pinchh, Polo Tako, Desi Bharat

- Sadu Bharat / Bengali Tako

It is a local name of satin stitch. It is used for filling wider areas. It is fill with continuous straight stitch that flows in and on the fabric. It is most comely used in Kutch embroidery.

- Gaj Tako

It is a local name of button hole stitch. Gaj means 'button' in Gujarati. It is mostly done with the thicker thread. Button hole stitches catch a loop of the thread on the surface of the fabric and needle is returned to the back of the fabric at a right angle to the original start point of the thread (www.issuu.com). This stitch resembles with the 'L' letter shape.

- Abhla bharat

It is a local name of mirrors. Mirrors are used for embellishment. Firstly mirrors are fixed with fabric through cross stitch. It is done to secure its position. Then whole stitch is cover with double button hole stitch.

- Sikal

It is a variety of herringbone stitch . It is done in circular form around the mirrors. It is done to enhance the mirrors.

- Bavaliyo / Kutchi Work

It is also known as sindhi taropa. It is one of the most important embroidery of Gujarat. This embroidery is to dense. Frist the framing of motifs are done then filling of frames through intermixing of threads. This embroidery gives edge to the design.

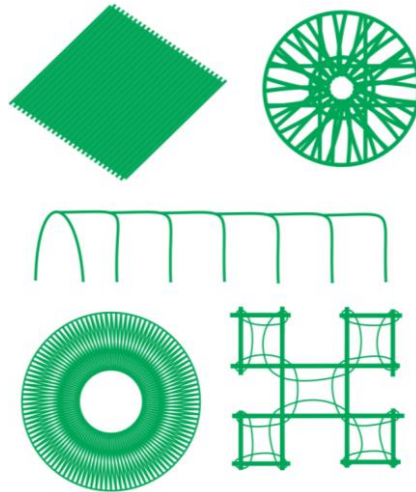


Fig 5: Sadu Bharat, Abhla Bharat, Gaj tako, Sikal, Bavaliyo

Products developed

A range of Home décor products was created using the stitch mentioned above.



Product:- Cushions, Table Runner & Coasters.
Category:- Home Furnishing

The inspiration is taken from the rabari work of Gujarat. These motif are the recreation of old Gujarati motifs.

Fig 6: Product Development by diversification

Current Status of the Craft and its Market

Traditional craft is not an option but an heritage of locals identity from its ancestors. As in the last few decades these crafts has undergo tremendous change. As these craft ore practiced all over the villages and have cheap mass production compelled them to find new market. Fortunately , urban market welcome the concept of traditional handicrafts.

This help them to adopt new demands of clients and evolves according to their tastes without leaving own roots. As market has expanded, creation in craft became key factors of survival. The craft development has to be fast and not stable to attract customers.

Through the market has expanded , many artisan doesn't have the ideas of market demand and its quality. To solve these problems many ngo's and designers reach out to the artisans and help them to create new designs and innovation in their fields. As the combination of

designers knowledge and artisan's skills create blunders in the market. In the machinery world, handicraft struggled and survived through its own unique identity just like diamond that always stand out for its uniqueness. The constant reproaching of traditional craft with tends give new flavour to cultural and Morden ideas. This innovation has created its own market in competition world with the influence of government , NGOs and designers. As the technology has been developed over period of time, many websites also take stand for handicraft work and their artisan . Internet has become a new platform for craft. Some of the websites are gaatha, okhai, hands of India etc.

Conclusion

The craft traditions of India vary from region to region. These crafts not only cater to the day -to -day needs of the people but are also used for decorative and ceremonial purposes. These crafts are deeply rooted in the lives of people which are even portrayed by the vivid picture of the ever-lasting sagas of their glorious past and even sometimes expressed by their inner creativity. The Kutch embroidery has lot of potential in terms of sustaining the livelihood of artisans if intervened and diversified widely.

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