

*Chapter 1*  
*Introduction...*

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Indian children of past generations grew up on a plethora of fascinating stories that often began with the phrase, “*Ek the Raja*”- once upon a time there was a King. Many of these tales were from the *Puranas*, the *Mahabharata*, and other ancient treatises. The monarchs of India, with their rich castles and indulgent ways of life, have been a wellspring of interest for quite a long time. Providence, it would seem, had created them with the sole intention of offering humanity a spectacle, a dazzling vision of marble palaces, costumes, and jewels. The word “ruler’s costume” conjures up a vision of splendor and magnificence: ropes of pearls, huge diamonds, jeweled turbans, elaborately carved furniture, shimmering textiles in every imaginable color. Some details are particular to a group and have become part of the textiles that identify their owners. (Dwivedi S,1999).

Prior to India's Independence in 1947 AD, the 565 maharajas, rajas, maharajas, maharanas, nawabs, thakoresahebs and different rulers were considered as the supreme authority, sovereigns who were conferred inheritance more than thirty-three percent of India's property surface and a fourth of her populace. A considerable lot of the ruling dynasties had been in power, continuously, for centuries and one particular dynasty can be traced back at least 2,000 years. They reflected the fact that, under the British, there had been two Indias: the India of the provinces, administered by the central government in Delhi, and a separate India with her 565 princely rulers. The anachronistic situation of the latter dated to Britain’s haphazard conquest of India, when rulers who received the British with open arms, or who proved worthy foes on the battlefield, were allowed to remain on their thrones, provided that they acknowledge Britain as the paramount power in India. The term “princely states” is a misnomer. These states were not ruled by “princes” but by “kings,” some of whom enjoyed a truly ancient heritage of political power. British Imperial ideology meant, however, that there was only the one “king” or “queen,” and the Indian rulers were, and had to be, “princes” (Patel H, 1998).

The independence movement led by Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and the Congress Party aimed for the unification of the country under a modern democratic political system. It

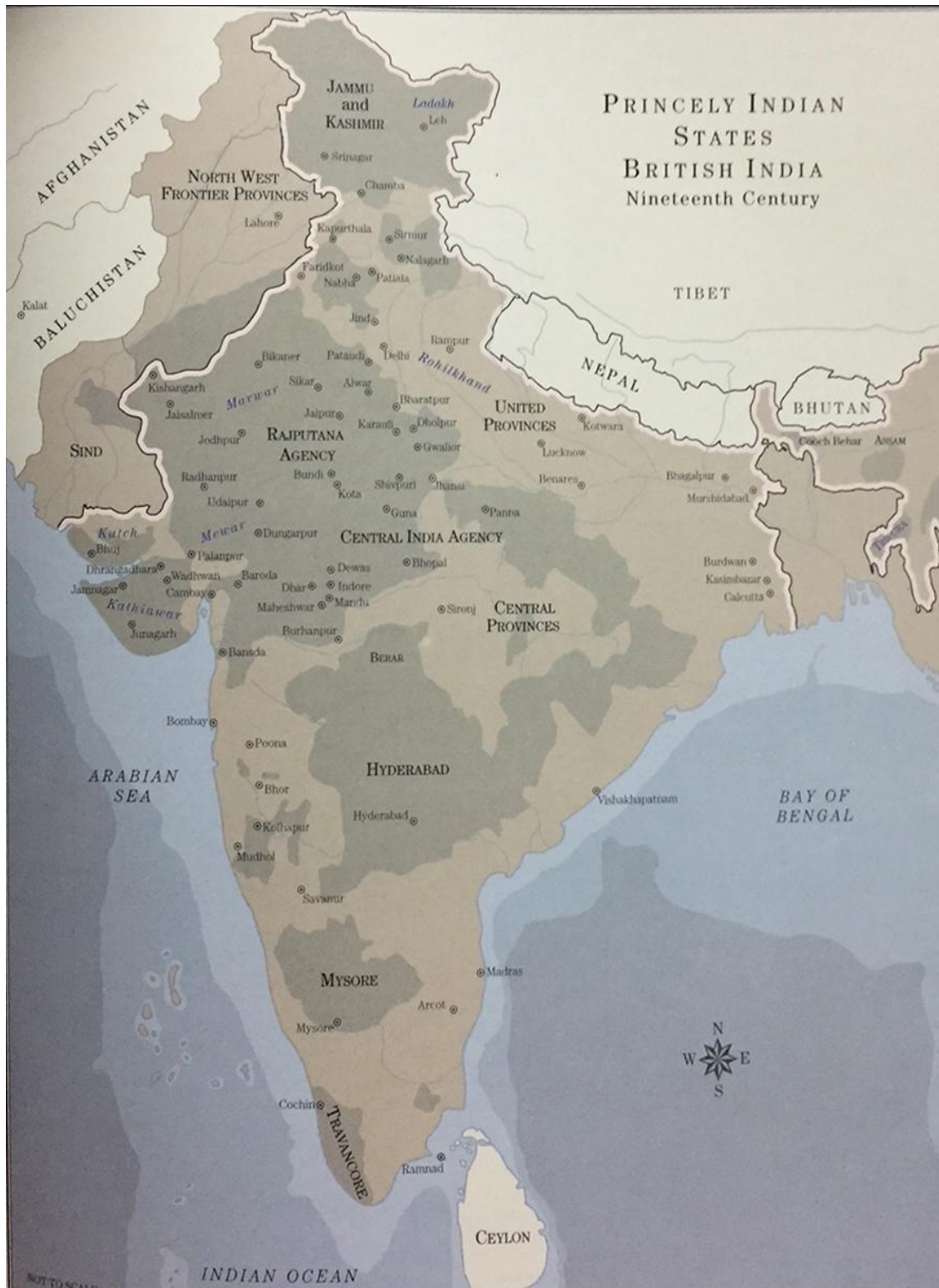


Plate 1: Princely States of British India-19<sup>th</sup> century

Source: Kumar R, *Costumes and Textiles of Royal India*

sought to put an end to the princes' power and to have their states merged into an independent India. Virtually overnight, and with clever political maneuvering by Lord Mountbatten and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the princes were stripped of their potency. One by one, 565 ruling princes, their heirs of generations of rulers, signed the Act of Accession, relinquishing all their authority and joining the Indian Union. By the end of 1948 AD, the whole of the Indian subcontinent was unified, and autocracy went forever. In the 1970s AD, the leaning socialist government further curtailed the limited powers which the princes still held. They were stripped of their titles, and their wealth was gradually to be eroded through taxation, the abolition of privy purses and confiscation of property without compensation. The only legacies that remain are the forts and palaces, opulent and monumental reminders of the glorious princes' pasts. The most willing and voluntary absorption of the princely states into the Union of India is one of the most astonishing and under-celebrated transitions in world history (Patel H, 1998).

India's westernmost state, Gujarat with 1,660 kilometer long coastline in west, desert in north and mountains in east and south comprised three different areas which are vivid in culture and geography. The eastern belt of the Gujarat state; Saurashtra, comprised Kathiawadi peninsula; and Kachchh. Saurashtra was one of India's most affluent regions, and its ports, fertile agricultural areas, rich pastoral grasslands and river valleys became one of the prime targets for invaders, who came by sea or through the north-west frontier passes. Because of this incredible geographic diversity and affluence, the princely states of Gujarat were ruled by some different communities, unlike, for example, Rajasthan, where the Hindu Rajput community ruled seventeen of the nineteen most important princely states (Patel H, 1998).

The Hindu Rajputs, who governed most of the princely states in India from the likes of Kashmir in the Himalayas to Mysore in southern India, and paying little heed to whether the foremost power was Muslim, Hindu or British, were leading in Gujarat too, and the different Rajput groups Jadejas, Jhalas, Gohils, Jethwas, Vaghela-Solanki and Chauhans-represented an impressive number of princely states.

Gujarat had hundreds of rulers, ranging from the chieftain Veja-no-ness, who ruled over half a square mile and fewer than 200 subjects, to the Maharajah of Baroda, who reportedly ruled over some three million subjects, and the Maharao of Kachchh, who held sway over more than one million square miles. The Hindu Marathas were skilled

mountain warriors, and took over the hills of southern Gujarat, making Baroda their seat of power. The Hindu Kathis ruled part of Kachchh and Kathiyawad for centuries and continued their rule over states in the hinterland like Jasdan, Jetpur, and Bhilka (Patel H, 1998).

The Muslim Mughals, who were the overlords of almost all of India including Gujarat in 16th and 17th centuries AD, appointed governors called subedars, later Babis, who carved out independent states at Junagadh, Balasinore, Cambay and Radhanpur during the 18th century AD, as the Marathas set in train the downfall of Mughal supremacy in India. Of particular interest was the Afghan Lohani family, who ruled earlier from Jalore in southern Rajasthan, moving to Gujarat and setting up the state of Palanpur in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, and proving to be one of India's longest Muslim dynasties. The Portuguese naval forces were too powerful for the Muslim, Hindu and perhaps even British rulers, the port of Daman and the island of Diu, captured in 1531 AD and 1536 AD respectively, remained with them long after the British lowered the Union Jack and retreated to London in 1947 AD. The Patels, who had become predominantly agricultural by occupation and were landowners rather than rulers, became the rulers of the state of Patdi and some smaller jagirs. By the time of the Walker Settlement of 1807 AD, the British were the established overlords of all of Gujarat, except for the Portuguese ports, and this included areas like Ahmedabad, Kheda, and Surat. The Europeans, notably the Dutch, did not rule Gujarat but had been trading with Gujarat since about 1600 AD, with factories in Surat, Baroda and the Sarkhej suburb of Ahmedabad (Patel H, 1998).

Among all other princely states of India, the Royal House of Kachchh (or Cutch) came in accession on 1st June 1948 and belongs to the Jadeja clan of Rajputs admired with 17 gun salute, 19 guns local. Kachchh's royalty, whose apparel would otherwise have continued to evolve in splendid traditional style, changed with the times as the pomp and ceremony once so much a part of the daily lives of the rulers was no longer relevant.

A princely state for four hundred years, and now a part of Gujarat, the Kachchh has managed admirably to preserve the culture of both its court and nomadic people. Its somewhat remote location on the northernmost part of the Indian coast has served to



Plate 2: Princely States of Gujarat

Source: Patel H, *The Palaces and Royal Families of Gujarat*

reinforce and helped to create the distinctive character of arts. Beyond the rich traditions and vivid diversity of its people, Kachchh has also been blessed with tremendous and aesthetically courageous rulers who became deeply involved in fostering the art and artisans of their state. Even today Kachchh retains a vibrant individuality, a quality often sullied elsewhere in a rush to modernize- to attain the most recent variant of current western lifestyle patterns and aspirations. Most writing on Kachchh celebrates the uniqueness born out of its isolation; however, Kachchh's openness to cross-cultural influence has seldom been examined (Christopher L, 2000).

The royal families, although stripped of their titles, were not however stripped of their dignity and ingenuity. The textiles and costume traditions laid forth by the royal families illustrated their graceful cultural identity. The way royal clothes were draped and layered, the elegance with which they were worn, the movement created by the countless folds and the subtle interplay of colour and light can only be imagined through these visual references from sculptures, cave paintings, medieval miniatures and palm leaf manuscripts. Such evidence, however, seemed to be incomplete. (Patel H, 1998)(Kumar R, 2006)

With the disappearance of rituals, the traditional and ceremonial costumes were either packed away in trunks, donated to museums, sold to private collectors, given away or left decay. Also, the earthquake has served to bring attention to the fact that behind this recent history lays a significant part of the heritage (Kumar R, 2006).

The research has explored the realistic impression of courtly life. It is necessary to uncover many of the last surviving examples of traditional royal clothing. For centuries, ruling dynasties of India promoted the skills of spinners, weavers, dyers, printers, and embroiderers, commissioning textiles from renowned centers of excellence across the subcontinent. The majority of the textile crafts have been transformed into costumes fit for kings, queens, and courtiers. In Kachchh, as in other parts of India, royal patronage encouraged master craftsmen to create the first fabrics. The craftsmen were more or less permanently engaged by the rulers of Kachchh. Their work was in constant demand and in prodigal output too during royal marriages, the occasions of the king being quite frequent in former times in Kachchh. There had been some highly skilled craft persons working at the Bhuj court at the beginning of this century. The present state of this wonderful craft is, unfortunately, deplorable. Royal commissions undoubtedly burnished an artisan's status and thus took priority over other work.

The archival records and narration of elderly Royal family member uncovered the fact that traditionally adorned in the best of Rajput attire; the Rulers incorporated elements of western style into their clothes during the nineteenth century. Inspired by the European and Persian motifs some of the most delicate *mochi* embroideries was produced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Indian royalty slowly relinquished its power, the craft degenerated due to lack of patronage. Kachchh's traditional royal apparel changed with the times and was no longer in vogue. Moreover, with the passage of time, the traditional and ceremonial costumes were either packed away in trunks, donated to museums, sold to private collectors, given away or left to decay. Also, the 2001 earthquake caused extensive damage to the collections of the cultural heritage of Kachchh. Moreover, it has resulted in an inadequate provision for display and documentation that can provide the essential sketch of Kachchh's Royalty. Conservation and revival of the Royal costumes have been an issue of concern for our country today.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**

Owing a piece of history and heritage is the ultimate unmatched luxury. Wearing your heritage is infinitely more stylish than flaunting labels. Scarcely any territories of the world are more suggestive than the Indian subcontinent, with its picturesque scenic beauty and juxtaposition of contrasting cultures. Providence, it would seem, had created them with the sole intention of offering mankind a spectacle, a dazzling vision of marble palaces, tigers, elephants, and jewels (Dhar S, 2012).

The cultural amalgamation of Indian subcontinents depicts each region's costume suiting to the local climate and the availability of fabric and identifiable uniqueness which differentiates Indian culture from that of other countries.

Each region of Indian subcontinent developed its own distinct textile identity, reflected in the weave and pattern of the fabric and in the way it was worn. The difference in social standing was revealed in the quality, level of refinement and ornamentation of the cloth. The Mughal period was the "Golden Age" of textile crafts in India. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, the clothing styles of the Hindu and Muslim courts across India evolved in very different ways. The introduction of Islam and the establishment of Muslim courts brought further innovations. The harmony between Hindu and Muslims during that period can be studied in the adoption of features from Muslim costumes into Hindu styles. As the Mughal Empire spread its boundaries, a more significant uniformity in royal fashions emerged. By the seventeenth century, *jamias*, *choghas*, and *angarkhas* were the height of fashion. They were worn with equally elaborate *paijamas* and an assortment of other garments in a layered fashion. It is precisely this astounding diversity of styles that makes the study of Indian clothing complex and fascinating. The intermingling of Mughal court with the royal courts of Gujarat had a more significant impact on a change of their traditional clothing. This study gives an in-depth knowledge of characteristic features of Mughal costumes over a period (Singh M, 1998).

India, has, however, also been a crucible of ideas and fashions. Every wave of foreign influence that reached here- be it through invasions, trade or commerce, or through cultural contacts was assimilated and recreated in some form or the another. Thus the Indian fashion of costume never remained static. It grew in a fertile land watered by



many ideas coming from within and outside the country. Restoring these pieces of art is what some designers and textile experts have made a mission of (Kumar R,2006).

From the late twelfth through the twentieth century 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 (Christopher L,2000).

The modern-day presents the new challenge of how to maintain the dignity of princely inheritance at a time when the princes themselves have been shorn of their previous glamour and pomp. If the inheritances are to survive, they must be put to commercial use. This is the only route towards maintaining the continuance of tradition under another guise and the resurgence of ancient pride in success and honor. In this way only can traditions remain a constant artery of the identity of the people and can never be entirely ignored or smothered by changes in political conditions (Dwivedi S,1999).

Change rarely invalidates the past and does not necessarily imply a rejection of the old. A great deal can and should be preserved from the past. This applies as much to those aspects that touch our sense of duty and achievement, as to those that help us to function on a day-to-day basis. In particular, we should treasure the ancient and selfless values that have stood for a test of time. No doubt it was not only a new beginning but an entirely new direction that had to be taken by the Indian Princes. Suddenly they found themselves selflessly knee deep in the concerns of the ordinary men-their erstwhile subjects- investigating a veritable plethora of pro-bono activities- becoming in many cases the very fulcrum of all that is charitable and caring when the State for the reasons of its own, neither can nor with support an endeavour, whether it be a new school, water or sewerage system, library or hospital wing (Dwivedi S, 1999).

The rarity of the millennium, upon the threshold of which everyone today finds himself shakily perched, will of course, also mean a significant new beginning not only for the citizens of India, including the former Princes for the world at large. It is, therefore, most appropriate and timely that such an essential part of India's history to be preserved

at this crucial juncture for the edification of the future. It is also imperative to extract now from history and reaffirm in ourselves time-tested ancient values. One cannot disagree with the statement made by Sir Conrad Corfield at his meeting with Maharana Fateh Singhji during his visit to Udaipur “There was clearly something to be said for preserving such qualities for the future well-being of India. For its only these qualities and above all that of courage which will allow us to survive and reach the threshold of the next millennia (Dwivedi S,1999).

It would not be inaccurate to say that the rulers serve their people in many different ways. The proximity made it incumbent for them to discharge several diverse functions according to the requirements of their people. In performing their inherited duties and responsibilities and providing inspiration, they pursued the path of excellence and set high standards. The diversity of tasks involved providing a proper, clean, just and benevolent administration. Their role as temporal and religious heads epitomized secularism and social justice. Socially fashionable pursuits of today such as preserving ecology, the environment, and wildlife and attacking pollution were routine duties. Creative art, architecture, and music flourished under the rule of the Princes. This is not merely fantasizing or in any way aggravating the role of princes but is borne out by facts which any researcher can ascertain by pursuing the readily available records (Dwivedi S,1999).

### **1.3 Objectives of the study:**

- 1.3.1** To study the history and ancestry of rulers of Kachchh from 19<sup>th</sup> century till present and discover the facts regarding trade routes and socio-political-cultural engagement.
- 1.3.2** To document the traditional textiles and costumes of the royal inheritance and investigate crafts and diversity in them through the generations.
- 1.3.3** To document the costumes worn during different public and private affairs with their significance.
- 1.3.4** To develop paper patterns and toiles of actual size for preservation of rare garments.
- 1.3.5** To develop an easily accessible database of royal costumes of Kachchh for documentation and preservation by digitizing it in the form of print media and an electronic media.

**1.4 Delimitations of the study:**

**1.4.1** The study is delimited from the 19<sup>th</sup> century till date (1819-2016); from the era of Maharao Shri Desalji II to HH Maharajadhiraj Mirza Maharao Shri Pragmulji III.

**1.4.2** The size of the paper patterns and toiles is delimited to-

- a. For upper garment of Maharao Shri: 40”.
- b. For lower garment of Maharao Shri: 36”.
- c. For upper garment of Maharani Saheba: 34”.
- d. For lower garment of Maharani Saheba: 30”.

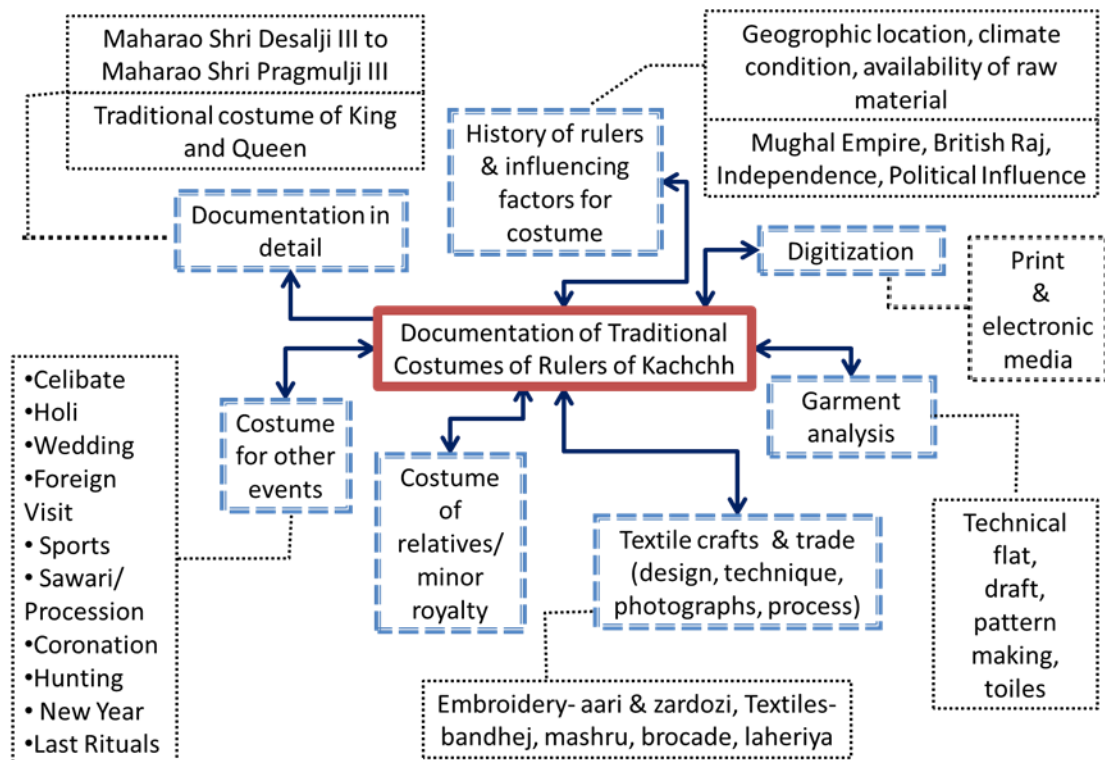


Figure 1: Mind mapping of the study