

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION



Introduction

Indian textiles have had a celebrated tradition that has fascinated the world for more than two thousand years. History is witness to the relentless efforts made throughout the ancient times by cultural groups and communities to fashion elaborate textiles. Different regions in the subcontinent explored and experimented with the natural resources at hand forming enduring traditions for their use. By being domicile to variety of fibres, fabrics and patterning techniques, India had manufactured matchless quality of woven, embroidered, dyed, printed and painted textiles in the past. Resting on the basic urge to create as well as to own distinctive sumptuous textiles, fabrics have been prepared as well as used by diverse cultural communities in the nation. Various striking Indian textiles from the past epitomizes the highest inventive successes of mankind. In literature cited by Gillow and Bernard, one reads that European, Asian and Laventine civilizations regarded India for her textiles. Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Persians and Chinese transacted precious metals and silks for the fine and colourful cottons of the subcontinent.

Literature evidences indicates that the origin of weaving and patterning fabrics in India was directly connected with cotton. Though the manufacture of silk and wool was known in India since ancient times, the production of cotton cloth was India's oldest tradition. Cotton was grown, spun, woven, patterned, used in and exported from India in proto-historic times. Vedic and Buddhist Literature, in general, have innumerable references to the art of carding, spinning, weaving and patterning of textiles. The process of weaving cloth was often used as metaphor for describing cosmic ideas. The terminology for weaving and basketry work was more or less the same in Vedic literatures. Certain terms that played a basic role in the early philosophy e.g. *guna*, *tarka* or those related to forms of literature such as *grantha*, *sutra*, *tantra*, *nibandha*, *prabandha* were derived from textile terminology. Present tradition of hand woven cotton textiles have evidently descended from the proto-historic prototypes. For historical, economic and climatic reasons, cotton has also been the single most popular textile type of this country (Ed. Singh M. and Jain J., 1986:3).

Archeologists also suggests that cotton originated in India, which was supported by the discovery of the cotton cloth fragments on the banks of the Indus river that have been dated to 3200 BC. The cotton plant diffused from the Indian subcontinent to China, the Middle East, and the Africa between AD 800 and 1000 and its geographical expansion is part of a process of ‘Southernization’, in which cultivation of cotton as well as related processes and technologies spread from the India to other parts of Asia, eventually, to the entire globe. The global spread of cotton did not consist only of the diffusion of the raw material and technologies. Cotton textiles themselves, many of Indian origin, were widely traded and exchanged around the world and came to be part of the consumption patterns and material culture of a considerable proportion of the world population long before European industrialization. (Parthasarathi and Riello, 2009:2).

The hand woven fabrics of India made Indian cotton ‘King’ in the world. Daniel Defoe, the celebrated author of *Robinson Crusoe*, wrote that after the 1688 revolution when William and Mary landed in England, they were resplendent in Indian calico! (Ramaswamy, 2002:120). Countless textual references describe its importance in native as well in foreign land. Clothes made out of both silks and cotton were spread to various corners of the world based on the requirement and beliefs of the society, initially from the ports of Gujarat followed by Bay of Bengal and Coromandel coasts. As explains John Guy, Indian textiles by virtue of their importation were not only exotic and desirable but they also attained spiritual importance unforeseen by their producers. The different uses and meanings that cotton textiles enjoyed across the globe are difficult to reconstruct. Textiles stood as entrepot for early international trade, an axial point from which east-west commerce in aromatics, spices and other luxuries passed. Indian cloth therefore was the communicating interface within and between civilizations and therefore was the center of colonial trade. Historical, archeological and literary evidences, hence, documents the scale and geographical reach of Indian textiles (Parthasarathi and Riello, 2009:2 and Guy J.)

Despite the bewildering variety of cloths, the bulk of the cloth made for local communal consumptions in the subcontinent was composed of cotton. Only a small fraction was woven from mixtures of cotton and other fibres, most commonly silk. Much of the cotton cloth woven in India was relatively coarse stuff and fitted the budgets of working people in the subcontinent.

In comparing the ways in which textiles are made from one culture to another, it can be discerned that many used the same basic processes- spinning fibres into yarns, weaving cloth, and embellishing it with designs and colours- but that the details differ. A plain white cloth without a colour or design, from anywhere across the world, is distinctive and carries with it the hallmarks of its particular time and space. Differences may be detected in the shade and the texture of the fiber, the direction and spin of the yarn, the formation of the interlacement, and the treatment of the edges and selvages, among other features. The materiality of the textile has significance to the culture that created it. Climate and environment play important roles in determining the materials that were available for use, which influenced regional traditions (Phipps E., 2011:2). Parthasarathi explains that the bulk of cotton weaving in the subcontinent, especially in the major cotton-manufacturing regions, was done by a class of professional weavers. The weavers were tended to be drawn from particular caste and community organizations. Between 1200 and 1800 thousands of varieties of cotton cloth were manufactured in the Indian subcontinent. The profusion of cloth types reflects the diversity of tastes within the subcontinent.

The author again accounts that the cloth consumption varied enormously by region and, within locale, by social status and aesthetic preference. The textile manufacturers of the subcontinent possessed the knowledge and the flexibility to meet the highly specific tastes of diverse Indian buyers. Attention must therefore also needs to go on the two aspects of the textiles under study- their functions and meaning, which vary significantly from culture to culture.

Regarding its function, John Forbes Watson expounds that the Textile manufactures of India can be divided into two classes- the first comprehending the various scarf or plaid like article of dress which leave the loom ready for wear, and the second consisting of piece goods for the conversion of which into clothing the scissors and needle are required (Watson J. 1866). George Watts also writes the clothing of the people of India might almost be described as woven in the required shapes and sizes but rarely cut into garments that fit the body. By far the larger portion of the people were dressed in cotton (1979:236). The specifics of the construction, of the textile under study, explains that it is a loom produced and patterned textile and hence composites the first category of the classified textiles by Watson. It is consumed as a non-stitched garment or drape.

Goswamy's document described that the use of word '*futa*' from Indian usage '*pota*' often described by Arab lexicographers. An Arab authority, Muhllabi, reported seeing ordinary persons using striped wrap around the waist. Babur spoke of the common man in India dressed only in *futa* and Abu'l Fazl eloquent about the incredible varieties of *futa-s* and *chira-s* that people used in Hindustan. The word was found to be used to describe unstitched length of cloth from turban to napkin to sheet to a cloth worn around loin (Goswamy B.N., 2002:14). Such are still the utilities of the textiles produced under the purview of present study. The classifications discussed in the Watson's and Goswamy's accounts implies towards the fact that, the forms, formats and functions of the unstitched clothes in India, based on their functionality, has seeped in from the pre-medieval times.

Also, Cotton textiles in India was often articulated a language. Such language was social and had specific expressions, vernacular uses, syntactic structure based on taste and custom (Parthsarthi: 2009). If one observes in this light, textiles in India are much more than mere objects. They are the irrefutable chronicles of the people. Produced as part of the ever evolving culture, these contains not just direct facts based on their techniques, modes of use and history but also pertains ethno-historical meanings and cultural information. Various qualities are imputed to cloth in India. As a transactional medium, it was conceived as a unique conveyor of spirit and substance of the

individual. Indian social order imparts unusual variety to the symbolism of nakedness and dress. Textile in the nation are intimately connected with the people who make them, those who both utilize and contribute to their long standing tradition. Unstitched and uncut pieces were considered ritually pure by Hindus as they had undergone a minimum of potentially polluting human touch.

Plurality is one of the defining characteristic of India. Regional, religious and linguistic identities, writes Patel Divia (2006: 14), existed long before any form of national Identity. Yet being a Nation, it strives to achieve consistency, somehow, in its attitude, thought, faith and material culture adoptions. Unity in diversity can best be illustrated by the mere fact that an individual is branded as an Indian but culturally he would be different even within a single community, based on the identity he has acquired by birth. Explains Dudha Kanha Rabari –

“every twelve village language changes. Our clothes, language and way of living portray who we are and where we belong to. All of us are the Rabaris but we are not the same Rabaris. We worship Lord Shiva and celebrate festivals together. An alien will never understand cultural dynamics within a social group like ours as to how even being different we are one” [Personal communication, Dudha Kanha Rabari, 05/12/2015].

This proves that a true Indian Identity is layered with multiplicity of factors yet it is flexible. Some of these factors are tacit and others are reflected in use of materials. It depends upon the experience and involvement of receptor that aids him to encode and read between the non-verbal cues practiced by each sect or society. Costumes, again, have been one of the commonly used tools in India for communicating identities. Cloth, in practical and metaphorical ways, cites Jacob M. (Ed. Livingstone J. and Ploof J 2007:299), has played a key role both in daily life and in establishing social structures in diverse cultures for centuries. Igor Kopytoff in this accounts explains that from a cultural perspective, the production of commodities is also a cultural and cognitive process: commodities must not only produced materially as things, but also culturally marked as being a certain kind of thing (Ed. Appadurai A., 1986:84).

The research thus, has directed its course towards examining meaning of the *Pachhedi* textile for Gujaratis at large and then engendering facts pertaining to the communal variation in its application as super imposed by the culture.

If one looks at the recent history of Indian textiles, Khadi occupies a prominent place in discourses on the freedom struggle from the perspectives of textiles. The Mahatma Gandhi's equation of patriotism and freedom with wearing indigenously produced homespun khadi not only prevented Indians from becoming imitative western clones but preserved our handloom weaving traditions at the time of increasing industrialization, remarks Tayabji (2016:32). Paradoxically, as a simultaneous process, industrialists and politicians such as Jawaharlal Nehru, who advocated technological progress for India, adopted an ambiguous position on issue. Consciously or not, they enlisted the moral and political capital generated by the Mahatma's campaign for village weaving in support of their own push for Indian freedom and industrialization.

As a concurrent process, the Gandhian ethos of rural revitalization was taken forward by work of individuals like Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Pupul Jaykar, and with state support, eventually, into the founding of institutions such as the All India Handicrafts Board, the Weavers Service Centers and the Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Council, to enable infrastructure for the craft sector. A noteworthy moment in this course was Vishwakarma, the series of exhibitions on Indian textiles held in India and abroad, as part of the Festivals of India- a landmark series of cultural-diplomacy initiatives by the government with the pioneering support of Prime minister Indira Gandhi and with designer-curator Martand Singh at their helm. The intention of early initiatives by the government were aimed at building a network of infrastructure and institutions for the development of the handloom sector. The objectives were both the generation of rural employment and the preservation of culture. The excitement, diversity and growth of Indian textiles in the first 25 years after Independence matched the national mood. A country trying to rediscover its own identity after a couple of centuries of colonization found traditional weaves and wearing styles an appropriate metaphor for asserting an Indian identity. Pride in the past was matched by a rational

realization that if India was to find a place on the international stage, it needed to build on its intrinsic strengths and unique traditions. In many ways, the introductory work initiated from the 1950s onwards had created the generative base for the prospects and opportunities that were to follow.

Mills, in India, simultaneously, continued producing careful, machine made copies of different sorts of homespun fabrics for distribution in the interior. The Republic of India that had spent large sums on the propagation of homespun through promotional organizations and exhibitions, which gradually started functioning at loss despite of the government's strong commitment to competitive industry (Sethi and Tyabji. Ed. Kaul: 2016).

Overlaying these major concerns, there existed other seemingly apparent issues or perhaps, the relative repercussion of the process of Industrialization. With influx of infrastructure, amenities, literacy and lifestyle development, the line between the ethnicity and modernity had begun to dilute day by day. Many of the textiles which had market in the rural India, has disappeared or in very few cases are on the verge of disappearance. The textiles which were produced as the substances of communal rooting were evading with the passing time. The meanings of the lifestyle for the folk consumers was progressing. To intensify the predicament of the producers, cheaper quality machine made goods were made available to the villagers. Perhaps, with the beginning of the modernization, craft of spinning which was practiced by the agricultural families as a supplementary activity also departed. Polyester and acrylic became the new cotton and wool of marginalized rural India. Sedimentation of cheaper quality of material in the market, lead traders and weavers to adapt with the requirements of the time, thus, leading towards the death of the actual sensibilities of hand-woven textiles.

Later, from early 1990s, reports Kaul, Sethi and Tyabji, government institutions started becoming less responsive to the needs of the sector. Political will shifted gear, financial priorities changed with an almost exclusive focus on the urban, industrial and digital.

The ensuing neglect of the rural craft sector was reflected in the phrase used by politicians and policy makers to describe the sector as a ‘sunset’ industry. In 2015, a plan to repeal The Handloom Reservation Act of 1985 was proposed within the government. This has been protecting traditional handloom weaves from being copied by their machine-made and powerful competitors. The powerful powerloom lobby agitated successfully that the act be withdrawn. The incident however galvanized a large civic movement towards the related concerns about a future for handloom. Such an urban, public movement demonstrated the fact, borne out by recent statistics, that over the years, the popularity and the sale of handlooms have increased.

The picture, thus, emerging from the above background, positions the fact that the current subject, can be viewed under several lights. The folk textile- *pacchedi* which was identified on the criteria of it being in its retiring stage, has been, therefore, examined in lieu of four dimensions. The study takes into account the quest that concerns predicting its history and evolution, status report, production configurations and consumption patterns.

Purpose of the Study:

Historically, India has been a conspicuous setting for the responses to the global fabric requirements. From the available qualities of textiles artefacts and discourses written on them, it is likely to recognize that two routes of advancement existed within the Indian textile industry. One was of the resident weavers in the village meeting the local needs for coarse cotton fabrics. Another, stream was of the weavers under the patronage of local nobility producing finely woven fabrics for urban elite. Understandably, the two groups were affected by the growth of the textile industry within the country, and overseas, in different ways. A status report by Society for Rural, Urban, and Tribal Initiative published in 1995, states that no significant changes have occurred in the organization of production of the village weavers. With the growth of the textile industry, household units started to rely increasingly on millspun yarn instead of

homespun yarn. Other than that, the advent of synthetic fibres and cheaper mill cloth, rapidly made artisans indigent (SRUTI, 1995).

Again in India, textiles and costumes demonstrated to have played multitude of roles to become one of the primary agencies of its culture, spiritual beliefs and economy. Regional and communal costumes in India has been used as the fervent identifier to comprehend the social hierarchy and position of the person. It was the thread that contoured the social and religious life of its people. Village weaving was customarily linked with communities and castes to full their requirements. With changing times, tastes and demands of the village inhabitants has evolved and there exists a very limited range of these repository surviving amongst the producers and the consumers.

Most of the fragments of the knowledge pertaining to the production system, sartorial expressions and the oral traditions related to them have been profoundly studied, recorded and revived, while a limited range of these has died a slow death. Some of the rare existent kinds of such threads have survived as a mainstream article of clothing; simpler, apparent and as a product for daily life yet unique in their own kind. The research thus intends to investigate and synthesize repository pertinent to the identified weaving craft of *Pachhedi* weaving in terms of production procedure and present day craft scenario. It has been further extended to unearth the significance of textiles in the different community, its consumption patterns, and gradual evolution into the present form.

Also, in order to sustain continuity and aid in the survival of *Pachhedi* as a weaving craft form, it calls for establishing its context in contemporary times. The folk connotation and representation of these textiles have been unique. The language, elements and techniques involved in the *Pachhedi* weaving has been proposed in form of contemporary design.

1.1. Objectives of the Study:

- 1.1.1. To trace and evolve meaning and historical accounts on the *Pachhedi* textile used in Gujarat.
- 1.1.2. To execute craft mapping investigation on *Pachhedi* textile for studying;
 - a. *the current socio-economic profiles of the weavers*
 - b. *the weaving process, technique and motif vocabulary, and emergent supply chain structure with kinship between stakeholders involved.*
- 1.1.3. To engender material culture database of the textile pertaining ;
 - a. *Consumption patterns, cultural meanings and significance of Pachhedis used by different communities and sects in Gujarat and Rajasthan.*
 - b. *Extinct and existent forms of textiles available with the consumers, museums and private collectors.*
- 1.1.4. To propose contemporary designs in *Pachhedi* weaving technique.

1.2. Scope of the Study:

In the course of the present study, researcher proposes to examine various cotton textiles consumed by the nomadic, tribal and folk communities of Gujarat. Along with some appraisal on the textile history and it's transcendence into contemporary forms, it predominantly focuses upon the production technology, status and demographics of the producing community as well as material and sartorial expressions of the textiles in the consumer communities. The study shall thus develop a database pertaining to;

- The socio-cultural and economic profile of the languishing craft producers
- Material cultural database of the brocaded cotton textiles in the form of digitized formats, constructional details and macro-photographs of the weave structure.
- Textiles as dress, their cultural expressions and use as commodities.

The elements and techniques of the *Pachhedi* production, translated in forms of contemporary designs may aid inspire weavers and encourage them to intervene and explore its urban market potentials.