

Abstract

Indian cloth, specifically cotton, was one of the drivers invigorating the wheels of the commerce in the early modern world, and structuring closer economic, social and cultural contact between Europe, Africa and Asia. The trade in Indian cotton was enormous, it complemented and at times displaced- local cloth and at places, it acquired the positions of currency, explained Reillo and Roy (2009:11). For centuries, Indian subcontinent had fashioned and delivered textiles of plentiful qualities and sizes to the several markets. In the local market as well, it's weaving traditions and the spectacular skills had acted as the vehicle of its cultural identity that had passed from generation to generation. Gujarat has been identified as "a land of the Indian Ocean as well as of India" which held until the nineteenth century a central place in western Indian commercial systems.

Gujarati textiles in India as well as in international market had a critical function in material exchange and relations. The function was the product of the specific communal, cultural, political and symbolic meanings which cloth attained through complex processes of domestication. In their journey from a weaver's loom to the hands of the local ruler, trader or patron client, a piece of cloth endured transformations as it became engraved with meanings that reflected local expressions of taste. Provincial and communal clothes in India since ancient times have worked as a strong repository that talked about its culture, beliefs, geography and social status. This visual language also essayed about the designation of basic details like age, marital status and socio-cultural status. Again, the weavers populating the spaces in and around the trading centers faced the multiplicity of changes in the organization of production. The sector that got encroached by the technology and grave needs of changing times, lost its value in the milieu of present day urban and rural requirements.

Most of the fragments of this visual vocabulary has been intensively investigated, recorded, diversified and revived, while a limited range of the textile tradition have died a slow death. Some of the rare existent kinds of such threads have survived as mainstream article of clothing; simpler, apparent and as a product for daily life yet unique in their own kind. One

such textile under study was identified for the purpose of investigation. A need assessment study was conducted to establish specific area of the study on to which exhaustive ethnographic study was implemented. The methodology thus, adopted was inclusive of literature study teamed up with field survey method. Visual as well as textual references were taken into consideration in order to interpret the history and evolution of pachhedis, the textile under study. The current information was gathered through the interview and observation method. The data, thus, collected was presented in terms of detailed case narratives, the quantified information from field survey was presented in terms of tables and charts. The evidence and material database was analysed, processed and discussed in areas relating to production and consumption patterns of the subject under study. The research encompassed following inquiries pertaining to the weaving craft;

- The socio-cultural and economic profile of the languishing craft producers.
- Development of material culture database on the textile under study and cataloguing as well as representation of their different forms, formats and patterns.
- Textiles as dress, their cultural expressions and use as commodities.

The analysis made it discernible that the form, format and function reflects upon its emergence and development from traditional *patkas* and *sashes*. Also, literature evidences helped in establishing the fact that word pachhedi can be accepted as a derivative term coming from Sanskrit, perhaps meaning cloth, used extensively in Gujarat. Its various forms were noted to have been evolved over the period of time. It was, therefore, accepted that the textiles existed as the conglomeration of different periods and influences whose origin can be linked with the rooted ancient tradition of draped garments in India while continuity can be part of the cultural exchange and expressions of communal designation. Field data reported that there existed only seventy-one practicing families interspersed in the districts of Surendranagar, Ahmedabad, Mehsana, Kachchh, Jamnagar and Porbandar and that the number of males practicing the craft were more than the females. The level of educational status had likewise barely improved over the years. A sizeable number of families also had reported to have converted their religion to Christianity and were completely disinterested in taking forward the legacy of practicing weaving as an activity.

Weavers wove on fly-shuttle pit loom and the motif vocabulary of the textiles that were produced in each of the regions were different. There existed a complex network between the traders, weavers, cooperative societies and independent weavers. Like weavers, traders were found to be equally contributing towards the sustenance of the craft and its continuity. They had acted as a driving force for constantly supplying folk textiles to the communities and evolving their forms, styles and formats. Although, the future of the craft was found to have been accepted in oblivion by each of the stakeholder. The consumer community comprised of various sects of Rabaris, Bharwads and Charans. Other sects were formed by Patels and Ahirs. Each community demonstrated use of distinguished colour and pattern arrangement, thus, yielding into the construction of visual signifier. The formats of the textile under study were based on its function which included of it being utilized as a scarf, shoulder cloth, turban, loin cloth as well the waist cloth. The patterns produced on each of the textile, even though, were formulated by similar technique, had a distinctly varied forms. An effort has also been made to propose application of current textiles in the formats that were relevant to the current context. The constraint here was to retain the colour combination as well the motif vocabulary of the textile used as the inspiration.