



CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Our heritage is all that we know of ourselves; what we preserve of it, our only record. That record is our beacon in the darkness of time; the light that guides our steps. Conservation is the means by which we preserve it. It is a commitment not only to the past, but also to the future (Ward, 1989).

Textiles have enthralled mankind since ages in all civilizations. Handcrafted textile products are essential components of intangible heritage. It has been an indispensable part of our lives from the time man dressed themselves with bark of trees and leaves till the finest linen. It bears the testimony of human history, past and present. Hence, obliviousness towards importance of textiles means ignorance to its history. Through the civilizations, textiles have played an important function to merge into ones culture, tradition and heritage.

Highly developed civilizations produced remarkable, eminent and ornate textiles with its own distinct patterns, utilizing unique techniques with the accessible raw material in the region. India, wrapped in mystique enhanced with romance of fable crafts has one of the finest textile traditions in the world. There is a compelling magic about the rich and varied textile tradition of India, which can be traced back 5000 years to Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro in the Indus valley. The history of Indian textile crafts is as old as the history of civilized life in India that achieved prominence during the medieval period and continued till the end of late 19th century. As stated by Gillow & Barnad, (2002) that no other land enjoys such a plethora of creative energies for the production of textiles as the subcontinent of India.

The intermingling of rituals and beliefs of the local people with various traders, conquerors, missionaries and nomads had scaled over the subcontinent down the ages had produced an amalgam of rich textile influences. The interaction of different groups of people such as invaders, indigenous tribes, traders and explorers had built a complex culture well-known for its vivacity, color and raw materials.

The superlative Indian textiles depict a story since centuries with a diverse impact of cultural influences, climatic condition, geographical factors and trade. Their sheer beauty, color and artistry won the hearts of both common people and monarchs across the country with the knowledge and skills passed down from one generation of master craftsmen to the next which will persist for a long time to come. A significant part of the wide range of Indian textiles produced seems to derive their distinctiveness from the local contours of their physical surroundings. Yet, the local environment made for divergences, emphasized the basic unity of the people. Thus, the physical element reflected the richness of diversity and the emotional, signified the wealth of likeness.

Antique Indian textiles narrate the history, culture and tradition of the past. They are physical links to the past providing meaning to the present and continuity to the future. Actually they are the physical records of the places, events and especially the people who helped to shape the country. They provide a sentimental or personal attachment to textile history and culture through objects used or seen in daily life as well as indicate cultural and technological advancement. Every stretch of our country has its own design, motif and characteristic fabric that entwines its history. The role and nature of textiles in

any society are both pervasive and diverse, for textiles serve individuals in many ways. Besides the function of protection and decoration to the body, textiles were an indicator of wearer's status and identity in terms of caste, community and regions. Certain textiles used for specific rituals were the finest creations of the craftsmen. "The unremarkable sensitivity of the weaver rooted in custom and ritual had its origin in religious fervor creating a relationship between him and the cloth he wove," as supported by Radhakrishna (2004). Fabrics were also believed to have magical and mystical power and the families preserved the most exquisite ones for generations as heirlooms.

An heirloom cloth although at times old, tattered or faded, is never considered a rag as stated by Kathleen, (2005), in the article, "Textiles with Attitude." Over years immense wealth of textile artifacts has been accumulated in spite of being amongst the world's most fragile, vulnerable and sensitive items of acquisition. It is unfortunate that despite of the large production of a varied range of textiles over the centuries by civilizations renowned for the excellence of their textiles, only a minuscule fraction of fabric samples have survived the degradation of time due to their fragility. However, the survival of any ancient textile against the ravages of climate, light, insects, microorganisms, improper storage and general human wear and tear is mere a matter of miracle. These agents are the forces that act upon objects causing physical, chemical and biological deterioration. Degradation is a major concern for historic textiles that causes dimensional changes leading to visible damage which is cumulative and irreversible.

The Canadian Conservation Institute has defined the agents of deterioration as:

Incorrect temperature that can be too high causing gradual disintegration or discoloration of organic materials; too low causing embitterment, which results in fractures of paints and delaminating brittle and solid materials.

Incorrect relative humidity that can be damp (over 65% R.H), causing mold and corrosion, above or below a critical value, hydrating or dehydrating some minerals and corroding metals that contain salts

Direct physical forces such as shock, vibration and abrasion that can break, distort, puncture, dent and scratch all types of objects.

Thieves, vandals or careless individuals who misplace objects.

Fire that destroys, scorches or deposits smoke on all types of objects.

Water that causes efflorescence in porous materials, swells organic materials, corrodes metals, delaminates or buckles layered component and loosens joined components.

Pests such as insects that consume, perforate, cut, graze, tunnel and excrete which destroys, weakens or disfigures or etches organic materials.

Contaminants that disintegrate discolor or corrode all types of objects especially reactive and porous materials.

Radiation including both ultraviolet radiation and visible light that disintegrates, fades, darkens or yellows the outer layer of organic materials and some inorganic materials. (51)

We treasure our textile heritage since they document art, craftsmanship and a way of life that no longer exists. We have a hoary tradition of textiles in India from Lucknow's Chikan to Bengal's Kantha, from Punjab's Phulkari to Kashmir's Pashmina, but somehow the awareness about conservation and restoration of textiles is lesser than it is for painting as quoted by Agarwal (2010), Director General of ICCI in an article on "The Infancy of Art Restoration in India." Hence to save our heritage, our past for our future, preservation and conservation is a must.

Conservation aims to reduce damage and loss of our cultural heritage. It protects the precious objects from the climate and slows down physical and chemical deterioration which is a continuous and natural process. The result of such degradation are manifested in loss of tensile strength, loss of surface texture, the fading of dyes and yellowing of white fabric. It can, however, be slowed; indeed, science has suggested ways in which the natural lifespan of these objects can be extended. Conservators use 'minimal intervention' methods, aiming to stabilise the object (chemically and physically) and keep its original material. They meticulously document the textiles, its condition and treatment in reports and photographs. The information is useful for the object's long-term preservation and conservation. When treating an object, a conservator respects its integrity, working with materials that age well and, if possible, using reversible techniques. (36)

Conservation is usually understood as a bi-partite action that includes preventive conservation and curative conservation. Preventive conservation aims to minimize deterioration and damage to works of art, therefore avoiding the need for invasive conservation treatment and ensuring works of art are protected for now and the future. The methods are based on the concept that deterioration and

damage to works of art can be substantially reduced by controlling some of the major causes like maintaining stable temperature and relative humidity levels, managing light exposure, controlling pests, disaster preparedness and protecting works of art from other physical or chemical damage. Curative conservation means active intervention in the physical state of the object by wet cleaning, consolidation, repair and support. (58)

Digitization is an encompassing approach to preservation. Digital copies play an imperative preservation role as it protects fragile and valuable originals from being handled while presenting their content to a large audience. Hence at a specific point of time, it might be the only record of an original object that deteriorates or is destroyed.

Digitization and documentation holds incredible promise for both collections and researchers through greater access, interaction and preservation of heritage for future generations. Textile documentation provides a written and photographic record of individual pieces and the artists who made them. Textiles with a known history have more value to scholars, families, and museums rather than those with unknown provenance. Collecting all possible information adds to the value and meaning of any individual textile, whether in a museum or family collection. (32)

The textile artifacts are otherwise difficult to access due to time and distance constraints but in present situation, digitization of collections enables easier reference of art items, designs and fusions of intercontinental cultural aspect development. It eases the dissemination of art information to thousands of users at any part of the globe at a particular time. Digitization of traditional textiles offers

the easiest and most user-friendly approach to enrich knowledge on rare material heritage and deploy them on database accessible to large audience. It also aids in prompt access and preservation of collections of yester years for future generations with decrease in handling these surviving frail pieces of textile artifacts as well as sustaining the cultural heritage knowledge of the country.

1.1 PURPOSE OF STUDY

India is a profolic of tradition and culture both in custom, art and craft. It possesses rich, varied and vibrant textiles, the most indicative of all historical artifacts. In ancient times the role of handcrafted textile products was more valuable, personal and a part of everyday life. Textiles personified the social values and customs of their times that included the opulent laces, richly woven fabrics displaying wealth and prestige, symbolic designs on fabrics used for dowries, births and deaths as well as richly hand embroidered and woven textiles for household decoration. Skilled craftsmen hailing from innumerable regions and diverse social and financial circumstances, created textiles that were a valued and indispensable part of their lives. Everything created to serve the daily and ceremonial needs of nearly all individuals, literally from birth to death bearing the impression of the makers' imagination and skill.

The value of the textile artifact lies not only in its creator but in the uniqueness of each and every individual artifact. It documents the style and culture of that particular region and simultaneously embodies in itself small yet unique characteristics that are extended to several generations of people who would have owned, used and personalized the artifact. The textile artifact incessantly

absorbs and gathers information with the passage of time. Possibly no other form of human expression is capable of recounting the past with such depth and intimacy as textiles. Since years ample documentation work has been carried on museum textile heritage but minimal information is available on personal textile collections. Hence, the inquisitiveness in the pertinent field encouraged the investigator to document, preserve and conserve the rare textile patrimony as artistic and educational evidence being a part of the individuals' collection today but may not be tomorrow.

Indian textiles be it woven, embroidered, painted, printed has always been the wealth of an individual, as well as the tradition of our country. Over the years immense wealth of evocative heirloom textiles have been passed down through individuals and families with the conscientiousness to accumulate and nurture. As stated by Singh (2011), Centre coordinator for INTACH Art Conservation Centre, "Textile conservation is a much neglected field of work where there's enough work but we still haven't realize the value of our textiles. Preventive conservation aimed at preservation of textiles is an immediate need. And all can do it at home through maintaining general cleanliness, proper storage and handling of ancient textiles." One of the major objective aims to raise awareness amongst textile possessors regarding preventive conservation of traditional textiles to be practiced at household level.

India's often-severe climate, marked by four months of rain in a year is not ideal for preservation of textiles unless fairly good conditions are met. Degradation is a major problem in historic textiles. The most common factors that are responsible for the deterioration are light, relative humidity, temperature, dirt,

dust, insects, microorganisms and other environmental factors both when the textile is in use or in storage, display or exhibition. These agents are the forces that act upon objects causing chemical, biological and physical damage. It may also include natural calamities like fire, earthquake, flood or man-made calamities like thefts.

Our responsibility for historic textiles is to hold these in stewardship for future generations, maintaining them in the best possible condition and assuring their permanence. Hence these surviving and frail pieces of textiles artifacts should be appropriately conserved.

It has also become a necessity to preserve the wealth of the country due to its rarity and great cultural significance. In absence of the original artifacts, it could be used as a reference material to designers for inspiration, weavers for design development, students, historians and art lovers for further research in their respective fields. Today with the collections on database, virtually unlimited research is possible.

In view of the above the researcher realized the dire need of the hour to address the problem with the following objectives.

1.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1.2.1 To source and document the rare textile artifacts from collections of individuals.

1.2.2 To identify and analyze the damages that lead to deterioration of the textile artifacts.

- 1.2.3 To study the preservation and conservation practices adopted by museums and individuals.
- 1.2.4 To develop a database to disseminate information beyond its geographical borders.
- 1.2.5 To initiate workshops for preventive conservation of textile artifacts at household level.

1.3 DE-LIMITATION

- 1.3.1 The study was de-limited to individuals residing in Gujarat state only.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

- Documentation of rare textile artifacts would serve as a resource material to academicians, researchers, weavers, art lovers, historians, fashion and textile designers interested in the field of traditional textiles.
- Preservation of rich textile heritage of the country would serve as a valuable asset for future generations.