

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Traditional and creative arts and crafts have conjured up the globe since time immemorial. Akin to all the crafts, textiles were originated as a matter of necessity but, they have always served as an evidence to recognize the creator's and wearer's identity. Apart from fabric, cloth or textile's primary efficacy of protection and decoration, it has always been an imperative means of records indicating the cults, communities, culture, region and religion as they are manufactured incorporating autonomous processes, motifs and raw materials inter woven with climatic conditions, societal norms and cultural ethos.

The sub-continent of India has forever relished the rich legacy of textiles. The denizen and migrated people have always put the country on omnipotent emplacement by continuing their crafts with passage of time and technological development. With the amalgamation of various art forms, symbols and imagery, it has never faced any doldrums but widened its scope and projected an image of the Indian way of life.

Textiles, primarily served as a protecting layer for the body, with time had been decorated implying ornamentation techniques which had been derived as a matter of necessity to decorate the fabric. Times immemorial the Indian craftsmen have been creating two types of craft i.e. rural and urban. The craftsmen created articles to suit the economic groups, simple articles for common people's use, and deluxe examples on demand for the privileged and the noble class (37).

Textiles beautification can be done in two ways i.e. structural and on a surface. Embroidery falls under second category and reflects the cultural heritage of a cult.

According to Bhushan (1990) embroidery, the embellishment of cloth with design made by needle and thread is an art that stretches back to antiquity. The word 'embroidery' is a Middle English word derived from the old French word 'broder' meaning edge or border.

Embroidery requires the use of needle, a primary tool either ordinary or of some special type. The origin of an ordinary needle though not of steel, is very ancient being known to Palaeolithic Europeans. It is interesting to note that in Vedic times the needle was considered an important item in the lives of people and it served as a symbol of joining and for strength (16). In the most primitive times needle work was practised to mend and add strength which later on led to ornate, resultant to a beautiful craft of embroidery and when these led to a perception of its ornamental possibilities, the beautiful craft of embroidery was created.

According to Ghurye (1951) in India embroidery must have been known even earlier than the Vedic period (16).

Embroidery technically known as a needle craft occupied a unique place in the warp and weft of the history and civilisation of the country. Embroidery is a manifestation of the aesthetic emotions delivered by applying a little material followed by a plethora of patient labour which determines its intrinsic value while ensuring a niche position amongst the family of crafts.

A survey of the embroidery existing in various regions in India presents the picture of a glamorous past, a vigorous present, and a promising future. It leaves no doubt that

the embroiderer's art has a significant part to play in the cultural, social and economic development of the country. Thus *Coomarswamy* clearly asserted that our civilisation lay in the hands of our craftsmen and it indeed was a tribute to the artisans (16,42).

Embroidery, though being a domestic art, has not only glued the bondages of relationship within the country but also between the countries.

An obvious intent of a craft is self-expression and communication of cultural values. Like any other art or craft embroidery welcomes anyone who is dexterous and zealous to excel. While it demands a set of discipline and covenants to be followed, it also provides a room for the craftsmen to let their creative juices flow. Embroidery is a craft of decorating articles, apparels or fabrics using a needle. Therefore, Bhushan (1990) referred the embroidery as '*painting with needle*'. Embroidery adds elegance and charisma even to mundane ambiances and gives a picturesque effect. It enhances the visual value of artefact and adds texture to the life of a common man. It satiates the vanity to flaunt the richness of interiors and surroundings that are decorated by embroidered articles. It simply adds to the status and dignity of elite while nurturing the poor deft hands.

Embroidery, since ancient times has embellished everything from a small handkerchief or a quilt to the extravagant royal artifact. The craft is directly linked to the external factors such as climate, natural surroundings, flora, fauna, raw material, economic and social life of the people however, they strongly influence the aesthetic sense of the artisans and provide them with an inspiration to bring out creative designs.

The legacy of embroidery extends its roots in different parts of the world especially in India as, the country claims to be the original home of embroidery. The beauty and

iridescence of traditional Indian embroidery was as much achieved by the quality of material used as from the embroiderer's skills. The ornamentation was done on all kinds of ductile material derived from animal sources i.e. leather, silk, wool and from plant sources i.e. cotton and linen that could be pierced with a needle. Thread made of silver, gold, silk, cotton and wool were used along with other decorative material to provide refulgence with simplicity to the surface being decorated.

The Indian embroiderer as an artisan has always showcased his or her best sense of hues and portrayed optimal adornment that has categorized their products as most preferred designs. The impeccable Indian craft has invariably impressed the world around with its graceful expression and style to put itself on the acme of excellence and creativity.

The skill of embroiderer lies in the choice of stitches and the deftness with which they are employed. The stitches are used to form the outline or to fill in the whole surface almost like mosaic. In other pieces they give an impression of being used like brush work in painting. Over the centuries a number of stitches have been evolved to enable the embroiderer to achieve sophisticated results. Most of the stitches are common to the work done in different parts of the world. However, variations of the basic stitches allow distinctive regional characteristics to develop. These depend on the type of ground fabric used, the thickness, colour and quality of the embroidery thread, the aesthetics of the embroiderer or his/her patron and the design favoured, whether geometric or figurative motifs or a combination of both (37). It could be said that local people exclusively drive the style of their craft. Most of the embroidery practised on the Indian sub-continent was done in the north-western region, the river Indus plain and Thar Desert area.

In western region, a thought of embroidery invariably directs one to think of Kutch in Gujarat. The needlework of Gujarat is famous across the globe for its fineness and exactitude where Kutch sets an example. The magnificent grandeur, beauty and distinctiveness of the Kutch embroidery have raised the eyebrows of craft lovers not only in India but across the globe.

Embroidery is Gujarat's quintessential handicraft and many of the artisans are herders, nomads and agriculturists battling for a second income. For the peasant woman of Gujarat, the needle is her pen; her paint brush with which she gives expression to her creativity and reiterates her relationship with religion and nature (15).

Kutch, is one of the richest regions imbued with variety of embroidery. Kutch, a single district is situated in the north-west of Gujarat. It is bounded on the south by the Gulf of Kutch and separated from Pakistan and mainland India by the *Rann of Kutch* on the north and east parts respectively. The adjoining regions touching the boundaries of Kutch have influenced its cultural as well as craft heritage phenomenally. A large number of communities who migrated due to some reasons have settled in various pockets of Kutch. Majority of them continued to practise their craft even after migration in order to maintain and carry forward their cultural heritage; simultaneously fulfilled their economic needs. This enriched Kutch with varied types of crafts and folklore that eventually made Kutch a craft hub of Gujarat. Kutch has not only introduced but defined craft in its true sense for Gujarat and beyond the boundaries of the state. Kutch has presented craft to the world in its divine form – with the language that is inaudible, but enunciate; abstract, but not unclear. It is the reflection of the deep rooted creative forces in material format.

Myriad styles of Kutch embroidery displayed a rich textured map of regions and ethnic groups. Each style a distinct combination of stitches, patterns, and colours, was shaped from historical, socio-economic, and cultural factors (20).

The peasant and tribal women at home, whose imagination and thoughts unspoilt by urbanized ideals, conjure up a world that throbs with life and a spontaneous liveliness unknown in the slick prodigality of the professionals. The vagaries of fashion picked up its own pace, but the peasant and tribal woman at home who carried their unfettered imagination and thoughts unspoilt by urbanized ideals were busy with their own world full of life and creativity. Undeterred by the urbanization, the needle of a peasant woman of Kutch has never been at respite.

During summers, the peasant woman is sighted busy embroidering the trousseau for her young daughter. Each year, during days that permit some leisure, the mother incessantly goes on with her needle. The little girl since her childhood imbibes the skills of the craft from her mother. The girl is trained to embroider lines, circles and flowers, stitch by stitch and gradually she delicately embroiders garments that are ready for her trousseau. The trousseau expressed the love of her mother and flaunted her own skills that earn respect and warmth of her in-laws.

Embroidery; beyond practical wealth, is a blatant expression of culture. What is merely a piece of art, decoration or status for others is a medium to communicate self and status. Embroideries, for artisans, link hearts and create bonds within society. Embroideries introduce a girl's identity to her in-laws. Ritually exchanged embroideries build relations and revive the existing. Different styles of embroidery demarcate various communities, sub-communities and social status within the community.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Society is ever changing, a process driven by various factors such as social, economic, political and migratory. When such changes occur, new ideas emerge, fresh trade contacts are established, and new tastes develop. A remake is imperative in order to accustom to these changes. Records of historians, accounts of travellers and contemporary literature enunciate this upheaval, and it is interesting to find that the embroiderer's art supplements this narration through their craftsmanship as a visual representation of man's adaptability to changes around him (37). In view of the above, researcher planned to re-assess the embroideries of Kutch as the entire process of revolution may affect traditional embroideries of Kutch that are susceptible to change with regards to motifs, material, products etc. Documentation is considered as one of the very old and authentic method to preserve the crucial records. Therefore, documentation on Kutch embroideries was agenzized to preserve the rich heritage in terms of traditional as well as existing motifs, stitches, raw material, techniques and modus-operandi for types of embroidery.

There is a huge scope available for the community of artisans to make their presence felt both nationally and internationally, obstructed by improper communication channels. Artisans are striving hard to approach the emerging markets. Various organisations are also making their efforts to serve the artisans for the upliftment of Kutch embroidery. The investigator felt the need to study in detail the socio-economic condition of the adept community in context to the potential global environment. This may provide a launch pad for the busy hands to flourish. The problem is studied in light of the following objectives:

1.2 Objectives:

Major Objectives:

1. To study the origin and history of Kutch embroideries.
2. To study the prevailing status of various types of Kutch Embroideries
3. To study the socio-economic status of the artisans of Kutch Embroideries.

Specific Objectives:

1. To study the origin and history of various Kutch embroideries.
2. To document various determinants of traditional and existing embroideries of Kutch regarding motifs, stitches, materials, colour combinations, techniques and products made.
3. To record the socio- economic status of the artisans of traditional and existing embroideries of Kutch region.
4. To explore the role of Government and Non -Government Organisations in promotion of traditional and existing embroideries of Kutch and its artisans.
5. To understand the market of traditional and existing embroideries of Kutch and various marketing practises prevalent.

1.3 Significance of the study

- The primary objective of the study is to document the types of embroideries as a form of craft with a view to preserve the intellectual capital as well as the rich artistic heritage of Kutch region of Gujarat.
- The research would provide an insight to the forms of craft and provide information pertaining to traditional as well as existing motifs, stitches, threads, fabrics, placement, colour combinations etc. and unveil cultural and

social rationale of the craft; which will provide an inspirational thrust to the neophytes, professional experts such as design magnate and academicians as well as craft appreciators.

- The study would reveal the present socio-economic conditions and hurdles encountered by the artisans which could be considered during policy formation.