



REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE DEITIES IN MATA-NE-PACHHEDI AND CONTEMPORARY CHANGES IN CRAFT

Dr. Pragya Pathak

PID, Dept. of Fashion Design
Parul University, Vadodara, Gujarat

Abstract: This paper aims to introduce the representation of female deities in folk textiles of Gujarat, namely the Mata-ne-pachhedi. Several sorts of goddesses, including the concept of *Saptmatrikas*, are usually depicted in this ceremonial textile, made and used by the *Vaghari*, a nomadic community in Ahmedabad. The paper gives a wholistic introduction to these female folk deities, worshipped by the community. The tradition is said to be centuries old but has survived tremendously over the years. Even today, it is frequently made by the community with some sort of significant change. In addition, this ritualist textile is called *dye-painted and printed fabrics*, technically because of the use of mordants and vegetable dyes. Earlier sources indicate the complete hand-drawn and block-printed methods of making, but in a later phase, Mata-ne-pachhedi has prevailed in screen printing and other newly introduced making methods. A new grammar of designs and motifs, themes, and depictions have been introduced in these years. Paper focuses on all these aspects of this textile, specifically contemporary changes in pictorial compositions due to screen printing application on it.

Key Words: Mata-ne-pachhedi, Folk female deities, *Saptmatrikas*, *dye-painted and printed fabrics*, Mordants and vegetable dyes

Introduction: The roots of the concept of Mother-Goddess, or *Mata Ji*, extend to the distant past of human civilization as an important tradition of worship. From a Jungian point of view, the Goddess is an archetypal image at work within the human psyche and finds expression in ritual, mythology, art, and also in dreams (Jung, 1959, 9).¹ Mother Goddess worship in India is considered to be the most ancient, possibly even older than the Aryan sect coming from the north. In the Indus Valley Civilization, Mohen-jo-Daro and Harappan bronze & terracotta idols are available in abundance, show the antiquity of the tradition.² The practise of Mother Goddess worship among the lower castes in India even today reflects their firm belief in ancient religious concepts and beliefs. Mata-ne-Pachhedi, a rich folk-textile found in region of Gujrat (Western India) is the beautiful showcase of this tradition in India. It is indeed, an integral part of Ritualistic-Performance played by Waghari, a nomadic community of Gujarat.³ The roots of the custom prevalently can be found in *Shruti-Prampara* or Story-telling tradition in local region. Apart from Mata-ne-Pachhedi, tradition of making Mother Goddess backdrops can be found many other regions across the country. Unlike the different types of dyeing and printing that take place in Gujarat, Mata-ne-Pachhedi is manufactured using a variety of techniques, mainly using various techniques such as free-hand drawing (drawing and painting), Block printing and dyeing on the cloth. It is used known by various names, such as Mata-neChandarvo, Mata-ne- Dhoti or The Backdrop for Goddess etc.⁴ These compositions are based on folk-tales related to Goddess.⁵ Conductors of this craft, Waghri live near the Central Post Office in Ahmedabad and manufactures Pachhedi here.⁶ Apart from the Waghri, some other lower castes also use these fabrics, mainly scavengers, cobblers, or people who work as farm labourers.⁷ At present, apart from Waghari tribe, Bharwad, Koli, Rawal, and Rabari are also manufacturing these clothes on a large scale in Kheda (Aghar, Madhya Pradesh) and Dholka areas of Gujarat.⁸ Tradition is said to be about 200 to 500 years old.⁹

History and Beliefs: According to the statement, the lower castes were not allowed to enter the temple, so they started building temporary temple-shrines out of cloth for the purpose of worship-prayer and religious rituals.¹⁰ Apart from making temporary shrines, these clothes were used for various purposes. It is brought in the form of a pediment and sometimes in the form of a canopy to adorn the lower parts of the roof. Additionally, it is used as a Dhoti worn by the Mother Goddess, as well as the sacred thong worn by the priest on the shoulder during rituals, these priests are called Bhavao or Shaman, which is an essential part of any ritual. If somebody from the community gets afflicted by some incurable disease or becomes a victim of some terrible calamity, he, along with his entire family, takes a vow before the Goddess, and after achieving the desirable things, he pleases the Goddess by offering sacrifices. Rituals are usually performed in front of the temple. These temples might be both permanent and temporary. On a side of the temple, huge awnings are fixed with the help of four logs. On these awnings, the Kulgotra Mata sits on her Peacock Throne with various acolytes and devotees.¹¹

Depiction of the Goddesses: Although many forms of the deities are worshipped in Gujarat as a theme of Mata-ni-Pachhedi, the most prominent choice is the *Saptamatrika Goddesses*, who carry various weapons and vehicles. Each sub-caste has a specific deity or a specific form of the goddess (Kula or Gotra Devi) that is worshipped as per the requirement. Saptamatrikas have various names and forms, mainly the names of goddesses are listed below in *Table-1*;¹²

Table-1: Depiction of Goddesses with forms and features

S.N.	Name of Goddess	Weapons & Props	Vehicle	Arms
1.	Khodiyal (Chief)	Sword, Trident, Axe, and in a blessing posture	Crocodile	Two or Four
2.	Vihat or Visota (Picture-1)	Dandashtra and Kauri (Pot full of blood)	Panda or Buffalo	Two or Four or Several
3.	Melidi or Medili	Dandastra, Sword, Kauri and Bottle full of liquor	Goat	Four
4.	Dasma or Momai	Sword, Broom, Bottle, Kauri and Dandastra	Camel	Ten
5.	Boucher or Bahuchera	Trident, Sword, Kauri and Shield	Rooster	Two or Four
6.	Gail	Trident, Sword, Kauri and Broom	Geta or Sheep	Four
7.	Varuchi (Picture-2)	Trident, Sword, Kauri and Broom	Throne	Four
8.	Hadaksha or Hadkoi	Trident, Sword, Kauri and Broom	Dog	Four
9.	Cheer	Trident, Sword, Kauri and Broom	Peacock	Four
10.	Vahanvati	Trident, Sword, Kauri and Broom	Boat	Four
11.	Jogini or Phool Jogini	Headless	Lotus flower	Four
12.	Saitroji	Spear	Rabbit	Two
13.	Nageshwari	Spear	Snake	Two
14.	Hooker	Sward, Spear, Kauri, and Bottle	Boar	Four
15.	Chandi-Chamunda	Several hands with weapons	Lion	Four
16.	Shakti	Trident, Sword, Kauri	Elephant	Four
17.	Amba	Trident, Sword, Kauri and Shield	Lion	Four
18.	Brahmani	Sword, Broom, Bottle, Kauri and Dandastra	Swan	Four
19.	Gayatri	Sward, Spear, Kauri, and Bottle	Cow	Four

20.	Sheetla	Brooms and Bottles	Donkey	Two
-----	---------	--------------------	--------	-----

Apart from this, there are several numbers of versatile forms of Goddesses e.g., Mahalsa, Sikotar, Bhagwati Randal, Hinglaj, Minawada and Santoshi etc, to be believed to possess different powers. In times of emergency and accidents, the selected form is worshipped. For example, if there is a severe head injury during an accident or there is bleeding from the nostrils, Goddess Jogini is worshipped. The goddess Hadkoi is worshipped after suffering from a dreaded disease called rabies, which is caused by a dog bite.¹³ From time immemorial, along with her home residence, she also protects the sense of freedom.¹⁴

Pachhedi in rituals: Usually we find about ten small temples in a community of thirty houses. is constructed, in which different pachhedi are installed.¹⁵ A Vedika-like place is made in the centre of each temporary Pachhedi temple. Inside the temple, small wooden sculptures on the altar are reminiscent of the ancient mother-goddess worldwide. Sacred silver ornaments are also hung on this altar. When the shell is presented right in front of the altar, it is universally called the Kauri-Pot, a symbol of production and reproduction.¹⁶ They worship the goddess with long horns, drums, and various kinds of sounds. The main door of the temple is usually closed only when a sacred object is kept inside.¹⁷ During the evening vela, when the process of worship begins, people gather around the sacred fire in front of the temple. People sit there for several hours, accompanied by the beats of the Bhuvo, or Shaman drums, and the sound of the horns. As soon as he enters the subconscious state, his body vibrates with rapid and irregular movements, rhythmically settles and becomes calm. During this some people start dancing with sword and kauri (blood vessel), symbolizing mother, until they fall to the ground. The priests on whom the mother appears, they sit and mumble something slowly. It would have been a kind of prophecy that the mother wanted to convey through that person to the community. Bhuvo literally means one who speaks the truth.¹⁹ The sacrificial donation is made at midnight. Pachedis also have an important place during processions in Navratri or special sponsored rituals.²⁰ This procession is guided by the deities themselves.²¹

The pictorial presentation: In the central part of the cloth, the *Kulgotra Devi* or any of the Saptmatrika Devis are depicted, holding various weapons in the form of a hexagon.²² The colour blue is considered a symbol of femininity and motherhood. The goddess is depicted in the boat as the destroyer of the universe, which is shown floating in the ocean of blood. She is also shown wearing milk and rice, which is considered the best food to feed the babies as a symbol of motherhood. The vehicle is selected according to the nature of the mother, in the form of a goat or a buffalo standing in water. In the stories, the story of a demon named Mahishasura is very popular in Pachhedi notation. Local versions of many popular mythological tales, such as the tales of demon-slaying, the salvation of devotees and granting them boons, or sometimes events related to daily life, are also depicted in these clothes.²³

In animals and birds, mainly peacocks, roosters, hawks, lions, elephants, deer, horses, wild boar, reindeer, goats, bulls, etc., are marked. In aquatic animals, fish, turtles, snakes, snails, crocodiles, alligators, oysters, etc. are marked. Apart from this, women holding flowers, various types of fringes, pylons, flags, chandeliers, trumpets, yakshas, eunuchs, Gandharvas, angels, winged nymphs, gods etc. The geometrical bays are divided by flared and ornate edges. These shores are sometimes single-stranded, sometimes made by continuous adjustment of several threads of different designs; they are called Lasapatti. After the Lasapatti, the edges with ornate designs are made with illustrations. In addition to the background, an adjustment of maroon and black colours is traditionally seen in these fabrics. The black colour is mainly used to make the contours of the figures.²⁴ Colours that are used in these paintings have some characteristic connotation or are inspired by some superstition.²⁵ For example, the colour maroon symbolises Mother Earth, which is considered a symbol of sustenance, as well as the blood symbolising life, which is also a symbol of the maternal power filled with vitality. It represents the combination of Shakti and Prakriti of the Goddess, who is the protector of the weak and the destroyer of the wicked. The colour black is considered a symbol of protection from evil spirits and spiritual energy. The colour white symbolises purity and contact with spiritual powers and deities.²⁶ In addition to these main colors, there are many such colors, which over time began to be used in these clothes without any religious symbolic expression. The discovery of many chemical dyes in modern times invited artists to experiment, and the abundance of colours gave these fabrics a dimension beyond the traditional form.²⁷

Findings and discussion on contemporary changes in craft: According to the survey received so far, at present most of the settlements of Waghri at the central post office are ruined and shifted in to the multiplexes, malls and big shops. As before, there are no rows of trails on either side of the road. At some places, only a few sticks will be seen hanging. After talking to local artists, it comes to know that today hardly 5 to 7 families are

doing this work around Mirzapur GPO or Central Post Office. They are often from the same lineage but as a nuclear family. Their financial condition is not good, neither do they have any concrete houses nor do they have any concern regarding governmental policies. They are moderately educated, but their second or third generation is moving towards higher education. The marking of the tails is usually done at the time of Nauratra or Chaitra. In the remaining months of the year, they make a living by doing a separate business. Like male artists working as auto rickshaw drivers. Those who are good in financial condition are opening their own printing factories, where Mata-ne-Pachedi is being printed with screen printing technology. These artisans are also printing other fabrics through screen medium. Some people have separately started wholesale of Algerine dye because it is frequently used for plastic products' coloring. Women work as a maid or watchmen in the houses. Some women have set up small shops.²⁸

Technical changes: Screen-printing, locally known as *Farma ka kaam* has been prevalently used for pachhedi making nowadays. The cost of printed pachhedi (near about 4.5 m long and 1.5m) comes to Rs.500 but normally can be sold up to Rs.2000. It can usually range from 300 to 3000 Rs. according to the size. Apart from the Waghari community, people from other communities are also adopting pharma work as a business. Hand work is now made on special orders only because of heavy cost price. A hand framed pachhedi of about 1 fit square is available up to Rs. 2000. The slightly larger clothing segments are directly priced at 7000 to 10000 Rs. or more. Some of the works are merely created for fairs or exhibitions. At present, screen work is going on at a fast pace around Vasna, Khanpur, Palampur, Manik Chowk and Baram bus stations in Ahmedabad. The irreversible thing is that even today the Devi worship community is making them according to their religious importance. Apart from Chaitra and Nauratra, sheets are being made even today for special Jatra (vow). Even today, these clothes cannot be called mata-ni-pachedi without being offered on the temple. However, even after screen printing, they are washed at Sabarmati or in a nearby dam. Jatra is still celebrated with the same gaiety among the worshipers as it was decades ago. Sometimes only the outer drawings are done through screen and these are filled in by fabric colours. Sometimes marking is done entirely through pigment colour. Instead of the traditional pen sometimes, raw drawing is done with a pencil, then the fabric color is added inside by making black outlines with the waterproof pen. To make large garments by hand, drawings are made by sharpening old pencils or sticks, dipped in jaggery or in black fabric paint.²⁹

Compositional changes in recent years: The background of the Pachhedi is still unchanged. The center part is mainly focused on the representation of Mother-Goddess and respective narratives all around. There is not much difference in the forms and figures due to the excess of screen work. Pieces look almost similar. Panels around the main figure, will be found the same in all the pachhedis. At present, 40 to 42 different plates are running for screen acting as the main theme, depicting different forms of the mother. Instead of originality in these figures, the impression of replica is clearly visible. Traditional figures have been replaced by popular figures e.g., Gayatri Mata, Brahmani Mata, Santoshi Mata etc. These figures are the influence of newly developed social consciousness. Frontal faces are become popular (*Picture-3, 4*). This is probably done in an effort to innovate to take into account the limitations of screen printing. The impression of Mughal art is also seen in some hand drawn drawings. The representations of mythical animals are visible in sufficient quantity at this time. Substantial changes are also visible in the themes. Other stories related to Rama and Krishna are being represented. It depends on the demand of the customer. Silver painted or Navrangi Pachedi are also being made according to the demand of the customer. Overall, these sorts of changes are happening due to the deteriorating economic condition of the artisan day by day. It is also because of the rapidly changing nature of the market. In the era of back breaking inflation, it is not possible that traditional artists can feed themselves and their families just by making these sheets. This is the reason that most of the families either left their ancestral business and migrated or the artists who are still working have taken it as mere seasonal work. Shortcut methods, such as screen and fabric color, are adversely affecting the quality and originality of these garments in a situation where these artists are spending their time in other occupations. Even the artists who are working today, ten years from now, they are considering them as endangered. Even today, they are giving more importance to government and permanent jobs and want to take the next generation also in this direction.³⁰

References:

1. Lagana, Louis (2009). *The Re-Emergence of Great Mother Goddess*. International Journal of Arts and Sciences. (pp.2-4) Gottenheim, Germany: Research Gate https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330831705_The_Reemergence_of_the_Great_Mother_Goddess
2. Vaishy, Reeta Pratap. (2016). *Bharteey Chitrkala evam Moortikala ka Itihas*. Jaipur: Hindi Granth Akadmi. pp.441-50
3. Fisher, E., Jain, Jyotindra., Shah, Hkku. (1979). *Mata-no-Chandarvo. Homage to Kalamkari*. Mumbai: Marg Publication. pp.74
4. Edwards, Eiluned. (2011). *Textiles and Dresses of Gujarat*. Ahmedabad: Mapin Publication/V&A Publishing. pp.137
5. Ranjan, Aditi., Ranjan, M.P. (2009) *Handmade in India: A Geographical Encyclopaedia of Indian Handicrafts*. New Yark & London: Abbeville Press. p.425
6. Eriksan, J. (1968). *Mata-ne-pachhedi; A Book on the Temple Cloth of the Mother Goddess*. Ahmedabad: National Institute of Design Publication. pp.12-14
7. Fisher, E. Jain, Jyotindra. Shah, Hkku. (1979). *Mata-no-Chandarvo. Homage to Kalamkari*. Mumbai: Marg Publication. pp.74
8. Ibid, pp.75
9. Ranjan, Aditi., Ranjan, M.P. (2009). *Handmade of India*. New Yark & London: Abbeville Press. p.426
10. Ibid
11. Ramani, Shakuntala. (2007). *Kalamkari and Traditional Design Heritage of India*. New Delhi: Wisdom Tree Publication. p.34
12. Datta, Amita. (2011). *Mata-ne-Pachhedi of Gujarat: Vegetable dyes and its application on Textiles (Book of Abstract, National workshop and Seminar on Vegetable dye and its application on textiles)*. Department of Shilpsadan, Vishvabharati, Shanti Niketan (pp.30). Birbhum: Shilpsadan, Vishvabharati, Shanti Niketan
13. Eriksan, J. (1968). *Mata-ne-pachhedi; A Book on the Temple Cloth of the Mother Goddess*. Ahmedabad: National Institute of Design Publication. p.73
14. Ibid. p.52 15. Ibid. p.54
16. Ibid. p.55
17. Fisher, E., Jain, Jyotindra., Shah, Hkku. (1979). *Mata-no-Chandarvo. Homage to Kalamkari*. Mumbai: Marg Publication. pp.73-74
18. Eriksan, J. (1968). *Mata-ne-pachhedi; A Book on the Temple Cloth of the Mother Goddess*. Ahmedabad: National Institute of Design Publication. p.58
19. Ibid. p.59
20. Ibid. pp.59-63
21. Ibid. pp.67-74
22. Fisher, E., Jain, Jyotindra., Shah, Hkku. (1979). *Mata-no-Chandarvo. Homage to Kalamkari*. Mumbai: Marg Publication. p.74
23. Datta, Amita. (2011). *Mata-ne-Pachhedi of Gujarat: Vegetable dyes and its application on Textiles (Book of Abstract, National workshop and Seminar on Vegetable dye and its application on textiles)*. Department of Shilpsadan, Vishvabharati, Shanti Niketan (pp.30). Birbhum: Shilpsadan, Vishvabharati, Shanti Niketan
24. <http://WWW.craftofgujarat.com>
25. Ramani, Shakuntala. (2007). *Kalamkari and Traditional Design Heritage of India*. New Delhi: Wisdom Tree Publication. p.33
26. <http://WWW.craftofgujarat.com>
27. Eriksan, J. (1968). *Mata-ne-pachhedi; A Book on the Temple Cloth of the Mother Goddess*. Ahmedabad: National Institute of Design Publication. p.28 28. Respondent's Interview
29. Ibid
30. Ibid

Picture plate description

1. Vihat *or* Visota (Hand drawn)
2. Varuchi (Hand drawn)
3. Khodiyal (Screen printed feature)
4. Hadaksha (Screen printed feature)



1. Vihat *or* Visota (Hand drawn)



2. Varuchi (Hand drawn)



3. Khodiyal (Screen printed feature)



4. Hadaksha (Screen printed feature)