



A Study of Kachchhi Handicrafts of Gujarat – Bharat (India)

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Abstract:

In this research, various handicraft items are prepared by the men and women of Kutch, a region in Gujarat, India. These unique and attractive handicrafts are exclusive to Kutch and are renowned worldwide. The men and women create these diverse items while residing in their homeland. This research provides detailed information about each item. These handicrafts can be purchased directly from the place of their origin or through various global online shopping websites.

Key words: Handy Craft, block-printing, Bandhni tie and dye, kachchhi work

Introduction:

Kachchh is one of India’s largest districts. Surrounded by the Arabian Sea and the salt-encrusted desert wilderness of the Rann of Kachchh, this district is the last frontier of many crafts and traditions that have changed little over the centuries. Best described as a ‘cradle of craftsmanship,’ Kachchh is the land of weaving, block-printing, Bandhani tie and dye, Rogan painting, and various styles of embroidery, pottery, woodcarving, metal crafts, shell work, and other handicrafts.

The district also has a long history, dating from the Harappan civilization that thrived in cities like Dholavira in the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC, to the Jadeja/Rajput rulers who reigned from the 1540s until the merger of states in the 1940s. These rulers endowed their princely state with forts, palaces, temples, and other monuments of historic and religious importance.

For those interested in natural history, Kachchh is the habitat of endangered and interesting wildlife species like the Indian wild ass. This district is widely reputed as a paradise for birdwatchers. Besides the reservoirs in

the state that are important habitats for water and waterside birds, and flyways for migrating birds, Kachchh is also the breeding ground for critically endangered birds like the Indian bustard and the lesser florican.

Kachchh is a haven for numerous handicrafts, which are passed down from generation to generation. The traditional basis of its prosperity has been its foreign trade in various handicrafts. The artifacts of Kachchh have moved not only throughout the country but also into overseas markets. The main handicrafts of the district include embroidery of ethnic style, patchwork, terracotta, pen knives, and nutcrackers.

Objectives Of the Study: A Study of Kachchhi Handicrafts

Hypothesis Of the Study: A Study the knowledge about Kachchhi crafts

Material & Method:

A Study has been Conducted in with **Kachchhi** area and Inherited by the bequest of craft making the Kachchhi people weave their dreams in different forms of embroidery. Kachchh is world renowned for its mirrored embroideries. Most of these were traditionally stitched by village women, for themselves and their families, to create festivity, honour deities, or generate wealth. Embroideries contributed to the substantial economic exchange required for marriage and fulfilled other social obligations which required gifts. Be it, thread work or leather; every village has a different and a unique style of making hand embroidery.

Handicraft products :

These are products that are either completely made by hand or produced using simple tools. The manual labour of the artisan plays the central role in the production of handicrafts. Handicrafts could serve different purposes and significance- aesthetic, cultural, functional decorative, decorative, religious and above all livelihoods.

Producing handicrafts requires great skill and precision. The knowledge and trade of making these beautiful products are often handed down from generation to generation. Materials range from cloth, wood, clay, metal, bones of animals and gems to leather, bamboo, marble, and coconut shells.

That *Kanjivaram* silk saree that is your mother's favourite, that *Kolhapuri* chappal your friend recently bought, that ornate *Pattachitra* adorning the drawing-room of that Odia neighbour next door are all handicrafts.

Crafts of Kachchh

Below are the different crafts of Kachchh:

Ajrakh Blockprint	Bandhani	Batik Print
Camel wool Weaving	Embroidery	Kachchh Weaving
Kharad Weaving	Knife Work	Lacquered Wood
Mashru Weaving	Metal Bells	Namda
Recycled Plastic Weaving	Rogan Painting	Silversmithy

The rich and diverse creative traditions of Kachchh live at the intersection of cultures and communities. Once a destination by land and sea for people from Africa, the Middle East, and the Swat Valley, Kachchh has a rich tradition of sea trade from Mandvi and a global connection. A river system was shared between Kachchh, Sindh and Rajasthan. As a border state, Kachchh is constantly absorbing cultures from the north, west, and east. Kachchhi motifs can be traced to the ancient Harappan civilization, yet craft is developing and growing with the innovative and entrepreneurial drive of spirited artists.

The arid climate has pushed communities here to evolve an ingenious balance of meeting their needs by converting resources into products for daily living. While embroidery has become a craft synonymous with Kachchh, other textile crafts and hard materials crafts give this land colour and identity. Craft is inextricable from the numerous communities, connected by trade, agriculture, and pastoralism in Kachchh.



Brief on different crafts

Ajarakh Blockprint

Legend says that Ajrakh printers were descendants of Rama's sons Lava and Kusha. They came to Kachchh from Sindh around 400 years ago. Rao Bharmalji (5), the ruler of Kachchh(1586-1631), invited the craftsmen to Kachchh to meet the growing needs of the people and the royal court.

Technique Of Ajrakh Block Printing: Resist Dyeing and Block Carving Techniques: Ajrakh printing involves resist dyeing and block carving on natural fabrics. The fabric is prepared, blocked, and dyed with traditional colours. The paste is removed, and the fabric is immersed in different dye baths for more intricate designs.

Camel Wool Weaving

Though primarily used for milk and transportation, camels produce high quality wool that is very warm, water-resistant, and highly durable. It can be used to make textiles, carpets, and ropes. Moreover, there is a great demand for its natural colours. This wool has traditionally seen minimal use by pastoralists and is a promising avenue by which they may earn additional income.

Kharad Weaving

The natural resources required for Kharad Craft are wool and vegetable colours. Kachchh had a robust tradition of cattle farming. The pastoral communities maintained large herds of camels and livestock like goats, sheep etc. Originally Kharad carpets were made from goat and camel hair wool. The Maldharis and Rabaris (pastoral communities) shear the hair from camels and goats. This was then given to the hand-spinners who are specialized in making wool out of goat and camel hair. This wool was then used by the Kharad artisans. The Kharad artisans produced Kharad (used for spreading on the floor), Khurjani (used to keep on the back of a camel to carry heavy items), Rasa (thick cloth used to cover grains). They used to roam the villages of Banni, Pancham and Sindh for selling their products. The village/town called Mugdan at the Indo-Pak border had regular customers of Kharad and Khurjani. Products such as Khurjani were popular in Sindh where these items sold easily as many people owned camels there. The Kharad adorned many palaces in Sindh and Gujarat. The Kings and the ministers were regular patrons of Kharad given their very distinctive look, strength, and longevity of Kharad. A kharad can easily last up to 100 years.

Mashru Weaving

Mashru Weaving appearing dressed in the finest clothing, weavers mixed silk and cotton threads to create a textile that was simple cotton on one side and rich silk on the other. The meaning of Mashru is “this is allowed.” The port town of Mandvi is at the centre of Mashru legacy in Kachchh, historically creating luxurious bolts of the fabric that Muslims and Hindus enjoyed. In the regions of Saurashtra and Kachchh, women stitch Mashru Kanjari (backless blouses), skirts, and cholis. Mashru helped weave communities together. The Ahir Patels (farmers) produced cotton, which was handspun and then given to the weavers. Rabari and Ahir women did embroidery and mirror work to create even more distinctive versions of Mashru. Mashru was a royal craft, produced in large quantities until the 1900’s for local elite and export markets. Till recently, the Maheshwari weavers practiced the craft. Today, traditional Mashru weaving is on the brink of extinction.

Recycled Plastic Weaving

Plastic takes thousands of years to degrade, preventing soil from being used productively and leaching its way into groundwater. One method of plastic waste disposal that has been common to Kachchh is burning large piles of plastic. Littering is a common problem, and trash in Bhuj rarely makes it to a landfill. Recognizing the issue of waste disposal as a global problem, it is necessary to create new, lasting solutions. Cleaned plastic is cut into long strips by women. The plastic strips of different colours are woven into durable textiles. Nylon is used for the warp, and plastic forms the weft, creating a thick dense material useful for mats, backpacks, or cushions. Weaving is a skill intrinsic to the Kachchh, and the recycled plastic is woven using a technology ancient to Kachchh – the pit loom.

Bandhani

It is a type of tie-dye textile decorated by plucking the cloth with the fingernails into many tiny bindings that form a figurative design. The term bandhani is derived from the Sanskrit verbal root bandh (“to bind, to tie”). Today most Bandhani making centres are situated in Gujarat and Rajasthan. Bandhani is also known as Bandhej, Bandhni, Piliya, and Chungidi in Tamil and regional dialects. Other tying techniques include Mothra, Ekdali and Shikari depending on the way the cloth is tied. The final products are known with various names including Khombi, Ghar Chola, Patori and Chandrokhani.

Bandhani has long been culturally important to Kachchhi communities. The most revered type of bandhani is the gharcholu, which is the traditional wedding odhani of Gujarati Hindu and Jain brides. The chandrokhani is worn by Muslim brides.

Embroidery

It is one of the most distinctive and easily identifiable craft styles of India. Kachchh work or Kachchhi embroidery derives its name from the source of its origin – the Kachchh region of Gujarat. It is characterised by its use of bright colours, mirrors and beads and intricate and extensive embroidery that embellishes the entire fabric on which it is based.

Usually crafted on cotton or silk fabric, Kachchh work embroidery is done with silk or woollen thread using fine stitches to create detailed and elaborate patterns. Motifs and designs draw inspiration from romantic, architectural, and human motifs, as well as Persian and Mughal art. The colours used are mainly green, indigo, deep red, black, yellow, and ivory. The embroidery is further embellished with its use of mirrors, shells, and beads, which are placed strategically in between or around the patterns. Mirrors or *abhla* are an inherent part of many embroidery styles in Kachchh, making the fabrics glisten and shine. The mirrors are believed to represent water – as its importance in such a dry region cannot be denied. It is also believed to be useful in warding off the evil eye.

Knife Work

Six generations of metal knife makers have sustained this Kachchh craft in Nani Reha and Mota Reha villages. There are two types of knife-making tradition in Kachchh. The chari has a steel or iron blade known as a fur and a handle made from wood, plastic, or brass. The chappu is composed of the same parts with an added spring that allows it to fold. Some artisans specialize in crafting the blade, some in casting the handles, and others in polishing the final product. In this system, each knife is the result of many artisans’ collaborative work. A collaborative spirit strengthens the sector and together artisans meet the needs of a consistent demand.

Metal Bells

One such craft which originated with cattle rearing is the craft of metal bells, or “Ghantadi”, as known locally in Kachchh, Gujarat (India). The craft is believed to be over a thousand years old, originated in Sindh, (currently in Pakistan). These bells were used to identify cattle. The Lohar community from Sindh, (now in Pakistan) saw the potential for their craft and brought the craft to the land of Kachchh.

Rogan painting

The process of applying this oil-based paint to fabric began among the Muslim Khatris community in Gujarat. Although the name rogan (and some of the traditional designs) suggests an origin in Indian culture, there are no reliable historical records to prove this. Rogan painting was initially practiced in several locations in the Gujarat region. The painted fabric was mostly purchased by women of the lower castes who wanted to decorate clothing for their weddings. It was therefore a seasonal art, with most of the work taking place during the months when most weddings take place. During the rest of the year, the artisans would switch to other forms of work, such as agriculture. With the rise of cheaper and machine-made textiles in the late 20th century, rogan-painted products became relatively more expensive, and many artists turned to other occupations.

Rogan paint is produced by boiling castor oil for about two days and then adding vegetable pigments and a binding agent; the resulting paint is thick and shiny. The cloth that is painted or printed on is usually a dark colour, which makes the intense colours stand out. In rogan printing, the pattern is applied using metal blocks (stylus) with patterns carved into them, whereas in rogan painting, elaborate designs are produced freehand, by trailing thread-like strands of paint off a stylus. Frequently, half of a design is painted, then the cloth is folded in half, transferring a mirror image to the other half of the fabric. The designs include floral motifs, animals, and local folk art.

Batik prints

This were made by dipping a block into hot Pилоo seed oil, which was then pressed onto fabric. After dyeing, the oil paste was peeled off to reveal a print. Over time, wax was adopted in the technical process of Batik printing as a more practical alternative to oil, which had to be pressed from movement and the emergence of chemical dyes, which worked in tandem with wax printing in contrast with vegetable dyes that were unfit for Batik making. Kachchh has long been an established centre for Batik, a wax resist dyeing, and block printing craft also practiced in Indonesia among some other cultures. Most of Batik artisans in Kachchh — if not almost every single one — are Khatris; Kachchhi-speaking Muslims.

Kachchh Weaving

Kachchhi weavers traditionally come from the Marwada and Maheswari communities. The Maheshwari's transitioned into the art of Mashru, while the Marwada style is now well known as Kachchhi weaving. This community is versatile, crafting woven textiles, leather, and woodwork all over Kachchh. The strong community linkages which insulated the weaving trade have ceased to exist. Weaving has taken on a drastically new shape in the modern marketplace. Weavers have become dependent on markets outside of Kachchh for raw materials acquisition and sales. The hub for weavers and traders to procure raw material is Ludhiana, where most weavers get their acrylic yarn. Departing from traditional raw materials, weavers now use silks, rayons, and acrylic yarn in their textiles.

Lacquered Wood

Lac, a material taken from insect resin, has been used in Indian craft for centuries. Coloured lacquer is applied to wood by heat through turning with a hand lathe. In the process, the artisan manoeuvres the lacquered colours to create patterns by hand in kaleidoscopic designs. This form of lacquered patterning is found only in Kachchh. The Vadhas are a nomadic community that moved throughout Kachchh through

villages like Nirona and Jura. They collected natural stones and colours from forests, created lacquer goods, and bartered them with the Maldhari community, who they had close ties with.

Namda

In the 11th century, during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, a man named Nubi innovatively created a felted covering for the king's ill horse. Ever since, people have been making felted cloth from the wool of sheep. The craft is primarily practiced by the Pinjara and Mansuri communities, Sama Muslims native to Kachchh. Namda is a craft made for all types of climates. There are Namda artisans throughout India, working in Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Rajasthan. In Kachchh, the Pinjara and Mansuri communities create felted Namda from indigenous sheep wool. After the wool is collected, cleaned, dyed, and compressed into sheets, artisans create colourful and intricate designs which are often embroidered. Namda is still used to create saddle blankets for horses and camels in local nomadic communities. Prayer mats for Muslims also can be found felted from the coarse, earthy fabric.

Only four Namda practitioners remain in Kachchh today. The Namda artisans Khamir supports are based in Gagodar and Mundra. The market for namda craft is located primarily in Saurashtra where Darbars, Patels, and Marvadis buy products regularly for their horses.

Silversmithy

Traditional silver tribal jewellery remains an integral part of village dress. Each silversmith specializes in a particular tribal jewellery tradition, creating an array of products from bangles to earrings to anklets. The jewellers and the communities where they work have strong relationships since they have lived and worked together for generations. During the 19th century, Kachchhi silver was made famous by colonialists who featured silverworks in some of the Great Exhibitions in France and England. Kachchh silver is known for its white quality which resists tarnish. Artisans use brightly coloured glass called Meena to accentuate traditional designs.

Conclusion:

This paper provides detailed information about various types of handicraft items that are purchased both domestically and internationally. The creation of these handicrafts by the people of India, especially from the Kutch district of Gujarat, helps bring foreign revenue into the country. This, in turn, aids the artisans of Kutch in achieving economic and social progress while working from their homes. Additionally, the specific handicraft items made are available online, granting Kutch handicrafts a global market. The Government of Gujarat and the Government of India consistently support and encourage these artisans by providing the necessary assistance.

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