

Traditional Embroidery of Western Rajasthan and Emotions of women

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Abstract: *Rajasthan, a colourful state has a rich heritage of vivid types of embroideries and different communities are practicing it in their own style. The women folks of remote villages are unexposed to the modern civilization and are experts in preparing articles of such great aesthetic value. Hence there is a need for traditional embroideries to be popularized. An effort has been made to develop it in to an industrial craft in order to save the everlasting art and reminiscent beauty of the past. This heritage is presently under extinction henceforth, an attempt is made to preserve this cultural heritage of art and craft.*

Keywords: *Barmer, Embroidery, Rajasthan, Documentation.*

I. Introduction

In order to decorate the surface of a fabric number of methods are applicable which includes textured weaving (called self-embellished fabric), hand paintings, fabric manipulation techniques like smocking, shirring, tucks etc. and embroidery. Embroidery method is applicable in two ways with help of hand and machine. In this method various designs are created on fabric while keeping in mind about present trends by using threads and some fancy stuff like pearls, sequins, beads, stones, buttons etc.

What is embroidery?

Embroidery is the traditional art for decorating the surface of fabric by hand or machine with the help of needle, thread and frame/loop. There are variety of threads based on their aesthetic and functional qualities like cotton, silken, twisted and untwisted etc. available in different shades. Embroidery is applicable on number of apparels such as tops, shirts, pants, jackets, caps, belts, skirts, shoes etc. There are number of stitches through which different patterns are created like, chain stitch, running stitch, back stitch, stem stitch, cross stitch, herringbone stitches, buttonhole stitch etc.

Embroidery historic perspective

Embroidery is originated for the purpose of reconstruction of garments in terms of patching, mending, tailoring and reinforcing cloth by hand. It is originated from the 5th -3 rd century BC, some examples of work are found in China. In 300-700 AD, the edges of bands were finished with stitches like back stitch, running stitch, whipped stitch, stem and buttonhole stitch. Slowly and gradually the purpose of embroidery changed from reinforcement to decorative purpose. Later clothing was seen as a sign of wealth and status in society. The 17th -century Turkish traveler Evliya Celebi called it the craft of the two hand [7]. The Medieval was a sign of high social status, hence it had become the important art. Gold and silver threads were used for decorating the surface through embroidery. There were various things like tunics, robes, uniforms, flags, shoes, horse tapping etc. were decorated with embroidery.

What is traditional hand embroidery?

The traditional embroideries refer to the art of decorating the fabric surface from different states of India based on their cultural and traditional values. These are done on a particular fabric and specific stitches are being used with traditional motifs. Some of them are done for a particular occasion by the household women with lots of emotions and love while some are done to depict stories and nature. In India almost every state has a particular type of traditional embroideries with specific names and purpose such as Phulkari from Punjab, Kutch from Gujarat, Chamba Rumal (handkerchief) from Himachal, Kantha from Bengal, Kasuti from Karnataka, Chikankari from Uttar Pradesh, Gota Patti from Rajasthan, Kashida from Kashmir.

The various traditional embroideries are as follow

- **Phulkari**

The Phulkari means “floral craft”. It originated in the late 7th century in Punjab. It is done by mother, grandmother and aunts since the birth of daughter in their family for the purpose of gifting in her wedding as part of their cultural values. Stitches like sateen is most popular with silken threads on khaddar fabric (hand woven) is used for this special craft. There are geometrical motifs and sometimes natural motifs like flower and

leaves are also done all over the fabric. Scarf, shawl or dupattas for daily use are called as “Phulkaris” which are done in simpler way, whereas for special occasion a dress which covers the whole body and fully intricated with jaal (all over) motifs are called “Bhags”.

- **Kutch**

The Kutch embroidery is originated in 16th and 17th century in Kutch district of Gujarat by tribal people who had migrated from Greece, Germany, Iran, Iraq. Stitches used in Kutch embroidery are chain, buttonhole, running and satin stitch done on cotton fabric, whereas motif of birds, flowers, and human figures are used. Specialty of Kutch work is the use of mirrors called “abhla” which are semi covered with thread using buttonhole or chain stitches. There are

six types of kutch embroidery based on the working styles of sub tribal groups such as khareek, pako, raabari, suf, garabia jat, mutava. The various product of Kutch embroidery other than ghagra, choli are pagri (head gear for men), cushion covers, bed covers, wall hangings etc.

- **Chamba Rumal**

Chamba Rumal is originated in Chamba kingdom of Himachal Pradesh in 17th century. It is done for the purpose of gifting their daughters in wedding as a dowry. This embroidery is done over mulmul or fine cotton with untwisted fine quality of handmade silk threads. Motif Saree inspired from various scene from epic Mahabharata, Ramayana, Krishna raas-leela, scene of war, marriage and hunting. The technique of “dohara tanka” called double satin stitch is used without any knots on fabric in geometrical pattern like square and rectangle. It appear so fine that it looks like a painting, as it is originally inspired by the pahari (hill) paintings. In chamba rumal outlines are drawn with a charcoal and brush which is then filled by double satin stitches in such a way that both the faces of fabric are completely same.

- **Kantha**

Kantha is a traditional embroidery of West Bengal, Tripura and Odisha. Household women reuse their old saree by arranging them into layers and hold them together with running stitch embroidery techniques. Beside this various saris, kurta, blouse, shawls, pillow and cushion covers were also available in kantha embroidery. Motifs in kantha are inspired from flowers, birds, geometrical shapes and from daily life activities. Fabric is covered with running stitch which create wrinkles over the surface of fabric.

- **Kasuti**

The term Kasuti indicates an activity that is done using cotton fabric and hands. It is derived from the words Kai (meaning hand) and Suti (meaning cotton). Kasuti embroidery is originated in Karnataka during the Chalukya period (6th to 12th century). Motifs used in kasuti are traditional and based on Rangoli pattern of Karnataka. Gold and silver threads were used for decorating bridal saree on special occasion like wedding. Motifs like chariots, shells, gopura (gateways) palanquin (palaki) were used in geometrical pattern and marked with charcoal pencil later embroidered with double running stitch called Ganti, zig zag stitch called Murgi, cross stitch and running stitches called Neyge and Menthe. It is done in such a fine way that both the sides of fabric are same.

- **Chikankar**

Chikankari is the traditional embroidery of Uttar Pradesh primarily from Lucknow. It is originated in the Mughal period. The word chikan is a Persian word Chakeen which means making of delicate patterns on the fabric. It is called white embroidery as it is done over white fabric with a white thread. Cotton, fine mulmul or delicate fabric like georgette, organza, fine silk were used. In order to follow trends, chikankari is now done in pastel shades of yellow, pink, blue etc. using white or matching threads along with some additional crafts like mukaish work, mirror work which makes it more attractive. Motifs are inspired from nature like flowers and leaves, and delicately intricated with stitches like herringbone, cross, and running which is done at the wrong side or back side of the fabric and its shadow appears in the front which is the actual beauty of Chikankari, this art of intricating from back side of fabric is called shadow work.

- **Kashida**

Kashida embroidery is famous from Kashmir. It is originated during the Mughal period. Traditionally done over woolen and silk fabric with one or two stitches at a time like chain stitch, herringbone stitch, stem stitch and knot stitch. These are majorly done in pastel shades with similar color thread in such a way that it gets merged with base fabric. Motifs are influenced by nature like flowers, leaves, birds, trees, fruits etc. Phirans, namdah (kurta, rugs) and stole are famous apparel in kashida embroidery.

- **Gota patti**

Gota patti is traditional art famous from Rajasthan. A piece of zari fabric is cut in patti (patel shape) then applied over main fabric and edges are finished with various stitches like chain stitch, running stitch etc. Which gives the impact of gold zari work. Gotta is now available in a form of ribbon as well as ready shapes are also available in different forms and sizes influenced by nature. This is done most commonly on female attires like saree. Now done in various occasional wear outfits for men and women.

Rajasthan, as its name signifies, was a conglomeration of princely states. They were of all shapes and sizes,

wielding varying degrees of power and enjoying wealth and prestige according to their size and martial prowess. Whatever their wealth or size, however, one characteristic was shared by all. The rulers were invariably patrons of the arts.

The traditional Rajasthani Embroidery work was done on cotton, silk or velvet with a variety of fine stitches. The embroidery designs were floral, geometrical or mythological and, showed court scenes or devotees praying at a shrine in much the same way as these were depicted in painting.

One bag embroidered in the 18th century shows a man squatting on the floor feeding birds. Others showed men and women engaged in various domestic and commercial pursuits.



Clothes, girdles, bags, tents, wall hangings, horse saddles, elephants' trappings and a host of other articles were traditionally embroidered in Rajasthan with gold, silver and silk thread. The effect of needlework was further enhanced by incorporating precious stones and pearls into the design.

The pichhwai, so beautiful a feature of Gujarat embroidery, was also made in Rajasthan where the largest number of devotees of Shrinathji, a special manifestation of Lord Krishna, lives. Applique work used here to show the God surrounded by worshippers and cows. The border was made up of image of the God in various costumes and decked with different jewels.



Apart from this sophisticated work which was similar in almost all courts each region developed its own specialty. The common people of Rajasthan beautified their clothes and articles of everyday use with rajasthani embroidery that used simple embroidery stitches and motifs derived from nature and objects familiar to them in their day to day living. The tradition has continued. In Bikaner district or Rajasthan, women embroider their garments by counting threads and building up the pattern by following the warp and weft thus

producing geometrical patterns. By using a double running stitch the pattern appears the same on both sides making the garment reversible. The work resembles the great Rajasthan favourite, the bandhani or the tie and dye method of decorating fabric with colour.

Chain stitch, done in contrasting colors, is used in Alwar to produce an effect of richness and beauty. Geometrical forms are used with flowing circular lines to produce a sense of movement in the design. Stark contrast is created by producing black and white motifs on a golden yellow background.



In Sikar and Jhunjhunu district of Rajasthan, skirt borders are embroidered with a variety of birds, animals, trees, and flowers. There is a pleasing quality of naïveté in the work. The Rajasthani embroidery stitches used are simple—herringbone for filling and stem stitch for outlining but a three-dimensional effect is created by using a thick thread in a variety of colors.

The ralli is a patchwork spread made in Jaisalmer district of Rajasthan. Small pieces of material are stitched together in a decorative pattern to form the top of the spread. As in other parts of the country, the padding is made up of layers of old material held together with running stitches. Jaisalmer and Jodhpur also excel in silk thread embroidery on leather which is done especially on shoes and waistcoats. The knuckle pad is another article made of leather which is decorated with scenes resembling miniature paintings. The work done in the cities is fine and in subdued colour and is sometimes highlighted with gold or silver thread. In rural areas the designs are bolder and made with bright colors and thicker thread. Horse and camel saddles are embroidered with an awl and are richly colourful.

The obvious inspirations for the folk embroidery of Rajasthan are toys. A whole expanse of material is covered with people, projecting arms at awkward angles. Elephants have large staring eyes, short legs and long trunk falling from a small head. Trees are shaped like candelabra with stems sticking out on either side and tapering to a point at the top. A horse stands on stick-thin legs; two sausage-like dogs with curling tails growl at each other while pencil slim human beings carry on various activities. The whole scene could have been lifted from a Paul Klee Canvas or, perhaps, embroideries like these could have been the inspiration for Klee's work.

STORY OF CRAFT

Craft is a symbol of long lived traditions and represents cultural heritage of a place. It is also a sign of the handwork and craftsmanship of the artisans. Their talented hands, provide us with beautiful and vibrant apparels that has a story in itself.



Bandhej, an ornament of Rajasthani culture enjoys place of pride in the realm of handicrafts. It is one of the finest arts of Rajasthan heritage, which is not only surviving but also thriving day by day. It has become the most renowned art and has got fame across the globe. Rajasthani Bandhej has assimilated itself in cultural codes in a way that it has become inseparable. The craftsmanship of the artisans is exemplary and speaks volumes of royal grandeur of Rajasthan.

Bandhani is not merely a fabric; it's a canvas of anonymous tales soaked in many colors and ensuring that the wearer is wrapped in the warmth of native emotions. While the women are busy tying knots in fabric, their whispered secrets quietly sneak into these tied bundles. They remain unnoticed but intact till the connoisseur hands unfurl the knots and set the stories free to engulf the wearer. The dazzling traditional garments and textiles attract domestic as well as foreign tourists and markets and are a good source of income generation for the women who create these embroidered pieces of art.

The artisans undergo a procedure, involving different skills. They are artistic enough to keep pace with the changing market trends, tiers with perfection and muscular coordination of the fingers have to maintain the intricacy of design.

But, there are certain issues with which craftsmen have to deal with. For instance :

Society fails to recognize the huge effort and capability of the artisans.

- They are not given proper incentives.
- They are not given proper wages and are exploited.
- Their skill is replaced with quick, standardized machine production.

- Low- cost replication has disheartened their well-being, making them resort to other professions.
- The strength of hand-craft, artistic vision involved and handmade quality are forgotten.
- Contemporary versions of the craft has resulted in the decline of the true vibrancy.
- Artisans does not wish to pass the age-old craftwork to their children as they have lost faith.
- The designers and big brands have brought change and revived the craft in a way that artisans feel left out.
- Implementations and developments have restricted artisans to work to the full extent.

Thereby, work and development needs to be done in relation to self-sufficiency and women's empowerment to protect and enhance the revival of the traditional embroideries of Rajasthan.

WOMEN ARTISANS OF THAR DESERT OVERCOME ADVERSITY THROUGH EMBROIDERY

Undeterred by displacement from Pakistan during the 1971 war and resettled in the unforgiving Thar Desert, women now living in Bikaner district have used their skills of traditional embroidery to earn a living with dignity



Paaro Bai of Dandkala village in Bikaner doing Kashida embroidery. (Photo by Tarun Kanti Bose)

The women of Dandkala village in Kolayat administrative block of Bikaner district in Rajasthan are a class apart. Although they are refugees from Umerkot district in Sindh province of Pakistan, they have fought displacement by taking ownership of their traditional embroidery skills, which has enabled them to be breadwinners for their families.

Located 140 km from Bikaner city in the Thar Desert, which is harsh, arid and tough with shifting sand dunes and extreme temperatures, the lives of rural women in Dandkala is not easy by any means. But it has not stopped the women artisans to earn a living with dignity.

Settled in 1988, the villagers had earlier stayed at refugee camps in Barmer and Jaisalmer for almost 17 years. There were lakhs of people ousted from Pakistan in these camps, who had fled to the adjacent states during the 1971 India-Pakistan war. The Rajasthan government has at that time allotted land to these oustees. In 1987, western Rajasthan suffered its worst drought of the century and Bikaner was one of the badly hit districts. Lack of food, water and fodder left thousands of families desolate and wiped off about half of the livestock. In these extreme conditions, the villagers either migrated to cities or earned a pittance at road construction sites.

Artistic heritage

“When my husband was allotted 25 *bighas* of land at Dandkala, we were living in abject poverty. When we came first to settle in the village from the camp in Barmer, we were shocked as it was entirely a tough dry patch without trees, shrubs, shade or water. We, like other 250 families in the village, had no option but to cultivate the virgin land, which had never been cultivated earlier,” 58-year-old Paaro Bai told VillageSquare.in. “The drought in 1987 further aggravated our problems. It was difficult to get a square meal in a day. It was such miserable condition that we had not taken bath for months together. My son and daughters were full of lice and used to stink badly. In that terrible condition, to earn a livelihood I used to accompany my husband along with our infant children on our laps wherever the *thakedar* (contractor) took us to work for road construction. Most of the women like me, who came from Sindh province of Pakistan, have the only skill that was special kind.”

Paaro Bai was referring to *Kashida*, a special kind of embroidery that includes various styles such as *taanka bharat*, *soof*, *pakka*, *kambiri*, *kharak*, *kachcha* and *sindhi*. “At our camp in Barmer and here in the village, middlemen took advantage of our situation as most of us were illiterate, unorganized and were in need of money,” she said. “The middlemen were exploiting us for a very long time by giving us very less for our exquisite hand embroidery.”

Sitting nearby, Santosh, who had been working among the women artisans, said, “The village falls in the command area of Indira Gandhi Canal and in 1988 the URMUL Trust expanded its activities in these areas. URMUL Seemant Samiti was formed at Bajju in Kolayat block to work in 113 villages.”

Watershed moment

“Earlier, Sanjoy Ghose accompanied by URMUL functionaries had seen me toiling hard in a road construction work. He had seen my son and daughters sleeping under the scorching sun subject to dust, heat, noise and multiple hazards. Then after that when URMUL health workers visited the village for treating the tuberculosis patients, then I showed the handicraft,” says Parro Bai.

Bai. “Their visit to my hut proved to be watershed in my life. They acted positively and started income-generation project of embroidery.”



Women embroiders show their latest work after a training workshop. (Photo by Tarun Kanti Bose)

URMUL supported the women artisans to upgrade their traditional skills, provided technical support and linked them with national and international markets. The non-profit also freed them from the stranglehold of the exploitative middlemen. Women artisans in Dandkalan, Gokul, Bhaloori Bijeri, Bikendri and other villages of Kolayat and Pugal blocks of Bikaner district started getting organized in self-help groups (SHGs) and further enhanced their skills in *kashidakaari* (embroidery).

“Constant orientation by famous designers like Laila Tyabji and graduates from National Institute of Design (NID) and National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) helped women to hone their skills,” Santosh told VillageSquare.in. “Now these women earn between Rs 3,500 and Rs 6,000 a month.”

“*Kashida mharo khet bhi suu aur fasal bhi* (Embroidery serves us a field, crop and produce for us). When I started working with URMUL my husband created lot of hurdles but when he saw that my earning is helping the family, so he stopped. Earlier we were not able to feed ourselves and our children a square meal but now there is no such shortage,” said Paaro Bai.

Ending migration

Paaro Bai is a founding member of a SHG and she has helped 40 to 50 women of her village to earn between Rs 3,000 and Rs 5,000 every month. She had trained her daughters, Manguri and Mathri, who are now married and live in Barmer district. They have trained other women of their villages. Women artisan's involvement in *Kashida* work helps them to remain in their villages, rather than migrating to the cities.

Most of the work is done in homes and not under controlled conditions. Their own homes are their workplace and they earn with dignity. Capacity building trainings, regular interaction with URMUL functionaries, designers and buyers enables them to see the world in a wider perspective.

Paaro Bai does her embroidery work along with her daughters-in-law, nieces and other women of the village, which operates like a Rangсутra Centre. Shubham Sharma Sen, a graduate of NIFT, explains about Rangсутra. "It's a company of artisans set up by social activist-turned entrepreneur Shumita Ghose 12 years ago. It was created to ensure regular work and market access to artisans. Artisans are co-owners and shareholders in the enterprise. They are part of board of directors and have a say in costing, planning, production and wages," Sharma told VillageSquare.in. "Paaro Bai is a shareholder in the company. Over 3,500 weavers, embroiderers and artisans from Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh, Assam and West Bengal have formed the company. Seventy percent of Rangсутra's artisan owner-workers are women. The work and money they earn through this work have given these women more say at home. These women now want to send their daughters to school and some have become group leaders in their villages, motivating other women to follow in their footsteps. The traditional embroidery used for making personal trousseaus is now market linked and kept alive."

Rangсутra is now a successful enterprise. "Rangсутra's biggest buyer is Fab India (a popular chain of stores). It also exports in small quantities to France, the Netherlands and the UK," says Sharma Sen. "The global attention means that there is continuous need to augment the strength of the existing groups and increase their capacity by speeding up the work while maintaining the quality. Retaining the cultural identity, the traditional embroidery used for making personal trousseau is now market-affiliated and kept alive."

Problem faced by workers and their Emotions & their solutions

Bandhani a beautiful handcraft . worker of different weavers makes it a craft what it is today . its value increases as soon as the colours spilt on it . fine dots and high precision give a bandhini creation a value.

After four months to one year of hardwork a weaver is able to weave a saree. this makes the piece more unique as all the bandhani dots are similar in size. It is a timeless craft passed onto generations. the people wearing it carry it with lot of pride but there is hardwork of a weaver behind it which is not even identified and doesnt meet even his basic necessity of day to day life even after working so hard

Problems

As handloom sector demand is going down because it is bit expensive and on other hand handloom sector has taken a place in the market . so people are preferring more of powerloom than handloom . similarly the motifs which handloom sector creates is easily copied by the powerloom at cheaper point so this creates a add on to the powerloom . this crossover by a craftsmen is considered to be a serious offence – if a weaver chooses to shift his practices to replicate designs using mechanized forms , he is socially disregarded from the community .

As there is involvement of third party between the craftsmen and customer so the craft men doesn't get what he really deserves . the money income is very low due to which they cannot meet even the basic necessity . more over there is no medication facility and they have to work in hot temperature creating a lot of problems for them . The industry is also facing threats due to poor payment and long turnover periods, which has led to a downfall in the number of artisans creating bandhini. As rajasthan is the drought are in summers water is not available . they have to stop their work which adversely affects their production . as the new generation as coming up they donot want to continue to work and want to move to other profession thus creating less laborious .

So summarising this we can say weaver faces the following problems –

- Lack of finance
- Health problems
- Social, cultural and religious constrains
- Industrialization and introduction of roller printing
- Unavailability of water
- No incentive from the government
- Children not taking up their parental art
- Marketing

Solution

The government should come forward to provide more finance on easy terms and bank loans can be arranged for them. This would help them in expanding their marketing opportunities and also minimize their dependence on middle men who exploit them. Workers should be given technical training to use dyes and chemicals in a better way, so they can prevent their skin and other body parts from the side effects of synthetic dyes. Efforts should be made to motivate workers to adopt new design and innovative techniques in their art. Moreover, government should assure them for marketing of their products by providing them financial security so that they can try new adoption in their work.

The traditional handicraft industries shall have to be motivated to produce better quality products for sophisticated markets and compete with the modern machine printing industry. Government should provide water sources to workers on loan basis or at subsidized rates. With the backing of suitable publicity campaigns and education amongst these poor artisans and awareness about the programmes started by government, they would be helped to prosper by minimizing the role of middle men. If the marketing conditions were made better by setting up co-operatives, get major share of profits. This will help the workers will also encourage the young children to take up this profession. Workers should be made aware of the importance of their art.

Suf embroidery

Suf embroidery is one of its own types of embroidery. From the number of counted thread, Suf embroidery is known for its unique technique. It is characterized by a type of economy stitch worked from the back. The patterns are generally based on triangles and are geometric, symmetrical and very detailed ones. Often small pieces of glass or mirror are included in the design. A lot of patience and hard work of the craftsmen is required. They work day to night into this, but there are many problems that they have to go through in their day to day life.

Low productivity – there are many unorganized sectors that work without any identity thus are not able to fulfill basic necessities of the labour and does not have the basic infrastructure where they can work like sheds, storage space, shipping and packing facilities.

Many crafts require the entire household to participate in production in some capacity. In many cases, crafts also serve as a seasonal source of income for agricultural households. This means that children miss school, resulting in low education levels for the family overall. The lack of education makes it difficult to manage inventory, access government schemes and market information and bargain with traders and middlemen.

Artisans may also lack the financial capability to upgrade technology in production, or undergo necessary training on a regular basis, as would be available to them in a formal work setting. This compromises the quality of their products and raises the cost of production.

They do not get health facilities as this craft requires a lot of concentration thus they end up weakening the eyesight of the worker and other health problems.

They are even given proper wages and income and they ended up getting nothing in hand. They don't have knowledge about the outside world and are being fooled by the trader very easily. Their next generation does not want to continue with this craft any more. They are mostly under the loans which they are not able to pay back.

Solution

Government should provide a safe environment to them. Give them knowledge of new techniques.

Ensure their basic necessities. Provide health-related claims. Give them their *yojana* which they are unaware of.

Ensure a safe future ahead.

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