



Exploring the Artisanal Heritage and Sustainable Practices: An In-Depth Investigation into the Traditional Craftsmanship and Contemporary Significance of Bhujodi Weaves

Dr. Shruti Tiwari^{1*}, Shikha Kapoor², Amar Mithapalli² and Doyel³

¹Professor in Design, Parul University, India

²Assistant Professor, School of Design, Avantika University, India

³Student B. Design, School of Design, Avantika University, India

***Corresponding author:** Dr. Shruti Tiwari, Parul Institute of Design/ CMIE (Centre of Multidisciplinary and Interdisciplinary Education), Parul University, India.

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Abstract

According to the 4th All India Handloom Census (2019-20), there are 26,73,891 handloom weavers and 8,48,621 allied workers in the country. Following map shows the state wise number of weavers (Figure 1).

This research paper presents a comprehensive study of the production method of Bhujodi fabric. A thorough study was done to examine the production process, focusing on the traditional weaving practices in the village of Bhujodi, Gujarat. The project involved a month-long immersive experience, living and interacting with the craftsmen to understand the design aspects and production techniques. The paper focuses on the unique characteristics of the Bhujodi weaving, from raw material sourcing, preparation, to the finished products, and the traditional practices preserved within the households of the village.

Aims

1. To trace the historical origins and evolution of Bhujodi weaves, examining their cultural significance and contributions to the artisanal heritage of the region.
2. To analyze the traditional craftsmanship techniques employed in the production of Bhujodi weaves, including weaving methods, dyeing processes, and design inspirations.
3. To assess the economic and social impact of Bhujodi weaving on local communities, investigating the role of this craft in sustaining livelihoods and preserving cultural identities.
4. To evaluate the current state of Bhujodi weaving in terms of market trends, demand, and challenges faced by artisans, with a focus on sustainability and market competitiveness.

Objectives

1. Conduct a comprehensive literature review to establish the historical context and cultural significance of Bhujodi weaves.
2. Document and analyze the traditional weaving techniques, materials, and design elements used in the production of Bhujodi textiles.
3. Explore the economic and social implications of Bhujodi weaving through field studies, interviews, and surveys with local artisans and communities.
4. Examine the contemporary market dynamics, identifying opportunities and challenges for Bhujodi weavers in the context of globalization and changing consumer preferences.
5. Propose recommendations for the preservation and promotion of Bhujodi weaving, considering sustainable practices, market access, and cultural heritage conservation.

Hypothesis

Given the rich cultural history and unique craftsmanship of Bhujodi weaves, it is hypothesized that a thorough investigation into the traditional techniques and contemporary significance of this art form will reveal its potential for sustainable development, economic empowerment of artisans, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Additionally, it is expected that insights gained from this research will contribute to the formulation of strategies for promoting Bhujodi weaves in a globalized market while ensuring the preservation of its authenticity and environmental sustainability.



Figure 1.

Keywords: Bhujodi; Weaving; Textile craft; Kutch; Handcraft; Manufacturing process

Introduction

Gujarat has a long history, dating back to Stone Age settlements and continuing through Chalcolithic and Bronze Age settlements such as the Indus Valley civilization. Gujarat's coastal cities, particularly Bharuch, served as ports and trading centers during the reigns of the Nanda, Maurya, Satavahana, and Gupta empires.

Following the fall of the Gupta empire in the sixth century, Gujarat flourished as an independent Hindu/Buddhist state. Gujarat derives its name from the Pratihara dynasty, which ruled Gujarat in the eighth and ninth centuries CE. For centuries before the Mughal period, parts of modern Rajasthan and Gujarat were known as Gujarat or Gurjarabhumi. There is a strong belief held by the Kutchis: simple living but dynamic thoughts eager to move forward. They are not afraid to experiment and think outside the

box, but they remain firmly rooted in their traditions. Handicrafts are used in everyday life, as dowry, and now as a source of income.

Each Kutch village has its own unique style, colors, and motifs that represent nature, geometry, or religion. Kutch's Rabari, Ahir, Mutwa, Halepotra, Jat, Megwhal, and Sodha communities are famous for their intricate embroidery work [1].

History of Craft

The Rabari tribe, who are pastoralists or shepherd communities believed to have travelled across the rugged mountains of Afghanistan and settled in Rajasthan about a thousand years ago, is responsible for their distinct weaving tradition in Bhujodi. Rabaris coexist peacefully with Vankars, who are members of the Meghwal, a community that migrated from Rajasthan (Figure 2).



Figure 2.

Earlier small villages were referred to as vandha, which means a cluster of individuals staying together, vandha was named after the eldest person of that particular place, thus here the pinnacle person was bojha bhai was a rabhri it absolutely was referred to as

bojhari vandha then afterwards as years past vandha was removed and was solely recognize by the name, and Bhuj is close to by thus in Gujarati bhuj+odhi ODHI means close to/within reach however village was named bhujodi (a place close to Bhuj) [2,3].

Evolution



Figure 3.

The craft is said to have evolved out of a need to protect against the elements during a time when barter was the primary mode of exchange. The 'Rabaris,' the original nomads and cattle rearers, supplied the village with wool, milk products, and grains, while the 'Vankars' began weaving cloth. While cattle rearing remained largely unchanged, the Vankars made one breakthrough after another, armed with an indigenous technique. All of the communities were essentially customers and vendors, each relying on the other to help create a product. And the craft became known as dhabla weaving, which is now famous worldwide for its traditional weave and natural colors. Because the work was primarily based on barter, the output was limited (Figure 3).

Methodology

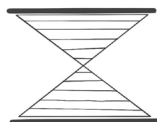
The researchers have delved deep into the weavers' mode of working following the cycle of their work within the natural surroundings of Bhujodi. The research took a month-long observation, interviews and analysis.

Bhujodi is one of the crafts that have stood the test of time. Bhujodi, named after the town, where it was created, is the work of a Vankar or weaver who learned the craft from his ancestors. Unlike other weaving techniques, it is distinguished by highly visible motifs that are woven and create bold textures on the background-plain fabric, giving the impression that it is embroidered [4].

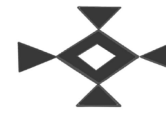
Traditionally, shawls were made of wool, but artisans are now experimenting with other materials such as silk and cotton. The artisans weave traditional motifs as well as modern modifications suggested by the designers. On the shorter length side, the shawls are usually adorned with several borders. In Bhujodi alone, nearly 200 expert craftspeople are housed, which is commendable given the country's dwindling weaver population. These vankars (weavers) are thought to be descended from the Meghwal (Marwada) clan, who moved from Rajasthan to Bhujodi hundreds of years ago. The herdsmen may have vanished, but the handwoven heritage spawned by them lives on, with many natives traversing the village's rickety roads wearing the exquisite fabric draped across their torso (known as a pachedi) and over their shoulders. To survive, the Bhujodi craft has evolved dramatically, and the products are still distinguished by their traditional motifs [5-7].

Motif Study

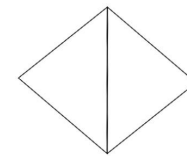
The Bhujodi weave makes liberal use of simple geometric motifs like triangles, stripes, diamonds, star shapes, and chevrons. The majority of their designs are created with linear patterns bestowed with motifs that run throughout the fabric's body. The artisans don't have to look far for inspiration: their home state of Gujarat has a trove of forts and other famous architectural monuments that serve as the perfect backdrop for the Bhujodi designs. The patterns are unique to the Kutch style and are created by repeating specific motifs in different ways. The following are some popular motifs found in Bhujodi weaving:



Popati - is a simple triangle motif that repeats in various forms to create complex motifs.



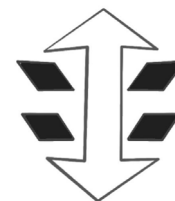
Chaumukh - is a stunning motif composed of four Popati motifs.



Panjka - is formed by joining two opposite triangles in the middle.



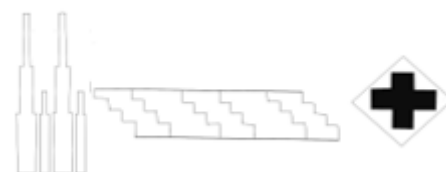
Damroo - is a motif in the shape of a drum.



Jhaad - is inspired by nature and resembles a tree.



Khungri - is a motif that resembles a zig-zag line.



Sachchi Kor, Lath, Sathkhani, Macchhar, Hathi, and Vakiyo - are motifs inspired by village scenery.

Process

- The weaving is performed on a two or four-pedal handloom.
- The woven design is created using a flying shuttle.

- Bamboo sticks are used to keep the threads separated uniformly during warping.
- The wrapping frame is used to ensure that the yarns are laid evenly and securely on the warp beam.
- Starch on the yarns to keep the strength of its length
- Dyeing Vessel is the container in which the yarn is dyed.
- Wood ash is used to bind the yarn ends together when mending.
- Winding is done on a Charaka and yarns are wound into hanks before being warped on a warp beam.
- Fibers most commonly used are Kala cotton, cotton, silk, Wool. (Figures 4-6)



Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.

The gathering of raw cotton fibers in and around the village. It is done to dry cotton or wool. The yarn is then spun into yarn on a spinning wheel, usually with the craftsman's right hand turning the wheel and roping with his left hand, and then twisted into thread. Once made, it can be separated into warp and weft. The frame is used to create a warp, and street sizing is performed. This is cleaned in kanji (flour) and shampoo to strengthen the length. It is done in the morning or early afternoon before sunset, and each thread is separated and brushed with the help of sticks and stands. Starch should be used in a specific amount, not too much or too little, as it can break or stick together after brushing. For cotton scarves, 1000

warps are typically used, followed by a weft attached to the loom with wood ash and water [8-10]. Dyeing can be done with either vegetable dye or chemical dye.

Heddles, shafts, a shed, a flying shuttle, a reed, and beaters are all examples of parts of the handloom that complete the process of weaving. Traditional Kutch motifs are commonly used, and they are woven separately with hand needles and yarns of different colors. They leave extra fringes after cutting the woven fabric from the loom, and most housewives add details like pom-poms. Later, it was washed to remove the excess starch that had been present then dried, and ironed (Figure 7).



Figure 7.

Challenges

Bhujodi weaving is a skill that requires a lot of concentration and knowledge.

It is a physically demanding craft that requires the weaver to hunch over his loom for days on end. This causes health issues such as sore arms, poor vision, and stomach problems.

This is a major source of concern for the weavers. It takes more than a fortnight of hand weaving at a stretch, with all the warp wrapped around the drum at once, to complete the craft. The weaver must handpick the warp and weft from memory, and any error means restarting the entire process.

Future

Bhujodi weavers traditionally used goat, sheep, and camel wool, but today they use silk, acrylic, and cotton from all over the country. There has been an expansion of the product line to include sarees, dupattas, pillow covers, bedsheets, and curtains. They eventually started selling sewn clothing and exported them all over the globe.

Geographical indication

The GI was granted to the Kutchi shawls on 17th October 2011 to the Kutch Weavers' Association, Bhuj, Dist. They are renowned internationally. A label will assist with marketing and will also prevent cheap imitations in other regions of the country. A Geographical Indication registration will guarantee consumers of a high level of quality and individuality that is primarily attributable to the place of origin within a defined geographical area.

Approximately 1,200 Vankar and Meghwal samaj weavers in Kutch will benefit from this tag, spread across 210 villages," Vankar also responded that the Kutch region represents India's only cluster of weavers capable of producing delicate designs in thicker, heavier yarns such as wool, cotton, and silk.

Artisan Profile

Name - Chamanlal Premji Siju

Qualification - Design Graduate

For how long he is been working - 20 years

Learnt from -Premji Siju (Father)

In family - Wife and 2 kids

Work Timing - 8 am to 5 pm

Reason - To take ancestral traditions alive

Position - Runs his own business.

Market - Exhibition, Custom client orders, Workshop.

Vankar Chamanlal received the President's National Award in 2001 for his exquisite natural dyed cotton weavings with supplementary silk weft. Chamanbhai dyes his own yarns as well. His father took training in 1994 at Ahmedabad which sparked his interest in natural dyeing, since then he trained with master dyers from Dastkar Andhra, as well as at a UNESCO workshop in

Pondicherry. Chamanlal Premji Siju of Bhujodi is an 11th-generation weaver. His father, Premjibhai received the Shilp guru award. He now works from home with his three brothers and their families. He likes to work with kala cotton and natural dyes, he is sensitive to both cost and production. The cost of the artisan's products starts at 1200 and depends on the quantity ordered. A single loom can produce 20 shawls and each house has one or two handlooms, with a total of 180 looms in the village.

Marketing: They are experimenting with digital platforms to promote their products, and their youth is assisting them in this endeavor. They have been working with agents and designers to promote the products, through exhibitions and fairs to sell their products and export fabrics in large quantities.

Packaging: Because the weight varies, packing is done either individually or in bulk as per the order or as directed by the customers.

Vankars Of Bhujodi

Self-employed spinners, weavers, printers, and dyers work from their homes in the villages surrounding Kutch's cotton fields. Following the 2001 earthquake, the resilient residents of Bhujodi, home to the vankar (weaver) community, began revival projects based on locally sourced and woven cotton and woolen textiles, which became the community's main source of income [11].

The vankar families claim kinship, and several members have received national awards. Shamji bhai has transformed the venture into a profitable business with clients in India and abroad over the last 20 years.

He also writes about his family history, Bhujodi village, and the history of handloom weaving.

His journey as a weaver and entrepreneur has earned him the UNESCO Seal of Excellence and recognition as a master craftsman. He took part in the 'Hand Made' project at Bunka Gakuen University in Japan in 2014, which highlighted the handmade qualities of traditional textiles produced in Bhujodi, including Kala cotton. In 2015, he actually participated in the project 'Cotton Exchange: A Material Response,' which compared and contrasted the social, cultural, and cultural heritage of cotton manufacturing and commerce between England and India. using Kala cotton that was handspun in Kutch and dyed naturally with iron and indigo. These international collaborations raised global awareness of Kala cotton's potential.

Kala Cotton and Fashion

Vankar Chaman Premji Siju comes from eleven generations after generations of weavers and continues his family's textile lineage. Chaman Siju received the Gujarat state government award in 1999, the President's National Award in 2001, and a number of other honors. He emphasizes the importance of using indigenous materials, such as Kala cotton, for regular orders as well as its potential as a fashion fabric to elevate the artisans' work using traditional handlooms. Siju displayed an intricate handloom cotton sari illustrating Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 5F formula:

'Farm, Fiber, Fabric, Fashion, Foreign' at Textiles India 2017 in Gandhinagar. Modi wore a Kala cotton stole woven by Siju, which gave the fabric a boost. He hopes to establish a local museum that will house a unique collection of Kala cotton and other heirloom textiles [1].

He has created collections with the themes of the ocean, festival, and desert. In addition to maldhari, which honors his forefather, the shepherds. Khamir's kala cotton initiative encourages the development of sustainable cotton textiles as well as the preservation of agriculture and artisanal livelihoods in Kachchh.

Artisans, in collaboration with Lakmé Fashion Week in 2016, presented an interactive three-day exhibition on its premises to encourage closer, tactile interaction between visitors and handloom designers. 'Please Touch! The Handloom Experience was a forerunner to the Lakmé Fashion Week's Sustainable Fashion and Indian Textiles Day. The goal was to highlight original and blended versions of seven fabrics, including khadi, Kala cotton, eri and muga from the North East, and Himalayan pashmina. Chaman Siju's participation in Lakmé Fashion Week Summer/Resort 2017 with his Kala cotton collection with complex woven motifs was expressive of the community's biography in Bhujodi.

The combined efforts of the vankar community of Bhujodi village, its use by fashion designers, and the efforts of nongovernmental organizations and fashion event organizers have all contributed to raising awareness about Kala cotton. Professionals who work at the intersection of people, processes, and the environment are essential in the development of sustainable products. They can make decisions about development processes and procedures that affect a product's long-term viability. Alison Welsh, head of fashion research at Manchester

Metropolitan University, has been working with Vankar Shamji Vishram Valji on a project called 'Field to Fashion' in collaboration with Khamir to promote Kala cotton. The goal is to investigate the possibility of creating a niche for organic cotton in the international market due to its strength, durability, and striking resemblance to linen, as well as to raise awareness about this fiber, which is used to weave denim. Welsh is interested in creating garments that combine Indian and Western aesthetic sensibilities through the use of their respective pattern-cutting methods. Kala cotton is sourced from Gujarat by Henrietta Adams, founder of the London-based label Henri. Stitch by Stitch, based in London, makes cushions and towels out of Kala cotton.

Conclusion

Effective branding, marketing, and advertising are important, according to the audience. Despite having a wealth of knowledge about crafts and handlooms, none of the participants in the poll actually own one, responsibility in the right direction. Educating the audience about the real story, the difficult and time-consuming effort that went into it, the advantages and the function they fulfill.

People should purchase and share the word about handlooms because there is still a need for more awareness.

Acknowledgement

None.

Conflict of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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