

Influence of Raja Ravi Varma's Popular Images and Design Elements of Mughal & Persian Art in Vintage Embroidery of Kathiawar, Gujarat

Praful N. Gohel*

Department of Applied Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts, the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat, India

Abstract – There is a saying, 'People speak with different tone of same vernacular language after the distance of every 15 villages'. Unity among diverse cultures, traditions and communities is the unique feature of India. The variety of costumes, festivals, art and craft keep people fascinated. Similarly it is also true in the case of handmade embroidery. Embroidery in India is different in different regions and states. The researchers can identify the origins of an embroidered piece of fabric simply by the style, colors, fabric and stitched used. Embroideries of Sindh, Kutch and Kathiawar are very popular among many types of embroidery in India.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

Kutch & Kathiawar embroidery was practised from the sixteenth and seventeenth century in Patan, a little town in the state of Gujarat. It is believed that this art was taught to the Mochis by a muslim who came from Sindh. The embroideries of Sindh, Kutch and Kathiawar are very similar and almost identical. The major features of this embroidery are pictorial and original. The mirror work and interlacing stitch make it unique in compare to other embroidery styles.

Handmade embroidery of Kathiawar, Gujarat is mainly used to decorate ghaghras (long colourful skirts), cholis, blouses, torans, wall and door hangings, floor mats, cushion covers, wedding canopies etc.

Here, I want to discuss the very specific case studies which can be found even today in the villages of Kathiawar as their vintage collection. The people of Kathiawar generally use this collection during festivals and marriage functions to decorate their homes. My main concern is to study floral design motifs, name writing, symbols and visual imagery of human, birds, animals, god and goddesses which are depicted in the case studies.

2. CASE STUDIES: VINTAGE EMBROIDERY OF KATHIAWAR, GUJARAT

2.1 Vintage Toran (wall hanging for entrance door)



Fig.1



Fig.2



Fig.6



Fig.3



Fig.4



Fig.5

The Toran (fig. 1,2,3,4,5 and 6 above) is a decoration for entrance door. It has tapering pennants hanging from its horizontal edge. The floral motifs are used for decorating borders. The main composition is inside the borders. For better understanding, I distribute it into three horizontal sections – top, middle and bottom. On the top, we can find the depiction of Lord Ganesha, Goddess Laxmi, Bal Krishna, Radha-Krishna, Coconut trees, cows, horses and sometimes elephants also. In the middle, we can see the representation of peacocks, parrots, rabbits, flowers etc. At the bottom, there may be sparrows, monkeys, bullocks, deer, lions, tigers etc. If we divide the whole composition from centre, we can see the formal balance in Toran. The elements on left part have been repeated on right part. So, it is a mirror copy each other in terms of positions of all the elements in Toran. Mango leaves are mainly used on borders because they are considered auspicious and welcoming. The flowers on the borders are having eight petals. They are decorated with round pieces of mirrors called 'Abhla'.

It is said that after the epic war of Mahabharata, Krishna came to Dwarka (Saurashtra). He had freed a thousand women from a demon and these women followed him to his capital city, as his Gopis and devotees. They brought along with them their styles of embroidery, which flourished ever since and that's why we can see the depiction of various episodes of Radha and Krishna in above case studies of 'Toran'.

The image of Lord Ganesha is generally placed on the top centre of 'Toran' because he is the first god whom we worship before starting any religious ceremony. Sometimes we find episodes of Ramayana as well as the image of Hanuman also in other examples of 'Toran'.

2.2 Vintage Chakla (wall hanging for wall decoration beside main entrance)



Fig.7



Fig.8



Fig.9



Fig.10

The 'Chakla' is a square piece of fabric (fig. 7,8,9 and 10 above) that the bride uses to wrap her dowry articles and later decorates her new home with it. Other such decorative pieces used on the walls and furniture are all heavily embroidered with cotton and silk threads and embellished with mirrors. It is decorated mainly with repetition of geometric design patterns. The border at the end mostly represents the pattern of 'Kangra' (pick of the mountain). Second last border is decorated with climber kind of pattern. On the centre we can find a grid of nine squares with same motifs or geometric pattern using triangles and squares. These decorated borders are separated with straight lines and sometimes with altered square patterns. The bright colours are contrasted with dark colours like yellow, red, pink, green, orange, white, blue etc.

2.3 Vitage Cushion Covers



Fig.11



Fig.12

The cushion covers (fig. 11 and 12 above) are having similar decoration like 'Toran'. On the left (fig.11), we can see the floral border with leaves and horse is composed on the centre. There are four yellow flowers are depicted with mirror positions. On the right (fig.12), Four peacocks are composed with repetition. Here, they are facing each other. Overall composition is set on circular path. The image of 'Bal Krishna' is represented four times outside the bigger circle on the centre. It is fully decorated with birds,

animals, Lord Ganesha, Goddess Laxmi etc. We can see the similar kind of 'Jalar' (folded pattern of cloth) which can be seen in 'Toran'.

3. INFLUENCE OF RAJA RAVI VARMA'S POPULAR IMAGES



Fig.13



Fig.14

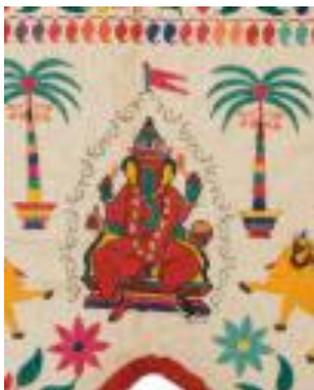


Fig.15

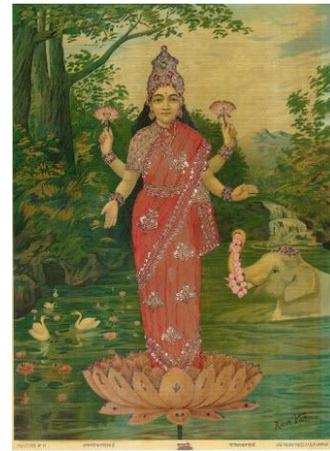


Fig.16



Fig.17



Fig.18

Raja Ravi Varma (1848 – 1906 AD) contributed a lot in painting. He is famous for his oleographs and calendar art. Most of the visual imagery of gods and goddesses were created by him. Here, I can see the visual similarity in depiction of gods and goddesses like Raja Ravi Varma. It might be possible that the craftsman who prepared tracing paper for transferring the image on cloth was highly influenced by Raja Ravi Varma's oleographs. It is also possible that no other visual images were available except him. I assume that the craftsman had to copy the images of gods and goddesses from calendars and prints. In fig.13 & 16 we can mark the postures represented by Raja Ravi Varma and how these postures have been

transferred on vintage embroidery of Kathiawar (fig. 14,15,17 & 18)

4. INFLUENCE OF MUGHAL AND PERSIAN ART



Fig.19



Fig.20



Fig.21

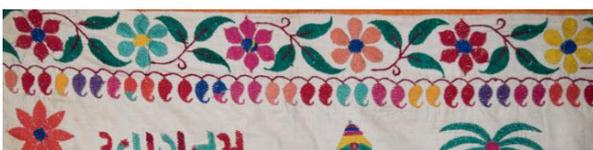


Fig.22

Most of the Mughal and Persian miniature paintings and Architecture have interlacing floral motifs for decorating the borders (fig. 19 & 20). Similarly we can see the influence of it in the design elements of

borders, flower motifs and leaves depicted in vintage embroidery of Kathiawar. The flowers in Mughal Art generally have eight petals but here we can see the similar visual representation of flowers but with more petals. The interlacing floral designs of Mughal and Persian Art are transformed in a linear manner here.

5. CONCLUSION

I am highly impressed by the visual imagery and design motifs which are used in the above case studies of vintage embroidery of Kathiawar. I have attempted to interrogate the influence of Raja Ravi Varma's oleographs as well as the Mughal and Persian tradition on it through case studies. Finally I have found many design motifs, patterns, birds, animals and imagery of gods and goddesses which have the influence of both. We can also find some sort of resemblance in colour scheme of vintage Torans, Chaklas and cushion covers.

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Corresponding Author

Praful N. Gohel*

Department of Applied Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts, the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat, India

prafullgohel@gmail.com