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Symbolic forms and Motifs in Patola Saree of Gujarat

Abstract

A patola is a double ikat woven textile. It is the traditional silk wedding saree of Gujarat. It has been worn in the form of sarees by the ladies of the aristocracy and women of high social standing. Patola symbolises wealth, refinement and culture.

Dynamic geometrical grid patterns and intricate stylized motifs combine to form one of the most fabulous double ikat textile of India. The precise placement of closely woven motifs in a rich array of colours gives the patolu (singular) of Gujarat a striking mosaic like appearance. The entire vocabulary of patolu forms is derived from the square or rectangular unit. Classified under geometric, floral or figurative motifs, many of these forms are symbolic and represent deeper culture rooted concepts. The present study was conducted by interview schedule to find out the traditional motifs, designs used initially and at present and their symbolic, cultural and social significance of this craft.

It was found that in almost all Patolas, the entire body of the saree was patterned, and combinations of the designs were used in borders and pallavs. Design with combination of traditional ones, deviation from traditional design and those taken from other sources were produced.

The artisans emphasized on the traditional designs, motifs and colour combinations as it was this kind of outlook which was preferred and bought by the customers and thus a subtle and gradual change was observed in the Patola sarees. Now a days, due to co-related factors of fashion and demand and increased mobility and media, weavers diverse to cross cultural influence resulting in little deviation from traditional designs and range of articles which is a significant evolutionary process in the history of Indian Ikat industry.

Keywords: Patola, Patolu, Motifs, double Ikat, textile.

Introduction

Patolas of Patan an affluent town in Mehsana district in Northern Gujarat, are famous throughout the world. Patan is 130 km away from Ahmedabad that is second biggest textile centre in India. Gujarat enjoys a special status with double ikat weaving as one of its important crafts. According to Ajit Mookerjee, "Traditionally, through Saurashtra and Gujarat in the West, ran an enormous colour belt with its multiform printed and tie-dye textiles. The designs of Patola are essentially traditional. The new designs are occasionally utilized. There is the usually complex ground or body pattern, another pattern in the pallu, a different design on the borders and strips of various colours and size going warp ways and weft ways separating the ground design, borders and pallu. The compelling charm of the patola is partially in the complexity of the overall design which equals the intricate attractiveness of an oriented carpet. This complexity of the design plus the subtlety of colour blending achieved by the ikat technique makes the patola a supreme textile.

According to Khtoon Jameela, motifs of patola though few are strictly Indian and traditional consisting of stylized flowers, foliage, creepers, birds, animals and geometrical configuration. Among the birds, peacock and parrot predominate. The export quality and lion motifs, symbolic representative of western India. Some camel motifs have also been formed. Evidently, the artisans imbibed their natural ornamentation from their natural setting. Yet another motif consisted of prayers and hymns in Devanagri alphabets specially, popular among the Vaishnavas and Jains.

The patterns emerges on the loom when the weft thread is woven into the warp. The patterns are generally stylized and based on

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geometrical forms and dyed. No definite outline emerges and there is a soft hazy outline which enhances the charm of the fabric. A characteristic of the patola is that the pattern is exactly the same on both sides, the colours merging gracefully and harmoniously together.

Material and Methods

A survey method was adopted to carry out the research and to collect the required information regarding traditional motifs and designs. For this research, an interview schedule was used because of the low education level of the respondents where it was difficult to implement a questionnaire. The schedule thus prepared had a large proportion of structured question i.e. closed question with few unstructured question i.e. open ended questions as necessary. The schedule included questions regarding the motifs, designs and colours used along with their vernacular names, significance and changes.

The study was limited to Mehsana district and to weavers residing in Patan of Gujarat, where the act of weaving patola sarees has been perceived by a handful of weavers. The traditional motifs used etc were carefully observed and photographed and the premises were keenly observed. Additional information was gathered by referring to various published and unpublished works. Besides reviewing the literature it was also substantiated by visiting National Museum, Indira Gandhi Centre for Arts at Janpath, New Delhi, Crafts Museum at Pragti Maidan, New Delhi, Calico Museum at Ahmedabad.

Result and discussion

Patola textiles are actually symbolic forms rooted in Indian wisdom. It was found that the motifs used in patola were derived from nature-flowers, tree leaves, and animals, and also from household environmental objects such as ropes and baskets but they had no particular meaning other than being representational. Still some motifs within the rich design. The designs were essentially traditional weaving technique so complicated, it was found that geometrical motifs predominated.

The designs on a patolu saree were numerous: there was the usually complex ground or body pattern, another pattern on the pallu, a different design on the borders and stripes of various colours and size going warp ways and weft ways separating the ground design, borders and pallu. The plant, animal and human forms were likewise combined in symmetrical patterns. Today, there were divergent motifs, but the traditional Patola has been still the most valued. The designs most commonly found include the following:

Pan Bhat

In Gujarati, Pan means leaf and Bhat pattern. Heart shaped pipal leaf (*Ficus religiosa*). This was an important motif arranged in rows and used along with flowering shrubs which were highly stylized. According to respondents, the arrangement of heart shaped leaves in the main field was called Jhummar.



Ful Bhat

In Gujarati, Ful means blossom flower. The term used for flowering shrubs in connection with numerals indicating the number of flowers in the shrub. Three Ful Bhat means when there were three flowers in a lozenge field and Panch Ful Bhat means flowers when there were five flowers.



Ful Vali Bhat

Fulvali means field of flowers, flower garden design.



Akhrot Bhat

Akhrot means walnut and Bhat design. The word referred to a motif type with flowering shrubs in Lozenges as the main field pattern.

Chokdi Bhat

Chokdi means courtyard square. A design with a double outline design. Each diaper (geometric pattern of lines crossing to make diamond shapes) included three flowers on a stem.

Chhabadi Bhat

The chhabadi design of an eight-petalled Lotus, with birds and flowers radiating from it and encircling the design with flowing curvilinear leaves, was an old traditional pattern. Its origin could be traced to a fertility ritual in which a basket of flowers was placed on the bride's head. From that ritual evolved the creation of a woven textile, saree chichwas placed over the bride's head instead. The respondents also stated that this 8-petalled lotus ornament was favoured by Anavil Brahmins in India and was very popular amongst the elite in Indonesia, possible because it symbolized the 8 pathi or learning in Buddhism.

Nari Kunjar Bhat

Nari means dancing girl, doll and Kunjar means elephant. Dancing girl and elephant, in which both the figures were highly stylized. The Patola weavers had in mind the popular iconography of sixteenth century, which used series of women's figures composed into an elephant. In the Patola the elephant motif was side by side with the dancing female. Elephants are associated with fertility and cosmic waters.



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Nari Kunjar Popat Ful Bhat

Nari means dancing girl, doll, Kunjar means elephant, Popat parrot and Ful Flower, blossom. This term referred to Patolas with all the four of the motifs used in the main field.



Popat Kunjar Bhat

When only the parrot and elephant were used in the design, it is called popat kunjar.

Vagh Bhat

Vagh means tiger and bhat pattern. The term referred to a single motif of tiger.

Vagh Hathi Bhat: Vagh means tiger and Hathi elephant. The term referred to motif type which were produced predominantly for export and were not used very often in India. This was the reason that the Gujarati word HATHI and not KUNJAR, as used for traditional Indian forms, was used for elephants.

Vagh Bara Hathi Bhat

A design consisting of tigers and 12 elephants in the main field.



Nav Ratna Bhat

The word 'Navratna' or 9 gem pendant our solar system, known as 'Navgraha'. According to Swamini Saradapriyananda, these 9 are said to have the greatest influence on the physical and psychic conditions of living beings. The nine grahas represent the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn and Rahu, Keta which are ascending and descending nodes of the moon. It is believed the future of an individual is decided by the position of these nine planets at the time of birth. On special occasions, 'Navgraha Shanti' or ritual ceremony is performed. The sun is always represented in the centre. The 8 grahas or planets surrounding the sun represent the 8 fold nature of man, which manifests itself as life, while the sun represents the higher nature, 'the soul'. When a man knows how to keep the two naures within him separate from one another he stands at peace with himself and the world around. 'Navgraha' literally means a 'new grasp'.



Bor Jail

A design with berry and trellis work.

Ratan Chok Bhat

Ratan means jewel, precious stone, diamond and chok means court, square, rectangle. It is called jewel Mosaic because of its geometrical form. The design includes floral elements.



Dado Bhat

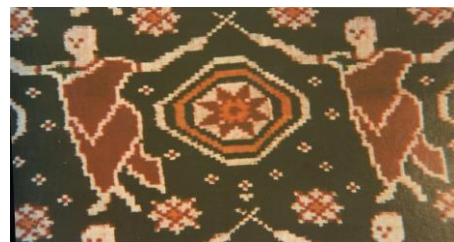
Dado means ball pattern. It was a modern, non-traditional pattern.

Galo Vali Bhat

The term referred to main fields either not patterned at all or not patterned in double ikat i.e. a saree with monochrome main field is called Galo.

Vohra Gaji Bhat

Although this motif is known as 'Vohra Gaji', a design patronized by hindus and bohra Muslims hence the name Vohra Gaji, it is believed that this design is based on the hindu birth chart or horoscope known as 'Janam Kundali'. The horoscope chart is basically a geometrical diagram with 12 divisions. The main sections (diamonds) converge at the centre and are known as trikons lie along the periphery of the rectangle. At the time of birth the position of each planet is charted on this diagram. Planet which fall within the 4 diamonds, exert the strongest influence on one's life, while those in the 'trikons' or triangles have a lesser influence. If the Vohra Gaji symbol is superimposed on this chart, it can be seen that the leaves been derived from the 4 kendras (diamond), the stars represent each trikon, while the caterpillar like forms act as dividers between the 4 main kendras.



Rasbhat

A Ras means the circle dance men and women do with sticks in their hands- a typical Gujarati folk dance. The designation thus refers to the female figures depicted in the main field.

Dadham Bhat

In Gujarati Dadham means pomogranate and Bhat pattern.

Ghar Bandi Ful

A design with flower enclosed with in a house.

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Laheria Bhat

Laheria means diagonal striped pattern in the main field.



Mor Patangya Bhat

Mor means peacock and patangya butterfly pattern. The peacock symbolizes beauty. A dancing peacock symbolizes coming of the rains and is therefore associated with prosperity.

Pan Chowka Bhat

A design with leaf and square pattern.

Taralia Bhat

A design with star pattern in main field.

Paper Mor Bhat

A design with parrot and peacock pattern.

Small row of triangles (serrated bands) are often found in the border stripes and narrow bands of end panels.

Char Pan

A design with four heart shaped pipal leaves.

Panetar Saree with elephant and parrot design ikat border worn by the bride during the marriage ceremony.

Torana

Term for a single motif, row of triangles.

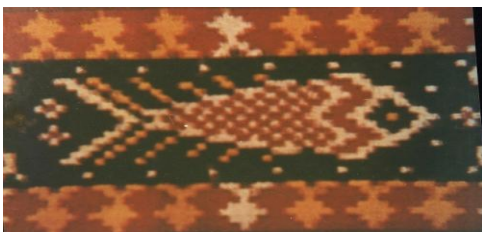


Vel

A design with concentric circles i.e. creepers.

The Matsya or Fish

The fish is the first incarnation of lord Vishnu. It is also one of the 8 symbols of good augury and good luck.



Jhad

A term for a single motif, tree.

Lal pan

A term for a single motif, heart shaped red pipal leaf.

Vichhi

A term for a single motif, scorpion.

Vavadi

Basket Motif.

Gajra

Rose flower with leaves.

Panch Patti

A term for five lines.

Swastika

An auspicious symbol of the Hindus.

Dakshni Patolu

Saree with double length, very long Patola typical for Maharashtrians.

Dhingli

Term for a woman's figure as single motif.

Karoliyo Eight- radiate star.

Kangri

Border strips consisted of small triangles.

Ful Chhadi

Bound bunch of flowers.

Conclusion

It was found that in almost all Patolas, the entire body of the saree was patterned, and combinations of the designs were used in borders and pallavs. Design with combination of traditional ones, deviation from traditional design and those taken from other sources were produced.

The artisans emphasized on the traditional designs, motifs and colour combinations as it was this kind of outlook which was preferred and bought by the customers and thus a subtle and gradual change was observed in the Patola sarees. Now a days, due to co-related factors of fashion and demand and increased mobility and media, weavers diverse to cross cultural influence resulting in little deviation from traditional designs and range of articles which is a significant evolutionary process in the history of Indian Ikat industry.

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