LESSON 13  EMBROIDERED TEXTILES OF INDIA

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13. EMBROIDERED TEXTILES OF INDIA

By now you are acquainted with the printed, painted and dyeing techniques for decorating cloth. We will see another wonderful art of decorating textiles, called embroidery. It is also known as painting with needl e. In this unit we will study about embroidered textiles of India.

13.0 Objective

After going through this lesson you will:

• Gain a basic understanding about the embroidered textiles of India.
• Be able to differentiate between the different famous embroideries of India.

13.1 Introduction

Embroidery, also been called “painting with needle”, is the art of decorating a cloth with needle work. It is the artistic use of needle and thread to create appealing designs.

In Embroidery there is a fundamental similarity not only in the craftsmanship of stitch, but also in the choice of designs and the colours used. Each region naturally has worked out its own modes, influenced by particular environmental conditions, customs and history. However, all through there is a similarity in the use of the basic stitches (Fig. 13.1) like the satin, stem, chain, darning, running and herring-bone, which have been used in a multitude of ways with varying inspiration to give each object embroidered a characteristic beauty of its own.

![Different embroidery stitches](image-url)
13.2 Historical Background

Few specimens of Indian embroidery before the Mughal period now survive. Bronze needles, used for embroidery, have been found at Mohenjodaro, 2500 B.C.-1500 B.C. Depiction on a stone sculpture of a bearded priest wearing a trefoil-patterned shawl (Fig. 13.2) found from Mohenjodaro is an important evidence. For the early mediaeval period we have the evidence of costumes in the Ajanta cave-paintings (Fig. 13.3). These include scarves, veils, waistcloths, and various types of tunic and jacket.

Fig. 13.2 Bearded priest wearing a trefoil-patter

Fig. 13.3 Ajanta frescoes

The style with which an embroiderer expresses himself/herself is not chosen, but assumed. In embroidery style, it is primarily the community that is identified; it is understood and used consistently by the whole group. Embroidery motifs are, in fact, more than “just designs.” They clearly relate cultural values and community experiences.

Self-check Questions

1. What are the commonly used stitches in Indian embroidered textiles?

2. Fill in the blanks:

   Embroidery, also been called “________ with needle”, is the art of __________ a cloth with needle work. It is the artistic use of ______ and _______ to create appealing designs.
13.3 Types of Embroidery

13.3.1 Kashmir

Northern areas of India, Kashmir has earned a name for fine examples of traditional embroidery done almost entirely by men such as the Kashmir Kashidas (Fig. 13.4) the Dau-shalos (Fig. 13.5) and the Akasi. In the Kashidas, the embroidery is very delicate mainly done with satin stitch. Designs are taken from nature like sprays of flowers (rose, lily, iris), almond, birds of many kinds, flowering shrubs and floral motifs of Persian style. In the Dau-shalos and the Akasi, work is done through the darn stitch, so that both sides of the shawl are exactly alike. In the Kani shawls (Fig. 13.6) both weaver and embroiderer (Rafougar) combine to create together a shawl of great beauty. The embroiderers could repair a damaged shawl and its woven design with their needle so beautifully that one could not make out where the difference lay between the weave and the embroidery. This singular form of craftsmanship was a noticeable feature of the Amli shawls also, where embroiderers actually took woven Jamia war shawls and perfectly reproduced the designs in embroidery, so that it is often difficult to tell difference one from the other.
13.3.2 Punjab

In Punjab, there are many varieties of embossed embroidered shawl for e.g. Phulkari. The Phulkari (Fig. 13.8) done on hand spun and hand woven cotton cloth. Each type is named after Bagh or garden according to the particular ornamentation and usage. These splendid shawls have been traditionally the outcome of the women's special talent with the needle, closely bound up with personal use and auspicious occasions. By utilizing the simple darn stitch in varied ways, and embroidering with untwisted silk thread, geometrical patterns and floral designs are arranged to give a rich mosaic-like effect. Rich tones of red-yellow and shining white, red, golden yellow or brown or deep blue cover the surface, the actual embroidery being done on the wrong side.

The Vari da Bagh (Fig. 13.9) is presented by the bridegroom's mother to the bride. It comes in different varieties viz., Satranga (seven coloured) and Panchranga (five coloured); Leheria, the waves; Dhoop Chawn, a combination of white and golden yellow; Chandrama Bagh (Fig. 13.10) etc.

13.3.3 Himachal

Chamba, in Himachal Pradesh, lies on the foothills of Himalayas from where we get Chamba rumals, the embroidered handkerchiefs. Miniature paintings of the Pahari school have been the inspiration. Besides, depicting scenes from the Krishna legends, with all the details of flowers, blossoming trees, musical instruments, human figures, dancers, fruit and the architecture, have been reproduced by way of satin stitch, running and stem stitch in deep rose-red, gold-yellow, green, and rust on cream coloured hand-spun and hand woven cotton
material. So perfect is the workmanship that both sides of the material are identical, these Rumals were used in ceremonial presentations, and kept as heirlooms.

13.3.4 Uttar Pradesh

Uttar Pradesh has Chikkan-kari (Fig. 13.12) using satin stitch and delicately outlining with small running stitches. The designs are taken from Nature. The jasmine and rose, leaves and flowing stems, five-petalled flowers, mango and almond, stand out with great effect, the pattern showing through the material and creating a shadow-work effect.

Chikankari is believed to have developed in the seventeenth century as a way of mimicking the expensive jamdani muslins. The embroidery involves about forty different stitches, with six basic ones on which the other are built. Each stitch has an individual name, involves a specific number of threads and has a specific use; it is never used in another part of the design. Finely detailed, dense floral patterns with knots, pulled network and other textural elements are characteristic of this work.

The importance of Lucknow as a centre of craft patronage dates from its creation as capital of the state of Oudh in 1775 the school of chikan embroidery of the nineteenth century.

The chikan embroidery of Lucknow in 1880, flourished there for about twenty years. It was then well established as a prosperous trade within Central, Northern and Western India and extended also to Calcutta. In addition to the skilled professional embroiderers, women to augment the family income worked on chikankari.

The Mohammedan’s families and the poor Hindu families who need to add to the income, their women and even small children work with needle and muslin. Thus the labour is cheap and abundant. This is on reason why the chikan business has taken deep: root in Lucknow.’ The repetitive work of embroidering saris, dupattas or yardage for dress-pieces, the individually embroidered garments and fine kerchiefs and rumals is the work being done.

The embroidery was executed upon tanzeb, muslin woven locally. The patterns were stamped from small print blocks for embroidery, using red earth colour, which washed out easily after the embroidery was completed. The work executed by women as a home craft was prepared by the chikanwalas, who provided the stamped cloths for embroidery according to market need; the payment for such work was meager, but the people were glad to undertake any labour, which added to their means of subsistence.
13.3.5 Bihar

In Bihar, as in the case of the Chamba Rumals, the embroiderers closely followed the subjects of paintings. In this case the wall paintings of Mithila (Fig. 13.13), with their philosophical themes - the Wheel, the conch, the moon, trident, the sacred drum, the thunderbolt, and the sun, all motifs connected with religious thought, have been used.

Bihar has several other types of embroidery. The Kashida (Fig. 13.14), though having a similar name as that used for a type of shawl in Kashmir, is very different. These beautiful embroideries done by the tribal people of this region consist of very closely worked stitches done to create an embossed effect, with unique geometrical, floral, leaf and star motifs with running stitch, having white ground material with blue or black designs.

13.3.6 Bengal

Nothing written about Indian embroidery could be considered complete without something about the Kanthas (literally, rags) a folk art of West Bengal. The village woman of Bengal often devoted their leisure hour in working on the Kanthas, creating

Self-check Questions

3. Name the famous shawls of Kashmir.
beautiful and artistic fabric out of worn-out clothes. Kanthas are made with lengths of old saris, several pieces of about the same length are placed one on top of the other. The field is now quilted in white thread the edges of all the pieces are stitched together so as to form a padded or quilted rectangular piece, on top of it embroidery is done on simple running stitches (Fig. 13.15), for which they yarns of different colours are drawn out from the borders of the saris, and the surface is embroidered with human and animal, foliage and floral motifs. It is said that it may take anything from six months to three generations to make a Kantha.

13.3.7 Madhya Pradesh

Tribal people have always had a great flair for decoration and ornamentation. Many of India's ancient craftsmen who employed embroidery introduced the mode of using the needle to follow the warp and the weft in their flow, and thus created a unique style, in which this added decoration appeared as part of the weave. In Madhya Pradesh Central India, a number of the tribal people have done embroideries by the above method on their various garments. So beautiful is the colour and weave that the geometrical patterns, squares, and diamond shapes they use seem as though woven on the loom. In tones of reds and buff of the backgrounds naturally. These lovely patterns can be seen on their sheets, shawls and waist cloths.

13.3.8 Assam

Assam on the eastern side of the country also utilizes this particular method of embroidery. Weave and embroidery are combined for the sarongs (Fig. 13.17) worn by men and women, and often the woven stripes of contrasting tri-colour
shades on the basic material have embroidery placed on them in the same tints, to give an embossed weave effect. Tones of dark red, purple red or deep red-brown row on the surface, and then, the borders which are generally in black are embroidered with symbolic designs and motifs that are taken from Nature or geometrical forms.

13.3.9 Gujarat

Turning to Western India, Kutch in Gujarat State has the most varied types of embroidery to be found in India. These embroideries are for the most part done in the town of Bhuj. The specialty here is the Ari or the hook, such as is used in crewel work, the outcome of which is the chain stitch. It is so closely and evenly done that the satin material on which the motifs are embroidered gets an added brilliant effect. Motifs here are once again inspired by Nature and the surroundings, worked on wearing apparel and wall hangings.

These sophisticated embroideries have their folk counterparts, such as the Kanbi (Fig. 13.18), which is similar in craftsmanship, and done by peasant women on their wide flared skirts (Ghagras), short blouses (Cholis), and children's wear. In these fascinating embroideries we find the imagination of the people. Cowherd families, for instance, who are gentle by temperament, use softer tones in their floral, bird and foliage motifs in contrast to their neighbours, the Rabaris, who specialise in appliqué work, using bright colour schemes and gay designs (Fig. 13.19). Striking shapes are cut out from cloth of different textures and flowing designs are created with the use of button-hole stitch to fix these patterns on to the material. Sometimes borders are further embellished with the use of double cross-stitch to create both contrast and variety. Moving further towards the Rann of Kutch, tribal people living here embroider striking designs with coloured threads. The motifs are mainly geometrical though the embroiderers also reproduce from Nature, animals, birds and sometimes-human figures. The workmanship is very fine and detailed, in keeping with choice colour combinations.
In Kathiawar, another part of Gujarat State, there is a type of embroidery akin to the Bagh of the Punjab, known as Heer Bharat (Fig. 13.20). Here also there is the characteristic all-over brocade-like effect produced by using long stitches in untwisted silk thread. The motifs for the most part are geometrical, comprising triangles, rectangles, diamond shapes and floral effects, and give the same effect of light and shade as one sees in the Bagh, the Abla (mirror work) designs as in Fig. 13.21, are made primarily by the placement of tiny mirrors that are set with button-hole stitch in harmonising colours on the material to give them prominence, and herringbone stitch is used in the spaces with ornamental design. Thus the texture of the materials is enhanced by the types of stitches and the charming ensembles of flowers and birds and leaves that are heavily set with glittering mirrors.

Self-check Question

4. Name the instrument which is used in Gujarat embroidery.

13.3.10 Maharashtra

In the neighbouring State of Maharashtra, a variation of the Kashida of Bihar is known as the Kasuti (Fig. 13.22). Kasutis are done by women for personal use and many motifs are taken from everyday life and temple ceremonial as well as Nature and symbolically reproduced in several types of fine stitches. With the double running stitch, for instance, they produce flowers and birds and stylised animals inside triangles, squares or rectangles. So excellent is the workmanship that the effect is the same on both sides. This reversible effect is also obtained when the motifs are different and done in a zig-zag stitch. Yet another style in this embroidery is that in which a woven effect is obtained by fine stitches applied to make the motifs in cross-stitch.

13.3.11 Southern India

Coming to the South, there is the purely feminine embroidery, also known as Kasuri as it gets its name from that town in Karnataka State. Done on a dark background generally with the help of knots, running and stem stitch, illustrative motifs of flowers, temple spires, stars, the lotus, conch shell, birds, parrots, swans, the bull and lion, and sometimes geometrical shapes are common on the borders and pallav of saris. The craftsmanship is so fine that it looks like weave.
Among the tribal people in the South, there are the handsome Todas who live in the mountainous area of Ootacamund. Men and women drape themselves in large shawls (*Poothkulli*) (Fig. 13.23), which are woven in off-white heavy cotton. There are two borders in black and red or in red and indigo blue on each shawl and between these borders the women embroider geometrical designs in lovely shades of red to coincide with the textural threads. The embroidery is heavy, and is done on the wrong side of the material, so that on the right side it is more delicate and appears like a woven pattern.

![Fig. 13.23 Poothkulli shawls; Inset: Detailed work](image)

### 13.4 Assignments

#### 13.4.1 Class assignments

1. Draw and sketch the motifs of various embroidered fabrics of India.
2. Make a replica of any one embroidered textiles of India.

#### 13.4.2 Home assignments

1. Collect pictures or photos of different embroidered textiles of India that you can find from magazines, shops, and the internet, representing different styles. Paste them neatly on clear pages with labels under each photo or picture.

### 13.5 Summing Up

In describing the various types of traditional embroideries of India, one finds that the aesthetic feeling for colour and design behind each of many artistic creations has guided craftsmen and craftswomen to ornament fabrics with special purpose. Laying stress on the form and texture of the materials, these types of ornamentation have always served the purpose of emphasizing the intrinsic beauty of the textiles on which
they have been placed the designs and motifs have all been influenced from nature and the surroundings.

### 13.6 Possible Answers to Self-check Questions

1. Satin, stem, chain, darning, running and herring bone are the main stitches used in Indian embroidery textiles.

2. Embroidery, also been called “painting with needle”, is the art of decorating a cloth with needle work. It is the artistic use of needle and thread to create appealing designs.

3. The famous shawls of Kashmir are Kashmiri Kashidas, Dau-Shalos and Kani Jamawar Shawls.

4. Ari or hook is used for chain stitch in Gujarat embroidery.

### 13.7 Terminal Questions

1. What is embroidery?

2. Which specimens were founded in Indian embroidery earlier than the Mughal period?

3. What evidence of costumes we get in the Ajanta cave-printings?

4. What is Chikkan-kari and from which part of country it is popular?

5. Where can we find embroidery in northern parts of India?

6. What are the main features of Punjab phulkari?

7. Which kinds of motifs are used in Assam embroidery?

8. What type of embroidery is found in Gujarat?

9. What types of motifs are used in embroidery from Gujarat?

10. Fill in the blanks:
   
   i) Embroidery has also called ____________________.
   
   ii) Limestone figure have found at ____________________.
   
   iii) Chiklan-kari is done with ________ or ____________ threads.
iv) Chikkan-kari best known in the city of ________________.

v) Phulkari done on ________________________.

vi) ________________________ Presented by the bride rooms.


12. Write an historical account of embroidered textile?

13. What are you known about embroidered textile of Karnataka?

14. What do you know about embroidery of Kathiawar?

15. Write a details account of traditional embroidery of Gujarat?

13.8 References and Suggested Further Reading


13.9 Glossary

1. Auspicious Suggesting a good chance of success in future

2. Mimicking Imitate the voice or behaviour of

3. Augment Increase

4. Sarongs Length of fabric wrapped around
5. Sophisticated Having experience of taste in culture and fashion
6. Harminozing The quality of forming a balancing combination