CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

India is a vast country; its people, their costumes and their textiles reflect a glorious past and a rich culture. One is wonderstruck by all the beauty, variety, diversity and skillful capabilities of its people especially in their textile craft. The traditional textile crafts of India have a tremendous impact on the people of the world, both in the academic and commercial circles.

India was perhaps the first country in the world to have perfected the craft of weaving. Mehta (1970) remarks, that the rich and beautiful products of the weavers of India have been rightly called "exquisite poetry in colourful fabrics." It was said that, there was no trick that was not known to the weavers of India and their art of weaving enjoyed undisputed supremacy till the 18th century.

Today, all textiles found in India are dated after the 16th century. This is perhaps due to the nature of the soil and climatic condition which is not congenial for preservation and also due to the ritual of disposing off belongings of individuals after death(7,10).

Crafts express the great traditional and cultural heritage of a country. They have deep relations with the deities and shrines, nature, festivals and everyday life. There is a strong sense of continuity by inheritance i.e.,
LOCATION OF GUJARAT STATE IN INDIA

Fig. 1
passing of techniques and hereditary skills from generation
to generation. The crafts belonged to the common folk but had
a royal patronage. There was nothing like having to create
markets or advertising as seen in the modern industrial
society of today (35).

India has one of the richest traditions of woven
textiles which are made from different materials using a
variety of techniques and processes. Each region within India
has its distinctive style, technique of weaving and design
which has been influenced not only by geographical, social
and cultural traditions but also through migrating ethnic
groups who have been coming to India by land and sea from all
over the world.

Gujarat is one of the states of India situated in the
western extremities between 68°.4' and 74°.4' east
longitudes and between 20°.1' and 24°.7' north latitudes.
The state is surrounded by the Arabian sea in the west,
Rajasthan in the north and north west, Madhya Pradesh in the
east and Maharashtra in the south and southeast. It occupies
an area of 195984 sq.kms, constituting 14.39 percent of the
total geographic area of the country. Its coastline is thirty
percent of the whole coast line of India (Fig.1).

Gujarat has a glorious history of a wide variety of
textiles full of design and patterns ingrained so beautifully
into the cloth by weaving or on the fabric by dyeing and
printing. The traditional patolas (tie and dyed woven
fabrics), brocades, kinkhabs, mashrus, shawls, blankets, 'pichwais', etc., are all part and parcel of a deep aesthetic culture of Gujarat which has been developed by many castes, tribes and folk families like the 'Gujars', 'Yadavas', 'Kathis', 'Makaravis', 'Khatris', 'Shaikhs', 'Rawals', etc. The 'Vankars' i.e., the weavers have carried their art through the ages from one family member to the other(74).

Excavations at the Harappan settlements at Lothal and at a number of ports show a large number of spindles as well as woven textiles confirming that weaving was extensively practiced in Gujarat. Ahmedabad, Surat, Jamnagar, Patan, Mandvi, Rajkot, to name a few, have been important weaving centres of Gujarat. Also, the long coast line of Gujarat has helped the textile crafts to flourish due to extensive trade with the outside world.

Presently, Gujarat has emerged into an important textile industrial centre which is based on power looms. So much so, that it's beautiful handlooms have suffered a tremendous set back. What has happened to those exquisite textiles? Why have they become so obscure? Banaras has come to be associated as the real home of brocades when actually it was in Gujarat that these fabrics originated. Where are the beautiful gold and silver fabrics called 'kinkhabs'? What has happened to the weavers who wove these fabrics that were "no less than dreams". The phrase "Patolas of Patan" is very common but, no one seems to know about the mashru's of Patan and Mandvi.
An exploratory study of these fabrics would help to understand the reason why these fabrics have lost their importance. Once the facts are laid bare, methods and plans can be evolved to try and promote, preserve and popularise these fabrics and prevent them from becoming extinct.

Brocades and kinkhabs are synonymous to each other. Today a distinction is made between the two. The finer variety are used for making sarees and are referred to as "Ahmedavadi" sarees, or "Asawali" sarees or simply "brocaded sarees." Sometimes they are also talked about as "Banaras sarees from Ahmedabad !" and the thicker variety with smaller width are called kinkhabs and are used for dress material, jackets, blouses, skirts, etc.

The brocades of India are probably older than the Code of Manu and were known as the "fabric of dreams" or as "cloth of gold". They have always been associated with grandeur and royalty and were made entirely of pure silver and gold wires with intricate and elaborate designs, by weavers who enjoyed royal patronage. In fact, introducing silk and/or cotton with gold and silver threads came in later.

The root of the word, 'brocade' is identical with that in 'broach' and means to "stab or transfix." It thus makes a direct reference to the small needle like spools, that carry the pattern threads, being thrust between the warp (either by hand or machinery) in elaboration of the pattern(77).
The 'naksha' technique of making brocaded fabrics has been replaced by the jacquard attachment, though the rest of the technique has remained more or less the same i.e., throw shuttle pit looms and the extra weft technique with twill weave is still practiced. Yarns have changed from pure gold or silver to imitation zari and silk has been replaced by synthetic yarns. Both traditional and contemporary designs are being used.

Until recently Ahmedabad, Ridrol, Surat and Jamnagar were centres of brocade and kinkhab weaving. But now it is centred around a few towns of Mehasana district. Surat has become a centre for power looms.

Mashru fabrics are popularly known as 'gaji' silk meaning of a single length or yard, and is distinguished as a textile, mainly with striped patterns in satin weave. Mashru a mixed fabric with pure silk warp and cotton weft which seems to have been introduced into India by the Muslims who were prohibited to use pure silk garments (36). According to Trivedi (1961), the term 'mashru' means "permitted". Mashrus are now made using rayon and cotton. Patan in Gujarat had about 200 families engaged in this craft and it has been an important centre since the 12th century. Mandvi in Kutch was another important centre for mashru weaving. Here it was known as 'Illacha'.

Colours were mostly bright yellow, red, green, purple. Often the warp were tie dyed to give a single ikat effect.
Sometimes dots were also introduced into the stripe designs. These fabrics were used for long coats or 'jamas' by members of the royal family. Today they are used mostly for blouses and as furnishing materials.

Mashru weaving is still a household craft, though the number of households have decreased. The technique of using fly shuttle pit looms with satin weave has remained more or less the same but, there has been tremendous product diversification and markets have grown larger. Yet, the traditional household craft seems to be dying due to competition from the powerloom sector and production of cheaper quality fabrics.

The arena of traditional textiles in India has lost it’s prime position, even though it has been recognised by policy makers that promotion of small production units can lead to a balanced economy. It plays an important role for employment generation, improvement of rural incomes, optimal use of local human and material resources. It also prevents migration from rural to urban areas. Infact government policies in India for the promotion of handicrafts, of which handlooms form an important part, can be traced back to the first five year plan period though prior to independence agriculture was thought to be instrumental for rural development. Even the 8th five year plan has a long drawn policy for the promotion of handlooms, but implementation of these plans have not been monitored sufficiently enough to benefit the craftsmen(3).
There are conflicting opinions of various eminent scholars and public figures as to the cause of the decline in status of the textile craft. There are some who feel that as India is a country of great survivals and resilience from the past it's people are not so easily swayed and continue their age old traditions resisting any change even if it is for their betterment. This could be one cause of the textile crafts dying out as they do not keep pace with the changing needs. On the other hand, this resilience could be a ray of hope for those who want to revive the crafts as they are not yet completely wiped out.

Singh Justina (1966), has quoted the following, 'In 1964, Mr. B. K. Nehru, Indian Ambassador to the U.S. commented : "The culture of India has grown over more than 5000 years, absorbing ideas and values from other civilizations and people, modifying itself in order to suit the needs of the times, but always retaining the unbroken thread of it's own tradition. Her roots are so deeply embedded in the soil of history that the people are not easily swayed by every passing sociological or political fashion of the time." (India News, Dec. 18, 1964, 2)'.

Dhamija (1989), is of the opinion that, "Today with the far reaching impact of audio visual media and the flooding of the market with synthetic fabrics which are longer lasting and easier to maintain, the traditional market for fabrics is changing". There is an intermingling of styles and culture, in fact there is a change globally at all levels and in all
spheres of life social, economical and aesthetic. This can be attributed to the introduction of new methods of communications, developments in science and technology. Values too are changing from aesthetic endeavour to commercialisation which is leading to mass production and cheap imitations as markets have expanded. In order to keep the hearths burning and provide basic necessities to the weavers and their families, the traditional textile crafts as a whole, have had to make compromises and innovate to meet the changing demands of the products of their looms, thereby preventing them from becoming extinct. Above all, the craftsman require motivation, organisation and encouragement to help manifest their traditional and artistic talent. Textile crafts not only reflect the creativity of simple, rural folks who have been unspoilt by modern thought and ideas but they are also a source of livelihood for millions of people in the villages. Due to the threat of modernization, commercialization and exploitation, the poor weavers are being forced to give up their craft which comes naturally to them or to migrate to cities to carry out tasks which are completely alien to their psyche and physique.

The concept of eco-friendly textiles has once again become very popular, of which Indian traditional textiles i.e., hand woven, hand spun, (Khadi) and handloom fabrics play a very vital role, since their production processes are pollution free. This has given fresh hope for the revival of the traditional textile crafts.
The heritage of textiles of India needs to be enriched adding to it the value of generating adequate remuneration. It once again needs to be anchored in art and pride of its heritage. It is for institutions, both government and others to design a better future and preserve this heritage in the art of weaving (58).

The traditional weaving crafts of India, wherein Gujarat had an important place earlier, is dying and it is very essential to prevent their extinction as they are reflections of a glorious past, a rich culture and a way of life of the people. This can be done by conducting an indepth study of the traditional woven textiles of Gujarat, documenting the weaving procedures and information on the social and economical life of the weavers, highlighting their problems and suggesting steps to overcome them, both at the grass root and governmental level. With this in mind the following objectives have been framed for a renaissance - a new emergence or revival of the textile craft.

1.1 Objectives
1. To record the demographic details of the weavers and their families making traditional woven textiles in Gujarat.
2. To document the production techniques of the traditional woven textiles of Gujarat, emphasising cause and effect of change, if any.
3. To identify the traditional and present day tools and equipments used for producing traditional woven textiles in Gujarat.
4. To study the designs, motifs and colours of the traditional woven textiles of Gujarat.
5. To understand material management, selling and marketing practices.
6. To study the impact of the traditional weaving craft on the economic life of the weavers.

1.2 Significance of the Study

1. To make an indepth study of the traditional woven textiles of Gujarat which would be useful to academicians interested in the study of traditional textiles.
2. To revive, preserve and popularise the heritage of weaving, unique to India and prevent it from dying out gradually.
3. To understand weaver's working conditions and give suggestions for improvement and alternative procedures to enable them to increase production, profitability and adequate return on investment.
4. To be able to suggest to government agents policy modifications for an effective revival of the traditional textiles.

1.3 Limitation of the Study

The study was limited to three traditional woven textiles of Gujarat - kinkhabs, brocade sarees and mashrus.