Indian Trade Textiles for Southeast Asia: Lost Histories of the Spread Cloth

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Significance of Indian Trade Clothes (ITC)

• Highlight the importance of Indian piece goods in Global trade
• Role of ITC in non European intra-Asian trade
• Even in the era of expansion of European powers in Asia, growth of global trade is not due to their expansion but due to Asian regional traders in SA, SEA and China.
• Asian trade in piece goods existed even beyond the VOC and EIC defined needs of spice for cloth trade
• Based on collection data, standard view of sharp discontinuity in Asian Trade by 19th century be reviewed to accommodate the survival of Asian traders’ network
• Raise the artistic value of ITC beyond commodities of trade to reflect upon their creative, cultural and intrinsic artistic value
• View them in their context of consumption as luxury goods; heirloom, spiritual and status symbols; cultural and social customs and rituals involved
Production and trade centres in Gujarat
Cambay-Malacca

• The Cambay merchants make Malacca their chief trading centre. There used to be a thousand Gujarat merchants in Malacca, besides four or five thousand Gujarat seamen, who came and went. Malacca cannot live without Cambay, nor Cambay without Malacca, if they are to be very rich and very prosperous. All the clothes and things from Gujarat have trading value in Malacca and in the kingdoms which trade with Malacca.

   Suma Oriental of Tome Pires, Vol 1, p. 45
Cambay- Malacca

• ..It (Cambay) has all the silks there are in these parts, all the different kinds of cotton material, of which there must be twenty, all of great value... p. 43

• ...Those from Aden bring to Gujarat a great quantity of opium, raisins, madder, indigo, rosewater, silver, seed-pearls, and other dyes, which are of value in Cambay. In these companies go Parsees, Turks, Turkomans and Armenians, and they come and take up their companies for their cargo in Gujarat, and from there they embark in March and sail direct for Malacca; and on return journey they call at the Maldives Islands.

• Four ships come every year from Gujarat to Malacca. The merchandise of each ship is worth fifteen, twenty or thirty thousand cruzados, nothing less than fifteen thousand. And from the city of Cambay one ship comes every year...The merchandise they bring is cloth of thirty kinds, which are of value in these parts;...pp. 269-270
Gujarati ship, early 20th century (right);
Ship building in Mandavi, Gujarat today (left)
Production and trade centres at Coromandel Coast
Pulicat-Malacca

• The Malabares come to Pulicat to take their companies. They bring merchandise from Gujarat, and those from Choromandel bring coarse Kling cloth. There come every year to Malacca three or four ships, each one must be worth twelve to fifteen thousand cruzados; and from Pulicat come one or two ships; each worth eighty or ninety thousand cruzados, or a junk worth no less. They bring thirty kinds of cloths, rich cloths of great value. They pay in Malacca six percent. These Klings have all the merchandise and more of the Malacca trade than any other nation.

• These Malabares form their company in Bonuaquelim, that is Choromandel and Pulicat, and they come in companies; but the name is Kling and not Malabars. Choromandel, and Pulicat and Nagore. These are ports of the coast of Choromandel: the first is Caile, and Kilakari(Calicate), Adirampatnam(Adarampatna), Nagore(Naor), Tirumalrajanpatnam(Turjmalapatnam), Karikal(Carecall), Tranquebar(Teregamparj), Tirumelwassel(Tirjamalacha), Calaparaoo, Pondichery(Conjmjrj), Pulicat(Paleacate). Pp. 271-271
Earliest examples of Gujarati textiles: Fustat, Berenike, Qusair al Qadim

Textile fragment with a lotus scroll
10th century - 1st half of the 11th century
Recovered from Fustat, lower Egypt

Detail of an elephant motif
13th-14th century
Recovered from Quseir al-Qadim, Egypt

Indian cotton resist dyed textile
5th century CE
Recovered from Berenike, Egypt
Structure of different textiles
Dancing ladies

Hanging depicting *dandia* dancers
Gujarat, 15th century
(Radiocarbon dated 1444-1491)
Acquired in Indonesia
Cotton; drawn and painted, resist and mordant dyed
Examples of dance and music

Dispute between Devi-Suri and Kumudachandra, c.1125-1150 CE
Gujarat and Rajasthan, western India
Collection: J.P. Goenka, Bombay
Examples of dance and music

Entertainment at Indra’s Court
Folio from a Kalpasutra and Kalacharyakatha, ca 1475 CE
Western India
Examples of Dance and Music

Detail showing scene of dance and music
Sun temple, Modhera, Gujarat
11th century
Women with veenas and parrots

Ma’a
Gujarat, mid 15th-mid 17th century
(radiocarbon dated 1440-1626)
Acquired in Toraja
Women with veenas and parrots contextual photo

River goddess holding parrot
Ajanta Cave 26, 6th-7th centuries CE

veenas and parrots
Gujarat, mid 15th-mid 17th century
(radiocarbon dated 1440-1626)
Hanging depicting women battling *yali*
Gujarat, 13th-14th century
(Radiocarbon dated 1285-1365)
Cotton; block printed, drawn and painted, resist and mordant dyed
Apsaras and Yalis

Temple fragment showing Yvala and Surasundari
Gurgi, Madhya Pradesh
Warrior ladies in temple sculpture

Vira type nayikas holding weapons on temple architecture from Abhapur, Gujarat and Osian, Rajasthan
Processions with elephants and horses

Piecegood with two fields of elephants, horses and entertainers.
Gujarat, 13th-mid 15th century
(Radiocarbon dated 1262-1422)
Acquired in Babar
Cotton; block printed, resist and mordant dyed
Procession with elephants in Jain painting

Elephant with two riders
Jain manuscript
15th century
N.C. Mehta Collection
Patola group

(1) Shrikarbhata patola (elephant design)

Hanging with large carparisoned elephants

*Kain patola*

Gujarat, late 18th- early 19th century (Radiocarbon dated 1798-1811)

Acquired in Indonesia

Silk, double ikat
(2) elephant/tiger/horses design

Hanging with horses with riders and tigers
*Kain patola*
Gujarat, 19th century
Acquired in Indonesia
Silk; double ikat

*Kain patola*
Gujarat, late 18th-early 19th century
(Radiocarbon dated 1798-1811)
Acquired in Indonesia
Silk; double ikat
(3) Geometric design

Three flower patterned *patola* shoulder cloth
*Kain patola*
Gujarat, late 19th century
Acquired in Indonesia
Silk, double ikat

Patola trousers
Gujarat, 19th century
Tailored in Java
Cotton and silk; double ikat

Pakubuwana wearing patola pants
Cultureel Indie (Leiden: Brill, 1943)
Vohra gaji patterned patola cloth
Gujarat, late 19th century-early 20th century
Silk, double ikat

Rani ki vav step well
Gujarat
11th century
Shoulder cloth with imitation *patola* pattern
*Selendang*
Possibly European manufacture, 19th century
Acquired in Indonesia

Lattice patterned window
Jama Masjid, Cambay
Geese pattern cloth

Hanging depicting eight geese in a roundel
Ma’a
Gujarat, 15th century
(radiocarbon dated 1437-1469)
Acquired in Toraja
Cotton; block printed, resist and mordant dyed
Geese pattern in paintings

Geese pattern on the sari of Adinath’s mother
Patan School
15th century
N.C. Metha Gallery

Mahajanaka leaving the palace
Mahajanaka Jataka
Ajanta Cave 1
5th-6th century CE

Wooden book cover
12th century
Grapeleaf pattern

Hanging with grapeleaf pattern
Ma’a
Gujarat, 18th century
Acquired in Toraja
Cotton; block printed, resist and mordant dyed
Grapeleaf motif in detail

Stylised grapeleaf motif
12th century
Recovered in Fustat, lower Egypt
Cotton
Kelsey Museum

Detail of grapeleaf motif
Gujarat, 18th century
Small leaf pattern

Hanging with small leaf pattern
Gujarat, mid-late 15th century
(Radiocarbon dated 1445-1494)
Acquired in Indonesia
Cotton; drawn and painted, resist and mordant dyed
Roto Bokong pattern

Piece good with five Roto Bokong patterned fields
Ma’a
Gujarat, mid-late 15th century
Radiocarbon dated 1444-1491
Acquired in Toraja
Cotton; block printed, resist and mordant dyed
Tree of Life group

Hanging with tree of life motif
Coromandel Coast, 18th century
Cotton, drawn and painted, resist and mordant dyed

Coromandel Coast, late 17th to early 18th century
Radiocarbon dated 1670-1695
Cotton, drawn and painted, resist and mordant dyed
Tree motif in architecture

Motif of stylised tree with curving tendrils
Sidi Saiyyed Mosque, Ahmedabad
Built in 1573

Motif of stylised tree with flowers
Adalaj step-well, Gandhinagar, Gujarat
15th century
Islamic calligraphy inspired

Hanging with calligraphic inscription
Coromandel Coast, late 19th-early 20th century
Cotton; block printed, drawn and painted, resist and mordant dyed

Hanging with calligraphic motifs
Coromandel Coast, 17th century
(Radiocarbon dated 1555-1633)
Cotton; drawn and painted, resist and mordant dyed
Thai Group

Manuscript wrapper with celestial figures
Coromandel Coast, late 18th century
(Radiocarbon dated 1782-1798)
Acquired in Thailand
Cotton; drawn and block printed, resist and mordant dyed

Fragment with floral tendrils
Coromandel Coast, late 17th - early 18th century
(Radiocarbon dated 1647-1667)
Acquired in Thailand
Cotton; drawn and block printed, resist and mordant dyed
Sri Lankan market group

Hanging with centrefield of stylised peacocks and floral motifs
Palampore
Coromandel Coast, 19th century
Acquired in Sri Lanka
Cotton; block printed, drawn and painted, resist and mordant dyed

Skirt cloth with lattice of floral roundels
India, Late 19th century-20th century
Acquired in Sri Lanka
Cotton; machine manufactured
Conclusion

• Limitation: Indian trade cloths have survived to tell a fragmentary story, as quite a large number of patterns have not survived.

• Market Recognition: From the evidence available, not all of them were meant for export as previously noted. Importance of domestic & parallel market needs to be established.

• Feedback: Some form of “feedback loop” existed which communicated finest details of the consumer’s needs through samples or pattern designs with relevant market response.

• Textile as Social Media: To understand textile traditions one needs to further research into different artistic media and art historical periods.

• Continuity & Change: Continuity of textile traditions at both ends needs to be studied and documented to understand their significance holistically.
Thank You