C H A P T E R I

INTRODUCTION

Tribal communities, all over India, appertain to Indian acculturation. Various elements in ancient civilisation of India are believed to be of tribal origin. Clothing is one of such major elements contributed by the tribal people.

The origin of costumes in Indian set up can be traced back to the vedic period. Satpatha Brahmins were of the view that in order to be civilised it was important to have some form of clothing. The dress in its origin and evolution has received thoughtful, scientific, and aesthetic consideration. However, the origin, logic and significance of costume encompasses varied views and opinions.

According to Ghurye (29) around 2000 B.C. a number of tribes or ethinic groups had close linguistic and other cultural alliances with Iranians, Greeks, Romans and some others. These tribals first covered their bodies with leaves, bark of trees or animal skin to protect themselves from nature. The art of cutting and sewing came much later in the cultural development of man. Garments with elaborate decoration came in even later.

Lester stated that painting, cutting, tatooing and scarification may well have been the precursors of the modern dress. An ambition to be distinguished from fellow beings may have stimulated the desire to dress (45).

Clothing is an art, an expression of personality. In any culture clothes and other forms of physical adornment have a tremendous social as well as psychological impact. It is also believed that clothing originated with the urge to decorate the body.

The primary objective of dress amongst the various aboriginal tribes generally appeared to be decoration of the body. This was more prominent among women's clothing than men's clothing.

It is mentioned by Ghurye (29) that 'Khasia' men of Khumayun wore a long black blanket while their women wore in addition heavy metal rings in their ears and nose as well as silver bracelets and anklets as ornaments. This reflects the significance of decoration among the aboriginal tribal women.

Clothing symbolises status, occupation, sex and religion. Among men and women in all parts of India, there are similarities and differences in clothing, ornaments and hair styles. Costumes worn by people are also an expression of social beliefs.

India is known for the diversity of her people. Their culture, tribes, communities, caste and religion through centuries have been judged by their costumes.

It has been proved time and again by authentic researches that various factors are responsible for bringing about changes in the traditional costumes. Singh (74) has mentioned that several changes had taken place in the traditional costumes of Indian women as the result of the spread of education and communication in India. Chandvadkar (16) conclude that the traditional costume, jewellery, footwear and hairstyle have changed to modern trend, so much so that only the older generation now seems to be an image of the tradition. It was also noted that socioeconomic factor had an impact on the mode of wearing the traditional costumes both by men and women.

Gujarat has a number of tribes residing in different parts of the state. The tribal culture is often reflected in a wide range of native costumes worn by them. Tribals of Gujarat have a distinct traditional clothing style of their own. P.G. Shah (70) states that the dress of the tribes that were studied in Gujarat were distinctive and it is possible for any experienced person to identify a person of one tribe from the another by the type of dress worn.

Tribal costumes are colourful thrilling and fascinating. These costumes are both in draped style and tailored, i.e. cut and sewn to the shape of the body. The garments worn by tribal people, largely depend on the local resources, climate and extraneous influence. A large variety of traditional costumes are still being used by tribes in some parts of Gujarat.

However, these traditional garments and ornaments are now being gradually displaced by new shapes and forms due to the various developments in towns and villages due to the increased accessibility to the remote villages.

Masavi & Pandya's (46) survey report reveals that the costumes of 'Kathodi' tribe of Gujarat has been modified to suit the modern society. The Kathodi men have started wearing Dhoti of varying length from calf to ankle with shirt and women have adopted sari blouse with sari. The adolescent boys prefer to wear trousers and shirts whereas some educated girls prefer to wear sari petticoat either with shirt or blouse. Due to the increased trade and commerce between urban and rural areas tribal people are shedding their traditional costumes and confine its usage to only religious occasions and festivals.

Lal (44) has made a mention in his survey report pertaining to the costumes of tribal industrial workers. The change from tribal costumes to modern costumes has taken place owing to the desire for acquiring civilised status as a result of the impact of industrialisation.

Bhatt's (7) study revealed that each tribe had a distinct style of dressing. The second generation was wearing the same traditional costumes as their adults whereas the third or new generation had adopted present costumes.

After reviewing the available literature the investigator thought that since the traditional costumes are fast being modified to modern forms, there is an intense need of reliable historical records documenting the type of garments, ornaments and footwear worn by the tribals.

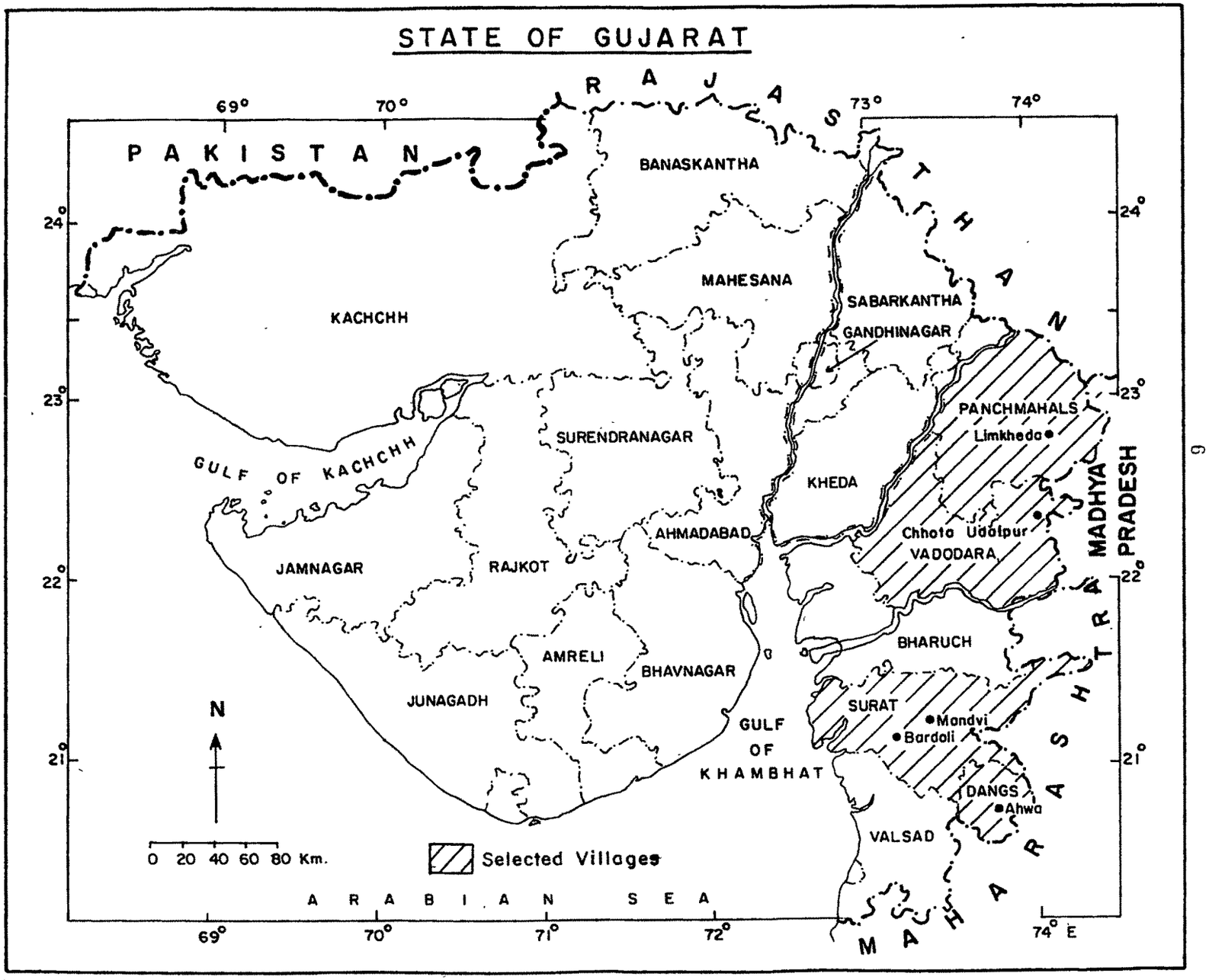
An indepth information on the use of various garments, the design aspects, constructional details and the draping of the draped garments needs to be recorded for future reference. This would enable the costume designers, museum curators and educational institutions to obtain a replica of the traditional tribal costumes.

Hence, a historical study of the costumes worn by the tribal people of selected tribes in the state will help to conceptualise better understanding of the traditional costumes before they are completely abandoned and also help retain the same.

1.1 Introduction to the State:

Gujarat, one of the most important states of India lies on the western extremities of the country between 20.1° and 24.7° latitude and 68.4° and 74.4° longitude. The state is surrounded by Arabian sea in the west, Rajasthan in the north and north east, Madhya Pradesh in the east and Maharashtra in the south and south-east. Gujarat was separated from Bombay state in the year 1960 and formed a new state.

The state occupies an area of 1,95,984 sq.kms. of which the tribal sub-plan covers 28,194 sq.kms. It thus constitutes 14.39% of the total geographic area of the state. Gujarat ranks fifth amongst all the states in India in respect of the size of the scheduled tribes population. According to the 1981 Census the schedule tribes population in Gujarat State was 48,48,586. The proportion of schedule tribes population to the total population of the state works out to 14.22 per cent. Every tenth tribal person of the country lives in Gujarat and every seventh Gujarati is a tribal person. The tribal population of the state mostly live in the areas along the eastern border of the State which is the most backward terrain. Most of these areas are characterised by hilly, rocky soil, uncertain rainfall and presence of forest over large areas. About 96 per cent of the schedule tribe population in the state is concentrated in eight districts namely Banaskantha, Sabarkantha, Panchmahals, Vadodara, Bharuch, Surat, Valsad and Dangs. The percentage of schedule tribe population to the total population is highest in the Dangs and Valsad districts. The climate in the south


STATE OF GUJARAT
PAKISTAN
RAJASTHAN
BANASKANTHA
MAHESANA
SABARKANTHA
GANDHINAGAR
KACHCHH
PANCHMAHALS
Limkheda
SURENDRANAGAR
GULF OF KACHCHH
KHEDA
AHMADABAD
Chhota Udaipur
VADODARA
JAMNAGAR
RAJKOT
MADHYA PRADESH
BHARUCH
AMRELI
BHAVNAGAR
SURAT
Mandvi
Bardoli
JUNAGADH
GULF OF KHAMBHAT
DANGS
Ahwa
VALSAD
MAHARASHTRA
N
0 20 40 60 80 Km.
Selected Villages
ARABIAN SEA
69°
70°
71°
72°
73°
74°
74° E
24°
23°
22°
21°

and south-west is moist with high rainfall, varies considerably in the tribal areas of the state. The southern most parts receive an annual rainfall as high as 1960 mm. whereas in the northern parts in the vicinity of Aravalli and Abu the annual rainfall is as low as 630 mm.

The northern part of the state being close to Rajasthan experiences extreme temperatures. The maximum temperature in summer (April-May) may be as high as 45°C in some parts, while in winter(Nov.-Feb.) the temperature ranges between 23°C to 30°C. In northern parts the temperature is low gradually increasing southward. Through centuries a number of tribal communities in Gujarat have settled. In all, twenty eight tribal communities have been identified in 1976. The main tribal communities are Bhills, Dublas, Dhodia, Choudhary, Dhanaka, Kukanas, Varlis, Rathwa, Gamit, Patelia, Naikas etc. Also there are primitive groups like Kotwaria, Kolghas, Kathodi, Siddis and Padhars. The tribal society continues to be lagging behind the neighbouring non-tribal society in almost all walks of life.

1.2 Introduction to tribes:

1.2.1 Bhils:

Bhills are the largest group and constitute about 39 percent of total tribal population in the state.

Their estimated population is 18.50 lakhs. They are spread over the entire tribal belt, but their main concentration is in Panch-mahals, Bharuch, Vadodara, Dangs, Sabarkantha and Banaskantha

districts. Most of them are agricultural labourers or settled agriculturists. But since income from agriculture is low they work as labourers during the lean season. The pattern of their migration for working as wage labourers is well established.

1.2.2 Dublas:

Dublas constitute about 10.5 percent of the total tribal population in the state, the number works out to 4.99 lakhs. Their main concentration is in Surat district but they also live in Valsad and Bharuch districts. They were traditionally attached to agricultural labourers and were exploited,but after independence, their bondage was terminated and they were given new nomenclature of 'Halpati'.

Some of them during recent years have been given agricultural land under government programmes, but yet most of them are landless agricultural labourers. Contact with non-tribal society has considerable influence on their cultural life. The influence of Hindu way of life on their customs, norms and values is evident. They speak Gujarati and literacy level is 13 percent amongst them. Dublas are extremely weak and economically vulnerable.

1.2.3 Rathwas:

The Rathwas are concentrated in Chottaudaipur taluka of Vadodara district. The total population of Rathwas is about 2.51 lakhs. They are also found in Naswadi and Jabugam talukas of

Vadodara district and Devgadhbaria taluka of Panchmahal district. They are mainly an agricultural community but earnings are low and are supplemented by working as wage labourers and by hunting, fishing and food gathering. Collection of Mahuda fruit is still an important source of their supplementary income.

Till recently the abode of Rathwas because of the dense forests and steep gradient, remained isolated, with the result that they have remained primitive and unsophisticated in their knowledge of the ways of the outside world. It is due to this isolation that their distinct individual cultural traditions are maintained. Of late the area has been easily accessible and they are increasingly coming in contact with non-tribal society.

1.2.4 Kotwalias:

The hamlets of Kotwalias are generally located near the forest areas. They are scattered in the districts of Surat, Valsad, Dangs and Bharuch. Kotwalias are classified into two groups viz. Forest Village Kotwalias and non-forest village Kotwalias. The total population is about 16,130. They are among the poorest, and the backward tribal groups in the state. According to the monograph of study this group presents a picture of most backward and retarded socio-economic life and barely subsists on household industry or bamboo work, basket making etc. They fetch bamboos from the forests or local merchants to produce various types of baskets, winnowing fans, fishing traps, brooms etc. They lead nomadic life and keep

on shifting from place to place. Kotwalias are almost illiterate as literacy rate is 1.2 percent, lowest among all the schedule tribes. On account of their poor condition and illiteracy they are being highly exploited by the middle-men and merchants. They are now being settled on the outskirts of the settled village and are being supplied bamboos by the state forest department. The State Government has also provided them residential huts at Waghai and other villages where bamboos are supplied to them at their door steps and finished goods are purchased from them.

1.2.5 Choudharys:

The total population of Choudhary is 2.44 lakhs. Ninetyeight percent of the total population is in Surat district while 2 percent is distributed among Bharuch, Baroda, Dangs and Ahmedabad districts. The main concentration is in north-eastern part of Surat district. Like Dublas and Dhodias they are plain dwellers and are settled in villages. They are an industrious group of people. They are primarily agriculturists, but all do not have enough land and have to supplement their earnings by working as wage labourers on construction works, in farms and forests, during the off season. They have highest literacy rate i.e. over 30 percent and the level of political consicousness is high. They are now entering into government services at high levels.