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An attempt to review the *Sujuni* embroidery of Bihar

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Abstract

Each of the region in India is popular for distinctive cultural essence. Many crafts like embroidery, weaving, printing, painting etc. are performed to satisfy their household need and unique social-cultural desire. Bihar state in India is centre for many crafts along with its religious significance. Embroidery is one of them. This study is an attempt to review and understand the traditional craft practise in Bihar.

Keywords: craft, Sujuni, traditional embroidery, women expressions

1. Introduction

Sujuni is an art of embroidery from Bihar state of India, which is similar to the world famous “*Kantha*” from neighbouring state Bengal of India. The term “*Sujuni*” is referred for straight running stitch. *Sujuni* is the source of livelihood of many women. It has a universal appeal to cater wider market. Embroidery is beautifully embellish with the help of needle and thread. *Sujuni* is an implicit part of the women lives and is inter-connected with social culture realities of their lives. The objective of the study is review the *Sujuni* embroidery of Bihar to record the contemporary approach of the craft.

2. About the Craft

The craft is practised mainly in Muzaffarpur district, Madhubani district, Darbhanga district, Patna district in Bihar state of India.

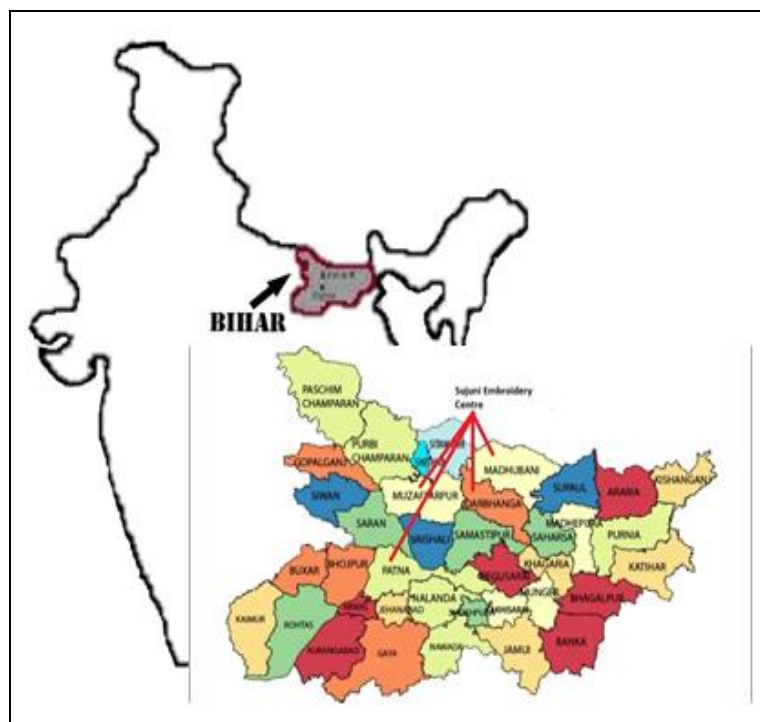


Fig 1: Map of India and Bihar, indicating main clusters of *Sujuni* Embroidery in Bihar State of India

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These special quilts were developed in “Bhusara” village of Muzaffarpur district of Bihar state. This village is located about 100 km from the centre of Mithila painting.

Sujuni is considered as utility item which does not have any religious and ritualistic value like *Madhubani* painting of Bihar state. *Madhubani* get exposed and received identity but *Sujuni* remain unexposed.

3. Theme and Patterns

Women artisan of *Sujuni* transfer their worldly quilts into a testament of their daily life. Motifs of *Sujuni* are bold in nature. *Sujuni* embroidery is comprises of narrative elements. Women express their feelings, experiences and realities through this artform. Many themes like domestic violence, female infanticide, effect of gambling and alcoholism, gender inequality, evil of dowry, education of girls, lessons in health care, AIDS awareness etc. are depicted to indicate the status of women in the men’s world.

Usually, one senior women artisan narrates the entire story. The one story are than depicted with number of scenes. Each scene of the story convey the day to day life of the women in society. Some scenes like A fish swims over the surface along with a snake, A rider gallops away on a horse, Mahouts on elephant amble into the forest, The grand marriage procession of Rama and Sita complete with palanquins carrying the bride, an old women on a pilgrimage. Religious mantras/text and God- Goddesses are avoided in *Sujuni*. Animal motifs like fish, elephant, mythical bird; where two parrots with one head signify harmony between men and women. Geometrical patterns like *hashiya* (Line Patterns), *phul-patti* (Graphic florals), *chaupad* (checker game) etc. are also used in the Craft.

4. Stitches and Construction

The designs are freely drawn on the fabric which is followed by the embroidery stitches. In the *Sujuni* embroidery, old saris (women drapes) and dhotis (man drapes) are cut into smaller pieces to transfer into the layers. These layers are than converted into the quilts. Traditionally *Sujuni* was embroidered on layered cotton. For the layered cloth, old and sometimes frayed, saris are folded into layer and quilted with a needle and thread. This cloth of the old sari gives silk like smooth and soft feel, due to the constant washing of the saris.

A group of women do the needle work on an article/pieces. Borders are made out of old fabric selvage. These selvages are stitched to convert into the borders. Background of the fabric and motifs are filled with the running stitches. These running stitches move into the vertical and horizontal directions, instead of spiral, circular, curvilinear, whorls of “*Kantha*” of Bengal. Herringbone stitch and chain stitch is used to outline the motifs in dark colour. Artisan combined fabric layer by giving tiny running stitches. The number of stitches are recorded from 105 to 210 in per square inches, thus *Sujuni* is extremely labour intensive and time taking craft. Dark colours especially indigo and black is used for the outline of the motifs.

5. Products

Sujunis were used for the various occasions like marriages, childbirth etc. in form of gifts. These layered clothes were also used to the wrap the household items like musical instruments, religious book, religious items etc. For the marriages, *Sujunis* were used to make dowry items includes *Rumal* (Handkerchief), Table Cloth, *Takias* (Pillow Cover), *Jajuns* (Quilt), Chadars (Bed Sheets), *Chanda Jodi* (Money

Bag), *Ketri* (A baby wrap) etc.

Purpose of the *Sujunis* were for the fulfilling the requirement of domestic items like bedcovers, cushions, canopies, floor spread, blouses, children’s cloth especially caps of newly born babies.

These days many contemporary products like jacket, scarves, stoles, dress materials, cushion covers, bags, wall hangings are developed by the women artisan to cater the need of modern market.

6. Current status

Many agencies involved and motivated women artisans for product diversification. Due to their constant efforts, *Sujuni* is making their place in international market like other neighbouring craft of *Kantha* and *Madhubani*.

7. Future Scope of Study

Traditional themes, current changes, involvement of designers & NGOs may also be included in future study.

8. References

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