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“Bharua Qaseeda Kurti” One of the forgotten traditional trousseau from Bihar

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Abstract

Bihar, one of India's 28 states, has its own rich culture, tradition, customs, festivals, food, art forms, and crafts. Bihar had and still has many traditional textiles, which were/are worn during many festivals and occasions. Some of them have been forgotten by people today, while others have managed to stand the test of time. One attire, ‘Bharua Qaseeda Kurti’, worn throughout Bihar, was special but brutally forgotten by people of Bihar. Qaseeda is a technique of hand embroidery and is arguably the soul of these kurtis. The patterns of drafting, cutting, and stitching in these kurtis were nearly the same across regions in Bihar. But the Qaseeda was different in all regions. The technique, motif, and colour of embroidery were completely different in all the regions. When I started researching about these, I found some more interesting knowledge about the Qaseeda style.

Keywords: Natural colors, basic hand stitches, motifs & patterns, tradition, culture and rituals, traditional fabrics and dresses, etc.

1. Introduction

I was recently reading a research paper titled ‘Incarnation: Resurgence of Indian Trousseau Textile Traditions’ by Sonika Soni Khar and Ashish Dhaka’ (1) and got inspired to explore this beautiful attire and discuss it with the design and handcraft fraternity. From here as I will talk about the “Bharua Qaseeda Kurti”, which, to use is the treasure of my grandmother, whom we fondly called “Mamma”. I remember, as a kid, I used to notice my mother making these kurtis for Mamma. I was always fascinated by every process of this garment construction from cutting, stitching, and embroidery. Today, my grandmother is no more but, I am reminded of the legacy she left behind in fashion. But through this attire, I want to shift the attention of our patrons to Bihar’s beautiful hand-crafted textiles traditionally worn with saree during festivals and occasions.

2. Objective

- To create awareness among the design fraternity about the Qaseeda Kurti that has been mostly forgotten.
- To grab the attention of students, craft clusters, especially the craft council of Bihar, design institutes, design houses, and fashion industries for the revival of this beautiful forgotten attire.
- To establish the same respect for this art form in society and the fashion industry that the art forms from Rajasthan and Gujarat have received at the national and international levels.

3. Literature Review

India has five distinct regions, twenty-eight states, eight union territories with many religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and many other folk and tribal faiths and religions. There are several cultures, traditions, customs, rituals, festivals, cuisines, languages, arts, and crafts participated by the people in India. Each region of India has its own traditional textiles and costumes. Some of these traditional outfits and textiles are even being used in today’s times. While some have faded with time, some are dying, some are forgotten and others have become extinct.

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I want to give some examples of these trousseau textiles that are very popular and still in practice in today's time. Famous traditional trousseaus are Kanjeevaram, Chettinad and Kornad Saree from Tamil Nādu, Pochampally Saree from Telangana, Kosavu from Kerala and Mysore Silk Saree from Karnataka, Nauvari and Paithani Saree from Maharashtra, Banarasi Saree from Varanasi, Tant Saree from West Bengal, Muga Saree from Assam, Bandhej-Ghar Chola and Patan Patola Saree from Gujarat, Chanderi Saree from Madhya Pradesh, Bandhej-Leheriya Saree from Rajasthan and Bomkai Saree from Odisha. These sarees are still in tradition and fashion.

From the Western region of India, especially Rajasthan and Gujarat's famous traditional costumes are Lehenga, Choli and Coondaree. Lehenga is an ankle-length skirt that is worn with the blouse called choli. Many tribes and nomads of Rajasthan and Gujarat, still wear them. These costumes are very popular nationally and internationally.

Examples of faded, dying and extinct traditional textiles and costumes are Daaman, Odhna, and Angia (famous traditional trousseau worn by Jatt Community) from Haryana, and Chamba Rumal (famous traditional hand embroidered handkerchief) are about die. Both of them need revival.

4. Forgotten Traditional Trousseau "Bharua Qaseeda Kurti":

Before I discuss this forgotten beautiful attire, I want to share something interesting about Bihar so we can relate to the topic better. Bihar consists of three distinct regions with their own distinct history and culture. They are Magadh, Mithila and Bhojpur with nine subdivisions and thirty-eight districts. Before the formation of Jharkhand, there were four regions in Bihar. Mithila, Magadh, Bhojpur and Santhal. Now Santhal region is part of Jharkhand. Five religions - Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Islam are practiced by people of Bihar. All three regions are different from each other and have own cuisines like Litti-Chokha; ways of celebrating festivals like Chhath Parva; languages like Bhojpuri, Maithili and Magahi; rituals; way of draping the saree; and surprisingly, Maithila also has its own astronomical calendar that dictates special occasions and sacred festivals. Bihar had many traditional textiles and costumes (silk fabric, saree, attire, a rectangle piece of silk especially worn by groom, etc.), that were popular during occasions and festivals. Most of them have been forgotten by people today.



Fig 1: Image Source: A Bharua Qaseeda Kurti from my grandmother's treasure

My mother tells, joint families were the norm then. Many

people lived in a single house. Each member of the family had his/her own share of responsibility towards the family/house. Any occasion or festival used to be a great happening. And had there been a girl's wedding, all other women of the family would get to prepare her wedding trousseau. Apart from regular cooking, washing and taking care of children, some women were experts in craftwork.

5. Reason behind being forgotten

There was a time when the Bharua Qaseeda Kurti was worn throughout Bihar. But, later, as time passed by, people started abandoning it. Let us explore the reasons why it was forgotten. The biggest reason was the out-migration of people for education and job. Urbanization of villages and towns, modernization of society, mechanization and industrialization were also major reasons.

6. Bharua Qaseeda Kurti

The two-interesting part of these kurtis are:

- First is its intricate qaseeda and motif, which shows that kurti belongs to which particular region, idea, concept, imagination, choice of colors and combinations, passion, patience, interest, dedication and hard work.
- Second is its cutting pattern, stitching technique and uses of small detailing?

Hand Embroidery

The several types of embroidery with a long history are found in Bihar. Embroideries are still appreciated by the rural and urban women of Bihar. In Bihar, embroidery is passed from mother to her daughter as a skill. Here, embroidery is mostly done by hand. The hand-embroidery is divided into three categories:

1. Applique
2. Sujani
3. Qaseeda

Applique is done by hand and it has two techniques.

- One is very common and known as positive applique. In this technique fabric is cut in different sizes, designs and patterns. After that all composition are attached to another piece of fabric according to design, motif and pattern.
- Other technique is known as negative applique or Khatwa work. In this technique two layer of fabric is compulsory. The upper layer is for cutting and stitching according to design, motif and pattern. The lower layer is for the support of the first layer. Applique technique is blend of small pieces of fabric and basic embroidery stitches.

Sujani

This style of embroidery is very similar to the traditional style of embroidery Kantha from Bengal. The basic and simple technique of this style is a layer of old clothes (saree, dhoti, dupatta especially old cotton clothes) are stitched together with running stitch. This is free style of embroidery and known as free to express emotions by hand with different form of running stitch. Now 'Sujani' style is world-famous embroidery and It's because of Swati Kalsi's efforts and hard work. Today, Sujani can be seen in Apparel, life style accessory, Home Furnishing and Home Décor products.

Qaseeda

Qaseeda has been practiced for years by women. It is a mix of different folk embroideries. Few basic stitches like different

forms of Chain, buttonhole, long-n-short, running, straight, cross are frequently used in this style. This beautiful qaseeda style of embroidery is still done in today's time by rural women of Bihar. All three regions of Bihar have their own technique and style of qaseeda embroidery. Motifs from old time can easily connected with religious symbols, nature, rituals, human figure, mythological stories and architectural monuments. But in present times, abstract and contemporary motifs are more frequently used by women. This style of embroidery was used in trousseau textiles and costumes by women of Bihar.

7. Bharua Qaseeda Kurti from Mithila Region



Fig 2: Image Source: from right: Embroidered Textile of India (lessen 13)

from left: बिहार के शिल्प (Craft of Bihar)

<https://docplayer.net/61376584-Lesson-13-embroidered-textiles-of-india-structure-13-0-objectives-13-1-introduction-13-2-historical-background-13-3-types-of-embroidery.html>
Date 28/11/2021

Bharua Qaseeda Kurti from Mithila Region

In this region Qaseeda is known as Bharat Work (Bhartiya Qaseeda). It is very similar to Bagh- a style of traditional embroidery Phulkari from Punjab and Kasuti one more style of traditional embroidery from Karnataka. In this style of embroidery straight stitch follows in only two directions, which are vertical and horizontal or according to warp and weft or parallel to weave (plain weave) fabric. We can put this style of qaseeda embroidery in the Counted Thread category of basic embroidery.

Mithila Qaseeda was completed that time in two steps:

1. First was the outline of the motif or design or pattern to enhance the embroidery. Murgi and Gawanti are a form of running stitch and style of Kasuti Traditional embroidery.
2. Second was filling technique inside the motif. For filling satin and long-n-short stitch were used.
3. In the Bagh style qaseeda, only satin and long-n-short stitch were used.
4. Negi is a form of horizontal running stitch and also a form of Kasuti Embroidery, which was frequently used in geometrical motifs.
5. Methi is also form of diagonal straight stitch and also a form of Kasuti, which was used for detailing.

Kasuti embroidery is the group of four stitches, which is a form of basic running stitch and known as Murgi, Negi, Gawanti, Methi.

Motifs were inspired from

- **Religious Symbols:** Lotus, Elephant, Wheel, Moon, Star, Owl, Cowl, Bell, Vajra (thunderbolt), Trishool (trident),

Peacock, etc.

- **Nature:** Mount, Birds, leaves, Trees- Mango and Banana, Animals, Fish, etc.
- **Ritual:** Kali Puja, Durga Puja, Tulsi Vivah, Doli and Kahara, etc.
- **Human Figure:** Men and Women, Warrior, Dancing Girls, Bride and Groom, Pandit, Humans with Drums (dhol and mridang), etc.
- **Geometrical Shapes:** Square, Diamond, Rectangle, Tringle, Circle, etc.
- **Mythological Stories:** Ram-Seeta Swayambar, Ram Vanvas, Geeta Gyan by Lord Krishna, Krishna and Gopiyani, Makhan Chor, etc.

Colors used were generally bright, gaudy and chromatic locally known as "Khilta Rang".

Nature-inspired bright colors were used in this region like-

- Deep Red known as 'Khuni-Lal' (blood)
- Parrot Green known as 'Suggawa Rang' (Parrot)
- Bright Yellow known as 'Sarso Phoolwa Rang' (Mustard Flower)
- Light Yellow known as 'Nibuaa' (Lemon)

In this region Black color was used as main color known as 'Kariya' (Lampblack)

Usually white, light and bright color threads were used on dark shade background fabrics and on the light shade fabric, dark and bright color threads were used for qaseeda embroidery. (3)

Threads were used some time untwisted cotton threads known as 'Kachcha Soota' for filling inner side of the motifs and sometime twisted cotton threads known as 'Pakka Soota' were used for outline of the motifs.

Motif, colour-combination, pattern, stitches

As we can see the neatness of stitches, eye-catching colour combinations, which are showing how much passion, and practice involved while creating these.



Fig 3: Image source: my grandmother's treasure

8. Bharua Qaseeda Kurti from Bhojpuri Region

In this region Qaseeda is traditionally known as "Bharua Qaseeda". In this region qaseeda style was influenced by the Mughal Culture because this region is known for Sher Shah Suri, one of the Mughal Emperor who was the greatest administrator and ruler of medieval India. In this region,

Bhojpur district (Bhojpur region) and Saran district (Mithila region) adjoins to each other. So, the style of qaseeda is very similar between both districts. Here qaseeda motifs were found with outline (Murgi stitch) and filling (Satin stitch). It was known as “Tagua Qaseeda”.



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<https://chandnasaumya.wordpress.com/2015/03/10/%E0%A4%AC%E0%A4%BF%E0%A4%B9%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%B0-%E0%A4%95%E0%A5%87-%E0%A4%B6%E0%A4%BF%E0%A4%B2%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%AA-craft-of-bihar/>

Fig 4: Image Source: बिहार के शिल्प (CRAFT OF BIHAR) :

But one more style of qaseeda was noticed in the districts Arrah, Buxar, Kaimur and Rohtas, which was known as “Bawan Buta” meaning fifty-two small motifs. This style was practiced by a particular caste Babhan (locally known as Bhumihar). So, this style was famous as Babhan Buta and slowly-n-slowly converted in Bawan Buta. This style is also found in Saree Weaving Technique. (2)

Numerous types of Buta were found in this style. Some of them were called Chand butia, Mandir butia, Tara butia, Phulaura butia, Pattiya butia, Machhiya, Motiya butia and many more. These buties were made of count like barah buti, solah buti to bawan buti.

Stitches were known in this style like

Chain stitch as Sikariya, Satin stitch as Bharua, straight (Running) stitch as Seedha Tanka, Cross stitch as Dusutiya Tankawa, Back stitch as Ulti bakhiyawa, Double Knot as Motiya Sikriya, French knot as Boonda.

Scrubby and Bushy Motifs with scattered pattern were mostly found in this style. Motifs were inspired from:

- **Nature:** Bushy plant, Sadabhar flower (periwinkle flower) Birds, Animals, Crops (wheat and rice), Belbuti (climber plant), Ghumer (tendrils) etc.
- **Architectural Buildings:** Munder (railings), Takha (window), Jharokha (jali), etc.

Colors were used generally inspired from nature. Bright and Gaudy with sparkle locally known as “Jhilmil Rang”. In this region women used mostly white, blue, green, red, violet (brinjal) color fabric and threads.

As we can see this style of qaseeda in those above particular pictures, the scattered, scrubby and bushy motif with a lot of buties and effective combination of colors are proving women’s interest in their choice of clothing.

9. Bharua Qaseeda Kurti from Magadh Region



Fig 5: Image Source: from my grandmother’s treasure

This region is known as Ancient Bihar. Eight districts are in this region, which are Arwal, Gaya, Patna, Jahanabad, Aurangabad, Nalanda, Nawada and Sheikhpura. Qaseeda from this region was little different from both regions because of district Gaya and district Aurangabad.

This region is known for magnificent temples for Hindu and Buddhist both. Aurangabad is well known for the very famous Hindu temple “Dev Surya Mandir” and Gaya is world famous for Buddhist temples “Mahabodhi Temple” and “Bodhi Tree”. Because of these religious places motifs and colors were different from both the regions. In the qaseeda style, one can clearly notice two types of embroidery. If we compare the center motif of this style to ‘Ahir’, a style of folk embroidery of Gujarat and side motif of this style to Negi (Kasuti) style of folk embroidery from Karnataka. There are striking similarities between both the folk styles and qaseeda style. Side motifs are often identical to the ‘Negi’ stitch.

Motifs used in this region

Mounds and mountains are mostly used in this region and uses of circles were mandatory, as evidence shows. My mother explains about the circle and technique of filling. She speaks about that qaseeda style, which was belonged to district Gaya, circle motifs were slightly influenced by Mandala art form. And other qaseeda style, which was belonged to Nalanda and Aurangabad district, circle motifs were similar to different form of God Surya.

Stitches used in this style

Chain stitch as Janjeer and Sikad, Open Chain as Sankal, Blanket and Buttonhole stitch as Kaj, Running stitch as Kachcha Tanka, Back stitch as Ultibakhiya.

Colors, Threads and Fabrics: were used more like the same as all regions. But uses of Black color was strictly banned in this region. White color was frequently used by the women and threads were dyed at home. Natural things like Turmeric, Indigo, and Green vegetable peels, Fruits, etc. Instead of Black color, women were used deep Green or Navy Blue.

10. Conclusion

As we can see bharua qaseeda kurti of all regions are as beautiful, elegant and rich as the vibrant traditional costumes of Gujarat and Rajasthan. I want to promote this traditional attire of Bihar so it receives the same respect and popularity in society and fashion industry. Art forms like these are not meant to be forgotten. They tell stories about legacy as a culture and civilization.

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