

Design Resource

Applique and Patchwork - Kutch, Gujarat

The Craft of Motifs on Textiles

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Rakshitha

NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/applique-and-patchwork-kutch-gujarat>



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2. Tools and Raw Materials
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Introduction

Applique and patch are two different methods of sewing pieces of cloth. Habitually women have practiced this art all over the world. The uniqueness of some artisans is they combine both applique and patchwork together to produce the final product made of applique patchwork. Multicolored and vividly shaped fabric pieces adorning the geometrically shaped textile base create a visual treat when seen as a composed applique patchwork. The speciality of the art is once the applique fabrics are bonded with the base of the patchwork, it does not sag or wrinkle. These techniques of applique and patchwork were traditionally used for making quilts and became the most favoured process of adorning textiles.

Applique Work:

The word “applique” is derived from the French verb “appliquer” which stands for the meaning “to put on”. The art of making applique work refers to a kind of technique through which the patterns are formed by attaching tiny pieces of designer fabrics onto a larger textile that is generally of contrasting color. The attaching of these designer fabric tiny pieces could be done on the base textile either by stitching or bonding it with glue. Edges of the fabric tiny pieces are usually folded underneath and stitched but sometimes they are even left free. Various apparel and products are prepared using tiny pieces of fabric by forming marvellous floral and animal designs. During the time of the Mughals, applique work became an imperial style of elegant textile products. Being introduced to India in 11th century applique work became the most popular craft used in almost every celebration in the country. Muslin fabrics used with architectural Jal patterns are very much renowned in applique technique. The designs of applique made on a textile base could be white and colored as well. Traditional motifs usually seen in this art are elephants, parrots, peacocks, flowers, creepers etc. Some of the popular subjects seen in applique work are oriented with mythical subjects like Rahu, half-moon etc. The uniqueness of applique work is, that it can also have intricate embroidery with mirror work to give a grandeur look. Earlier the colors used were limited to red, blue, green, white, black and brown. But these days colors and designs are used in plenty without any limitations and mostly focused on artistic appeal.

Patchwork:

The art of sewing patches of geometrically shaped fabric together to form a textile pattern is called patchwork. The bright-colored patchwork of a well-composed arrangement of triangles and squares attracts any individual and retains them as being favored textile products. The quilted funeral canopy made of patchwork found in Queen Esi-mem-Kev's tomb of Egypt who lived in 980 BC is the earliest example of this art. The other records of this work date back to the Middle Ages. During this period the armies of William the Conqueror and the Crusaders wore body armours of patchwork that were made of heavy quilted fabrics with layers of soft padding. These quilted patchwork armours gave the soldiers warmth and protected them from chafing.

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Thus the craft is believed to be the inspiration for making quilted bed covers made of patchwork which was frequently noted in the household inventories of the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries. In later days the pilgrims in America had a tough time with the harsh climate and poor land conditions hence everything was repaired and reused, and quilts were patched over and over as there was a huge financial crisis. These patched quilts became the basic array (pattern) for the invention of patchwork patterns in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The history of Indian applique and patchwork can be traced back to the times when folk women of native communities in Gujarat produced large canopies, tents for ox carts, and hangings were stitched. Gujarat applique is mostly focused on patchwork in which the various patterned and colored fabric pieces are cut in different sizes and shapes to sew them together to form a composed piece of artwork. The color palette of applique and patchwork designed by Gujarat artists varies from cool to warm colors, and bright to neutral tones. Rani Ben's family is one of the artisan families that migrated from Pakistan to India during the partition of India-Pakistan. During that period though they brought nothing with them except the ancient craft of applique and patchwork that was taught to them by their forefathers. To make a living Rani Ben's family moved to Kutch and continued to work on applique patchwork. Here, these artisans were spotted by an NGO by the name Kala Raksha and were supported to enhance the work of making applique patchwork that could meet the contemporary world's style. Kala Raksha also conducted educational programs for the artisans very often. This NGO was established in the year 1993 with an aim of preserving the traditional arts of the region by making them culturally and economically viable. Thus by comprising 800 artisans with expertise in their field of art and design, with various embroidery artisans Kalaraksha serves as a model for contemporary technology for village artisans.

Senior artisan Rani Ben who is 80 years old has an experience of 25 years in making applique and patchwork. The uniqueness of this artisan's family is that they combine the techniques of applique and patchwork and fabricate the products of applique patchwork. These products are sold through the exhibitions and sales held by Kala Raksha in Bombay, Bengaluru, Calcutta, Chennai, Delhi etc. Sometimes when the buyers at sales held by NGOs did not believe the applique patchwork is of handmade work, the Senior artisan Rani Ben attended the exhibitions herself and showed her talent for sewing applique patchwork which was no less than a machine work that amazed the public immensely. Through this Rani Ben travelled from Delhi to Australia to show her immense talent in this art.

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Kala Raksha is a trust dedicated to preserving traditional art.



Artisan working on applique patch work.

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Generally applique patch is inspired from home & its surroundings.

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Tools and Raw Materials

Tools and raw materials that are used for applique and patchwork are:

- **Cotton Fabric:** Pieces of cotton fabric is the basic material used for making the applique patchwork.
- **Scissor:** Scissor is used for cutting extra fabric and thread.
- **Thread:** Thread is used for stitching the pieces of fabric together.
- **Needle:** A needle is used for sewing the fabric.



Cotton fabric used for making applique work.



Needles generally used for hand sewing.



A roll of thread used for stitching.



Scissor is used for cutting the fabric according to the design.

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Making Process

The materials used for applique patchwork are usually cotton fabrics. The base textile is retained to be thin fabric compared to the fabric bits used for applique work. The minimum length of the applique patchwork is 3 metres and goes up to the length of the requirement of the customer. To fabricate an applique patchwork initially the base of the product has to be prepared. The base can either be a plane textile or a base prepared using patchwork. The artisan at Kutch prepares the base by patchwork. They initially decide on the design of it. The required size of the colored fabrics is cut into shapes needed for the pattern. All the cut pieces of fabric are laid on a flat surface to check the pattern. Once the pattern is set, pieces of fabric are sewn together facing inwards by creating the required form. Thus the base of the applique patchwork is made and ironed neatly.

In the next level applique work is carried out on the base textile prepared using patches of fabric. The motifs used for applique are trees, houses, and seasonal drawings representing the weather and environment during the summer, winter, rainy, spring and autumn seasons. Scenes from the mythological stories like Lord Krishna along with the dancers, narrative scenarios depicting festivals, farming, seasonal festivals like Raksha Bandhan, Navarathri celebration etc. As per the motif, the required patterned colored fabrics are cut. These pieces of desired cloth are arranged on the base textile initially as per the scenario narrated and then they are stitched on the base material with the help of a few rough stitches. Later the edges of these fabric bits are turned inwards and the motifs are completely hand stitched. The detailing of the motifs like the features of people, ornamentation etc is finely detailed further. As a final procedure, the artwork is neatly mounted with a border and sold.

The cost of the product differs according to the material of cloth used, designs made, work done to fabricate the product and the effort of the artisan put in. The work that narrates the whole scenario of a particular festival or occasion costs high. The number of days worked is calculated into hundred and the final product's INR is fixed. For example, if the artisan works for three days to complete a single product then the product will cost INR300.



Artisan is parting the needed cloth.



Cotton fabric is getting cut in to required measurement pieces.

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The thread is insured inside the needle.

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Artisan making an applique patch work by sewing the cloth.



Each patch is getting arranged for the required product.



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Border getting stitched on the base cloth.



Border getting stitched on the base cloth.

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Final product of applique work.

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Products

Multicolored geometrical shapes made of several pieces of fabric upon which the textured textile is adorned with a scenario create a marvellous visual treat for any individual. This applique patchwork technique suits the longer duration of time when it comes to durability. The maintenance of applique patchwork is very easy as once they are fused and stitched there is hardly any damage. The traditional technique of fusing these applique and patchwork products has been used for both functional and decorative purposes. Some of the products that are innovatively produced are listed below:

- Carpets
- Pillow covers
- Wall hangings
- Bedsheets
- Jackets
- Handbags
- Cushions

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Wall hanging done in applique patchwork.

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Wall hanging depicting home and surroundings.



Applique patchwork stands out against a dark background.

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Video



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