

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEVELOPMENT
OF TRADITIONAL INDIAN TEXTILE DESIGNS
FOR NEW MARKETS, WITH SPECIFIC FOCUS
ON THE AJRAKH BLOCK PRINTING OF
GUJARAT**

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Abstract

This research analyses the various models of design development used to find viable contemporary markets for the ancient hereditary craft of *ajrakh*.

Since India's Independence, there have been various initiatives by government and non-governmental organisations and commercial businesses to revive and preserve India's handicrafts and find new sustainable markets. This has happened at a time when there has been growing interest amongst international and Indian urban markets for handicrafts and eco-friendly and ethically made products. The research methods involve case studies of four organisations that have played an important role in the revival of *ajrakh*, alongside three artisan case studies; two of which are successfully producing for urban and international markets; and one who is producing chemically dyed *ajrakh* for a local market. The case studies were analysed to identify strategies used to preserve the cultural wealth and significance of the craft while appealing to an increasing culturally separate, urban and international market.

Results have found that a collaborative model is a successful one. This involves collaboration between designers or intermediaries (which include NGOs and businesses) and artisans - in which the intermediaries serve as an interface between the artisan and the market. Further, collaboration between the local level, in which artisans play a prominent role in decision making, the intermediary level in which the organisations operate, and the heterogeneous level, which addresses issues affecting the broader, social and economical context of the craft, are important.

Finally, it was found that design education for artisans at the local level is the most effective model because it focuses on all-round education for the artisan. It allows the artisan to realise the potential of his traditional craft, understand his market and combine tradition and innovation to develop high quality, desirable products that hold cultural and social value.

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List of Abbreviations

Abhiyan	Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan
ADB	Asian Development Bank
CII	Confederation of Indian Industry
CRC (KHAMIR)	Craft Resource Centre
CF	Co-operative Federation
DSA	Development Support Alliance
DSI	Development Support Initiative
DSO	Development Support Organisation
GI	Geographical Indicator (intellectual property)
GRC	Grassroots Cooperatives
GRI	Grassroots Initiatives
GSHDC	Gujarat State Handicraft Development Co-operation
KMVS	Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan
NFD	Nehru Foundation for Development
NID	National Institute of Design
NIFT	National Institute of Fashion Technology
NRI	Non-resident Indian
TNSC	The New School Collaborates

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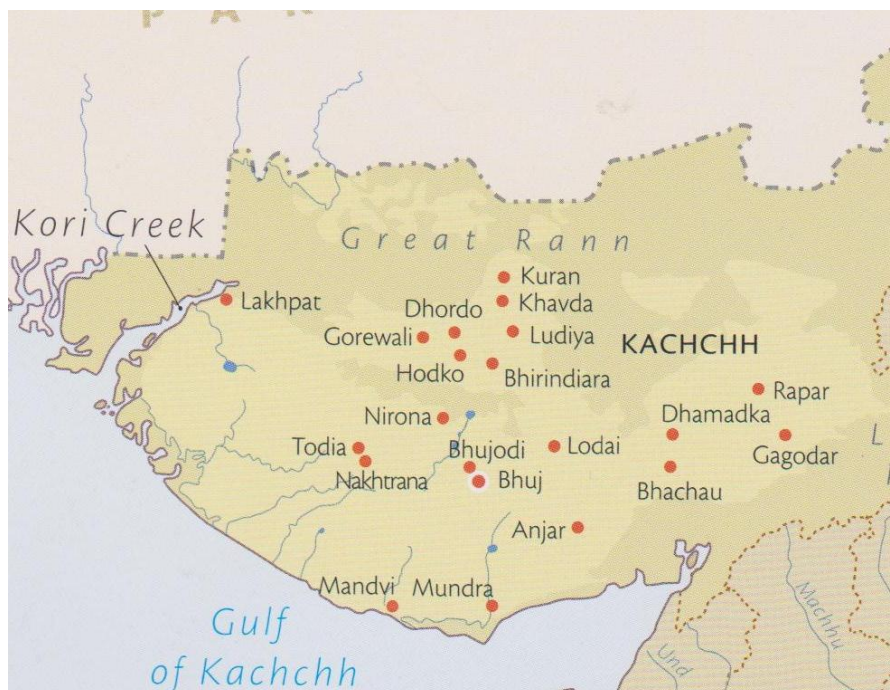
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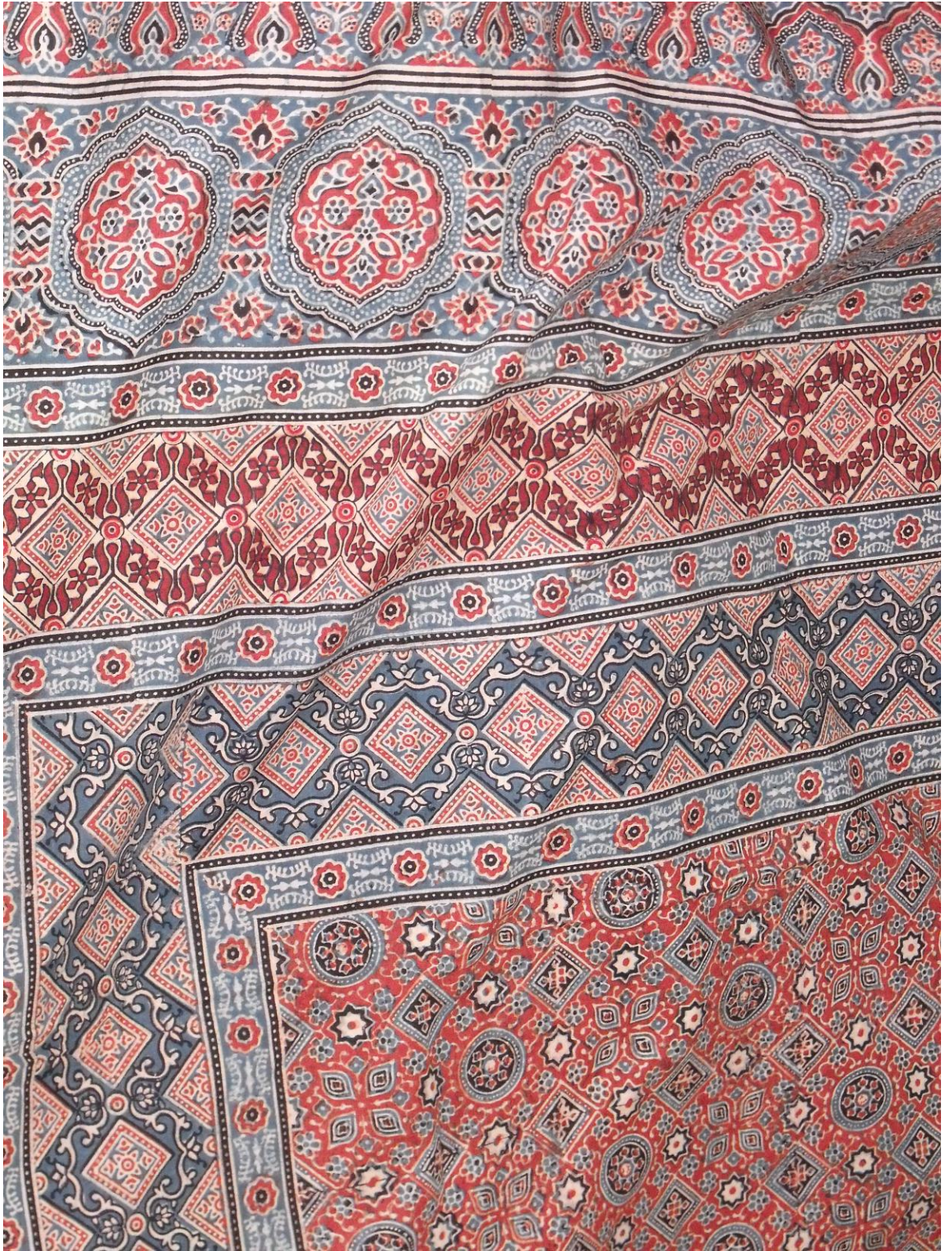


Figure ii): Traditional ajrakh belonging to Abdul Raheman Khatri, Ajrakhpur
(Photo): Ruth Clifford 2010

Introduction

Background

Ajrakh block printing is a centuries old craft practiced by Khatris, a hereditary caste whose main occupation is printing and dyeing (the name Khatri literally translates to ‘one who applies colour to cloth’). The craft is characterised by its complex geometrical patterns, its use of natural dyes and its skilled, extensive production process. The patterns share similarities with ancient Indus Valley Civilisation patterns, and the patterns of medieval cloths traded along the Indian Ocean route.

The production methods used in producing *ajrakh* are also thought to date back to the Indus Valley Civilisation evident in discoveries by John Marshall of a well-equipped dyers workshop at Mohenjodaro, an Indus Valley Civilisation site in Sindh, in what is now Pakistan (Bilgrami, 1998). The complex and multiple stages involved in producing a ‘true *ajrakh*’ (Roland, 2007) vary from artisan to artisan, but widely involves repeated stages of washing, drying, dyeing with indigo and alizarin or madder for red, the printing of a resist mud paste and the printing of coloured outlines.¹ Depending on the process used, the printer of the cloth is recognisable amongst local artisans and clients (Biswas, 2010).

Ajrakh is currently produced, using both chemical dyes and natural dyes in the areas of Sindh, Kutch² in north Gujarat, Deesa in Gujarat and Barmer in Rajasthan all of which display their own variations of *ajrakh*.

This study focuses on *ajrakh* printing in the region of Kutch. It is believed that the Khatris residing in Kutch today migrated here from Sindh 400 years ago at the request of Rao Bharmal I (Edwards, 2007 p. 184) who offered

¹ A full description of the *ajrakh* process is described in Appendix.

² The name for this northern region of Gujarat has a variety of different spellings. In colonial literature the region is often spelt Cutch, for example: (Postans, 1839)—today it is either spelt Kachchh or Kutch. I will use the latter’s spelling with the assumption that it is universally simple to read.

craftsmen work to supply the court and subjects along with gifts of land and tax concessions. The Khatris therefore, began a stable, long-standing production, supplying printed and dyed cloths for the royal courts and the local rural communities. The Khatris of the Kutchi villages of Dhamadka and Khavda supplied to the Kutchi *maldharis* - Muslim herding communities, and the Meghwal community (Edwards, 2007 p. 7) whose men wore *ajrakh* as *safa*, head covering and *lungi*, lower garment, combined with plain white as basic everyday garments (Varadarajan, 1983 p. 21). Variations of *ajrakh* such as *malir*, *jimhardi* and *hindhoro* were also printed by the Khatris for women of the different rural communities. These were worn as *odhani* (veil cloth), *chunni* (larger veil cloth) and *ghaggra* (gathered skirt).

The tradition of giving *ajrakh* as a gift during special occasions such as the festival of Eid, and at weddings (Edwards, 2007) is still in practice.

The Khatris chose to settle in the villages of Khavda and Dhamadka because the river provided good quality water required for the dyeing and washing of the fabric. These rivers have since dried up and the water is now extracted from deep wells in the ground. The problem of the increasing scarcity of water is a threat to the continuation of natural dyed *ajrakh* and various strategies are in place to overcome this, such as the implementation of irrigation systems which will be discussed in chapters three and six.

Water scarcity is amongst various environmental factors that have affected the production of *ajrakh*, a major one being the earthquake of 2001. The epicentre was the state capital Bhuj and villages all over Kutch and beyond experienced devastating effects, Dhamadka being one such place. Thus, in the years following the earthquake, a new village was built to house the Khatris and provide a communal space helping rebuild livelihoods by providing more employment opportunities to local communities through the training of *ajrakh*. This village was named Ajrakhpur (literally translated to 'place of *ajrakh*').

For this research I have focused on the villages of Ajrakhpur and Dhamadka, which have been centres for the revival of traditional processes and natural dyes, and the village of Khavda, north Kutch, which contains a minority group of *ajrakh* printers using chemical dyes and producing for the local market.

Locally, *ajrakh* has been an important symbol of the wearer's caste, status and cultural identity. *Ajrakh* cloth was an important product for rural communities in Kutch in Gujarat for this reason, and the continuous demand meant the Khatris' market was constant and sustainable. Since British rule, industrialisation, which spread to India following the British industrial revolution, dealt a massive blow to India's handicraft production communities. The increasing availability of cheaper, machine-printed cloth forced many Khatris to move occupation, and those that continued were forced to replace natural dyes with synthetic dyes. This was done to make production cheaper, to compete with the flooding of British mass-produced cloth into their markets. These cheaper cloths were more affordable to their local customers whose agricultural occupations were also suffering under industrialisation and the partition of India and Pakistan.

Indian nationalism led by Gandhi's freedom movement and subsequently his campaigns for *swadheshi* (local hand-spun and hand-woven cloth) as a rejection of the British mass-produced fabric encouraged a revival in India's handicraft industries. This revival was an important step in re-gaining India's identity, (Bean, 1989; Bayly, 1986) and was started by various government initiatives, as well as non-governmental organisations and private businesses. The role of these initiatives was to help reposition these crafts in the emerging urban and overseas markets in which there was a desire for exotic artefacts and 'ethnic' fashion, as well as environmentally friendly products.

In order to be commercially viable and appealing to these markets with different lifestyles to the local customers, crafts have required a certain level of design development and adaptation. This design development has been a key strategy of the initiatives just listed and amongst artisans themselves.

This research will examine the strategies that have been put in place to revive and preserve block printing in Kutch, which have been successful and which have experienced problems, and how these have affected the changing nature of the designs and processes.

Definitions

It is important to outline what I mean by the key words and phrases that make up the title of my investigation, and how these relate to the context of this study.

The term 'textiles', according to the Oxford English dictionary (2011b) pertains to woven or non-woven fabrics (such as knitted or bonded natural or man-made fibres). In this essay I use the term textiles to describe the physical object that is *ajrakh*, a printed textile, and often placed within the category 'Indian Textiles.' The context in which I use the term will change during this thesis, as *ajrakh* has experienced changing purposes and markets.

While historically an *ajrakh* printed textile was important mainly as a commodity and a way of identifying one community from another, the new markets for *ajrakh* place it in a variety of different contexts which have ascribed various definitions. These can be 'fashion', in the case of being adapted for fashion accessories, 'art', when one-off pieces are produced for exhibitions, 'artefacts', when they are collected for museums or by independent collectors, and finally the most commonly used term by craft writers and activists in post-Independence India, 'traditional handicrafts'.

The terms 'crafts' and 'handicrafts' were introduced by the British (Venkatesan, 2009 p. 24) and there are no exact translations in the Indian languages. In English the term can have various meanings, but the one relevant when discussing *ajrakh* is: 'an art, trade, or profession requiring special skill and knowledge' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2011a). Traditionally in India the word '*Kala*' embraced all aspects of human arts, crafts, skills and

techniques including disciplines such as dance and engineering as well as hand-crafted processes and products (Vyas Kumar, 1991 p. 189; Chatterjee, 2009). The Sanskrit word *shilpa* carries the same meaning (Jain & Aggarwala, 1989). Thus, the terms ‘craftsman’, ‘designer’ and ‘artist’ considered by Westerners to be distinctly separate roles, are in traditional Indian culture defined under the same collective. A craftsman in India who crafted products for utility, would also produce aesthetic art for temples and sacred places and for ceremonial use (Vyas Kumar, 1991).

Most craftsmen or artisans in India were collectively regarded as ‘*karigars*’ (skilled workers). This was a respected profession within society. *Ajrakh* artisans would not necessarily have referred to themselves as ‘designers’ before entering into more distant markets, and even though they always created the patterns, motifs and colours themselves, ‘design’ is a Western term and only introduced with outside influence.

Throughout the majority of this essay I use the term ‘craft’ or ‘textile craft’ when referring to *ajrakh* because the process involved is one predominantly using hand processes and techniques. Both the process and the resulting product have been placed under the collective term of ‘crafts’ or ‘handicrafts’ within previous literature and by the NGOs and development organisations working to revive and develop *ajrakh*, and also by commercial enterprises when selling the products made with *ajrakh* cloth. The artisans or craftspeople producing *ajrakh*, themselves refer to their profession and the process of creating an *ajrakh* as ‘craft’.

Personal background

The research began while on work placements with three different organisations working with block printing artisans in Gujarat in 2008. These were Kala Raksha, a grassroots trust in Kutch, where I carried out a product design project; KHAMIR CRC (Craft Resource Centre), also a grassroots initiative in Kutch where I worked briefly on an *ajrakh* documentation project, and Anokhi, a block printing company in Jaipur, Rajasthan. Here I designed

two collections of painted designs for block-printed fabrics, and worked with a group of printers to produce a collection of block-printed fabrics using existing blocks but with new compositions and colours.

Kala Raksha in the local Kutchi dialect means 'preservation of the arts' (this shows an example of the collective term *kala* in use). They work to provide local craftspeople with a sustained income by producing high quality textiles for the urban and international markets. The trust's primary focus is on the 'artisan as designer' aiming to expose the artisan's own creativity.

KHAMIR CRC was realised following the devastating earthquake in Kutch in 2001, when along with other NGOs and government initiatives it provided support to communities whose hereditary occupation is craft, to rebuild their livelihoods and find new, sustainable markets.

Anokhi was founded forty years ago in Jaipur, Rajasthan. Their products found a market in the UK via the well-known brands Monsoon and subsequently East. They set out to revive the traditional block printing processes of Jaipur, and the nearby villages of Sanganeer and Bagru, all areas well known for their long history of block printing. Anokhi now has a successful chain of shops in India as well as a worldwide export market.

These placements allowed me direct access to the block printing communities and to numerous contacts within the organisations that aim to help them. Participatory observation research was the initial exploratory method. Data was gathered through informal interviews and discussions with the directors and employees of the organisations and the artisans producing work for them.

Two return trips to India during the course of the research enabled additional interviews to be carried out with members and contributors of the organisations I worked with, and artisans, to inform case studies on a selection of organisations and artisan families.

Aim:

- To identify successful models of design development which work to encourage or support the continuation of traditional *ajrakh* block printing.

Objectives:

1. To explore the issues and debates surrounding traditional Indian crafts and the development process as it exists today through a literature review.
2. To carry out case studies on a selection of organisations working in India and overseas with the block printers of Gujarat, to analyse the strategies being used to promote continuation of *ajrakh* and to determine the impact these organisations are having on *ajrakh* design and production.
3. To extend current knowledge of the block printing process by recording and documenting the production process, techniques and designs.
4. To carry out case studies on a selection of young and old block printers and record and compare their memories and thoughts on the situation of their craft and their interpretations, knowledge and value for the cloths printed for the local markets and those printed for urban and overseas markets.
5. To identify communities that have not had help or design intervention from organisations and NGOs and to compare the differences in their practice to those that have.

Structure

The first chapter provides an overview of the broader context of crafts in India. By reviewing existing literature I have identified three significant aspects that have changed the course of crafts in India during the twentieth and twenty first century. The first area of debate covers industrialisation causing the majority of handicrafts to suffer or become redundant, and

subsequently efforts to celebrate these and reject foreign imports of mass-produced cloth. The second section reviews strategies put in place following independence to revive traditional crafts and to find new markets for them, as they were considered a significant part of India's identity. I also explore the complexities surrounding the preservation and revival of traditional crafts including their branding to appeal to certain Western views of authenticity and idealised views of traditional, rural practices within a modern industrialised society. The third section analyses more recent models of intervention that encompass various types of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social enterprises that have encouraged equal collaboration between themselves, artisans and formally educated designers to draw upon the designer's knowledge of the market and the artisan's skills and knowledge of his traditions.

Chapter 2 outlines the methods I have used to carry out the research, based on their effectiveness in addressing my initial aims and objectives and answering the research question. I discuss the reasons for selecting case studies as my principal research method and the data collection strategies which include interviews, observation and studies of physical artefacts. I also discuss how I have addressed the ethical issues involved in carrying out research in a different country and culture to that of my own.

Chapter 3 provides overviews of each organisation case study and each artisan case study selected for the research. For the organisations this includes outlining their history, aims and objectives and philosophies, the markets they target and the model they fit into, according to the development models identified in chapter 1. For the artisans I outline their history and family background, the markets they produce for, which organisations they have worked with, and the model within which they fit.

I follow these overviews with a comparative analysis of the case studies in chapter 4. This includes incorporating findings from chapter 1, analysing strategies to promote the continuation of the craft such as documentation of the traditional craft, branding and promotion. I subsequently analyse the

different target markets of *ajrakh*, and how collaboration between design development intermediaries and artisans is helping to reach these markets. This includes the various ways designs are being adapted within *ajrakh* and their advantages and disadvantages in appealing to markets while simultaneously exploiting the characteristics of traditional *ajrakh*.

Chapter 5 focusses on the artisan and his changing role from artisan to designer, artist and entrepreneur as a result of collaboration with designers and development organisations, and design education. I analyse how his representation has changed since producing for a local market and how he has come to be recognised within the local community and the wider national and international community. This involves examining various political, social and economical issues that have arisen as the artisan has become recognised individually and how this differs in the modern context producing for distant markets, to the traditional context producing for local markets. I also compare this representation and recognition with the case study of the artisan who has not received any design development support or intervention.

The penultimate chapter's focus draws towards the future of the craft of *ajrakh* block printing in Kutch, the threats and opportunities, and the possibility of a returning local market.

In the conclusion I give a summary of the research and the findings. I return to the main research aim and questions and articulate the answers and conclusions found. I will reflect on aspects that have limited the research process, and opportunities for taking it further.

Chapter 1
Indian craft in context:
Artisan production for changing markets

This chapter provides a review of literature and previous research surrounding the subject of the broader scope of traditional crafts in India that *ajrakh* exists within and its continuation and adaptation in the face of globalisation, industrialisation and fluctuating market trends.

Through my gathering of existing literature surrounding this subject, I have found there to be three main areas of debate. Therefore, the first section of this chapter will analyse the 'Westernisation' of Indian textiles and in turn the arising ideals of traditional craft amidst the rejection of industrialisation in the late 18th and early 19th century. The second section will analyse the marketing of Indian crafts as 'traditional' due to its association with India's identity and cultural heritage, along with a global desire for 'ethnic' and 'authentic' crafts. It will subsequently focus on challenging views by anthropologists that the latter approach problematically assumes that all craft communities should continue traditional craft practices in order to survive. The third section will analyse the effects of outside intervention in the form of non-governmental organisations and social enterprises on current craft practices in India.

1.1 The dilemma between traditional crafts, new technologies and Western tastes

If we are to assume that India's craftsmen have adapted their designs to suit different markets since they first began trading them, then this activity along with the mixing of influences has taken place since at least the 1st century AD, when printed cottons from the sub-continent were first traded to Alexandria (Yacopino, 1977). Subsequently the fabrics unearthed at the site of al-Fustat, (old Cairo, also known as Fostat) (Barnes, 1993), dated between the 8th and

15th centuries³ and thought to have originated in Gujarat share similarities in the patterns we know to be traditional to *ajrakh*. Where these differences lie are most probably in the requirements of the Egyptian market. Fabrics traded to South East Asia from Gujarat share similarities to the Fostat fabrics but are much more sophisticated in design and have been conserved in their treasured status as ceremonial cloths (Barnes et al., 2002). This Middle Age trade depicts an example of the same technique of printing being applied differently depending on the cloth's final use.

Moreover, while there is little evidence to suggest that Indian artisans adapted designs for ancient markets, it is clear that adaptation was in practice for the more recent European market. Despite the Europeans' admiration for the skills and processes used in Indian arts and crafts, the wares of India have not always been palatable to Western taste. 'The West has for a long time, 'shaped and fashioned India according to its own needs' (Head, 1988). The formation of the East India Company in 1599 (Watson, 1979 p. 118) initiated this. The cloth synonymous with the company, chintz, is a perfect example of a popular well-known and distinguishable fabric that derived out of a combination of European tastes and Indian producers' skill. These cloths were adapted to resemble Western flora so they were more relevant to Western markets. Later, as oriental designs came into fashion the motifs were changed again to reflect Indian *kalga* or *buti* (King, 2005 p. 57). Thus, even though Indian craftsmanship and designs were admired by many English patrons of the arts and crafts such as William Morris and John Ruskin⁴, there had to be adaptation of Indian design according to the English fashions. This adaptation continues right up until today and is evident in the

³ The revolutionary discovery of the al-Fustat or 'Fostat' fabrics and subsequently similar fabrics discovered at the Red Sea port Quseir-al-Qadim, began a series of in-depth research (Barnes, 1993; Barnes, 1997; Gittinger, 1982; Vogelsang-Eastwood, 1990) which revealed a rich culture of block printing in Gujarat as well as a successful Indian Ocean trade. There is no firm clarification on the dates due to the archaeological interest at the time focussing more on shards of pottery. It was the textile scholar R. Pfeister who first noticed the similarities between the motifs in the Egyptian block-printed cloths and those in Indian textile designs and architecture (Barnes, 1993).

⁴ The Arts and Crafts movement was originally inspired by the writings of Ruskin and Pugin and was centred on the revived interest in the decorative arts. The designs and ideas of William Morris were central. Craft guilds and societies along with the arts and crafts exhibition society (1887) promoted shared values based on socialist and utopian ideals (King, 2005).

rise of 'ethnic' fashion in Britain, as we shall see in the following section of this chapter.

During British colonial rule and the height of the industrial revolution following the Great Exhibition of 1851 (McGowan, 2009), dilemmas emerged between the desires to preserve and value 'traditional' crafts based on an idealised view of the village crafts communities at a risk of becoming extinct, and the British efforts to adapt and develop these traditional craft skills to new technologies. This was based on a criticism for being too conservative, succumbing to old habits and being unable to adapt successfully to the modern world (McGowan, 2009 p. 74; King, 2005 p. 160).

Art historians and craft revivalists Ananda Coomaraswamy and Sir George Birdwood⁵ shared a common view that Western and elite colonial society ruined India's traditional crafts and way of life (Birdwood, 1880; Coomaraswamy, 1909). Birdwood writing in the late 19th century argues that 'Indian native gentlemen and ladies should make a point of culture never to wear any clothing or ornaments but of native manufacture and strictly native design' (Birdwood, 1880 p. 244).

Mohandas Gandhi shared the views of Birdwood and Coomaraswamy and expressed them strongly in his campaigns for an independent India. He strove to shed the 'English political domination and economic exploitation' that the mass-produced European cloth had symbolised (Bean, 1989 p. 364). Like Birdwood, he believed in the symbols and meanings of clothes, and the importance they had for indicating a person's 'status, group identity, social stratification and political beliefs' (Bean, 1989). This is true for *ajrakh* cloth and its variations printed for the rural communities of Kutch. Particularly for women, variations of pattern and colour combinations in a *ghaggro* (full, gathered skirt) can denote a woman's age and marital status (Roland, 2007

⁵ Sir George Birdwood took the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement to India and he and other important figures in the movement had a strong influence on Ananda Coomaraswamy who wrote extensively on the arts and crafts of India. His book *The Craftsman* (1909) criticises the British hold on the craft industries and the subsequent degradation of quality of craft and the British governor's ignorance of the religion and culture of the artisan and its importance in their craft.

p. 32). With Gandhi's campaigns for *swadesh*⁶ and shedding British political domination further tensions continued between a nationalist striving for identity and the surge of industrialisation.

1.2 Post-independence: India's search for a lost identity

Following independence from British colonial rule in 1947, the Indian government set up various initiatives as part of its 'nation building project' (Venkatesan, 2009) to support the handicraft industry. These included Census of India reports on selected crafts from all over the country; the opening of the Calico Museum in Ahmedabad by the founding Prime Minister Jawarhal Nehru and the Sarabhai family⁷ in 1949 which displayed a wide range of India's textiles and crafts, and subsequently the Government of India's All India Handicrafts board set up in 1952. All these initiatives encouraged intervention to adapt and develop the crafts into new designs and products. The wealth of literature at this time was written to celebrate India's craft and aimed to encourage the continuation of crafts in their 'traditional' form. Kamaldevi Chattopadhyay was the chief of The All Indian handicrafts board and the Indian Cooperative Union and was a prominent figure in the rehabilitation, production and marketing of India's crafts. Her books were a reflection of her devotions to handicrafts and celebrated them as 'an important part of our rich cultural heritage' (Chattopadhyay, 1976). She hoped that the book *The Glory of India's handicrafts* would 'lift a small corner of the veil of ignorance that is descending on this vast treasure.'

Two key roles of the craft revivalists were design development, 'new production techniques and modes to suit today's needs without in any way impairing the old inspirations of design and motif and beauty of

⁶ There is a wealth of literature on the Indian nationalist movement and the resemblance of arts and crafts of the country's cultural identity. This includes: Bayly (1986), Bean (1989), and Guha-Thakurta (1992).

⁷ The Sarabhai family played a prominent role in the preservation of India's craft and cultural heritage. Shri. Ambalal Sarabhai and Smt. Sarladevi Sarabhai set up the Sarabhai foundation and the Calico Museum of Textiles, funded by The Calico Mills which date back to 1880, and continues to be funded by the foundation's own funds (Sarabhai Foundation, no date).

craftsmanship', and marketing, in that it 'had to be put on a fresh and permanent footing' (Bhavani, 1968). The traditions of *ajrakh* for example, are its resist-printing with natural dyes and its complex geometric prints. The criteria of any adaptation in *ajrakh*, therefore, according to the ideals of revivalists such as Bhavani, is to conform to the use of natural dyes, the process and the use of the distinctive motifs and patterns in 'traditional' *ajrakh*.

While some of the government initiatives were successful (such as GSHDC and Mohammed Siddik which will be discussed in chapter 3), many were unsuccessful and have received criticism. There was an apparent contradiction between the craft revival initiatives and the country's broader, global, manufacturing agenda that 'competes with, and will ultimately lead to the marginalisation, or even complete demise, of local artisan industries' (Scrase, 2003). Kak (2003), more frankly pointed out that 'the government simply does not know what to do with them (the artisans)' and that 'we have absorbed the colonial mentality of the people being objects of policy'. A wide range of craft outlets opened across the country but due to government controls on the sale and price of textile products, it was more profitable to sell raw cotton than convert it into a marketable product (Mustafa, 2010).

Despite the criticisms of government initiatives, their efforts paved the way for emerging commercial enterprises, designers and NGOs to enter into the development, promotion and revitalisation of India's crafts. Shrujan were one of the first NGOs to enter Kutch and work with embroidery groups following a severe drought in 1969 (Shrujan, 2010 p. 2), with a goal of 'reviving and promoting traditional embroideries and empowering rural craftswoman of Kutch'. Ritu Kumar, the 'doyenne of Indian fashion' introduced and revived embroidery and craft traditions into her 'boutique' designer clothing (Dwyer, 2006) in 1969 and subsequently Abraham and Thakore are a label continuing similar philosophies that began in 1992 (Ghose, 2010).

1.3 Authenticity and ethnicity

The marketing of crafts by these commercial enterprises and NGOs strongly focuses on branding the 'ethnic', and 'authentic' (Scrase, 2003). In this section I will explore the meanings of these terms within the context of Indian crafts and their appeal in a contemporary global market.

'Authentic' refers to something authorised, established, in accordance with fact, reliable and trustworthy, and taken to be the genuine, original article, as opposed to something copied (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012). For a traditional, hereditary craft like *ajrakh* that has supposedly ancient roots, as discussed in the Introduction, the descriptions 'established', 'reliable' and 'trustworthy' are applicable according to the evidence of oral history, text books and remnants of ancient textile fragments and artefacts, considered to date the production of *ajrakh* to the ancient Indus Civilisation and then middle-age trade. However, this is not yet confirmed as fact, and therefore one cannot confidently label *ajrakh* as authentic on this basis. Authenticity in this context is often more likely to be based on the *idea* of the craft's age and history.

Concerning genuineness as opposed to replication, there is an on-going debate amongst antique dealers and collectors concerning the authenticity and originality of cultural artefacts, particularly objects made with a durable material such as wood, stone or metal, and defining between the 'real thing' and a copy to confirm its value (Hook, 2011). On the other hand, textiles, due to their fragile nature, rarely last longer than two centuries, and within a tradition such as *ajrakh*, are continuing to be produced for livelihood. Throughout this essay, reference will be made to the reproduction of 'ancient' or 'traditional' for a customer base interested in the cultural heritage and history of the craft of *ajrakh*. But if authentic refers to original, how can a reproduced copy be labelled as authentic?

Marketing professor Bergadaa and anthropologist Venkatesan suggest that an artefact or craft object situated in a museum context confirms its

authenticity (Bergadaa, 2008 p. 7; Venkatesan, 2009 p. 134). The Indian textile collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum is one of many in England that were the stimulus for various exhibitions during colonial rule to promote the crafts as entities that should be preserved, or moved forward with industrialisation. It was hoped they might 'leave a long term inheritance beyond the short life of the exhibition' (King, 2005 p. 161). Since the revival of *ajrakh* for urban and international markets, one of the main design strategies has been reproducing the designs seen in the ancient Fostat fragments in the Ashmolean museum, and *ajrakh* printed cloths from Sindh in the Victoria and Albert Museum dating to the nineteenth century⁸. This therefore provides an example that the collections have indeed demonstrated a 'long inheritance'. It seems possible that the success of reproductions of designs in museum collections, which I will analyse further in chapter 4, is based on their representation of an ancient culture and the story behind the craft, which fascinates the customer.

This appeal for the craft's story and history has often been described as the romantic ideal of primitive cultures - "life as it was" (Ballengee-Morris, 2002) before the degradations of industrialised society (Murray, 2009). To define this primordial ideal, I will refer to a quote by Greenhalgh (1997):

'The work of rural craftsmen was believed to have evolved 'naturally' as the direct and honest expansion of simple functional requirements and solid virtues. This vernacular tradition was constructed as something static and timeless, in contrast to the dynamic and progressive modern world'.

Hendrickson (1996 p. 112) who analyses the marketing of Mayan exports in US mail order catalogues, emphasises the power that stories and images illustrating the background to which the craft products are made, have in increasing the authenticity of the product, based on this romantic notion of a vernacular, village tradition. Through the sense that the prospective buyer

⁸ This will be discussed in Chapter 4.5 – the case study of Mohammed Siddik and family

gains a closer understanding of the production and social background of the craft, along with the words 'unique' and 'traditional' used to describe the craft, value is added and a relationship is forged between the producers and the buyers (Hendrickson, 1996 p. 118).

A step further from communicating this ideal through marketing, is the actual experience of the craft being produced, which Bergadaa (2008) suggests emphasises the authenticity through physically visiting the artisans and seeing the primitive forms of craft production in their natural environment. Although Bergadaa is analysing French crafts at the request of a French city (whose name she does not mention) interested in 'promoting artistic craftspeople in order to attract enlightened clients', the relationship between craftspeople and customers could be compared to the tourist or craft enthusiast's experience when visiting crafts people in a remote village like Ajrakhpur in Kutch.

The factors that emphasise the authenticity of experience when visiting the craftspeople in their workshops include; hearing the personal story behind the making of the product; the quality of the product; the combination of the artisan's knowledge with his/her desire for change; the realised importance of the craftsperson's responsibility to pass this knowledge on to ensure the longevity of the craft; and the complicity amongst customers to share their experience with others, so they too are passing on the knowledge to future buyers to encourage the craft's longevity (Bergadaa, 2008). Thus, Bergadaa suggests authenticity, for the individual consumer, lies in the holistic experience of buying a craft object rather than in the object alone.

While the branding of 'authentic' may be used to appeal to a tourist or museum specialist consumer, traditional crafts or textiles such as *ajrakh* have been branded as 'ethnic' for the fashion conscious consumer. The trend for 'ethnic' which emerged in the 1970s is continually reappearing in the Western and increasingly Indian and Eastern markets, translated in the recent spring/summer 2011 style as 'far-out traveller' (Vogue, 2011). The trends have derived out of the West's desire for the "exotic other" (Ashmore,

2006; Chandler, 2008) that has existed seemingly since the rise of the East India company, and is still prevalent in Western society. Chandler (2008) emphasises that the desire for exotic or ethnic in the West highlights a still inherent colonial mentality:

‘The question of ethnicity and artisans may be reframed as an indigenous/colonial relationship, one which exposes the possibilities of the Western/elite consumer once again pursuing those objects of pleasure and desire once promoted as "the exotic other".’

The successful Indian company Anokhi⁹ began with an aim of reviving the traditional hand-block printing of Rajasthan and successfully combining both Indian and Western styles. As well as being successful in the West, as a supplier of genuine ‘ethnic’ clothes to suit the current fashions, Anokhi was also meeting the needs of the Indian elite and their desire to define their identity, and ‘distinguish themselves from the Indian masses and the West’, a feeling influenced by India’s nationalist movement (Tarlo, 1996 p. 326). This ‘lost identity’ is something that the elite classes are still striving to keep hold of, amidst continuing modernisation and globalisation, even if it is a ‘creation of the present’, as described by Venkatesan (2009 p. 230). This ‘search for a lost identity’ is also significant for non-resident Indians wanting to keep hold of their cultural identity while distinguishing themselves from the Western masses. Thus there still being a desire for the ‘ethnic’ suggests it will continue to form a prominent focus of the branding and marketing of crafts in India.

While there is a strong appeal for all that is traditional or authentic about India’s crafts, many of the artisans who produce these crafts have never seen any past examples of their craft to understand what constitutes so-called ‘authentic’ or ‘traditional’. For those communities producing craft as a livelihood, pieces were always sold, and keeping old pieces wasn’t seen as

⁹ Faith Singh founded Anokhi in Jaipur, Rajasthan, with husband John in 1970 to revive the traditional hand-block printing of the area that Singh found was in decline. Singh says they were the first such enterprise and have influenced many more like them since. The company’s success has been built on a ‘fundamental policy of respect and interdependence between entrepreneur and artisan’ (Singh, 2005).

necessary when these could make the family money. During the decades following independence, and the breakdown of local markets, crafts were sold to museum collectors to be displayed in urban exhibitions or exported (Taylor & Page, 1998). Eventually these pieces might have been reintroduced by craft interventionists who had access to museums which held such pieces.

Moreover, the idea of preserving and exhibiting artefacts from the past is seen to be a predominantly Western concept, and for that reason the idea of authenticity also. This is evident in the fact that, according to Vyas Kumar (1991), Indians have never had the desire to preserve traditional art. He says 'Indian attitudes are largely shaped by a philosophy of life which engenders a sense of detachment towards anything which has served a purpose for which it was originally conceived and created.' Indeed the National Handicrafts Museum in Delhi¹⁰ that was part of the government's handicraft preservation and revival scheme was of Western origin (Ministry of Textiles, 2009). The village complex replica, and the craftsmen demonstrating their craft is something the museum has done to imitate the 'authentic' experience that Bergadaa talks of, as discussed earlier in this chapter. However, the Indians unlike Westerners, made no division between the old and the new, and the survival of crafts was based on abandoning the old, and reproducing the new, which continues to be part of living practice.

These two different perceptions and interpretations of the old and the new bring about two main concerns in the debate about traditional crafts and their viability in a modern market. The first is that this appeal for the past and its romanticised village ideals encourages the idea of recovering 'lost practices', a 'problematic assumption' based on the primordial ideal of a community continuing to work on their craft in the same way they have done for centuries (Venkatesan, 2009 p. 168). This proved to be problematic in relation to the contradictions of the government strategies to preserve and

¹⁰ The National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum, (Crafts museum), New Delhi was set up in 1956 by the All India Handicrafts board to build a collection of specimens that would serve as a resource for craftspeople and those working with them, encouraging the revival and development of crafts (Jain & Aggarwala, 1989).

revive traditional crafts, as discussed in section 2.1 of this chapter, which was overshadowed by the state's broader global and industrial manufacturing agenda.

This in turn relates to the second concern which is based on a past tendency to exclude the artisans' viewpoint from policies and documents written to encourage craft preservation, further resulting in the artisans being 'marginalised from debates of aesthetics and novelty' (Taylor & Page, 1998). This tendency to talk about the artisans collectively as communities rather than individuals is said by Venkatesan (2009) to have derived out of a long tradition of imagining India through categories that make it the oppositional Other of the West, a tradition evident in the desire for the 'exotic other'.

Further, the solution doesn't lie in adopting completely new styles to meet market demands. Jayakar and Chattopadhyay, pioneering craft activists both highlighted at the time newly independent India was planning the revival of crafts, the dilemma this creates:

'To go back to the past is impossible, for the past was background to a life that has no longer any meaning in terms of the new social order. The mere absorption of Western forms equally has no meaning, for they are alien and have no link with the craftsman's comprehensions and concepts' (Jayakar, 1956).

Thus, the solution was not to abandon tradition but to be dynamically responsive to changing demands. In 1998 Taylor and Page curated the exhibition *Hand made in India: Crafts in Transition*, at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Taylor & Page, 1998) to challenge the West's idea that products of India's craftsmanship were either to the taste of the 'ethnic' loving hippy, or to be displayed in museums as ancient artefacts. In the catalogue they challenge the idea of the 'static entity' of 'traditional' crafts:

'Craft is or should be, a constantly evolving dynamic: sheer economic survival depends upon an awareness of contemporary movements

and markets and the current exhibition underlines this premise in having ruled out the display of historical work’.

Writing on *ajrakh*, Bilgrami (1998 p. 117), who collaborates with *ajrakh* artisans of Sindh, saw the possibility of the ‘making of a new tradition’ through the unlimited variations that were possible in new designs. However, Bilgrami stresses that ‘any attempt to contemporise a living tradition has to be tackled with extreme caution, for any change or innovation could be damaging. The change should fall within the craftsmen’s comprehension and concepts (Bilgrami, 1998). Bilgrami’s theory is one that echoes Kamaldevi Chattopadhyay’s forty years earlier:

‘No single human mind can mould the unconscious impulses of a craft tradition; what it can do is to help cleanse the eye of the corrupt forms that blurred his vision and leave it to the unfailing creative force that still lies deeply embedded within the craftsman’s eyes and hands to dictate a new tradition’ (Chattopadhyay, 1963 p. 197).

This leads me to the third section which analyses and compares various models that have used strategies such as collaboration and education to empower the artisan and enable him to take on the role of designer while understanding the history and background of the craft and remaining ‘loyal to the traditions of his heritage’ (Chattopadhyay, 1963 p. 198).

1.4 Social enterprise and design development models

To introduce the following chapter, I have provided an overview of models that have been identified through the information gathered in the first section of this chapter and the analysis of case studies in chapter 3. The first model identified is the traditional model which comprises the craftsmen producing mainly for a local market, while some may also have sold to traders for export. In the traditional production and trade of *ajrakh* each Khatri group specialised in producing a specific cloth to meet the requirements of specific local clients’ taste making them recognisable from one another, and strengthening community ties (Roland, 2007 p. 28; Edwards, 2007 p. 183).

Craftsmen were also supported by patronage in the form of royal rulers (Ramaswamy, 2003 p. 6). In the case of the Khatri of Kutch, this came in the form of tax exemptions and gifts of land in exchange for their services to the community and the royal courts (Edwards, 2007 p. 184).

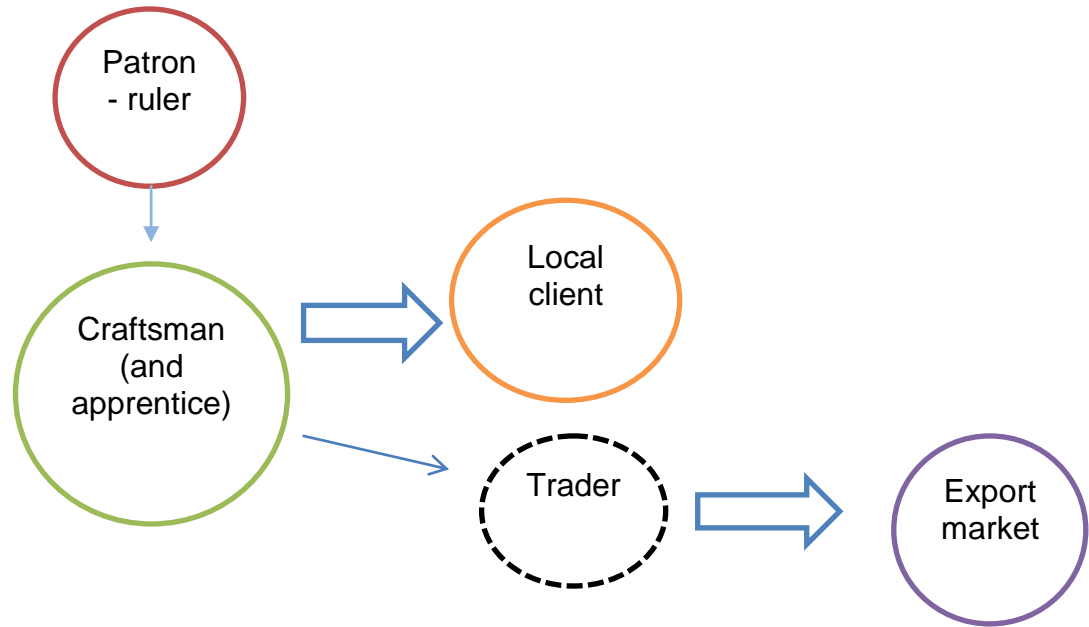


Figure 1.1: Traditional model

While this model represents an individual craftsperson's set up within the local market, there was also a strong sense of community amongst both the Khatri and the clients, as was the case in many other crafts communities, hence the village of Dhamadka, being almost solely inhabited by Khatri families, and likewise 'Khatri Chowk' (street/market) in Bhuj. With the breakdown of the local markets and the struggle to sustain their occupations, craftspeople were reduced from being held in high status, to the margins of society. The government's revival efforts were largely based on the rekindling of this idealised community set up. However, the results were largely criticised as haphazard and inept. I discussed earlier the criticisms of the ideals of the romanticised primordial community based on the anonymity of the individual that it causes. However, there are many arguments that highlight the community or collective model as a strong network, creating social awareness, shared aesthetics and help fashion place-specific

differentiation for their crafts (Mohsini, no date). Indeed this model was effective for the Khattris of Dhamadka following the earthquake of 2001 when they worked together to build a new *ajrakh*-specific village, Ajrakhpur.

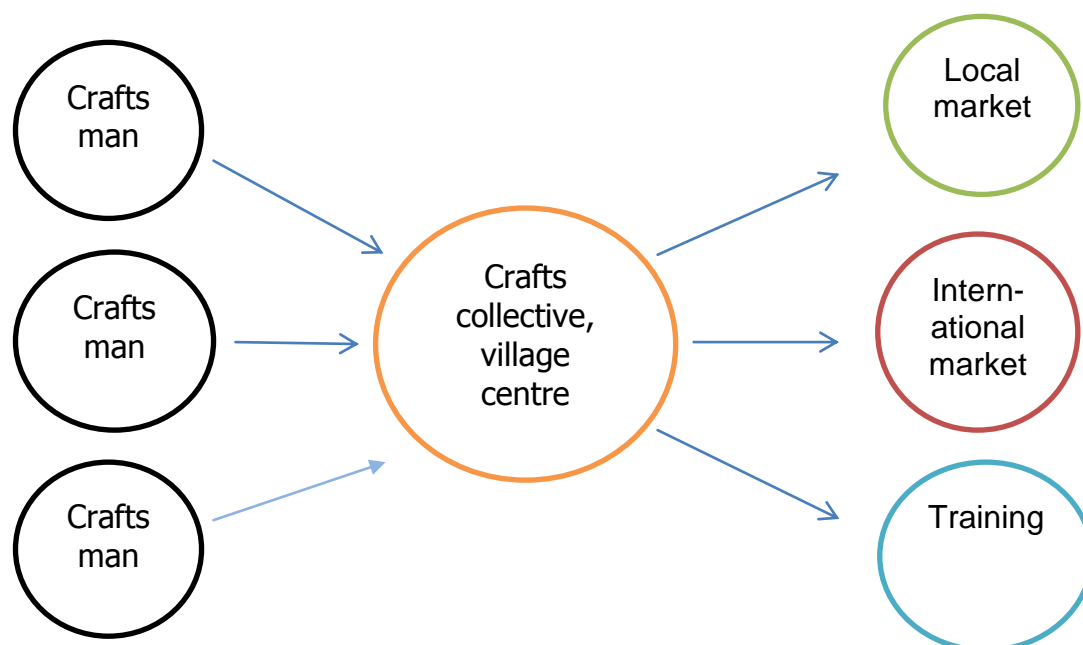


Figure 1.2: Crafts collective model

The final model, that I will call the collaborative model is an extension of the crafts collective model introducing more players. This model involves the intermediary which may be a non-governmental organisation, a term that has come to cover a broader category of development concepts, social enterprise or commercial business. Many demonstrations of this model have arisen out of a broader development model seeking to address the wider range of issues within the social context of the crafts community. This model can also be defined as the ‘market intermediary model’ as described by Alter (2010), based on the provision of services to small producer groups such as product development, production and marketing assistance, and credit to help them access their market.

I will examine a study by Mintzberg and Srinivas (2010 p. 40), *Juxtaposing Doers and Helpers in Development* which outlines the various levels of

development within the collective term NGO. The authors say the best development model combines ‘roots’ – the small, localised grassroots organisations derived indigenously, with the ‘roofs’ – the bigger national or international development aid organisations. Grassroots initiatives (GRIs), at ‘the roots’ are ‘loose groupings of people within an identifiable community or neighbourhood who recognise the benefits of working together in response to some shared need, perhaps provoked by crises’ (Mintzberg & Srinivas, 2010 p. 43). In the craft sector, these initiatives are formed around a shared craft or group of crafts, as we have seen in the first model which is devoid of hierarchies and in partnership with supervision.

Some GRIs grow and formalise their structures to become grassroots cooperatives (GRCs) (Mintzberg & Srinivas, 2010 p. 43), as they become inclined to address wider issues affecting their operating activities, described by Mintzberg and Srinivas as ‘federating upwards’. GRCs can also be initiated at the encouragement of an overarching *cooperative federation* (CF), described as ‘federating downward’ (Mintzberg & Srinivas, 2010 p. 45). I will discuss how the case studies in chapter 3 of Kala Raksha represent the former, and KHAMIR the latter. While all these models operate on a local level, they are often supported in the form of funding or a particular expertise. These are termed, in order of size and capacity: *development support initiatives, development support organisations and development support alliances*.

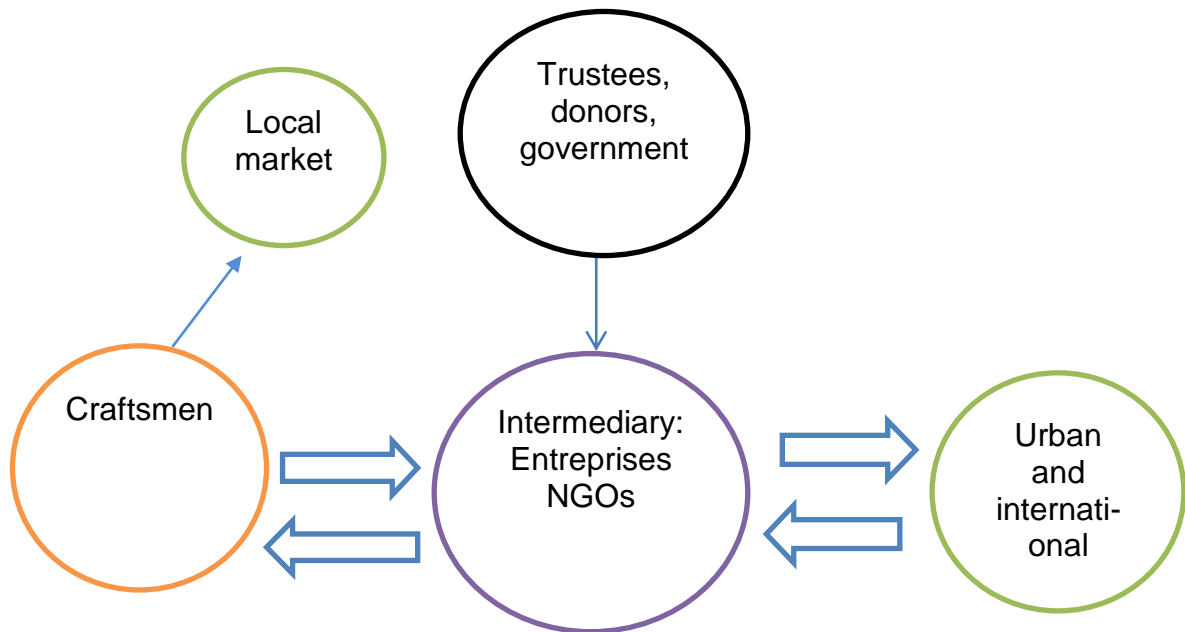


Figure 1.3: Collaborative development model

I will now focus on literature that has analysed the Collaborative Development model, and what strategies are used to develop designs for traditional crafts and position them in viable markets.

A key text within the literature on recent collaborative design intervention initiatives, is *Designers Meet Artisans: A practical guide* published jointly by UNESCO, the Craft Revival Trust and Artesanias de Colombia S.A (2005). The aim of the guide is to encourage closer links between artisans and designers, as an effective way of continuing a struggling craft and making it commercially viable for the markets seeking authenticity. The issues the guide bases itself on are the fact that; in 'today's 'global village', the artisan is, paradoxically, more and more disconnected from consumer needs and tastes' and that the artisan can no longer take on the combined role of designer, producer and marketer as he did in the past. The designer is seen as an 'indispensable intermediate, a 'bridge' between the artisan's know-how and the knowledge of what to make' (UNESCO et al., 2005).

The guide includes case studies of collaborative projects between designers (mostly design students) and artisans working in a particular craft tradition. Many of the case studies of projects in India are students from the National

Institute of Design (NID), in Ahmedabad or its more recent contemporary, National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) in Gandhinagar (20km north of Ahmedabad)¹¹

The groups of students come under the category that Mintzberg and Srinivas (2010 p. 46) define as *development support initiatives*, in that they are a small group of people with a shared interest in promoting the crafts in local communities. These groups are often supported by education institutions, NGOs and government initiatives. The case studies discussed in *Designers Meet Artisans* show an aim within development support initiatives to revitalise the quality of the traditions of the crafts, while encouraging creativity and the development of the artisans' own designs. This elevates the artisans' social position, by 'playing a pivotal role in the actual design of products' (Lawson, 2010). Lawson here is discussing similar projects happening between North American institutes and South American craft which have been organised by The New School Collaborates (TNSC)¹², an on-going project by Parson's School of Design in New York and several external partners and groups of Mayan artisan women in Guatemala, as the central case study for the above-mentioned type of work.

Both the projects documented by *Designers Meet Artisans* and TNSC base their projects around a two-way learning process in which both designer and artisan are learning from each other. The designer through sharing knowledge of the market and tastes allows the artisan to understand the culture and lifestyle of who they are producing for and therefore be involved in the marketing and decision making as well as designing for that market. The designer must also understand the traditional culture of the artisan and their craft production, while understanding the markets they are aiming to

¹¹ Both NID and NIFT encourage students to take on work placements during their course during which they pursue work in the field, most often with rural craft communities. Because of Ahmedabad's close connection with Kutch, NID students often work on projects with Kutch craft communities, including the *ajrakh* artisans as we will see in the case study on the family of Mohammed Siddik in chapter 4 and subsequently the artisans at KRV.

¹² The TNSC are a cross-divisional and interdisciplinary faculty research group at The New School, a university in New York City, interested in how socio-economic and urban development can be achieved through design (Lawson, 2010).

enter and their tastes, so they can work as a 'bridge' between the two by adapting the traditional designs for these markets.

The final section of this chapter demonstrates examples of contemporary methods of intervention and design adaptation. These exist in response to criticisms that the crafts should exist as a static entity in which the individual artisan is anonymous within a community. The collaborative model works to encourage the alleviation and empowerment of the artisan to become the designer and entrepreneur of his craft and to be recognised for it. This is achieved through intermediaries including designers and facilitators working closely with the artisans acting as a bridge between the artisan and their traditional craft, and the market.

In chapter 4 I explore the use of the strategies above as well as identifying further strategies within four case studies of organisations working with the *ajrakh* artisans today. Additional case studies analyse how artisans themselves have benefited from these strategies and what effects the collaboration with designers and organisations has had on their business, processes and designs.

Chapter 2

Methodology

This chapter discusses the research methods I have chosen to use to achieve the objectives of the research. I address issues surrounding research within a different cultural environment to my own, and define my position as researcher and my role within the context of traditional crafts in India. I explain my reasoning for choosing the case study method, which includes participant observation and interviewing. I then describe my strategy for analysing the data. Finally I examine the ethical issues surrounding the research.

2.1 Qualitative research and my position as researcher

As the British entered India from the 1860s onwards, it began an increasing fascination with India demonstrated through numerous travel and ethnographic accounts of the country's culture, people and artefacts (King, 2005 p. 162). These studies came about through a desire to discover and understand a very different culture or what is regularly described as the 'Other' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008 p. 1). This quest for knowledge is described by Denzin and Lincoln (2008) as 'a metaphor for colonial knowledge, for power, and for truth' existing in other colonial countries as well as India.

The post-colonial researcher or author attempted to abandon the stance that put him above or in power over the subject of research and class himself as equal to the other races and cultures he was studying (Silverman, 2001 p. 48). However, while post- and neo- colonial rules for ethnographic practice do not necessarily encourage "better" cultural accounts according to Clifford (1986 p. 9), there is no settled criteria for a good account. Silverman highlights an example of this explaining that it can still be tempting today, among researchers as well as the increasing travellers and tourists to foreign countries, to fix a boundary around the 'native' group of people being researched. 'We may unreflectively distinguish the 'exotic' by what appears

to be familiar. So the early anthropologist may have shared with modern 'upmarket' tourists a belief in the irreplaceable intrinsic value of every culture still not affected by Western influence' (Silverman, 2001 p. 48).

Furthermore, crafts and artefacts that have been produced by a group of people untouched by the West draw attraction from Western tourists for their 'authenticity'.¹³ This insatiable thirst for the 'exotic' and attraction to the 'authentic' could cause the researcher to fail to recognise the similarities between the culture to which they belong, and the cultures which they study (Silverman, 2001 p. 8). Similarly, a point that Clifford (1986 p. 23) makes that has importance in contemporary ethnographic texts is that every version of the "other", wherever found, is also the construction of a "self" and the making of ethnographic texts. In other words the researcher is aware of the similarities between his own culture and the one being studied.

Therefore, I needed to identify what my role would be while carrying out this research to help decide on the most appropriate methods and responsibilities that come with that role. When I first visited Kutch in 2008, my position was as tourist, coming from a creative discipline with a desire to discover the arts and crafts of a different culture. I then became designer when working with the various organisations. The motivation to pursue the research on the crafts communities, drawn from an intrinsic interest in the artisans and their craft, meant my position changed to 'researcher', or perhaps 'ethnographer', as I would be studying the objects of a group of people.

It was important for me not to be led by my interest in the traditional *ajrakh* artefacts to carry a pre-assumption, particularly the above-mentioned idea that this craft should be continued in its traditional form in order to be 'authentic'. It was therefore practically and analytically important to attempt to understand the culture of the Khatri community against my own culture, which is increasingly prevalent in the lives and work of the craftspeople, and in the wider contemporary world (Silverman, 2001 p. 48).

¹³ The idea of authenticity is discussed in chapter one

2.2 Case Studies

According to Yin (1989 p. 1), the case study method is used 'for focus on contemporary as opposed to historical phenomena' . It was decided that because the research is focusing on the current situation of block printing, while touching upon history to provide a comparative view of how block printing existed before industrialisation and independence, it was important to focus on the contemporary context in the form of case studies. This will be complemented by the study of ethnographic and documentary texts, artefacts and oral history.

A decision was made to carry out case studies on organisations that currently have a strong presence in the craft sector in India, as many communities have continued their craft due in large part to the support of these organisations and companies who have helped open up new markets for them. These organisations are social enterprises or companies with a common goal to support the continuation of *ajrakh* and other crafts local to Kutch through design development, access to markets and financial support. It was also considered important to study artisans alongside the organisations to collect evidence from both sides of the interventions and compare differing roles within the block-printing sector.

Yin (1989 p. 1) goes on to explain in more detail and in what context case studies would be used:

'(Case studies are) the preferred strategy when 'how' and 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on contemporary phenomena within some real-life context.'

A case study must cover phenomenon and context (Yin, 1993). It is therefore important that this research covers the context within which the *ajrakh* block printing of Kutch sits - the contemporary political, social and economical

context, and the phenomenon - the strategies of design development by organisations and artisans, influenced by the changes in this context.

2.2.1 Choosing the case studies

Selecting the case studies for this research was based upon the importance of defining the topic broadly (Yin, 1993). To rely on multiple rather than single sources of evidence would allow me to cover different aspects of the topic, and compare the variety of ways in which different artisans and organisations are working today.

My case studies involved a combination of the descriptive and exploratory case study methods. An exploratory method was selected to allow for discovering theory by directly observing a phenomenon in its raw form (Yin, 1993 p. 6). Firstly, a descriptive summary of each case would be made to give an overview of each artisan and organisation I had chosen to study, and what their role and position is within the context of the study. I would follow this with an exploratory comparative analysis of each case study within themes that were identified through the data collection, providing a contextual study that proposes a hypotheses for further research.

I also chose to use multiple case studies because I was researching the 'phenomenon' or 'general condition' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008 p. 123), which is the revival of *ajrakh* block printing in Kutch, and made the selection based on a belief that 'understanding them will lead to better understanding, and perhaps better theorising, about a still larger collection of cases' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008 p. 123).

Category	Name of organisation	Geographical Region	Market
Non-governmental organisation (NGO) or Grassroots Initiative	Kala Raksha KHAMIR	Near Bhuj, Kutch, Gujarat	International through export, tourist, national urban, Non-resident Indian (NRI)
Fabric or clothing company	Maiwa and Maiwa Foundation	Vancouver, Canada	Mainly Canada. International through website
	Gamthiwala	Ahmedabad, Gujarat	Ahmedabad, tourists and NRIs

Table 2.1: Case studies: organisations

My final criteria was based on covering a cross section of markets, purposes and geographical regions. Maiwa works commercially and has ethical and environmentally friendly policies, while the Maiwa foundation works charitably, like Kala Raksha and KHAMIR to provide financial and environmental support. They are all supplying to different markets. Gamthiwala works mainly commercially and has traded with the block printers of Kutch since before independence when there was still a local market. They now sell mainly to a wide market of tourists, designers and non-resident Indians. Kala Raksha and KHAMIR are based within the same region of Kutch as the artisans. While Maiwa is located in Canada, they work very closely with artisans in Kutch and they display an example of an

organisation that is situated close to the Western market, in relation to the other three which are situated in Gujarat, exporting to international markets, while also supplying to a national market.

For artisan case studies, it was important to include both artisans who have had help from organisations and those who have not, according to my research objectives. I therefore selected one artisan family who had connections with all the organisations of the case studies, one who was connected to some of them, and one who had no connections with any of them.

Name of Artisan	Area	Market	Organisations connected with
The family of Mohammed Siddik Khatri	Ajrakhpur and Dhamadka, Kutch	Mainly urban and overseas	Maiwa, Kala Raksha, Gamthiwala and KHAMIR
Irfan Anwar Khatri	Ajrakhpur, Kutch	Urban, overseas and local	Kala Raksha, Gamthiwala and KHAMIR
Khatri Kasam Haji Junas	Khavda, Kutch	Local	None

Table 2.2: Case studies: artisans

When selecting these cases studies, I took into account that each study must serve a specific purpose within the overall scope of the research. As Yin (1989 p. 53) describes, each case must be carefully selected so it, a) predicts similar results to the others or b) produces contrary results but for predictable reasons. My assumptions were that the two artisan case studies who were connected to organisations would provide similar findings, whereas the study of the artisan who was completely independent of intervention would produce contrary results, predictable for the reason that

he was geographically separate, produces for a different market, and is not connected to any organisations.

Having the case studies selected didn't necessarily mean I would be able to continuously pursue these, as this depended on a number of factors. These are: whether candidates within each study would be willing to contribute; how feasible the access to the case was; whether the interview answers were sufficient to work with; and whether I had enough members within each case to contribute.

I therefore communicated my proposal to each person involved and made sure I received their permission before starting the data collection. It was agreed that a copy of each case study once complete would be sent to the participants of the studies to approve. All participants of the case studies supported my research and were willing to contribute all the information, thoughts and knowledge they had, so the case studies developed well with valuable data.

2.2.2 Presenting the Case Studies / Case Study Design

Yin (1989 p. 19) gives the definition of research design as 'logic that links data to be collected [and conclusions to be drawn] to the initial questions of the study.'

The case study design serves the purpose of guiding the investigator through the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting data and observations. The main points to address when designing the case study are: what questions to study; what data is relevant; what data to collect; and how to analyse the results. The main point of the design is to avoid the situation in which the evidence does not address the initial research questions (Yin, 1989 p. 21).

I have derived a set of questions from my aims and objectives listed in the introduction chapter and linked to the main question of the whole study:

Questions	What data is relevant	What data to collect	How to analyse the results
What strategies are being used to promote the continuation of <i>ajrakh</i> ?	Initial participatory observation Interviews and observation during following visits	Journal from previous work experience, videos, photographs Interview transcriptions, photographs, videos documents and reports	Thematic analysis
What effects have these strategies had on the visual designs and production of <i>ajrakh</i> ?	Documentation of designs using photography and video and collecting artefacts, along with participant observation and interviews	Visual analysis of images of design process, completed products and images of old and new designs Transcriptions of interviews	Thematic analysis
Has artisans' interpretation of and value for their craft changed with new influences and markets?	Interviews and discussions	Transcriptions of interviews with artisans and organisations	Thematic analysis Writing up
How has the local customer's	Interviews with both artisans	Previous literature	Thematic analysis

interpretation and value for <i>ajrakh</i> differed from that of the urban and foreign customer?	and organisations and documentation	transcriptions of interviews	Writing up
How does the design, production and custom for artisans who have received exposure and support from organisations differ to artisans who are working alone and have received no intervention?	Interviews and observation	Transcriptions of interviews	Thematic analysis Writing up

Table 2.3: Case study design

Once I had chosen my case study methods, I had to decide upon how I would present them. I had chosen the multiple case study so should I discuss these sequentially or in parallel? If sequentially, in what order? I decided to discuss the studies descriptively in sequence, providing a background of each, and then go on to explore and compare the cases further in a continuous narrative. This would allow me to apply various findings within the studies to my research questions and compare them across the case studies.

I will now discuss the methods of data collection decided upon for the case studies.

2.2.3 Observation and Interviews

To refer to Denzin's statement (2008) - that 'qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive methods, always seeking better

ways to make more understandable the worlds of experience they have studied' - it was considered as important to make notes of observations made when working with and holding conversations with the participants. Additional methods are also required to gain a sufficient range of data for analysis.

The majority of my design work at these organisations was done prior to the beginnings of the research. This meant that at that time I did not have a set of clear objectives in mind of what I wanted to find out from the observation. However, the ideas for the research derived out of this experience, and observations were still recorded but in a more informal way. On beginning the research, the journals and data I had gathered from this experience provided a lot of useful information with which to base the case studies on. The main advantage of having spent time with the research participants previously was the direct access, the long periods spent with the organisation workers and the artisans, and the understanding I developed. Further, it made future trips easier, as there was familiarity between myself and the research participants.

According to Yin (1989 p. 89), interviewing is a vital method to use in case study research. Over the course of the research I interviewed a range of people associated with the subject of study in person and via telephone and email. For the organisations I interviewed employees and trustees at different levels, who worked directly or indirectly for the organisation. For example, for Kala Rakhsa, I interviewed the director Judy Frater and the members working on an administrative level such as the person in charge of marketing. Additionally, I chose to focus more upon the educational section of the organisation, and therefore I interviewed students and teachers at the Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya (school).

On the trips to Kutch and Ahmedabad I visited each artisan and organisation member with a set of general questions and themes I hoped to address. The interviews consisted of mainly open-ended questions to allow for a free flowing narrative from the interviewee and to allow for more questions to

arise out of these answers. I found that often conversations happened naturally and that sometimes subjects and themes would occur that I would not have thought about bringing up myself. This would then unpick further evidence or introduce another area to be explored further. It was important to regularly refer to the list of themes I wanted to cover to make sure I was collecting enough data to help answer these questions.

The visits were also based on observation, particularly with the artisans to gain an understanding of the process of *ajrakh* block printing and the techniques and materials used. Actively taking part in the block printing allowed me to understand the process in greater detail and I also documented the range of designs that were being printed.

Whilst I learned conversational Gujarati on visits to Kutch, it wasn't feasible to learn the language to the point where I could conduct the research in Gujarati within the time frame. The language was not a barrier when interviewing members of organisations as all the participants were fluent English speakers if not speaking English as their first language. I was also able to have some relatively in-depth interviews and discussions with artisans who spoke some English. These artisans receive regular visits by English buyers and tourists, and for them knowledge of English is a necessity in order to successfully do business with their overseas clients (personal communication, Irfan Anwar Khatri August 2011).

Because Khatri Kasam Haji Junas had no connection with foreign markets, he had no need to speak English. I therefore employed an interpreter to carry out the interview. To take this research further following the completion of this study, taking Gujarati lessons and spending more time with the artisans would be valuable in receiving more in-depth insightful data.

A useful way of testing the validity of the case studies was to show the studies to the relevant participants to read, ask if they recognise and agree with the account I have made and if not to clarify any points that are not clear or accurate, or not representing the participants and their accounts in the

right way. For three of the organisation case studies: Kala Raksha, KHAMIR and Maiwa, I sent the case studies in English to the directors who were all English speaking. For all the artisan case studies, and the Gamthiwala study, I employed a translator to translate them into Gujarati. My translator also worked as an intermediary and the artisans would make corrections, suggestions and amendments, send them to the translator who would then translate these into English and send back to myself. I would then send the amended copy in the same way as the first time. For both the artisan and organisation case studies (while being a longer process for the latter), this process was very effective in ensuring that the case studies were factually correct, to fill in any information gaps and to retrieve further data that would inform my case study questions and themes.

It was also important to use additional methods in the case studies along with interviews and observation to broaden the scope of data and ensure validity of findings.

2.2.4 Documentation and physical artefacts

Documentation refers to the study of additional documents including reports, letters, agendas, administrative documents such as proposals and progress reports. Below is a list of documentation that was analysed for each case study alongside the interviews:

For Kala Raksha and KRV, these include monthly newsletters, annual reports published for the interest of its' funding bodies, publications written by the director, publicity, films produced by the organisation and their statement of their aims and objectives.

The documentation on KHAMIR included material in their documentation centre, publicity and information on their website.

Maiwa's documentation is in the form of podcasts on issues arising in the areas they work in. A few have involved discussions with the *ajrakh* artisans

and presentations by the founder of Maiwa and researchers, designers and entrepreneurs who have worked with the *ajrakh* artisans.

There was a lot of publicity material for Gamthiwala, as well as articles in research publications and Indian magazines, and comments made by the wide variety of international and local visitors to his shop.

Physical artefacts play an important role in the case study. They are essentially the textiles that form the physical focus of the research. Block-printed textiles in the homes of the families I interviewed, both contemporary and traditional, formed important evidence. These were studied alongside textiles documented in books and museums.

2.3 Data gathering and analysis

Having collected a wealth of data through these various methods, it was important to carefully examine the data, extract the important findings and put these together into a concise analysis. It was decided while planning the case studies that thematic analysis would be the most effective method to carry this out. According to Aronson (1994), 'thematic analysis focuses on identifiable themes and patterns of living and/or behaviour'.

Denzin and Lincoln (2008 p. 5) compare the process of identifying and collecting themes and patterns with the *bricolage* metaphor referring to the researcher acting as *bricoleur* or quilt-maker, someone who 'pieces together sets of representations that fit to the specifics of a complex situation'. I could relate to this role through previous practical textile projects, while the description was an appropriate way of describing the process I would take.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) in-depth guide to thematic analysis was referred to when planning and carrying out the analysis. Firstly it was important to immerse myself in the data. This was done by listening to the interviews, transcribing them and repeatedly reading them in an active way to identify meanings and patterns in the data from one interview to the next.

From the paper copies of the transcribed interviews along with the above-mentioned documents, audio and visual material and internet sites, key quotes and observations were extracted and categorised into themes relevant to the key questions of the research. Once a basic set of themes was established, each was colour coded. I then re-read through the data in detail, highlighting particular sections in the colour of the theme it related to. These themes were subsequently reviewed by distinguishing between them, identifying whether there was enough data to support each theme, and extracting and dismissing themes depending on whether they fitted into the pattern that I could see forming. I wouldn't completely dismiss themes that didn't relate to the primary themes emerging but keep them aside in case they fitted with any findings that may arise at a later stage. By defining and refining (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p. 22) each theme I was able to identify what was important and interesting about each in relation to my research question and this analysis formed the structure of my discussion chapters.

It was important to be writing the analysis up in parallel with carrying out the thematic analysis as the act of writing further allowed for identifying and analysing the emerging themes and patterns.

2.4 Ethics

It was important within the course of the case studies for this research to acknowledge the ethics and politics surrounding the area I was entering into. Carrying out research in a different country with a different culture to that of my own meant it was important to learn and understand the culture of the communities I would be working with. Within the area of Kutch, different communities observed different religious practices and rituals. When visiting the *ajrakh* artisans, who are Muslims, it was important not to interrupt or disrupt times of prayer, and to work around this. I made sure to get permission from individuals before taking photographs of them and asking their permission to include the photo in my thesis. Further practices to be

aware of included the wearing of suitable, acceptable clothes. This was important for maintaining an amenable relationship based on mutual respect.

As explained by Penslar (1995) one fundamental principle underlying the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects is respect for persons. For the case studies on artisans, a crucial task before conducting interviews and observation, was to explain the nature of the research and the purpose and the risks and benefits of participating (Penslar, 1995 p. 112). It was then made sure participants gave their consent to be subjects in the research.

Sending the case studies to all participants involved as discussed earlier in this chapter was crucial for ensuring each participant was happy with how they were represented. The feedback received from Abdulrazak Mohamed Khatri, communicated his disappointment that his experience and views had not been discussed in the case study. He said to the translator that this happened regularly when Western or English speaking writers and researchers wrote about the family, because Abdulrazak had less knowledge of English than the two other brothers. This was likely to be the same reason that I had not communicated with Abdulrazak, and therefore sending the case study to Abdulrazak enabled him to add extra information such as awards he had received and workshops he had taken part in.

I hoped to send a copy of the complete thesis to each participant but within the time limit it wasn't feasible to arrange translation of the complete piece, send it to the relevant people, await return and make necessary amendments in time for the final submission. However, either an English or Gujarati version of the thesis will be sent to each participant once submitted.

2.5 Summary

In this chapter I have described my position as researcher within the context of study, and which methods I have chosen based on their effectiveness in collecting relevant information related to the nature of the study. I have discussed problems which may arise when using these methods and how I

hope to overcome these. I have discussed the validity and reliability of these methods. Finally I have discussed the ethical issues surrounding the research area.

Chapter 3

The Case Studies

In this chapter, I will present descriptive case studies in two sections: organisations and artisans. The organisation section will contain four case studies: Kala Raksha, Maiwa, KHAMIR and Gamthiwala, all which work closely with the *ajrakh* artisans. The artisan section will contain three case studies: Irfan Anwar Khatri, the family of Mohammed Siddik and Khatri Kasam Haji Junas¹⁴. Below is a table which shows the connections between organisation and artisan:

	Kala Raksha	KHAMIR	Maiwa	Gamthiwala
The family of Mohammed Siddik	Education. Dr. Ismail Mohammed - advisory at KRV	Market and exhibition linkages, workshops	Main customer of 'Mohammed Siddikbhai and Co'	Sells to and collaborates with
Irfan Anwar Khatri	Education	Market and exhibition linkages	No connection	Sells to
Khatri Kasam Haji Junas	No connection	No connection	No connection	No connection

Table 3.1: Case studies: Organisation and artisan links

¹⁴ The names of the Khatri are spelt in various ways. For example, Abdulrazak's name is spelt by some writers as 'Abdulrajak', but for this essay I will use the spelling 'Abdulrazak', as this is how he signs his name. Further, sometimes, the surname 'Khatri' is placed before the first and middle names, and sometimes after. The order I use depends on how each artisan refers to himself.

3.1 Kala Raksha

'Kala Raksha' translates to 'Art Preservation' in the local dialect and this 'preservation of the art of craft' (La Compagnie des Film de l'Inde, 2008) is the concept that formed the basis of the trust. It was founded in 1993 by Judy Frater, an anthropologist and museum curator from Washington, and Prakash Bhanani and his sister Dayaben, local to the village of Sumrasar Sheikh, 25 km north of Bhuj. They started working with a small community of embroiderers in this village, and now work with over 1,000 artisans living in villages all over Kutch. (Kala Raksha, no date: online-a) Kala Raksha's aims are to 'preserve traditional arts of the region by making them culturally and economically viable' (Kala Raksha, no date: online-a). Artisan initiative and participation continue to be the pillars of Kala Raksha's work.

When artisans had lost their local markets after the villagers sought the cheaper, mass produced wares available, the trust began to help the artisans avoid the exploitation of skill and low wages given by middlemen wanting cheap textile pieces for tourist and overseas markets. As 'sophisticated urban markets' started to show an interest in these traditional crafts, Kala Raksha saw the need to adapt the designs to suit the new clientele. Kala Raksha wanted to avoid the 'downward spiral of declining quality' (Kala Raksha, no date: online-b) that commercialisation leads to. Further, in order to revive quality, it has been recognised that new design input is needed, mostly in the form of professional designers. According to Frater, an implication of this method is that the artisan's role is reduced to labourer, only producing the designs that are given to them. Therefore Kala Raksha's aims are to avoid subjecting the artisan to being a labourer, and significantly engage her in both design and craft (Kala Raksha, no date: online-b).

Frater and Bhanani situated Kala Raksha's headquarters within the village of the artisans they first began working with, Sumrasar Sheikh. To keep the trust local and within close contact with the artisans was seen as important. They wanted to encourage decentralisation of their operations because, 'the

bigger things get the more disempowered people get' (La Compagnie des Film de l'Inde, 2008).

Thus, Kala Raksha demonstrates the grassroots model outlined in chapter 1, having evolved within the artisan community, on artisan initiative. The Kala Raksha trust is self-sustaining through the sales of crafts. The Vidhyalaya (design school), however relies on support from trustees and donations. Funding comes from donors such as the Bestseller fund (Bestseller Fund, 2010: online), a charitable initiative working to support cultural initiatives all over the world, and the COMO foundation (COMO Foundation, no date: online) who work to support grass-roots initiatives and social enterprises that work to improve the lives of women and girls. Thus KRV is also rooted in the local community and has developed with the support of trustees and *development support organisations*, whose support is based on the organisation's or individual's own policies and beliefs.

Artisans working for the trust collaborate with professional designers and student designers from urban design institutes. Artisans are left in control of the patterns and motifs of the surface design while professional designers give ideas and usually patterns for new products. The colours come either from Kala Raksha's in-house designer or the artisans themselves.

KR and KRV therefore, both have a strong focus on collaboration at the wider global level and at the 'roots', and therefore, as discussed in chapter 1, according to Mintzberg and Srinivas, demonstrate a successful development model.



*Figure 3.1: Kala Raksha headquarters, Sumarasar Sheikh, Kutch (Photo):
Ruth Clifford, February 2010*

Shops

The region of Kutch, once situated off the main tourist path, is experiencing increasing numbers of tourists who are being drawn to the region for its multitude of crafts. The earthquake of 2001, which attracted worldwide attention to the region and as well as encouraging international aid, put Kutch on the map for many visitors. The revival of craft, a major occupation in Kutch, to ensure an income to the many victims who had lost homes and family, required the promotion of the crafts and encouraged increasing tourism.

Kala Raksha's shop displaying its products at their headquarters in Sumarasar, receive many of these visitors. Kala Raksha is well signposted, and features in the *Lonely Planet* and other guidebooks on the area. The trust acts as a gateway to visit the village and Kala Raksha staff facilitate these visitors to visit the artisans in their homes and experience the crafts in their real setting.

The village attracts film makers, designers, students, researchers, authors, photographers, textile enthusiasts and tour groups.

For visitors who are just passing through Kutch and don't have time to make the journey up to the village, there is a shop based in the recently opened Hotel Ilark in Bhuj and one in Rann Riders, a tourist resort near the little Rann Sanctuary, about 100 km east of Bhuj. Selling in exhibitions all over India and the world ensures continuous sales and in turn attracts the attention of buyers who will come and visit the Kala Raksha headquarters in Sumrasar regularly.

Museum and documentation

The Kala Raksha museum serves an important role in the preservation of the area's textiles, as well as a source for the artisans to keep referring to when producing new work. Frater set up the museum in 1994 based on her experience gained from her Master's degree in Museum Studies, various museum internships and her position as curator at The Textile Museum in Washington DC from 1989-92. While the majority of the heritage pieces have been bought from the artisans and displayed in far off urban or overseas museums, inaccessible to the artisans themselves, this museum enables the artisans to have direct access to important crafts of their ancestors within the community environment. As well as a variety of embroidery pieces from different communities in Kutch, the collection includes block-printed, tie-dyed and woven pieces, providing references for the wider communities of artisans in Kutch.

Maryann Sadagopan, a Collections Care Specialist at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston worked on digitising the collections in 2005, and trained staff in conservation. The project was funded by the Development Commission (Handicrafts), and in the second part of the grant, Sadagopan put the collections online in 2009. She says in her article for the Textile Society of America, 'Kala Raksha's museum acts as an important resource to ensure the cultural longevity of these traditional arts. The KRT (Kala Raksha Trust)

holdings include over 600 traditional textiles and costumes, contemporary craftwork, a library, archives, photographs and slides' (Sadagopan, 2005).

The museum has been set up in collaboration with the local artisans, who are responsible for and have access to them, encouraging artisans to take inspiration from their heritage pieces when creating new designs with 'cultural integrity' (Kala Raksha, no date: online-c).

Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya

While Kala Raksha (KR) directly work with embroiderers and not directly with *ajrakh* artisans, the Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya (KRV) design school holds particular relevance to this study, as it is the first institute in India to provide design education to rural artisans, and therefore provides a new model of design intervention. KRV began as 'an institute of design for traditional artisans' in 2005, as a reaction to the need to educate the artisans on design, including quality, finishing, marketing, and presentation enabling them to take full control over the design, production and marketing of their products.

The Focus of the Vidhyalaya as quoted in its regular newsletter is on 'acquiring knowledge and skills that can be directly applied in the artisans' own art to enable innovation appropriate to contemporary markets.' (Kala Raksha, 2010)

The National Institute of Design opened in 1962, at a similar time to the efforts of the All India Handicrafts board which was working to encourage the development of traditional crafts. The design institute was the first of its kind in India, and was set up to create an industrial infrastructure for development of resources on a national scale (Vyas Kumar, 1991). However, this design education is only available for the urban classes, at high costs, unaffordable and inaccessible to rural artisans, much like the urban museums.

Therefore KRV is unique in that it provides accessible design education to rural artisans. While the majority of artisans living in the rural villages of Kutch cannot attend urban institutes like NID and NIFT, due to the high costs, language and cultural difference, geographical distance and for some their limited general education, many teachers and current and previous students of these urban institutes and many more around India, work on collaborative design projects with the KRV students, or as teachers on the course.

KRV provides a familiar environment for the artisans. Classes are taught in the local language, in two week blocks so that they fit around their family and household duties. Women raising children are not able to leave home, so the majority of the female students are either unmarried or over the age of fifty with adult children when their responsibilities are less. The men tend to be at a typical university student age, having less family and household responsibilities.

The period of a few weeks between each unit where the artisan returns home, and produces work incorporating what they have learnt on the previous KRV unit.

The units are:

Unit 1: Colour: Sourcing from Nature and Heritage

Unit 2: Basic Design: Sourcing from Nature and Heritage

Unit 3: Market Orientation

Unit 4: Concept, Communication, Project, Sampling

Unit 5: Finishing and Collection Development

Unit 6: Merchandising and Presentation

The course then ends with a convocation ceremony after the artisans are judged by a panel of experts in the field of craft. The jury gives prizes to men and women separately for: best collection, best presentation, most

marketable collection, most promising artisan. Visitors come from all over India and abroad to the ceremony which involves a fashion show and exhibition of each artisan's work, performance and music. This event is important in connecting artisans to markets and buyers and initiating possible future partnerships.



Figure 3.2: Class of Unit 1: Colour: Sourcing from nature and heritage
(Photo): Ruth Clifford, February 2008



Figure 3.3: Salemamed's final collection on the catwalk at Convocation.

Photo Courtesy: Judy Frater

3.2 KHAMIR (Kachchh Heritage Arts Music Information and Resources)

KHAMIR is one of many organisations promoted by Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan (better known as Abhiyan), which is a collective of Kutch based development organisations, set up in response to the 1998 Kandla cyclone (Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan, 2011). Abhiyan has co-ordinated relief projects and facilitated connections between various NGOs in Kutch, particularly following many of India's natural disasters, most notably for this research the Kutch earthquake of 2001 at which point KHAMIR evolved. The development organisation Nehru Foundation for Development (NFD) became a partner in the process of promotion of KHAMIR, along with the larger development support alliance Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), a body promoted by Indian industries, who address needs and issues on an heterogeneous scale

and translate solutions to the local level with support from a variety of stakeholders. These stakeholders include designers, researchers, artisans and volunteers in a variety of areas of expertise. KHAMIR, through this collective collaboration 'believes in bringing diverse stakeholders together onto one platform to address issues collectively for optimum good' (KHAMIR, 2010: online-a).

KHAMIR's role in rehabilitation for the craft communities - craft making up the majority of employment in the region of Kutch - is to showcase the crafts, facilitate access to markets for them, and essentially to enable the various creative industries in Kutch to become profitable and a model of sustainable and economic practice (KHAMIR, 2010: online-a). Pankaj Shah, one of the founders and mentor, says the main aim of KHAMIR is 'to revitalise local crafts and re-position them for the current market. Working to build capacities of artisans for trade and design' (interview, 2010).

KHAMIR's craft resource centre (CRC) works as a platform for showcasing the crafts and initiating and supporting collaboration and facilitation for the craft institutions and artisans. The centre is situated 12km from Kutch's capital, Bhuj. Artisans have access to craft resources, technical and ICT facilities and the documentation centre, and also take part in educational and practical workshops and meetings with designers, buyers and researchers. The documentation service centre holds information on the history and techniques involved in each craft that serve as both an educational tool for the artisans to take influences from past traditions into new innovations, and a marketing tool to strengthen their brand identity through the display of traditional influences of a rich cultural heritage. The centre also contains a range of socio-anthropological, and technological research documents (KHAMIR, 2010: online-b).

The relevance of KHAMIR CRC to this study is its work with the *ajrakh* artisans. Ajrakhpur is situated about one mile away from the CRC, and artisans regularly visit the centre, while members of KHAMIR and visiting staff regularly visit Ajrakhpur as well as Dhamadka. KHAMIR's main intervention with the *ajrakh* community is to encourage and help provide

sustainable water resource management planning through promotion of decentralised effluent treatment techniques. They help to implement an improved infrastructure for printing and dyeing, which is important in a semi-desert region where the water table is low. With the help of their various stakeholders, KHAMIR can focus on a diverse range of issues within the crafts situation in Kutch and as well as design, technical and market development they are involved in the artisans' health, production issues, technical and skill upgradation and environmental aspects (interview with Pankaj Shah, 2011).



Figure 3.4: Khamir's weaving facilities (Photo): Ruth Clifford, February, 2011

KHAMIR CRC have also hosted and supported exhibitions of art works by craftspeople in Kutch. The exhibition *New Voices, New Futures...stories of sustainability* was curated by Carole Douglas (an artist, tour leader, writer and social advocate who has carried out various development projects with Kutch artisans), with the support of KHAMIR and CEE India (Centre for Environment Education), to facilitate artisans to use their craft to express

their experiences and thoughts on sustainability. The exhibition offered the artisans an opportunity to communicate their concerns regarding environmental factors affecting their own lives, while challenging their ideas and plans for making their own craft more sustainable. Douglas says that the exhibition pieces 'are made with the future in mind while celebrating past traditions' (Douglas, 2007).

For this exhibition, Irfan Anwar Khatri produced a piece focusing on the damaging effects of the fast increase of polluting industries, and the destruction of trees in and around the artisans' village for this use. His message conveys the importance of tree plantations for 'maintaining the balance for human survival' (Douglas, 2007).

Sufiyan Ismail Khatri's piece depicted his dream for a self-sustaining village and craft production. He illustrates electricity from solar power, wide tree cover, good rainfall and therefore good crops and animal care in the form of his traditional craft of *ajrakh* block printing in natural dyes.

Therefore, these exhibitions work not only to display the skills and qualities of the crafts, but messages are being conveyed through the art pieces of the threats the crafts are facing, inciting support for their continuation.



*Figure 3.5: Sufiyan Ismail Khatri:
'The Village of my Dream', 2007*

(Photo): Ruth Clifford, February 2011



*Figure 3.6: Irfan Anwar Khatri:
'Trees=Water=Life', 2007*

(Photo): Ruth Clifford, February 2011

3.3 Maiwa

Maiwa is a company from Vancouver in Canada founded in 1986 by Charlotte Kwon. The business evolved after Kwon's travels in Asia researching the use of natural dyes. She noticed that the artisans she was meeting had 'generations upon generations of skills in their hands and minds and yet were not finding markets' (interview, August 2010). In response to the rejection of traditional processes and skills for new ones that she noticed happening within these communities, Kwon set out to return to the traditional processes and create a market for them through Maiwa (interview, 2010). Maiwa works with several craft communities predominantly in India. The relevance of their work to this research is their partnership with the family of the late Mohammed Siddik and his three sons, well known members of the *ajrakh* printing community of Ajrakhpur and Dhamadka in Kutch.

Kwon makes it very clear that she only intervenes with a craft community if they do not already have a sustainable market for their traditional craft. 'If an

artisan community has a thriving, strong and vibrant local market, Maiwa doesn't get involved. That's (the local market) the strongest, best market' (Kwon, 2007). Communities that would benefit from Maiwa's support, custom and intervention, would be communities who are not finding the best markets for their craft. The traditions and qualities of their craft may have been 'eroded by the tourist and mass-produced market'. It is important, therefore that Maiwa makes it clear that they are not the tourist market, and to sensitively communicate their objectives they meet regularly with the artisans to discuss issues and exchange ideas. Maiwa's business model, therefore, is one which 'demands trust and respect from both artisan and entrepreneur' (Charllotte Kwon, interviewed, August 2010).

When requesting a large order, Maiwa pay a 50% advance to the artisans and as small segments of the order are fulfilled, complete payment is made (Maiwa, 2010). Maiwa takes no part in the design of the order. They leave the choices of pattern, colour and motif up to the artisan. They will commission samples, and from seeing them, decide which will work and which ones to pursue to the full order. They may ask for different colour ways, and they exercise firm quality control. The only design work they take on is for the clothing and products. Kwon states that if they were to take on the role of designer, 'our experience is that the artisans concede to our opinion and don't bring their ideas forward.' Rather than impose designs upon them, because Maiwa's products lie in the Western market, Kwon feels it is their role is to 'educate the buyer towards the artisan's designs, skills, choices etc' (Charllotte Kwon, interviewed August 2010).



Figure 37: Contemporary ajrakh scarf by Maiwa. Photo Courtesy: Charllotte Kwon

Maiwa sells garments, accessories and home-ware made from the traditional crafts of Indian artisan suppliers, through a shop in Granville Island, Vancouver, and also sell wholesale. They have a shop called Maiwa East, also in Vancouver selling a collection of objects, mainly furniture from South and Central India. They also sell art supplies, including materials used for natural dyeing and relevant processes used by the communities they support, in order to support the continuation of traditional and eco-friendly processes.

Alongside the Maiwa business Maiwa Handprints foundation was established in 1997 as a non-profit organisation, separate from the business, and a platform to raise funds for supporting the communities they work with. While the business takes part in preserving and sustaining a traditional craft for a Western market, the foundation's purpose is to promote the economic self-sufficiency of the artisans living in rural villages (Maiwa, 2011: online). An example of the foundations' help is a recently built water facility seven kilometres from Ajrakhpur for the use of Ismail son of Mohammed Siddik and his family in Ajrakhpur, and Abduljabbar and Abdulrazak in Dhamadka. The site includes a huge water tank of 3000 litre capacity with a filtration system

to remove impurities such as iron from the water. The site is away and cut off from both villages so no other artisans can use it, or see the designs being produced. This means the families can produce new designs that will be exclusive to Mohammed Siddik and Co.



Figure 3.8: The new water facility for the families of Ismail, Abduljabbar and Abdulrazak Khatri (Photo): Ruth Clifford, February 2011

Maiwa also exists in the Collaborative Development model. They represent the market in this model while demonstrating attributes of an intermediary in their close relationships with the artisans and their wider stretch of support. Having worked with the *ajrakh* Khatri for fourteen years, and developed a trusting and understanding relationship, along with the good business acumen of the Khatri means there is little need for an intermediary. Maiwa collaborate closely with KMVS, (a grassroots initiative branch of the Abhiyan collective, particularly working with embroidery artisans in Kutch) as well as

the embroidery artisans on developing designs and new products. Maiwa strongly pushes documentation, promotion and education of the crafts they commission so the markets have a complete understanding and appreciation for what they are buying.

3.4 Gamthiwala

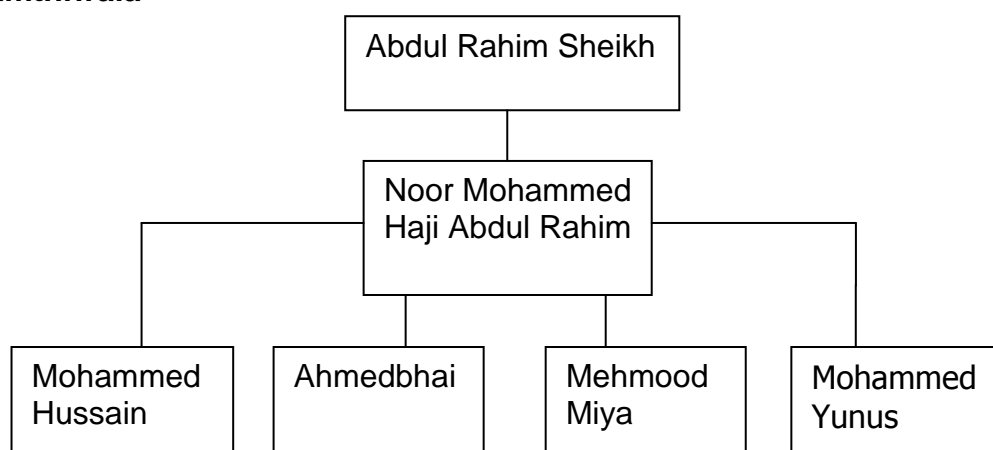


Figure 3.9: Gamthiwala's family tree

Gamthiwala is a company in Ahmedabad that supplies block printed fabrics from Kutch, as well as other areas of Gujarat and Rajasthan, along with batik printed fabrics, hand-woven cotton and hand-woven *mashroo* fabrics to the Ahmedabad market, which includes tourists, local interior design companies and non-resident Indians. Gamthiwala also has its own printing facility in Ahmedabad run by Fakrudinn Block Printers.

Gamthiwala is unique in the way it has supported the continuation of hand-crafted fabrics, and realised the need for change and adaptation as Ahmedabad becomes more and more modernised and globalised. The shop is owned and run by Noor Mohammed Haji Abdul Rahim's sons – Mohammed Husain, Gulam Ahmed, Mehmood Miya and Mohammed Yunus. The family traces their involvement in the cloth trade back at least four generations (McGowan, 2000).

The original shop is situated in the bustling market of Manek Chowk which, when first opened in 1955, was filled with traditional block printed saris and *odhanis*, which were sold to urban customers as well as to farmers and cattle herders from rural areas (McGowan, 2000). At this time business was seasonal, and would usually flourish for two or three months of the year from the festival period of Holi, when villagers had the time and resources to buy the cloth. Gamthiwala's business along with the general market for block printed cloth started to decline dramatically due to the increasing availability of chemically dyed and cheaper synthetic cloth. At this time, there were also more foreign visitors and Noor Mohammed began to realise the potential for supplying to these new customers. He began selling fabric by the yard instead of by the piece. As popularity increased, customers began to request different combinations of colours, and smaller pieces of material that they could make into Western style garments (Ahmedbhai Sheikh, interview February 2011).

There were big risks for Noor Mohammed, as moving his market from the traditional, rural to the urban elite was a big step and required a lot of time, hard work and skill. His hard work paid off though. Over twenty five years the business has expanded to three shops (Ahmedbhai Sheikh, interview February 2011). The second, larger shop opened in 1998 across the street from the original one and attracts a constant footfall of overseas buyers, tourists and local interior decorators. On completing a B. Com degree at Nav Gujarat College, Noor Mohammed's son Ahmedbhai learnt the basics of vegetable dyeing and block printing. This helped him to realise the popularity of the fabric amongst the new markets (Jhala, 1999).

While organisations such as KHAMIR, Kala Raksha and Maiwa were helping to open up an international and urban market, Gamthiwala worked with the *ajrakh* Khatri of Kutch to adapt the designs in accordance with the tastes of the visitors to the shop. These were often international visitors, but also upper class residents of Ahmedabad and other cities in India. While the founders of the other three organisations in this study had knowledge in, or came from the international or urban 'elite' backgrounds that these new

markets existed in, Ahmedbhai, a local businessman, developed the knowledge of these markets through the custom he received.



*Figure 3.10: Fakhruddin Block Printers Factory, Behrampur, Ahmedabad
(Photo): Ruth Clifford, February 2011*



Figure 3.11: Piles of block printed fabrics in natural colours in Gamthiwala's shop at Manek Chowk (Photo): Ruth Clifford, February 2011

Despite various risks for Ahmedbhai and his family, such as a declining interest of the young generation to enter into the block printing industry (interview, February 2011), in honour of their father Ahmedbhai and his brothers make sure they continue using his philosophies and methods and build on these to continue to keep a successful market while helping to preserve the traditional designs and processes of hand-block printing.

Gamthiwala has played a similar role to Maiwa but for the urban Indian market, in that they have supported the continuation of block printing and worked alongside the artisans particularly the Khatri of *ajrakh* to develop new designs to suit the emerging markets interested in this craft. Gamthiwala also demonstrates the collaborative model, having a significant voice when it comes to the layouts and designs of the block-printed fabrics, from their experience of what the urban and overseas customer wants.

Case Study backgrounds - Block printers

The partition of India and Pakistan hugely affected the practice and trading of block-printed textiles. Many of the families were split up over the two countries, and displaced into new surroundings. The main customer base for the block prints were the herding communities whose migration routes were affected and were pressurised by the government to settle, which forced many to adopt different occupations or migrate out of Gujarat (Edwards, 2005 p. 172).

The decline in rural industries was led by the demand for 'mass-produced urban consumer goods, services and luxury items, rather than local handicrafts' (Sakar, 1995 p. 155). In the 1940s natural dyeing had completely stopped. Chemical dyes and synthetic cloths were significantly cheaper and sped up the printing process (Sufiyan Ismail Khatri, interview February 2011). The Khatri were forced, if not to abandon the craft for alternative employment, then to turn to the use of chemical dyes to keep hold of their local market.

The industrialisation of agriculture in the 1960s (Sakar, 1995 p. 155) saw a move away from dry farming. This threatened the jobs of many nomadic communities of Kutch and, along with the government's enforcement on nomadic communities to settle, meant that many of these communities had to seek new employment, sometimes moving to the cities. Therefore the *ajrakh* Khattris' market was diminishing. Further, the increasing availability of cheaper synthetic cloths meant they were chosen by local communities over the hand-printed versions which were much more expensive due to the laborious process they required. Again, this meant the Khattris were forced to use the cheaper fabrics and dyes in order to continue to provide for their markets and sustain a living.

Two of the case studies below highlight families that have revived the traditional processes of *ajrakh* using natural dyes, and one case study highlights Khatri Kasam, who is continuing to practice with chemical dyes, but still using the hand block technique for local markets.

3.5 Mohammed Siddik Khatri and family

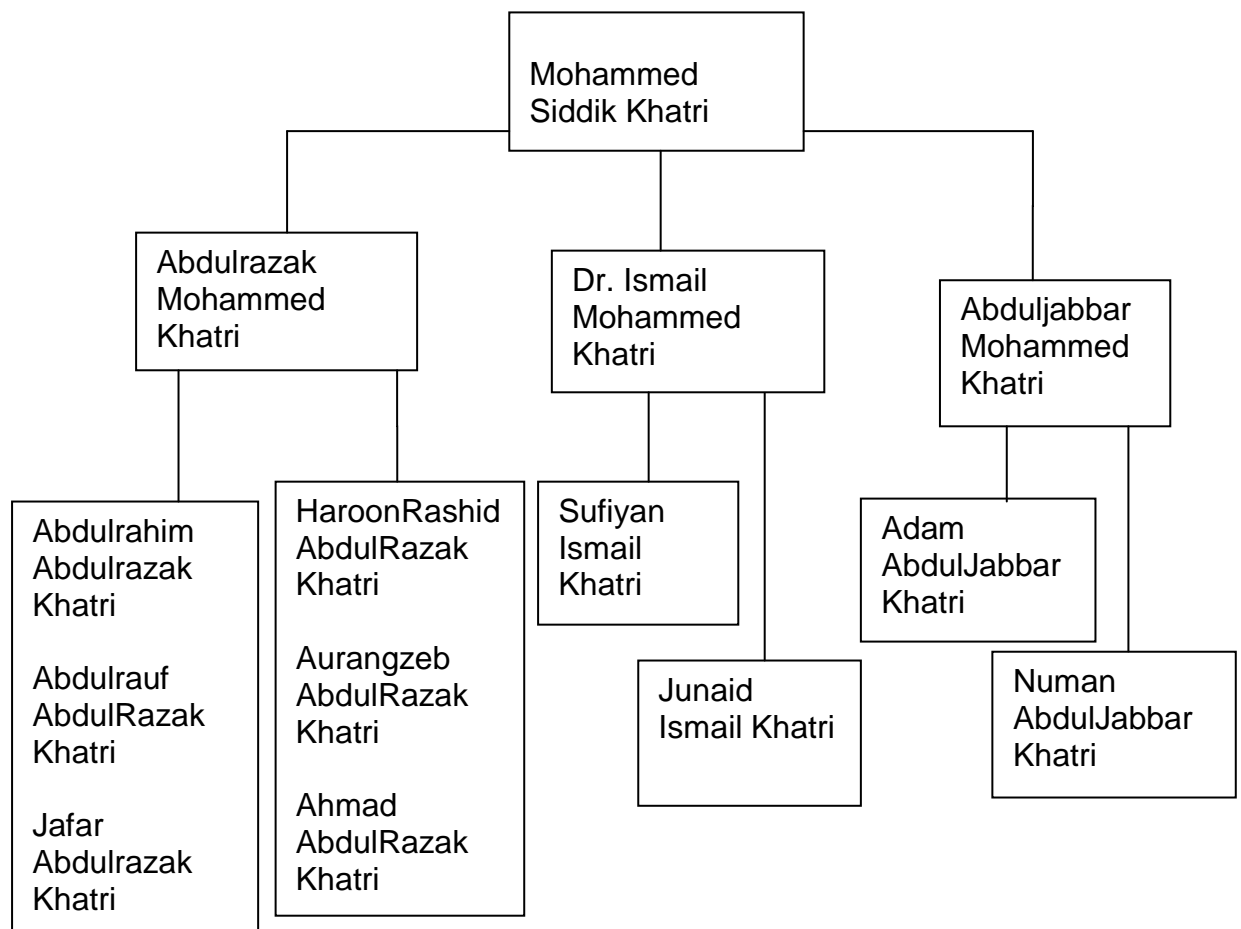


Figure 3.12: Mohammed Siddik Khatri's family tree

This case study focuses on a large family, well-known world-wide for their unique contribution to the revival of traditional *ajrakh* block printing.

The sons of the late Mohammed Siddik are the ninth generation of Khatri in Dhamadka (Khatri Abduljabbar Mohammed, interview February 2011).

Before that his family were in Sindh but the brothers' knowledge of their family's lineage does not go back any further. The generation before Mohammed Siddik's demonstrated the traditional model of trading and would

sell directly to their customers through *pheri* (hawking) (Edwards, 2007 p. 188). The Khatri printer would sell directly to his market.

‘My grandfather would take a few days to travel out to the villages to sell....then he would travel to Anjar to source fabric. He would collect orders from the Banni villages then return to print’ (Khatri Abduljabbar Mohammed, interviewed February 2011). Thus, there were no traders involved, and each individual craftsman was involved in the entire process from sourcing to production and selling.

This trading relationship was based largely on trust and a thorough understanding of the circumstances of each customer and community. The Khatri producer and his customer shared a close relationship.

After having practiced chemical dyeing since it was introduced into *ajrakh* in 1950 (Abdulrazak Khatri, e-mail communication August 2011), Khatri Mohammed Siddik began experimenting with natural dyes in 1975 with what he had remembered of his father’s practice and realising that this knowledge was a valuable part of their community heritage (Roland, 2007 p. 79). He also passed this knowledge on to his sons.

The first successfully natural dyed and printed *ajrakh* was four *chadars* (bed sheets). These drew the attention of Jyotindra Jain¹⁵, who was conducting field work in Gujarat to set up the collection of folk art at the Shreyas museum. This led to Jain’s suggestion of a piece being submitted for the All Indian Handicraft’s board’s National Award¹⁶ which Mohammed Siddik won in 1981. According to his son Abdulrazak, this was a pivotal point in the journey of Mohammed Siddik and his family.

In 1975, the craftsmanship of Mohammed was noticed by the Gujarat State Handicrafts Development Corporation (GSHDC) (Edwards, 2005 p. 177).

¹⁵ Jyotindra Jain is an Indian art historian and museologist. He was the director of the Crafts museum in New Delhi, discussed in chapter one and he has written various publications on the art, textiles and crafts of India.

¹⁶ See chapter 5

The GSHDC set about working with Mohammed Siddik as part of the government's initiatives to revive traditional craft. They saw intervention in the craft sector as "an important plank of the rural development programme" (Edwards, 2005) and their products were marketed on their 'Indian-ness' demonstrating the country's nationalism at the time and efforts to express their identity. An important way of GSHDC achieving this was through making sure traditional practices were maintained and rejecting modern technology, as well as ensuring that "the intrinsic imagination of the craft persons having their roots in society do not get corrupted", (Edwards, 2005 p. 177) an echo of the country's desire to maintain village traditions.

The outcome of this intervention was the collaboration between artisans and professional designers at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. The *ajrakh* cloths were easily transferrable to contemporary products such as bedcovers, cushion covers and table cloths and dress material. These products were sold through GSHDC's retail outlet, Gujari. Gujari was an important catalyst in introducing these new products to a wider market, a market accessed through the increasing numbers of tourists visiting Kutch, and the artisans taking their products to craft fairs and exhibitions all over the country.

Mohammed Siddik's three sons are continuing the production of *ajrakh* cloths using natural dyes and highly-skilled traditional processes today and their businesses are thriving within the national and international markets. Currently the export market accounts for 80% of family's business and Maiwa makes up a large proportion of this, being the family's largest client (Edwards, 2005). Gamthiwala is the family's largest customer in India.

The second eldest of Mohammed Siddik's sons, Ismail Mohammed, played a pivotal role following the devastating effects of the 2001 earthquake. Damage to the village of Dhamadka was severe, and left very little resources needed for the continuation of *ajrakh* production, particularly water for the dyeing. Along with support from local and international NGOs, state agencies and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (Edwards, 2003a). Ismail led the

project to build a new village 35 kilometres from Dhamadka on the road to Bhuj. This village was named Ajrakhpur, meaning 'place of *ajrakh*'. This project was part of an overall aim to organise artisans into clusters of each particular craft that would link artisans and buyers (Edwards, 2003a). The village, along with nearby craft villages such as Bhujodi, predominantly a weaving village, and Dhaneti, a centre for embroidery, are all marked in tourist guides for the area, similarly to the organisations Kala Raksha, KHAMIR, KMVS ¹⁷ and Shrujan¹⁸, and the Hiralaxmi Memorial Craft park specifically built to showcase the local crafts to tourists and prospective buyers, situated in Bhujodi, only three kilometres from Ajrakhpur.

The planning of Ajrakhpur consisted of a grid of houses, each allocated to a different Khatri family. The choosing of each was done democratically under the leadership of Ismail, at random, by picking from a hat. Ismail wanted the process to be fair, and for no one to be given a better slot over anyone else (personal communication, Eiluned Edwards March 2011).

With the damaging effects of the earthquake putting many of the artisans out of employment, another initiative led by Ismail Mohammed and family was to teach as many villagers as possible the process of block printing. This meant that many other communities, for whom *ajrakh* was not in their family, were entering into the profession. There are now over one hundred families practicing *ajrakh* in these two villages.

Ismail now lives in Ajrakhpur with his family including two sons practicing *ajrakh*, Sufiyan and Junaid. Ismail's older brother Abdulrazak is living in Dhamadka with four out of eight sons who practice *ajrakh*, Aurangzeb, Haroon Rashid, Ahmed and Jaffar. Two of his sons Abdulrahim and Abdulrauf now live in Ajrakhpur. The youngest son of Mohammed Siddik, Abduljabbar is also in Dhamadka and his two sons Adamjabbar and Numanjabbar are also practicing *ajrakh*.

¹⁷ Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) are a grassroots initiative under the same umbrella organisation as Khamir – Abhiyan and work in Kutch with women artisans working in embroidery (see: <http://www.kmvs.in/>).

¹⁸ See chapter 1

The revival efforts of Mohammed Siddik and his sons are recognised internationally, and have led to increasing attention from the government as well as designers, buyers and researchers. On my most recent visit in January 2011, I spoke to Abduljabbar who had just returned from the *Muscat International Festival for Arts, Heritage and Creativity*, and won second prize for the textiles section of the *Muscat International Award for Innovation and Creativity in Crafts* (IRCICA, 2011: online).

Abdulrazak participated in a workshop with Vietnamese artisans organised by Dastkari Haat Samiti¹⁹ in Delhi in 2004 and with Thai artisans in 2006. He also participated in a workshop in Kandy in Sri Lanka where he experimented with making prototypes printing *ajrakh* on the bark of a *chiku* tree. In 2007 he and Ismail attended the Maiwa Symposium in Vancouver where they carried out workshops and presentations.

The National Award, following Mohammed Siddik in 1981, has been won by Abdulrazak in 1998, Abdulrahim Abdulrazak in 2002, Abduljabbar in 2003, and Haroon Rashid Abdulrazak in 2006. Ismail was awarded the National Merit certificate in 1992 and an honorary doctorate from Leicester de Montfort University in 2003 for his contribution to the knowledge of and research into *ajrakh*.

These awards along with increasing exposure through companies like Maiwa who reach an elite American market, and Eiluned Edwards who documents and records *ajrakh* for worldwide publications, have helped to increase the Khatri's recognition and success.

In 1993, Jenny Housego, a textile historian living in India and with a fascination for the Fostat textiles²⁰ introduced some of these fragments to Mohammed Siddik when he was demonstrating *ajrakh* in the Crafts Museum

¹⁹ Dastkar Haat Samiti is a non-profit organisation in Delhi that work with craftspeople nationwide to promote their skills and help sustain livelihoods. (see: <http://www.indiancraftsjourney.in/>)

²⁰ See chapter 3

in Delhi. While the resulting reproductions proved not to be viable in a Western market at this time, Housego's and Mohammed Siddik's efforts were not in vain. Later Maiwa took on the promotion of these fabrics and they have been successful in their market ever since.

Currently Sufiyan describes their family's market as being split into three. (personal communication, Sufiyan Khatri, February 2011). One third is made up of traditional *ajrakh*, one third is made up of modern designs and one third is made up of 'natural' designs. Natural designs, as Sufiyan describes them, include designs once printed for local women by the Khatri, *jhimardi* and *hindhoro* and variations, that consist of simpler patterns than *ajrakh* for men, being made up of repeated *butti* (flower) motifs.



Figure 3.13: Traditional *ajrakh* printed table cloth, Abduljabbar Khatri.
Courtesy of Anne Morrell. (Photo): Ruth Clifford, August 2011



Figure 3.14: 'Natural' design in the workshop of Ismail Mohammed Khatri
(Photo): Ruth Clifford, August 2011



Figure 3.15: New design incorporating Fostat and ajrakh motifs on silk
(Photo): Ruth Clifford, February 2010

The modern designs were introduced by visiting designers and buyers, and the artisans increasing exposure to this new market through these visitors and their own visits abroad. Current organisations, particularly those mentioned in the case studies above, are making a significant contribution to encourage this contemporary design process.

Many of the grandsons of Mohammed Siddik have attended Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya, which has encouraged the input of new designs. Junaid Ismail, son of Ismail graduated in 2006, Abdulrauf son of Abdulrazak graduated in 2008, and his brother Ahmed Hajji in 2009. Currently Numanjabbar, son of Abduljabbar is studying on the course. They are among a total of thirteen *ajrakh* artisans who have studied at KRV since it started in 2005.

Junaid created a successful final contemporary collection, which sold out during the graduation exhibition. He experimented with different combinations of blocks and placement of colour. Using traditional designs he added non-traditional colours to give a more contemporary look. His final collection was based on the theme of *Kudrat* – life and creation. Another collection was based on a sea theme and inspired by an observation he'd made that 'patterns in the shell look like the sea' (Frater, 2006a).



Figure 3.16: Junaid's *Beachcomber* collection, 2008. Photo: Judy Frater

Before beginning the KRV course, Abdulrauf Khatri received the Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay award for promising young artisans in 1998. He participated in Lotus link, a workshop with Vietnamese artisans organised by Dastkari Haat Samiti in Delhi in 2004. He has also travelled to Delhi, Mumbai, and Ahmedabad for promotion and marketing of his products (Frater, 2008).

On the course, Abdulrauf embraced new markets and fashion trends, aiming to 'make the traditional look new' when designing a collection based on the theme "Strict" from the Autumn-Winter 2008 trend forecast, adapting traditional geometric designs to follow the styles in this trend (Frater, 2008). He collaborated with Pearl Institute students to create a collection of saris focusing on attention to detail, layout and quality. For the marketing unit, after a trip to Ahmedabad to help understand urban markets, Abdulrauf created a skirt for Ranna Parekh, an interior designer, and a dupatta for Villooben Mirza, former Director of NIFT Gandhinagar. 'His choice of colour as well as product reflected understanding of different tastes' (Frater, 2008).



Figure 3.17: Abdulrauf Razak's sari on the catwalk at the KRV convocation ceremony, 2008. Photo Courtesy: Judy Frater

The family of Khatri Mohammed Siddik have demonstrated all models discussed in chapter one. Mohammed Siddik, his father and grandfathers before them had a close relationship with their customers and would print the same patterns their father before them had printed for the local *maldharis*.

As Mohammed Siddik began to collaborate with designers from NID gaining support from GSHDC, he began to demonstrate the collaborative model which is still being used today while continuing to sell to a local market but also to growing distant markets. The three sons of Mohammed Siddik demonstrated a collective model following the earthquake of 2001, when the Khatri were led by Ismail to build a new village and work closely together, providing an *ajrakh* hub for tourists and buyers from all over India and the world to visit all the craftspeople in one place. The three brothers as well as their sons are demonstrating the collaborative model as they continue to work with designers but through this increase in collaboration with designers and the education at KRV, they have become designers in their own right.

It was seen as important to include the family of Mohammed Siddik as a case study because of their unique approach and efforts to revive and continue their craft. It was also seen as important to study the organisations and individuals who have worked alongside them, to examine the different roles working within this revival. The fact that this family are connected with all the organisation case studies within this study, emphasises the important presence they hold within the Kutch craft community and their important contribution to the revival of their craft.

3.6 Irfan Anwar Khatri

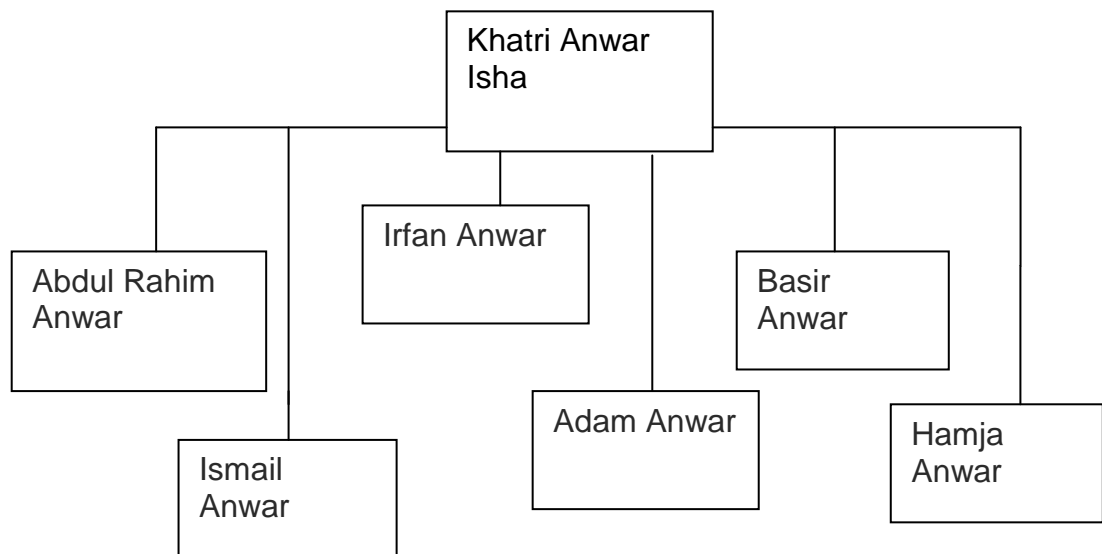


Figure 3.18: Irfan Anwar Khatri's family tree

The family of Mohammed Siddik have been widely exposed in publications documenting *ajrakh* block printing (Edwards, 2007; Edwards, 2005; Edwards, 2003b; Edwards, 2011; Varadarajan, 1983; Roland, 2007) due to Mohammed Siddik's pioneering efforts to revive traditional processes. However, none of this literature includes names of any other artisans amongst the approximately one hundred families practicing *ajrakh* in Ajrakhpur and Dhamdka, or indeed Khavda in the north of Kutch. Therefore, this case study focuses on a neighbouring family to Ismail Mohammed in Ajrakhpur and particularly a successful designer and entrepreneur, Irfan Anwar Khatri.

I first visited Irfan in February 2008. He showed me some pieces from his KRV graduate collection as well as pieces he had produced since completing the course. Some of these included a scarf of *mashroo* fabric on which traditional blocks were printed in varying innovative compositions. Another scarf on a luxurious silk was printed a design in monochromatic colours inspired by Islamic architecture.

Irfan's grandfathers were based at Vagad in Kutch, block printing cloths for local communities like Mohammed Siddik's ancestors as well as traders. *Ajrakh* was a small part of this business along with the printing of other block-printed cloth such as *malir*, *jimhardi* and *haidharo* for different cattle herding communities in Kutch. He is one of four brothers of a traditional block-printing family, and began learning the craft at age fifteen from his father Khatri Anwar Isha. He has five brothers all working on *ajrakh*. His older brother Abdul Rahim won the National Award in 2004 and his uncle Khatri Ibrahim Isha won the award in 2007.

Before joining KRV, Irfan's work gained significant exposure which encouraged him to continue working for a global marketplace. In 2004, he participated in Dastkari Haat Samiti's Lotus Links, a collaboration of artisans from India and Vietnam to exhibit his craft (Frater, 2006b).

Irfan completed the KRV design course in 2006 and has since worked as a mentor. The course helped him to develop design and business skills (personal communication, Irfan Anwar Khatri, February 2011) 'I learned the relationship between paper concepts and actual work, I learned to develop themes. And especially, I learned how to make a collection' (Frater, 2006b).

In the KRV unit *colour, basic design and sourcing from nature and heritage*, Irfan took the traditional motifs of *ajrakh* and simplified them into larger, more childlike shapes. He continued to use natural dyes but mixed brighter colours, to create more abstract, playful designs than the rigid, geometric ones characteristic of *ajrakh*.

For the unit *concept and communication*, Irfan worked on a contrasting theme which was more closely related to the traditions of his craft. Irfan used rhythm as a principle when developing a collection based on "Unity". He worked out his concept during the sampling stage, using traditional blocks in innovative ways by layering the blocks and placing them in a variety of compositions.

For the fourth course *Finishing*, the theme “Tropical Tango” was chosen. The printed stoles and saris he produced were in bright varying colours, ‘dramatically evoking the concept’ (Frater, 2006b). Again, this produced a contrasting look to the usual deep blues, blacks and greens of *ajrakh*. The motifs were reminiscent of Moghul prints using repeated *buttis* and all-over *jaal* prints.

His final collection of stoles, bags and ties won him the ‘Most Marketable’ award at the final convocation.

When I came to visit Irfan again in 2011, four years after his graduation from KRV, his business was running successfully. Seventy per cent of his production is for Indian urban markets including FabIndia, Siddhi Textiles-Bombay, Handloom Art- Bombay, CCIC (Government. agency), New Delhi and Jawahar Export in New Delhi. Twenty per cent of Irfan’s market is for export markets and ten per cent is for local markets.

His production consists of four main block-printed design ranges:

1. Traditional *ajrakh* for collectors, tourists and as general gifts.
2. His own designs which consist of combinations of traditional patterns on new fabrics such as silk and wool or traditional designs combined with contemporary designs. These are produced for exhibitions and a niche high end market in the urban and overseas markets.
3. Lengths of fabric in designs chosen by the buyers that will be made into products by the buyers. These designs account for the majority of the Indian urban and overseas markets.
4. Cheaper fabrics printed in chemical colours for the local (Bhuj) and urban Indian market.

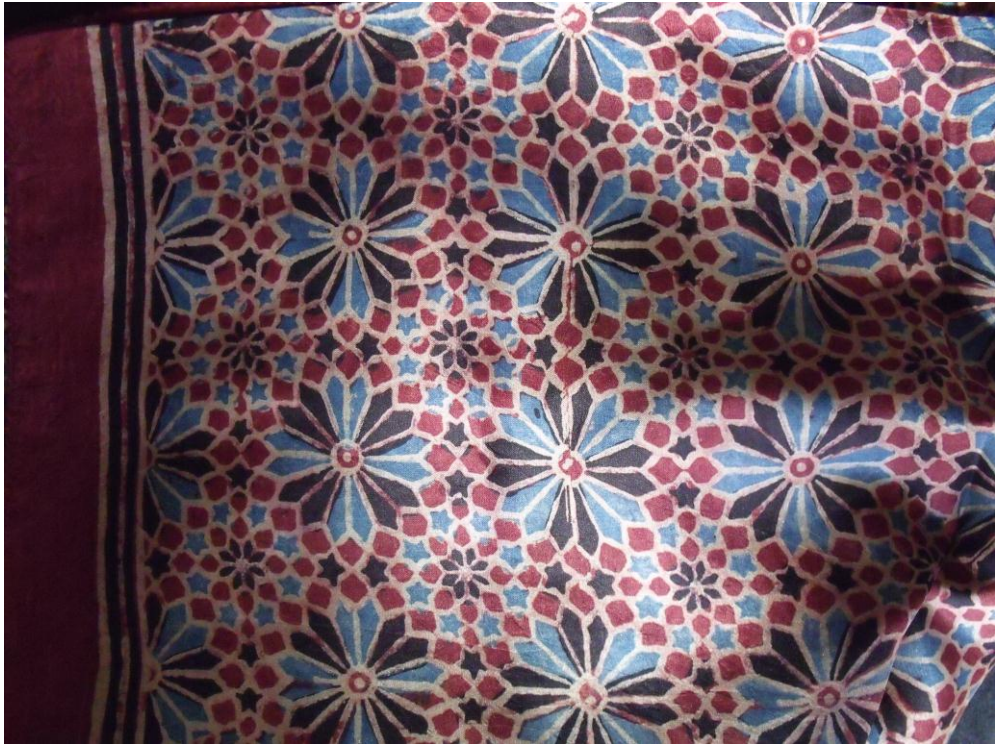


Figure 3.19: A contemporary design on silk influenced by patterns in the Taj Mahal, Irfan Anwar Khatri (Photo): Ruth Clifford, February 2011



Figure 3.20: Creating a plain border to a traditional piece (Photo): Ruth Clifford, February, 2011

Like the family of Mohammed Siddik, Irfan and his family have fitted into different craft and trade models. Irfan's grandfathers existed amongst the traditional craftsmen-local market model also selling *ajrakh* to be traded on. Irfan now regularly collaborates with designers, and develops new concepts and ideas seeing himself as an artisan and a designer.

3.7 Khatri Kasam Haji Junas

The area of Khatrivas in the town of Khavda is another place in Kutch with a long standing tradition of *ajrakh* block printing (Varadarajan, 1983; Gillow & Barnard, 2008). Khavda is 50 km north of Bhuj, situated near the Great White Rann, the stretch of desert that divides Kutch and Pakistan. For this reason it is more isolated and less visited than Ajrakhpur and Dhamadka.

There was once more than one hundred Khatri in Khavda working on *ajrakh*. Now there are just forty five Khatri there, after many left for Bhuj for alternative employment. Out of these forty five there are only fifteen individuals working on *ajrakh*. The rest of the Khatri have gone into tailoring or other professions. All of these Khatri are using chemical dyes and some are screen printing (Khatri Kasam, interview, February 2011).

Kasam's family have been living in Khavda for more than seven generations, after moving from a village near the Indus Valley site of Dholavira for the better market prospects in Khavda. The family were using natural dyes up until forty five years ago, when they began using chemical dyes and are continuing to use them now.

Kasam's forefathers produced in Kutch for the Pakistan market (at that time, part of India). They produced skirts, *chunni*, *odhni* and *lungi*. Now Kasam produces for the local market, particularly Bhuj. The production consists mainly of bed sheets rather than the traditional cloths to wear, as less people are wearing the traditional cloths and it is becoming too expensive to produce traditional garments.



Figure 3.21: Khatri Kasam in his workshop (Photo): Ruth Clifford, February 2011



Figure 3.22: Khatri Kasam's son printing in the family workshop (Photo): Ruth Clifford, February 2011

Kasam's workshop is much smaller than the workshops of Ismail Mohammed, and many Khatris of Dhamadka and Ajrakhpur, because of his smaller workforce. The tables are small – not needing to be as big as the ones in Ajrakhpur in Dhamadka because Kasam doesn't print cloth yardage. The fabrics are treated in a naphthol dye prior to printing which produces a strong smell and creates a bright yellow colour. There are much fewer processes involved than the natural dye processes of Dhamadka and Ajrakhpur.

Cloths printed for the women of the Harijan community are printed with a *bandhani* imitation print, a traditional regional style of this community. These cloths are cheaper to print than the *ajrakh* cloths as the blocks are made with iron nails hammered into a wood base, instead of carved – which is the method used for *ajrakh* patterns.



Figure 3.23: Odhni (shawl) for the Harijan community (Photo): Ruth Clifford, February 2011

This cloth (figure 3.23) is one of few that are still produced for a traditional market based on particular motifs and patterns for particular communities. Traditionally there were particular communities buying *ajrakh* such as Harijan Meghwal and Mutwa but now there is a more general market:

‘People will buy because they like [the cloths], all are scattered over different communities. It is now more difficult to identify the traditional communities that once always wore *ajrakh*’ (Khatri Kasam, interviewed February 2011).

Kasam’s family hasn’t been recognised as needing help (personal communication, Pankaj Shah, February 2011), because he is successfully producing for a local market. However, Edwards (2007 p. 189) describes the struggle of the Khavda block-printing communities, saying the main market for their cloths are three shops in the main bazaar in Bhuj, run by Lohanas (Sindhi merchant caste). The Lohanas were offering very low prices, but when the families in Khavda protested they were told to take it or leave it and because of their isolation and little contact with new potential clients, they had no choice but to continue to sell their goods to the Lohanas.

Kasam and his family demonstrate the traditional model of craftsmen producing for the local market. The family have worked in much the same way as generations of Khatri before them, only adjusting to chemical dyes during independence and industrialisation. It could possibly be that this model may also change as there is less demand for the traditional *ajrakh* cloths for the local markets.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of each case study within the context of crafts in Kutch.

The next two chapters will provide a comparative discussion of the case studies, keeping within the aims and main questions posed in the

introduction chapter, and comparing review of the literature in the previous chapter with findings from the case studies. I will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the organisations and the services they provide for the artisans, the problems and opportunities they provide for the artisans and the designs and markets for the *ajrakh* cloth.

Chapter 4

Preservation, value and marketing

All of the organisations and individual artisans profiled in the case study chapter share a similar goal: to encourage, support and promote continuation of the craft of block printing in Kutch. This is achieved through a variety of strategies, which I will analyse throughout this chapter. Drawing upon the significant findings of previous researchers that I discussed in chapter one, in relation to the situation and importance of traditional craft today in an increasingly globalising and modernising world, I will analyse what effects the strategies described here, along with those described in the case studies, are having on the design, production and social context of *ajrakh*.

I will discuss both the strategies assumed by artisans and those assumed by the non-governmental organisations, social enterprises, buyers and traders, facilitators and designers, all of whom assume the role of intermediary or 'bridge' between the market and artisan. For this reason, when referring to the latter, I will use the term 'intermediary'.

4.1 Museums and documentation

A common focus amongst all four of the organisation case studies I have examined is that the continuation of a traditional craft like *ajrakh* should be based on fostering the inherent qualities of the craft, the skills, process, materials and designs that make it unique to any other craft. In order to make this uniqueness the focal point when designing, producing and marketing the *ajrakh*, it is important that the artisan and the intermediary (when it comes to promoting and marketing the craft) are aware of the characteristics that make the craft unique. This involves researching and documenting the designs that have evolved within the history and traditions of the craft. According to *Designers meet Artisans*, this research and documentation is important for many of those involved in revitalising craft. They see it as necessary for 'the

development of crafts, for preserving memories and protecting copyright' (UNESCO et al., 2005).²¹

As I also discussed in chapter one, artisans producing textiles or other crafts for a living rarely still have access to craft objects produced by generations before them. For local markets this might have been because they didn't see a need for preserving a living craft that they worked at as their daily occupation, but for more recent distant markets, artisans have been forced to sell craft objects to tourists or collectors taking them to distant museums inaccessible to the artisans who made them.

Kala Raksha's museum and archive, displaying the traditional textiles of the artisans Kala Raksha work with serves as a reference for the artisans who are encouraged to reconnect with their cultural heritage. The concept of this museum works to provide artisans with a reference, enabling them to appreciate traditional designs while being inspired to rejuvenate these by, for example, disseminating them into new products. This concept is not different to the design process many training and professional designers take when seeking inspiration and reference in urban galleries and museums. The collection is also available for buyers, tourists, researchers and any other visitors to Kala Raksha, to learn about the traditions of the local crafts and to understand the cultural heritage and therefore the value of the old heirlooms as well as the rejuvenated new designs and products (Kala Raksha, no date).

A rural museum in India is rare, most traditional pieces finding homes in those of the rich craft collectors, or urban museums. Tyabji (2003) describes Kala Raksha as a 'shining example of how a local documentation centre has acted as a catalyst for craftswomen to move from piece-wage earners to creative artists'. A similar museum with the same motivations as Kala Raksha is the Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing run by the Anokhi Foundation, adjoined to the company of the same name. The museum,

²¹ The issue surrounding copyright within traditional crafts is something I will expand on in chapter 6.

situated in the picturesque, historical town of Amber situated on the other side of Jaipur to where the company lies

‘intends to depict the traditional inherited wisdom of a living indigenous craft in all its facets and unbroken historic continuity, working towards the crafts’ furtherance to contemporary aspirations, markets, technical improvement and greater sustenance to its practitioners – the craftspeople’ (Anokhi museum information board).

Like the pioneering Calico Museum which opened in 1949 in Ahmedabad, the purpose of the Kala Raksha and Anokhi museums is for the *study* of antiques rather than their imitation (Goetz, 1949), and are a new form of revolution in the sense that they are much more accessible to the rural artisans whose own families or communities produced many of the crafts on display. For this reason, one could ask why artisans were taken out of their natural environment to be put on display at the urban crafts museum in Delhi, and separate museums not be built in their own villages. Further, huge collections of ancient and valuable textiles and crafts live in rarely seen protected collections thousands of miles from the descendants of the artisans who produced them²². Some artisans have had the opportunity to travel to America or Great Britain to see these collections, but this is a rare opportunity, and why should they have to travel that far to see something that has been made in their own village? There could surely be an opportunity to redistribute at least a selection of these crafts to the artisans’ local communities all over India.

However, if the majority of the markets for the traditional crafts are situated overseas, then it is important these markets have accessible reference too. Maiwa’s collection in Vancouver, of the ‘best work of all the artisans’ with whom they trade (Charlotte Kwon, interviewed July 2010), is available for their customers, as well as craft enthusiasts and collectors to view if they want to know more about the history and traditions of these crafts. Therefore,

²² One collection of note which has been referenced throughout this essay is the Victoria and Albert museum’s collection. Further significant collections include the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester and the Textile Museum in Washington, America.

prospective Western customers, companies, designers or collectors don't need to travel all the way to India to learn about the culture behind these textiles.

The education these museums and documentation provide serves to inform both the designing and the marketing of a craft like *ajrakh*. They encourage artisans to realise the 'uniqueness' of designs existing in their own traditional textiles, and encourage them to revive these and revitalise them through adaptation and combination with new designs, layouts and colours. For the buyers and organisations selling the end-products, the 'traditional' designs add value for their customers desiring 'authentic' textiles, 'thick with history and rich with traditions' (Hendrickson, 1996 p. 113).

The communication or education of the history and traditions of *ajrakh*, therefore plays a major part in the promotion or branding of the textile and can become a unique selling point.

4.2 Marketing, promotion and branding

The marketing of a craft is an important part of any craft intervention when aiming to position it into a viable market. Pupul Jayakar said, 'Craft is an economic activity before it is a cultural activity. The centre of the development process is marketing' (Tyabji, 2003).

I discussed in chapter one, the motivations behind Indian urban and international consumers buying traditional craft textiles like *ajrakh*, and how these have encouraged the growing success of *ajrakh* within these markets. I am going to revisit these motivations now and discuss how they have influenced the designing, branding and marketing of *ajrakh* by both the organisations and artisans in my case studies.



Figure 4.1: Ajrakh cloths in the Hand-made in India exhibition at the Crafts Council, Islington, London 1998. Photo Courtesy: Anne Morrell

The authentic appeal

For the niche markets that are the craft specialists or historians, or an elite consumer desiring an authentic craft object to decorate their home or to wear, the sacrosanctity of the traditions and motifs is most important. Therefore it is this market that enables the artisans and development initiatives to preserve the traditional traits of the craft and what constitutes its cultural heritage and identity. The reason that these clients or customers buy from KHAMIR, according to Pankaj Shah (interview, May 2011), is because there is a trust created for customers about the authenticity of the products, and from Maiwa, because ‘people know us for quality craft...and the connections to the stories and actual people behind the work’ (Charlotte Kwon, interviewed July 2010). These marketing methods could also make the craft appeal to ‘Gandhians and grassroots activists’.

In the case study on Mohammed Siddik and family I discussed their revival of the ‘Fostat’ designs, examples of an ancient craft and trading tradition that

ajrakh was most likely to have been part of. But Housego was unable to find a market for the high quality reproductions of these by Mohammed in the early 1990s, giving the reason that 'the West's perception of India was still that it was cheap and cheerful'(Housego, 2003). Does this mean that there wasn't a desire for 'authentic' Indian crafts at that time? Or perhaps the reason lay in the marketing - that the communication of the 'story' behind these fabrics and the details of the complex printing and dyeing process, was missing. A lack of understanding about the work that goes into a hand-crafted object is often the reason consumers will not be willing to pay the amount it is worth. Furthermore, even if there is an understanding, the average consumer can't afford to pay this (Tyabji, 2003). What then is the reason for Maiwa successfully selling these 'Fostat' reproductions in the West, what had changed then between Housego's and Maiwa's efforts?

Maiwa certainly focuses on the stories, people and process behind each object they sell, as a way of educating the customer and promoting the crafts. 'Every garment, piece of bedding, bag shawl, embroidery, we sell has tags describing the process, the dye, the stitch, the artisan, the place' (Charlotte Kwon, interview July 2010). Having been in constant, close contact with the artisans for a long time, Maiwa has a deep knowledge of *ajrakh*, its history and traditions. This knowledge has enabled them to promote the craft of *ajrakh* as it is - 'a beautiful item' which a community or culture has made for generations without implementing particular strategies to meet the requirements of a particular market. Communicating this story and its making then means the customer 'can't help but become interested in the origin, the value and the craft.'

Similarly, KHAMIR base their branding largely on the authenticity of the crafts they work with and their documentation center serves to:

'support artisans with documented material regarding the own craft, skills, history, techniques, which they can use to market their business, connect with buyers, and strengthen their brand identity' (KHAMIR, 2010).

The communication of the skills, history and techniques and the authenticity these encourage adds value to the objects:

‘With our name, there is a trust created for customers about the authenticity of the products because of our known attachment with origin and maker. This adds value’ (Pankaj Shah, interview May 2011).

Thus, both KHAMIR and Maiwa promote the crafts as stories and ideologies, not just as physical objects, thereby enabling the audience and consumer to connect directly with the maker of the craft object they are purchasing, as discussed in chapter one.

Indeed, it is these traditional patterns along with their stories and history and a rich cultural heritage that first attracted customers seeking authentic craft. Irfan Anwar emphasises this:

‘The present day prosperity of our craft and artisans is based only on traditional designs’ (Irfan Anwar Khatri, interview July 2011).

Reflecting upon the arguments raised in chapter 1, how can the traditions and cultural heritage of the past, which strengthen the craft’s authenticity, be celebrated and promoted without encouraging the artisans and their crafts to be static and un-changing to appeal to this clientele? On the other hand, to what extent does the incorporation of new influences and innovation affect the ‘authenticity’ of *ajrakh*, which we have established is in part, defined by traditional characteristics and designs that convey *ajrakh*’s history and cultural heritage?

When the Khatri first began adapting traditional designs into products used in an urban context such as bedcovers and tablecloths, these did not go without criticism, particularly by craft specialists whose view is that new designs are not exploiting the true features of *ajrakh*. A passage in *Beyond Tradition: handcrafted Indian textiles* writes:

‘Although the printers of Dhamadka eventually developed a successful range of furnishings for the home as well as apparel such as *kurtas* (long shirts) and *dupattas* (stoles), their inability to apply the two-sided print to a wide range of base fabrics and colours appears to have restricted the contemporary potential of this art’ (Chishti et al., 2000).

The printing of both sides of the fabric is the traditional way a ‘true’ *ajrakh* was printed in past generations, and was required for the types of uncut garments it was produced for, such as a shoulder cloth which showed both sides of the cloth when worn. Sufiyan Khatri explains the reason that they have decreased the production of double-side printing:

‘Actual/traditional *ajrakh* is a both sided print but hardly anyone understands the worth (work, energy and time spent) in doing so. Thus, to adapt to new markets we print one side only and produce products which have a wider acceptability’ (Sufiyan Ismail Khatri, interview February 2011).

Thus, while double-sided printing demonstrates a ‘true’ *ajrakh*, something that will be desirable to a connoisseur knowing its value, it cannot be used in the context of a wider customer base wanting something more affordable and wearing predominantly Western style clothes. Moreover, while traditional *ajrakh* was printed for men’s garments, and only accepted by these customers as a double-sided printed cloth, there is no need to print *ajrakh* on both sides of the cloth to be made into a shirt, or equally for furnishings, a table cloth or cushion cover.

A similar more recent observation to that of the authors of *Beyond Tradition* was noticed by Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya director, Judy Frater. As she was travelling to America, Ismail Mohammed asked if she could sell some of his *ajrakh* cloths. She agreed, but when she viewed them could only pick out two or three from a large bundle, being disappointed with the rest:

‘They were over-simplified, had just two colours and had lost their richness – rich ornamentation and rich colour combinations that *ajrakh* is known for. I felt that knowing what the tradition was, I couldn’t accept these inferior pieces’ (Judy Frater, interview June 2011).

The simplified versions of *ajrakh* were thought by Frater to have been left overs of a Fab India order, an urban Indian fashion and interior chain supporting India’s handicrafts while simplifying them for a wider market. Gamthiwala has also developed simplified block-printed designs with the Khattris. The wide market of companies such as Fab India and the growing market of Gamthiwala (having expanded from one shop to three in Ahmedabad) whose brand appeals to a wider market desiring the hand-made, natural-dyed and ethnic at more affordable prices, means that they can’t be too specific with their design. The customers of these products will buy because they ‘look nice’. Knowledge of the craft’s cultural heritage is overtaken by the purpose of fashion and decoration. For the majority of *ajrakh* cloths, as well as for Kala Raksha products, this market is the consistent ‘middle’ market. Nevertheless, the artisans all need this market to ‘fill their stomachs.’ After all, as Tyabji (2003) points out: ‘Crafts are not just part of our aesthetic and culture, they are the bread of life to millions of craftspeople.’

The production of simplified *ajrakh* printing for the middle market has further advantages, as it provides ideal opportunities for apprentices to learn the craft before he can be trusted with the complex prints of the ‘true’ *ajrakh*, therefore allowing the master craftsman to work on the more skilled printing involved in the ‘richly ornamented’, traditional designs, giving the artisans the opportunity to ‘fill their soul’ (Judy Frater, interview June 2011).

Indeed, the majority of *ajrakh* artisans I speak to today communicate a strong connection to their heritage and enjoy printing ‘true’ *ajrakh* as much as innovating and experimenting with new designs which take on new influences around them. Irfan Anwar said ‘it is very important to know and value the traditional designs and patterns in *ajrakh* with their history. This is

our heritage and its knowledge will help us to keep our feet in tradition' (Irfan Anwar Khatir, interviews July 2011). Sufiyan adds 'I prefer to print *ajrakh*, because we never forget our traditions. I will teach my son also' (personal communication, February 2011).



Figure 4.2: Simplified designs in the workshop of Ismail Mohammed Khatri, January 2010 (Photo): Ruth Clifford

The hand-made and eco-friendly appeal

Irfan Anwar says only twenty per cent of his customers understand the *ajrakh* craft tradition, suggesting that the above-mentioned market of craft specialists, enthusiasts and activists account for this proportion (Irfan Anwar Khatri, interviewed February 2011). For another branch of the market, including fair trade and environmental activists, followers of ethnic fashions or those desiring individuality, the appeal lies in the use of natural dyes or the 'made by hand' confirmed by the Craftmark label. This label initiated by the All India Crafts Association has a similar purpose to that of the Fair Trade or

Soil Association marks, in that it guarantees the product is genuinely handmade (All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association, 2010).

This method of branding enables the consumer to immediately know and trust what they are buying. Subsequently the act of buying this product is for some a political act, in which they are supporting the production of hand-made products and rejecting those that have been mass-produced – thus rejecting production methods that damage the environment and the livelihoods of handicraft producers. They are expressing their beliefs through shopping and ‘voting with their money’ (Charllotte Kwon, interview, July 2010). Indeed, Spooner (1986 p. 219) suggests that until the birth of machine-made products, the Western idea of authenticity lay in the design, but when handicrafts gave way to the machine-made products, the emphasis turned to that of the handicraft. For some, the act is a spiritual one:

‘Made by hand reminds us of the human connection between producer and consumer and, no matter how high we soar into the skies, it is from earth substances that we are created, and it is to earth substances that we return’ (Kak, 2003).

The desire to buy products that are environmentally friendly and fair traded, where the consumer knows that the product has been produced under acceptable conditions and is receiving fair wages has been an increasing motivation for a small proportion of the world’s consumers over the last few decades (R. Clifford, 2006).

The focus of the hand-made and natural dyed aspects of *ajrakh* is prominent in all the case study subjects’ branding and marketing.

Maiwa strongly push the environmentally friendly or ‘green’ processes involved in the craft products they sell, as well as communicating the living conditions of the artisans to the customer. They are ‘transparent in their selling and are ‘very fussy that [the block printers] only use natural dyes and that they stick to colours that do not require stannous chloride and potassium dichromate (both toxic heavy metal mordants) (Charllotte Kwon, interview,

July 2010). They have also introduced certified organic cotton to the artisans' *ajrakh* production, to assume a completely environmentally friendly process from the growing of the cotton to the printing and washing of the fabric.

These fair trade and green attributes that Maiwa promotes are their strongest USPs situating them in a successful position for the ethical market. Indeed, the use of natural dyes was what first ignited overseas interest in *ajrakh* realising its potential in a growing environmentally aware market.

Gamthiwala's dress and furnishing fabric yardage in simpler *ajrakh* designs, is strongly promoted as 'natural dyed' and 'hand block-printed' (Gamthiwala, no date). Kala Raksha strongly promotes its use of natural dyes and local hand-woven cloth, and their products bear the Craftmark label. An additional label gives the customer a brief overview of the traditional craft used to make the product.

If we are to assume that the technique of *ajrakh* which involves significantly complex and skilled processes, should also stay the same, the customer must understand this technique to understand the craft's value. The consequences of lack of understanding results in the *ajrakh* artisans struggling to compete with screen-printed imitations of 'true' *ajrakh* passed off as original or *pukka* to the un-trained eye.²³ Thus, as the stories and histories are communicated to the buyer, so to must the details of the process.

4.3 Collaboration and design education

A potential detriment that could arise out of focusing on maintaining the technique of a traditional craft alone, the 'handicraft' and promoting this, is the artisan being reduced to the role of a labourer. As well as reducing the status of the artisan, this has brought about problems of regional characteristic patterns taken from one region or crafts community and given

²³ Edwards (2005) explains the popularity of these cloths amongst un-knowing tourist customers in Rajasthan where the block printing business is on a much larger scale, and 'notoriously cut-throat'. Further, on a trip to Ahmedabad in January 2011 I noticed a bag that had been made with screen-printed *ajrakh* and this was confirmed by Ismail Mohammed. The bag was also embellished with Rabari embroidery so the *ajrakh* craft was not the focal point of the bag.

to another to produce, perhaps for a cheaper price. While many artisans will confidently accept a design given to them that has no relation to their traditional designs, often because they trust this professional designer, who knows a ready market, they are being denied the chance to express their own creativity and identity. Further, they are led to believe their own designs are inferior and that they will never be able to produce what their only surviving market wants. For this reason, the design development initiatives focused on in this study emphasise the importance of a more equal partnership between the artisan and designer or intermediary.

Maiwa and Gamthiwala liaise directly with the artisans when buying and commissioning *ajrakh*, and they know their customer base well. Therefore their input when establishing designs is valuable, both in sustaining the traditional practices, as that is what their customer looks for, and for successfully promoting *ajrakh* for a ready market. The close partnership these clients have with the artisans is much more effective than the patronage that the government initiatives demonstrated. That the clients understand the cultural, social and familial aspects of the artisans and allow them to take a key part in the decision process, means the artisan is able to express his own creativity and ideas in the work, thus resulting in pride and empowerment.

KHAMIR, on the other hand acts as an intermediary where, along with their collaborating stakeholders, offering expertise in different areas, they aim to assess the wider needs of the artisans. This knowledge is inputted into the education of visiting designers so that before fully entering a design partnership with an artisan, they are knowledgeable about all aspects of the craft. They then encourage a three way process between themselves, designer and artisan making sure each has an equal say on the design process.

Kala Raksha demonstrates a third model of design development to target a viable market, on the basis that teaching artisans design skills is a more successful approach than teaching designers craft traditions: 'If one

recognises the creative capability of artisans, in terms of cost efficiency and feasibility, it is more practical to think of traditional artisans in design principles than to train designers in craft traditions' (Balaram, 2005). This is a unique approach that no other NGO or enterprise has attempted before, (Tyabji, 2003) and many have sought excuses for not including the craftsman in the decision making, like Kala Raksha aim to do both through its main organisation and the school KRV.

The teachers at KRV all implement their own teaching methods and ideas, none of which impose any strict design ideals or procedures upon the artisans. The teaching and learning process echoes the designer-collaboration that was highlighted in chapter one. The teacher/designer learns about the artisan's culture and craft while the student/artisan is learning new design methods, concepts and market contexts. From interviews with the KRV teachers, it was evident that most found themselves to be on an equal level to the artisan and that each were learning from the other. The teaching approach would vary depending upon what was found appropriate to different students, but one successful approach is to make the student aware of design processes and colour selection and, as one teacher stated, 'to teach the artisan to start thinking creatively' (Sanchari Mahapatra, interview 2011).

When KRV first opened the teaching was largely based on the Western design process (Frater, 2007). However, later on it was realised that it was more effective to encourage design understanding through known cultural concepts. A shared finding amongst the teachers I interviewed was that universal design principles are inherent within many of the traditional designs and therefore the teacher's role was to make the student realise this and help to unleash his creativity (interviews: Lokesh Ghai, August 2010, Sanchari Mahapatra, June 2011).

This involves the students creating and developing their own concepts which means 'reflecting on trends they observed in their own lives', as well as what is happening internationally (Frater & Bhanani, 2009). During the *Concept*,

Communication and Projects course Santanu Das, who taught on this course, describes the process the students took to achieve this:

‘Initially they were asked to choose a season of their choice, and write an essay on it. Later they were asked to illustrate various incidents from the essay. They were then asked to paint swatches of colour which they think appropriate for their season. Therefore they learned how to conceptualise an abstract thought and visualise it in the tangible world. After deriving the colours they made stripes to understand the relation and proportions of their colour palate, so that they become more informed when using them. Once the colours were in place, they concentrated on developing motifs and blocksOnce the motif bank was done, they made final layouts’.

According to another teacher on the course, Mahapatra (interview, June 2011) some artisans turned dramatically away from tradition during the course, enjoying the opportunity to explore and experiment, and Das explained that amongst the young artisans awareness of their tradition was vague. However some teachers including Shah (interview, June 2011) notice the value for tradition amongst the artisans. For many of the artisans, it is the education at KRV that instils a value and pride in their cultural heritage. This is true for many of the Khatris who have studied at KRV. AbdulRauf Abdulrazak says:

“The beauty of the education at KRV is that it is not only based on our tradition but also broadens our vision of our tradition. We value our tradition more after coming here” (Frater, 2011).



Figure 4.3: Students at KRV, Unit 2: Basic design, sourcing from nature and heritage, February 2011 (Photo): Ruth Clifford



Figure 4.4: Unit 1: Colour: sourcing from nature and heritage, January 2008 (Photo): Ruth Clifford

4.4 Designing for markets, understanding contexts

Artisans share a common view that understanding the culture and lifestyle of the markets they are producing for is difficult. Irfan Anwar says the tastes for colours, fabrics, size and variations vary from country to country, while Sufiyan says 'it is difficult to predict and assume the culture and tastes of our customers' (Sufiyan Ismail Khatri, February 2011).

Therefore, the most important focus of the teaching, according to KRV teacher Shah, is for the artisans to understand how their designs would fit into a different context to that of their own, and what they are used to, including interiors of urban homes and fashion the wealth of fashion garments and accessories that their craft can be transferable to. She stresses that while they are aware of these new contexts, it is important for them to keep their 'inner artist and essence alive' (Mona Shah, interview June 2011).

In summary of the above discussion, the 'contemporising' of 'traditional' craft whether it is for a fashion conscious consumer, a consumer aspiring for the 'authentic' artefact, or the consumer aspiring for the hand-crafted and environmentally friendly product, is not as simple as adapting designs through colour variation, layout and incorporation of new motifs. The ambiguity of combining contemporary with traditional is made clearer through realising that the traditional designs can be contemporary in their own right. Indeed, through new designs artisans within living traditions are creating new traditions through their adaptation of designs for modern contexts and societies.

I will turn now to discuss how artisans have taken their understanding and learning of their market's contexts by examining the different methods they have used in developing new designs, and the resulting products and end uses.

4.5 Adaptation of surface design and end product for different uses

Kala Raksha, KHAMIR and Maiwa all have design teams that create contemporary products out of a variety of traditional and contemporary *ajrakh* fabrics. The design of the fabric is left up to the artisan and the fabrics are incorporated into new products.



Figure 4.5: Bag in Kala Raksha's shop made with a variety of *ajrakh* printed fabrics and embroidered fabrics (Photo): Ruth Clifford, February 2011

Often the fabric will be combined with various materials from other local craft producers. These include *ajrakh* combined with local leather work to produce a laptop bag; combining *ajrakh* with *mashroo*, the distinctive satin like woven fabric, to make a cushion cover; and combining *ajrakh* with embroidery within a patchwork or to embellish its surface.



*Figure 4.6: KHAMIR cushion cover made with Fostat printed mashroo fabric
(Photo): Ruth Clifford, August 2011*

Artisans themselves individually develop new products, which involves adapting the layout of the print for it to be compatible for the particular shape and style of the product. The grid format consisting of layered borders round the edge and an all-over pattern in the main ground was the characteristic style for *lunghis*, shoulder cloths and turbans but cannot be printed on fabric destined to be a scarf, cushion cover or fabric yardage.

While making sure that the artisans own creativity is displayed in the final product, Maiwa works with the Khatris to experiment with the scale and layout of the designs to suit the scarves and shawls or garments the fabric would be made for. For example, smaller stoles can carry a similar layout to the traditional shoulder cloth, but the amount of border would be much less.

Ismail and family also took on the idea of combining different craft techniques, and combined *shibori* techniques with the block-printed patterns.²⁴

Further to these forms of adaptations, artisans are also experimenting with varying the composition of patterns. Salemmammed for his collections produced at KRV kept traditional motifs and arranged them into different layouts and compositions. He subsequently incorporated these into both Indian and Western style garments.



Figure 4.7: Scarf printed with non-traditional colours incorporating a simplified border (Photo): Ruth Clifford, February 2011

²⁴ *Shibori* is a Japanese tie-dye technique closely resembling *bandhani* which is also a traditional craft of the Khatri community and is carried out by the women in Ismail's family.



Figure 4.8: Salemammed's skirt, made for his KRV Collection, 2008 (Photo):
Ruth Clifford, February, 2010

Revitalising ancient designs

In chapter 3.5, the case study of the family of Mohammed Siddik Khatri, I described how the Khatri were influenced by the collections of the Fostat fragments discovered in Egypt, which the *ajrakh* cloths are thought to share similarities with. Maiwa has taken a major role in encouraging this revival, and says that the resulting interpretations the artisans create 'look completely new'.

Like the contemporary adaptations discussed earlier in this section, these Fostat imitations stood out against the traditional *ajrakh* fabrics and their dense patterns, creating a contrasting look. It has been established that the *ajrakh* cloths may have been included in the trade fabrics to Egypt (Bilgrami,

1998), because of the similarities they hold. However, the resulting Fostat inspired cloths produced have a strikingly different look to that of the densely patterned, geometric *ajrakh* cloths that we know as traditional.

Although we can't be certain that *ajrakh* printed cloths were part of the Fostat trade, these reproductions resemble an authentic antiquity, telling stories of an ancient material and trading culture, while at the same time displaying contemporary decorative aesthetics.



*Figure 4.9: Fragment of medieval printed cotton from Fostat, V&A collection
(Photo): Ruth Clifford*



Figure 4.10: A reproduction of a Fostat print, Ismail Mohammed Khatri, February 2011 (Photo): Ruth Clifford

New Fabrics

Cotton is traditionally the fabric that *ajrakh* was printed on, most likely because of the abundant availability of it, like the dyes mentioned in chapter three. While it is said to have existed in India for millennia (Rogers, 1983), the word ‘cotton’ is thought to have arrived from the Arabic word ‘qutun’. It had existed in other countries such as the Greek and Roman world but wasn’t given the same status of luxury as silk (Rogers, 1983).

Silk has been introduced into *ajrakh* production for new luxury markets. It is not permitted to be worn by Muslims according to the teachings of the Prophet, (Bayly, 1986 p. 290) and it would not have been practical for the cattle herders of Kutch to wear, therefore it was not used in the production for the local market.

Ismail Mohammed realised the potential of silk for urban and overseas markets when he travelled to Australia to display his *ajrakh* fabrics at an exhibition (Biswas, 2010). He was travelling with Khatri Alimohamed Isha who was taking a bundle of light *bandhani* silk scarves to exhibit (*bandhani*, or tie dye, being his own traditional craft), while Ismail was carrying the heavy cotton bed covers and table cloths. Evidently the heavy cotton pieces cost much more to transport than the silk scarves. At the exhibition Ali-Mohamed was more successful in his sales than Ismail because, while being on a par with each other on terms of quality, skill and therefore value, light but luxury fashionable scarves are an easier purchase than heavy bed covers and table cloths. Therefore the cost of transportation and the different rates of selling meant Alimohamed came out of the exhibition better off. The images in the previous section of Ismail's scarves are an example of the resulting silk *ajrakh* scarves.

Colours and patterns when printed on different fabrics can transform their appearance. When printed on silk, the patterns are sharper and the colours brighter and shinier. Wool is another newly introduced fabric, which makes designs appear duller with softer edges. If it was to be presumed that the designs and colours do have meanings and significance, then these meanings may get lost in the alterations the designs experience being printed on different fabrics.

However, various aspects of the traditional fabric – cotton, might also affect the nature of the designs. These aspects are; its source, whether it is hand-woven or mill woven and how it has been treated. It appears that the nature of the cotton, and other factors such as varying lengths of time dipped in dye, the dye's consistency and the time left out to dry, can all affect the look of the design (personal communication, Ismail Mohammed Khatri, February 2011) but they have been something that the Khatri have got used to controlling.

It is difficult to say, therefore, whether adoptions of new fabric mean radical movement away from tradition. Combining new fabrics with traditional designs, could be an effective method for preserving traditional designs,

because the designs are still being printed. But combining them with a new material can mean they are keeping both traditional and luxury, modern elements.

Quality control, finishing and presenting

The choice of cloth for Maiwa is an important step in assuring the quality of the *ajrakh* textiles they are commissioning, hence the use of carefully selected organic cotton as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Quality, for Maiwa is an important part of their brand identity. Indeed, Kwon says she sees Maiwa's role as 'not much more than quality control'.

'We push quality on every level – from procuring the raw materials to the skills of the artisan to the finishing by the tailors to the testing of the products' (Charllotte Kwon, interview August 2011).

Ajrakh for *lunghis* and other uncut garments would not have required particular attention to finishing or tailoring. *Ajrakh* as a scarf or stole worn around the neck to hang, or bed covers and table cloths would need to have a neat finished hem as these would be clearly visible. Adding a trim to a traditional *ajrakh* printed scarf may further add a contemporary touch. If made into products or garments, it is important that the stitching, making up and finishing are done with attention and quality. Judy Frater feels this should be an inherent part of the design process, and a unit of the KRV course is dedicated to quality control and finishing. In 2009, for unit 5 of the KRV course, *Finishing Collection and Development*, pattern makers and designers from NIFT were introduced and collaborated with the artisans, acting as the client and encouraging them to 'make choices and take responsibility for the results. The collaboration resulted in improved quality of final collection products' (Frater & Bhanani, 2009 p. 20).

Experimenting with scale, composition and application

Simply changing the scale of a traditional *ajrakh* motif or pattern, applying it in different compositions such as randomly or asymmetrically, or applying dye and colour to the cloth in different ways can transform the look of an *ajrakh* cloth while still retaining traditional characteristics. These are all approaches KRV artisans have experimented with, gaining them success with elite clients and one-off boutiques in India and abroad.

This chapter has shown that the combination of artisans value and knowledge for traditions along with their ability to think critically (rather than being led by client's orders) (Frater & Bhanani, 2009) and be creative, can enable them to create designs that celebrate their traditions, while knowing how to place them into contemporary contexts. Thus, currently, the most important thing for the artisans to develop knowledge of is the lifestyles of the customers they are designing and producing for.

Chapter 5

Representation and recognition

In chapter one and throughout this chapter, I will have identified the effects of design intervention enabling the transformation from the role of ‘artisan’ or ‘craftsperson’ to that of ‘designer’ or ‘entrepreneur’. Both *Designers Meet Artisans* and the TNSC project, and subsequently in my own findings, KRV and KHAMIR, highlight how this transformation alleviates the artisans social position and broadens their skills and capabilities to allow them to be more in control of the whole design and production process. This ultimately makes the individual artisan’s business more sustainable as they become closer to their market, and more aware of their client’s needs.

Kala Raksha teacher, Sanchari Mahapatra (interview, June 2011) says, ‘this kind of cross-cultural exposure is highly important to a creative mind and also plays a big role in connecting [the artisan] with the client.’

The government’s recognition of Mohammed Siddik was pivotal for the continuing success of the Khattris business. The National Award is a scheme developed by the All India Handicrafts Board and instituted by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay²⁵ as a way of acclaiming master craftspeople who have demonstrated a high level of skill and innovation in their craft. Every year, and out of approximately 1,500 entries, 40 are chosen for National awards and Merit certificates (Venkatesan, 2009). The awards carry cash prizes, but more importantly recognition and opportunities. As well as demonstrating skill and high quality craftsmanship, the master craftsperson has also to be a ‘socially responsible leader’ and ‘the nominated person must contribute to the craft as a whole’ (Venkatesan, 2009).

The winner is therefore able to channel the benefits of the award to the wider crafts producer group, through teaching and passing on his skills to aspiring young craftspeople. Therefore the awards gained by Mohammed Siddik and

²⁵ Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay is introduced in chapter 1

subsequently his sons Abdulrazak and Abduljabbar²⁶ have been instrumental in spreading the skills and success of these artisans to the wider community of *ajrakh* printers in Ajrakhpur and Dhamadka. Irfan Anwar's brother Khatri Abdul Rahim Anwar won the award in 2004 and his uncle Khatri Ibrahim Isha won it in 2007. The awards helped these artisans to become recognised in the wider crafts world, due to being given preference for participation in national melas and other international events (Venkatesan, 2009).

The National Award, like other government craft revival initiatives discussed in chapter one, has experienced criticism, largely based on an imposed view of aesthetic and branding of 'authentic' by a peripheral force. Venkatesan (2009 p. 171) presents this criticism in emphasising that none of the judges are craftspeople themselves. The judges include bureaucrats, museum staff and 'experts' from NGOs, who are all 'expected to have a high degree of knowledge and skills to select a number of 'masterpieces' from a vast variety of objects whose common feature is their identification as 'craft objects'.

This situation presents a contrasting view of aesthetics and the classification of 'authenticity' by comparing the view of the judge, to the artisan who created the craft object. Venkatesan (2009) highlights one case in which a Pattamadai mat (a mat finely woven on handlooms in the village of Pattamadai, Tamil Nadu (Venkatesan, 2009)) was submitted for the award by the artisan's father. When shown to the NGO representative who was sponsoring the entry, it was not deemed suitable and so the representative submitted a previously purchased Pattamadai mat whose maker she wasn't certain of. The aesthetics of the mat are seen differently by the artisan and by the judge, who evaluates the object on the grounds of its authenticity, craft aesthetic and need within the peripheral elite's perspective. Like the Pattamadai mat, Mohammed Siddik's *ajrakh* piece submitted for the National Award was not submitted by himself but by the renowned craft writer, Jyotindra Jain²⁷ (Santhanam, 2007) who presumably made the choice

²⁶ See chapter 3, section 5 – Case study of the family of Mohammed Siddik

²⁷ See chapter 3, section 5 – Case study of the family of Mohammed Siddik

according to what he deemed to be acceptable, like the NGO representative for Pattamadai mat entry, in terms of craft aesthetic, authenticity and need.

While the award was put in place to recognise the achievement of the master craftsperson on the basis of talent, skill and creativity (Chattopadhyay, 1980), the artisan's creativity is contradicted if he is having to produce something according to the opinion of the elite judge or the intermediary submitting it, rather than something of his own choice. This reflects the anonymity of the individual artisan against the favour for community as a collective entity. Both these points reflect arguments raised in chapter one, that these government initiatives focus their support on a collective of craftspeople rather than the individual. Tyabji (2003) emphasised this when discussing a celebration of the golden jubilee of the resurgence of India's handicrafts in 2002 for which ten master craftsmen were honoured. Ironically these *shilp gurus* were not mentioned in the programme, and were 'clubbed together, as craftspeople always are, seen as one unified entity, undoubtedly culturally interesting and picturesque but without individual personalities, needs or voices'.

Indeed, most documentation and writing on *ajrakh* talks about *ajrakh* as a collective craft, and a community tradition. While artisans were recognised and respected within their local community, when working for the local markets, the individual artisans were not recognised in the wider national community, even though books were written on their crafts and museums displayed them (McGowan, 2009). This continues to be the case today. The majority of *ajrakh* documentation mentions Ismail, Abdulrazak or Abduljabbar, even though there are at least 100 more artisans practicing *ajrakh*. This is because the three sons of the renowned Mohammed Siddik Khatri have received the most recognition and exposure through the legacy of their father, and through continuing to live up to this legacy, have become the most well-known within their craft.

This individual recognition and exposure of rural craftspeople is a relatively new phenomenon in Indian crafts. In the introduction chapter, I discussed the broad categorisation of India's arts and crafts or *kala*. There has never been a major distinction between the different titles 'artist' and 'craftsman', and

likewise a *karigar*'s work was not necessarily recognised widely as his own and never named or signed as art works as unique craft objects are in the West.

While the artisans (or artists, designers or entrepreneurs) of *ajrakh* in Dhamadka and Ajrakhpur continue to receive recognition and exposure, and become the representatives for *ajrakh*, Khatri Kasam Haji Junas in Khavda does not receive any attention outside his village. That Kasam is continuing to produce *ajrakh* in the same way he and his family has done for seven generations, except for the change from natural to chemical dyes, could make him the perfect example of an artisan preserving his heritage and traditional craft. However, the lack of adaptation in design and his use of only chemical dyes means his work doesn't appeal to the elite craft enthusiast or expert, such as the judges of the National Award, who look for high levels of skill, quality and use of ancient practices, or equally the urban or international market seeking 'ethnic' or eco-friendly textiles.

Kasam says that he has never been visited by anyone from the All India Handicrafts Board because he is isolated and they 'don't bother' to visit such far out villages, but he is also unaware of the process involved in submitting a piece for the award (Khatri Kasam, interviewed February 2011). That Kasam is not attached to an NGO is a likely reason for him not being picked to submit a piece for the award. The government are much more likely to focus on Ajrakhpur and Dhamadka where the majority of artisans have connections with NGOs and are known for their innovation, revival of natural dyes, ancient processes and designs.

Kasam appeared quite resentful at not being recognised by the national or the state government for his craft, wondering why he hasn't received recognition, while a Harijan printer who was taught by Jacob Siddik, Mohammed Siddik's brother had been given the National Award. However, while he may aspire to the recognition and appreciation that the award brings, Kasam may not realise the responsibilities that he would have to take on if winning it, the changes he would have to embrace, and even the problems it

could cause. Kasam says he would not want to adapt the designs in *ajrakh* anyway, as if he did so, the cloth would no longer be an *ajrakh* (interview, February 2011). Indeed this thinking appears not to have changed since 1983 when Varadarajan interviewed Kasam's father Khatri Haji Junus Yusuf. She noted that 'artisans at Khavda appear less open to innovation than those at Dhamadka' (Varadarajan, 1983 p. 67).

Therefore, Kasam would not make an ideal candidate for the National Award, but the various changes that this could bring about, would suggest he is more suited to his position within the local market. The government would expect a change akin to that of the artisans of Ajrakhpur and Dhamadka, which in turn may lead to the decline in availability of cloths for the local market. Furthermore, the effects of the National Award are not always positive, as Venkatesan points out. Receiving an award can mean competition with other award winners of the same craft, as often invitations to craft bazaars are given out to only one artisan of a particular craft, and the more recent award winner is likely to steal the previous winner's thunder as the attention is spread out across two people (Venkatesan, 2009 p. 187).

I am going to introduce another National Awardee at this point, master wood-block carver Maneklal Gajjar (who won the award in 1990). Gajjar and his family have supplied wood blocks to Khatri communities and other block printing communities all over India for centuries. The craft is an ancient occupation traditional to the village of Pethapur near Ahmedabad and is currently facing the threat of extinction. When Gajjar learnt the craft from his father there were 25 workshops in the village, further before that there were hundreds, now there are only four or five (Maneklal Gajjar, interview January 2010)²⁸. Gajjar has played a pivotal role in promoting his craft by teaching as many young people as possible in the village, as he has no sons of his own to teach. Further, his work has been exhibited in the Calico Museum in Ahmedabad, the V&A in London, and various other international museums. Despite this, Gajjar currently suffering from declining eye sight and unable to

²⁸ Since writing this, Maneklal Gajjar has sadly passed away

afford the operation he requires to relieve it, receives a state pension of only 1,000 rupees (about 13 British pounds) a month (Pathak, 2010). This is also not enough to enable him to teach others the craft. This story again demonstrates the contradictions of the government's motivations behind the award, and their efforts to preserve a rich heritage craft, when the only living master craftsman of wood-block carving, a 'national heritage', is not shown continued recognition and support to allow him to maintain the craft, not only the hope of a world-wide community but that of Maneklal Gajjar himself.

Perhaps then, the National Award scheme is not the most effective strategy to show support for and allow recognition of a craftsman. Tyabji (2003) emphasises this further when quoting one of the *shilp gurus* attendant at the anniversary celebration: 'I have received many awards, but I still work on the footpath.'

It is noteworthy at this point to discuss Ismail Mohammed Khatri's receipt of an honorary doctorate from Leicester de Montfort University in 2003 which demonstrates a different kind of recognition. Ismail received this for his inspiring contribution to the knowledge of *ajrakh*, despite minimal schooling. Jaitly (2007) focuses on education as taking a key part in alleviating a craftsperson. Many artisans have started to learn their father's craft at an early age, at the choice of his father who has little faith in the education system and therefore encouraging him to learn everything he knows about the family skill to lead his son into a secure future. Without good all-round education, young artisans have sufficient skill at their craft but little grasp on the changing markets and confidence to innovate in his design work.

For this reason there is an imminent need for art and craft to be a stronger focus on in the schooling curriculum to help artisans realise the potential of their family craft as an option for the future. In the meantime KRV provides a unique alternative and probably crucial model enabling the artisan access to design education at any age. KRV education focuses on the all-round design education of the artisan, including developing new concepts, themes and

collections, colour selection, presentation, quality and finishing, and marketing.

In contrast to the anonymity that the National Award imposes, and indeed the position of artisans traditionally, KRV believes as part of their aim to preserve traditional arts, that the artisan is recognised for their individual creativity as well as for their traditional craft. The artisan profiles on their website²⁹ are available for anybody to see and this exposure allows for prospective buyers or clients to know the art or craft of that artisan rather than a producer group or community. Khatri Khalid Amin is an *ajrakh* artisan who graduated from KRV in 2010 and has absorbed this philosophy, applying it to his craft with vigour. The outcome has been innovative abstract pieces that combine the printing of traditional *ajrakh* blocks with lively marks created by applying natural dye to the fabric with a range of tools as well as wood blocks. The pieces attracted widespread attention and figure 5.1 shows the recognition he received from the elite UK design magazine *Wallpaper*.

The title of ‘artist’ that the resulting recognised work of Khalid initiates, and one that KR and KRV generally encourage, through exposing the ‘art of craft’, is a title more universally recognised and respected than ‘artisan’. This status therefore encourages much wider exposure for the artist. Kak (2003) emphasises this further:

‘The products today that resemble the kinds of products made earlier, or are derived from the techniques that made them are called ‘crafts’ or ‘folk art’. This is opposed to ‘fine art’ which is art claimed to be for its own sake, and in which the artist claims the inherent right to determine the validity and meaning of artistic expression.’

Khalid’s traditional craft of *ajrakh* usually comes under the term ‘crafts’ or ‘folk art’ by museums, NGOs and craft promoters and distributors. However, the success of his work is largely based on his innovative, creative and contemporary styles, comparable to art created for contemporary art

²⁹ See: http://kala-raksha-vidhyalaya.org/eportfolios_2010.php

galleries, therefore placing it in the perhaps more appropriate term ‘fine art’. While he does incorporate traditional patterns and blocks in his work, the pieces take on a completely different aesthetic to that of ‘traditional’ *ajrakh*. Therefore, would Khalid’s work be considered ‘authentic’ and would it meet the criteria of the National Award judges? Khalid’s recognition suggests that receiving this exposure through his own learning and developing his own creativity, rather than meeting the tastes of an intermediary representative or the National Award judges, is more fulfilling and valid.



5.1 To Dye For: Khatri Khalid Amin’s work in *Wallpaper* (Falls & Smith, 2011)

On the other hand, if Khalid were to win the National Award, would he have to render his individuality and innovation void in order to teach and encourage the rest of his community?

This leads me to discuss the difficult debate surrounding the artisan’s ownership of his designs. I discussed in the case study of Maiwa the building of the new site for the three sons of Mohammed Siddik, chosen for its suitability as a washing and dyeing site, but it also fared them well for keeping separate to the artisans practicing *ajrakh* back in the two village centres. It also avoided the copying of designs that had arisen from the

family's journeymen setting up rival businesses that has happened previously when the Harijans - who did the journeyman printing for the Khatris - established their own "new Dhamadka" at a caste discreet site which was to become their own *ajrakh* production centre (Edwards, 2005).

However, because of the difficulty of applying copyright or trademarks due to the ambiguity of the law on intellectual property rights on handicrafts, it is difficult for artisans to protect new and innovative designs from being copied. While there are laws in place to protect handicrafts traditional and attributable to a particular region, termed 'geographical indicators' (GIs) to avoid designs being taken from one community and given to another to produce (Deepak, 2008 p. 200),³⁰ the laws are unclear as to the protection of a design produced by an individual who has made a particularly notable improvement to an existing product within a handicraft tradition, and predominantly collective activity. Deepak (2008 p. 201) explores the complexities surrounding the intellectual protection of a new design within a traditional crafts community. The Design Act 2000 and the Copyright Act 1957 are both bound by the confines of subjectivity, and defining between 'artistic craftsmanship', 'design', functionality and 'handicrafts'.

The difficulty in securing intellectual property lies in being able to distinguish a new design that incorporates traditional *ajrakh* patterns with designs that combine both new and traditional patterns. Deepak (2008 p. 205) goes on to offer a possible solution, which is to formulate a combination of GIs and ancillary rights in traditional handicrafts. The nature of these ancillary rights may be similar to copyright. On the one hand, GIs will ensure that the community does not lose out on its identity and its sole claim over the craft and on the other hand, ancillary rights will encourage innovation within the community. For this to be effective for the designer and his community, he needs to understand this process and how to apply the copyright. Therefore,

³⁰ This law prevents the designs characteristic of a long-standing, regional traditional craft like *ajrakh* from being copied and produced outside of that particular crafts' community. This situation has been prevalent in the hands of opportunistic middlemen and has contributed to many crafts communities' struggle and in some cases decline of the crafts.

this would be the role of the teacher or collaborating designer to investigate and be aware of.

This section has highlighted that while recognition and exposure might be good for artisans, it also raised a myriad of disadvantages to individual recognition and success. I have presented an argument between the artisan as individual artist or designer, recognised for his individual creativity, and the idea that knowledge and skill should be passed onto other members of the producer group in order to keep the craft thriving and enable sustainable livelihoods for as many artisans as possible. This provides a complex issue and an avenue to be explored further. I have also discussed the potential problems that arise out of recognition and exposure of individual artisans that lie in a complex web of historic cultural and social systems and rules. I, as a Westerner among others working with Indian crafts and artisans, cannot presume that the elevation of the artisan to be recognised individually will have the same effect on them as it does for a Western 'artist', 'designer' or indeed, a profession that is becoming more recognised in the West, 'designer-maker'.

Chapter 6

Looking to the future

6.1 Pressures

While this study has focused on design development initiatives put in place to preserve a traditional craft, any intervening organisation or individual cannot ignore the various external, practical aspects that are standing in the way of its continuation.

The handicrafts are currently facing a battle with the larger modern industries in India that have helped the country build its capital. This is particularly evident in Kutch. Not long after the campus of KRV was built, the state government began building two massive coal-fed thermal power plants looming over the school in extremely close proximity. Therefore, the school is being forced to relocate.

The growing number of industrial factories in Kutch is also affecting the individual *ajrakh* communities. While providing employment opportunities to many and avoiding the migration to cities, they provide more desirable means of employment than the manual labour involved in hand-block printing. Sufiyan thinks this provides a threat to the continuation of the craft (personal communication, Sufiyan Khatri, February 2011). Ahmedbhai of Gamthiwala has offered to train young people in block printing but it is very difficult to convince them as they are not interested in the hard work this takes (personal communication, Ahmedbhai Sheikh, February 2011), and choose to enter into industries involving easier work with machinery or computers. However, it is important that any intervention with a traditional crafts community like the Khatri, that the artisans are not made to feel like they should stay in the craft, and if they don't want to, there is something wrong with them (Jongeward, 2003). Rather, as I discussed in the previous chapter, the focus should be on allowing the opportunity for young artisans to realise the potential of craft as an occupation, and, as Chatterjee put it (2003)

‘ensure that their staying in the craft is not at the cost of their own progress as human beings, but rather supplements their progress as human beings.’

A further threat that the majority of artisans highlight is the diminishing availability of water and the lack of water drainage and recycling facilities (personal communication Irfan Anwar Khatri and Ismail Khatri, 2011). Efforts to solve this problem are priorities of Maiwa, who has helped fund a new water facility for Ismail Mohammed’s family, and of KHAMIR who has been working with Atira, an expert organisation in Ahmedabad to put in water recycling systems in Ajrakhpur for the printers which is still in progress. A government agency also helped fund a detailed study of water resource management.

Pankaj Shah suggests that *ajrakh* has prospects for continuing, but that it is inevitable that some crafts have less chance of continuing:

‘It is like the theory of evolution and survival. Some crafts may grow, flourish, some may perish. The world is taking more fancy for all things natural, organic etc, so the *ajrakh*s have a good opportunity....The skills will survive, while the application may change.’ (Pankaj Shah, interview May 2011)

While this section has outlined the threats to *ajrakh*, the following two sections of this chapter will discuss the opportunities for the craft.

6.2 Artisan and client relationship

Part of the success and stability of the Khatri local markets lay in the close relationship between the artisan and his customer. They understood each other and shared mutual appreciation and needs.

The Khatri used to go from village to village selling their dyed and block printed cloths, or clients came to them. The small local market they do have now is accessed through Bhuj bazaar. The *ajrakh* in its traditional form is

now not affordable to these local markets. Further, the local clients would not accept dramatic adaptations in designs (Biswas, 2010). Therefore, many of their sales are now made through foreign and urban buyers, for whom the designs have been adapted, visiting the homes of the Khatris, while the Khatris sell to this market via various other means such as exhibitions in these cities, and some have had the opportunity to showcase their craft abroad.

Thus, what was a local market is now a global one, an inevitable phenomenon in a globalising and modernising India. But if a sustainable crafts production depends largely on close business relationships, can new customers, most of whom are geographically and culturally separated from the artisan, hold equal appreciation for the craft, and therefore, a continued close and holistic partnership take place? Kak (2003) responds to this saying 'In the modern market, there is no such bond, and producers must compete with each other for clients'

Contrary to Kak's comment, the case studies in this research demonstrate close working relationships between buyer and artisan. I have seen that the success that Maiwa has contributed towards the family of Mohammed Siddik, as well as being based on commissioning designs that exploit the full creative capacity of *ajrakh* and contributing a large proportion of their annual turnover, is based on a close and trusting relationship established over fourteen years of partnership (Charllotte Kwon, interview August 2011). Maiwa decides very carefully which artisan groups to work with, on the grounds that they can establish this kind of loyal relationship encouraging sustainability for the artisans. Kwon's daughter and son have also entered the business, suggesting this relationship will continue.

On the other hand, the reason no international business or NGO has entered into partnership with Kasam is because they have seen that he is sustaining the local market. While there is currently still a need for Kasam's fabrics, will there be in the future? We saw in Kasam's case study, that his market is also changing and desiring new products to meet a modernising lifestyle.

6.3 New local markets?

Although, the authors of *Designers Meet Artisans* talk of the intermediary NGO, designer or teacher, as being the bridge between a distant market and the artisan, they also suggest that, essentially intervention should be made with local markets in mind in order to be most sustainable (UNESCO et al., 2005 p. 7).

Perhaps, if India continues to modernise as quickly as it is doing so now, the local markets will benefit from the local hand made goods. Furthermore, there is evidence that the results of a booming economy has resulted in burgeoning middle classes. Currently there is still a strong local market for other crafts such as pottery, lamps for Diwali, toys, silver jewellery, tie and dye saris, embroidery, turned wood laquer products, carved wood for furniture and leather saddles and footwear (Pankaj Shah, interview, May 2011). These are generally basic items that are affordable. The natural dyed, traditionally produced *ajrakh* cloths cost on average 1000 rupees (approximately fourteen pounds) per piece, whereas a screen printed fabric costs about 50-60 rupees (approximately 70-80 pence).

Shah says the reintroduction of the local market for 'true' *ajrakh* cloths would depend on user preferences and affordability (interviewed February 2011). Like global fashions, local old fashions are also sometimes revived. Further, as Frater (2003) says is evident with local embroidery styles, 'Fashion is the new tradition, and they can consciously shape it'. While Frater is talking of embroidery here, the same could apply to cloths dyed and printed by the Khatri as they are worn within the same communities who are producing and wearing embroidered garments. Ismail also sees a possibility of the local markets returning in the future.

While Sufiyan doesn't think the local market understand the benefits of natural dyes (personal communication, Sufiyan Khatri, February 2011) and don't necessarily value or see the need to sustain a cultural heritage,

perhaps the increasing capital will bring along with it the trends for 'green' fashion and the fashion and need for the hand-made.

Kwon (interviewed, August 2010) thinks this may happen: 'I feel it is a critical role that the Western economy can play for artisans worldwide, to support those who have carried skill to this age...to keep that creative thread unbroken until the local community, the local economy can support this incredible cultural treasure of craft – craft that speaks for the creative core of that community.'

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this chapter I am going to revisit the initial questions that frame my research. I will reflect upon the themes that have developed and the findings relating to these themes.

Through analysing the sequence of events within the wider area of Indian crafts and the social, political and economic context in which they have found themselves, I have identified that the changes in these contexts have had significant impacts on India's crafts. For *ajrakh*, this meant the enforced adjustment to cheaper forms of production and struggling to compete with the influx of screen-printed cloth; the loss of their local markets due to the displacement and marginalisation of many of their local rural clients following independence and partition; and the upheaval caused by numerous natural disasters.

The research has found that the 400 year-old tradition of *ajrakh* block printing has survived these changes, and the main reason for this has been intervention by government and non-government initiatives and private businesses working to reposition the crafts within growing appreciating markets. I have sought to identify how this has been achieved through examining some of the successful models of intervention and design development.

Lodhya (2005) speaking in 2003 said 'no single initiative to support or revitalise craft has succeeded entirely'.

The research has found that the models examined throughout this study have all addressed these different needs most effectively through collaboration, whether between the client and the artisan, or the intermediary, craft community and various stakeholders in different degrees of expertise. On the other hand KRV demonstrate a unique model of education that is

enabling the artisans to eventually address these problems without the need of outside intervention.

I embarked on the research with a view to finding out how the designs in *ajrakh* may be contemporised to appeal to modern markets. The findings have informed me that design development is not a case of 'contemporising' the crafts. To some markets the ancient designs appeal as they are, still entrenched with universal design sensibilities. There will always be an interest in ancient artefacts telling us stories of ancient cultures. However, for a living craft tradition to exist and survive in contemporary times and provide a sustainable livelihood, the design process involved, as in any other medium needs to change, develop and adapt if it is to be compatible with changing consumer needs and the changing world around it. Indeed these changing consumer needs are drawing towards hand-made, fair traded and eco-friendly products, as a result of the global threats of climate change and the need for human development. As Kwon says, when purchasing their products, customers are 'voting with their money' (Charllotte Kwon, interviewed, August 2011). Likewise, Chatterjee, the director of NID and the chairman of Crafts Council of India, says there is a growing pattern for 'consumption for development... Consumption patterns must change, while development must concentrate on improving consumer choices in ways that promote human life' (Chatterjee, 2009).

Each case study has added something new to the debate about the development of *ajrakh*, despite having different aims and interactions with the artisans.

Maiwa promotes *ajrakh* in its living and ancient traditional form, displayed in high quality, environmentally sound products for a successful and appreciating international market.

KHAMIR works to promote the craft of *ajrakh* by encouraging new Maiwas to realise the potential of *ajrakh*. This promotion combined with the facilitation and encouragement of successful designer and artisan collaboration will help

to meet a growing global consumer aspiration for good products, as well as the burgeoning national middle class market.

These two models also address wider needs, such as technological and environmental issues affecting the craft and raise funds to donate, or seek expertise to collaborate with, towards improving these.

Ahmedbhai at Gamthiwala thanks God for his family business' success and stability. Despite having benefited from the growing number of tourists, the Indian urban middle classes and visiting non-resident Indians, there is still space for him and his family to grow even further in these markets, while there will be space for many more like Gamthiwala.

Kala Raksha Vidhyalya demonstrates a unique and possibly crucial role model of design education that provides artisans with the skills and experience to understand and meet the needs of the various markets I have discussed throughout this essay. This puts the artisan in a position to make informed decisions about the creative and business partnerships they enter into, which allow them to continue to innovate and express their creativity and cultural identity. Irfan Anwar and some of the grandsons of Mohammed Siddik are examples of this process. The more professional artisan-designers there are, the more space there is for businesses like Maiwa, and the local equivalent to thrive and extend on these new markets. However, formal design education for rural artisans is a new phenomenon in India, and still in its early stages, therefore at this stage it is not yet possible to assess the full extent of its impact on the graduates. An in-depth survey on the alumni of KRV would help in determining the school's impact of this design education on their business, livelihood and social status.

Mohammed Siddik's pioneering achievements in reviving *ajrakh* and being the first to collaborate with designers to increase the capacity of *ajrakh* for the growing international and urban markets has made him a role model to the community of *ajrakh* artisans. The increase in design collaboration and design education reaching these artisans enables the opportunity for many

more artisans to achieve the success of Mohammed Siddik's family, while bearing in mind the various issues that inform and result from the design process such as intellectual property and competition with neighbouring artisan families.

The traditional arrangement of selling *ajrakh* door to door, no longer exists for any of the Khatris. Even Kasam sells through a middleman like the Bhuj market traders. Perhaps his market might change too, as Bhuj is catching up with the more modern Indian cities like Ahmedabad. If this is to be the case, his family might also require intervention or design education to upgrade designs and introduce new product ideas depending on the new fashions and trends of the local community. Kasam would therefore be in a beneficial position, if ever the local, 'organic' market becomes a more prominent market in the future again. This would allow for the opportunity to continue and pass down the valuable knowledge of *ajrakh*, its complex process and designs to the next generations, while simultaneously setting new trends and fashions (or new 'traditions') based on the artisans' own influences and creativity. If this can enable the artisans to overcome issues such as competition and intellectual property then this is surely an ideal model.

I will reference Ramaswamy (2003) here, as although she was writing in 2003, the situation she describes is still apparent today.

'We are now at a crossroads. There is a tremendous consciousness that Indian crafts are important. But how do we assert its importance? How much do we yield to the needs of consumerism, the needs of the market, and the demands of global requirements? To what extent do we retain what is 'authentic' in Indian culture? This is where the larger question of 'culture care' comes in. The debate must perforce be an open-ended one.'

The research has uncovered many challenges that both the artisans and the organisations have to face, and continued research to further analyse these challenges would add to this debate. Firstly the artisans and intermediaries

need to understand the various dimension of the market for *ajrakh* and the appeal of traditional craft products, in order to position their craft in these markets, while at the same time meeting the wider social and economical needs of the crafts community.

To further understand the reasons people buy traditional crafts, in-depth research focusing on tourists, visitors of craft outlets, exhibitions, boutique stores, trade fairs and museums, to analyse customer motivations when buying, would be merited. This should involve both quantitative methods, to discover the size of the demand for these products, and which groups buy them most, as well as qualitative ethnographic research to determine why it is that people are attracted to traditional craft products, drawing on the discussion of previous ethnographers as discussed by designer and philosopher van Hoten (2009). van Hoten refers to this research as understanding how humans form meaningful relationships between themselves, objects and their environment. The insights gained would thus inform the process of design and production.

This study will also help to define the importance of the traditional, and how consumers decide on the authenticity of the craft, if this is a reason they purchase them. Are these classifications defined by the history, story or idea of the craft and the makers; the hand-made processes, or are they concepts applied by representatives of the market and design development initiatives? If it is indeed the history and cultural heritage that defines the craft as authentic, how successful are adaptations and innovative new designs in the contemporary market seeking authenticity?

Understanding these questions will also inform methods to overcome the other challenges that the craft faces. Issues that could possibly hinder the continuation of *ajrakh* in its true and perhaps 'authentic' form, are the fluctuating level and quality of the water needed for the extensive resist printing and natural dye process, as well as the declining block making industry.

Thus assessment of the availability of raw materials, the amount needed, and whether these will continue to be available, bearing in mind the current support in place by local NGOs, is another area of study that would help in addressing the overall question of the continuation of a traditional craft in a changing geographical and economical context.

Further anthropological study into the social dynamics of the Khatri community as well as other communities such as the Harijans, would be a fundamental part of envisaging the future of *ajrakh*, as artisans' social and occupational status has changed from artisan or craftsman to artist or designer and entrepreneur. We have seen that this new title, and the individual recognition that it brings, has led to tensions within the community; including competition and the difficulty to define between a collective community design and an individual's innovative new design. The unawareness of intellectual property rights, or perhaps the reluctance to apply these because of the further tensions it may create within the community are therefore also factors that would require careful consideration.

Determining the distinction between these titles and the disciplines they represent, would help in identifying the position of the final craft product and the outcome of the creative process, and ultimately the significance of a traditional craft like *ajrakh* within contemporary markets. Ismail Mohammed says that craft is the skill and art is the imagination (Biswas, 2010), mirroring Ruskin's belief that "he who works with his hands only is a mechanic; he who works with hands, head and heart is an artist" (Frayling & Snowdon, 1982). Artisans have been known to have the skill at their craft, but not the knowledge to apply their skills in making their craft commercially viable, thus the intervention and aid by development organisations. The detriment being that the artisan is not using his own imagination or creativity.

Now that a small proportion of *ajrakh* artisans, through design education have been provided with these skills, and the outcome is proving commercially viable, they are able to continue making products that express their own identity and have pride in their craft, contribute to economy and

appeal to a burgeoning middle class and international market. As the education is local, this enables them to stay in the villages, continue a close connection to their heritage, while contributing to the local economy. Furthermore, collaboration with a craftsperson or designer representing the international or urban middle class market, will ensure a constant connection to the wider context in which their crafts are situated and their relevance within a global market.

Glossary

Ajrakh (Also spelt *ajrak* in Sindh) Geometrically patterned resist-dyed and mordant printed cloth

Al *Morinsa citrifolia*, the roots of this tree traditionally used as red dye

Alizarin Synthetic red dye used as an alternative to madder

Bandhani tie and dye resist patterned cloth

Bipuri the printing of *ajrakh* on both sides of the cloth

Buti single flower motif

Chadar bed sheet, or shawl or wrap worn by men and women

Choli woman's blouse, backless with long front panel and short sleeves

Chunni woman's veil cloth, generally larger than an *odhani*

Datla wooden block for printing infill areas of design

Dhori gach clay and millet flour resist paste

Dupatta a large scarf worn by women, also known as *chunni* or *chadar*. The *dupatta* is usually the term used for the scarf when worn with *salwaar kamiz* - suits predominantly worn by women in urban centres or in rural areas by girls of school age.

Ekpuri the printing of *ajrakh* on only one side of the cloth

Gach alum, clay and millet flour combined mordant and resist paste

Ghaggra full skirt with gathered waist, in heavy weight cloth

Geru red clay, used as a pigment

Gudh (wood block for printing) background colour of design

Haldi *curcuma longa*, turmeric

Harde powdered dried myroballen fruit from *terminalia chebula* tree, or process of treating cloth with this

Indigo *indigofera tinctoria*

Jaggery traditional unrefined sugar product in India

Jalebi Indian spiral shaped sweet made from batter, fried and soaked in syrup

Kasanu process of applying harde to the cloth

Kut black paste from fermented horseshoes in molasses, colour produced by printing this

Khariyanu printing paste containing lime, creates white outlines in *ajrakh* designs

Kamiz tunic, normally worn with *salwaar*

Khadi hand-woven cloth. Gandhi used this term to refer to hand-woven cloth from hand spun yarn

Khatri (member of) community to which *ajrakh* printing families belong

Lunghi long wrapped waist cloth worn by men

Maldhari (member of) semi nomadic community of cattle herders, Banni district, Kutch

Malir Cotton block-printed cloth originally from the village of the same name in the Thar Pakar region but now printed in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Sindh. The cloth is printed in the *ajrakh* style but predominantly in red rather than blue.

Mashroo handloomed silk weft-faced cloth with cotton warp; literally means 'permitted'

Minakari style of enamelled jewellery; 'azure' (Persian); 'the sky' (Turkish); 'precious stone' (Hindi); also used to refer to *ajrakh* with more than one shade of colour(s)

Mordant substance used to fix dye on to textiles by combining the dye to form a stable insoluble compound lake

Mughal (member of) a Muslim dynasty of Mongol origin that ruled large parts of India (1526-1857)

Neerani solution of camel dung, castor oil and soda ash used for *saaj* process

Nil indigo, literally means 'blue'

Odhani women's head or veil cloth worn wrapped around the body and over the head

Pa mordant print paste containing alum and tree gum

Rabari (member of) nomadic or semi-nomadic herders in distinct regional communities, Rajasthan and Gujarat

Ralli traditional quilt using scraps of cloth combined with embroidery; Sindh, Pakistan and Western India

Rekh (wood block for printing) outline of design

Resist lime, clay or starch paste printed with carved wooden blocks prior to indigo dyeing to preserve the base colour of the cloth; can also be ties of thread or printed or painted wax

Saaj treatment of the cloth in solution of castor oil, soda ash and camel dung to remove any impurities

Safa length of material for turban

Salwaar loose fitting trousers

Swadeshi (Hindi) 'of its' own country', use of indigenous products

Tamarisk *Tamarix diocia Roxb.* Flowers; source of tannic acid, prevents red dye spreading beyond mordanted area

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Appendix A:
Fourteen Stages of Ajrakh

The process of *ajrakh* as practiced by Dr. Ismail Mohammed Khatri, given to me in January 2010

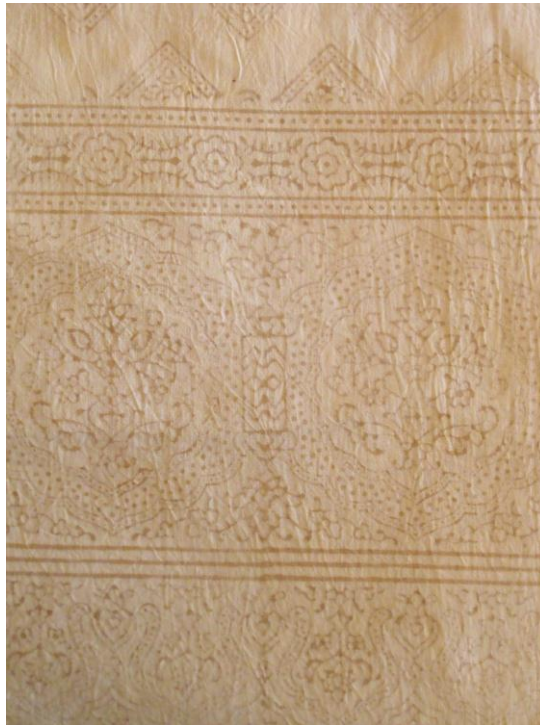
1. The cloth is washed in water to remove any finish applied in the mill or workshop. If the cloth has a heavy finish on it, steam treatment may be required. Cloth is then put in a solution of castor oil, soda ash and camel dung. This is known as *saaj*. It is left overnight to soak. The following day, cloth is laid flat to dry in the sun. When it is semi-dry, it is returned to the solution of castor oil, soda ash and camel dung. *Saaj* and the drying stage are repeated (7-9 times) until the cloth foams when rubbed. It is then washed in plain water.



2. The cloth is dyed in a cold solution of *myrobalan* (powdered nut of the *harde* tree). This stage is known as *kasanu*. The cloth is then calendered, after which it is laid flat to dry in the hot sun. If the cloth is to be printed on both sides, it is turned over during drying to ensure sun treatment for both sides. The *myrobalan* powder is then brushed off the cloth.



3. Khariyanu - A resist of lime and gum arabic is printed on to the cloth to define the outline of the design. This is known as *rekh*.



Lime and gum resist mixture

4. *Rekh* resist printing is applied to both sides of the cloth.
5. A paste is made by fermenting scrap iron (horse shoes, etc), *jaggery* (raw cane sugar) and *besan* (gram flour). This mixture is left to ferment which takes about one week in the hot season and two weeks during the cold season; a yellowish scum on the surface of the mixture indicates that it is ready for use. The liquid, or “iron water” is drained off and added to tamarind seed powder. The iron and tamarind solution is thoroughly mixed, and then boiled for one hour. The resulting “iron paste” is printed on to the cloth (*kat*) the colour is black.



This image shows a stole being printed with *ajrakh* borders and a non-*ajrakh*, Moroccan tile inspired design on the main section

6. Tamarind seed powder is mixed with alum (aluminium sulphate) and then boiled for one hour to produce a printing paste for red areas of the design. A small amount of a fugitive dye is added to this in order to aid registration when used for printing. Traditionally *geru* (red clay) was used but chemical dye is now more common. Printing of the alum paste is known as *kan*.



Image shows both *kat* and *kan*

7. A paste of alum, millet flour, red clay and gum arabic is printed on the cloth where there are large areas of red in the design. A resist of lime and gum arabic is also printed at this time; this combined stage is known as *gach*. Sawdust is sprinkled on to the printed areas to protect the design from smudging. After *gach* printing, the cloth is left to dry naturally for several days. The paste used for *gach* printing is made from local clay which is filtered through muslin, millet flour and alum. The millet flour is boiled and then red clay and alum are added and the paste is filtered to achieve the required consistency for printing.



8. The cloth is dyed in indigo (*bodaw*). In order to establish an indigo vat, natural indigo, *sagikhar* (a salt), lime, *casiatora* (seed from *kuwada* plant) and water are mixed in a clay vessel, plastic barrel or concrete vat. The dye bath is left to ferment for about one month; sometimes *jaggery* is added to this to aid fermentation. It is ready to use when the colour of the solution is yellowish (best quality) or greenish (medium quality). With an established indigo vat, indigo, *jaggery* and water are added as required to maintain the strength of the dye colour. A faster alternative is to the above, is to make a solution of natural indigo, caustic soda and hydrosulphate, which is ready to use in one or two days.



9. Cloth is washed in running water and laid flat to dry in the sun. This stage is known as *vichharnu*.



Indigo after being washed

10. Traditionally, this stage is either madder or *al* dyeing, depending on the availability of the dye stuffs. The cloth is boiled in a solution of tamarix (from the *dhawri* tree) and either madder root powder or *al* root powder and is then washed and sun-dried. But for some ajrakh, alizarin (synthetic madder) may be used, in which case the cloth is boiled in a solution of alizarin and tamarix powder. In all cases, the cloth is washed in plain water after dyeing and dried flat in the sun. At this stage (*rang*), the red and black areas of the design develop and the resist areas are revealed as white.



Alizarin dye or first indigo dye



10a) *Single indigo and single madder red dye*



10b) Indigo and henna dye



10c) Indigo with rhubarb root

10 b) and c) are using dyes not traditionally used in *ajrakh* and have been introduced in recent years for the new markets

11. *Gach* (alum printing – see 7) is repeated. The cloth is left for several days after this. This stage is known as *minakari* (from Persian, refers to enamelling but used in Kachchh to mean ‘double work’)



12. Second indigo dyeing (*bodaw*). Cloth is sun-dried.



13. The cloth is washed in running water and laid flat to dry in the sun (*vichharnu*).



14. *Rang* stage (stage 10) is repeated.



Double indigo and double alizarin



14a) double indigo and double madder

Green Ajrakh

Traditionally Kachchhi *ajrakh* is predominantly a blue textile but the family of Khatri Mohammad Siddik has developed green *ajrakh*. This is made in the same manner as blue for the first 10 stages; stages 11 to 14 are as follows:

11. Resist printing (lime and gum) for white areas of the design.



12. Cloth is dried flat in sun. Pomegranate skins are boiled and the resulting liquid is sprayed on to the cloth. It is then dried flat in the sun. This stage is repeated two times.



13. A solution of turmeric and lime is then sprayed on to the cloth.



14. The cloth is dyed in alum solution and then washed in plain water and dried.



Appendix B: Interview Transcripts

Interview: Dr. Ismail Mohamed Khatri January 2010

1. How long does the printing process take?

Printing process usually takes 15 days

2. What designs are you currently printing?

New designs are used as well as traditional ajrakh. These are generally introduced by designers from organisations such as Shrujan. Our main clients are Anokhi and Fab India. Anokhi buy original traditional designs, Fab India give new designs to produce as well as buying old ones already available. I also make my own designs. Some designs used are traditional but not ajrakh. One is a floral design from Pakistan.

Designers also come from elsewhere to ask us to produce new designs that are completely different to the traditional styles. We are happy to do this.

We have a portfolio of 16 traditional ajrakh designs that are used for skirts, blouses, bed covers, quilts, pillows, ajrakh lungi, malir (veil cloth).

3. Do you still have a local market for this cloth?

We no longer have a local market as polyester is being bought by them. When our family did have a local market they were using chemical dyes from 1945 for about 30 years.

4. How has your market changed since this time?

There is much more publicity now and so more demand for the fabrics amongst international and higher end markets. One example is Maiwa in Canada. Maiwa have been making and selling films or publishing to their website of the ajrakh artisans. They use the money from these films to help us. We borrowed money off them, didn't want it as a donation so paid them back. With this money we have bought more land for all the family to use (his brothers and their sons as well).

Marketing is a good idea as the more people know about the craft, its process etc, the more likely they are to understand the quality and why its worth the price.

5. How many block printers do you have working for you?

There are a total of 12 people working for me. They start at age 10 – 12 when they have finished school. They get paid by the meterage they produce but are sometimes on a wage in which case they get 200 – 300 rs a day.

6. Where are your blocks made?

The blocks are made by Mukesh in Pethapur, some are made in Ajrakhpur. They are kept in boxes on shelves with label on showing the design. Blocks

last 2 to 3 years until they need to be re-made, or less if the design is more intricate.

7. Do you still print on both sides of the fabric?

We generally print on both sides of the fabric, depending what the buyer wants. If we are printing on both sides, the price goes up by two and a half times the price for one side.

8. What do you see in the future for block printing.

The market is better than it used to be, we have no problems with that. The main concern is with the facilities – lack of water, need electricity and drainage problem.

For the last twenty years we have had a river but it has now dried up. We have had to dig a well which is getting deeper and deeper. It now goes down as far as 150 feet. In the last 20 years dams have been built on the Sindhu river in Pakistan stopping the river supplying water to Kachchh. This has provided a benefit to Punjab but not Sindh or Kachchh.

Power is needed to get further underground as the water is getting lower and lower. The government are working on working on a water harvesting scheme. However it is not moving very fast and the ajrakh artisans are finding them difficult to work with.

9. How much water do you need for printing ajrakh?

100 metres of fabric uses 3000 litres of water

Interview: Junaid Ismail Mohammed January 2010

1. What did you produce for your final KRV collection?

For my final collection I used traditional blocks. I experimented with different placement of these blocks and different combinations of blocks and colour. Using traditional designs I used new colours to give a more contemporary look. My final collection for KRV was based on the theme of *Kudrat* – Life and creation. Other themes I used are a sea theme *kegra* – coral, shells and the life inside shells. 'Patterns in the shell look like sea'.

I sold the whole of his KRV final collection. Using the theme mentioned above, I created a collection for a hotel room. The brief included napkins, bedcovers, curtains, bathroom etc and the students were to choose a selection of 3 to 4 products from these to design for. I also created shirts and bag and others.

2. What opportunities have arisen since graduating from KRV?

I now sell both traditional and contemporary designs to Gamthiwalas as well as others. Exhibitions provide a good platform to sell too. Along with a group of alumni from KRV, I am part of Karvada, a group of 22 male members – designers and craftsmen who exhibit together at exhibitions. We have our own bank account and pay about 21000 rs for a stall for 10 days. We have exhibited in Delhi 5 times, in Bombay 3 times and Bangalore once.

Interview: Sufiyan Ismail Mohammed, January 2010

Sufiyan says the new generation producing ajrakh are not interested in hard work. A lot of industry has sprung up, people are more likely to go and work in these factories as it is easier work. The khattris pay about 150 rs, these other companies pay the same for the same hours, but are offering much less physically hard work. The ajrakh printers are having to wash which is very physical work, either in the strong heat of the sun or the cold in the winter. Sufiyan doesn't think the craft will continue for this reason.

The traditional market is totally finished. He says the new market see ajrakh like fashion. Traditional market is finished but many foreign people want to buy traditional designs. They don't understand the meanings and history, but buy because it looks nice.

When asked about the symbols/meanings khattris reply in a more general sense, about the designs being geometrical, not including any animal or human figures, sticking to Islamic tradition and rules.

There are three ways of designs. One is natural designs created from plants and trees, second are common designs, similar to mogul – jali, doors, Lakhpat have a lot of moghul patterns, third way is modern designs depending on what customer gives them. Another is their traditional designs, continuing through the generations.

In 1945 natural dyes stopped, but my grandfather taught us the art of natural dyeing and traditional patterns. Each motifs name is different. In my grandfather's time, each community was wearing different patterns. In Kachchh each community have

different dress. The Rabari men are wearing white, the Rabari women wearing black. The Jat and Sindhi and halibutra are wearing motifs of ajrakh. Men wearing turban, lungi and shoulder cloths. In these communities the women are wearing different patterns on the edges. Younger women are wearing jimaldi designs, older women wearing hydro designs.

As his grandfather was teaching his sons, people were coming and seeing and encouraging them to do more. Sufiyan's father and uncles realised this was a good way to continue business, and slowly they increased their use of natural dyes to 100%.

Modern customers now want part traditional, part modern.

Ten years ago Sufiyan's family revived the Fostat designs after Ismail went to see the original fragments in the V&A and took photographs of them.

For the traditional designs, customers want new colours.

There is very little market for the completely traditional designs.

Indigo doesn't grow in this area anymore. It did in my grandfather's time. From July to October, printing stopped. They were making indigo cakes at this time, because they couldn't carry out full process. Indigo cakes would last one full year.

Every day we are making new designs. Now we have many new colour combinations, new patterns, new designs for the new markets.

They increase the colour range with new natural colours that aren't traditional ajrakh such as henna, rhubarb etc. Now more colours are available through being able to travel quicker to source dyes from other areas of India.

Screen print costs 50/60rs per ajrakh, whereas Sufiyan's costs 1000 rs per ajrakh piece. Local people will not buy this because of the expense.

33% people want ajrakh, 33% want modern, 33% want natural designs.
'I would prefer to print ajrakh, because we never forget our traditions. I will teach my son also'.

Before only 36 cm width cloth available, Now more widths available and many more silks, crepe, tussar, mulberry, and wool. Wool dyeing was only plain lac dyeing traditionally. Now they are printing ajrakh on the wool.

'Fostat Riyal' came from V&A. Fostat designs and ajrakh very similar, About 90% of designs match. Link from Sindh to Egypt, buying and selling, Sufiyan thinks his family may have been involved in this.

Most designs influenced by Islam, but some come from Indus Valley.

When asked if the Islamic designs have any meaning, Sufiyan says they are just decorative, they don't have any meaning.

However, he says as a whole, ajrakh symbolises the universe, indigo is the colour of sky, red is for the sunset, the white stars are the stars in the night sky. He says ajrakh means 'everyday keep'. The sixteen day process reflects this – ajrakh, over and over again 'keep it today'.

There are now about 100 families printing ajrakh. Ismail and Mohammed Siddik taught many of these families.

Interview: Irfan Anwar Khatri: 12 July 2011

1. How would you define your role/title working within the traditional craft of Ajrakh. Would you say you are:
 - a) artisan
 - b) businessman / entrepreneur
 - c) artist
 - d) designer
 - e) all of these
 - f) None of these – something else?

Answer: a) Artisan & d) Designer

2. How do you think this role has changed since your grandfathers and great-grandfathers' time? What do you think their role was defined as?

Our present day role of block print artisans has changed a lot. My grand fathers were based at Vagad (Separate region demarcated within Kutch district). They were making block printed cloths for local communities. They were not making Ajrakh that much. Their role was of artisans only. They were working for local communities as well as local traders.

In our times, the market has changed. It is more a national & international level urban market. We are playing roles of entrepreneurs and designers apart from artisan. We need to organise all aspects of our business as entrepreneur to deal with new market and also we need to create new designs according to customer taste and preferences.

3. Do you think traditional Ajrakh can be successful in urban and overseas markets, or does it need adapting to suit these markets' tastes? If they do need adapting, how should this be done?

According my view, Ajrakh is successful in urban and overseas markets. But there is a need of certain changes to make it successful.

The changes required to make it successful in urban markets are:

- *There is a need to change the colours of traditional prints*
- *Change in design. The appropriate new designs should be placed with Ajrakh prints to make it more attractive.*
- *The base fabric should be of more finer counts suitable to urban clients etc.*

4. Which of the below do you think is most important?:

- a) Preserving traditional designs, patterns and motifs
- b) Preserving and continuing traditional technique and processes
- c) Both of the above
- d) None of the above

Answer: b) Preserving and continuing traditional technique and processes

5. How important do you think it is to speak English for sustaining a successful global market?

English is a global language and used by most of the nations. The knowledge of English is essential if you are functioning in global market.

6. Do you think it is important to know about and value the traditional designs and patterns in Ajrakh and their history?

As a block printer of Kutch, it is very important to know and value the traditional designs and patterns in Ajrakh with their history. This is our heritage and its knowledge will help us to keep our roots in tradition.

7. Do you value the traditional designs?

Yes. I very much value the traditional designs. The present day of prosperity of our craft and artisans is based only on traditional designs. It is our main identity in urban markets.

8. Do you think the future generations will value these same traditional patterns and designs?

Yes. They are the main identity of our craft. The future market will also know our craft from these designs only.

9. Do you prefer printing the old, traditional designs, or experimenting with new designs?

I like the both. I more like to give new look to old designs and also traditional Ajrakh look to contemporary designs.

10. Do you think collaboration and working with other designers (such as those from institutes like NID) is good for the continuation of Ajrakh?

Yes. But the new designers should be orientated enough about the Ajrakh craft tradition before they start working with it. Their designs should be valued more on the basis of their traditional looks not from the contemporary point of view.

11. What skills did you develop from the KRV course? Which out of the six units did you learn most from, and enjoy most?

All design skills have been developed at Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya. I enjoyed the most during the first class of colours and basic designs. It enriched my knowledge of colours and various aspects related to it.

12. Do you think the KRV course broadened your creativity?

Yes. It has broadened my creativity. I learnt many new concepts of design from there. I interacted with very reputed designers during my course, which had benefitted me a lot.

13. Have you ever found it difficult understanding the different culture of your overseas markets?

Yes. It is very difficult to understand the different culture of overseas markets. It is difficult to assess them because of their taste of colours, fabrics, size variations etc. Such parameters are different from country to country.

14. Do you have a clearer understanding of your urban and overseas markets since graduating from KRV?

No. Although KRV has helped to understand these markets but my present day understanding for these markets is not enough.

15. Do you think your relationship with international and urban customers is, or will ever be, as close as the relationship with local customers?

The relationship with international and urban market is different from local customers. The relations with local customers are from our forefathers' time. They know our craft and tradition very well. There are good relations with urban clients also but they are very less in nos.

16. Where do you find inspiration for new designs now? Do you follow international trends?

We are not following the international trends. The inspirations of new designs come from demand of market, interaction with designers and experts, looking at museum pieces, reading books etc.

Interview: Irfan Anwar Khatri, 21 May 2011

1. Do you think the craft of Ajrakh will continue? If so, in what form, and for which markets?

Yes. I think that the craft of Ajrakh will continue. With shift in market from local to urban, the traditional designs require to be given contemporary look. The technique would be traditional but the colour/design can be changed according to the demand of emerging markets.

2. Do you see any problems arising that could hinder the continuation of the craft? If so, how would you plan to overcome these?

The water usage in craft is increasing. The water table of our village is decreasing. Also, there is no system to recycle the used water through water treatment plan. We are planning to install a recycling plant in our village to over come the issue.

3. Do you think you would have reached the success and recognition you have today without the help and custom of companies such as Fab India, and organisations such as Khamir and Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya?

Yes. We have received continuous orders from companies like Fab India. We got market and exhibition linkages from Organisation like KHAMIR CRC. Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya has support us by providing opportunities of design education for traditional artisans.

4. What, for you, are the positives of the new urban and international markets for Ajrakh, and what are the negatives?

The positive aspect is that we can get more return on our craft products. The negative aspect is that the urban and international markets don't understand the craft technique and tradition and purchase the craft products as usual products. There is a possibility that the craft products get copied in urban market and would be available in machine made product with cheap prices.

5. What do you think is the best way of continuing the knowledge and awareness of Ajrakh's tradition and cultural heritage?

The next generation should be prepared and motivated to join the craft. For that they should enough income and recognition from the craft. Since the local markets are diminishing, we need to find new markets for the craft, which can ensure its sustainability.

6. What impact did the KRV course have on your business and designs? Do you think it has made your work more successful?

The KRV course has helped me to improve my design and business related skills. I could able to create new designs due to design education I received from KRV. We have started using wastage of our craft production to make new design products like Bags, Quilts, Garments etc.

7. Do you promote or advertise your business and designs? If so, how?

Yes. We do promote business through publicity materials like business cards, regular advertisements, display of products on KRV website etc. We have promoted our new designs in KRV fashion show and exhibitions in which we have participated.

8. Do you think your customers understand the history and traditions of Ajrakh?

The large chunk of customers don't understand the history and traditions of Ajrakh. Only estimated 20 % know the Ajrakh craft tradition or they are willing to understand but the others seem not interested in knowing it. Most of them are the retail customers. The parties, which provides good orders, usually don't understand the craft.

Interview: Charllotte Kwon, July 2010

These questions refer to both the work of Maiwa Handprints and the Maiwa Foundation.

1. What is/are Maiwa's main aim(s)?

The reason that Maiwa exists is to provide a venue for high quality textile crafts. We are particularly interested in traditional processes and natural dyes. We provide a selling environment which is unique and nurturing due to the investment of time and attention and management. We visit at least once a year, each craft group, village, or family with whom we work.

The Maiwa Foundation was formed 10 years ago to raise money for small loans and grants to aid in capital costs associated with an artisans craft, with education, travel to workshops etc. More recently the Foundation has been very active in funding workshops for artisans to revive recipes and techniques for natural dyes.

The Maiwa Foundation also exists to promote craftspeople, techniques and cultures in places that are appropriate for non-profit organizations. These included museum exhibitions, symposia, academic settings etc.

2. How did you first become interested in India and its' traditional crafts, and what made you first want to work with the craftspeople?

As a textile artist myself, I have always been aware of the importance of Indian textiles. Twenty-five years ago my studio and business produced and sold my own work and designs. It was from travelling to research the use of natural dyes that I became aware that artisans I was meeting had generations upon generations of skill in their hands and minds, and yet were not finding markets. My studio and store are located in a prime gallery location in Vancouver and I thought they could be better used to highlight this work. I felt I could be happy as an artist working with these artisans to explore creative ways to find markets for their work. I am pleased to say that my intuition was correct and this work has brought myself, my family, and the company staff much satisfaction. Maiwa was born from this.

3. How would you define your role working with the crafts and artisans of Kutch?

Sometimes one simply has to implement a sensible, clear approach. I see our role as not much more than quality control. If we trade consistently with a group and work out costing that is fair and reflects their skill and professionalism, then the designs flow. Quality control, however, is tricky to do by those within the village. We push quality on every level – from procuring the raw materials to the skills of the artisan to the finishing by the tailors to the testing of the products (ie: colour fastness, strength of seams, buttons, zipper quality – that sort of thing). It is easily said, but really involves an entire range of talents in terms of problem solving, creative solutions and

holding fast to what the craft can be at its most elevated level.

4. How many artisans/communities and organisations do you work with?

We work with 4 groups in Kutch, 3 in Rajasthan, 2 in Bengal, 4 in Andhra Pradesh, 1 in Karnataka, 1 in Madhya Pradesh, 1 in Orissa, 1 in Himachel, 1 in Assam, 1 in Nagaland, 1 in Uttar Pradesh. We work with cooperatives, villages, families, and individual artisans.

5. Do you hope to work with a wide range of artisans and communities, or would you prefer to concentrate more attention to a smaller, more manageable amount?

We work very intimately with each group and prefer to work with smaller groups as we do small productions of high quality. We base our criteria almost entirely on the quality and integrity of the craft being done.

6. How would you describe Maiwa Handprints' brand image?

People know us for quality craft, handweaves, handprocesses and the connection to the stories and actual people behind the work. If that is a brand then that is what we are. Once people discover us they are amazed at what the artisans are producing – the quality, the aesthetic, the beauty and they remain long time customers – some flying in to Vancouver from large distances just to shop with us.

7. What is your main market and who did you originally decide to target your products at and why?

Our market is quite broad, since we market on many levels – three retail stores, some wholesale, online sales, and conferences, symposia etc. We have lines of clothing that appeal to women and men from 20 to 80 (and up). Our bedding appeals to everyone. Our leather goods are classic and in great demand, our shawls – well we just think everyone, men and women, should have several shawls – once a customer has their first one they usually agree. We market in the reverse to traditional and contemporary marketing methods. Rather than starting with an analysis of the market, demographic studies and focus groups to see what they want, we start with the product. We begin with a beautiful item which a community or culture has made for generations. We then communicate the story of an item and its making. No real target but to place beautiful objects and irresistible textiles within everyone's grasp. We have exquisite quality with quite reasonable prices.

8. Do your buyers understand the value of what they are buying? Do you think they buy because they like the item or because they are interested in its' origin and maker?

We have many ways of educating our customer and they can't help but

become interested in both the origin, the value, and the craft. Every garment, piece of bedding, bag, shawl, embroidery, we sell has tags describing the process, the dye, the stitch, the artisan, the place. We give lectures and presentations, we have a very informative website and blog. We hold a Symposium every two years where the artisans we work with come and learn to tell their own stories through lectures and workshops – these we put up as podcasts after the Symposium (on iTunes), we make and distribute documentaries about the artisans with whom we work (excerpts are on YouTube), we curate exhibitions of their work that have been in major Canadian museums, we constantly try to find creative ways to get their stories and their work out there so it does not disappear – this I live for. To not have the beauty of the handcrafted silently disappear, overwhelmed by the fast pace of the world. We do feel quite strongly that people do not buy out of sympathy or charity and we do not encourage that. It is important to understand that the buyer is not buying trinkets or poorly made items to support a cause. They are buying work that is the best of its type in the world. They buy the work for its own sake – for its own beauty and integrity.

9. Who would you say are your main competitors, if any?

At this point we do not have enough competitors. We would like more. Not many companies work as deeply as we do – but it is an incredibly satisfying life and I am always speaking to students about the possibilities of this life.

10. Does Maiwa Handprints take any part in the designing of the Indian produced products they buy and sell?

Very little, almost none with the textiles. We do design the clothing, some of the bedding, basically the products but not often the textiles. Once we take on the role of designer, our experience is that the artisans concede to our opinion and don't bring their ideas forward. Being unsure of western tastes this is understandable. But I feel our role is to educate the buyer towards the artisans designs, skills, choices etc.

11. How well do your Ajrakh cloths sell? Do the cloths that are completely traditional in design sell better, or the ones that have incorporated contemporary design?

Ajrakh in every form sells wonderfully. We have had to work on the finishing of the bedding, procuring organic cotton, and on the design of the clothing. The traditional clothing in its design sells well but we always have to work on the fit for a western market. But we also design lines of classic clothing and lines which are a bit more funky.

12. Do you think there are the same attitudes to the Ajrakh block printing as there would have been, say 50 years ago. Do the patterns translate the same meanings to today's artisans as they would have done to their grandfathers?

We have to say (and this is going to sound like marketing) that the Ajrakh patterns are timeless. The geometric forms which make up the grammar of Ajrakh design seem to exist outside of time – perhaps this is because they are not representational and so do not get classed as say a 1960's pattern or a 1980's pattern. We have worked with the artisans as the revival of patterns found in archaeological digs from several hundred years ago and they look completely new. The Ajrakh techniques are all about pattern, colour, figure, ground. It is very difficult for us to speak to what the artisan's themselves think about the patterns or the cloth. But based on what they tell us – they love them as they love their children. The pattern and the whole idea of Ajrakh is who they are. So much so that it is often hard for them to consider or imagine radical deviations from these traditional motifs and techniques.

13. Do you encourage that other traditions are kept alongside specific patterns and motifs such as the names and meanings of certain patterns? Are any of these still in use, either amongst the designers or the artisans?

In terms of Ajrakh, traditional names, patterns and motifs are still very much alive. The artisans cost and bill us in these terms. We don't at present market the Ajrakh cloth in these terms as we are presently focused on promoting the organic cotton and the community of blockprinters and the term ajrakh and what that means. However, we have a permanent collection of the best work of all the artisans with whom we trade. This is in our textile library that is open to the public by appointment. In here we go into detail about the names of all the ajrak patterns and as much history as we know.

In terms of embroidery and some of the other crafts we market, the question of meaning and naming is a mercurial area, especially with living traditions. We have a number of epistemological qualms about ascribing meaning to either motifs or cultural practices. When considering this question it is often useful to relate the question to a contemporary practice and see where the analogy leads. So for example, what is the meaning of baggy pants in youth culture? Is the source for this aesthetic rap? What is the meaning? I have heard it said that the meaning comes from the hand-me-downs a little brother receives from an older brother. If the smaller brother's pants are baggy the implication is that he has much bigger brothers – so you better not mess with him. If you asked someone wearing baggy pants what the meaning was – you might get a completely different story (the meaning is to show my flowery underpants!). The same holds for the groups we deal with, the artisan and the group may have diverging opinions about the names and meanings of names and patterns. Sometimes this is dependent on the number of people who are needed to make (or design) an item. Embroidery often has a very individual identity within the group.

Whereas, with Ajrakh, the process requires blockcutters, printers, and designers to work in concert. We try to record what they tell us. But we also try to avoid reprinting what they say as the "truth" about the item.

14. Where does the funding come from for the foundation's charitable projects?

Maiwa Ltd. is still the biggest donor and the biggest fundraiser – usually through auctions and events (like fashion shows or exhibitions). But in the past five years we have attracted a number of solid, annual, donors who believe in what we do and want to support it.

15. What are your USPs? What makes you different from other organisations and companies doing similar work and selling similar products?

I think our strongest USP is that we know exactly where everything we sell comes from, who made it, what it was dyed/treated with. We are very transparent with our selling, sharing not only stories and contacts but also how we come up with the costing. Our staff are highly educated about the company the products, the artisans. Most have come on trips to India (we have 20 staff here in Vancouver), they all work in many areas of the business. Our strength is that we are small, strong, hands on, and a team of highly creative people who all care deeply for what Maiwa stands for.

16. How have the crafts changed and developed during the years you have worked in Kachchh. For example, how have the ajrakh patterns changed and developed with the help from organisations and people such as yourself?

With the artisans we work with, what needed to change has and what didn't need to change has not. The intricacy of the patterns has increased since they are now very sure that even the more expensive items sell. We love the traditional designs so they have stayed the same – but are now done on organic cotton which we researched and found the suppliers that are properly certified – field to mill. We have been very fussy that they use only natural dyes and that they stick to colours that do not require stannous chloride and potassium dichromate (both toxic heavy metal mordants). There are smaller issues, we like the borders of the cloth clean. Previously the printers would often dribble a little resist over the border as they positioned the block and think nothing of it. Now they treat the border with the same care as the pattern.

17. Where do you see Maiwa in the future, and where do you see Indian crafts in the future through their changes and developments?

India is the well spring of traditional processes – processes that have died out in other parts of the world. Once a processes dies it seldom gets revived again. There is just too many generations of skill and knowledge required to perfect something and this gets lost. It is hard, within India, for artisans of excellence to get both the recognition and the remuneration necessary to continue onto the next generation. I feel it is a critical role that the western economy can play for artisans worldwide, to support those who have carried

the skill to this age – to support them – to keep that creative thread unbroken until the local community, the local economy can support this incredible cultural treasure of craft – craft that speaks for the creative core of that community. Maiwa exists for this. Maiwa will continue to exist for this. It is interesting to note that my children grew up coming on these trips to villages for the past 25 years. Now both in their 20's and having looked at other options, have come into Maiwa – my daughter as a clothing designer and my son in shipping and customs along with photography and film.

Along with the Maiwa Foundation, I see Maiwa growing as a centre for a craft community. It is often said that the purchase of an item is a political act, "vote with your money." This is true. We would add that the purchase of an item is also a cultural act. Economically, individuals in western markets have surplus capital and the choice of how to spend it. Western consumers are also increasingly educated about the problems associated with the industrial scale productions of goods – both in terms of the impact these industries have on labour, raw materials and economies – and in terms of the displacement of small scale, highly skilled craftspeople and their communities. We give a concrete voice to these ideas, show how an alternative is not just possible but is also highly desirable. In doing so we have found that we are not alone but are part of a vital shift in thinking.

Interview: Pankaj Shah, Khamir, 21 May 2011

- 1. In the last interview I asked you 'what are the main aims of Khamir?', to which you answered, 'We aim to revitalise local crafts and re-position them for the current market. Working to build capacities for trade and design'. What methods are put in place by Khamir to achieve this aim?*

Khamir works pro-actively to do design & technical developments in different crafts, works closely with markets/buyers to interpret contemporary preferences and works with artisans to create such products, thereby building their capacities for trade and design.

- 2. What is the main market for the products produced by Khamir? Would you say it is the high end, urban and international market?*

A combination of all of these. It is the artisans who mostly produce for the markets. Khamir is more of a facilitator, while creating a few products in-house/with the artisans, which require customisation.

- 3. If the answer to the above question is yes, would you ever hope to re-introduce local traditional crafts into the local market?*

There are quite a few local traditional craft products that are being made & sold in the local markets. It is just that the scales have declined in some cases. The weaver & tie-dyers still make products for the Rabari community, there are pottery products that are being sold locally and are still very

popular, such as the water pots, lamps for diwali, toys, etc. The silversmiths still make jewelry for local communities. Tie & dye sarees, dupattas, dresses etc. are still being used widely by local communities. Embroidery is commissioned by women in some of the communities locally. Turn wood lacquer products are still bought by local communities. Quilt stands, carved doors, windows etc. are still being produced by wood carvers for local communities. Leather foot wear is still being made & used locally, there are traditionally local markets for saddles made by leather artisans. Felt makers also make saddles. Ajrakh lungies & cloth are still used by local communities. Since the vegetable/natural dyed ajrakhs became expensive, local communities have been using the same designs made in chemical dyes and at times screen printed.

This would depend on the user preferences, which can vary. Sometimes old fashions come back and there could be a revival. The question in some cases is of affordability for local customers.

4. How would you define your role working with the crafts and artisans of Kutch?

Revitalizing traditional crafts & repositioning them for contemporary markets. Creating new markets by promoting the crafts through different channels. Building capacities of artisans to be entrepreneurs. Looking at holistic development of the crafts through design, technical & market development, looking into the artisans health, production issues, technical up gradation, skill up gradation, environmental aspects etc. Of a facilitator, for capacity building, catalysts & change agents

5. What criteria do you follow when deciding which artisans need help or intervention with preserving or revitalising their crafts, or entering new markets?

We work with different artisans at varying levels, depending on their skills, capacities. So, we work with small, medium & big artisans.

6. Do your buyers understand the value of what they are buying? Do you think they buy because they like the item or because they are interested in its' origin and maker?

Buyers do understand the value. They buy mostly because they like the item. Customers have to see value for money. With our name, there is a trust created for customers about the authenticity of the products because of our known attachment with origin and maker. This adds value.

7. Do the designers working with the ajrakh artisans work to adapt the patterns on the cloth, or do they just design the products that will be made with the fabric?

Both.

8. *Do you think there are the same attitudes to Ajrakh block printing as there would have been, say 50 years ago. Do the patterns translate the same meanings to today's artisans as they would have done to their grandfathers?*

The world is constantly changing, so like everyone else, they have also changed. So obviously what meant to their grandfathers would be different than what it means for the new generation! The skill & commitment to their traditional craft have remained.

9. *Do you see any problems arising that may hinder the continuation or development of Kutch's crafts, in particular Ajrakh, and if so how will these be overcome?*

It is like the theory of evolution and survival. Some crafts may grow, flourish, some may perish. The Ajrakh will develop, but water availability can be an hindrance. The world is taking more fancy for all things natural, organic etc. so the Ajrakhs have a good opportunity.

10. *Where do you see Khamir in the future, and where do you see the crafts of Kutch in the future through their changes and developments?*

As said above, there is a growing interest in natural, organic, hand made things, which is an opportunity for most crafts to re-invent themselves for the future. The skills will survive, while the application may change. Khamir will be a strong part of this integration process for the future of these crafts, based on their traditional skills from the past!

Interview Pankaj Shah, Khamir, January 2010

1. *What is/are the main aim/s of Khamir?*

We aim to revitalise local crafts and re-position them for the current market. Working to build capacities for trade and design

2. *How many artisans/communities do you work with?*

We have a sectorial approach, the number of artisans not significant. We don't take a buying-selling approach. Work with approx 400 – 450 artisans

3. *Where do designers come from, how are they advised to approach the design process by yourselves (the directors)?*

Designers come from Ahmedabad, Delhi and other Indian cities as well as internationally. There is an in-house design process. We encourage artisans and designers to work together. There are design workshops for artisans and designers to work together. It is all an in-house design

process. There is a 3 way process between artisans, designers and Khamir.

4. Who are your main buyers, what market do you aim for?

We sell to companies all over the world. Sell over the internet as well as people coming over to buy. Exhibitions are promoted for the artisans to have a platform for their work and to bring artisans together.

5. How many staff work with Khamir, what are their backgrounds?

There are 20 staff working in craft development. They all have different specialities and have general professional backgrounds. Pankaj works as a mentor.

6. Where does the funding come from for your projects?

Funding mostly comes from India. E.g Indicorp and L.S.R. Also have volunteers working for us.

7. What policies / projects do you currently have in place?

Khamir are trying to make printers realise the importance of water. Atira – an expert organisation in Ahmedabad is helping to put in water systems for the printers. A government funding agency helped fund a detailed study of water resource management.

We also provide insurance cover for artisans. Craft centre works to facilitate artisans' insurance.

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