

Two ways to embroider

By drawing the design on the base fabric

In most embroidery traditions, the basic drawing is hand-drawn on the fabric.

Traditionally, a thin stick sharpened at one end served as the drawing instrument. Natural pigments derived from certain leaves and stones were used as ink. Today charcoal, coloured pencils, ballpoint pens and stencils are also used.

Not all the craftswomen who embroider have the skill to render the drawings on the fabric. There are, however, one or two artists in every village or group of villages who are also well versed in their embroidery tradition. They draw the designs on the fabric as per the requirements of the embroidery craftswomen.

By counting the threads of the base fabric

In embroideries such as Soof, Khaarak and Jat-Garaasiya, there is no outline or drawing done on the fabric to guide the craftswomen. Instead the design is conceptualized by counting the threads of the base fabric and mentally working out the composition. Embroideries done in this manner are known as counted thread embroideries.

Embroidery Elements

The interplay of five elements - stitches, mirrors, motifs, borders and styles - creates the embroideries of Kutch.

Stitches

Stitches are the smallest unit. The stitch repertoire ranges from simple to highly complex.

The running stitch is easy to render.

The assorted chain stitches are slightly more difficult.

The complex *mukkko* stitch is difficult to render.

Mirrors

The variety in the use of mirrors distinguishes the embroideries of Kutch and other parts of Gujarat from the other embroideries of India. Each embroidery tradition stipulates the shape, size and quantum of the mirrors to be used.

Some styles of Mutva embroidery make profuse use of very tiny, round mirrors. Neran embroidery uses mirrors sparingly. Dhebariya-Rabaari embroidery uses medium- and large-sized mirrors of different shapes.

Motifs

A single stitch or a combination of stitches builds a form or motif. A motif may be floral, geometric, abstract, curvilinear or figurative.

Borders

Borders are created by using one or more elements in a linear, continuous format. Some borders are embroidered only with stitches - just one stitch or a combination of stitches is used.

Stitches are also combined with mirrors and/or motifs to create borders. A border may be a single line. Some compositions also have a series of borders stacked one on top of the other.

Styles

An embroidery tradition may have one or more types of embroideries. The Ahir embroidery tradition has one type while the Mutva tradition has no less than 18 distinct types of embroideries.

We have used the term *style* to denote a distinct type within a particular embroidery tradition.

