

Kasuti Embroidery: A Timeless Tradition of Karnataka

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ABSTRACT

India is the land of rich culture and diverse traditions. Almost every region of India has a distinct style of embroidery based on cultural history of the region. Kasuti embroidery, originating from the state of Karnataka in India, is a traditional craft that holds deep cultural and historical significance. Kasuti embroidery has a rich history dating back to the Chalukya dynasty, with mentions in ancient texts like the Kavirajamarga. Characterized by intricate patterns and motifs, Kasuti has been an integral part of Karnataka's textile heritage for centuries. Traditional Kasuti embroidery involves a variety of stitches, including the basic running stitch (gavanti), the double running stitch (murgi), and the cross-stitch (menthe). These stitches are used to create intricate geometric and floral patterns on fabrics like cotton and silk, using threads in contrasting colors. It used in traditional clothing like the Ilkal saree and the Kurta.

INTRODUCTION

India is a country known for its culture, heritage, history and natural resources. Every region in India has its own style and pattern of art. Each state in India is unique in itself as far as embroidery of its variegated designs is concerned (Saroj and Parveen,

2017). The embroidery style known as "Kasuti" in Karnataka has a rich history dating back to the Chalukya dynasty, as referenced in ancient texts like the (Kavirajamarga. Bennur and Gavai 2015). The word "Kasuti" is associated with this specific embroidery, and

its etymology has been the subject of several theories. One prevalent explanation suggests that "Kasuti" can be deconstructed into "kai" (meaning hand in Kannada) and "suti" (meaning cotton), although Kasuti embroidery historically used both silk and cotton threads on silk or cotton bases (Brijbhushan and Jamila, 1990). Another theory posits that "Kasuti" may have originated from the Persian word "kashida," meaning embroidery. It is believed that "kashida" was locally pronounced as "kasuti" in India, influenced by trade and cultural exchanges between India and Persia, where "kashida" also denotes embroidery. A third theory proposes that Kasuti might have been named after a town in the Mysore state. Over time, Kasuti has evolved, influenced by various cultural and historical factors, including trade routes and royal patronage. The charm of Ilkal sarees is enhanced by embellishing with kasuti embroidery (Jyoti S Kordhanyamath, 2019). Ilkal sarees are the traditional sarees of North Karnataka. Ilkal is one of the best-known handloom clusters in Karnataka famous for Ilkal sarees that are made using cotton, silk and art silk. Kasuti embroidery is closely knotted with the social customs and festivals of Karnataka. It is often used to embellish traditional garments worn during weddings, festivals, and other auspicious occasions. Over the centuries, Karnataka has been influenced by various other cultures, including Persian, Mughal, and British. These influences can be seen in some Kasuti designs, which feature motifs and patterns that reflect these cultural exchanges. Today, Kasuti is not only a symbol of Karnataka's rich cultural heritage but also a vibrant and living art form that continues to inspire artisans and designers around the world. Karnataka has a strong tradition of temple art and architecture. Many Kasuti motifs are inspired by temple carvings and architectural details, reflecting the region's deep-rooted religious and spiritual beliefs. Temple carvings, in particular, play a

significant role in shaping Kasuti motifs. Artisans draw inspiration from the floral and geometric patterns in these carvings, translating them into intricate embroidery designs. Many Kasuti designs feature elaborate grids, triangles, and diamond-shaped motifs, reminiscent of the architectural elements found in Karnataka's temples. These geometric patterns not only enhance the visual appeal of the embroidery but also mirror the mathematical precision and symmetry often observed in temple architecture. Kasuti motifs often echo the region's profound religious and spiritual beliefs, with symbols like flowers, leaves, birds, and animals holding symbolic significance in Hindu mythology (Kumar, V 2016). Revival of kasuti embroidery with modernized technologies is the one of the best ways to save the heritage of traditional embroidery. It was found that transformation of innovative designs of kasuti embroidery into hand painting has enhanced the range of designing and productivity. Variability of designs was created through the use of CAD technology using design tools which aided creativity and made the process more efficient (Renu and Nisha 2018). Famous fashion designers implement embroideries in their attires. When utilized appropriately, these embroideries with the right mix of floral emblems, designs and abstract patterns, serve as catalyst of a new fashion statement. Embroideries are the pride of the nation and source of the national economy and employment (Shaik raffia sultana 2021).

Kasuti embroidery is known for its intricate stitches and motifs, which reflect the rich cultural heritage of (Karnataka Madhok P, (2023). The art form typically employs a variety of stitches, each with its own unique characteristics and uses. Some of the key stitches and motifs in Kasuti embroidery (Shailja D Nayak and Jyoti V Vastrad 2008) include:

- 1. Gavanti stitch:** Gavanti derived from kannada word gantu means knot. Also known as the double running stitch, this stitch is used to create outlines and intricate patterns. It is characterized by its double-sided nature, where the first running stich is filled in by second running stich on the same line. The second running stich work exactly opposite to the first stich. It worked in horizontal, vertical or diagonal directions.
- 2. Murgi stitch:** This stitch is similar to the gavanti stitch but it worked in stepwise manner. It is zig zag running stich which appears like steps of a ladder or staircase. It is worked in parallel rows, creating a smooth and even surface a large geometric design is produced by grouping the tiny design on regular intervals and sequences.
- 3. Negi stitch:** Negi in kannada means to weave. In this ordinary running or darning stich is used. It worked in long and short straight lines or flots and therefore the design does not appear identical on either side of the cloth.
- 4. Menthi stitch:** menthi is ordinary cross stich. Menthi means fenugreek seed so, people in karnataka identify the cross stich as menthi. It involves making tiny stitches in a diagonal direction, forming a series of X-shaped stitches. This cross stich usually appears heavy as it is used for filling purpose. This stitch is similar to the herringbone stitch and is used to create decorative borders and edgings.

Kasuti embroidery motifs are diverse and rich in symbolism, drawing inspiration from nature, mythology, and everyday life. These motifs are often intricately woven into the fabric, creating stunning and elaborate designs. Some of the most common motifs in Kasuti embroidery include (Renu and Nisha Arya (2017):

- 1. Gopura (Temple Tower):** Inspired by the towering structures found in South Indian temples, the gopura motif is a geometric design often seen in Kasuti embroidery. It represents spirituality and devotion.
- 2. Elephant:** The elephant is a symbol of strength, wisdom, and prosperity in Indian culture. In Kasuti embroidery, the elephant motif is often depicted in a stylized form, with intricate patterns adorning its body.
- 3. Peacock:** The peacock is a symbol of beauty, grace, and immortality in Hindu mythology. It is a popular motif in Kasuti embroidery, often depicted with its feathers spread out in a majestic display.
- 4. Floral Patterns:** Flowers are a common motif in Kasuti embroidery, symbolizing beauty, purity, and auspiciousness. Different flowers, such as lotus, jasmine, and hibiscus, are depicted in various designs.
- 5. Animals:** Other animals, such as birds, deer, and fish, are also commonly depicted in Kasuti embroidery. These motifs symbolize various qualities, such as freedom, grace, and abundance.
- 6. Geometric Patterns:** Kasuti embroidery is known for its intricate geometric patterns, which are often inspired by the architectural details found in South Indian temples. These patterns symbolize harmony, balance, and order.
- 7. Conch Shell:** The conch shell is a symbol of purity, and is often used in religious ceremonies in India. In Kasuti embroidery, the conch shell motif is a common symbol of auspiciousness and spirituality.

These motifs are often combined to create elaborate and beautiful designs, reflecting the

cultural heritage and artistic traditions of Karnataka. Orange, green, purple, and red are the colours that are most commonly utilised for kasuti embroidery. White is predominant on the black and dark background.

Threads Used in Kasuti Embroidery

The cloth itself was pulled for the thread used in Kasuti in olden times. They are now getting Mysore silk threads to make the embroidery. The reason why silk threads are used is to ensure the surface seems flat. Currently mercerized cotton threads like kohinoor and anchor thread, or pure, strong, fast-colored silk threads are used for the broding of Kasuti (Naik, S.D., (1996). It usually uses a single strand. A knot is never placed at the end of the thread, before or after the work ends.

CONCLUSION:

Kasuti embroidery from Karnataka exemplifies India's rich cultural heritage, with origins dating back to the Chalukya dynasty. This art form is distinguished by its intricate stitches and motifs inspired by temple architecture, nature, and mythology, reflecting the region's deep-rooted spiritual beliefs. Modern revival efforts using CAD technology and adoption by fashion designers have kept Kasuti vibrant and relevant. Traditionally used in Ilkal sarees and other garments for special occasions, Kasuti continues to inspire artisans and designers, contributing to the national economy and preserving a significant cultural tradition.

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