

Documentation Project ‘The Mewar Regalia: Textiles and Costumes’, The City Palace Museum, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India: An Overview

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Abstract

‘The Mewar Regalia: Textiles and Costumes’ Royal collection comprising of more than 500 costumes, accessories and textile objects, belongs to Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar of Udaipur, 76th Custodian, House of Mewar and his royal ancestors. This collection is currently under the patronage of Maharana Mewar Charitable Foundation, (MMCF), The City Palace Museum, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India. This paper discusses the aspects and challenges associated with the Documentation Project of the collection mentioned above. The work comprised of planning strategy for textile documentation in a restricted time frame, establishment of documentation section, categorization of objects, preparation of inventory list and index cards, providing objects an accession number, labeling and marking, digital documentation vis-à-vis photographic documentation, compilation and subsequent utilization of literary and oral information regarding local terms for costumes along with diacritical marks and Indian terminology of pattern making etc.

1. Introduction

1.1 Location

Udaipur is known for its history, culture, and picturesque locations and for its Palace Architecture. Udaipur, also called the city of lakes, is situated in the western Indian state of Rajasthan. It was founded by Maharana Udai Singh II in 1553 and was formerly the capital of kingdom of Mewar. Maharana Udai Singh Ji II and his successor Maharanas built the City Palace Complex concurrently with the establishment of the Udaipur city in 1559 and subsequently expanded it over a period of approximately 300 years. It is considered to be the largest Palace complex in Rajasthan and is replete with history.



Fig.1 an image of the City Palace, Udaipur, Rajasthan

1.2 Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation (MMCF), The City Palace Museum, Udaipur.

The Mewar dynasty is acknowledged as the oldest-serving dynasty of the world, with a rich history and an unbroken legacy since 734 A.D. The concept of Custodianship, which this great dynasty follows, has guided it in successfully sustaining and preserving its culture over the years. One such institution within the House of Mewar, which carries forward the ideals of the Custodianship, is the Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation (MMCF), established by His late Highness Maharana Bhagwat Singh Mewar on the 20th October 1969.

1.3 The Tangible and Intangible Textile Heritage of Mewar at The City Palace Museum

The 76th Custodian, House of Mewar along with his family carries on the legacy, to keep alive, the Living Heritage of Mewar through the Eternal Mewar Festivals. Festivals and rituals form an important part of the lives of the people of Mewar and an excellent example of the same can be experienced through the rituals performed by the Royal Family of Mewar. The festivals and intangible rituals cannot possibly be performed without the tangible items. Some, such items could be the ingredients for the *Pooja*, the utensils, the seating and even the clothes meant to be worn by the people performing them. For example, during the festival of *Kartik Poornima*, which is celebrated on the full moon night in the auspicious Hindu month of *Kartik*, usually in November; it is believed that all worship done in this month contributes towards the spiritual upliftment of the individual. It is also done to honour Lord Brahma, the foremost in the Hindu trinity and the creator of universe. During this day, men and women are seen wearing **clothes in silver and pearl pink colours**.

One of the significant medium for understanding the living heritage of Mewar is the '*The Mewar Regalia: Textiles and Costumes*' collection of the House of Mewar. It is through this tangible Mewar regalia that we also receive a vibrant display and understanding of their continuing tradition of the living heritage.

Another example of the amalgamation of the intangible with the tangible is seen during the *Holika Dahan* ritual. *Holi*, the festival of colours is celebrated in most parts of India and is a major festival for the people of Rajasthan. The women during this festival would wear a *poshak*, which would have a *phagnia*; which is an *odhani* made of white and red colours. In the more modern context, they wear *sarees, chudidar-kameez or salwar-kameez* in the same colour combination. Every year, the Royal family of Mewar performs the *Holika Dahan* ceremony. Objects like the *bichats, shawls, silver bajots* and many others are used in the ceremony. The costumes worn by the Royal family also follow the traditional colours of red and white. Another particular colour combination, in the costumes that the women traditionally wear during the *Holi* festival and on *Basant Panchami*, is *Basantiya*, a yellow or saffron coloured *odhani* with small red dots all over and red colour sprayed through the *odhani*. Nowadays, of course, various patterns of the same colour combination are also worn.

Another significant ritual performed by the Royal family of Mewar is the *Ashwa Poojan*. *Ashwa Poojan*, is a ceremony conducted to offer gratitude to Equines. During this ceremony, many material objects are utilised to adorn the horse, like the *palli, jean, odhani, dumchi, kalingi, halra, neveri, phuldi, mora* and others. All these traditional pieces are used even today, not just for display only, but also as a part of the ceremony as well. Some other material objects utilised for this purpose are the traditional seating, the *tora* and *moda*, a bolster and seat cover, which are exquisitely embroidered with *karchobi* embroidery.

The recently concluded wedding of Maharaj Kumar Lakshyaraj Singh Ji Mewar, in 2014 showcased beautifully, some of the traditional objects. At the departure of Maharaj Kumar from Udaipur and on his arrival in Bhubaneswar; both the elephants that he was seated upon, had *jhools, pherwaz* and *seeri*, which are very much a part of above mentioned collection. The same *jhools* can also be seen in the wedding procession of then Maharaj Kumar Bhagwat Singh Ji on February 1940.



Fig. 2 a.) ¹Maharaj Kumar Bhagwat Singh Ji Udaipur, February 1940 and b.) ²Maharaj Kumar Lakshyaraj Singh Ji Mewar, January 2014 both are seated on an elephant decorated with same Jhool in procession to their wedding.

At the wedding reception, Mewar Prince was wearing the *Angarkhi*, which now is proudly a part of the textile and costume collection, bringing along with it, all its history and nostalgia. Many other objects showcased in

¹Kumar pramod, Mrinalini Venkateshwaran, S Girikumaran and Lauren Power. Long Exposure: The camera at Udaipur, 1857-1957. Udaipur: Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation. 2014. 225

²<http://www.indianrajputs.com/pictures.php?page=28>

the wedding also form a part of the Textile & Costumes collection. Perhaps, for some objects their contemporary usage is redundant, but for many others, they can still perform their duties in a subtle yet significant manner along with the intangible thereby forming a **whole Living Heritage**.

2 Significance of Documentation of 'The Mewar Regalia: Textile and Costumes'

The costumes, accessories and objects of Royal '*The Mewar Regalia: Textiles and Costumes*' Royal collection of Maharana Mewar Charitable Foundation, are remarkable for their robust design, lavish materials, bold workmanship and all quintessential qualities of the art forms of The *Mewar region*. The collection is redolent of the splendor of city of the *Maharanas* and exudes an opulence that celebrates more a fullness of life than mere lavishness. These objects have been preserved over the years at the royal residence; The City Palace, Udaipur and have never been documented earlier. The costumes and textiles are a wonderful example of the preservation of traditions, visible through wearing styles of the region, adapted and innovated by successive generations of the royal family and court. They are, in general, of varying quality and historic importance and nevertheless one of the most informative collections of Indian textiles known anywhere. Their value lies in the amount of accompanying documentary information in the form of nametags, stamps, labels, seals and inscriptions. They also convey deep historical, religious and technological messages. It is befitting, therefore, to document them.

As per the UNESCO, ICCROM and EPA 2010, basic documentation is always required in any museum for the administrative management of the collection. This documentation will support the museum to do following things quickly and effectively viz. Establishing proof of ownership of textile objects and locating textile objects in the museum, providing information about total number of textile objects in the collection and their category, establishment of unique identity of each textile object, sourcing tangible and intangible information linked with every object, appropriate holding of permanent and temporary exhibitions, systematic storage of the collection and providing useful guidance to the researchers.

3 Documentation Methodology

3.1 Establishment of Documentation Section

Before actual work commenced, an ideal area had been provided by the MMCF within The City Palace Museum for establishing a documentation section and a photography section, along with all the documentation materials and tools and with other basic office amenities. The various textiles and costumes were stored here on flat, large tables; properly covered and protected. They had also prepared a raw inventory with basic information, museum code number along with their corresponding digital image.

3.2 Segregation of objects and preparation of the inventory list:

The raw inventory was only a suggestive list regarding the Textile collection. Though it was very helpful in identifying the object, however, it provided very little information and was in sporadic state. Generally in museum objects are segregated according to their type, technology, area, period or theme. Thus, preparation of new detailed inventory of the collection as per the museum code number was essential and it was linked with the raw inventory. Various discussions were held on, how to categorise them. At first it was thought to

segregate them as per the corresponding reign of ruling Maharana of Mewar or as per the category of objects, for instance Woven, Printed, Appliqué, Embroidered and Painted, and then sub category according to their usage during rituals, festivals, special meetings and ceremonies. Unfortunately, not much information was available regarding the time period and who wore them or commissioned to make these textiles etc. To get these answers a detailed historical research based on evidences was needed. This was not feasible in the restricted time period for such a large collection. Thus, a category tree was prepared and the objects were categorized into following lots and further lots and sub-categorized according to their usage:

- *Zenana* Costumes (Woman's Costumes)
- *Mardana* Costumes (Men's Costumes)
- Children Costumes (Girls and boys Costumes)
- Animal Trappings (Horse and Elephant trappings)
- Furnishings (Carpets, Curtains, decorative materials etc.)
- Accessories (Accessories worn, carried, attached etc.)
- Miscellaneous (Wooden *Bajots* etc.)

3.3 Assigning Accession Number

Once the collection was segregated and categorized into different lots, the actual work was started by assigning the object with an accession number, a unique number, by which the object will be identified and listed in the Inventory list and documentation form. The Accession Number was based on the three-number (trinomial) system as per the ICCROM guideline 1996.

3.4 Marking and Labeling

Labeling and marking of textile objects was done in a consistent manner. Material and position of the labels were decided and a consistency was maintained in all the objects. Tyvek®™ labels were used; as they are very strong, tear proof, waterproof; acid free and resistant to harsh chemicals. The Tyvek®™ labels were sewn onto the object with a few stitches, using a fine needle and compatible thread. A Hand typewriter was used for writing accession numbers on the Tyvek®™ label. The ink of the typewriter was checked for properties such as water resistance, fading or discoloration under direct sunlight and museum lighting. Precautions have been taken regarding durability and reversibility of labels.

3.5 Recording format of the documentation

Initially the data was created as hand written documentation sheets and subsequently it was fed into the computer system by using Microsoft Office Software, in a form similar to catalogue forms. These digital catalogue forms were designed specifically for the collection. It is preferable to use software, which can easily be operated by the museum staff and with minimal training requirements. There are various parameters observed internationally to enable effective record for the small private collections. The important keywords were selected and formatted into one sheet of paper and were referred to as Documentation Forms. Descriptive writing was formulated as per the anatomy of a textile. Detailed glossary was made to standardize the

description information. Local terms and terminology were used with diacritical marks and they were defined in the glossary.

It is necessary for the documentation to record tangible and intangible information related to objects. The accompanied information was preserved in written form as well as in the form of digital images. Adding information about the size of the object, colour, material and technique and the era of object was essential for the identification of individual object. Distinguishing features such as marks and inscriptions and condition of the objects provide useful information. Some objects were fragile and brittle in condition; hence guidelines for storage and handling were also given for each individual object. The Documentation Form is designed in such layout that its print can be directly taken on A4 sized sheet.

MMCF has a rich collection of photographs and paintings belonging to The House of Mewar and many similar photographs are present in various other archives. Various textile objects were found in these photographs, which were worn by or used by the Royals of Udaipur; therefore these photographs were linked with the textile object.

The House of Mewar also has their own archive of *Haqiqat Bahida* available in the collection of Maharana Mewar Research Institute under the aegis of Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation; some of which have been published also. The original archival records are in Mewari language. The published *Haqiqat Bahida* is in Mewari, Hindi and English language. In these records daily life of rulers has been recorded. What they wore in a particular festival, where they had visited, who had accompanied them, what was the mode of travel etc. *Haqiqat Bahida* gives information about the rulers; their inspiring realities and working methodologies. Due to restricted time limit it was not possible to relate the objects and to decipher the information written in the *Haqiqat Bahida*. Oral information present in the textile craft community of Udaipur has been added to an extent, but it is an ongoing process and there is always scope for additional research.

The MMCF collection also has a large collection of accessories. It was a difficult task to categorize them in meaningful sections. Finally, they were categorized as

- Accessories worn like eye wear, footwear etc.
- Accessories carried viz. walking sticks, umbrella, purses etc.,
- Accessories added to the body or clothing for ornament viz. *turra*, laces, *gota* etc.,
- Accessories used for care of clothing,
- Accessories used for making clothes like threads, decorative laces and tools and equipment etc..

3.6 Pattern making of the costumes

The pattern making of a few selected objects was done. The Pattern making is the science of designing patterns. It is a paper or cardboard template from which the parts of a garment are traced onto fabric before cutting out and assembling. After the paper/ fabric pattern was completed, it was digitized for archiving. For pattern cutting traditional tailor from Jodhpur, Rajasthan was invited to create pattern on cloth and to provide local names of all the parts of costume. All the information has been added in the detailed description.

4. Conclusion

Ideally, documentation is an ongoing process and there is always scope for additional research. Records were kept in two formats, in the form of paper records, which had documentation forms and digital images using Microsoft Office Excel Software. The outcome of records were given using manual procedure in following manner, Category spreadsheet, layout of storage and spreadsheet with object location, Directory of digital data, Data reading guidelines, Handling guidelines, Collection care.

Further, Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation has been articulating programs related to workshops, exhibitions and publications after this elementary museum documentation to bring these textile objects in view of the public and to make it easily accessible to textile researchers/ scholars for comprehensive research.

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Ms. Smita Singh is a Textile Conservation Consultant and working as Project Associate, at National Research Laboratory for Conservation of Cultural property (NRLC) for Textile Conservation Projects since 2012. She is currently based at Srinivas Malliah Memorial Theatre Crafts Museum, New Delhi, the majority of collection of this museum are Textiles, which were collected by Smt. Kamladevi Chattopadhyay. She is also associated with The City Palace Museum, Udaipur as a Consultant since 2014 for the Documentation of Mewar Textiles. Besides, she is also a PhD research scholar at the National Museum Institute, New Delhi, and her research topic is 'Scientific Studies on Conservation Issues of Painted Textiles of India'. During her decade long association as Senior Conservator/Centre Coordinator with INTACH Art Conservation Centre, Delhi, she has been associated with numerous conservation projects and training programs. She has also established a 'Specialized Textile Conservation Unit' (STCU) at INTACH in 2010 and was In-charge from June 2010-September 2011. She was the editor of 'Conservation Issues in Asia' a conference proceeding of 'Asian Regional Cooperation Conference on Heritage Conservation and Education (ARCC), published in 2009. She has written and presented various papers in National and International Conferences. She has done her Masters in Art Conservation from National Museum Institute, Delhi and specialization in Conservation of Traditional Painted Textiles from British Museum London, UK. She was also a recipient of the Charles Wallace India Trust (CWIT) scholarship in 2010 and Nehru Trust Scholarship in 2004. In 2014, she visited University of Applied Arts, Vienna for Indo-Austrian Workshop on Conservation of Metals, Paintings and Textiles funded by National Museum Institute, New Delhi and Eurasia-Pacific UNINET.