

Indigenous Lippan Art Form of Kutch Region

Introduction:

'Chhittar' or 'Lippan' work is a mural tradition from the Kutch region of Gujarat, India; and this traditional art form is used to decorate the walls of houses and household items. The **wild ass** or **camel dung** was traditionally used in this craft, which means "Lippan" in Gujarati language, and hence is more



Figure 1, Traditional Bhungas huts of Kutch

popularly known as 'Lippan Work'. Earthen work done in **bas-relief** is practiced by various communities in this region. The clay work is done on "Bhungas" (circular mud huts), in which the local people live. Various communities migrated from the other side of the border in several phases, the latest being after the Indo-Pakistani



War of 1971. The major communities practicing Lippan work are the **Rebaris**, **Harijans** and **Mutwas**, although many more sub-tribes also practice this handicraft. The *Mutwa* and *Rebari* communities migrated to Kutch from Sindh around 400 and 700 years ago respectively. While the *Harijan* community had migrated from the Marwar region of Rajasthan and reached Kutch. These communities are mainly engaged in **embroidery**, **pastoralism**, **animal husbandry** and **horse rearing**. However, all these communities continue Lippan work as a local tradition, which has aesthetic as well as functional uses. Earthwork increases the strength of the Bhungas and also acts as an insulator. The air gaps between the clay keep houses cool in summer and warm in winter. The mirrors used in **Aabhla**, or **Lippan**, reflect the light from the lamps and make the interior even brighter than even a single lamp.

Clay mirror work attracted the attention of the modern world for its intricate patterns and aesthetic perfection and has made a complete transition from its unknown modest stature to the mainstream art world adorning the walls of rural homes.

Etymology of Rogan Art:

The word "Lippan" is based on the meaning of "Lepan Kaam" in their own local colloquial language of Kutch division in Gujarat. In the earlier time, women of the **Rabari** community used to do this art to decorate their walls of **Bhungas** and **Adobes**, with their palms and fingers; because, this art form was done by directly hands, hence it was called *Lippan Art*.

Practice of Lippan Art:

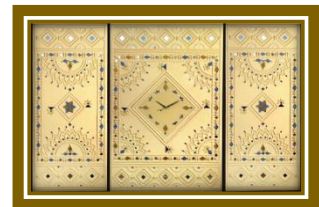
Traditional Lippan art form Practiced by both communities like **Hindu** and **Muslim** in Kutch and Runa districts of Kutch region in Gujarat, India; these communities known; such as, **Rabari**,



Kumbhar, Marwada Harijan and **Mutwa** communities, but most Lippan artisans today belong to the Kumbhar community.

Clay and mirror work is mainly done by the women of the “**Rabari**” community; beside this, Kumbhar, Marwada Harijan and Mutwa communities men are creators of this art form in their habitats. The women are so adept and experienced in this art form; that, they usually do not make any prior or dummy design-patterns before starting the art work. The Rabari are a pastoral community of Kutch, living on the outskirts of villages. They live in certain groups of communal or family houses called “**Bhungas**”, which are designed and built to take care of their practical needs in the harsh climate of Kutch.

Clay-mixture and glass work is mostly done by the women of the Rabari ethnic group. The women are so skilled with this form of painting that they rarely recreate or follow a pattern before starting work. Rabari is a quiet part of Kutch that lives on the outskirts of its cities. They live in certain groups of public or family buildings called Bhungas, which are designed and built to meet their practical needs in the harsh environment of Kutch. There is no document available to trace the origin of this creative expression. Lippan work is a type of clay and mirror handicraft.



Cultural Significance of Rogan Art:

All mediums of expression such as various creative arts, creative writing, drama, music, cinema, photography and dance etc. all reflect the various activities of the society and their religious, cultural, economic, political, spiritual aspects and social events; So that, all these platforms are such tools that can speed up the development of human mind and help in refining antiquity according to time. Different cultures and arts help to explain the social changes in which we find the direction of creativity.

The Lippan art form stems from the harsh environmental conditions of Kutch as a compensation for the need of the residents there; the people of the nomadic community there who lived on the outer edge of the settlements. They began by using local materials to build hut-like dwellings made of a mixture of clay and cow dung; In addition, the art they developed to decorate the walls of their abodes and still remains exemplary, basically the same art form is unique in the whole world in the form of “Lippan work”.

The artisans of both Hindu and Muslim communities have contributed equally in the development and promotion of this art; However, where the craftsmen of the Hindu community used to combine geometric and nature-inspired motifs, including forms of animals and birds, while the Muslim craftsmen used to create only geometric motifs.

Social Concern:

In the “**Rabari**” and “**Meghwal**” communities of Kutch region, the craft work is mostly done by women artisan, while in the “**Mutwa**” community, this art work is done by men artisan, who basically associated with mud-mirror work. The artistic creation on the walls of **Rabaris** reflects their love ad aesthetic approach for ornamentation and their designs and motifs are inspired by the motifs; which they used in



Figure 2, Interior view of Lippan art in Bhunga.

embroidery design patterns. These communities have a belief that mirrors ward off evil and hence; so that, they are used extensively in their embroideries and panoramic decorations of their homes.

Traditional Glory of Lippan Art:

Awarded with the “**Kutch Shakti Puraskar**” in Mumbai, Lippan artisan ‘**Gani Mara**’ from Gujarat, while participating as a resourspurson in a workshop based on lippan art, threw light on the origion, development and expansion of this art form and informed that lippan art has evolved during the last six to seven centuries

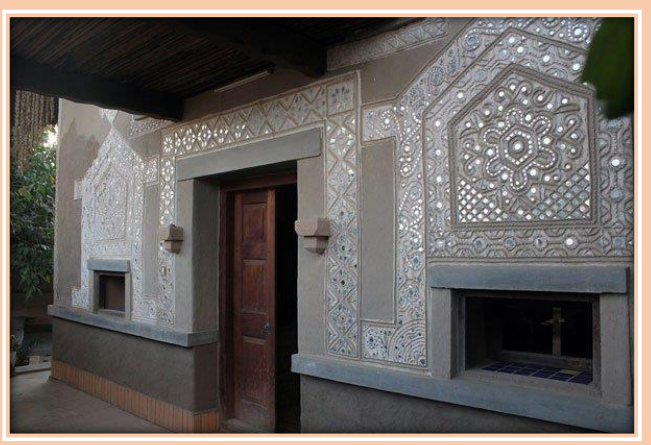


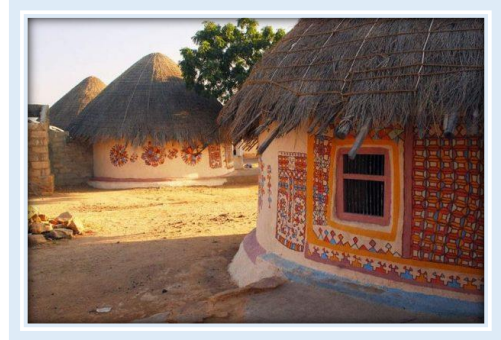
Figure 3, Lippan work on cemented Exterior walls of modernize house

and now the traditional artisans of lippan work are trying to keep it alive and adapt it according to the need of the time by accepting modern available new materials in place of the traditional means used in its creation. Lippan Kama, the traditional clay art of Gujarat, was executed mostly by the women of the **Rabari community** in the Kutch region; Whereas, **Kumbhar, Marwara Harijan** and **Mutwa** community used to do this work. T use clay and donkey or camel dung to make designs on the walls (inside and outside) of their bhungis (huts) to decorate and beautify their homes. It is also called clay relief work. Different communities in Kutch do mud-relief work and have their own original style of lippan work. Gani Mara, who has been active in this field for almost two decades, also cited the example of his family and explained how this art has been passed down from generation to generation. In this context, I would like to inform that I inherited this craft from my forefathers and now our nephews and daughters, some of whom are also studying, are working as professional interior designers.

According to Ghani, lip art is now a form mostly done on walls and people in cities prefer to have them made as wall decorations. In modern times, lippan has replaced the traditional materials with clay, glue and colours to make the work more attractive. To add a modern twist, we resort to graphics; while the traditional lippain work done in the past was not very durable and would require a lot of maintenance and touch-ups annually. Lipp works are now being made waterproof and durable.

Historical background of Lippan Art:

Due to non-availability of authentic account of the historical background of this traditional art form, tracing its origin is a difficult task. Different communities in Kutch do the work of mud washing in their own style; nevertheless, this indigenous art form has been making its presence felt for many centuries and



local communities are making concerted efforts to keep this wonderful and traditional handicraft alive.

Lippan art is mainly practiced by the Rabari, *Kumbhar*, *Marwada Harijan* and *Mutwa communities*, but most Lippan artisans today belong to the **Kumbhar community** and attribute the origin of this traditional art form to their ancestors. Traditionally the pottery makers of Sindh, the potters had at some point transferred their expertise in working with clay and clay to the exterior and interior walls of their houses and a large panel like the traditional boxes and is still being practiced; they are still practicing.

Like the **Kumbhar** of the **Mutwa community** in Kutch also migrated to India from **Sindh** (currently part of Pakistan) around 400 years ago. They were skilled artisans in their unique embroidery; which is called “*Mutwa Embroidery*”, but their main livelihood was cattle and horse rearing. The *Marwada Harijan community* migrated to Kutch from the **Marwada region** of south-western Rajasthan, which includes the modern Jodhpur city. The *Rabari community* also practices this panoramic art form. They lead a nomadic pastoral lifestyle, having migrated from **Sindh** to **Kutch** 700-800 years ago. Mostly women of these communities practice this particular unique art tradition.

Theme of Lippan Creations:

Kutch region of Gujarat state is known for its traditional painting techniques. Chhittar work is also one of them. The origin of Lipan work remains a mystery. Different people groups in Kutch do earth-labour and have their own distinct weaving style.

However this work has been mainly confined to the interior walls; But, now it is being done on the outer walls also and in the creation of some other creative items. These magnificent murals

infuse gaiety and panoramic beauty into the generally harsh lives of the people of Kutch. Its traditional artisans commonly created design patters include *peacocks*, *camels*, *elephants*, *water carriers*, *women churning buttermilk*, *temples*, *mango trees*, etc.

Muslim communities however only use geometric patterns as the use of human or animal symbols is prohibited by their religion.

Motifs and Patterns Used in Lippan Works:

In “**Lippan works**”, the *Rabaries* present their activities of daily routine as artistic subjects. **Peacocks**, **camels**, **elephants**, **mango trees**, **representative sanctuaries**, **profuse women churning buttermilk**, **women holding water** and other **day-to-day activities** of life are often depicted on the walls of Bhungas in Kutch region of Gujarat state in India. The combination of Lippan work is often



Figure 5, Different types of motifs & patterns used in lippan work

combined with freehand. On the other hand, Muslims use geometrical motifs as subjects because the use of animal and human images is forbidden in their religion. The subjects of the creation are inspired by well-known *weaving patterns*, and when the composition of motifs are finished, they are mirrored in the clay-work like the original weaving. Different shapes of mirrors used are known as “**Aabhla**”, including round, precious stone and three-sided. These mirrors are visually appealing and provide a dazzling glow to the Bhungas habitats. They apply these motifs on the dividers, portions, ceilings, entryways, features, and floors all have elaborate clay-mirrored work.