CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Textiles have been known to us through the human history. They are the major attractions all over the world, but due to their short life span, they can only be seen in the pictorial forms either in the ancient paintings, murals, inscriptions, sculptures, etc. The textiles have played the major part in the lives and traditions of the people. These are constructed by using the different methods and materials from natural fibres to the regenerated or manufactured fibres.

In India, cotton, silk, and wool were the major raw materials used for hand-woven textiles right from the period of the Indus valley civilization (circa 2700-1500 B.C.). Needles, spindles, and madder-dyed cotton fragments from Mohenjodaro were the earliest evidences of cotton and silk (Bhatnagar, 2005).

According to Chattopadhyay (1985), although no sample of Indian needlework earlier than that of the sixteenth century is known to have survived, but there is ample evidence that embroidery was widely practiced in India from very early times.

The goat was the earliest mammals to be domesticated. The Harappan toys had representations of goats. Two seals from Mohenjo-Daro showed wild bezoars' goat with curled enormous horns and a bearded domestic male goat with side-spreading horns (Patel, 2010).

There are different varieties of textiles, out of which certain traditional textiles, archaeological findings or fragments are of cultural, historical and sentimental value such as tapestries, embroideries, flags, shawls, etc. These kinds of textiles due to their historical use and environmental factors require a special attention to guarantee its long-term stability. There should be informative and careful decisions regarding the display, storage and handling of the textiles so as to make them available for the future generations.

Textile conservation is a complex, challenging and multi-faceted discipline as well as it is one of the most versatile branches of conservation. Traditional textiles are still produced using the traditional patterns and dyeing methods. Textiles being organic in nature get easily

damaged and therefore, only a small amount of textile artefacts survive compared to artefacts made of other materials.

This is why special conservation treatment is needed for textile artefacts. For extending the lifespan of artefacts, causes of damage should be predicted beforehand and preventive conservation measures should be carried out. When damage has occurred, the appropriate treatment method is chosen following the artefact's condition, so that it can be protected from further damage.

As stated by Jyotshna Sahoo (n.d.) in her paper entitled 'Preservation of library materials: Some preventive measures', says that preventive conservation plays a vital role and has assumed much importance in our country because a large number of institutions do not have proper conservation facilities. In fact, if diagnosis in time is followed by proper preventive measures many problems can be solved.

The comfort zone for different kind of objects is different and, therefore, it is difficult to recommend appropriate environmental conditions where display/storage of all types of collection prevails. Control should depend upon the structure of the objects, their reaction speed and effects of rapid changes in R.H. (Relative Humidity) and temperature (Gupta, 2009).

Conservation can be termed as any direct or indirect action taken towards prolonging the life expectancy of the object whether the object is organic, inorganic or composite. Conservation is defined as any action taken to determine the nature and properties of materials used in any kind of cultural holdings or in their housing, handling or treatment; any action taken to understand and control the causes of deterioration, and any such action is taken to better the condition of such holdings. Thus, conservation includes both the aspects – Preservation and Restoration (Agarwal, 1977).

The textile collections of National Museum, New Delhi is magnificent as regards the traditional textiles. It possesses two very ancient textiles collections, some of them are still intact but most of them were in the fragmentary state which had been collected by Sir Aurel Stein. Indeed, the people of India have a rich, exotic and varied tradition in cloth, chiefly due to its variety of climates, wide-spread geographical locations, diverse festivals, arts and crafts, and social customs in different parts of the country (Bisht, 2010).

There are quite a few museums in India which have wide collection of textiles such as Bharat Kala Bhawan, Varanasi; Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaja Vastu Sangrahalay (earlier known as The Prince of Wales Museum of Western India), Mumbai; Indian Museum, Kolkata; Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad; State Museum, Lucknow; Government Museum and Picture Gallery, Chandigarh; Shreyas Folk Museum, Ahmedabad, Gujarat; National Museum, New Delhi; Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery, Vadodara; The National Handicrafts and Handloom Museum, also known as Crafts Museum, New Delhi and the only museum devoted to the textiles named as Calico Museum of textiles, Ahmedabad. The museums were identified on the basis of the collections of textiles. The museums which have the good collection of shawls were also identified and surveyed. Hence only those museum collections and few private collections were taken up for the study.

Textiles are mostly organic in nature. They are very difficult to maintain once they start decaying or becoming weak. They get affected by improper environmental conditions such as the excess of moisture, light, air pollution and heat. Biological agents such as insects and microorganisms, attack and cause considerable loss of tensile strength and pliability. Acidity also affects the textiles very much. In fact, their decay starts at the moment they are made due to lack of proper knowledge or understanding of the factors of their decay.

Preservation is about raising awareness of what can be done to avoid damage to textiles which do affect the procedures and practices in every museum operation according to preservation standards and policies need to be studied and followed. Most museums do not follow such practices and as a result textile collections suffer. The researcher has intended to make the museum staff aware of such preservation guidelines for the museums to take care of the textile collections.

Conservators have agreed that it is difficult to maintain them especially in the tropical and sub-tropical climatic regions of the world. Besides maintaining the collection to keep it in good condition, people did not realize that their decay process has to be well understood to save them. In order to provide a proper conservation treatment, it is necessary to know their chemical composition and method of making. For example, some of the textiles contain metal thread for decoration purpose. Their cleaning, conservation, care, and storage requires careful consideration, otherwise, these may suffer irretrievable damage. Since not much work has been done in India so far in this direction and therefore, such study was required to be

undertaken to save the textile collections especially shawls in Indian museums and in the private collections.

As such when we talk about textile collections, it is huge and includes a variety of collections such as tapestries, carpets, rugs, costumes, shawls, upholsteries etc. To study all the textile collections at a time was not possible for anyone because there are varieties of collections. They have different weaving processes, they are made of different materials which have different properties and they are exposed, displayed and stored in different climatic conditions. Hence it was decided to study specifically the Indian shawls, as very less work has been done on Shawls. Many museums, as well as a few private collectors in India, have the good collection of Shawls. It was also not possible to study the collection of all museums and therefore, the researcher intended to study some Indian Museums which have collections of shawls. The research required an interdisciplinary approach and it involved curators, conservators, chemists, conservation scientists who are involved in the preservation of shawls. When we say preservation, it is not a one man's job. It is teamwork because it includes the display, storage, and handling. Any aspect operated in a wrong way certainly harms the object. Moreover, wrong practices of conservation also harm the object. Considering these factors, it is necessary to study the materials of the shawls, practices of conservation, techniques of display, handling and storage in different museums. Based on these observations, discussions and data collections, the researcher developed the correct techniques in all aspects of the museum profession which may enhance the life expectancy of the shawl collections.

1.1 Purpose of the study

A search for literature indicated that several studies have been done on the deterioration of textiles from internal and external factors. Effects from these factors showed the loss of strength and discoloration of degraded fabrics. Light is believed to break down the molecular chain of cellulose into shorter units and to weaken the glucosidal linkages, so that they may be more readily attacked by oxygen. Various dyes and pigments are capable of acting as sensitizers for the action of sunlight. It seemed from the review that no study has been reported on shawls, in textiles materials or objects. Therefore, the author was interested to set up a plan to study the effects of light, heat, humidity, air

pollution on shawls as well as to study the various techniques of conservation, preservation and preventive conservation on shawl collections.

A broad investigation was therefore undertaken with the expectation of getting useful information from the museum professionals and private collectors or individuals for a larger and deeper understanding of the conservation practices of shawl collections in India.

Conservation is inherent to any culture that values resources, traditions, and workmanship. The tradition is most relevant for textiles as they can be a complete reflection of our culture, technology, influences, and beliefs of both the maker and the wearer. Textiles are precious tools of embellishment; each element that makes up a textile is driven by some logic that is an indicator of its ecology. Conserving a few textiles at the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) in the material heritage division, which includes few Kalamkari Textiles, Thanka paintings, painted and dyed textiles on silk and cotton cloth, inspired me to gain more knowledge about the conservation of shawls. Masters in conservation, preservation and heritage management and working at INTACH involved the complexities of problems in the preservation of textile attracted my interest and fostered the research interest into the textile conservation.

It's a matter of pity and great regret that many valuable textiles of historical, scientific archaeological, artistic and universal value have met their end and thus been lost due to the carelessness or ignorance of the care-taker. Even at present such deterioration and decay continue. In several museums of India, the condition of ancient textile is lamentable. It is, therefore, high time that the museum authorities should realize the importance of textile and become alert against the forces damaging them.

Curative measures should be recognized and applied accordingly so that we can save our cultural heritage which cannot be replaced even by a high cost. Thus, proper scientific preservation is an essential need not only for avoiding a monetary loss but also to ensure the inheritance of rare and ancient culture of shawls to the posterity. The curative measures comprise scientific investigation of the causes of deterioration, examination of the material, with a view to the composition and manufacture of that particular textile, chemical treatment in order to cure the maladies and make the textile impervious to further attack.

The scientific study of textiles is a recent origin. The totality of the scientific methods regarding textile has not yet been adopted in India. Attempts have been made by some museums, allied institutes and private collectors on preventive conservation of textiles. As far as conservation of textiles is concerned, efforts have been taken to give information about the recent advancements in the conservation and preservation of textiles in the museum. The responsibility of museologist and museum chemist is to care for textiles based on scientific methods. Therefore, it is necessary to know the structure and chemical composition of fibers.

During the course of the research work, the researcher visited museums in various parts of India and carried out comparative studies of different museums. There is only one museum in the country which is solely devoted to textiles, i.e. Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad. It is very sad to note that out of thousands of museums in India, a very few museums have a good collection of textiles and furthermore, a very few museums have adopted a proper scientific method for conservation and restoration of fragile and traditionally important textile materials. The most common reason is the negligence of the museum authorities and lack of availability of conservators and sophisticated instruments in museums.

The work deals with an extensive study of past as well as present conservation techniques and practices by making the use of historical and technological information. Original textile traditions are slowly vanishing along with their skills and technologies especially historic shawls in museums of India due to various reasons such as their ageing processes and lack of scientific approach towards conserving them.

What makes shawls so interesting is its provenance. The survey was undertaken to exhume and document the history of shawls also. The shawls still have much to teach us. Thus, it became imperative to conserve these precious momentums, so that they can be studied and researched repeatedly over a period of time, helping to understand the culture of past and inspiring the generations to come.

1.2 Specific objectives

1.2.1 To study the profile of the artisans from Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, and Nagaland.

1.2.2 To study the different shawl weaving methods and preservation of the weaving technique.

1.2.3 To study the different types of shawls in museums, private collectors or individuals.

1.2.4 To understand and enumerate the preventive and remedial conservation methods adopted by museums in India, private collectors, and conservators in private practice.

1.2.5 To identify and analyze different kinds of damages that causes degradation of shawls.

1.2.6 To develop suitable method for conserving traditional shawls.

1.3 De-limitation

The study was limited to the preservation and conservation of woollen shawls only within a few selected museums in India, private collectors, and conservators in private practice. The shawl collections in India is huge and varied. These are made up of different kinds of fibres. To study all the shawl collections was not possible. Therefore, the researcher only concentrated on the woollen shawls in India and hence, it was taken up for the study.

1.4 Scope of the study

The present work brings within its scope a vast field of study. In the introductory chapter, some emphasis has been given to the origin and development of the age-old crafts in a broad historical perspective. The study also seeks to present an analytical picture of different deteriorating agents and how they degrade shawls. Along with history, an account of raw materials, traditional tools, and production techniques are also discussed. The readers will be able to understand the composition and properties of fibers and structures as well as how they affect the long-term stability of the textile artefact.

A pictorial presentation of the different types of shawl collections in museums have been provided and thus, it becomes necessary to record and document these artefacts before they become extinct under the impact of modernization and certainly the natural degradation/ ageing.

The study will assist future researchers and designers to understand shawls through the history, to carry out safe handling and documentation procedures for textiles as well as to implement preventive conservation procedures for textiles. It will serve as an educational asset and tool for researchers, art scholars and those who are interested in the field of traditional or historic shawl collections. The aim of writing is also to provide precise instructions for conservation and preservation techniques, to preserve the textile heritage and to make them comprehensive to the dilettante.