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# A heritage of handiwork

Gujarat has a rich legacy of weaving and handicrafts, encompassing disciplines like—embroidery, tie-dye, block printing, beadwork, metalworking, woodcarving, lacquer work, pottery, marquetry, quilting, stone carving, etc. Here's bringing you the very best that the state has to offer. By **Anil Mulchandani**  
Photographs: **Dinesh Shukla**

**S**ITUATED ON the west coast of India, with a long coastline open to the Arabian Sea, Gujarat has enjoyed trade relations with overseas lands from time immemorial. Traders, invaders, colonisers, migrants and refugees have landed in Gujarat, bringing with them their skills that have become part of the handicraft heritage of the state. The palaces, forts, havelis, mansions, mosques, temples and mausoleums of Gujarat reflect the richness of crafts skills that has existed in the state from medieval times.

## SURAT

» **Key Craft: Sadeli**

Surat is an important centre for Sadeli crafts. Sadeli is a form of marquetry, the art of decorating the surface of wooden articles with delicate pieces of wood and other materials in precisely-cut geometrical shapes. Sadeli bears much resemblance to Khatam which is the Persian version of marquetry, which is said to have developed in Iran during the reign of Safavid dynasty from 1501 to 1722. The processes, techniques and motifs of khatamkari marquetry are said to have been brought to Surat by the Parsis who came to the Gujarat shores from Iran, and this gave birth to the distinctive Sadeli craft.



The Sadeli craftsmen are mostly carpenters, who have the precision and patience required for the art forms of marquetry. While originally the art of Sadeli was used mainly for decorating doors, windows and furniture, today these craftsmen also embellish jewellery boxes, photo frames

and other products. Artisans cut wood pieces and other materials, and glue them together, based on the plan, colour, shape, dimensions and the place of application. Rakesh Pethigara, Sadeli craftsmen says, "The quality of the craftsmanship is judged by the intricacy of detail of the geometric forms used in a surface. We successfully apply 250 pieces in one square inch

of a wooden surface. This art is distinct from inlay-work, as in we do not inlay wood but create a decorative layer for wooden products."  
» **Other crafts:** Being a major manufacturing centre for textiles, Surat is also known for **zari** embroidery and aari **khatla** work done using a long needle on fabric stretched over a charpoi cot-like frame called khatla.

## » GETTING THERE

Surat has an airport and a well-connected railway station. Surat is 211 km from Ahmedabad.

## » WHERE TO STAY

The Gateway Hotel Athwa Lines is Surat's premier five-star hotel. Other properties suitable for tourists are The Grand Bhagwati Surat and Lords Plaza Surat. Mid-budget and budget hotels include Hotel Golden Star, Sheetal Plaza, Budget Inn Hospice, Best Western Yuvraj, Hotel Ginger Surat,

Hotel Dreamland, Vishal Hotel, Budget Inn Bellevue, Hotel Central Excellency, Hotel Balwas, Hotel Yadgar, Embassy Hotel, Ostria Hotel and so on.

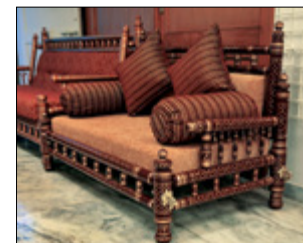
## » SHOP AT

The Petigara family runs a Sadeli workshop and a shop at 7/B 212, Dhobi Seri, Syedpura, Surat. Phone 09374542424. For embroidered fabrics and zari, visit the textile markets of Surat and the artisan workshops on Varacocha Road.

## SANKHEDA

» **Key Craft: Woodworking**, especially lacquered furniture Sankheda, in Vadodara district, is synonymous with its colourful wooden furniture, which is an excellent example of woodworking, woodturning, lacquer ware and hand-painting on wood. The furniture is made by an artisan community called Kharadi Suthar, using hand-held tools, lathes and simple machinery. The tradition of making hand-painted furniture in Sankheda is said to have started in the mid-1800s.

The Suthars turn blocks of wood on lathes, prior to shaving and smoothing, to achieve the characteristic rounded shapes of the Sankhedha furniture pieces. The pieces are then hand-



painted with colours like maroon, vermilion, green and brown, often picked out with gold or silver, in designs that range from floral patterns, peacock motifs and abstract drawings to delicate lace-like forms. A brush made from squirrel's hair is typically used for the painting. After painting, the pieces are coated with lacquer. Anil Kharadi, owner of a Sankhedha furniture workshop says, "The lacquer-ware style called

atishi is used for Sankhedha furniture. This involves a cast of violet dye over which an emulsion prepared from kalai or tin is used to paint the designs. The product is then glazed next with a hard stone called akik while being turned. This process is followed by imparting a transparent lacquer coat using a lacquer stick after which the kalai work beneath gleams to give the finished product a fiery golden-yellow effect. This process is what gives Sankhedha's furniture its distinctive metallic shine." Finally, the pieces are drilled to create space for tongue and groove or other forms of joinery required to fit them to make the required piece of furniture.

» **Other crafts:** Sankhedha is largely known for its furniture and low stools called **bajoths**, but the Suthars also produce smaller items like **dandiya** sticks, candle stands, powder boxes, toys, utensils and rolling pins. You can also get lacquered wooden temples at Sankhedha.

## » GETTING THERE

Sankhedha is about 47 km from Vadodara, which has an airport and a well-connected railway station.

## » WHERE TO STAY

Welcomhotel Vadodara, Hotel Express Towers, The Gateway Hotel Vadodara, Hotel Surya, Surya Palace, Revival and Sayaji are some of the good hotels of Vadodra, an ideal base for visits to Sankhedha.

## » SHOP AT

The main market of Sankhedha has showrooms of many leading workshops where the lacquer-ware is made.





The pithora or pithoro paintings on the walls of a Rathwa house near Jambughoda

### CHHOTA UDEPUR

» **Key Craft: Pithora painting**  
Chhota Udepur and nearby towns in Vadodara, Panchmahals and Dahod districts are the centres for many arts and crafts associated with tribal groups—like the highly ritualistic paintings called pithoras done by communities like the Rathwas. The pithora or pithoro painting is executed by the Lakahara group with the Badva officiating as the head priest for the associated rituals. This form of painting is done either to celebrate an auspicious occasion or to call upon Pithora Baba to solve problems like disease or drought. The ceremonies involve songs, dance, drinking and feasting. The legends and events related to this revered tribal lord dominate the pithoro.

The process begins with treating the walls with cow dung and white chalk powder, usually brought by unmarried girls. Powders, earth and vegetable colours are mixed with milk and mahuda flower liquor to prepare the dye for the pithoro in colours like yellow, indigo, orange, green, vermillion, red and silver. The brushes are prepared from bamboo, neem and other twigs that are frayed by chewing, beating and

other methods. The painting begins after the offerings are made to the lord. The Badva chanting, the prayers and tales go into a trance while they're being painted. The marriage of Pithora Baba and Pithori with processions of vibrant dancing people and animals dominates most pithoros. They also depict

#### » GETTING THERE

Chhota Udepur is about 102 km from Vadodara, which has an airport and is well-connected by train.

#### » WHERE TO STAY

The most tourist-friendly accommodations are heritage hotels like Kali Niketan in Chhota Udepur and the Home for Nature Lovers at Jambughoda, both run by

### SURENDRANAGAR

#### » Key Craft: Handloom weaving and textile embellishment

Surenranagar district has one of the largest handloom clusters in Gujarat. A unique and rare weave of this district is the Tangalio, which can be seen in Bajana, Wadhwan, Sayla and other villages in this region. The Tangalio weavers are adept at adding extra knots on the weft which create motifs and figures in a dotted pattern

life among the Rathwas—like musicians, dancers, protecting, feasting, men climbing palm trees, milking of cows, livestock at pasture, women churning butter, bullock carts ploughing a field. Animistic figures of bulls, horses, birds and tigers are part of each pithoro and live sacrifices are offered near the tiger pictures. Raja Bhoj with an elephant procession is another distinctive feature of many pithoros.

Today, the Rathwas are bringing the pithoro into the mainstream at craft fairs and other events, doing these paintings on cloth or paper.

» **Other crafts:** Dahod and Panchmahals Districts with their significant tribal populations, are excellent places for pottery and terracotta figures, made by potters called Kumhars. And also for jewellery made by the Soni community.

their respective owners who arrange tours of the tribal areas.

#### » SHOP AT

Visit the Chhota Udepur market, especially on Saturday when there is a weekly mart called Haat, to look for these crafts. The Bhasha Kendra at Tejgadh near Chhota Udepur can also be helpful to source the handicrafts.

on the woven fabric. Using this technique, artisans weave shawls, stoles and garments. The single Ikat done at various places in this district, including Somasar and Sayla, creates a less expensive version of the ultra-rich double Ikat Patolas of Patan. The weaver families go through continual resist drying of the warp threads before drawing them on the loom to weave the fabrics, mainly saris and stoles. The Bharwad women of Surenranagar



Single Ikat Patola, Sayla, Surenranagar district

district are adept at doing beadwork, attaching beads to a cloth by using needle and thread. They create decorative items, ornaments, garments, wall hangings and torans using

#### » GETTING THERE

Surenranagar lies 129 km from Ahmedabad and 107 km from Rajkot, an airport city. Dasada, Sayla, Wadhwan and other craft centres in Surenranagar district are easily accessible from Ahmedabad and Rajkot airports.

#### » WHERE TO STAY

Shiv Hotel is one of the modern hotels in Surenranagar city. Rann Riders, Camp Zainabad and Royal Safari Camp are

this craft.

In Dasada, about 15 families of semi-nomadic Mirs have started making beaded bangles for sale to tourists visiting the Little Rann of Kutch.

» **Other crafts:** Wadhwan is an important centre for *bandhani* tie-dye and metalwork. The utensils of Wadhwan, like the brass gadhas, are especially famous. Surenranagar district is also an important centre for stone carving. Dhrangadhra is well-known for its sandstone carvings.

eco-resorts near villages like Bajana and Dasada, which are craft producing centres. The Bell Guest House at Sayla is a heritage homestay facility.

#### » SHOP AT

Visit the markets of Surenranagar and Wadhwan, and the khadi emporia and manufacturing centres in Surenranagar, Sayla and other centres. Visiting the respective villages can also be a good way to buy the handicrafts directly from artisans.

### JASDAN

#### » Key Craft: Brass-embellished wooden chests and boxes

Jasdan is an important centre for the production of brass-ribbed chests called pataras or pataris and boxes embellished with metalwork. A patara is typically made of teak wood and contains eight or more drawers. Traditionally covered with brass and copper, now white metal is being increasingly used in their making. The box is strengthened with thick black metal pieces and decorated with thin pieces of white metal, embossed on the wood. The chests are lined with brass strips and brass stoppers are fixed. The chests were used



Silvercrafts at Gondal, Rajkot district

for storage and traditionally as dowry and trousseau carriers. Some really fine pataras can be seen in the museum collections of Hingolghad Castle and the Gondal Palace. Apart from the chests, the artisans of Jasdan and nearby villages produce ornate jewel boxes with brass and other metal decorations. » **Other crafts:** Rajkot district is well-known for its gold jewellery and silverware, including jewellery, boxes, furniture and

utensils made from silver. Traditionally handcrafted, now mechanisation has been introduced. Rajkot's wood artisans produce meenakari-style painted furniture. Jetpur is an important centre for block printing and screen printing.

#### » GETTING THERE

Jasdan is situated about 60 km from Rajkot Airport. The Gujarat State Road Transport Corporation (GSRTC) runs regular buses to and fro from Rajkot to other cities of Gujarat. Currently Indian Airlines and Jet Airways offer daily flights between Rajkot and Mumbai Airport.

#### » WHERE TO STAY

The heritage hotels of Gondal, about 42 km from Jasdan, are among the most tourist friendly places to stay near Rajkot. Rajkot has a number of star-rated hotels.

#### » SHOP AT

Pataras and jewel boxes can be bought in the main market and Lathi Bazaar of Jasdan. The Udhayog Bharati (Telephone: +91-02825-220177, 240377, Bhavan: +91-02825-223859 Fax No: +91-02825-220177 email: info@udhyogbharti.org) and Khadi Plaza of Gondal also sell the jewel boxes and smaller versions of the pataras. For silverware, Soni Bazaar and Palace Road in Rajkot are excellent places for shopping with well-known jewellery shops like Premji Valji, JC Kansara and Popular Art Jewel. The Darbargadh Road of Gondal also has silver workshops. For printed fabrics, visit the factory outlets in Jetpur.



## BHAVNAGAR

### » Key Craft: Metal utensils of Sihore

Sihore situated 20 km from Bhavnagar has a deep-rooted tradition of crafting metal utensils. The Kansara artisans of Sihore are known for the superbly crafted metal utensils, now mainly made using simple machinery. Working with brass, copper and bronze, the thalis and bowls made by the Kansaras of Sihore are popular with restaurants in cities like Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Surat. The Kansaras make several kinds of utensils, and also solid brass chains with ornate motifs for swings and other uses.

» **Other crafts:** Bhavnagar district is known for a variety of handicrafts, including Gohilwad Rabari and Koli embroidery, beadwork, bird hangings, Botad's pottery, Sihore's bronze and copper work, Palitana's metal-embossed woodwork and stonework, and Mahua's lacquer work. Botad has become an innovative centre for pottery, producing a variety of decorative terracotta items, contemporary products and ceramic jewellery.



Pottery, Botad, Bhavnagar district

### » GETTING THERE

Bhavnagar has an airport (which has flights from Mumbai and Surat) and a railway station. Bhavnagar is about 168 km from Ahmedabad and well connected via roads and train.

### » WHERE TO STAY

The Nilambag Palace Hotel in Bhavnagar is a deluxe heritage hotel. The Blue Hill, Apollo, White Rose and Jubilee are other good hotels. Vijay Vilas at Palitana is another good heritage option.

### » SHOP AT

There are workshops for metal vessels in Sihor. For terracotta products in Botad visit the potters called Prajapatis in the town.



Crafts of Bhavnagar district

## JAMNAGAR

### » Key Craft: Bandhani

Jamnagar is known for its bandhani, an ancient art of tie-dyeing which gets its name from Bandhan, the Hindi word for tying. Bandhani is an ancient technique of tie-dyeing that is intricate and time consuming.

The fabric is pinched together in selected places, according to the pattern lightly drawn or block-printed on the surface in fugitive colours that fade away and tied round with thread or twine before coating with material that resist the dye before immersion in a dye-bath. After the threads or twines are removed to reveal a pattern in the original colour, the process is often repeated to create a variously-coloured bandhani pattern.

It can take up to six months to a year for most saris to be completely dyed and even the simplest patterns can take more than a month before the sari is ready for the market. Entire families work at homes or at workshops in their residential areas and often family members develop their own specialised expertise in tying, dyeing red and other dark colours, working with pastel shades, etc.

In Gujarat, bandhani has always been a favoured bridal dress, specially the gharchola sari which is usually red or green in colour, patterned with yellow and white dots often depicting floral and other motifs. The trousseau of women from Saurashtra was rarely complete without a panetar sari in gajji silk with rich borders and central medallions, usually white



Bandhani tie-dye in Jamnagar

with red tie-dyed dots. The Bhatiya community of Jamnagar district preferred the traditional design called the zari kyara with square grid work of varied bandhani patterns on fine cotton depicting elephants, floral patterns, birds, dancing figures and other motifs.

The Jamnagar, Kutch and Surendranagar districts are known for their bandhani artisans but the Jamnagar bandhani is sought after because the ahores of the Rangmati and Nagmati, two rivers whose mineral-rich waters in the post-dyeing immersion process are believed to increase the richness and fastness of the colours.

Vanza Bharat of Vanza

### » GETTING THERE

Jamnagar has an airport and railway station. Jamnagar is about 302 km from Ahmedabad. It is well connected with road and train from Ahmedabad.

### » WHERE TO STAY

Hotel President is one of the premier hotels of Jamnagar.

Gopaldas Hirji, a bandhani specialist shop in Jamnagar says, "Today, the artisans of Jamnagar make saris and other fabrics that fuse bandhani with various other handcrafted surface ornamentations like the laheriya wavy tie-dyed patterns associated with Rajasthan, shibori patterns adopted from Japanese tie-and-dye techniques, hand-painting, embroidery, sequins, crystals. The bandhani odhnis, chaniya cholis and other products are also decorated with mirrors, gota and tassels to enhance their dressiness for special occasions."

» **Other crafts:** Jamnagar is known for its metal crafts, zari and jewellery.

New Aram and Vishal International are other popular hotels of Jamnagar.

### » SHOP AT

Chandi Bazaar, the Darbargadh area and New Super Market are good places to buy bandhani. Reputed shops include Mahavir Bandhani and Vanza Umar Ibrahim.

## DHAMADKA – AJRAKHPUR

### » Key Craft: Ajrakh block printing

Dhamadka has long been a centre for block printing, with the artisans called Khattries believed to have come here from Sindh in medieval times practicing the art form. Following destruction of the workplaces and residences of Khattries in Dhamadka by the 2001 Earthquake, an alternative site called Ajrakhpur was developed. These two villages are known for Ajrakh, an intricate art of resist block printing fabrics, using a resist, mordant or both. The artisans go through a lengthy process from treating fabrics to applying handheld wooden blocks with designs in relief to the finishing.



Ajrakh block printing, Dhamadka

### » GETTING THERE

Dhamadka is about 50 km from the Ajrakhpur. Ajrakhpur is located near Bhuj which is 299 km from Ahmedabad. You can get there by train or road from Ahmedabad.

### » WHERE TO STAY

Bhuj has a number of hotels like Prince, Ilark and KBN.

### » SHOP AT

Most of the artisan workshops have block printed fabrics for sale. The Craft Resource Centre (Khamir Craft Resource Centre, Bhuj Tel.:+91-2832-271272/271422 Email: info@khamir.org) at nearby Kukma can be a good place to get information about buying fine Ajrakh work.





Bhujodi woven blankets and shawls are well-known

### BHUJODI

#### » Key Craft: Weaving

Bhujodi is well-known for its Vankars, weaver families, who produce colourful shawls, traditional blankets like the dhabda, dhablas and floor coverings like woollen durries. The shawls and other products are distinguished by their intricate woven patterns, tight weaving and embellishments with tie-dye or embroidery. Many of the weavers of this village have won prestigious national awards for their work. The weavers work on a throw shuttle or a fly shuttle pit loom, or occasionally

frame looms.

The colourful shawls and durries of Bhujodi are usually woven with motifs which have been passed down through generations of artisan communities. While usually wool was sourced from the pastoral communities like the Rabaris, the weavers today also use cottons, Merino wools, acrylics and silks. The shawls may be embellished further with tie-dye, mirror-work embroidery and other handwork.

» **Other crafts:** Bhujodi is also known for Rabari and Marwada embroidery, woodcarving and other handicrafts.

#### » GETTING THERE

Bhujodi is a village situated 8 km to Bhuj, which has an airport and railway station.

#### » WHERE TO STAY

Bhuj has a number of hotels like Prince, Ilark and KBN.

#### » SHOP AT

The Hiraxmi Memorial Craft Park, (Near Bhujodi Village, Tel: +91-2832-240495-240496 Fax : +91-2832-240332 Email : info@hmcrafterpark.com) developed

by the Ashapura Group at Bhujodi, is an excellent place to watch craftspeople at work on various handicrafts and shop directly from artisans. In the village, most of the weavers retail their wares at their workshops. Shrujan, an award winning NGO, has its showroom for handicrafts in Bhujodi (Tel: 91-2832-240272 / 241903 / 394360. Fax: 91-2832-241902. www.shrujan.org)

### POSHINA

#### » Key Craft: Terracotta horses

Sabarkantha district, including villages like Poshina, are known for their votive terracotta figures that are very much part of the rituals of tribal communities like the Garasia Adivasis. The terracotta horse called Ghoda Dev has special place for rituals, considered a messenger for the gods in many cultures.

Symbolic sacrifice of terracotta horses for fulfilment of wishes is common, and at some sites you can see scores of terracotta horses that have stood here for decades. The potters called kumhars, make the various hollow parts of the terracotta horse on their wheels and then join them together, with some parts moulded by hand and added in grooves. These terracotta horses, elephants and other figures are becoming popular adornments for houses and gardens.

» **Other Crafts:** Poshina is also the centre for the making of silver jewellery and tribal adornments.

#### » GETTING THERE

Poshina is about 180 km from Ahmedabad airport. Direct buses are available from many places, including Mount Abu, 45 km away, Palanpur, 65 km away, Ahmedabad, and Idar.

#### » WHERE TO STAY

Darbagadh Poshina and Vijay Villas at Vijaynagar, both in Sabarkantha district, are tourist-friendly places for those who want to visit the tribal areas and potters.

#### » SHOP AT

Walk around the village of Poshina to find potters who make the terracotta horses and earthen ware. The village market can be a good place to buy tribal crafts.

## OTHER ICONIC CRAFTS OF GUJARAT



Agate crafts

#### » AGATE STONE ITEMS

Khambatt or Cambay produces jewellery and decorative items using polished agate stones. Agate, or Akik as it is called in Gujarat, is ideal for arts and crafts because of fineness of grain and brightness of colour. The stone is said to have been used for crafts in Gujarat from 7000BC and beautiful agate beads were made during the Harappan period in Lothal. Roman Emperor Nero is said to have coveted Gujarat's agate cups and Pliny mentions agate stones from the Gulf of Khambatt in his writings. The Siddis, a community of African origin, is said to have come to Bharuch district with leader Baba Ghor because of the agates found in this area. This stone is mined in the hills and riverbeds by tribal groups like the Bhils, and after sorting by colour and quality transported to Khambatt. The nodules are sun-dried and then heated to fracture regularly before the rough

cut, after which they may be re-heated with oxidizing iron or other materials that give it the reddish orange colour. After chipping and flaking, the agate bead goes for drilling and polishing. Lamp shades and lamp bases, decorative trees, small ornate items and jewellery are made using agate in different colours.

#### » NUTCRACKERS

Anjar is an important centre for metal crafts. The artisans, some of them ancestral swordsmiths, make exquisite nutcrackers fashioned in different mythical, human, animistic, bird and abstract figures, and knives with ornate handles and sheaths. Ganga Bazaar and shops in the main market of Anjar are worth exploring. Kothara and Reha Nana are other places for nutcrackers. Copper engraving is done in Panjar and Bhuj.

#### » MELODIC BELLS

Artisans called Luhars at

villages of Nirona and Jhura cast bells in different sizes that when played as a set produce musical notes. These bells are usually cast for the identification of cows when they are at pasture but now the Luhars also make bells for temples and modern uses like chimes. After crafting the cylindrical body and domed crown from iron, the family members coat the bell with copper. The sound of each bell depends on its design and the Luhars take pride in the music that their bells can produce when struck, though they themselves have no musical background.

#### » WOODCRAFTS

Kutch is well-known for its woodcarvings and other woodcrafts. At Nirona and Jhura, artisans called Vaadas make lacquered wood products. Bhujodi, Dumado, Ludia, Khavda, Kapurasi, Kuriyana, Jhinkada, Gorewali, etc are known for their woodwork. Idar is well-known for wooden toys. Himmatnagar and Bhavnagar also produce wooden toys. Other places for woodcrafts are Mahuva, Sawarkundla, Rajkot, Jamnagar, Junagadh, Khambaliya (Jamnagar district), Chittal (Amreli district), Tharad, etc.

#### » STONE CARVING

Traditional stone carvers called Sompuras work on different stones from sand stone carving in Dhrangadhra which is popular for images, latticework and carved walls to marble carving at Ambaji.



# Threads of power

Embroidery is the quintessential handicraft of Gujarat, a state identified with the colours of the heavily embroidered *chaniya cholis* worn by women during festivals like Navratri. Several communities in different parts of the state do fine embroidery, beadwork or appliqué. **Anil Mulchandani** takes a look into threads that create magic on clothes. Photographs: **Dinesh Shukla**

**F**OR VISITORS to Gujarat, the area most organised for textile and handicraft tourism is Kutch—the district where there exists a strikingly diverse variety of embroidery styles of different communities that use different stitches to create distinctive motifs. Judy Frater, director of Kala Raksha Vidyalaya says, “Differences in style create and maintain distinctions that identify community, sub-community and social status within the community. Each style, a distinct combination of stitches, patterns and colours and rules for using them, is shaped by historical, socio-economic and cultural factors. The Meghwals, Sodha Rajputs and other communities that migrated from the Sindh-Thar Parkar region, for instance, are known for Suf embroidery, which involves filling symmetrical patterns with tiny triangles and accent stitches,” explains Judy.

*Khaarek* is a geometric style that fills the entire fabric. *Paako* is a tight square chain and double buttonhole stitch. Rabaris and Ahirs are Hindu pastoral groups whose embroidery uses mirrors in a variety of shapes. Jaths are Islamic pastoralists who originated outside of Kutch and their women stitch an



Rabari embroidery at Dasada

array of geometric patterns in counted work based on cross stitch studded with minute. “The Mutavas, also Muslim herders, use minute renditions to create embroideries that are uniformly fine and geometric,” she says.

## RABARI EMBROIDERY OF DASADA

One of the closest places to Ahmedabad for an experience of the embroidery of the pastoral people is Dasada, situated 96 km from the city. Dasada and its nearby villages,

are the home for Kharapat and Vadiyara Rabaris.

### What the embroidery is like

The Kharapat Rabari embroidery comprises of various forms of interlacing with liberal use of mirrors and herringbone stitching, and sparing use of chain stitches for figures. Traditionally, large herringbone stitches create dotted patterns on the *sadlos*, the head covering of Kharapat and Vadiyara Rabari women. Kharapat Rabaris do embroidery on their clothing, wall decorations and bullock cart ornamentations, and girls still do some embroidery for their trousseau and dowry bags. Today, some enterprising Rabaris have started producing fabrics for more contemporary dresses, bed and table linen, etc for tourists visiting the region.

**Places to stay:** Rann Riders offers tourist-friendly accommodations at Dasada. Royal Safari Camp and Camp Zainabad are other places to stay in nearby villages, where also you can see and buy Rabari embroidery.

## AHIR AND RABARI VILLAGES OF KUTCH

Travelling onward from Dasada towards Bhuj, you enter the Kutch region and come to the villages of Dhaneti and Paddhar, which have substantial Ahir populations. Ahirs are traditionally a pastoral group that identifies itself with the gopi culture of Lord Krishna but today many of the Ahir men are in businesses like truck transportation. Several Ahir women in villages of Kutch, like Dhaneti, Padhar, Tappar, Lodai, Ratnal, etc, continue to do embroidery for their own use and as a second source of household income.



Ahir Embroidery at Dhaneti

### ● Ahir embroidery

Ahir embroidery is known to be largely in a flowing style, with peacock, floral and other motifs, and circular patterns. They use ladder chain stitch, herringbone stitch and round mirrors. Visiting villages that fall on or near the highway to Bhuj you can watch Ahir women doing embroidery, and you may be able to buy embroidered fabrics and clothing directly from them.

New Dhaneti is an adjoining village where you can watch women doing embroidery at ‘Parmath’, 106, Ramkrishna Nagar, (New Dhaneti), Taluka: Bhuj - Kachchh. Phone: 02832 273453, run by an Ahir woman named Laxmiben.

### ● Dheberia Rabari embroidery

Paddhar is also home to the Dheberia Rabari, a pastoral group that also lives in villages like Makhiyan, Bhardoi, Mamuara, Nadapa, Raydhanpar, Varnora and Dudhai. The Dheberia Rabari embroidery is known for its highly skilled work and accent stitches, but many of them no longer do embroidery because of a ban imposed by elders in the community. You may still be able to get some fine work with detailing in these villages. Some of their border motifs are derived from Sindh and the princely courts of Kutch.



● **Kachchi Rabari embroidery**

A short distance from Paddhar towards Bhuj, and just about 12km short of the Bhuj city-centre, Bhujodi is home for some Kachchi Rabari families who do fine embroidery using chain stitch to outline the patterns and a regular sequence of mirrors and accent stitches to fill and decorate them Rabaris also use decorative back stitching, called bakhiya, to decorate the seams of blouses and jackets. One of the finest places to see and buy Kachchi Rabari embroidery is the picturesque village of Tunda Vandh. The Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya in Vandh is an institution of design for traditional artisans, where you can get information about the different embroiderers of the village.

● **Waghadia Rabaris embroidery**

Travelling east, past Rapar, you come to the Vagad region of Kutch. The Waghadia Rabaris cover dresses with embroidery, some of them showing influences of Mochi-embroidery. This area is off the trail for most tourists and it is not as easy to shop here as in the Ahir, Dhebaria Rabari and Kachchi Rabari villages near Bhuj.

**BHUJ TO KHAVDA EMBROIDERY AND CRAFT TRAIL**

The highway from Bhuj to Khavda goes through the grasslands of Banni, dotted with villages of pastoral and artisan groups known for their embroidery. Kala Raksha Trust at Sumrasar Shaikh has a museum featuring a collection of heirloom embroidery, which can offer an insight into the different embroidery traditions of the Kutch region.

Sumrasar Shaikh is an



Meghwal Harijan embroidery in Banni

important centre for the Soof embroidery of the Sodha Rajputs, as are villages like Kuran, Loriya, Bibbar, etc on this route. The Meghwal Harijan is an artisan group spread across a number of villages like Bhirandiara, Sadai, Dumado, Dhrobana, Kuran, Tuga, Andhau, Gorewali, Dhorodo, etc, and practices embroidery styles like Soof, Paako, Kharek, Kambira and Kudi which vary with the villages. Garasia Jath women, in villages like Sumrasar Jathwali, stitch an array of geometric patterns in counted work based on cross stitch studded with minute

mirrors. They are known for their superbly embroidered yokes. Dhaneta and Fakiriani Jaths embroider tiny bars of tight satin stitch with radiating circles of a couched stitch.

● **Places to stay**

The place to stay in the Banni region is Shaam-e-Sarhad at Hodka. This endogenous resort is decorated with traditional handicrafts. The village of Hodka is home to the Halepotra pastoral group and the Meghwal Harijans. Besides fabrics, this village is good for embroidered leather products. West from Hodka

are the villages of Dhorodo and Gorewali, excellent places for the minutely detailed embroidery of the Mutwas. The Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan runs a centre at Khavda, which can be a good place to source fine embroideries of various groups under their Qasab label. Khavda is also a centre for Lohana embroidery and embroidered leather crafts.

● **Other embroideries**

Travelling west from the Banni grasslands towards Nakhatrana, you will find a number of villages for Samma, Kabira and other embroideries.

Apart from embroidery, the villages of Bhirandiara, Hodka, Gorewali, Dhorodo and Dumado are known for their appliqué or patchwork. The Jadeja Rajput women of villages like Bibbar also do appliqué work.

Further west, villages like Tera are centres for Sodha Rajput embroidery, and there are many Jath villages.

Bhuj is an organized place to shop for products carrying embroideries. The Shroff Bazaar is lined with shops selling embroidered goods. Senorita Boutique and Bhoomi Handicrafts are among the reputed places in the market and Station Road areas. The Hiralaxmi Craft Park at Bhujodi is an innovative social initiative of the Ashapura Group. A cluster of traditionally styled cottages, set in a pleasant park, is given over to various artisans by rotation to showcase their skills and sell their handicrafts. This can be a good place to look for embroideries.

**BATIK IN MANDVI**

At the coastal town of Mandvi in Kutch, the Shri Vivekanand Gramodyog Society is working on promoting batik in this region. Batik is a cloth that uses a resist dye technique. The artisans use this technique to create batik cloth which is stitched into a variety of garments that can be bought

at the outlet of the society in Mandvi. For more information log on to [www.vgsbatik.org](http://www.vgsbatik.org)

**EMBROIDERY IN NORTH GUJARAT**

Banaskantha district is the home of Rabaris, Chaudhari and Kanbi Patel, Choradia Ahir, Choradia Rabari, Kanabi Patel, Harijan, Bajania and other communities that do fine embroidery and appliqué. This district has many interesting styles of embroidery and is also known for its Mochi Bharat, embroidery done mostly on leather items like footwear, and Aari work. Patan and Mehsana districts are known for the embroidery of Patanwadi Rabaris and other communities. Not being on tourist routes, there is a lack of organized places to shop for embroidered products in these districts. DWCRMA Mahila SEWA Association (BDMSA), an organization of SEWA, is active in Banaskantha district and supports the artisans.

**EMBROIDERY, APPLIQUE AND BEADWORK IN SAURASHTRA**

Several communities of Junagadh, Rajkot, Bhavnagar and Jamnagar districts of Saurashtra do excellent beadwork, embroidery and appliqué. The exquisite embroidery of the Kolis and the Gohilwad Rabaris of Bhavnagar district, and of the Bhopa Rabaris of Jamnagar district, are specially known. Intricately done beadwork is done by pastoral groups like the Bharwads almost throughout Saurashtra. The markets of Bhavnagar, Gondal and Rajkot are excellent places to shop for these handicrafts.

In the Okhamandal area, between Dwarka and Okha, Bhopa Rabari and Charans



Meghwal girls embroidery clothes and bags for their trousseau



have been organised into self-help groups. "While much work was being done for the community benefits, it was in 2002 when we felt that there was a need to upgrade the work we were doing for the women of pastoral communities like the Rabaris, Ahirs and Charans, who do excellent embroidery, and other groups like the Lohanas and Harijan who are also very good at embroidery and applique," says Alka Talwar, Head Community Development at Tata Chemicals, "to increase this we felt it was important to have a brand value for the product, and capacity building to ensure better design and quality for an improved market for the brand, Okhai, signifying the Okhamandal region."

The Okhai brand has a wide range of clothing for men and women, accessories like embroidered hang bags and home décor products like cushion covers and bed linen. They have a centre at Mithapur where women gather for appliqué work.

Prof. Dungarba Ker's NGO, Gramya Vikas Trust, Opposite S.T. Stand, Varvala Vaghriyaas, Vasai, near Dwarka, also supports the artisans of Okhamandal (phone 02892-34309, 02892-34791)

Apart from Saurashtra, many NGOs and self-help groups are promoting appliqué crafts in other parts of Gujarat. One of the important initiatives is that of the Tribhuvandas Foundation in Anand that is supporting rural women involved in appliqué work.

## BLOCK PRINTING

Handblock printing is an intricate and painstaking process for embellishing fabrics. Wood-carvers first cut out the pattern in relief on the wooden block. This block is then dipped



An exquisite beadwork piece at the palace in Gondal



Applique of Okhamandal



Leather embroidery at Hodka

in colour and used to print the design on the fabric. It is pressed firmly and steadily on the cloth, ensuring a good impression by striking it smartly on the back with a wooden mallet. The second impression is made in the same way. The printer takes care to see that it fits exactly to the first, a point which he can make sure of by means of the pins with which the blocks are provided at each corner and which are arranged in such a way that when those at the right side or at the top of the block fall upon those at the left side or the bottom of the previous impression the two printings join up exactly thus continuing the pattern without a break. Each succeeding impression is made in precisely the same manner until the length of cloth is fully printed.

Ahmedabad is an important centre for block printing, done mainly in the Jamalpur area which is also known for its hand-dyers. Pethapur, Gandhinagar, is known for its art of Sodagiri Prints which is potentially a dying art.

Jetpur is one of the well-known places for textile printing, and here too there are artisans who do hand-block printing and discharge prints, though it is largely known for its screen printing. Rajkot, Wadhwan-Surendranagar and Jamnagar are other places to look for printed fabrics.

At Deesa, some artisans turn out printed fabrics for rural dresses.

### ● Ajrakh block printing

The villages of Kutch, like Dhamadka and the recently

created Ajrakhpur, are known for their block prints specially Ajrakh. Ajrakh, is a complex form of block printing which requires 14-16 stages from beginning to end. The fabric is washed and de-starched, then dipped in a solution of Myrobalan before dyeing. The part to be left original is printed with resist, which is made of lime, gum and water. The red portion is printed with alum solution. Portions not covered with resist absorb the background colour usually blue, alum for red, molasses and rusted iron produces the black colour. In the 'Minakari' process of printing, lime or clay resists is avoided and the white portions of Ajrakh turn out light blue. Dr Ismael is one of the master artisans of Ajrakh in Kutch.

At Tera in Kutch, artisans do discharge prints, a chemical process whereby the fabric is first dyed with one color, then printed with another. It is rolled and steamed which causes the original dye to disperse under the block print, giving a two tone design.



The intricate art of block printing at Jetpur, Rajkot district

## OTHER TEXTILE CRAFTS

● **Brocade:** Gujarat has for long been known for rich brocades made using Zari or tinsel thread of gold. Surat, Patan and Jamnagar were specially known for their gold Zari brocades, though these are not common anymore. Mehsana is famous for ashari, the twill weave brocade design replicating the Mughal gold coin. In cities like Surendranagar, old brocades are reused to create furnishings and wall pieces.

● **Sujani:** Sujani in Bharuch is a kind of quilt made by weaving, and not by quilting as in eastern India. Sujani is a unique craft in which a quilt is made on a handloom with the double cloth-weaving technique. Small pockets are woven on to the loom and filled with cotton while weaving and are locked on to the loom itself. Each square inch is woven with the cotton of one pod to fix the quilting in each square. It is an imperiled craft with only a few practitioners.

● **Kota:** The Rathwas weave cotton fabrics with patterned borders, called Kota.

● **Stuffed cloth toys:** Camels, horses, elephants, birds and other toys are made using colourful fabrics, often embellished with beadwork, embroidery, tinsel, metallic ribbons, etc. Juna Wadaj in Ahmedabad is one of the major centres for making these cloth toys, which are sold in markets like the Law Garden night market in the city. Bhavnagar is famous for its bird hangings. Delightful dolls and stuffed animals are

made in the Banni region of Kutch. Chhota Udepur is the other place to look for such stuffed cloth toys.

● **Tangaliya or Tangalio:** This is a form of weaving where extra threads are used to create patterns. Traditionally done for shawls of the Bharwad shepherds, the weavers of Surendranagar district are now making tangaliya fabrics for more contemporary uses. Vasatari village near Sayla, Wadhwan and Bajana are known for their Tangaliya.

● **Khadi:** Khadi refers to fabrics made from handspun yard and woven on handlooms. Surendranagar district has some of the major handloom clusters for khadi. Ahmedabad district has important khadi producing centres like Arnej for cotton khadi and Ranpur for woolen khadi. Gondal's Udhog Bharati has become known for successful experiments with khadi products for the contemporary market, sold at Khadi Plaza on the highway. Gandhiji's institutions, like the Rashtriya Shala in Rajkot, are encouraging khadi.

● **Woolens:** A variety of products from sheep wool, and also goathair or camel hair, are produced in Kutch and Saurashtra, including blankets and shawls called dhabla, floor coverings called durries, etc. Dhablas are made in Porbandar by a few weavers. Villages of Kutch like Bhujodi, Adhoi, Kukma, Vadva, Kotay, Kuran, etc are known for dhablas, durries, etc.



# Arty lineage

From the wooden toy makers of Idar to the weavers of Surat, handicraft techniques have been passed down from father to son, mother to daughter for generations. Here's looking at three famous families that are continuing age-old traditions and getting recognition for their skills. By **Anil Mulchandani**  
Photographs: **Dinesh Shukla**

## THE CHITARAS OF AHMEDABAD

In the Vasna area of Ahmedabad, a few artisans produce hand-painted ritualistic cloths, called *Mata Ni Pachedi* and *Mata Ni Chadarvo*. One of these artisans is Sanjay Chitara, who together with his mother, Manjuben Chitara, and brother, Vasant, have all won national awards for '*kalamkari*', the art of drawing with a hand-held pen.

Sanjay Chitara says, "My father, Manubhai, and his family used to prepare the *Mata Ni Pachedi* and *Mata Ni Chadarvo* cloths for rituals in a distinctive painting style passed on through generations of the Vaghari community, using colours extracted from vegetables, flowers, herbs and other natural source. The *Mata Ni Pachedi* and *Mata Ni Chadarvo* cloths are offered to the mother goddesses especially during Navratri. They become scaffoldings for temporary shrines created during the festivals and then are immersed in the rivers. The labour involved in the intricate painting of *Pachedi* and *Chadarvo* made the hand-painted ones unaffordable for farmers, pastoral people and those who were economically

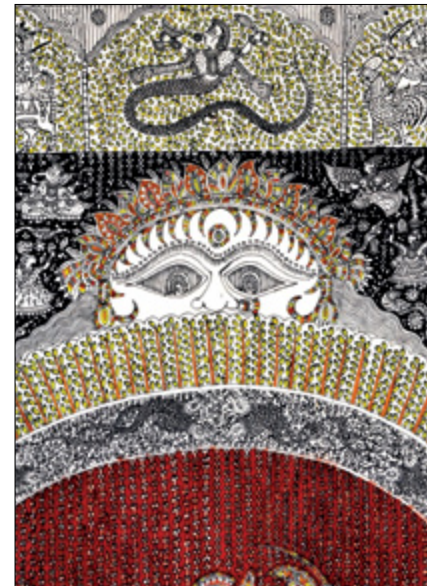


backward." Thus, the hand-painting method was replaced by the use of mud-blocks to replicate the drawings and make multiple copies for sale, and then durable wooden block. The block printing is done according to the patterns given by the artists and are re-used for production. "To give you an indication of the difference in price between a hand-painted and a block-printed *Mata Ni Pachedi*, we have sold hand-painted pieces, which were three to four-feet-long for ₹30,000 while block printed ones sell for just ₹500 to ₹1000. By the 1970s, only a few pieces were hand-painted in a year," he says. Sanjay Chitara's family has a block printing workshop but also continues to make a few hand-painted masterpieces. "While we won state awards for *Mata Ni Pachedi* between 1969 and 1979, we found the work lucrative when the Gujarat State Handicrafts Corporation gave us an order for block-printed stationery, bed sheets, table linen and

wall hangings to be sold at their Gurjari stores in 1984. We were encouraged by textile designer Villoo Mirza, who was involved with this corporation, to continue hand-painting *Mata Ni Pachedi* for those willing to buy them as—wall decorations, collectibles or for their artistic value and to turn to block-printing for our regular income. Secular paintings and prints gave us a market beyond the religious Hindu textiles we were producing," says Manubhai Chitara, Sanjay's father. At their house, Manubhai, his wife Manjuben, his sons Sanjay and Vasant, their respective wives Kailash and Pinky, are all involved in the various processes that go into making each one of these paintings—preparing the fabric, making the dyes, drawing, painting and fixing. The dyes are made from natural materials—madder and alum for red, henna for orange, pomegranate and mango extracts for yellow, indigo for blue, iron and molasses for black and so on.

*Myrobalan* (a tropical tree with nuts) extract, herbs, tamarind seeds, castor oil are used in the dye-making and dyeing process. "After treatment with *Myrobalan* and applying alum for the red, the fabric is immersed in the Sabarmati river in Ahmedabad, after which the other colours are applied," Vasant Chitara explains.

Their paintings are exquisitely detailed and make perfect art pieces for those willing to spend ₹15,000 to ₹50,000 for three to four square foot wall pieces or about ₹3000 for smaller ones. "One that measured 35ft x 4ft was commissioned for a house by interior designer Amala Shah and her client also bought one of the national award winning pieces. The result of our expertise and artistry was that I was one of the master crafts persons and weavers selected from all over the country for National Awards in 2000. While my brother Vasant won the National Award in 2001 and my mother Manjuben, in 2004.



Sanjay, Vasant and Manju Chitara's *Matani Pachedi*





Father son duo: Govindlal and Satish Prajapati



Intricate patterns on the wooden blocks



Mukesh Prajapati with son, Avdesh and nephew, Bhavesh on the job

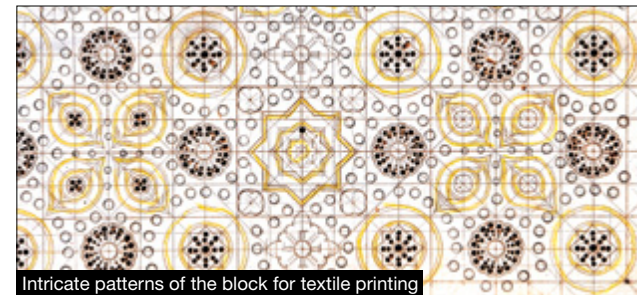


The transferring the design to the blocks

leading centres for the making of woodblocks used for textile printing. According to Govindlal Prajapati, one of the craftsmen from Pethapur, "Pethapur has been a centre for carpentry for centuries. The carpenters realised the potential for making wood blocks for printing and since then it has been the main source for wooden blocks. I have been making blocks from the age of 12 working under a master craftsman, the late Hiralal Gangaram Gajjar. Hiralal's descendant, Ganshyamlal Popatlal Gajjar, is a good craftsman and runs a block making unit." Maneklal Gajjar has won a National Award for his wooden blocks.

"There were about 300 craftsmen during my youth but with the growth of modern occupation opportunities many families gave up this handicraft. Today, there are just 12 craftsmen in Pethapur who follow this tradition," says Govindlal.

Govindlal who is currently in his mid-60s, recalls that Pethapur in his childhood was also a centre for block printing textiles, much of which went



Intricate patterns of the block for textile printing

to Java and Sumatra. This tradition has also unfortunately died over the years.

Govindlal today runs his workshop with his son, Satish Prajapati. "Apart from my son, I also encouraged my nephews to learn the art of carving wooden blocks. My nephew, Mukesh Prajapati, is one of the country's finest wood block makers. He runs his workshop with his sons, Avdesh and Pragnesh, and his nephew, Bhavesh—all three of whom are good carvers, and other artisans in his employ. Prakash Prajapati, who is also a relative whom I encouraged, has turned out to be a good craftsman and runs a workshop with employed artisans," he says beamingly. Govindlal says the surface of the teakwood

block to be used for printing is planed and smoothed to be completely flat. The drawing is transferred by means of sticking a paper on it. "For geometric patterns we use graph paper while for symmetrical, floral and other designs we do it on regular paper. The pattern is then carved out on the block with holes created to let out air at the time of pressing the fabric on the fabric. When ready the pattern on the woodblock appears like a high-relief carving. "Pethapur is a national hub for woodblocks used for textile printing. The four or five workshops in the village supply carved wooden blocks across the country from wherever the art of textile printing using hand-held

blocks is still practiced. In Gujarat, we supply blocks to Kutch, Jetpur, Ahmedabad and other centres of the state for woodblock printing, discharge prints, *batik*, etc.," says Govindlal.

### THE SALVI WEAVERS OF PATAN

The Patola textiles, made using the double *ikat* technique are extraordinary pieces of art. Double *ikat* is a technique where both the warp and weft threads are resist-dyed to create the patterns of textiles before they are set on the loom. Considered the premiere form of *ikat*, Double *ikat* requires the most skill for precise patterns to be woven and is so complex and time consuming to create that they are rarely woven, except in a few places in India, Japan and Indonesia. The *Patola* is one of the finest of Double *Ikats*. "Today, only three families in Patan and one in Vadodara make the Double *ikat Patola*. We all belong to the extended Salvi family, which has separated to form different family workshops. The four families are those of Kantilal Lalubhai Salvi, Sevantilal Lerchand Salvi and Kantilal Lerchand Salvi in Patan, and Mafatlal Dayalal Salvi who moved to Vadodara," explains Satishchandra Salvi. "According to our traditions, we believe that our ancestors came from Jalna in Maharashtra and moved to Patan when it was the seat of power of the Solanki Rajput ruler, Kumarapal, who reigned over Gujarat in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This could explain the resemblance of historical *Patola* patterns to the paintings in cave temples like those of Ajanta. About 700 weaver families are said to

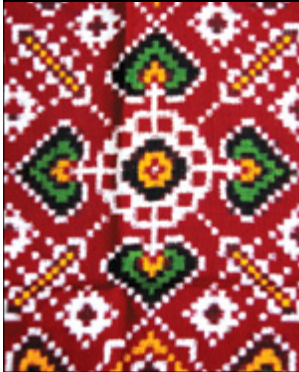
### THE PRAJAPATI BLOCK MAKERS OF PETHAPUR

Pethapur is one of India's





Double *Ikat Patola* of Patan



have migrated from Jalna and nearby places in Karnataka to Patan. Double *Ikat* weaving thrived in Gujarat where we enjoyed the patronage of wealthy Jain and Hindu mercantile families, and the princely states. Being a time-consuming art, many members of our Salvi family began to move away for this business for other prospects. In the last two decades, many excellent weavers like Chhotalal Salvi, Vinayak Salvi, Bharat Salvi, Kantilal Salvi, etc have been awarded on a national level. My father, Kantilal Lalubhai Salvi, won the National Award in 1992.”

Satishchandra Salvi, who was selected for the Sant Kabir Award 2009 says that the entire family is involved in the complex process of weaving the *Patola*. “At my workshop, my brother Paresh and I work with the help of our sisters and wives, to go through all the processes from resist-dyeing of the

threads to the completion of the weaving. Similarly, in Vadodara, Mafatlal, his son Kanubhai and his two daughters, Neepa and Hetal, are carrying on this tradition,” he explains. Most of the silk is brought from Bangalore and some, imported. The designs are usually drawn on graph paper and then copied on to the yarn. The number of threads required is calculated according to the design. And this must remain constant till

the entire weaving of the sari is done, as the measurements are very minute.

The process of tie-dyeing the threads can take up to 75 days. The dyed threads are then strung on the loom in a sequence that makes the design become visible. The weft threads are wound on to bobbins and fed through the bamboo shuttle. Working on a hand-operated loom that is slightly inclined to make it easier to move the shuttle, three to five people work to complete a single sari which can take anything between four to six months to complete. The artisans have to carefully monitor the tension of the warp and weft threads during the weaving process. The completed saree has the same pattern on both sides. “Since vegetable dyes are used, we can assure that the fabric of the *Patola* may tear but the colour will never fade for centuries,” says Satishchandra Salvi proudly.

# Extraordinary art

The skilled artisans across Gujarat are trying to conserve the age-old art forms of Rogan, Namda, Weft Ikat and Mashru from decline. **Anil Mulchandani** finds that these artisans and art forms need as much of love, respect and support as any popular art from across the country

Photographs: **Dinesh Shukla**

**T**HE DISTRICT of Kutch probably boasts one of the highest number of villages in India that are known for its skilled arts and crafts. They have become synonymous with embroidery, block printing, *bandhani* tie-dye, woodcarving, pottery and so on. However, even in this district with active NGOs, government support for artisans and craft-based tourism, some of the handicrafts are still imperilled and being practised by only a few artisans. Four such crafts are—Rogan, which is the art of painting cloth using castor-based colours, Namda, products made from a non-woven cloth that is hand-produced by matting, condensing and pressing variously coloured woollen fibres—Single *Ikat* weaving and Mashru, a warp-faced satin weave fabric meant to replace silk but with the same sheen.

## ROGAN ART, NIRONA

Rogan is the art of decorating fabrics with dyes using a castor oil base. The process begins with boiling the castor oil till it thickens. When the consistency is right, the artisans apply the paint on the palm of one of their hands and rub both palms together



Rogan, the art of painting fabrics with castor-based colours at Nirona

so that the body warmth creates a stringy gooey paste from which the colour can come off on an iron rod or wooden stick, like threads. With these ‘threads’ of paint, the artist makes an outline on one half of the cloth and then folds it to repeat the process on the other half. After that,

the outlines are filled with colour. The price of the piece depends on the intricacy of the design. A three sq foot multi-coloured piece with intricate motifs, which takes two or three months to make, could cost ₹3,000. Whereas a cloth-bound file folder with simple designs of the same





Rogan, the art of painting fabrics with castor-based colours at Nirona

size would just set a buyer back by anything between ₹200 and ₹3,000.

According to Khatri Abdulgafoor Daud, a national award winning Rogan artisan, the art of Rogan paintings probably originated in Persia as it means castor-based in Persian. "I don't know when this art form came to India, but I do know is that it was practised across Sindh and Kutch with Nirona, Khavada and Chaubari being major centres during my childhood in the 1970s. Some of the Rogan artists received awards from the British rulers in the past. Over the years, it went into decline," Khatri explains.

"Rogan is a technique of painting, which was used to produce trousseau of ghagra-choli-odhni and household linen like bed sheets, cushion covers and quilts for weddings in certain communities. As this is a laborious and time-consuming art, and involves working with terribly smelling oils, the Rogan painted pieces became expensive and the communities started looking at cheaper options like printed fabrics. The work was also seasonal and once the wedding season was over we

had to go out to work in my fields," he says.

Also, the hard work involved in creating the Rogan colour, working with foul-smelling oils and then painting a fabric using the colour—put-off many of the younger generation from pursuing this art. Khatri himself gave up the art and went to work at a printing and dyeing factory of a Kutchi entrepreneur in Mumbai. He worked there until 1982-83, when the droughts in Kutch that caused widespread misery opened up a new avenue for the artisans.

Khatri explains, "The Gujarat government began to realise the importance of home-based industries and handicrafts in a land where agriculture and livestock-related work was so monsoon dependent. They began to encourage the craftsmen and women working from home to develop their handiwork as part of the drought relief measures. During this period, my uncle Khatri Arab Hasham, was among the artisans awarded at the district level in Kutch. This gave an encouragement to the art and my family told me to come back and continue

the ancestral tradition, as my father and uncle could not execute some of the really intricate designs because of age and health. Since then, we have worked on developing this art to go beyond its traditional uses. We have made masterpieces for wall hangings and decorations, saris, tablecloths, wall hangings, skirts, which are a huge hit with foreign and domestic tourists. We work on both silk and cotton cloths. A saree, which took eight months to paint, was valued at ₹60,000 and tourists offered me almost double the amount, but I did not sell it for sentimental reasons. It had won me a national award in 1997. His brother, Khatri Sumar Daud, too won a national award in 2003 while his uncle had won a state award in 1991. "We are generally dependent on tourist flow to Kutch for our livelihood. Most of our buyers take pieces as collectibles when they know Rogan is a rare art today. This flow is limited to the August to March tourist season with November to February being the peak and we spend the rest of the months creating our



Karim Mansuri with a Namda creation

pieces," says Khatri. He hopes that NGOs and government authorities concerned with crafts will give them more opportunities to demonstrate and exhibit overseas and across India. "I have heard of artisans trying to pass off raised block prints as Rogan instead of the castor-oil based freehand work that is the actual art," Khatri elaborates. "I hope to get the opportunity to demonstrate the real art to the world."

**For further details contact: Abdul Gafoor Khatri, Nirona, Phone: 09825753955**

### NAMDA, MUNDRA

According to Karim Umar Mansuri, Namda was an art that was practised mainly in

the eastern areas of Kutch near Rapar. "We moved to Mundra for better opportunities as the ports and big towns are nearby. This craft of felt-making is one that not many people can understand as it involves creating a fabric without weaving or using adhesives," he explains, "and while there were six or seven Namda makers in Mundra alone a decade ago today only a few people make these products in Mundra and Nakhatrana."

Karim obtains the wool from shepherds and makes the fibres into variously coloured hanks. He then wets the wool, tightens and presses the fibre to create a yarn. Felting happens because every strand of wool is

covered by tiny scales. The primary mechanism of felting is abrasion. As the individual strands get rubbed together the scales catch on each other and the effect is that the whole thing shrinks in an irreversible way to make a square. The second layer is then laid by moving the wool threads at a right angle so the end fibres connect to the fibres of the previous layer. Karim says artisans like him have mastered the direction in which the wool is to be moved to connect to one another and the required friction that would cause 'felting'. The number of layers would depend on the final thickness of the mat to be achieved. After the mat is made, it's kept for drying and then rolled to be pressed to make the wool shrink. A mat could take three to five days to be ready.

"The main use of these felt mats were in prayer rooms—whether for puja or namaaz, but these days there are machine made versions available and some people sit on stools or sofas when praying, which has diminished the market for Namda," says Karim. "I have been trying to create other products like woollen carpets, jackets, telephone bases, wall pieces, cushion covers and caps to keep the art alive but it is not easy. Recently, an artist from Australia, Carol Douglas, gave me an order to make some products in interesting designs like a sea turtle." He says that a Namda mat goes for ₹200 or ₹300. "I am hoping there will be some NGO support or design interventions that will help me keep this art alive," hopes Karim.

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## WEFT IKAT, ANJAR

Kutch was once a thriving centre for Mashru and *Ikot* silk weaving, but today these weaves are on the decline in the district. Dharamshi Maheshwari, owner of Dharam Patola Art, Bhuj, says, "I come from a family of Mashru weavers but diversified into Weft *Ikot* weaving. Today, the Mashru weaving centres in Mandvi, Kutch are closed because the weavers do not find this a feasible occupation any more. We are practically the only family in *Ikot* weaving left in the entire district of Kutch." Weft *Ikot* is a process of resist-dyeing the weft yarn to pattern the fabric. The process of resist-dyeing is similar to *bandhani* or tie-dyeing of fabrics. "Weft *Ikot* is a very intricate process for the weaver because the variance in colour of the weft means precisely delineated patterns are more difficult to weave on the loom," says Dharamshi. "My entire family, including my father, brother and the women, are involved in the process of tie-dyeing the silk threads according to the overall pattern to be achieved,



Mashru from Mandvi

drawing the threads on the loom, and finally weaving the fabrics. The resultant fabric is similar to the richer and more expensive Double *Ikot* patola of Patan. Today, single *Ikot* weaving is restricted to a few families in Rajkot and Surendranagar districts and our family in Kutch, and double *Ikot* weaving to Patan's Salvi families. Therefore, rare arts like *Ikot*, Rogan and Namda should be encouraged before they are lost."

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## MASHRU, KUTCH, PATAN AND SURAT

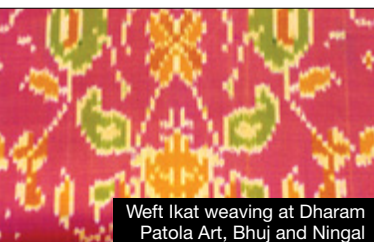
Mashru weaving came into existence because the Shariat forbade Muslim men from wearing pure silk next to skin. In response to this requirement, weavers created Mashru, a warp-faced satin weave fabric which has a glossy surface of silk, while the reverse face has cotton touching the skin. The tradition of Mashru is said to be influenced by weaving traditions prevalent in Iraq and Arab countries. The weavers



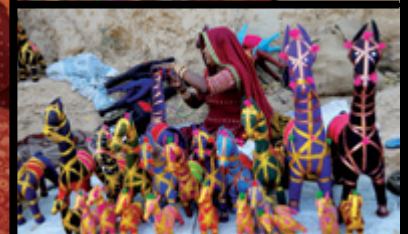
Mashru weaving in Patan

say that Mashru is derived from an Arabic word which means 'permitted'. These fabrics grew during Islamic rule in India and Mashru was exported to Persia, Egypt, Turkey, and other Middle Eastern, Mediterranean and African countries. While Mashru was once woven at various centres in India, its production has declined and is now restricted to Gujarat, mainly Mandvi in Kutch, Patan in North Gujarat and Surat in South Gujarat. At the time of this going to press, however, the workshops in Mandvi were not in production.

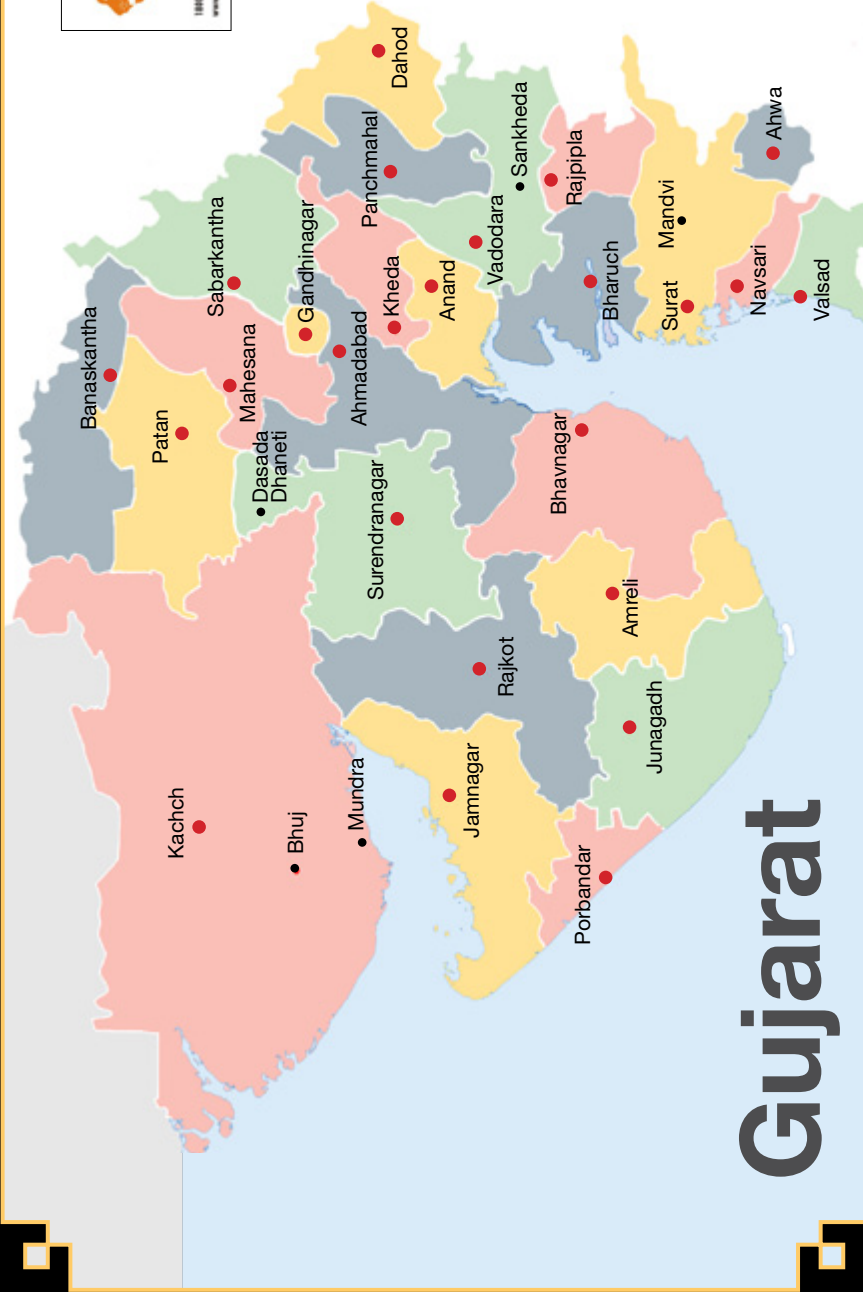
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Weft *Ikot* weaving at Dharam Patola Art, Bhuj and Ningsal







# Gujarat

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