

COMMUNITY: JAT

EMBROIDERIES: JAT-GARAASIYA, JAT-FAKIRAANI, JAT-HAAJIYAANI, JAT-DAANETA

Elders say that about 500 years ago their **Jat** community lived in Medina in Arabia. From there, the community scattered to different parts of Europe and to Iran and Afghanistan. Some also settled in a place called Halab, near the Baluchistan border.

All was well till the king of Halab wanted to marry a Jat girl. What happened next is best narrated by a Jat elder:

The locals of Halab must have sung the praises of our Jat women to the king; they must have said ... *See how beautiful they are, see how beautiful their clothes are, they deserve to be in a palace, you should marry one of their daughters.*

We would never give one of our daughters in marriage outside our community. But how could we tell this to a king? How could we be rude and impolite, when we were living in his land? So we told the king ... *We will give you our daughter on one condition: give each of our 10,000 families a beautifully decorated horse or camel. Let one of your men deliver the animal to each house.*

The king agreed. We perched a drummer high up on the mountain. When he saw the king's men approaching with the decorated animals, he alerted the community. We killed the king's men - and ran away to Sindh with the horses and camels. We stayed a long time in Dhrobeni village in Sindh and then we moved towards Banni in Kutch.

The king of Kutch was warned that we could overthrow him, there were just too many of us. But the king welcomed us. He divided us into smaller clusters.

The king gave land to one cluster and involved them in ruling his kingdom. They became the Jat Garaasiya subgroup. He did not collect taxes from them. The *maaldhaari*, the cattle-rearers among us who stayed at the border area, gave *daan* - tax - to the king. They became the Jat Daaneta. We also had nomads amongst us. They did not have land or cattle, only camels. They lived simply like fakirs, devoting their lives to Allah. They became the Jat Fakiraani. An ancestor from this cluster went on the Haj pilgrimage. His descendants and followers came to be known as Jat Haajiyaani.

A much revered character in the story of the Jat community is Mai Bhambhi.

We call her Mai. Mai Bhambhi. Her uncle, Sai Chirkitsa Baba, was our spiritual leader when our ancestors were in Drubeni in Sindh. Mai rode her own camel without any assistance from men.

Once our ancestors moved away from Sindh, Baba sent Mai to all the places where we Jats lived. She crossed mountains, forests, rivers to come to Banni. She talked about Islam, about Allah, but most of all she wanted to make sure that we had not forgotten Jat philosophies and the Jat way of living.

The faith people have in Mai is boundless. She is not just Mai of the Jat community. People from every community and religion and from all over Sindh, Kutch and Gujarat visit her shrine in Taaknaasar in Kutch. A *medo* - festival - takes place once a year at the shrine. We belong to Mai, but Mai does not belong only to us. Mai belongs to everyone.

The Jat community claims that it was Mai who taught embroidery to the women. Mai told them that embroidery was for personal use; embroidered garments that have been worn cannot be sold. An old garment cannot be recycled or given to anyone to use. When the embroidered garments have outlived their use, they have to be buried, or deposited in flowing water or in an abandoned well. This practice continues to this day.

It was in the late 1980s that Shrujan began working with the Jat community near Jura and in Sumrasar Jat vaand. However, when Shrujan wanted to extend the work to the Jat women in Kunathia, the women were reluctant even though they were in need of an income. They said ... *Mai has told us to respect embroidery. Selling embroidery to make money would be disrespectful.*

Chanda Shroff asked them whether they worked on other people's farms. They said that they did and that they were paid for their labour. Shrujan would do the same thing, the women were assured. It would pay them for the labour involved in embroidering. This sat well with the craftswomen. As long as it was only their labour that they were being paid for, they would not be going against Mai's wishes. Today Jat Garaasiya and Jat Fakiraani craftswomen embroider for Shrujan. But they always make the distinction... *This is not our embroidery; this is our majuri, our labour.*