

## COMMUNITY: MUTVA

### EMBROIDERIES:

**PAKKO:** PAKKO, CHOPAD, DHORAN, KAARO BHARAT, MUKKO, PAKKE JO GOLAADO, PHULADI, TAKKE JO JUNO, GOTANV  
**KACHCHO:** KACHCHO, KATARI, KHAARAK, KAMBHIRI, SOOF, KACHCHE JO GOLAADO, NERAN, BIDO, PADE JO BHARAT

The Mutva community migrated from Sindh to Banni - a remote area in northern Kutch, on the Indo-Pakistan border - about 400 years ago. Banni was then a vast grassland with little or no human habitation. The Mutvas came with their animals - cows, buffaloes, horses and camels.


A Mutva elder tells us what happened:

When our elders asked King Desalji of Kutch for refuge, he said ... I am giving your cows and buffaloes a land called Banni. You live there and safeguard the border.

To this day, we Mutvas and the people of Banni have kept this promise. We have grown up hearing stories of Mutva men patrolling the border on horseback and many of them losing their lives after putting up a brave fight against the dacoits who came from across the border.

Today the Mutva community - with a population of about 7000 - lives in eight villages in Banni. Rearing and breeding cattle is their main occupation - and their passion. Some Mutva families also breed and train horses. Traditionally, whoever had cattle also had horses. Although the horse culture is now slowly disappearing, horses remain dear to the Mutvas - special saddles and reins are made for them, and women embroider elaborate blinkers and special coverings for them.

In the early 1970s Chanda Shroff had gone to Banni in search of Mutva embroidery. The first village she reached was Dhordo. Facing severe hardship due to several years of drought, the women there were more than willing to undertake embroidery to earn an income. Also, their household duties had dwindled; there were no cows and buffaloes to bathe and milk twice a day, no milk to process to make ghee and buttermilk. So the women embraced embroidery as if it were a lifeline and produced work of the highest quality.



Chanda Shroff remembers the contribution of Mahmood Iliyas from Dhordo. She happened to see some of his drawings and asked him whether he would do *aarekhani* for her. So far only women had done the drawings on the base fabric. Mahmood created many new designs. The precision and fineness of his aarekhani demanded that the craftswomen render extremely fine and tiny stitches. This made Mutva embroidery even more spectacular.

By the mid-1980s, however, the quality of the embroidery began to decline. In 1998 when Shrujan initiated the *Design Centre on Wheels* project, Chanda Shroff told the craftswomen that they had to rise to the challenge of restoring Mutva embroidery to its former glory.

Master craftswoman Hafizabai of Gorewaali village took this daunting task upon herself:


I knew *Kaki* (Chanda Shroff) was disappointed with the quality of our work. She knew what we were capable of. Why could we not do it again?

I knew of 20-25 young girls from my village who did good embroidery for their personal use. Maybe their embroidery was not so good when they did it to earn money. But I knew they had superior skills. So I told them ... *We have to do the museum panels. Here is someone who appreciates good work and is willing to pay. You can command the price, but your work has to be outstanding.*

For me it was not about money. It was about getting appreciation, about our embroidery getting the praise that it deserves.

Rukiyatbai, Fatmaben, Lalluben and other master craftswomen also played a major role in motivating, teaching and supervising the women of their villages to create panels that were museum-worthy. Mahmood designed most of the panels in several Mutva embroidery styles.

The mother-daughter team of Rukiyatbai and Fatmaben has also helped our researchers discover and document the stitches, motifs, mirrors and styles that belong to Mutva embroidery. Says Fatmaben:



The Shrujan researchers would bring me pictures of our embroidery and ask me all sorts of questions. Whatever I knew I told them. What I did not know, I asked my mother. Unlike the other women in our community, she used to leave our village whenever she wanted to attend a wedding. There she would meet women from that village. So I told her to get the older women to recall the embroideries they used to do when they were young. This way, I learnt a lot. We discovered more and more stitches, more ways to embroider a mirror, and so many new styles.

This finding-out process went on for one or two years. I thought we had discovered all that there was to discover about our own embroidery.

Then one day, the researchers brought me pictures of a *kanjari* that had some stitches that I had never seen before. I burst out ... *Didn't our ancestors have any other work? Why did they make our embroidery so complicated! If only they had played with four-five stitches, my life would have been so much easier!*

My outburst was half-hearted. Of course I am happy about the treasures that we have discovered, the heritage we have regained. I mastered the new elements quickly; and I taught them to the 18 girls who used to attend my class, and even to girls in other villages.

Most of the women in our community cannot go out - not to any *medo*, festival, not even to the market. At least this activity will keep them nicely occupied. Because the arena of embroidery has expanded, the girls have become smarter, more knowledgeable. They will also earn more. That is *khaaso*, good!