

COMMUNITY: RABAARI

EMBROIDERIES: DHEBARIY-RABAARI, VAAGADIYA-RABAARI, BAKHIYAWAARU BHARAT

There are several subgroups of the Rabaari community in Kutch. Embroideries of two of these subgroups are displayed here and described below.

Rabaari craftswomen make profuse use of embroidery. They embroider their own clothing and their children's as well. They embroider certain garments worn by men as well as home decorations and a variety of bags. Camels are also adorned with a number of embroidered decorations.

The embroidery seen on women and children is big, bold and vigorous. It uses mainly the *saankdi* stitch to create stylized motifs that are large and bold. Two colours - white and yellow - feature prominently. Spike-like details called *daant* encase and highlight the motifs. Medium to large mirrors of varied shapes feature in abundance. As do colourful trims and accessories such as beads, shells and buttons.

The most common motifs are bird and animal motifs, flower-inspired motifs and the figurative motif of the *mahiyaari*, the milkmaid. There is also the *aambo*, the tree-of-life motif and the *ardho chandar*, the half-moon motif.



Men wear white garments. Fine, delicate embroidery called *bakhiyawaaru bharat* features on the front and back yoke of the shirt called *kedhiyu*. The main stitches are *bakhiyo*, *tappo* and *trajako* - all rendered in vibrant colours. Mirrors are not used, but elaborate tassels in white provide the final flourish.



Elaborate, detailed and colourful camel decorations are rendered on white, heavyweight, cotton base fabric. They feature applique mixed with embroidery and embellished with shells and beads. The applique is of a very high quality. Thin, fine strips of applique are manipulated to create shapes that resemble the abstract motifs of Rabaari embroidery. However, no mirrors are used while creating this appliqué.

Home decorations and bags use white, cotton base fabric. The largest home decoration is the *ochhaad*, the long cover for quilts.

The bags are of different sizes - ranging from 15 to 200 centimetres in length. Some bags are heavily embroidered; others have embroidery only on certain areas. All the bags are further ornamented with colourful cloth tassels or with button, bead and shell details. Some bags also feature appliqué work.




Bag
બટવો



Bag
કોથરી

Despite this strong embroidery tradition, Dhebariya Rabaari women no longer practise the craft for personal use, because community elders have prohibited the practice. However, they retain all the elements of their traditional style in the products that they embroider in order to earn a livelihood.



Embroidery is an integral part of the lives of the craftswomen. And the pursuit of excellence is a strong motivator. Craftswomen acknowledge that the criteria for evaluating creative excellence vary from one embroidered piece to another. They have, however, identified a set of indicators by which the technical excellence can be assessed.

The indicators of technical excellence in Rabaari embroidery are:

- use of medium to large mirrors of various shapes
- stitches are rendered densely
- embroidery is so dense that very little base fabric shows through
- stitches used for embroidering the mirrors are rendered tightly so that maximum area of the mirrors is exposed.