

## COMMUNITY: RAAU NODE

EMBROIDERIES: PAKKO SOOF, KACHCHO SOOF, KACHHO KACHCHO, PAKKO PHOOLADI, PAKKO PAKKO, KACHCHO NERAN

The Node community hails from an area called Vaanga in Tharparkar in Sindh, Pakistan. All 15 subgroups originally resided there. They were farmers, zamindars and cattle rearers.

When and why did this community come to Kutch? A Node community leader tells us:


The story goes that about 700 years ago a king asked to marry one of our girls. As per our custom, girls could not marry outside the community; so our Vadera, leader, wanted to refuse the king. But he knew that the king was not going to take kindly to having his proposal rejected. His wrath could even lead him to wage war against the Nodes.

Our Vadera sought advice from Bhat Raja. How could he protect his community without giving in to the wishes of the king? Bhat Raja was a high-ranking Hindu official who was entrusted with the task of keeping a written account of the history of our community. He advised that the community should leave Sindh with their cows, buffaloes, horses and camels.

And that is what our ancestors did. Many Node families came towards Kutch and settled in Andhau, Baniyaari, Bhadiya, Khaarad and other villages. Other families went straight to Barmer taluka in Rajasthan. In both Kutch and Rajasthan, we continued our occupation of animal husbandry. Even today, our men go all the way to Saurashtra, Rajkot, Jamnagar to sell our prized 'Sindhi' buffaloes. The Nodes are also fond of horses; some families rear Arab horses.

Although the Node community is spread across many villages of Kutch, it is with the craftswomen of the **Raau Node** community in Lakhara - a remote village in the eastern corner of Banni - that Shrujan has been working since **1999**.

The only way to reach Lakhara is to take the long route via Bhuj. The main source of livelihood here is rainfed farming. Families also rear livestock. But unlike several other villages in mainland Banni, where the dairy industry has had a significant economic impact, Lakhara remains relatively unaffected. Access to formal learning continues to be limited and literacy remains low.



The women of this community practise a set of distinctive embroidery styles in which there is an abundance of floral motifs. The embroidery is seen on the clothing of women, men and children. The craftswomen also create applique quilts as well as embroidered horse decorations.

Despite their strong embroidery tradition, the women of Lakhara were initially unwilling to do embroidery for commercial use. It took them a long time to accept that they possessed skills that could actually earn them an income.

Chanda Shroff talks about the beginning of her journey with the Raau Node craftswomen of Lakhara:

Hussainbhai of Dhamadka village used to sell old embroidered pieces. We bought some pieces from him. Some of those pieces had embroidery that we had never seen before. I liked this embroidery a lot. It had a charm and boldness that set it apart from other embroideries. Hussainbhai told us that it was the women of the Node community that did this embroidery.

He took us to Lakhara where we met Vilayatben. She knew *aarekhani*. And it was with her that I started work with this community.

We were disappointed with the initial pieces that the women embroidered. It was difficult to make them understand what we wanted. How could their personal embroidery be so endearing and their embroidery for Shrujan be so lacklustre?

We brought six Node craftswomen by car to our Shrujan campus in Bhuj. The women said they had never travelled so far, and certainly not by car. At the campus, we showed them how the traditional embroidery done by craftswomen of other communities was used on contemporary products such as kurtas, cushion covers, jackets and handbags. These pieces gave them an idea about how it was possible to play with many colours and still create a sense of harmony and balance.

After this, there was a definite improvement in quality.

Soon more women started asking for work. And once again the quality went down. When I tried to find out the reason for this I was told that the eyesight of many women was not good. So an eye camp was organized in Lakhara and spectacles were given to the women who needed them. After this the quality of the embroidery improved once again. Even women who were much older started embroidering again. And their embroidery was good.

Once we were assured of quality, our designers created many new designs with the participation of some of the craftswomen. These efforts to enlarge the design bank increased the visibility of Node embroidery on Shrujan products and also created a greater demand for Node embroidered products.

From a time when doing embroidery for commercial use was looked down upon, to the present, when almost everyone embroiders to earn a livelihood, the Raau Node craftswomen have come a long way. Although they no longer practise embroidery for personal use, their embroidery tradition remains strong, and even the younger generation has learnt to embroider the traditional designs

We asked the craftswomen if they were excited about coming to the Museum and seeing the visitors admiring their panels.

*Our face is more or less covered. So people won't know which one of us has done which piece. They will only know that some community called Node has done them.*

But you will still come to the Museum, won't you?

*Maybe.*

Will you bring the young girls?

*Yes, we will come if you send a car for us.*