

COMMUNITY: RABAARI

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

There are many subgroups in the **Rabaari** community - the Dhebariya Rabaari, Vaagadiya Rabaari, Kaachi Rabaari, Bhopa Rabaari, Maarwaada Rabaari, Dwarkawaada Rabaari, and Choradiya Rabaari. All the subgroups identify themselves first and foremost as Rabaari - *ek dor e bandhaayela Rabaari*, one thread binds us all.

Irrespective of subgroup, Rabaari men and women lead a nomadic life in search of pasture with their sheep and their camels. Says a Rabaari woman who has spent most of her life out in the open:

Animals are our life. If our animals are happy, we are happy. Four-five families, we travel together with our belongings in a *joond*, caravan. We halt for the night; in the morning, we eat some *rotla* and set out again. If grass is good we may stay five to six days, otherwise it is a different place every day. Today's generation is not very happy to be wandering like this in the heat and rain and cold. There are many difficulties. If our animals get into a farmer's field, we get shouted at. Sometimes they beat us and we also have to pay a fine. And where is the land for grazing? Things are changing . . .


Embroidery has a large presence in the lives of the Rabaari. Clothing of men, women and children is embroidered. As are household items such as *toran*, *ochhaad*, *latkaniya*, *chaakda* and *theli*. Camels are also adorned with embroidered covers.

In the early 1990s, elders of the Dhebariya Rabaari subgroup decided that the women would no longer practise embroidery for personal use. They could embroider to earn an income. But the practice of embroidering their clothing and household items was 'banned'.

The women explain the reasons for this:

When a girl got married, she had to take her *aanu* (trousseau) with her; she would not go to her husband's family home until it was ready.

Our girls used to spend years and years doing embroidery for their *aanu*. And so the girls remained in their parental homes and did not join their husbands even when they reached the age of 30 or 35.



Also, it was very expensive. Not all families can afford a lavish aanu. Is it right to send some of our daughters to their in-laws with a big aanu and other daughters with only a small one?

Now nobody can create aanu - now it is equal.

Sometimes we feel bad that our daughters will never wear embroidery on their clothing. But they have found a way to make their clothing look grand. They use fabrics with bright designs; they put ready-made colourful borders. So they don't feel that they have not worn embroidery. Sometimes what they create looks better than embroidery!

This does not mean that we have forgotten our embroidery. We still embroider to earn money. Our day goes well if we embroider. People recognize our community from our embroidery. We take our embroidery to exhibitions and fairs, we also get orders. With the money we improve our houses, use it to get our daughters married . . .

The Dhebariya Rabaari craftswomen are especially proud of the textile panels that they have embroidered for the *Design Centre on Wheels* project. By the time this project was initiated by Shrujan, they had stopped embroidering for personal use. But their work was outstanding. As a master craftswoman proclaimed:

Our daughters can't match the skill that we showed on those big pieces. Women of my generation started embroidering when we were young girls. We had so much more experience. We had embroidered our aanu as well.

Now all that is gone.