Embroidery, Mirrors and Beads: Elements of Rural Gujarati Textiles

Intricate embroidery embellished with mirrors is a hallmark of rural Gujarat, in northwest India, as well as the neighboring state of Rajasthan and certain areas of Pakistan. Gujarat is one of the primary textile-producing states of India; its capital, Ahmedabad, is the national center of industrial textile production for internal needs and foreign markets. In rural villages, however, much textile work is done in the home. Mill and hand loomed cloth are often combined in a single outfit or garment of a village woman, who assembles the fabric into any one of a variety of garments or textiles, and turns each into a unique creation reflecting her religion, tribal group, social standing and personal taste. She achieves this through use of traditional needlewoman’s skills learned from her older female relatives, combining silk and cotton thread, glass mirrors (called abhla), shells, beads, metal objects, buttons, and even seeds, assembled to create a dynamic visual and cultural statement in cloth.

Western Gujarat is primarily desert terrain, and the multicolored embroidery and shining mirrors of clothing and household textiles must create a luminous contrast to the barren surroundings in the tiny rural villages (called gams). Few of these rural clans have any chance of ever achieving great wealth in their lifetime. Most earn their livings as farmers or herders; others as small scale merchants or craftsmen. Cultural ties within regional caste subgroups, called jatis, are strong, and marriages usually take place between members of the same subgroups of a jati, called a nat (Elson 1979: 14). Because the herders are largely nomadic, it is somewhat difficult to pinpoint their exact home territory; for centuries subgroups have splintered off and migrated with their herds of sheep, goats or cattle, so it is not uncommon to find Muslim Bannis, for example, in several regions within or even outside of Gujarat.

Because of this ancient tradition of migration, we find that skills, designs and forms employed in textile arts have their origin for the most part outside of Gujarat. For example, the Rabari, a Hindu herding group, probably migrated to their present area of Kutch in the sixteenth century from Marwar in Rajasthan. Their needlework skills are attributed to association with the Mughal courts prior to that time. The mosaic stone inlay of Mughal architecture is likewise seen as the inspiration for Rabari designs. Today, mirrors are pressed into mud walls to decorate house interiors. The Rabari shepherds adapted the designs and techniques of courtly embroidery to fit their materials, “by adapting new stitches and modes of design, and abstracting the older motifs as they drifted further into the past,” the Rabari gradually made mirrorwork “an integral part of being Rabari” (Frater 1975: 47). These courtly origins can be traced by frequent use of motives no longer common to Rabari life, such as great flowering trees, parrots, and peacocks, none of which thrive in the desert of Kutch. Certain textile forms, such as the toran, also have an ancient origin, which is discussed further below.

The mirrored and beaded objects in the Allen Collection are primarily from the Kutch, Surindernagar, and Saurashtra or Kathiawar regions of Gujarat; a few are from Sindh in Pakistan or were produced by Sindhi refugees living in India. Some of the main jatis in the Kutch region that create mirrorwork are the Hindu groups Ahir, Bansali, Kanebi, Rajput, Rabari, Bhardwad, Harijan; the Muslim Banni, who are eighteen groups including the Haliputra, Raisiputra, Mutva, Sumerah, Jehjah, Pathan, Samejah, Hingorah, and Node, as well as the Gracia and Dhanetah Jats, and the Baluch. Some of these jatis live in nearby Kathiawar or Saurashtra, but the primary groups in that area are the Kathi, the Mahajan (including Lohana), and the Raiput. In all areas professional embroiderers, or Mochi, also work but they use mirrors infrequently.

Recently mirrorwork has achieved popularity as a commercial and export item, with an unfortunate corresponding decline in quality. Unfortunately because for the rural tribes who create mirrored and beaded textiles, the objects have traditionally held significance beyond the decorative enrichment of their surroundings. Certain specific items must be ornamented with mirrors and exchanged between individuals and families in connection with life passages, most specifically, marriage. The objects are customarily created by females as an important and irreplaceable component of the dowry. Although other elements of the dowry are given by the bride’s family, such as jewelry, brass vessels or furniture, the dowry textiles must be created by the bride, with the training and assistance of her mother. For the wife will continue to be responsible for domestic textile production throughout her marriage; not the least of these responsibilities is teaching the traditional skills to her daughters (Elson 1979: 11-13; Frater 1975: 48).

In the past, child marriage was the rule rather than the exception, the wedding couple often being as young as ten. Although the bride and groom are now commonly about sixteen, child marriages do still take place. Therefore the embroiderer’s craft must be learned by girls from a very early age, in order to be able to create sufficient textiles for the dowry by the time of marriage. Among some groups, such as the Rabari, the groom wears embroidered garments during the wed-
ding, which are made by his female relatives. Among the Ahir, the groom’s family gives mirror-embroidered clothing to the bride’s family to seal the engagement, and a second set at the time of marriage. The bride and her family also contribute clothing and other goods (Eison 1979: 26). In addition to garments, certain household textiles are mandatory among many Kutch and Saurashtra clans. For Hindu groups such as the Ahir and the Rabari, among others, seven is the number of textiles commonly created: four types of wall hangings, two types of bags, and a quilt cover.

Perhaps the most distinctive object prepared for the dowry is a hanging textile called a toran. These objects are made in several different sizes and techniques. They are hung over or to the side of the doorway of a house (see Pl. 1.35). The customary form for the toran is a rectangle about four or five times wider than it is long, to which are appended seven or more pointed tabs a little shorter...
than the rectangle. The tabs may be done in the same technique or a different one from the rectangle. The shape of the toran itself is a link with the courtly roots of mirrored embroidery. An eighteenth century miniature painting in the Watson Collection (No. 2.98, not illustrated; Chandra 1968: no. 114) has a probable Bundi provenance, in present day Rajasthan state. The elegant scene shows a woman reclining on a patio, from the roof of which are suspended multicolored tabs. These tabs strongly resemble those seen on the toran, which suggests that this common household textile has its origins in Rajasthani architectural practices. This suspected cultural link is further borne out by the tie-dyed patterning on the woman’s shawl or blanket, a technique commonly used on Rabari shawls, among others. Indeed the Rabari maintain their origins are in Marwad, in Rajasthan (J. Jain 1980: 47).

The Allen Collection includes a number of torans; most are primarily mirrorwork, while one is beaded. Of the four torans illustrated (Pls. 1.36, 1.37/Col. Pl. 1.4, 1.38 and 1.39), two are Rabari (Pls. 1.36 and 1.37/Col. Pl. 1.4). The smaller of the two (Pl. 1.36) features typical Rabari designs of parrots, several types of flowers, and trees, all within a border of lines of zigzags, lozenges, interlaced crosses and mirrors, with a more elaborate zigzag outermost, as shown in the detail. All these are executed in mirrorwork with a variety of stitches used. The tabs, however, are in plain or tie-dyed fabric.

The common parrot design shows a bird present only in the memory of the Rabari, for it dwells in the jungle and not the desert. Here it appears in a clearly delineated form. Its head, wing and belly are filled in with appropriately shaped mirrors. The beak, body and tail are decorated with an embroidered zigzag pattern and its feet are clearly depicted in embroidery. On many Rabari textiles, however, only a very abstracted parrotlike form can be made out, presented as a simple outline (see Pl. 1.40, near top center). This tendency toward extreme stylization in Rabari drawing is seen as reflecting their “close and prolonged contact with Muslim peoples” (Frater 1975: 53-55).

Two main types of large flowers are depicted on this toran. Each has a large round central mirror held in place with a blue or pink metal circle, which is stitched down around the edge. The more common technique is to secure the mirrors with a tightly executed buttonhole stitch. It is probable that the unusually large size of these mirrors dictated the use of the metal circles, which were also desirable for their decorative qualities. In the large daisy-like flower on the left end of the toran rounded and straight petals alternate. The other three are more circular in form, with a net-like stitch used to outline the pointed shape of the petals, each of which is decorated with an interlacing stitch. (For further information on stitch terminology, see Irwin and Hall 1973: 201-02.) Small scattered blossoms or stars also appear, and in the upper right, a flowering tree.

Two types of zigzag designs are also featured, a simple embroidered one and a more complex one with mirror infill, each point topped with a smaller diamond. The zigzag design is known as kunghi, and is meant to symbolize the top of the fortress wall, or by extension, protection of any sort (Frater 1975: 51-53, fig. 8). This protective association of the toran relates to its place above or beside the doorway. Its presence there is seen as auspicious for guests and inhabitants alike; as an
alternative to or in combination with the use of textiles, wooden posts and lintels may be carved, or mud walls or furniture may be embossed with similar designs (Dhamija in Marg 1965: 48b; J. Jain 1980: 63-54, figs. 72-75).

On the larger toran (Pl. 1.37/Col. Pl. 1.4), although the use of machine stitching to assemble the components is prominently visible, the quality of the piece is nonetheless high, which is seldom the case. It features the same layout of embroidered band above tabs of other types of fabric. In this case, the tabs are made of silk using various techniques for patterning. One fabric is musru, a warp-faced satin featuring a striped pattern. Small amounts of ikat patterning (see Chapter 3) are incorporated, creating subtle color changes within these stripes. This is particularly obvious in the second tab from the left and right. Rabari women use musru fabric in their skirts and blouses as well (see Pl. 1.43). Another type of patterning used is tie-dye, in the two tabs on either side of the center tab. The green spots at the intersections of the diamond shapes are probably overpainted.

Flowers dominate the design field in the rectangular band here as in the smaller toran discussed above. Only one type of round blossom is seen, which features many small mirrors in concentric circles, alternating with embroidery, rather than the one large mirror used in the smaller toran. Between these larger blossoms are complex designs which could be a form of flowering tree, but more likely represent the village temple (Frater 1975: 52, figs. 11-13). Each small Rabari village has a temple to the Mother Goddess, particularly in the form of Momai Mata, riding a camel. (For further discussion of the Mata, see Chapter 1.) The rounded form seen here which resembles a flower is probably meant to indicate the domed top of the temple. This central band of patterning is enclosed in border similar to that on the smaller toran, but the outermost row is of flowers rather than kungri. Similar border patterns are used on Rabari skirts (Pl. 1.43). In the upper left corner is a small trident, also associated with the temple of the Mother Goddess. The small tassels of narrow strips of cloth bound with metallic or silk thread are commonly found on torans and sometimes on blouses or hats. This toran is lined in loosely handwoven fabric; the smaller Rabari toran is unlined.

The third toran illustrated here (Pl. 1.38) is quite different in motives but similar in format to the first two discussed. It is also from rural Gujarat, but probably was produced by one of the numerous Muslim groups living mostly in the Banni area of Kutch. It shows no recognizable figurative forms, relying exclusively on geometric patterning. The main color used for the designs and for outlining is orange, on a white background, together with numerous other strong bright colors of silk embroidery floss. The main design element in the large rectangular band is a diagonally quartered square, the crossed arms being composed entirely of mirrors. The border designs are less involved than on the Rabari pieces. The appended tabs are all decorated with mirrorwork also, in a number of geometric patterns all outlined in orange. Tiny shells and tassels are appended to the corners of the tabs.

Elson says that of the Banni Muslim clans, only the Jehjah and Kaskele see make torans as part of the dowry. Numerous other items are apparent more important, with the preferable or auspicious number of objects for the marriage being twenty-one (Elson 1979: 69-70). No published illustrations of torans like the one In Plate 1.38 have been located; however the designs and techniques correspond to those on Jat skirts (Marg 1965: 46) and a bokani or turban band worn by a Meghwal Banni man (J. Jain 1980: 103, fig. 167).

Many of the Muslims of Banni region are known as maldhari, meaning cattle owners. They raise cattle for milk but also for meat, which is not permissible for Hindus. In addition, many of them, particularly the Meghval, are leather crafters. Some Jat groups are maldhari, while others are engaged in farming for their livelihood (J. Jain 1980: 87).

The fourth toran illustrated here (Pl. 1.39) differs from the other three in that it is not embroidered at all, but is executed in beadwork technique. Beadwork is apparently a more recently developed craft than embroidery, to which it is closely related. It owes its origins at least in part to the availability of Italian beads, which were traded into India through Africa not before the early nineteenth century. The earliest bead artisans were probably the professional Mochi embroiderers (discussed below under Costumes) working in the Kathiawar or Saurashtra area. The figural element in Kathi beadwork has continued to predominate, mixed in recent years with bolder geometric patterns, such as the swastika motif used as a frieze here. Opaque beads (chidiya mot) in white, blue, yellow and light green are combined with translucent ones (sakana mot) in red, green, dark blue, and pearly white to provide visual variety. The entire piece is backed in pink cotton. Each pendant of the toran features a different design, and backed with sheets of red or gold metal foil for added luster.
The techniques of beadwork, referred to by Dhaky as knitting, is more accurately termed netting. The beads are strung onto cotton thread and worked in sequences of three or more creating the pattern in small diamonds. The edges of the designs are therefore always angular. (This discussion is indebted to the work of M.K. Dhaky, in Nanavati’s *The Embroidery and Beadwork of Kutch and Saurashtra*, 1966: 61ff.).

In addition to the torans shown here, another type is made by the Kanebi. Rather than a band with dependent tabs, it is an inverted V-shape made in one piece (see Elson 1979: fig. 17).

Several other types of wall hangings are important in rural Gujarat and are commonly used for major dowry textiles. One such hanging is called a sanka. This is one of a pair of textiles placed on either side of a doorway. The “L” shaped projection at the bottom points away from the door. Sankia are usually used in combination with a separate toran above the door, or made in one piece with it (sakh-toran), especially when made in beadwork (Nanavati 1966: Pls. 93-95). A pair of sanka in the Museum of Cultural History–UCLA (not illustrated here; see Elson 1979: fig. 14) features designs of women, elephants, flowers and birds. It was made by the Ahir, a Hindu farming group living in Kutch, whose designs and techniques are extremely similar to those of the herding Rabari groups; the Ahir were reportedly cattle herders in the past and trace their origins to “the cowherd god Krishna” (J. Jain 1980: 72-74). Similar-shaped textiles are made by a subgroup living in Saurashtra, the Boricha, which lack the appended tabs, as do those made by the Kanebi of Saurashtra (J. Jain 1980: fig. 110; Nanavati 1966: pl. 58).

1.39a

1.39b

1.39 Doorway hanging (toran)
a, overview; b, detail of right two tabs
Kathi people, Kathiawar region, Gujarat, mid twentieth century
7½ x 37 in.
Netted with beads
White, multicolor
1983.6.2
Another textile hung in the home is the tarpudio, which is hung over windows. A tarpudio is made by the Kutch branch of the Kanabri, another Hindu farming group; it is one textile contributed by the bride and her family toward the wedding. Among the Ahir, like the Kanabri, the groom's family also must contribute embroidered clothing and other items to the dowry. The designs used by the Kanabri are also similar to those of the Ahir; this tarpudio features flowers, parrots, and peacocks. Although mirrors are not used here, they are featured in many Kanabri textiles.

Besides textiles in unusual shapes like those pictured here, perhaps the most common shape is the simple square, which is called chakla. Bags in square shapes are also common, such as the bag called kothali, illustrated in Plate 1.40. It was made and used by a Rabari bride, who used it as a container in which to transport her other dowry textiles to her new home with her husband. The kothali is heavily ornamented with embroidery and mirrors, and trimmed with shells, beads, and tassels. Another notable feature is its pieced construction; in some Gujarati jatis, patchwork textiles are more important than mirrorwork. Sometimes kothali are quilted as well as embroidered (J. Jain 1980: 56, fig. 82). The traditional Rabari designs of flowers, parrot, peacock, temple, and tree are all seen here; a trident represents the local goddess (Frater 1975: 51-53, fig. 8). In addition, the design of a woman carrying a pot on her head appears, a common sight in Indian villages and depicted in many art forms (cf. Pl. 1.6a, upper register just below top border), but among the Rabari its use is restricted to the kothali; living beings are sometimes depicted on household textiles but rarely on clothing. The layout of the designs is the same on both sides of this bag, but the actual motives used vary somewhat.

Closets for storage are largely unknown in Indian homes; chests or wardrobes are commonly used for such purposes. In Kutch and Saurashtra, quilts, cloth mattresses and other textiles not currently in use are often piled on open shelves of stone or wood against one wall. This pile is usually covered with a large quilt cover, which is either embroidered or quilted or some combination of the two depending on the group. Among the Khat of Saurashtra, this cover is called an ulech (Nanavati 1966: 53, Pl. 53). A Mahajan style Khat ulech is illustrated in Plate 1.41. An almost identical piece illustrated in Indian Embroideries (Irwin and Hall 1973: 115, no. 161, Pl. 68B) is described as a dowry, quilted, embroidered with mirrors, and appliqued in cotton and silk; dark red-violet, yellow, dark blue, red.
canopy (chandarvo). Another very similar piece is shown as part of a Kathi interior recreated in the Shreyaas Folk Museum (J. Jain 1980: col. pl. facing 6) but used as a bedcover. Jain states that the Kathi women made ulex, but translates this as ceiling cloth (ibid.).

Kathi embroidery, whatever its ultimate use, is readily discernible from that of other nearby groups. First, the mirrors used tend to be much smaller than those used by most other mirror-workers, and are generally incorporated into simpler designs, such as diagonal lines or squares. Although many stitches are used, satin stitch tends to predominate, and is used here for the large, quartered squares, which are embroidered with deep red silk floss. As Irwin and Hall have pointed out (1973: 115), although only one shade of red is used, “the play of light over the sheen of the silk gives the effect of more than one tone of red.” The central design of squares is surrounded by several rows of patchwork and applique, in dark blue, red, and a white and blue zigzag outer border. The entire textile is lined with hand block printed fabric.

Costumes

In addition to household textiles, women in rural Gujarat produce and, for the most part, continue to wear mirror-embroidered clothing. For men, the wearing of mirrorwork is largely confined to weddings and other ceremonial occasions. With the exception of a few hats, the Allen Collection contains almost exclusively women’s clothing. Also, besides garments for humans, elaborate animal trappings are produced for horses, bullocks, and camels, such as the small band shown in Plate 1.42. This may have been used as a knee band by a camel, possibly during a wedding procession (J. Jain 1980: col. pl. facing 88).

Throughout much of Gujarat, distinctive garments are worn that are seldom seen elsewhere in India. Few women wear the sari except in the larger towns and cities. A blouse and skirt combination with a large shawl is more typical among most Hindu groups and some Muslims (see Pl. 1.43); other Muslim women wear dresses or tunics with trousers. Among those garments that are embroidered, the designs usually correspond to those on the household textiles, specific designs being associated with specific groups.

A gathered skirt called ghaghro is probably the most common item of dress for women. A ghaghro worn by Banni women is shown in Plate 1.44. It features borders of geometric designs executed with a number of different embroidery stitches, including chain, buttonhole, and a variant of feather stitch often called long-armed or Cretian (Thomas 1935: 56, 58). Mirrors are incorporated into these designs of circles, squares and diamonds worked in many colors of silk, among which orange

1.42 Band or animal trapping
Rabari style, Kutch region, Gujarat, mid twentieth century
4 x 8½ in.
Satin weave; embroidered, with mirrors, balls, seeds, and fringe
Silk: red, multicolor
1976.9.24/EAI 1394

1.43 Rabari girls
predominates, on a dark red heavy cotton ground. Some of the larger areas, such as a row apparent meant to represent buildings, are filled in with a couching stitch. Flowering trees repeat across the upper area. It is constructed of two pieces sewn together horizontally, gathered into a waistband, through which a drawstring is inserted and tied to secure the skirt. The Allen Collection contains three other textiles with almost identical embroidery; they were made into wall hangings by assembling parts of skirts.

Similar skirts are made and worn by Ahir women. The Ahir skirt illustrated here is hand embroidered but finished on the machine (Pl. 1.45). The lower half features designs of parrots, two kinds of flowers, trees, temples, an elaborate kunghri, stylized butterflies, vines, and an ogee border, all embroidered in silk with mirrors inset, on a dark purple cotton ground. These motifs are all outlined in orange with open chain stitch; the other embroidery colors are burgundy, green, and blue. The top half has repeated crosses done in interlacing stitch.

Skirts worn by Bhardwad women are very different in form, design and construction (Pl. 1.46). They are commonly made of black handspun wool woven in plain weave with red stripes in supplementary weft. Two long strips are sewn together along the selvages; no other construction is required for the skirt is simply wrapped around the waist. Top and bottom are interchangeable for both are decorated with pointillist patterns of trees, birds, houses and so forth, created by wrapping cotton threads around the warps. This is done primarily in white with accents of pink and turquoise. The remainder of the costume is composed of a mirrorwork blouse and a tie-dyed odhani with a deep mirrorwork border.

Not all embroidery is produced within the home. An important group of professional embroiderers earn their livelihood in Gujarat, primarily in cities, such as Bhuj in Kutch. These artisans are called Mochi, which also means cobbler. Plate 1.47 shows the design on a skirt made by Mochi embroiderers. It is worked in chain stitch on a dark blue satin ground. This type of work, often called Bharat, chain stitch is used to the exclusion of other stitches because a small hook, the arhi, often referred to as a tambour, is used to create the stitches. This allows for faster and much more regular production of stitches, but only chain stitch can be created. Its origin may be in leather workers' awls, for these fine embroiderers also worked on leather objects (Dhamija in Marg 1965: 48, Irwin and Hanish).
Wrap skirt
Detail of one third
Bhurjwad people, Kutch region, Gujarat, mid-late twentieth century
114½ x 44⅞ in.
Plain and supplementary weft weave, wrapped warps.
Wool and cotton: black, red, with white, pink, turquoise.
1976.9.54/WLI 2748

Skirt fabric
Detail of border
93⅔ x 27⅞ in.
Mochi craftsmen, Gujarat, mid-twentieth century
Satin weave: embroidered
Silk: dark blue, multicolor
EAI 867

1.47

1970). Irwin and Hall cite (1973: 197) a nineteenth century account which states that Mochi embroiderers learned their trade from Muslim craftsmen: "About 250 years ago a Mussalmán beggar, fakir, skilled in embroidery, is said to have come from Sind, and taught his art to some families of the shoemaker, mochi, caste who both in Bhuj and in Mandvi are famous for their skill" (Gazeteer of the Bombay Presidency, 1880: v. 5, 125-26).

Several types of blouses are also worn. Blouses may be densely embroidered and covered with mirrors, or may be made of the striped mushru fabric seen in the Rabari torans. The two blouses illustrated here are both from the Banni Muslim area, similar blouses are also worn by Harijan women (Elsoh 1979: 98-97). These blouses, called coralo among the Banni, are generally constructed from a number of rectangular pieces, are basically backless, and have little or no sleeves.

An exquisite coralo made by a Meghval Banni woman is shown in Plate 1.48. It is so densely embroidered that almost none of the purple or green silk ground fabric is visible. (The cotton lining of the blouse is also purple; in some places the silk is abraded and this lining appears to be the ground fabric.) The back of the blouse, however, which covers only the shoulde - ers, is not embroidered, and is made of tie-dyed rust-colored cotton. The primary colors used for embroidery are orange and white, with black and many other colors used in varying, lesser amounts. The white flowers on the lower half are surrounded by orange; the tightly packed open chain stitches which create the flowers give them a third dimension by forcing the mirror centers to stand up from the cloth. Orange or black silk tassels are attached to the centers of the pinwheel forms in the central section, and along center front and at the lower back corners tiny white cowrie shells are attached along with the tassels. This type of flowers, pinwheels, and leaf or wing forms in alternation with single mirrors for the borders is particularly characteristic of Meghval work (J. Jain 1980: pl. 128), although used to some extent by other Banni groups as well.
A blouse with similar construction and design layout is detailed in Plate 1.49. Jain illustrates a turban band with almost identical designs which he identifies as Meghval (1980: 221, pl. 167). Elson illustrates a Harijan woman wearing a very similar blouse, noting that although the Harijans are Hindus, they have long been closely associated with Muslim neighbors, from whom they “often borrow embroidery patterns and techniques…” (1979: 84, fig. 85). The blouse in the Allen Collection has a green silk ground, which is visible in square areas surrounding the mirrors, and the interstices are filled with a very regular interlacement of purple, red and orange lines executed in satin stitch. Running, buttonhole, chain, and couching stitches are also used. In addition to mirrors, tassels and shells, tiny flower-shaped sequins and cardamom seed pods are also attached. The back shoulder area is made of tie-dyed cotton.

Among Jat and Biauch groups dresses take the place of blouse and skirt combinations. The dress illustrated in Plate 1.50 is from the Gracia Jat group; it is called a churi (Elson 1979: 41); Jain, however, calls the dress a gharqho, and classes all the Jat groups as a subgroup of the Bannis (1980: 87-88). The red color of the dress and the minute precision of the embroidery stitches on the bodice identify it as Gracia; a woman embroidering a similar dress is shown in Plate 1.51. Among the Dhanetah Jats, black is much more common than red, and the embroidery uses larger, bolder designs similar to those of the Gracia. The Gracia women treat their garments with extreme reverence. “No man is ever supposed to touch it, and each Friday night at sunset women are expected to fold their unworn churis, pray, and wave a stick of burning incense over the garments” (Elson 1979: 54). In contrast to the tightly fitted shape of the Banni blouse, the churi is cut extremely full, with the extra fullness gathered into the bodice. It may be worn belted or loose.
Numerous types of headgear are worn by the various groups inhabiting Kutch and Saurashtra. For men these include turbans, sometimes with embroidered bands tied in, or a square cloth or rumal tied in the back. Two types of hats are common for children, the natiyo and the topi. Women usually wear a very large shawl, which may cover them from head to foot, called odhani, ludi, or chandhanni.

An Ahir girl’s hat, called a natiyo, is illustrated in Plate 1.52. Constructed of a square top piece attached to a long, rectangular back and short strip that goes across the forehead, it features typical Ahir designs of flowers, trees, and parrots. Narrow strips of contrasting silk cloth are worked into the borders, and shells, beads and white buttons are attached to each corner of the top.

The topi is another form of child’s hat, usually worn by boys. The topi shown in Plate 1.53 features designs and colors almost identical to those of the blouse in Plate 1.49, so is most likely Meghval Banni as well.

A long, wide shawl is commonly worn over the head and shoulders by women in Kutch and Saurashtra. These may be made of wool or cotton depending on the group; some feature embroidery along the borders or as isolated motives, while others depend only on the printed or dyed designs of the cloth for their patterning. A number of groups also wear printed odhains which are made in imitation of tie-dye technique, or sometimes with floral prints. This type of printing has been in use since the fifteenth century (Gittinger 1982: fig. 14, 29). The genuine or imitation tie-dye patterns are common among the Ahirs, Rajpals, Jats, Banni and Khatie (Elson 1979: Col. Pls. IV and VIII, figs. 22, 45, 48 and 119). A woolen shawl worn by Daysee Rabari women is detailed in Plate 1.54. Elson
(1979: 98-99, fig. 101) terms this an "odhani," while Jain (1980: 49-50) terms it a "ludi," using "odhani" for shawls made of fibers other than wool. The Daysee herd sheep, among other animals, as well as growing crops, and spin the woolen yarn for the odhani or ludi. However, other groups are responsible for the weaving and dyeing. The cloth is woven by Harijans, and the customary diamond grid pattern is tie-dyed in orange on a dark brown or black ground by Khatiye dyers (Eison op cit.). This shawl also features scorpion and bird designs. The resulting garment, made of two lengths seamed together along the selvedges, is then embroidered with isolated floral motives near the ends and center; the central motives are seen on the back of the woman’s head when the shawl is worn (Jain 1980: 58, fig. 63). The brightly colored embroidery is done here in cotton floss, although silk is sometimes used; the loosely woven wool is backed with a piece of cotton fabric to give support to the embroidered area.