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INTRODUCTION

Manchmal verwenden die Weber einen goldenen Faden, um ein Tuch schöner zu machen. Die Banjara sind der goldene Faden im reichen kulturellen Erbe Indiens.
Indira Gandhi, 1966, Gulbarga

At the beginning of the 90s I saw embroidery of the Banjara for the first time.

I had been on a buying trip in Gujarat searching for old textiles. My intention was to gather a representative collection of Indian fabrics. I had been pursuing this goal and was quite successful. My cupboards at home were quite full, all available books and publications stood in the bookcase and I was actually lacking only a few models. To be exact I was searching for old turbans from Rajasthan, which I was able to find a few weeks later nearby Jaipur, and for good tie-and-dye odhinis and patolas which come from Gujarat as well. So far I had been satisfied with my shopping.

Before flying back to Mumbai I wanted to spend a few days in Bhuj. Bhuj is a very old beautiful town in Gujarat in the utmost west of India.¹

At this time there were hardly any tourists in this area and I expected a lot from this stay. To cut a long story short I discovered there less fabrics and jewelry than expected, but the few days became however more than two weeks. The town with its surroundings and its people enthralled me.

India like I have always dreamt of. A journey a few centuries back in time. One day, just outside of the city, I visited a tradesman friend of mine and asked him if he had anything of interest for me. He brought a large sack and poured out its content in front of my feet. An endless amount of small little fabrics, rectangular, quadratic, with and without cowry, with and without little mirrors, but above all draggled and dusty.

On closer inspection I could notice that these were all embroidery mainly kept in all shades of red, yellow and ocher. Some of them I noticed were pouches, a few looked like belts, but most of them were rectangular and quadratic embroidered cloths. Despite the dirt the fineness of the embroidery caught my eye.

The patterns struck me the most though. They were different from anything I had seen in India so far. Not a bit of flowers, peacocks, elephants or of the fixed geometric patterns of baghs and phulkaris. I saw apart from a few exceptions abstract creations made by an instinctive feeling for proportions and colors. My friend told me these pieces originate from the Banjara.

¹ The earthquake on January 26th 2001 destroyed 90% of this town.

Needless to say I acquired most of what was in this sack. My initial fascination was confirmed after I had the embroidery cleaned, curiosity came along to it.

I acquired more pieces in the course of time and at the same time I tried to gain all available information about these fabrics and their producers. The fascination did not decrease. Everything I could learn about the Banjara was gathered. Back then the thought of a publication arose for the first time.

This appeared to be more difficult than expected. Information was contradictory, there were hardly any publications and the Banjara I met were not very talkative.

With the help of friends in India and Germany I was eventually able to collect enough material in order to take on the task given to myself.

Some time ago I happened to see photos from India taken in the 1980s: Women of the Banjara in traditional dresses - colorful and draped in jewelry, heavy loads of bricks on top of their heads - on a construction site in Trombay east of Mumbai.

In the evening the Banjara returned to their traditional settlement, called *Tanda*. At that time the first Indian nuclear power plant was built here. Middle Ages and atomic age.

One author referred to the Banjara as "living anachronism".

I prefer Childers description: '*...the Banjara move between the gaps of the social order, they are not incorporated into a certain social system.*'²

The Banjara

Preface

With a bit of luck any tourist can meet Banjara in India. Oftentimes one can see their women from the taxi or train window performing hard work building roads or houses. They often carry heavy loads of bricks or cement in baskets on top of their heads or sit at the roadside producing gravel by crushing lumps of rocks with a heavy hammer. Their gaudy embroidered dresses, the opulent jewelry, the various bangles and the tattoos of the elder women catch ones eye immediately. They mostly live in tents right next to the construction site. If one passes by car in the morning or evening, one can also watch them cooking or doing other household related things. Sometimes one can even observe in the middle of the traffic snarl of a major city like Ahmedabad a little caravan of donkeys led by Banjara children who transport sand to a construction site.

² Childers, p.248

Most of the illustrated books and travel brochures about the subcontinent, especially the federal states Rajasthan and Gujarat, do not lack corresponding pictures. Therefore one seems to experience some familiarity at the first encounter. Looking at the pictures the feeling “typically Indian” arises.

If one eventually starts to show more interest for the Banjara, this superficial familiarity is quickly put into question. Shortly after it becomes apparent that there is only little reliable information which often conflict with each other and one is rather confronted with prejudices than with facts. It also becomes clear that the Banjara are only a minority in India who are mostly regarded with distrust and rejection by members of the main ethnic groups. If one shows interest in their fabrics, this person soon makes similar experiences. However, there are a few collections in museums and there were few exhibitions.³ If one compares this though to available information about other groups of Indian fabrics, e.g. the Patola or the Kashmir scarf, one realizes quickly that there is a backlog demand. To my knowledge there exist only two publications at the moment which do justice to the fabrics of the Banjara.⁴ The standard work⁵ about Indian embroidery does not mention them at all. Acquiring information from the Banjara themselves turns out to be quite difficult.

Nora Fisher writes:

*They love it when people give them attention and admire their dresses and embroidery, but they are not at all willing to answer questions interpreting their symbols or throw light on the origin of these pieces.*⁶

Elsewhere she writes:

*Non-Banjara are misfits and therefore offer opportunities for jokes, lies, theft and memory gaps. Here the circumstances of the field study are similar to the ones concerning Sutherlands work about American gypsies.*⁷

In literature one can find an often quoted poetic statement of a Banjara woman:

*We handle the threads like flowers and embroider the pattern on the back of the material. We embroider from the bottom to the top as if we would stride from earth towards heaven. All plants, animals and human beings have to climb up the ladder of life in this manner.*⁸

Ms Fisher refers to this explanation as an “indeed gorgeous description of their work which is probably just a half-truth, though.”⁹

³ Museum für Völkerkunde, Basel 1987/88; Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, 1993/1994; Japan Folk Craft Museum, Tokyo, 1996

⁴ N. Fisher; M. Lang-Meyer and L. Kartaschoff

⁵ J. Irwin and M. Hall

⁶ N. Fisher, p.157

⁷ N. Fisher, p.228

⁸ Bhagwat and Jayakar, p.5

Trying to get to know more within the country, one soon experiences the same. Asking for typical characteristics of Banjara in India one can be sure to receive contradictory answers from “hard working, self-confident and honorable” up to “dangerous, fake and criminal. Well, who are those Banjara? Where do they come from, which context does one have to view the textiles?

Even my Indian informants have difficulties defining the term Banjara precisely. Sometimes it occurs that they are confounded or lumped together with other nomad groups. Further, one can occasionally read that a unitary group of Banjara does not exist, but that there are various, seemingly similar groups which actually do not have anything in common with each other.

In the following I would like to demonstrate that we are really dealing with **one** nation. Although the Banjara are spread all over India, they all share the same origin myths and a complex system of clan names and genealogical tree. The clothing displays next to all the regional variations many similarities as well.

Ancestry and History

The origin of the Banjara is still mostly in the dark. Some ethnologists link it to the dark-skinned Dravidian natives of the subcontinent. It is more likely though that their roots are in the former Rajputana which consists of parts of present-day Punjab, Gujarat and Rajasthan. This can be supported by their origin myths as well as their clothing and language. They themselves refer to the area around Jodhpur and Jaisalmer as the center of their mother country. Iravati Karva does not exclude the possibility that the Banjara migrated to India. She states that their names and wedding rituals are similar to the ones of the Rajputs. Thus, it is possible that they migrated together with the Rajputs and the Gujjars to India at the beginning of the Middle Ages.¹⁰

It is more likely though that the origin of the Banjara can be derived from the Charan or Bath caste from Rajasthan¹¹. The members of this caste were regarded as holy men. They were prowling singers and living history books. They carried their few belongings on an ox and they had access to all courts of rulers. Those bards had the reputation of rather killing themselves than giving up commodities which have been consigned to them. The legend that a Charan who was pushed to commit suicide chases the culprit lifelong as a ghost helped in order to discourage possible raids. They basically enjoyed immunity

⁹ N. Fisher p.157

¹⁰ Iravani Karve, p.123

¹¹ T.S.Randhawa, p.136

anywhere. Therefore, they were perfectly qualified to transport messages or valuables from one court to another.

The trust they enjoyed offered them with time bigger opportunities, though. Formerly leaders of caravans they became their owners and with growing wealth they also became money lenders. They increasingly organized and took over the supplies for armies. They travelled through India with huge caravans. They say the brothers Bhangi and Jhangi Rathod arranged a succession of 180 000 oxen in the 17th century.

They moved from the south into the Deccan Plateau as an entourage of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in the 17th century. Later on they also organized the supplies for the British army.¹²

A report about the armies of the mughals provides the following description:

These people accommodate the Indian armies on the battle field, they are never being attacked. The grain is taken from them, but of course not without pay. Every evening they build a quadratic protective barrier around their camp made of grain sacks. They and their families are in the center, the oxen are tied to the outside. Guards with guns and spears are positioned in the corners, they also have watchdogs.¹³ I have seen herds of 5000 oxen. During the day they do not move faster than 2 miles per hour, since they allow their cattle to graze while marching.¹⁴

Over the years the Banjara became a well-organized group which was able to defend itself very well and therefore did not have to rely exclusively on deterrence through suicide anymore.

With time they spread almost all over India. Today we mainly find them in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Utter Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Orissa, but also in all the other 16 federal Indian states and even in Pakistan and Iran.¹⁵

A report from 1824 gives a graphic description of such a caravan:

We were passing a big Brinjaree camp, a nation which spends its whole life on transporting cereals from the one end of the country to the other one. This mostly happens by order of other rich trades people. They trek in large groups with their women, children, dogs and loaded oxen.

¹² It is conveyed that the Banjara delivered grain from 1791 to 1792 to the British army under the Marquis of Cornwall during the siege of Seringapatam. The duke of Wellington regularly employed them in his army.

¹³ Up to today the Banjara are known for their watchdogs. One can find all over central Asia holy shrines which are dedicated to very loyal and famous dogs.

¹⁴ T.S.Randhawa, p.136

¹⁵ "A side note shall be given that particular groups of the Banjara left India westbound in the slipstream of the army of Alexander the Great, latest around 1000 AD, maybe earlier. Nowadays they are considered as the ancestors of the European gypsies. This is confirmed by investigations which discovered that elements of the European gypsy languages can be traced back to Sanskrit. (Vossen, p.18: The Indian origin of the gypsies is considered to be proven for more than 200 years due to language comparison. Controversial till today however is the era of the migration, the location of the region of origin between northern India and Persia, the migration trails and the possible relation to gypsy-like groups in this area today)

*For protection against thieves all the men are armed. They do not have to be afraid of the rulers and armies of India. Even armies in action allow them to pass safely. They never receive their goods without paying for them and do not even stop them from supplying the opposing army. Both parties wisely agree on supporting and respecting a business whose prevention could be fatal for both sides.*¹⁶

Deogaonkar compares this status to the one of the Red Cross¹⁷.

With the emersion of railroads in the 1860s and the expansion of a modern road system they increasingly forfeited their initial livelihood. Nowadays, one usually meets them as road men and construction worker, as scrap dealer and as wandering farm workers.

However, a considerable portion of them enjoyed a good education and fill high positions. There are many attorneys and important government officials who are Banjaras. The deceased head of state of Maharashtra, V.P. Naik, was a Banjara. His nephew Sudhakar Naik filled the same position at the beginning of the 90s.

Language and names

They say that the name Banjara is derived from *van* (forest) and *charan* (wanderer). One can find other explanations as well.

<i>Van-jara</i>	forest dweller
<i>Biranjara</i> (Persian)	rice carrier
<i>Banjara</i>	bow
<i>Labhan</i>	salt carrier
<i>Banjar</i> (Urdu)	brown yellow land; the inhabitants would be Banjara

They are however not always referred to as Banjara. They have many names depending on the region they live in and their employment. I would like to present only a few of these.

Banjari, Vanjari, Brinjari, Baladhia (ox driver)

Kangsi (comb producer and seller)

Lamania (salt trader)

Lambada, Labhana (bearer, envoy)

Shirkiband (producers of grass mats)

Sugali, Sukali (betel nut trader)

¹⁶ T.S.Randhawa, p.135

¹⁷ Deogaonkar, p.12

The government of Maharashtra published a list of all Banjara and their subgroups in 1983. For the sake of completeness I repeat this enumeration.

*Banjara, Banjari, Vanjara, Mathura-Banjara, Gor-Banjara, Lambada/Lambara, Lambhani, Charan Banjar, Labhan, Mathura-Labhani, Kachkiwala Banjara, Laman Banjara, Laman-Lamani, Laban, Ghali/Dhalia, Dhadi/Ghadi, Singri, Navi Banjara, Jogi-Banjara, Shingade-Banjara, Lambade, Pha-nade Banjara, Sunar Banjara, Dhalya Ban-jara, Shingadiya Banjara.*¹⁸

A different investigation established that the Banjara are known under a minimum of 26 names and that there are at least 17 subgroups in various regions of India.¹⁹

There are also indications that there is a subgroup of the Bhil tribes (Mavchi Bhil) in the Dhule district in the north of Maharashtra which could be accounted to the Banjara considering their appearance.²⁰

Those are all names though which are used by outsiders. They themselves prefer the names Ghor or Ghormati²¹, this means "Nation with the oxen".²²

References about their quantity deviate extensively between 3 and 20 million depending on the source.

The Banjara speak at least two languages. For once, the language or dialect of the part of the country they live in or they earn their living, respectively. In this manner they can stay in contact with the remaining population and do not attract too much attention. Among each other they communicate in their own language though which is referred to as *Banjaraboli* or *Lambadaboli* by outsiders. They themselves refer to their language as *Ghormati*. It is related to Rajasthani, Hindi, but also to the European Romani language. This language is incomprehensible to people who are not Banjara.

Childers writes:

*Members who temporarily or permanently doffed visible signals like clothing or appearance demonstrate their belonging to the group by commanding this language.*²³

¹⁸ Deogaonkar, p.11

¹⁹ R. Naik, 1969

²⁰ Singh, p.34

²¹ Childers, p.247

²² Thurston, p.210: It seems the names Sugali, Lambadi and Brinjari are used for the same kind of people, although one could make a distinction. The Sugali permanently settled in Arcot (northern Tamil Nadu), the Lambadi tramp back and forth between the coast and Mysore, whereas the Brinjari trek south from Hyderabad or the central provinces.

²³ Childers, p.247

Organization and social structure

Nora Fisher writes that she had contact to thousands of Banjaras from any kind of social background in the course of her field studies.

I met Banjara from any kind of social background; donkey drivers and taxi drivers, factory workers, hoteliers and cigarette sellers, social workers, scientists, architects and attorneys. I met Banjara students preparing for their graduation, but also leaders with lots of charisma who did not have any education at all or very little.²⁴

She concludes:

Two shared elements connect all these people with their entirely different professions and education. Firstly, all Banjara work very hard which is in most cases also very rewarding for them. Secondly, no matter where these people are located on the social ladder, they manage to keep their privacy. Day-laborer as well as people with a graduate profession avoid having a full-time employment. This way they accomplish to allow time in their life to fulfill their obligations as Banjara like the participation on holidays or rites of passage.²⁵

The majority of the Banjara lives in so-called *Tandas* – cottages, tents, trailers and less frequently in buildings at the outskirts of settlements. In order to be allowed to enter a *Tanda* or even take a picture of it or ask questions inevitable to get in contact with the leader, the *Naik*, and get his permission.

The *Naik*, together with the council of elders (*ghor panchayat*), accepts the jurisdiction within the settlement. Punishments could be fines, public reprehension or, as one of the worst penalties, even the exclusion from the group.

All matters concerning the group are discussed as well, even the bride price, the minimum age for the marriage and after how many days the bride should set off for the camp of her new relatives.

This self-administration, as far as it is still possible nowadays, allows them to elude themselves from higher social orders and therefore maintain their autonomy.

One can conclude in general that the dissociation from society is a very important issue to the Banjara culture. By definition they belong to the nomadic or semi-nomadic section of the population without belonging to a caste (*symbiotic peripatic nomads*) which offers their goods or services to the population and do not own land. Hence, they are committed to install clear borders in order to maintain their cultural integrity concerning all the contact with the remaining world.

²⁴ N. Fisher, p.144

²⁵ N. Fisher, p.144

These borders are evident in terms of the difficulty to access settlements, their for outsiders incomprehensible language, their religion, their origin myths and taboos, their clan system, their confident behavior and last but not least their colorful typical costumes and embroidery.

They make appoint of getting along with their environment, on which they rely on in the end, without adapting more than necessary.

In order to be accepted easier and not to frighten other groups they sometimes even adopt another identity.

N. Fisher reports:

One group in Maharashtra uses face to face with outsiders different group names of which none are typical for Banjara. Every year, when they trek to the western mountain ranges, they travel in little groups. Families split themselves according to requirements and present themselves to outsiders as four different groups whose names are roughly Bull-Laman, Ox-Seth, Logger-Laman and Charcoal-Seth. People cannot identify them as Banjara. It is concealed to them that a member of the Oc-Seth could possibly be the brother of a Logger-Laman. For the purpose of having better business opportunities and organizing the traffic with people the Banjara make people believe that they buy wood from one group, charcoal from another and oxen from a third.²⁶

The Banjara are endogamous which means that marrying someone who is not a Banjara is not allowed. They are divided into a complex network of clans and subgroups which are called *gotra*. The exogamous principle prevails here. A marriage is only allowed between members of different *gotra*. Incidentally, we find here additional evidence for the Banjara originating from the ambit of the Rajput in Rajasthan. All *gotra* names like Rathod, Chauhan, Pawar are family names of old Rajput families.

The same *gotra* are found with all Banjara of India. They subdivide themselves however into countless subgroups. If Banjara from different areas meet one another, they can quickly classify among each other by expounding their ancestry and their group genealogy. Hence, the *gotra* system serves the dissociation from the outside world and the group identity as well.

The wedding of the Banjara

The wedding age of men is 20 to 25, the one of women 15 to 18 years. The Banjara consider the monsoon season in contrast to the traditional Hindus as favorable for the wedding.

²⁶ N. Fisher, p.147

This has practical reasons since they do not have to travel during this time and thus enjoy more time for ceremonies.

A wedding with a Non-Banjara is not allowed. Among themselves they are exogamous, i.e. they only marry outside of their sub-caste or clan.

Contrary to most population groups in India the dowry is not only a burden to the family of the bride. The family of the groom has to contribute their share of jewelry, cattle, food and clothing as well. Additionally, the woman is less subordinated than in patriarchic groups. The wedding ritual lasts for at least three days.

Russel and Hira Lal provide a vivid description of a Banjara wedding:

They set up a tent for the wedding ceremony. On the ground they place two rice mortars which are circuited seven times by the groom and the bride. The mortars may be replaced by a packsaddle with two sacks of cereal as a symbol of their nomad life. The priest or Brahman holds the hand of the bride during the circuiting. It is a very bad omen if she stumbles.

Afterwards the girl runs away and the priest has to chase and catch her. In Bhandara the bride wears a flimsy skirt and a stomacher, her body is lubricated with oil from head to toe to complicate the task for the priest. In the meantime the wedding entourage pelts the priest with rice, curcuma and nuts, sometimes with stones as well. It is considered a good omen if he lets out shouts of pain.

In some regions the bride and the groom stand after the marriage on two oxen which are being lashed on. The one falling of first is going to die first. Since there are less women than men a widow is rarely allowed to leave the family. In case the husband deceases she either takes his younger or his older brother. This is in contrast to the usual customs of the Hindu.²⁷

The women sing the following song while circuiting the rice mortar.

*Oh bride, do your rounds,
You bragged that you will not marry
But now you are married
Oh bride, do your rounds.
Your bragging is for nor earthly use now,
because you ate the pudding
Keep lapping, oh girl,
stop bragging,
Did not you eat on the wooden floor,*

²⁷ Cited after T.S. Randhawa, p.138

*your husband's thighs on yours?*²⁸

Thurston provides a vivid description of a Banjara wedding in Bellary in the border area between Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh:

*The groom comes to the bride's house in the night. A cloth covers his head and an artistically embroidered bag with betel leaves and nuts hangs over his shoulder. Four piles of clay pots, five pots in each of them, are located at the sides of a quadratic place outside the house*²⁹.

Inside of this place two pestles were stuck into the ground. The bride is covered with a certain textile and led out of the house to meet the groom. Both stand inside of the four piles of pots. A cloth is wrapped around their shoulders in which the priest embeds a rupee. Then the couple holds each other's right hand and walks around the pestles seven times, while the women sing the following song, one line for each lap:

*You and me, we are married now
We walk together around the wedding stake.
Walk the third time, we are married,
You are married to me.
Walk the fifth time, we are married,
Walk the sixth time, we are married,
Walk the seventh time, we are married.
Seven rounds we walked and I am yours.
Walk the seventh time and you are mine.*

The couple sits down on a blanket close to a pestle and is entirely covered with a cloth. The bride gives seven little balls of rice, butter and sugar to the groom who eats these. He then passes seven more balls to her eating those.

The same procedure is repeated close to another pestle. The women sing over the whole period of time. Then the couple enters the house and the ceremony is finished for the evening.

On the next day the bride and the groom are bathed separately and then the celebration starts. The same evening the mother or another close female relative affixes the odd emblems called gugri to the strands of hair close to the temples which distinguish a married woman from an unmarried one. The hair in the back is decorated with a tassel and she gets a ribbon around her hips from which a little bag is hanging down in which the groom puts five

²⁸ Thurston, p.223

²⁹ See the chapter about the quincunx

*rupees. These pieces are not worn every day, but only for special occasions. The next day the girl is taken home by her husband.*³⁰

The groom receives a little bag (*chenchi*) from the bride to keep the instruments and ingredients for enjoying the betel.

The traditional ivory bangles are worn by the girls between the wrist and the elbow. As a married woman they are now worn between the elbow and the shoulder. The *kodi sadak*, a long ribbon with cowries stitched on it which dangles down a skirt from the waist and the *topevalo junda*, a piece of jewelry which is affixed to the back of a shawl demonstrate that the wearer is married.

A couple of flaps (*karya*) which are attached to the shoulders of a blouse also display the married status of a woman. A widowed woman is bound to remove them. One never sees these on unmarried women.

In southern Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and northern Maharashtra she decorates herself with a *chunda*, also called *seemgh*. This can be a silvered corncob which is worn on the head on some occasions. In the south of Madhya Pradesh, in Nimar, this is a very outstanding headdress which is more than one meter tall.

After the marriage was consummated the groom gives a square silver pendant (*tali, bottu*) to the bride. A new one is added with every child birth. Finally, all of them are melted to a single big pendant which serves as a visible proof of the fruitful marriage.

The bride repeats several times the following song before she leaves together with the groom her family:

Oh father,

You raised me so lovingly

You procured so much money for me.

What's all this in aid of?

Oh mother,

The time has come, I have to leave you.

Did you nurture me in order to send me away today?

*Oh brothers and sisters how can I live apart from you?*³¹

³⁰ Thurston, p.221-222

³¹ Thurston, p.224

Religion and origin myths

The Banjara are officially regarded as Hindu, but are not part of the caste system, though. They imitate parts of it, but one can notice elements of the Islam and the Sikh religion as well.

They primarily worship Vishnu mostly in the shape of Krishna since they trace back their ancestry to him and his companion Radha. A big part of their religious life consists at the same time of animist traditions prior to Hinduism.

G.N. Thomssen reports:

They worship the highest being in a very odd way. A stick, a carved cane, a peg or a knife is being stuck into the ground. The men and women gather around it in a circle, a wild and strange chant begins while all of them bend forward to the ground. All of them circuit the stick, move their arms despairingly, fold them for a prayer and eventually lift them into the air. It just sounds like the crying of a child in the night, a cry for light.³²

The mother goddess is worshipped under many names – *Guttamma, Poleramma, Mallalamm, Ankamma, Peddamma* and *Maremma* are a few of these.

They have their own heroes, gods, pilgrimage sites and rituals which are tightly connected to their past and their style of living. They nourish the ancestor worship and idolize certain saints. Some of them like for instance *Mahakali* and *Ramdeo-ji* are only of local relevance. Others are worshipped by all Banjara.

Due to their past as ox drivers they worship these animals.

The tutelary goddess of all Banjara is called *Banjara Devi*. She dwells in the horns of the leading ox.³³ Sometimes she has her own shrine which is strayed from the camp in the forest. Most times the shrine consists of a buildup of rocks. The top one is painted red and represents the goddess. During each prayer another rock is added. Inside the *Tanda* she is represented by a saddle (*khogir*) which is set up in an elevated corner of the cottage. Veneration is showed to this one before the caravan takes off.

The caravan contains a chosen ox called *hatadya*. This one never has to carry a load, is never butchered (*hatya-adhya* in Sanskrit: sinful to kill it) and is decorated with cowries and tassels.

The Banjara have own priests (*bhagat*) and shamans (*janya* or *janta*) who communicate with ancestors and interpret omens and dreams.

They respect natural processes and show admiring comprehension for their ambiguity and contrasts. Good and evil are relative terms to them; therefore they cannot do much with

³² Thurston, p.228

³³ Thurston, p.228

the established moral terms of the majority of the population. Instead, they demonstrate, as Ms Fisher writes, *major appreciation for ambiguity, badinage and jollity. This affinity to irrationality provides them an own strength and allurements.* ³⁴

Contradicting aspects and antagonisms are not forces the Banjara aim to fight, but they perceive them as distinct aspects of the same truth. These seemingly irrational aspects of their culture and their lifestyle naturally contribute to the insecurity and even hostility of the population towards them. On the other hand this also appeals, like anywhere in the world, an attraction – the Banjara are said to have magical powers and they use this reputation by offering their services as healers and fortunetellers.

One mantra loosely translated is as follows:

*I worship Brahma in the roots
Vishnu, who forms the trunk,
Shiva, who is in the branches,
And the goddesses in every leaf.*³⁵

A few more words regarding their origin myths.

As mentioned before they consider the territory around Jodhpur and Jaisalmer as their home. Their own legends convey that they served the army of Alexander the Great as envoys. In the 14th century it is said, they transported material for the Mughal armies and organized the supplies.

The Banjara around Yavatmal in Maharashtra believe that they immigrated from Rajasthan 300 to 500 years ago after a war between Pritviraj Chauhan and an anonymous Mughal emperor.³⁶

According to a legend the Banjara descend from two ape generals, Vali and Sugriva, who are mentioned in the Ramayana. Once upon a time there were two brothers, Mota and Mola, sons of Sugriva. Mola did not have any descendants. So he and his wife went to the yard of three kings. There he exhibited his acrobatic skills and the kings were impressed by these and also by the grace and beauty of Radha, that they granted them one wish. Mola asked each of the three kings for a boy to adopt. The kings allowed the wish. The names of the three boys were Chavia, Lohia Panchar and Ratâde. These three boys, in course of time, grew up and married. Their descendants became the ancestors of the different Banjara groups.

³⁴ N. Fisher, p.148

³⁵ Thurston, p.227

³⁶ Deongaonkar, p.12

The appearance of the Banjara

The jewelry

The Banjara mainly wear the typical jewelry of the area they live in. Many pieces of jewelry are therefore not specifically worn by Banjara, but also by other groups. These include among others the below mentioned bracelets made of bones or ivory. These are typical pieces of jewelry in the rural areas of western India. They share their affection for thin glass bracelets with other Indian women.

This may have to do with their attitude of not provoking unnecessarily, but moving smoothly within the society. An important reason is certainly that they do not have own silversmiths and therefore shop in the bazaars of towns and villages.

A considerable part of the jewelry is characteristic though and is only used by Banjara, even if they do not produce it themselves. This is especially true for the groups in the federal states Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh where the cultural identity was conserved more than for example in Maharashtra.

Eye-catching are the numerous bangles around their arms and legs made of metal, ivory, bones or recently even of plastic (*baliya, bodal or chudo*).³⁷ An embroidered, approximately three centimeters wide, with cowries³⁸ spangled textile ribbon hinders the bangles from slipping over the wrists, the ankles respectively.³⁹ Widowed women do not wear bangles around their legs anymore. Unmarried girls wear jewelry only on their forearms. Married women attach heavy hangers to their temporal hair (*gugri, gujuri*), their absence indicates that the woman is a widow.

Deogaonkar describes another typical piece of jewelry of the Banjara women.

*Typical decoration which attracts the attention of strangers is a big bell-shaped piece of jewelry which is placed above the head and dangles down behind the ears – big hollow earrings; the holes are filled with red dyed lamb's wool, at the edge are tiny silver bells. It is called zumka.*⁴⁰

Jewelry for the forehead, nose rings (*mukaram*) and miscellaneous jewelry for the ear completes the attire for the head.

³⁷ Depending on the employed literature there are different versions of the names of pieces of jewelry. This is due to the translation Ghormati – English on the one hand. On the other hand ethnologists seem to have had contact with various groups so that regional differentiations were considered here. Some of the applied names are not Ghormati, but Hindi.

³⁸ D. Bhagwat and P. Jayakar p.11: The cowry (*cyproa moneta*) embodies the female principle in the universe and is the emblem of the mother goddess Parvati. In case there are no cowries at hand they can be replaced by seeds, buttons or tassels made of fabric.

³⁹ (*gozra* or *guzera* for the wrists, *pachala* for the ankles)

⁴⁰ Deogaonkar, p.23.

Regarding decoration for the neck one often finds heavy silver hoops (*hasli*) or when it comes to unmarried girls ten to twenty glass pearls which are wound up horse hair with a pendant made of cowry (*cheed*). The numerous finger or toe rings (*kada*) are made of silver, brass or plumb.

After consummating marriage the groom gives the wife a rectangular silver pendant (*bottu*), with the birth of each child another one is added. After three pendants have been accumulated they are melted down to one; no more are added anymore.

The male Banjara have a preference for gold jewelry, hence one can find earrings, neck jewelry and gold-plated incisors.

At the end of the 18th century Moor provides a very vivid description of the Banjara women.

We observed women who carried, apart from a child on their backs, eight to ten pounds of metal or ivory around their arms and legs. The most favourite pieces of jewelry are ivory bangles which are worn from the wrist up to the shoulder with increasing size... Sometimes these bangles are dyed red.

Heavy bangles of round or spiral shape made of silver, plumb, copper or brass dangle on the shinbones; we have seen women loaded such that it could have hardly been more uncomfortable for a criminal in chains than it was for these women, who go with their jewelry on long tramps and never doff it, not even in the hottest weather.⁴¹

The Clothing

Meeting Banjaras the colourful and richly embroidered clothing of the women strikes ones eye first. If one has the opportunity to observe Banjara dancing during a celebration, one will get a first impression of the complexity of their garbs.

The blouse of the women (*kacholi* or *choli*) leaves the back open and is halfway closed with cords. During fabrication the individual pieces are embroidered before joined and sometimes decorated with cowries, glass pearls or little mirrors. The front piece is a wide rectangle at which a smaller rectangle is attached to at the bottom reaching from the navel down to the waist. The sewed on sleeves are of tubular shape. The embroidery is mostly performed on the textile underneath in order to assure the necessary stability. The blouse is oftentimes decorated with little mirrors. For the production of the skirt several 30cm wide fabrics are embroidered, decorated with little mirrors and garnished with appliquéd rows of prongs of a different color at the selvages. The skirt is put together horizontally with several of these fabrics. Its bottom part is worked twice to ensure the required

stability. The material is gathered around the waistline and sewed on a padded and embroidered belt (*lepo*). These skirts have a width of more than two meters.

One can also see skirts which are not embroidered, but sewed with imprinted scrim purchased at the bazaar. The cut is always the same, though.

A big shawl (*chantia*, *chhatya* or *tookar*, ca. 140x200cm) is laid across the forehead so that the head is covered half. The other end is tucked into the skirt. The part resting on the head and framing the face is beautifully embroidered or decorated with sewed on coins or mirrors. The shawl itself is generously embroidered. In case it is made of thick material it is called *pomcha*.

More often than not a little bag (*kotudi*) is carried with the belt.

The three part headdress which original purpose probably was to enable the transport of heavy water jugs is very beautiful. A quadratic embroidered textile with a side length of 10-12 cm called *phulia* is placed on a braided ring of plant fiber (*nihanji* or *indhoni*). A rectangular textile (*gala*) ca. 20x40cm is affixed to the back of the head. It is almost always garnished at three sides with cowries and tassels. These "*gala*" are very interesting. On the one hand one can find here some of the best and finest embroideries of the Banjara. On the other hand one can, as I will demonstrate later, with some knowledge draw conclusions concerning the origin of the piece on the basis of the employed materials, patterns and colors. Taking a closer look one can discover diversely formed plumb pendants at the edges of habiliments and bags. Shape, size and design of these inconspicuous little ornamentations provide information as to origin, social status and descent of the person wearing those.⁴²

I would like to utter once more that all these details provide information as to status of the woman, where she originates from, if she is married, single or widowed, her role in society and if she has a traditional attitude to an adept, meaning a member of the Banjara.

The male Banjaras are dressed less conspicuously. Their clothing is usually white. Additionally a big, white or as well colored, with silver threads intermingled turban is worn. The shirt (*barkasi*) has a wide cut, traditionally comes with twelve ribbons to close and is kept together by a padded and embroidered belt. Sometimes this belt is worked as a money pouch. They wear an inconspicuous string around the waist which is put together by tassels and plumb pendants (*kanadori* or *kanadoro*). This attire again provides information as to status and descent of the wearer.

⁴¹ Narrative of the Operations of Little's Detachment against Tippoo Sultan, 1794

⁴² N. Fisher, p.152: The wife of the Naik (leader) in a tanda differs by only one with plumb pendants garnished bag from the other women.

The bottom part of the body is either covered by plain scrim (*duheri* dhoti) which is wrapped around the hips in a certain manner or white pants which just reach over the knees. One can discover tattoos on women as well as men. The common spot is the upper arm, concerning the women also the forehead, the back of the hand and the ala of the nose. One can see writings like the own name, the name of the brother or invocations to Gods. Illustrations like scorpions, a pair of oxen or a tulsi plant⁴³ are often used as well.

The Embroidery

Overview

While the majority of the Indian rural population prefers floral patterns or animal depictions for their embroidery, the Banjara mainly employ abstract patterns. Squares, rectangles, circles and irregular shapes designed in bright or harmonious colors are the elements making up the patterns.⁴⁴

The various textiles of the Banjara can be allocated into five groups

- A) rectangular or quadratic fabrics
- B) different types of bags
- C) belts and ribbons to decorate and weigh down skirts and shawls
- D) blouses and skirts
- E) textiles to garnish animals

Examining hundreds of embroideries I was able to allocate almost every piece to one of these categories. However, since the Banjara have a preference for ambiguity and ambivalence there are no clear boundaries between these groups. They are very much aware about the accuracy and effort spend on one piece of embroidery. Thus, worn out pieces are not simply thrown away, but remade and reused in a different context. Folded and together sewed cloths result in bags and pouches, a ripped open bag becomes a cloth and an old belt can still serve as a handle of a shoulder bag. I have found bedspreads, which consisted of fragments of old Banjara textiles, made for tourists on the markets of Goa and Delhi. Nowadays the Banjara women mainly wear skirts made of bought cotton material. However, in almost all the cases an embroidered braid is sewed to the bottom. The lined and embroidered belt, on which the panels are sewed on (*lepo*), originates in most cases from an old skirt as well. The cloths are a group on their own. Depending on

⁴³ *occinum religiosa*, holy basil, plant devoted to Vishnu

⁴⁴ J. Graham writes: "Die Bedeutung der Banjarastickereien liegt darin, dass hier ein Stil verwendet wird, der aus der Zeit vor den Moghulen stammt...Die geometrischen Muster sind aus der Architektur dieser Epoche bekannt." (Hali 39, Seite 46)

their size, material and purpose they serve as a seat pad, as covers for ewers and food, to blanket and wrap, as a utensil for dancing, as a children's cradle or simply as adornment. The most important textile of this group is quadratic embroidery of a side length of approximately 50-60cm. This textile is called *dhavalo*.⁴⁵ Originally *dhavalo* is the name for elegies, prayers and vows which play an important role during the moving of the bride out of the parent's house. This ceremonial cloth is spangled with cowries (*kodi*) at each of its four sides. It is almost always pieced together with an inner embroidered square and ca. 10cm wide braids which are added to the edges. A smaller square is sewed onto the four corners of the inner square. The composition of the embroidery base therefore composes a quincunx on whose meaning to the Banjara I shall get back.

This piece is reused after the ceremony in the everyday life, either in its original form or it is sewed together in various ways resulting in different bags.

The headdress during a wedding ritual consists of a ring made of plant fiber (*nihanji* or *indhoni*) which is wrapped with a drapery, on which a squared textile with a side length of about 10cm rests (*phulia*). The back of the head is covered with rectangular embroidery, which is decorated with cowries on three sides (*gala*).

These *gala* document the artistry of the Banjara women quite well. Although these pieces can be allocated to certain regions due to their patterns and colors, no single piece looks like another. The embroiderer employs all her skills and experience. During the naming the baby lies in a rectangular or quadratic embroidered cloth called *ghodiu*. This textile is oftentimes not to be distinguished from a *dhavalo*.

It is not very astonishing that one can find a multitude of sacks, bags and pouches with a group leading a nomad life – after all everything needs to be stored during decampment.

The *kalchi* (or *kulchi*, *khalchi* or *kalechi*), the bread bags⁴⁶, which at times remind one of the *gala* with their patterns, are very beautiful. A densely embroidered textile of a side length of 50-70cm is sewed together like an envelope on three of its sides. The fourth side supplied with a closing string which serves as a lid. The embroidery base is quilted from multiple plies. The flat breads, the *chapatti*, *roti* and *kulcha*, which were baked in the

⁴⁵ N.Fisher, p.155, uses this name; Ms Lang-Meyer calls it *cadno* (p.87). According to my informants in India this term was not known as a name for a textile.

⁴⁶ N. Fisher uses the name „*kotli*“ and refers to them as dowry bags. My informants in India reckoned these bags could be used during a wedding, their main purpose however is the above mentioned. Concerning Ms Lang-Meyer the name „*kotudi*“ refers to a little money pouch which is similar to the *kalchis* with respect to its structure, but only has a side length of 15cm. She uses the name „*kotli*“ for a little rectangular bag which serves to keep toilet utensils.

morning before break-up, are kept in these on the way. We can find similar bread bags all over Asia by the way.

The same textile can be sewed together differently. Indeed, it may be folded like described above, but each of the four sides are sewed together half-way by a thick ornamental seam. Straps attached to the corners serve to close and carry those women bags.

One can find pail-shaped shoulder bags for women, which consist of four rectangular pieces and a square as the bottom piece. A richly embroidered strap with pompons on the edges serves to drape on the bag. Many times the four side pieces are reused *galas*, the neck strap may have served as a belt initially. The pieces are connected with a very strong, clearly visible ornamental seam. Sometimes the inside is divided into additional sheds.

A common sacrifice in the temple or at the family altar is a coconut which is carried in a special bag, called *jumer (jolanu)*. Here a quadratic embroidered cloth with a side length of about 30cm is sewed together with a thick ornamental seam half-way at the sides. A cord is sewed on each of the four corners. All of these run through a metal bead. By shifting the bead the bag is either opened or closed.

Another type of bag (*sunchi*) is very decorative as well. A quadratic bag is attached to each of the four sides of a quadratic textile with a side length of 15-20cm. A thick thread for fastening is in the center of the middle piece. When hung up the bag adopts the shape of a dice which is open at the bottom. The lower selvages of the four bags are tassels made of fabrics, cowries and plumb pendants. The entire piece is as expected richly embroidered. With this bag the bride brings spices, the base of her new kitchen, to the house of the groom.

During the wedding ceremony the groom receives a bag (*chenchi*) from his future wife to store the equipment and ingredients for the consumption of betel. The actual bag is relatively small (15-20cm, square) and divided into several sheds. The cap however is up to 60cm long. After application the cap is wrapped around the bag and closed with a cord. Long tube-like money pouches are used as a belt by men.

One can find rectangular bags of a size of about 8x20cm and open at the longer side, which are used according to my information to preserve combs and thin twigs of the Neem tree⁴⁷ (*datanya, kanshija*). Rectangular cloths with a size of about 25x60cm, which are embroidered on one side and have an approximately 30cm long slit, are used as pillow cases (*takya*).

Over the last years I have seen many bags and pouches of the Banjara.

⁴⁷ These twigs are used for dental care in India. For this a twig is being chewed on for a while. Apart from the mechanical effect similar to a toothpick, the oil in the neem wood disinfects the gums.

Among those were tiny 5x5cm bags up to sparsely embroidered unicolored sacks and double bags with a side length of 80-90cm.

As far as I am concerned the listing on the previous pages covers the largest part of this group.

When one is looking at textiles of the Banjara one can always find among these a number of straps, belts and sashes of several lengths and widths. The long straps which are up to 4 meters long and of miscellaneous width served as seams. Pieces of a length of approximately 150cm and oftentimes spangled with mirrors were sewed on head cloths (*chiantias*), namely on the part which frames the face.

The Banjara men wear embroidered belts and sashes.⁴⁸ These are mostly thickly lined and feature straps, tassels respectively made of fabrics on the narrow sides in order to close them. A little more narrow and smaller are the waist straps which constitute the upper opening of skirts.

Blouses and skirts I have already mentioned writing about the clothing.

Pets, especially oxen are decorated as well. These animals do not just play an important role during the everyday life, but also during religious ceremonies and weddings. This is not surprising since the Banjara were dependent on their health and well-being in their older role as caravan leader. As mentioned before the Banjara viewed the horns of the leading ox as the residence of their tutelary goddess, the Banjara Devi.

The jewelry for the forehead consists of a wide textile band which rests on the head between the horns. Four rectangles or squares are sewed on this band. The entire piece is sparsely embroidered and mostly spangled with mirrors and cowries. Sometimes one can see peacock feathers. The horns are decorated with a pair of horn covers. These are two tapered textile covers, about 15cm long and with a diameter of 5-6cm, which are put onto the horns. They are densely spangled with cowries.⁴⁹

As a separate group I would like to mention the *chopat game*. *Chopat* or *chaupar* is a well known board game almost all over India. However, the board is made of fabrics. For this two textile stripes, about 15x90cm, are sewed onto each other in the form of a cross. By means of embroidery the stripes are subdivided into fields in which all sorts of symbols appear. It is played with 16 stones or wooden blocks. Every „arm“ of the cross is

⁴⁸ 10-20cm x 70-85 cm.

⁴⁹ Ms Lang-Meyer describes a pair of horn covers as follows: *The horn covers are entirely embroidered and little mirrors are attached to their tops. As thread even silk yarn is used, this happens only very scarcely. The lopping cords made of colored wrapped or embroidered strands of horse hair are draped with cowries all around. A single horn cover can feature up to 230 of these precious snails (p.87).* The horn covers I have seen so far were made much simpler.

subdivided into 24 fields. The square in the middle is called *kuliphul*. This game belongs to the Indian wedding ritual not only concerning the Banjara. It is also played simply for amusement. These embroideries can be found quite rarely.

Techniques

There are different ways to acquaint oneself with the textiles of the Banjara. During the phase of getting acquainted the aesthetic aspect was vital to me. I was able to observe the different patterns and the intuition of the women combining colors for a long time. After a little while however this was not enough for me anymore. I started trying to find scheme in which I could classify my present collection and future pieces.

Parallel to the previously described classification of embroideries according to their purpose the following systems can be established.

The pieces can be divided into two main groups:

Firstly, large area covering embroideries, i.e. the embroidery base is not visible anymore.

Secondly, the embroideries which leave the surface visible and therefore many times contributing to forming a pattern.

The first group can be differentiated once more.

1a) Large area covering embroideries with various types of stitches and basic motives freely arranged in a pattern.

1b) Large area covering embroideries with a main motive and one main stitch.

Type 1a) At the beginning two, seldom even more, layers of textiles are sewed together by means of running stitches. Embroidering is performed through all layers. The inner part of the cloth is subdivided into bordering areas of different sizes. Those are entirely embroidered in different colors. A common basic shape is the square. This is mostly sectioned into eight triangles, but one can find partitioning into four smaller squares as well. This is combined with circles, spirals or stripes crossing each other consisting of multicolored lines. These geometric areas are gladly traced by chain stitching.

The inner field is mostly framed by a border of narrow parallel stripes in various colors⁵⁰, one or multiple unicolored stripes (cross-seam stitch) or the combination of both.

⁵⁰ These remind one shallowly of the Kharek embroideries from Gujarat or Sindh. They are more roughly embroidered though (image see N. Fisher, p.67, p.82).

Sometimes little mirrors are employed to highlight striking parts of the textile. Cowries serve the decoration of the outer selvages. Sometimes they are used in rows or blossom like groups of four for the inner areas. Finally, the edge of the fabric layer is blind-stitched. The dominant colors concerning this group are different shades of red and yellow alongside orange, green and aubergine. They all have in common that the embroidered surface is not visible anymore.

There is one version in which the textile is sectioned into four squares. Again we find 2-4 stripes as a framing, but the inner surface of the squares is only embroidered with a quilting technique employing additional threads. The bottom surface serves here as the element determining the color. This piece is a mix with the later mentioned type 2b).

Type 1b), the large area covering embroideries with one main stitch and one main motive display a calmer radiation. Whereas the first group draws attention to the multitude of shapes it is here the harmonious composition of colors. The border is narrow in comparison the center area, which is partitioned into little repetitive geometric patterns. Most of the times we can see lozenges, triangles and sometimes even little squares.⁵¹ The prevailing stitches are the straight stitch, the skew stitch and the cross stitch, whereby the first one is worked with a shift. The cross stitch mostly appears in the borders or the dividing stripe. Mirrors are not used here. The Indian name if this style is "*kashida*"⁵² , outsiders also speak of "diamondwork".

The second group – as a reminder: the surface stays visible here – can be subdivided once more.

2a) Embroideries on a simple fabric layer whose surface stays visible; these are oftentimes put together in patches.

2b) Quilt-like embroideries with a visible fabric base.

Type 2a), with which the base stays visible and many times contributes to the pattern can almost only be found in Madhya Pradesh. A squared ceremonial cloth with a side length of 45-50 cm is produced here. An inner square is framed by an approximately 10 cm wide border. Many times the basic fabric is not one piece, but consists of differently colored

⁵¹ Ms Lang-Meyer points to an interesting effect (p. 93). With a horizontal or diagonal color arrangement of the triangles and rhombs a multicolored or differently colored row always alternates with a unicolored red row. This way the colored motives seem like they were stitched onto a red surface, although this one consists of the same motive 'with the same type of stitch.

⁵² Bhagvat and Jayakar, p.5: *The Sanskrit literature refers to embroidery with the word khachita, which originally stood for filled or peppered in connection with jewels. Later on it referred to the stars in the nightly sky which looked like peppered with gemstones. Since the embroiderer rendered sun, moon and stars he took possession of this word and used it for his own works.*

pieces pieced together in a patchwork style. Since only one layer is worked on, the pieces feel softer and less firm than the ones of the first two subcategories.

This technique is also gladly applied to straps and stripes, which later on constitute borders of skirts, blouses and cloths.

Straight stitch and skew stitch as well as the weave stitch mainly occur. All the pieces of this group have in common that the color of the basic fabric stays visible and further impacts the pattern. Again, no mirrors are apparent; the selvages are almost always purled with cowries. Due to their geometrical pattern these pieces oftentimes remind one of a mandala.

Interestingly, there exists a cross-over between 1b) and 2a). The use of the Kashida style covers the middle area, while the border, which is embroidered with big jag motives, incorporates the color of the fabric. These pieces usually come from Maharashtra.

The single elements of a pattern are almost always framed by an appliquéd border of tiny triangles.

The Banjara highly appreciate these ceremonial cloths which play an important role as a cover for water jars or as a ritualistic tablecloth during a wedding ceremony. Even if it is outworn such a piece is never thrown away. It is rather folded and sewed together in diverse ways instead, and now constitutes different bags and pouches.

Group 2b, the simple quilt-like embroideries with a visible surface represents bags, sacks and blankets. Multiple layers of fabrics are fixed with regular rows of parallel or shifted running stitches. The top layer is oftentimes put together with differently colored pieces of fabrics.⁵³ Threads of different colors are incorporated into the running stitches. This way it is possible to form geometric patterns of an arbitrary size without much effort. A slightly corrugated relief-like ground structure results due to the threads of the running stitches being smocked most of the times, this means they puckered a bit, due to this. Bags of this kind can be found with all the Banjara groups all over India⁵⁴. Sometimes it is even possible to allocate them to certain regions due to little variations.

Although this type is by far not as spectacular as many of the other embroideries of the Banjara, it especially displays the keen sense of the embroiderers for harmony and planning, which is apparent in the way shapes, color changes of the yarn and ground of the embroidery work together.

⁵³ N. Fisher displays on page 158/59 a quilt from Karnataka whose top layer is pieced together with sari fragments.

⁵⁴ Bags of almost identical size (ca. 40cm x 40 cm), shape and pattern were found in northern Karnataka as well as in Bhilwara in Rajasthan, almost 100km further north. (N. Fisher, p.157)

Regional Variations

Even though textiles of the Banjara appear in museums and collections and many exhibitions in England, Switzerland, India and Japan have been held over the last years⁵⁵, it is quite difficult for most collectors, museums, trades people and even for the Banjara themselves to match pieces to a certain region. It is also not that easy to determine the age. As mentioned before, information about motives and symbols of the textiles are even sparser. There are different reasons for this.

On the one side the textiles are bought by tramping trades people, who are oftentimes Banjara themselves, and then resold at certain central places which are mostly far away from the place of manufacture. Obviously, it is not of interest for the trades people to disclose their sources. Accordingly it could happen that a trader from London purchased embroidery in Goa which originally comes from south India. This piece was then sold to an American museum.

On the other side it is not of great interest for the Banjara to pass along any information. They prefer keeping their independence by giving no, very little or misleading information. The women are proud of their works and also glad to show them, but they avoid collectors or ethnologists asking too many questions or satisfy their curiosity with trivialities. Thanks to persistency, much time input, fieldwork and finally respect and sympathy instead of mere scientific curiosity, it was possible however over the past few years to collect quite some material. Further, the Banjara open up more and more to the outside world since they understand that even their lives are in flux and that their self-chosen isolation has to be vacated at least partially.

Nora Fisher writes:

„Ich reiste in Indien Tausende von Meilen von Karnataka im Süden bis nach Himachal Pradesh im Norden; bequem im Auto oder in reservierten Zügen, nicht so bequem in überfüllten Bussen und Zügen ohne Reservierung ... Nachdem ich sorgfältig Ergebnisse aus 50 Tandas in 8 Bundesstaaten verglichen habe, kann ich feststellen, dass es sich um ein Volk handelt, das nicht nur eng verwandte Klannamen und Abstammungslinien sowie gleiche Ursprungsmythen teilt, sondern das auch über ganz Indien hinweg charakteristische Kleidungsformen und Stickereien benutzt, in denen sich viele wiedererkennbare Elemente finden. Ich kann über die typische Banjarakleidung so wohl für den täglichen Gebrauch als auch für Feierlichkeiten sprechen; ein Schwerpunkt liegt auf der Bedeutung vieler der schmückenden Elemente Ich kann zwischen

*traditionellen Banjaraelementen und denen unterscheiden, die von der Umgebung angenommen wurden.... Schließlich kann ich jetzt viele regionale und überregionale Banjaravariationen identifizieren“.*⁵⁶

In the following I will mainly go along with the system suggested by Ms Fisher. My conversations with collectors, gallery owners and traders in India as well as in Europe support her classification.

The embroideries of the Banjara in the Kandesh region in the district of Jalgaon in the north of Maharashtra are well known. These embroideries seem strictly geometrical, they belong to group 1b)⁵⁷. More or less only two kinds of stitches are employed to generate the patterns, namely the straight stitch (bullion stitch), its variation the skew stitch and the cross stitch. The first is always stitched via pre-counted threads, the cross stitch not always. Since such little irregularities can appear at any time, the cubic patterns often display an own liveliness. All pieces are probably embroidered on the back side.⁵⁸ Brilliant pieces of this group are stitched such smoothly that they seem like weaved at first glance. The embroideries are mostly performed with cotton, but one can rarely find silk threads as well. The patterns are mostly strictly geometrically put together using little squares, longzenes, triangles and zigzag lines. The quincunx motive can be found quite often as well. Occasionally, intensively abstracted images of animals, buildings and even more rare manlike figures appear. These pieces, they are mostly bags, are very rare. At almost all times the embroideries are covered on the back side of the material. It is worthwhile though to undo the lining for once and admire the concinnity of the stitches from the back side. Quadratic ceremonial cloths which are not densely embroidered (group 2a) also originate from the Kandesh region, but they come from further north from the district Nimar in Madhya Pradesh. The base of the material is always visible and is many times put together by differently colored pieces. The types of stitches are quite limited here as well⁵⁹. Most of the times one can find linearly arranged patterns, less frequently embroidered areas. The cloths are not back lined. The back side is many times worked such carefully so that it can become the right side.

The patterns of these pieces seem very calm and harmonic. They remind one of Yantras (pictures for visual meditation) as well as diagrams which are put together with rice flour

⁵⁵See Footnote 3

⁵⁶ N. Fisher, p. 60

⁵⁷ see p.18

⁵⁸ Lang-Meyer, p.88 and p.93. Also compare the Phulkari embroideries from the Punjab.

⁵⁹ Lang-Meyer: weave stitch, straight and skew stitch, cross stitch, seam cross stitch.

in front of doorsills for certain occasions in many regions of India.⁶⁰ Ms Fisher supposes that these cloths are used among other things for meditation.

Moving further south to Karnataka we arrive at the "Shimoga Hills".⁶¹ This fruitful area is located east of the inaccessible Western ghats and south of the cragged Deccan Plateau. The Banjara are called *Lambani* here.

Embroideries from this area are very characteristic. The work entirely covers the surface which consists of multiple layers. The dominating colors are dark shades of red, green and black. By use of bright yellow and white emphasizes are being set. The patterns are put together by generously proportioned irregular areas which are filled with concentric embroideries. They seem very abstract, sometimes wild and archaic. It is also typical that the single areas and patterns are mostly stitched around by means of white or yellow chain stitch. Sometimes two rows of linearly meandering chain stitches cross each other and form a series of ovals. Those are fully embroidered with a contrasting color. The outer edge of a piece is oftentimes formed by small parallel rows which look like thin, approximately 3 mm wide rods.⁶²

Almost all pieces coming from this area are spangled with mirrors. Similar to other areas we also find cowries and plumb pendants here.

I happen to possess a group of textiles which stylistically correspond to this group. The colors however are by far not as bright. Cotton was mostly used as thread. All colors have a natural origin. Informants from India told me these textiles were older than all the others. They probably stem from the 19th century and were made further north in the Nimar district in the northern part of Madhya Pradesh.

Other Banjara, from the severely unfruitful areas around Afzalpur, Gulbarga and Bidar in northern Karnataka, seasonally move into the Shivamogga district in order to hire out as harvester. The embroideries of these northern groups differ from the ones from Shivamogga. Light yellow and red are the dominating colors. Regular patterns put together from squares and rectangles are prevalent. Being filled out these areas are oftentimes subdivided into further rectangles, squares or triangles with concentrically running chain stitches. Here the single areas are often separated from each other by rows

⁶⁰ The door sill diagram of a Banjara tanda in Karnataka, displayed by Mud, Mirror and Thread on page 193, is very interesting.

⁶¹ I stick with the English term since "hills" cannot be translated without problems with 'Hügel'. The "foothills of the Himalaya" reach a respectable height of up to 2500 meters and the 'hills' of India do not have anything in common with the European hills regarding height and shape.

⁶² See Footnote 50

of chain stitches as well. Mirrors are almost never used; as mentioned before the concentrically filled areas serve the same purpose.

One cross-over of these two types originates from the area around Bijapur in northern Karnataka. Here the outer parts of the embroideries display the mentioned thin rod-shaped embroideries, but the inner part reminds one, due to its regularity, more of the pieces from Gulbarga.

I happened to find a few Banjara embroideries which cannot be allocated to any of the groups classified by Ms Fisher. Cursorily these pieces seem like they originate from Shimoga Hills. However, the colors are duller, green and black appear more frequently, the embroideries are much smoother and the mirrors are very small. Little stitched on flowers or stars strike out. One can also find here appliquéd borders made from little triangles, which can be seen with other groups of Banjara, but never in Shimoga. Whether these pieces belong to a possibly older subgroup of the Shimoga textiles or originate from the further southeast located Vishakhapatnam at the border between Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, as I was told by Indian informants, cannot be determined at the moment.

There exists a type of textiles in southern Rajasthan and bordering Madhya Pradesh which is not embroidered, but instead displays appliquéd floral motives in the colors white, red, black and yellow on a blue or red base. According to statements of Banjara these pieces originate from Marwar in the federal state Rajasthan.

Patterns and motives

It is said that the patterns on the embroideries formerly represented a defined meaning and that they served the non-verbal identification of the wearer⁶³ just like the plumb pendants and the jewelry. In the course of time however these descents were lost.

One can therefore conclude, that the Banjara (but not just them) highly appraise symbols and patterns, whose origins date back so long though, so that their original meaning is if at all only known to a few insiders. Since symbols or rituals have the peculiarity that they

⁶³ Bhagvat and Jayakar, p. 9: *Just one generation ago these patterns were linked to totemistic signs: the water caltrop, the lotus, the pond etc., thereby they allowed, since the Banjara are exogamic, clues concerning the marital status of the wearer and served as a hint for the choice of the future spouse. Therefore the universe is reflected in our work. Human beings and big animals may be missing, but earth and heaven, flowers, twiner, ponds, rivers, hills, fish, flies and stars are all contained in it. Every creature has its own sign, the ancestors knew the complete meaning, not us anymore; nonetheless we keep stitching them on our fabrics.*

work on beyond the verbal and intellectual level, it is not necessary anymore to analyze, explain or classify it.⁶⁴

In contrast to the flower and animal motives of almost all Indian embroideries we find, apart from very few exceptions, only geometric motives like triangle, square, rectangle, rhomb or circle with the Banjara. These basic shapes are further segmented. The circle for instance can appear, in case it is not formed by mirrors, as a spiral or in the shape of a star as well, the square is sectioned vertically, horizontally or diagonally. Sometimes one can see on bags illustrations of animals or images of temples or persons, but these are very geometric and reduced to the minimum.

Many times appliquéd differently colored fabric stripes form the opening.

Regarding some groups single elements of a pattern are framed by an appliquéd cotton border consisting of little triangles.

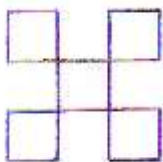
One element of almost all Banjara textiles are cowries, tassels made from various materials and appliqués made of casted plumb. All of these more or less richly decorate any textile. The swastika appears as a symbol for fertility and marriage. This symbol can be found all over India and is not typical for Banjara.

Apart from the decorative effect the little mirrors also have the purpose, not only concerning the Banjara, to throw back evil eyes before they can be harmful to the wearer. Regarding older pieces one can observe that the mirrors are slightly concave. In order to manufacture these mirrors in former times, glass spheres were blown, the inside applied with reflective coating and then smashed. Oftentimes one can find round areas which are fully concentrically embroidered. These areas fulfill the same purpose as the mirrors.

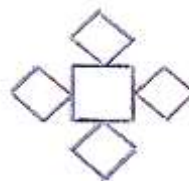
The Quincunx

An important motive observable on the textiles of all Banjara groups is the quincunx. This refers to a formation of five squares comparable to the 'Five' on a dice. Thereby the outer four squares always have the same size. The center square can be a lot bigger. This motive can appear in many variations. Many times it is already apparent in the partitioning of the embroidery base.

⁶⁴ M. Lurker, p.553: *While explaining the symbolism alongside the translation into the language of terminology, there always remains an untranslatable rest. Especially because of the symbol pointing to the invisible and imperceptible and presenting it, it is difficult to understand with our rationality. Mircea Eliade emphasizes on the feature of the symbol that it refers to the human being as a whole and not just his mind.*



Type a



Type b

Wherever this motive appears in Indian embroidery, one can be almost sure it was produced by Banjara.

For interpreting this formation of a pattern it is helpful to remind oneself that the number 'Five' plays a very important role in the Indian cosmology and philosophy. Thus, the wise Indian Kapila postulated in the 5th century B.C. that the cosmos consists of five elements. There are five directions since the four main directions are joined by the center Mount Meru, the *axis mundi*. One knows the five cosmic acts creation, preservation, extermination, disguise and salvation symbolised by the five heads of Shiva. Further the five cognition organs, the five action organs and the five elements are known. Regarding Hinduism the deity reveals itself in uncountable ways with different names. At least the five main Gods Shiva, Vishnu, Surya, Devi and Ganesha are worshipped by any Hindu grouping.

Concerning the early medieval temples in northern India we can detect the *Panchayana-Type* whose center tower (*Shikhara*), which represents the above mentioned Mount Meru as the center of the universe, is surrounded by four shorter towers at the corners which represent the four main continents. An Indian informant explained me that there are up to today family altars, called *tulsi mandir*, in the households of central India which exactly correspondent to this layout. Against this background one can comprehend the notation made by Nora Fisher that the quincunx applied in Banjara embroideries is supposed to be a symbol for the order of the universe.

Employed materials

The Banjara rarely use new materials as an embroidery base. Mostly one can find a reused fabric. Many times the base is pieced together from various old textiles.

I discovered on the back side of many pieces beautiful cotton prints from Rajasthan from the 19th century. Regarding most pieces the fabric is hand-spun and rough-textured. For pieces like blouses or skirts finer mechanically woven fabrics are also used, though. I was not able to detect any hints for pieces woven by the Banjaras themselves.

The material is cotton without any exceptions. Multi-threaded cotton was usually employed as embroidery yarn. One can also find silk though and in particular for older pieces wool. Awn hairs are often implemented into the wool.^{65,66} Hair of horses and goats were used as well. I was told by Indian informants that plant fiber was also used, but I was not able to find proof for this.

As mentioned before cowries (*cypraea moneta*) are very popular. The usage of cowries, not only by Banjara, allows various interpretations. Due to their shiny surface and their shape they are very suitable as an ornamental element. This is complemented by their usefulness as a barter currency. Reckoning a cowry transversely it is similar to an eye – resistance to an evil eye. Upright it looks like the female genital. This way it expresses the wish for fertility, especially on wedding textiles.

Concerning the mirrors one can find two types. The older ones are slightly concave and display a blunt gloss (manufacture see page 35). The newer ones are cut from mechanically produced mirror glass and are therefore flat. The metal pendants on many fabrics are made of plumb or alloys similar to plumb.

The Stitches

Information and analysis for this chapter I extracted for the biggest part from the catalogue “Götter, Blumen, Tiere” owned by the “Museum für Völkerheilkund Basel, 1987. Only little can be added to the know-how and accuracy of the authors Ms Nabholz-Kartaschoff and Ms Lang. I would like to thank them for their friendly permission to make use of the drawings in this catalogue.

Depending on the characteristic of the employed stitch the fabrics are either embroidered with pre-counted threads starting on the back side or freely beginning in the front. Obviously, the first type can only be exerted on a simple non-shimmed embroidery base. If multiple layers of fabrics were requested they are added later.

Embroideries that have started on the front side can be performed on singly or multiply shimmed textiles right from the beginning. Both types have in common that the embroideries were conducted very subtly and precisely. In order to connect two pieces with each other, e.g. for a bag, or to blind-stitch different fabric layers an errand stitch as for instance the chain or blanket stitch or intersected leaf stitch is employed. Hereby, at the edges results a bulge which is applied as a decorative element.

⁶⁵ Awn hair: stiff, below their tip condensed hair of the fur of mammals which belong to the guard hair and protrude the wool fiber.

⁶⁶ Laboratory investigation by mr Lehmann, Esens from 4th June

Most of the stitches applied by the embroiderers can be traced back to a few basic stitches. Nonetheless, there are various variants which are only employed by Banjara. The stitches applied by Banjara are itemized according to the taxonomy of Boser and Müller (1969, 1984). The variants which are not presented in this taxonomy are illustrated for better understanding.

Running stitch:

Sewing on of applications

Double-running stitch:

Lines, parting lines; simultaneously in two work steps bidirectional on the same line.

Weave stitch (pattern building couching stitch)

Fabric-like structure of the kind of weaving patterns. Backside shows a reciprocal image of the front.

Lockstitch

Parting lines, linear filling stitch.

Skew stitch (bullion stitch)

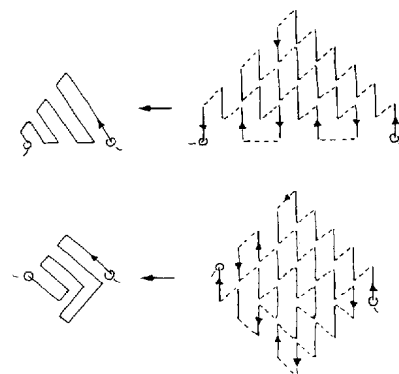
Parting lines, three-rowed parting stripe.

Raised stem stitch (bullion stitch)

Areas of on top of each other lying rows, worked by fitted threads.

Variant (image.1)

Area as a pattern of separately stitched triangles or rhombs. The series of stitches of the ascending and descending rows is schematically rendered on the left..



Angle stitch

Areas, backside is also used as illustration.

Chevron stitch

Stripe pattern, ascending stitched row, angles close above each other. Stripe pattern, twinged by harking back, phased angles.

Variant (image 2)

Stitched leave-shaped top down, starting with a chain stitch, individual motives in areas or wave-like borders.



Cross stitch

Separate back and forth running stripes or areas (dices); back side with an intermitted and an overlapping stitched row. Individual rows for stripes on appliquéd fabric straps stitched bicolored in two rows; back side with vertical double stitch.

Variant (image 3)

Double-rowed stripe pattern (skirts, blouses), whereby a cross is skipped and in a third row the crossing points are overstitched with a differently colored running stitch: face side and back side are identical.

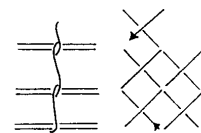


Variant (image 4)

Stitched bottom-up from the back side in two columns in one work step. Double horizontal stitches are connected by a vertical stitch. This stitch is canvassed with the lower stitch while ascending to the next double row or it is stitched through as an additional garnishment.



Schema der Stichfolge auf der Rückseite



Stichform auf der Rück- und Vorderseite

Closed cross-seam stitch (herringbone stitch)

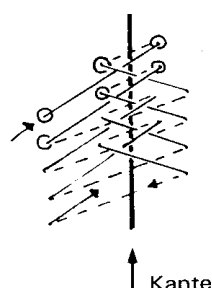
Stripe pattern, filling stitch for smaller areas, horizontal stitches on the back side.

Open cross-seam stitch (herringbone stitch)

Stripe pattern, crossing points with differently colored running or back stitch worked over; on uni fabrics or narrow appliquéd stripes; backside horizontal stitches.

Variant (image 5)

Vertically top down stitched cross-seam or leaf stitch; to re-stitch selvages. This stitch is stitched skew one-sided. The crossing points are on the selvaige.



Vertically stitched cross-seam stitch (herringbone stitch or opposite feston stitch)

Stripe pattern; areas or wide stripes of multiple meshing rows.

One-sided accentuated cross-seam stitch (herringbone stitch and feston stitch combined)

Stripe pattern of two meshing stitched rows; horizontal stitches top down; vertical festoon stitches in the middle against each other.

Rosette cross-seam stitch

To affix little mirrors above the thread loop.

Variant (image 6)

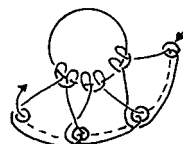
Vertically stitched; the outer stitched may vary in their length so that the edge can be round, drop-shaped or triangular.



Variant (image 8)

Two additional loops are subsequently hinged into the thread loop; The

selvage stitch is twice as long; thereby the lower thread crossing is made visible.



Laid chain stitch

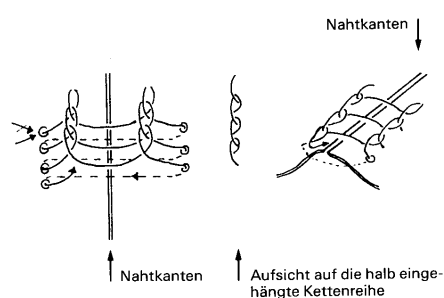
Parting line, stripes, linearly filled areas.

Twinged chain stitch or braid stitch

The loops are hinged into both or just one side of the previous loop.

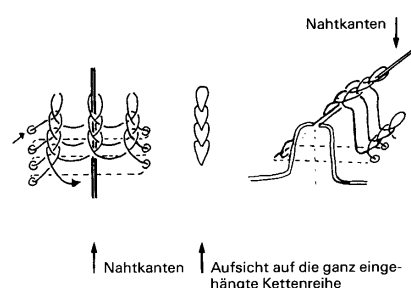
Variant (image 9)

Worked from two parallel rows in one work step left to right. The loops are hinged into the left side of the loop above; for openings with slightly edgy selvages or seams. Depending on the length of the stitch leading back a more or less elevated welt seam results. The loop rows are on both sides of the bulge and the upper cross-over stitches are crosswise above the seam.



Variant (image 10)

Worked from two parallel rows in one work step left to right. The loops envelop both sides of the loops above and form distinct chain rows; for openings with extremely edgy selvages or seams. The short back leading stitch aggravates the bulge formation.



Open chain stitch or ladder stitch

Stripe pattern

Open feston stitch

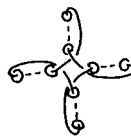
Areal pattern of offset meshing rows; trellis effect. Stitched relief like over the applied thread.

Rosette feston

Bottom fixed half loops; back side shows vertical stitches; stitched with four stitches from the outside to the middle as cross-shaped single motive.

Variant (image 11)

Lead in a circle over an applied thread loop in order to affix little mirrors.

Cretan feather stitch

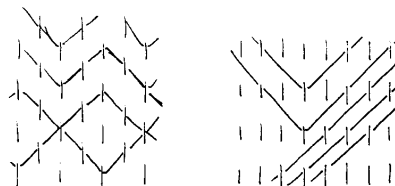
Single leaf-shaped motives in a wave-like stripe pattern; diagonal stitches from the outside towards the middle.

Oriental filling stitch

Stripe or areal pattern; closely adjoining flat stitches fixed with short horizontal stitches

Quilting stitch (image 12)

Areal pattern; additional threads are worked into uniflow or offset running stitch rows.



CONCLUSION

Visiting the tourist markets in Delhi, Mumbai or Goa one realizes that the Banjara women produce embroideries up to today. Bags in any size and garnished clothing are preferred. However, one should not have too many expectations referring to the quality or even compare them with older textiles. The stitches are much more unsubtle, the color composition is glaring and many different styles are intermingled. Of course one can compliment nostalgically the olden days and wish them back. I prefer to view this occurrence as a sign for the adaptability and vitality of the Banjara though. They had to, due to the changes that come with time, give up their sources of income now and then before and were forced to find new ones. At all times they moved like fish in the water, taking the chances offered to them, and while doing so they were able to maintain their identity up to today and remain a strong nation. They are aware of their beliefs, their old traditions and customs and their identity builds up on this, but at the same time they live here and now including all the challenges and chances.

A Colonel McKenzie once closed a report about the Banjara in 1881 with the statement: "...there has to come a time where all the special distinguishing features and traditions will be forgotten."⁶⁷

This prophecy was not fulfilled. Even today 100 years later they are almost everywhere in India present and visible. In 1982 the Banjara in northwest Karnataka were the focus of a study.⁶⁸ It was concluded that

"the Jews, the Lue, the Chinese in Thailand, the Lamani (Banjara) and similar communities in India have stronger social dissociations and form closer social units than federal states or municipalities".⁶⁹ They "have successfully adapted to the increased amount of social contacts...and thereby conserved a cultural identity which is still intact."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Russel and Hira Lal, p.191-192

⁶⁸ Halbar, 1982.

⁶⁹ Halbar, p.210

⁷⁰ Halbar, p.214

GLOSSARY

Dhavallo	Ceremonial singing as the bride leaves the parent's house	Chenchi	Pouch to preserve the utensils needed betel consumption
Jaisalmer	Desert city in the west of Rajasthan	Chhatya	→ Chantia
		Choli	blouse
		Chopat	Indian board game
Tamil Nadu	Federal state in the south of India with the capital Chennai (Madras)	Chudo	Bangles for arms and legs made of various materials
Afzalpur	Town in the west of → Gulbarga	Chunda	Headdress of the Banjara
Ahmedabad	Biggest town in the federal states → Gujarat	Datanya	Pouch to keep toilet utensils
Andhra Pradesh	Federal state in the southeast of India	Deccan	The south of the river Narmada, Plateau. Bordered in the east and in the west by the → Ghats
Baliya	→ Chudo	Dhoti	Leg clothing for men
Banjara Devi	Tutelary Goddess, lives in the horns of the leading ox	Gala	Rectangular textile; part of the headdress of the female Banjara skirt
Barkasi	Shirt for men	Ghagra	Mountain range which constitutes the landslide of the → Deccan towards the sea
Bhagat	Priest of the Banjara	Ghat	
Bhuj	Town in the northwest of Gujarat	Ghodi	Cradle made of fabric
Bidar	District in the north of Karnataka with homonymous capital	Ghor	Denomination of the Banjara for their own people
Bijapur	District in the north of Karnataka with homonymous capital	Ghor panchayat	Council of elders
Bodal	see → chudo	Gotra	Clan system of the Banjara
Bottu	→ Tali	Gugri	Bijera Banjara temples eigen-
Cadno	→ dhavallo		
Chantia	Head shawl for women		
Cheed	Pendant made of cowries		

Gujarat	Federal state in the west of India		
Gujuri	→ Gugri	Kodi sadak	<i>moneta</i>) Strap with sewed on cowries
Gulbarga	District in the north of Karnataka with homonymous capital	Koliphul	Center of the → Chopat game
Guzera	Garnished fabric strap which is worn above the elbow in order to prevent the slipping down of the → chudo	Kotudi	Little quadratic pouch attached to a belt
Hasli	Neck hoop made of metal	Krishna	Shepherd God, Incarnation of Vishnu
Hatadya	Antlered ox	Laigna	→ Ghagra
Himachal Pradesh	Federal state in the north of India	Langa	→ Ghagra
Hyderabad	Capital of → Andhra Pradesh	Lue	Tribe in the north of Thailand
Indhoni	→ Nihanji	Madhya Pradesh	Federal state in central India with the capital Bhopal
Jaipur	Capital of → Rajasthan	Mahakali	The „great Black“; horrible aspect of the great Goddess
Jalgaon	District in the north of → Maharashtra with homonymous capital	Maharashtra	Federal state in the west of India with the capital Mumbai
Janya	Shaman	Marwar	District in the southwest of → Rajasthan
Jodhpur	town in Rajasthan	Monsoon	Rain season
Jolanu	→ Jumer	Mukaram	Nose jewelry
Jumer	Bag for a coconut	Mumbai	Capital of → Maharashtra; formerly Bombay
Kalchi	Rectangular bag to preserve laver bread	Mysore	District in the federal state → Karnataka, with homonymous capital
Kaledi	→ Kalchi	Naik	Head of a Banjara clan
Kanadori	Waist cord with tassel and plumb pendants	Nihanji	Part of the headdress for women
Kanadoro	→ Kanadori	Nimar	District in the south of → Madhya Pradesh
Kandesh	Region in the district → Jalgaon and → Nimar	Odhini	Cloth for head and shoulders
Kania	Silver hangers, attached to the upper edge of the ear	Orissa	Federal state in the east of India with the capital Bhubaneswar
Kanshija	→ Datanya	Pachala	Fabric strap around the foot, serves the same purpose as the → guzera
Karnataka	Federal state in southwest India with the capital Bangalore	Patola	Double ikat, mostly from Patan in → Gujarat
Karya	Fabric flaps at the shoulders of a blouse	Phulia	Quadratic textile, part of the headdress
Kashida	Embroidery style		
Khalchi	→ Kalchi		
Khogir	Saddle which symbolized the seat of → Banjara Devi		
Kodi	cowries(<i>cyproa</i>		

Punjab	Federal state in the northwest of India with the capital Amritsar. Prior to independence parts of Pakistan also belonged to it	the present → Punjab, → Rajasthan and → Gujarat belonged to it Type of bag
Quincunx	Five squares positioned like the eyes of a five on a dice	
Rajasthan	Federal state in the west of India with the capital Jaipur	
Rajput	Ruling caste in north and central India. They view themselves as descendents of the warrior caste (<i>kshatriya</i>)	
Rajputana	Literally „Land of the Rajput“; a group of states which roughly border the present → Rajasthan	
Ramdeo-ji	Heroic figure	
Sari	Main piece of clothing of the Indian women	
Seengh	→ Chunda	
Shimoga	District in the middle west of Karnataka with homonymous capital	
Sikh	Member of a religious group founded by Guru Nanak	
Sindh	Province in southeast Pakistan. Prior to independence parts of	
	Sunchi	
	Swastika	Tantric symbol all over India
	Takya	Rectangular pillow case
	Tali	Wedding pendant
	Tanda	Settlement of the Banjara
	Tie-and-dye	Dyeing procedure as a part of batik dyeing → Chantia
	Tookar	
	Topevalo	Pendant at the back side of the head spawl
	junda	Little family altar with the layout of a → Quincunx
	Tulsi mandir	
	Uttar Pradesh	Federal state in the north of India with the capital Lucknow
	Vishakhapatnam	District in the northeast of → Andhra Pradesh with homonymous capital
	Vishnu	Indian God, the sustainer, part of the trinity Brahma (the creator), Vishnu and Shiva (the destroyer)
	Zumka	headdress

About me

I was born in Bad Nauheim in 1950 and spend my childhood there and in Aachen. I visited the Gymnasium in Munich and studied chemistry afterwards. After completing my diploma thesis in 1976 I visited India for the first time.

The planned three months became, apart from short intermission, six years. I was fascinated by the attitude towards life, the traditions and the arts of this country and its different peoples.

I returned to Germany in the 1980s and opened the gallery 'Noah's Ark' in 1984.

The offering of my gallery is supposed to reflect my love and respect for India as well as the diversity and the richness of the culture of this subcontinent.

In order the extent the collection in the gallery and to obtain information about publications I regularly travel to India. Over the years I undertook expanded vacations to Nepal, Tibet, Thailand and North Africa.

Um das Spektrum des Angebots in der Galerie zu erweitern und Informationen für Veröffentlichungen zu bekommen reise ich regelmäßig nach Indien. Im Laufe der Jahre unternahm ich auch ausgedehnte Reisen nach Nepal, Tibet, Thailand und Nordafrika.

The permanent range include among other:

A broad collection of old textiles from all over India (among them of course pieces of Banjara and Phulkari)

Old gold and silver jewelry

Tribal art

Objects and figures made of metal, wood and rock

Tibetica

Friends and clients of my gallery are collector, museums and galleries.

I am especially interested in Indian textiles. My article about the Bagh and Phulkari was published in English in the newspaper HALI (Nr.113, Nov/Dec 2000).

The extended version of the article can be obtained in German language via the gallery:

*Phulkari und Bagh – Stickereien aus dem Punjab
41 pages, 38 color pictures, 2 maps.*

If you have questions, please contact me or visit me on my website
<http://www.m-beste.de>.

There you can also have a look at a selection of my offering

I took pictures of the major part of my collection. On request I gladly send you a CD-ROM.

You are free to visit me in my gallery subsequently to a phone arrangement. Since I travel a lot, I gladly demonstrate you selected pieces at your home - of course without any commitment.

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