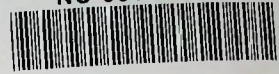


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NOMADIC CULTURE

The Similarities of Maintaining Heritage Through a Portable Environment.
Taking as a Case Study, the Banjara of North West India and Their
Tradition of Textiles

by

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4th Year

Fashion Department

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ILLUSTRATIONS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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I would like to thank Author Duff, architect and Indian textile collector and expert for his valuable help and knowledge concerning Indian textiles and for allowing me use of his samples of Banjara textiles.

2. Map of Eastern Turkey

I would also like to thank David Shaw-Smith, film producer and traveller for taking time to help me with information on the Kurgits of Afganistan and Turkey.

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INTRODUCTION

What can we do?

We were born with the great Unrest.

*Our father taught us that life is one long
journey on which only the unfit are left
behind.*

Caribou Eskimo, Bruce Chatwin,
The Songlines

From the beginning of time man has travelled in pursuit of greater and better things, perhaps knowledge perhaps happiness or maybe just greener fields to feed his herd. But we have been inflicted with "Wanderlust" to go and discover new places and to see for ourselves if the grass really is greener over on the other side.

It has been said that there are two types of men, those that stay at home and those who don't I feel that there is a lot of truth in this saying and that if you are brought into the world living out of a suitcase, then you will never feel comfortable unless you continue to do so.

Having spent most of my life moving house and changing address, school and country, due to my father's work, I have always held a passion for travel and, in fact, get itchy feet if I stay in the same place too long. There is a need, almost an inner yearning to go away, and the longer I neglect it, the further I have to go.

Perhaps it is because of my own itinerant attitude that I have become interested in nomadism, different nomadic cultures and their maintenance of heritage and tradition (for if you travel, you must travel light). I also became interested and curious as to how Nomadic peoples have overcome

the problem of travelling as lightly as possible but still maintaining their traditions and carrying their heritage.

This interest was eventually sparked when a friend and I started a train journey through India during the monsoon season.

We became acquainted with a tribe known as the Banjara who are mainly from Rajasthan (see Illustration 1) but can be found throughout India. They were originally Nomadic, although many are settling down now. Little is known or written about them and yet a lot of people would be familiar with their wonderful textiles and Hamboyant almost bohemian (skirts and tassles similar to Romanian Gypsies in Europe) clothing, especially the colours and also the jewellery.

Their unusual appearance has become their tradition and thus they carry their heritage by wearing it. In fact from looking at several Nomadic tribes, it can be said that this is true for many of them. Image and identity play a very important part in Nomadic heritage in general.

Perhaps it is the extremely strong sense of Kinship brought on through isolation from settled communities which produces pride and therefore leads to a need to be seen as distinctive from the rest of the community, to show their rejection of it.

Unfortunately, little is known or written about the Banjara tribe who I have chosen as my case study and therefore I found it exceptionally difficult to find information on them and their textile work. However on my return to Ireland, on enquiry, I was put in touch with Author Duff, an architect who has travelled extensively and lived in India and who also is a collector of Indian textiles. He was able to provide valuable information and also samples of Banjara work from which I could study and draw any own conclusions and observations.

I encountered other problems when studying different Nomadic cultures, very little is written about Nomads, because very little is known.

The Nomadic cultures I chose are mainly tribes whose main heritage revolves around image and identity as with the Wodabbe of Central Niger or tribes who have strong traditions of craftwork, especially textiles for example, thanks to David Shaw-Smith, a film producer and traveller, I was able to write on the textiles of the Kurkits of Afghanistan.

The tribes I have chosen to illustrate tradition in Nomadism are the Kurkits and their textile tradition, the Basseri of Iran who are pastoralists and have maintained their weaving techniques for centuries. The Wodabbe, of Central Niger, who have a strong heritage of identity and image and the Aborigines of Australia who have continued to carry their traditional stories and magic in the form of songs and verses.

WHAT IS NOMADISM?

My own definition of Nomadism would be that of a person or people who take their possessions on travel or who are prepared to make sacrifices in order to take up their roots and wander. I feel that there is a certain amount of wanderlust in us all but some of us suppress it, whereas Nomads succumb to it.

SECTION I

NOMADISM AND THE PROBLEM OF MAINTAINING HERITAGE THROUGH A PORTABLE ENVIRONMENT

The term "Nomad" (from the Greek "to Pasture") was originally used to refer not only to pastoralists - groups that migrate in an established pattern to find pastures for their domestic livestock, which may be their only form of livelihood. For example, the Wadabbe of the Niger. However it has since been generalized to include all nomadic populations, of which there are three basic types.

According to "The Nature of Nomadism" (1959) Salzman (P.C.) the first type of Nomadism is a foraging population, who wander in search of their food. Usually, the women gather vegetable foods and the men hunt, except in the Arctic where there is little or nothing to gather.

There the women are preoccupied with clothing maintenance, hide tanning and food preparation. These foraging populations constitute the simplest form of human society and are made up of small isolated bands rarely exceeding more than fifty individuals. It is estimated that 90% of all humanity once lived in this way, even though it has been estimated by anthropologists that food production was begun in some places as long as 10,000 years ago. Hunter-gatherer societies remain today only in a few marginal areas where they have had to take refuge from more highly organized and technologically advanced people, as in parts of the Arctic, the Kalahari Desert, the tropical rainforests and especially the Australian Outback.

WHAT IS NOMADISM?

My own definition of Nomadism would be that of a person or people who fulfil their yearnings to travel or who are prepared to make sacrifices in order to take up their roots and wander. I feel that there is a certain amount of wanderlust in us all but some of us suppress it, whereas Nomads succumb to it.

A more specific explanation is that of a population without permanent dwellings, who may migrate regularly according to their own knowledge (perhaps passed on through generations) of a particular area possessing exploitable resources.

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where the Aborigines are threatened by white society and alcohol, almost to the point of extinction. Most of these people, however, have now given up foraging and have attached themselves to outposts of modern industrial life.

The Second and most significant form of Nomad, both numerically and historically, are the "Pastoral Nomads" (again, according to P.C. Salzman). They move with their families, belongings and herds of cattle, camels, sheep and goats through an annual cycle of pastures, whose availability is determined by the alternation of hot and cold or wet and dry seasons. For thousands of years, pastoral Nomads have controlled vast areas from Southern Africa to the Siberian Arctic.

Mainly because they can organise themselves in large numbers, such as in the Mongol Invasions (13th Century), and because they are free of any fixed assets, they have played an important part in the history of Asia and Africa. However with the development of Nation-States, they have been brought under control. Their traditional structure is breaking down and in many cases, unfortunately, their members are obliged to settle and be absorbed into the general population, as with the Kurkites in Turkey. The third type of people generally referred to as Nomadic are the Gypsies, Tinkers and similar itinerants thought to have Bohemian heritage, who live on the outskirts of urban and complex societies. It is believed that the Gypsies originated in Northwest India, where they were members of a low caste. In the 1st millennium of the Christian era they migrated westward through the Middle East. The first written reference to Gypsies in Europe dates from the 14th Century. By the early 16th Century they had been encountered in nearly every part of Europe. Trading is also an important part of Nomadic life, travelling may become necessary also in order to sell or exchange goods in order to buy necessities such as grain or luxuries. They may trade livestock, as with the Lapps of Scandinavia, or products that they make themselves such as jewellery and textiles of the Banjara of North India.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF NOMADISM

1. Advantages

One of the main and probably most obvious advantages of a Nomadic culture is that of its complete freedom. Its people are not held by fixed assets of any kind, except perhaps Kin. But they have no financial or land ties, restrictions or boundaries. There is nothing to keep them in one place and so they have the ability to travel to wherever they want, whenever they want of if the climate demands it. Unlike a settled community where both land and or employment have such a hold, the Nomad does not consider these social stabilities important.

*Our nature lies in movement; complete calm
is death.*

(Pascal, Les Pensées 1670)

It has often been written that it lies in every man's true nature to wander and travel and that only in travel is there true happiness. It is also well known, that travel can be one of the greatest educations:

*He who does not travel does not know the
value of man.*

(Moorish Proverb)

Through change of country and environment, different ideas can be exchanged as well as various techniques tried and learned, similar to the way bees collect pollen to make honey. In addition Nomads do not usually possess the same fear of the unknown as the settled populations, for they are used to change and discovery. This is probably why many Nomadic tribes are excellent warriors. Indeed most tribes who move would have to be a moving military machine, as it were. Settlers therefore, since the beginning of history have employed and recruited Nomads as mercenaries: either to scare off a Nomad threat, as in the case of the Cossacks, who fought the

tartars for the Tsar in Russia, or if there were no Nomadic threats, then to fight other states. Another advantage evident in Nomadic culture is their incredibly strong family and even tribal bonds. The ties of kinship are unshakeable and extensive and this trait is found similarly in most Nomads, be it Irish Tinkers or the Bororo of Central Niger.

Tradition is what binds us, keeps us alive, enables us to live together, from the moment we open our eyes we follow the way of tradition. For tradition is a path, a path that must be followed.

One who does not follow this path who strays from it, is no longer one of the Wodabbe.

Tradition is friendship, a mutual assistance....tradition is a heritage we receive at birth and treasure until death....he who follows tradition is a Wodabbe and he is free - for he is himself.

Wodabbe Saying

The hold of kinship can produce security and wisdom within the tribe which is invaluable and which may never be fully understood by settled communities, especially in today's insular, modern societies. As outcasts from settled communities, Nomads become strong; as can be seen in an old Bedovin proverb:

*I against my brother
I and my brother against our Cousin I, my
brother and our cousin against the
neighbours
All of us against the foreigner.*

(The Songlines, Bruce Chatwin)

What I have also come to discover is the great and varied artistic ability within Nomadic tribes, be it textiles in India, jewellery and metal work in Africa, woodcarving and painting in Australia. There is a great need for artistic expression in Nomadic races. I was curious as to what provoked this need or why it had evolved so strongly.

Could it be through the need for trade, as Nomads cannot be self sufficient and must barter usually for extra foodstuffs and luxury items? Thus craft items were developed from their natural resources in order to barter for necessities from settled communities; for example; the Tuaregs of the Sahara (Illustration 2) are famous for their leather work, especially their saddles which they trade at camel fairs and markets. Another reason for perfected artistic abilities passed on from one generation to the next could be excess time which is available due to the varied work brought on by pastoralism. Surely when a herd is happily grazing there is not much work involved but to sit and watch. This artistic expression is their heritage, no matter what form it takes, be it tattoos, nose rings or carved hunting spears and through movement they can put their heritage to use by trading what they are gifted at making for what they consider necessities for living (Ref: Illustration 3). A further advantage of Nomadism is the "best of both worlds syndrome". They are free to move when climatic conditions, either floods or draughts, make it impossible to maintain the standard of living they are used to.

2. Disadvantages of Nomadic Culture

Unfortunately, Nomads, no matter where they live in the world, are still even to this day treated as outcasts by the settled societies. They are considered an "underclass" and are feared, due to lack of knowledge and often they are seen as being unemployable. This can result in educational as

well as health problems, as with the current problems faced by Irish itinerants. Who, through constant movement around the country and with access to very poor amenities, find it difficult to attend educational services provided and as a chain link to this, miss out on medical checkups made in schools (where most early medical problems are diagnosed). The isolation and perpetual movement prevent Nomads from having a direct land claim and this in turn leads to opposition from settlements when their land is infringed on, by people they consider outcasts.

.... A verse of Midrash, commenting on the quarrel says that the sons of Adam inherited an equal division of the world: Cain, the ownership of all land, Abel of all living creatures - whereupon Cain accused Abel of trespass".

(Bruce Chatwin: The Songlines)

Because many Nomadic tribes are small and very closely there is also a need for arranged marriages to prevent blood becoming too close within a tribe. As in the case of the Aborigines of Australia, sometimes a man will have to travel several hundred miles to find a wife and then travel all the way back with her to his tribe. Nomadic life can be hard and treacherous as they are a people who in some senses are maintaining life in area which are not necessarily capable of sustaining it such as deserts. This constant movement leads to the inability to build tangible and lasting forms of heritage. Once a Nomadic tribe moves on, there is nothing left behind them except perhaps a few fire ashes and some broken pots. This is also a contributing factor as to the reason why there is so little information recorded about Nomads. They must carry their entire environment with them, both past and present, and naturally, their past heritage must be as lightweight as possible. That is way, in general Nomadic heritage tends to take the form of invisible traditions,

art techniques, crafts and self adornment. This is where the fundamental problem of tradition and portability of heritage surfaces and is solved. Vast buildings, monuments, libraries or even paintings cannot be lumbered from one destination to another. Nomadic culture must be weightless and strong to withstand constant external change.

It must be bred in the bone. Though a tribe will constantly move and change places, the traditions and artistry remain the same and are uninfluenced through the centuries. This constitutes the true value of their heritage. And their heritage is the one small part of their life which must be kept balanced and stable because movement requires a weightlessness, their libraries become songs and stories locked into memories and passed from one generation to another. Their galleries become their bodies, which they adorn with tattoos, body paintings and jewellery especially crafted and highly worked textiles and headpieces.

CULTURE / CRAFTS AND SIMILARITIES OF DIFFERENT NOMADIC TRIBES

As the body was one of the Primary objects of Art - that is, an object of nature which people by the use and addition of symbols, transformed into an object of culture. The decorations may be of a permanent nature, in the form of scars, tattoos or even extend to changes in the shape of bodyparts. (For example the enlarged earlobes of the Masai of Kenya.) see Illustration 4.

On the other hand the transformation may be temporary in the form of paintings or with the addition of such objects as feathers, metals, skins and in cases where it is not strictly utilitarian, clothing. Much of the personal decoration seems to be motivated by aesthetic considerations, which obviously vary from culture to culture.

Many nomadic cultures use body decoration not only as a form of beauty or heritage but also to delineate social position, rank, sex, occupation or perhaps religion. There are also sometimes special body decorations to mark the initiation of youth into Adulthood. Sometimes this can be a form of sexual and status adornment, for example, the circumcision of young boys or the clitoridectomy - which can mark the sexual maturity of girls in some cultures.

THE WODABBE OF CENTRAL NIGER

An example of a Nomadic pastoral tribe where a very strong tradition of body image and adornment has been upheld are the Wodabbe or Bororo, numbered as one of the last traditional nomadic tribes in Africa and who originate from Central Niger, an area which is desert like for 9 months of the year (see Illustration 5). The power of tradition, nomadic tradition is indicated by their name, the Wodabbe, the literal meaning at which is "The people of the Taboo". (Taboos reflect a society's understanding of its own order and that of the universe. They caution against contacts that might shun approved social behaviour). They believe that life is made up of a certain amount of suffering and joy. The hardship of the dry season alternates with the happiness of the rainy. During the dry season, the Wodabbe travel over hundreds of kilometres in search of water and grazing land for their animals.

Unusually and strangely, it is the men, rather than the women, who enjoy body adornment to its fullest extent. Indeed there is even a festival held within the tribe and in competition with other tribes for the most handsome and virile men. The young men dress up and parade in "Miss World" style in front of the elders and women who chant and applaud. Great time and work is taken to achieve a look which is considered beautiful. First of all, the face is coloured with an orange powder to give a lighter complexion. (The Wodabbe are naturally very dark skinned). Then the area around the eyes and the lips are blackened. The teeth are whitened by the use of a particular root which is ribbed over them. A white line is drawn from between the eyes straight down the full length of the nose to give it a longer appearance (Illustration 6).

Their hair is dressed with beads and feathers which are often dyed bright vivid colours. Their performance, from which a winner is picked

according to his energy, beauty and grace, includes keeping the mouth wide open in a smile showing strong, white teeth and rolling the eyes to show the size and whiteness. They leap and dance emitting high pitched yells to prove virility and grace./this can go on for hours and is highly competitive. Eventually a winner is chosen, usually through the effect he has on the crowd (Illustration 6).

They mainly herd sheep and goats and a dry and arid habitat and their life is based on a regular migratory exploration of the grazing lands within their territory, which measures about 15 thousand square miles. The Nomads have developed the concept of "Il Yab" or tribal road and therefore have a traditional route and schedule. The schedule regulates the length of time each location will be occupied. Milk and its by-products are the most important commodities but the women have developed the art of spinning and in all bags and packages are woven on horizontal looms from European wool and hair, as are carpets, sleeping rugs and the characteristic black tents made of strands of woven goat hair. Women goat hair is extremely valuable for winter use it retains heat and permits free circulation of air. Their tradition of weaving is functional rather than decorative, unlike the Weavers where self-adornment has become purely aesthetic and an art form. However, the weaving of the Nomads is central to their existence.

THE BASSERI OF SOUTHERN IRAN

Another group of nomads, also Pastoralists, except not from Africa but from Southern Iran, are not so much known for their body adornment as for their textiles. They are known as the Basseri and are exceptionally skilled weavers and spinners.

They mainly herd sheep and goats and a dry and arid habitat and their life is based on a regular migratory exploitation of the grazing lands within their territory, which measures about 15 thousand square miles. The Basseri have developed the concept of "Il Rah" or tribal road and therefore have a traditional route and schedule. The schedule regulates the length of time each location will be occupied. Milk and its by-products are the most important commodities but the women have developed the art of spinning and saddlebags and packages are woven on horizontal looms from homespun wool and hair, as are carpets, sleeping rugs and the characteristic black tents made of panels of woven goat hair. Woven goat hair is extremely versatile: for winter use it retains heat and permits free circulation of air. Their tradition of textiles is functional rather than decorative, unlike the Wodabbe where self adornment has become purely aesthetic and an artform. However, the weaving of the Basseri is essential to their existence.

The single girls wear only a small yellowish type hat is used on the head and then a scarf is dropped over it and attached and kept in place with the peg at the front. The head scarves are plain or sometimes are made of lace.

The Kuchas are Muslim but the women do not wear jashmans. The men wear a similar long shirt to the women, usually with a pullover over it and with trousers underneath, although many men are changing to a western style of dress. They also wear various types of hose which they make themselves. The most popular is a small woven round hat, again this is

KURKITS OF AFGHANISTAN

The Kurkits, perhaps Mongolian in origin, are from Afghanistan and are now settled in Turkey. They are a pastoral nomadic tribe, who are Muslim and they have a strong traditional image which has remained the same for centuries.

They are famous for their weaving, needlepoint and carpets. The wool which they use comes from the herds of yaks which are their livelihood.

During the summer months, they migrate to high mountainous regions and clip the wool from the yaks and make hay for the winter months. The yakswool is washed and prepared during the summer and it is during the long winter months on the lower planes that it is woven by the women. The carpets have distinct designs per region.

The Kurkit women wear a dress which is very similar to Pakistani traditional dress. A long skirt to below the knee, loose at the waist but with slight gathers from below the waist. The sleeves are long but usually worn rolled up to the elbow. Underneath this long shirt wide trousers are worn with a drawstring at the waist and a slightly stiffened border around the ends. Red is a favoured colour. The headwear is very simple and used to separate single and married women. The married women wear white and the single girls wear red. A small pillarbox type hat is fixed on the head and then a scarf is dropped over it and attached and kept in place with the peg at the front. The head scarfs are plain or sometimes are made of lace.

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pillarbox hat, this can either be plain black or brown or multicoloured with designs. The boys wear skirts similar to the girls up to a certain age.

Mother of pearl buttons and cowrie shells are used to decorate clothing, especially necklines (similar to the Banjara) and the jewellery that is worn is traditionally silver and amber. Unfortunately most of their valuable jewellery has been sold and now the items worn are merely imitation.

The women are expert weavers and the carpets that they make are tufted. Carpets made by the nomads of Central Asia are collectively designated as Turkoman carpets and have a distinctive character. Most are reddish and have a geometric design that incorporates in an all-over pattern, the coat of arms (gul) of the individual tribe. However, since the tribe has been settled by the Turkish government around lake Van, The women are being trained to weave carpets in a Turkish rather than Kurkit style, which is infortunate as their method and design may be lost.

Having previously lived in black felt tents known as Yurts they now live in 2 strong concrete houses where the family lives on top and the animals below.

THE ABORIGINES OF AUSTRALIA

The Aborigines of Australia and Tasmania were well established about 40,000 years ago. It is said that they arrived by sea, possibly from South East Asia. Traditionally about 500 different tribal groups existed, each living in a particular stretch of country and speaking a different dialect or language. They are Nomadic hunter-gatherers. They have few everyday belongings, the men carry spears, spear throwers and various kinds of boomerangs. Women carry their digging sticks, dishes and bags or baskets.

Aboriginal society has a well developed trading economy: goods of various kinds (spears, ochres, implements, pendants) were exchanged and passed from one group to the next - the entire country was crisscrossed with complex trade routes.

Aborigines are one Nomadic culture where the ties of Kinship can be seen. Every Aboriginal society had its own set of kin terms in its own particular kinship system. Kin terms indicated marriage eligibility, responsibilities and reasons for avoidance of particular individuals.

The Aborigines produced a wide range of ritual objects and emblems. Oral and visual arts are highly developed, including fire bark and cave paintings, rock engravings and sculptured posts and figures.

Song poetry, another very important and weightless heritage of these tribespeople, ranged from the succinct verses of Central Australia and the western desert to the elaborate Songcycles of North Eastern Arnhem land, which made use of complex symbolism. Dance and the dramatic arts are also well developed.

The reason I have chosen these four Nomadic tribes is because they are prime examples of the continuation of tradition even though the disadvantage of continual movement is present.

They have all maintained their heritage within a portable environment and most of these varied heritages are concerned with body adornment or appearance. Whether it is textiles paint, jewellery or weaponry.

THE BANJARA, A CASE STUDY

Introduction

While travelling through India by train during the summer of 1960, my companion and I couldn't help noticing that we continually came across the same tribe of people in completely different areas of the subcontinent. Strangely, none of the members of the settled communities seemed to be

SECTION II

A CASE STUDY OF THE BANJARA TRIBE OF NORTHWEST INDIA AND THEIR TRADITION OF TEXTILES

They were wearing extremely coloured clothing which was highly and extravagantly worked with embroidery, shells and mirrors. The women were wearing full skirts with bodices which laced at the back, other than the traditional sari. They also wore an abundance of silver and brass jewellery and had indigo coloured stains on their faces, hands and feet (Illustration 11).

What we couldn't understand, was that they were not particular to one region. We found them in Goa, Cochin, Hyderabad and Jaipur. They seemed to be everywhere, but only in small numbers. Where tourists go, the tribespeople follow.

The only employment they seemed to derive is from trade and this was specifically made of their own textiles, clothing and jewellery. They are, apparently, excellent and persuasive barterers. One such tribeswoman I met in Goa, called Sureshadevi, was so adamant in selling me a nose ring that when I told her I didn't wear it, as my nose wasn't pierced, she produced a beautiful wife, dressed in full traditional dress and asked me to have my nose pierced for a small price (Illustration 12).

THE BANJARA, A CASE STUDY

Preface

While travelling through India by train during the summer of 1990, My companion and I couldn't help noticing that we continually came across the same tribe of people in completely different areas of the subcontinent. Strangely, none of the members of the settled communities seemed to be able to help us find out who they were. The tribes people themselves didn't speak any English.

They were weaving incredibly colourful clothing which was highly and extravagantly worked with embroidery, shells and mirrors. The women were weaving full skirts with bodices which laced at the back, other than the traditional saris. They also wore an abundance of silver and brass jewellery and had Indigo coloured tattoos on their faces, hands and feet. (Illustration 11).

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We realized it was only the women who seemed to work, carrying their huge envelope-type sacks made out of reinforced embroidered and/or quilted cotton, to and from market places and tourist traps.

This sack, when empty, is used as a mat and the wares are then spread out on it and a corner section is left empty for the prospective buyer to sit on.

Goa, the former Portuguese Colony and a very commercialized part of the west Coast of India was where we first came across the "Banjara", as we were later to discover they were called (and this was not until we came home to Ireland). What we did realize was that when we enquired in India, the subject was treated as if it was disdainful and people suddenly became generally unhelpful. This could have had some-thing to do with the effects of the caste system, so widespread in India, where nomadic tribes are fairly low if not untouchable on the caste ladder (Illustration 13).

Origins

Because the Banjara (also sometimes known as lombardis) are a travelling race, similar to our Gypsies and tinkers, Their Nomadic nature automatically places them at the lower end of the Indian Caste system. Although this system is Hindu in origin it has spread throughout the entire society and is extremely complex.

Basically, the word Caste actually comes from a Spanish or Portuguese word Casta and describes the four basic divisions of Hindu society which have their origins in the Vedic Period.

There are certain main features which run through the system:

1. Endogamy: Compulsory marriage within the group. These are usually arranged by the parents of the bride and groom and dowry and wealth are a main factor of consideration.
2. Ascriptive membership by birth and for life, with implied hereditary starts.
3. Ranking in a hierarchy in relation to other such groups different strata within the tribe, nobles, vassals and also different actual tribes being higher than others, according to size, strength or wealth.

In the Indian Caste system, there are four main Varnas or sections: Brahmins, Kshatnyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. There are then further divided into a multiplicity of Jati, which are even smaller and more complex groupings.

The Brahmin is the highest class, consisting of Priests and arbiters, and the Sudras are the lowest, being usually peasants and labourers. Below this again are the untouchables and these, quite literally, have no caste, the Banjara would be considered untouchable. Today this caste stratification

system has been much weakened but unfortunately still has considerable power.

Gandhi put great effort into bringing the untouchables into society. However when Indian Airlines appointed their first untouchable flight attendant, it was front page news in India and this was only a couple of years ago.

For many people it comes as a surprise to learn that more than 40 million Indians belong to tribal communities as distinct from the great mass of Hindu Caste Society. These Adivasi, as they are known in India, have origins which precede Vedic Aryans and even the Dravidians of the South.

The Banjara are thousands of years old and are of Aryan descent. Aryan is a term formally used to denote both a linguistic and an assumed racial category related to Indo-Europeans. Early scholars, struck by similarities among ancient Indian languages, such as Sanskrit and Ancient European languages, such as Latin and Greek, hypothesized the existence not only of a proto-Indo-European language but also of a proto-Indo European social group.

Aryan is a Sanskrit word meaning "noble" and of a higher Civilization. Aryans were supposed to be from a band of land which stretches across North and Central Asia and the Banjara are supposed to have originated in Afghanistan, then travelled south into India² (Illustration 14).

Central Asia can be divided into 4 distinct regions which span out in belts over a large area from Turkey to China. The area has one common physical feature, a cold and dry climate with enormous temperature variations nearly everywhere and less than 6 frost-free months a year. Therefore only 20th Century technology has permitted the creation of large towns in the Tundra (vast, frozen marshes) and the Taiga (heavily forested) areas. These temperature changes and types of land make the area hostile to the development of human settlement. As a result, due to annual changes

in climate, most societies of the region were of a Nomadic, but mainly pastoral-Nomadic type.

Although the Banjara may have previously been a pastoral tribe to a greater extent, they are not longer. However, they do have goats with them wherever they go, but not in great numbers and it is the men who seem to look after them. We never saw any Banjara travelling on trains so I presume they travel by foot to the different regions.

When moving, the women carry goods balanced on their heads. They have special flat-topped hats made out of matted straw which enable them to do this. The group we saw moving also had a couple of donkeys laden down with pots, mats and other utensils. (Illustration 15).

I could not find out if they have specified routes which they are familiar with and follow, or if they merely travel until they find somewhere which suits their needs and where there is a population large enough to trade with. Nowadays, they are found mostly in areas of tourism, as European travellers seem to be most sympathetic towards their waves, especially with the rise of ethnic awareness in Europe and the United States.

The Banjara do not seem very religious and I don't believe them to be Hindu, perhaps they are still Muslim. I came across a few who had crosses tattoo'ed on their thumbs which is usually symbolic of Christians, but very few of the Banjara speak English so it was difficult to obtain information.

I was curious as to their burial ritual, where and how are their dead are buried if they are always on the move. The Banjara's main way of cooking tends to be with stainless steel and clay pots over open fires.

TRADITION OF TEXTILES, ORNAMENTATION AND CLOTHING

As I have already discussed in the first chapter, the main problem of a nomadic people is the maintenance of their traditions and heritage. However, generally it is these very same cultures which seem to hold onto their traditions the longest, and the Banjara are no exception. They have withheld a strong tradition of textiles which is possibly the same today as it was thousands of years ago. Perhaps because Nomads are forever moving, they need their heritage to be stable and to remain exactly the same, almost as an anchor.

The Banjara heritage is material and related to self adornment, including not only specific clothes made from their own worked textiles but also jewellery, specifically of their own design. Other aspects of their adornment include headwear, hair braiding, facial and body tattoos.

(i) Textiles

Throughout Banjara textile work, pattern is used as a language of identity. There are similarities to other Indian textiles especially in Rajasthan where mirrors and shells are also used traditionally in the textiles.

The majority of Banjara pieces are begun by taking a weave of perhaps green or black whose entire surface is covered by needlepoint with very fine stitches in several coloured cottons and fine wools (silk is also used but only on very special and elaborate pieces). The designs are primarily linear with a repetition of pattern. The designs are sometimes concentric with squares moving inwards, squares of colour and crosses within squares. Sometimes the colour (if it is a block of colour) fades or deepens in tonal intensity within rectangular designs. Some of the threads change colour as they progress due to the strength of the dyes and this gives wonderful tonal variations within solid areas of colour.

The underneath side of a worked piece is usually reinforced with a cotton fabric to give strength, sometimes this is quilted. The stitching is so fine and so accurate that it almost looks woven. Stitches are done on the straight and then at angles to the straight. The predominant colours used include yellow, pale and a deeper mustard, red, through a range of wine and orange, blue, pale and deep. The red and blue stitches are also mixed side by side to give a purple appearance. Designs are repeated side by side or moving up and down each piece and basic shapes include squares, rectangles and diamonds. The swastika is also scattered randomly through some designs as an ancient Persian fertility and harvest symbol (Illustration 16).

In addition to needlepoint, Applique is also another technique used, where pieces of differently coloured or marked shapes are stitched to the main piece giving added colour and texture. This is where mirrors are added, small pieces of mirrored glass are incorporated into their textiles from the Sind region, recognisable as they are tear shaped and round, sometimes even square².

These mirrored discs are usually affixed by a ring of stitches interlaced around a central loop (Illustration 17). The general principle of working this stitch is related to the methods of working closed Herringbone stitch, double Herringbone stitch and interlacing stitch, each of which appear on the Banjara work, the main difference being that the stitch for affixing the minor discs is worked in a circle and not in a line (Illustration 17)³.

Further additions to the worked pieces are wool or cotton bobbles, small lead fittings, tassles, buttons, sequins, coins and twisted rope straps made from cotton, wool or silk.

The small soft bobbles are usually made from unbrushed cotton or wool and as a result have a velvety feel. There is usually a plait of cotton coming from the main piece with one or two bobbles at the end. Sometimes at the top of the plait will be a bobble and a lead texture. The lead they use is very soft and therefore cheap and the design usually used is similar to half an acorn shell, holding the bobble in the hollowed end (Illustration 19). I was unable to find out where they acquire the head and brass which they use and I can only presume that they barter for it when at markets and towns.

The whole area of the piece will be covered entirely in small neat stitches which are fairly thick, whose yarn is cotton. Sometimes, for extra strength near the edges, cross stitches are added. (Illustration 20) The embroidery is simple and the stitches come through the fabric rather than being superimposed onto another fabric (a lot of Indian textiles are embroidered in this way).

The Banjara do not dye their own threads but buy or barter for them already dyed which may account for the very wide range of tones and colours². The fabrics that are worked are cotton, silk or wool.

(ii) Clothing

The Banjara women have a particular mode of dress which is strikingly different from the saris of the regions where the Banjara can be found, from Rajasthan to Goa, Hyderabad and Cochin. Not only are they a lot more colourful and ornate than Saris, they are also much easier to wear and allow greater movement, which is an important factor to a nomadic tribe.

The bodice when laid out flat is almost butterfly-shaped (see Illustration 22). It is backless and has a figured bust through the use of darts and gathers. The neckline is either a slight "v" shape or a wide "v" shape which slopes towards the shoulders. The sleeves or gussets are elbow length and tight, slightly restricting. The garment reaches the waist and is put on by slipping the arms into the sleeves and by the use of ties from the sides and waist, it is then tied around the back. There are also strings of twisted cotton at the neck to keep the front in place. I tried one on and it is incredibly uncomfortable, but this was obviously because European clothing has different restrictive areas, for example, I couldn't get used to the tight armholes and sleeves and found it difficult to raise my arms and the very fitted bust was uncomfortable and something you were constantly aware of.

On these bodices the main design seems to be on the centre panel below the bust with a repetition of design on either side above the bust and usually a repeated linear design down the sleeves and along the waist area. The piece that goes out towards the side may not be so highly worked, as such pieces are not necessarily seen.

The skirts are wide, full and gathered from a thick waistband. They sometimes have a yoke or basque and this is somewhat plainer than the bottom of the skirt (Illustration 23). As the eye is led from the waist to the hem, the design and colour become more intense there - obviously the area that is seen the most is more highly worked.

The border around the hemline is nearly always detachable (Illustration 24) and almost an artform in itself. It is detachable because it gets used and dirty more easily than the rest of the skirt, especially during

the monsoon, as it is the hemline which is nearest the ground. This piece can be replaced so the skirt can last longer. The hempieces vary in width, usually around 15 cm. The designs on them can be circular but are mainly linear and embroidered. The design is usually repeated along the entire length of the hem. The piece is usually reinforced at the back with another fabric to give it extra wear and strength.

Shawls and scarves are worn over the head and around the shoulders, when the women are moving or carrying goods, a flat, round hat is worn over the scarf. This is made from matted goats' hair with a piece of worked cloth which hangs down the back of the head as far as the neck. Cowrie shells are usually worked onto this to provide extra weight. The flat-topped hat enables the women to balance weights on their heads.

Headscarves are usually decorated with a mixture of shells, sequins and mother of pearl buttons around the area next to the face and neck, not only as decoration but also to keep the scarf in place by adding additional weight at the front to balance the weight of the scarf-length at the back.

The men, and sometimes the women, wear small round hats with plain tops and richly embroidered edges, however these pillarbox hats are not traditional to them, but are from Humachal Pradesh and have been adopted and made specifically for the tourist market².

The Banjara carry numerous small purses and bags of various sizes and tie them about their person. They also wear small square sections of cloth which have been intricately worked with the addition of cowrie shells. These are either tied from the waist and allowed to hang or they are tied from the neck and almost worn like a necklace. (see Illustration 25) Unfortunately, I was hardly unable to find any information about Banjara men and their adornment traditions, they may have completely converted to western style dress (like the majority of most Indians) and therefore blend in.

(iii) Jewellery

The jewellery of the Banjara women could be said to be their riches, similar to a dowry. It is predominantly silver, brass and soft lead with the odd piece of gold (nose rings and usually gold) (Illustration 11)²/these metals are probably bartered for. Several necklaces are worn, made up of a main chain around the neck which might branch into three or four lengths, each longer than the last. Onto these chains are added several bells, enamel or glass beads, and coins (for example, holes are put through old silver rupees and attached).

Coloured glass or enamel beads are also used, although red is favoured, I presume that these are either bought or exchanged (Illustration 26). Coins are also attached to the section around the face of the head-scarf and this can be so ornate that it can look like an extended necklace.

Strings of coloured beads may be worn underneath the silver to add colour and extra volume. Nose rings are worn by all the women, as is typical among most Indian communities. The nose is automatically pierced when the girl is very young. The Banjara nose rings are much bigger than those worn by the settled Indians and they are usually of gold and very ornate. They are sometimes even decorated with beads, semi-precious stones or extensions. Finger rings are not very popular and if they are worn, they are simple silver or brass bands, sometimes with small bells. Toerings are very popular and two rings (again silver or brass) may be worn on at least four toes of each foot. The Banjara do not usually wear shoes and if they do, they wear a very simple leather sandal, where the toes are free (like a beach flip-flop).

Ear-rings also are not usually part of the Banjara tradition but if they are worn, they are fairly simple hoops. However what takes the place of earrings are very large hair clips worn at the front just below the ears. They

are silver and clasp onto the end of each braid at the front. They have several extensions of bells and beads from a large silver base (Illustration 12).

A shoulder piece is also worn which hangs down in two sections over each shoulder. Although this is mainly a richly decorated textile with an exuberant amount of beads, shells and mirrors, the addition of silver coins and bells almost turns it into another form of jewellery.

Bracelets take the form of coloured glass bangles and large white bracelets which are now of plastic but would originally have been of ivory² (Illustration 11). These white bangles are very tight and several are worn as far up as the elbow. More traditional forms of bracelet can be seen in Illustration (27). The brass pieces are fairly heavy and worked into shapes by the Banjara which almost look like teeth and the cord which holds them together is made of twisted and plaited cotton. A mushroom-like brass fixture is used to hold the bracelet on by putting it through a cord loop. When it is worn, it hangs down over the wrist.

The main designs recurring through most of the jewellery take the form of coins, discs and bells or small silver beads. Chains tend to have large links. The vast amount of jewellery and silver work gives the women an awesome and very noble appearance. Whether the men wear jewellery or not I was unable to discover.

(iv) Hair Braiding and Tattoos

The hair of the Banjara women is not worn loose and long, as it is by many of the settled Indian women. But it is usually braided and decorated with silver bells and then covered with a headscarf which is just laid over the head so it falls down on either shoulder.

The braiding can take many forms and shapes but the main kind is of a centre parting with two or three braids, one down each side of the face and one down the back. They are then weighted at the end to give a dragged appearance with silver hair pieces.

For the women, hair length does not seem to be a sign of beauty as most have only shoulder length hair and this is the same for all ages. Because the hair reaches the shoulders this allows the braid clasps to hang down, ear-ring like, over the shoulders. The thickness of hair was definitely taken into consideration as oils are used and fake hair (previously horse hair, now monofibre, and can be brought in most Indian markets) is plaited into their own to give extra body.

The tattoos that most of the Banjara wore had, I presumed, been executed when they were born or were children. They all had facial tattoos - floral designs on the cheeks and chin and sometimes a series of dots on the top of the nose. There were tattoos of flowers and concentric circles or dots on the back of the hands and sometimes down along the fingers, in no particular pattern, maybe just one dot on each toe. These tattoos were probably made by hot needles and indigo ink which is rubbed into the patterned wound. I have been unable to discover if these tattoos have any religious or symbolic meaning.

RECENT CHANGES IN THE BANJARA WAY OF LIFE

Although the Banjara can be found all over the subcontinent of India, even as far south as Sri-Lanka, the main concentration of the tribe still remains in Rajasthan. The land itself is somewhat dry, arid and inhospitable and to the north east lies the Thar desert. Up until recently there was also a lot of the tribe along the Pakistan border, however, because of the trouble there, many have moved southward, mainly to Jaipur and its outskirts (just south of Delhi).

About two years ago a new and exciting plan was thought up by a half English, half Indian textile company "Anokhi", in Jaipur, whereby villages, almost like craft villages were built to house the Banjara to provide them with amenities and shelter. Outside the village workshops, wells were dug and lined and used as dye vats, where the Banjara men would dye their natural fabrics, mainly cottons and leave them to dry on the ground. This method is successful. The village usually employs one or two tailors, who will size and cut the fabric, sometimes backing it.

The Banjara women then set about embroidering the design which has been mapped out on the cloth, by one of the women, using their traditional forms of stitchwork.

The designs used on the fabric are either traditional Banjara linear designs or are modern interpretations. Designers from western textile companies are sometimes employed to work out in "Anokhi" for short periods of time.

The quilt covers, table cloths, wall hangings, cushion covers and clothes which are the final result are usually produced for export, where high prices are fetched for the workmanship or they are sold in craft emporiums in the major Indian cities specifically aimed at the tourist market and abroad.

CONCLUSION

In the world today, where heritage has become monumental it is refreshing and stimulating to find cultures where heritage is not tangible but lives through tradition, which is passed from one generation to the next, taking the form of identity, song, dance, craftwork, artforms and storytelling.

It was only after I chose Nomadism and the difficulties in maintaining tradition and heritage through a portable environment that I realized how little Nomadic cultures have been explored. One of my main problems was finding information. Another obstacle was that nomads in many cultures are outcasts and on enquiry, many embassies whom I contacted in reference to the tribes involved, were off hand and unhelpful.

Traditional nomadism is fast dying out as more and more tribes are encouraged to settle down and therefore their traditional crafts are also suffering, as they are taking up employment in other trades.

Many tribes are also being persecuted as were the Kurds of Afghanistan in 1982 when, under the regime of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi's waged chemical warfare against the tribespeople. Also in World War II, the genocide of Gypsies (as well as Jews) in Germany.

The Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth wrote of how the Basseri, Iranian nomads, were in the 1930's, forbidden by Reza Shah to move from their winter grazing ground.

In 1941, the Shah was deposed, and they were free once again to make the 300-mile journey to the Zagros. Free they were, but they had no animals. Their fine-fleeced sheep had suffocated on the southern plains: yet they set off all the same.

(They became nomads again, which is to say they became human again.

The supreme value to them lay in the freedom to migrate, not in the circumstances that make it economically viable

Fredrik Barth, *The Songlines*

When Barth came to account for the dearth of ritual among the Basseri - or of any rooted belief - he concluded that the journey itself was the ritual, that the road to summer uplands was the way, and that the pitching and dismantling of tents were prayers more meaningful than any in the mosque.

Nomadic culture and the rich heritage involved is something which should be studied more carefully before it completely disappears. Or maybe a new form of nomadism will evolve? Nomadic attitudes are very different to those of settled populations, for example, in respect to burial of the dead, settled populations know and visit sites where their dead behind them, even this in itself is a fundamental difference.

As Kipling wrote:

All things considered there are only two kinds of men in the world - those that stay at home and those that do not.

Kipling, as quoted in the Songlines by Bruce Chatwin

FOOTNOTES

1. Grolier eyclopedia on Caste System. ¹
2. Infomation acquired from Arthor Duff, (Collector of Indian Textiles) at an interview conducted in December 1990.
3. Indian Embroideries, Arun and Mehta. ¹¹

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COILED BASKET, *gorof*, Buloxaar. Fiber. H 29cm. Collection Abby Thomas, Washir. This basket is used to hold water, for milk and as a drinking vessel.

opposite NOMAD holding his *gorof*. Photo Wehrmann.

21

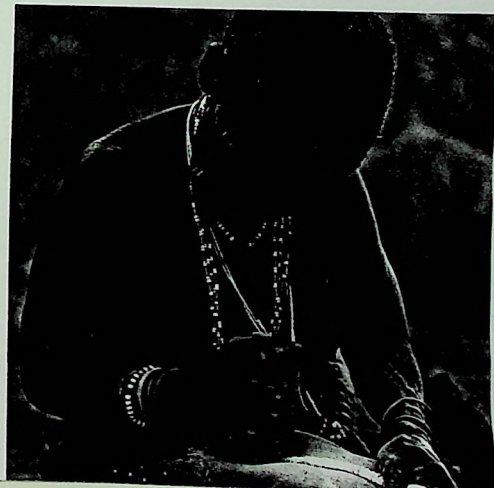
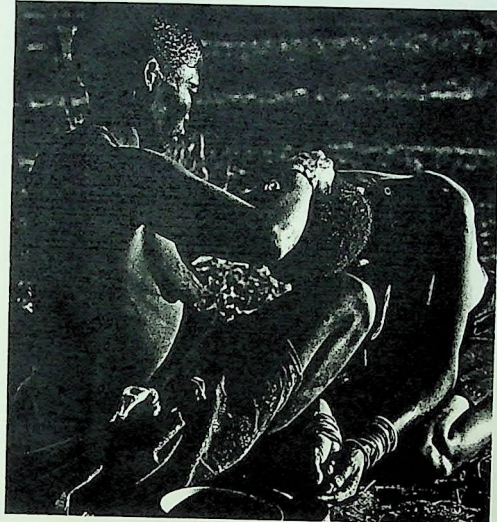


Illustration 3. Several Pictures of Different Nomadic Art Forms.

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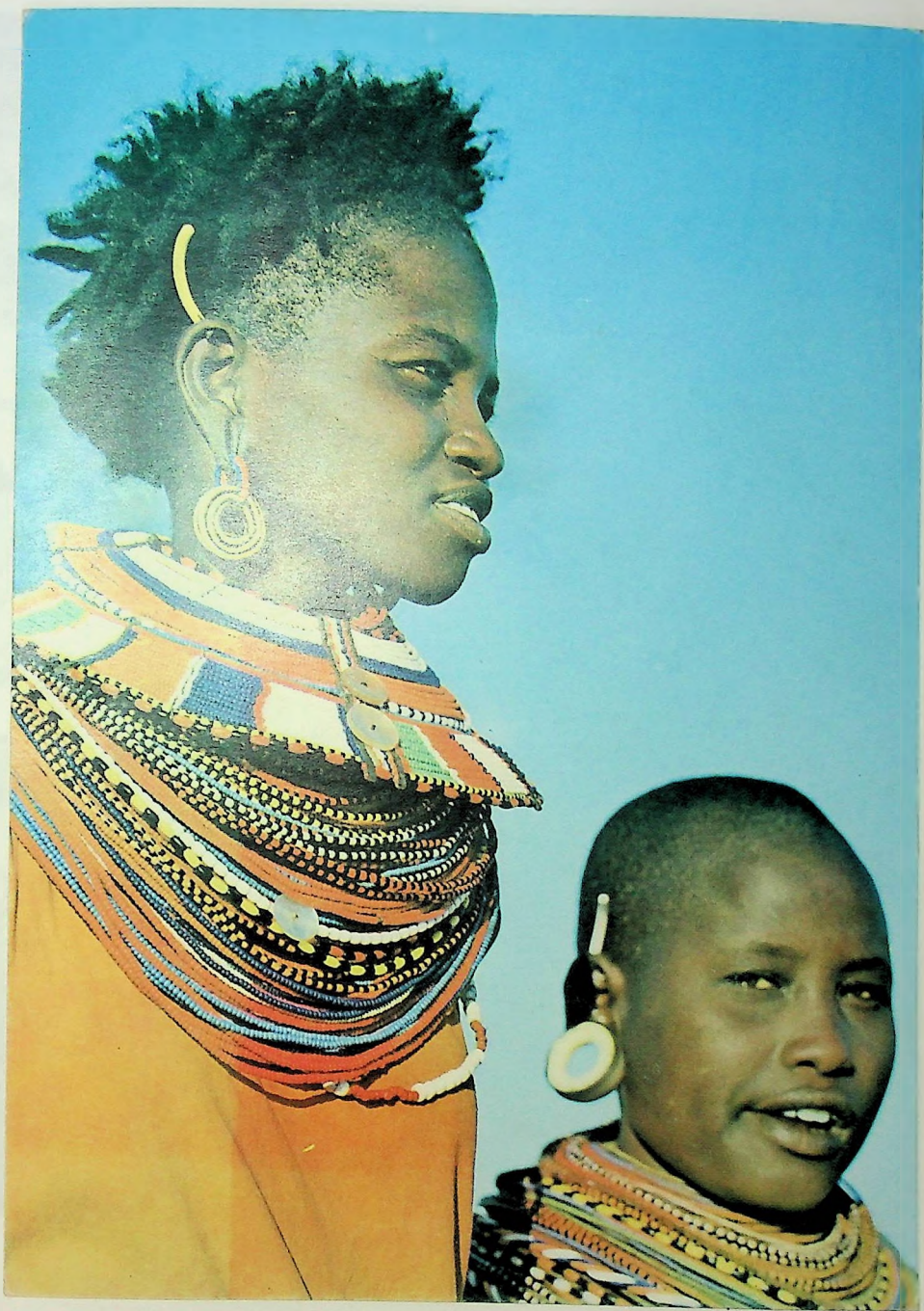


Illustration 4. Masai Tribe Member with Slit Ear Lobes.



Illustration 5. Map of Central Niger.

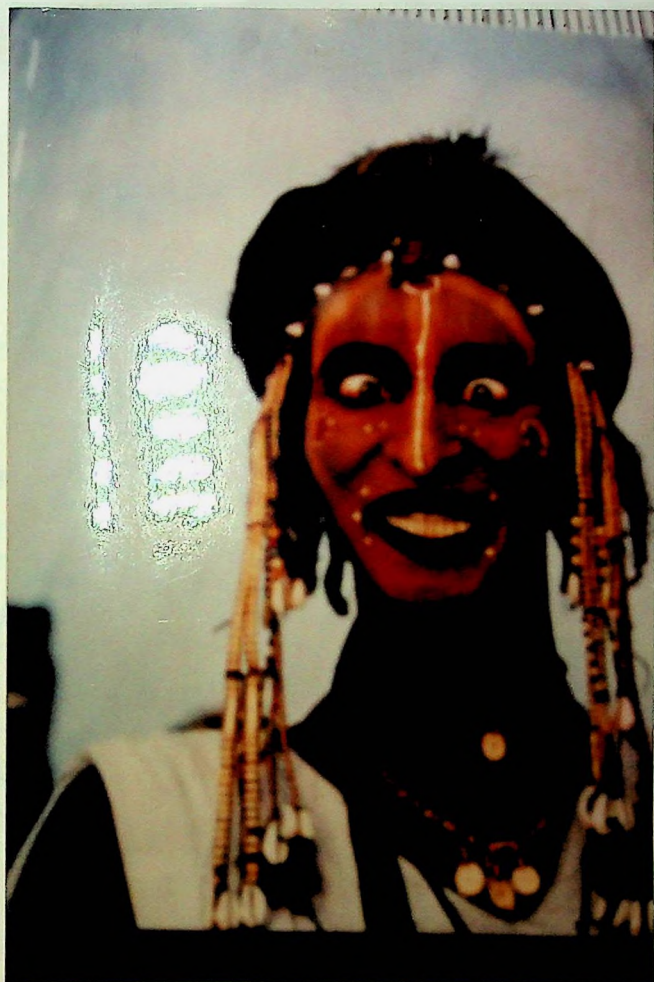


Illustration 6. Wodabbe Male in Full Costume.



Kurdistan occupies portions of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and the USSR. The Kurds, who are ethnically closest to the Iranian traditionally are nomadic herders. Saladin, the great opponent of the Crusaders, was of Kurdish descent.

Illustration 7. Map of Kurdistan.

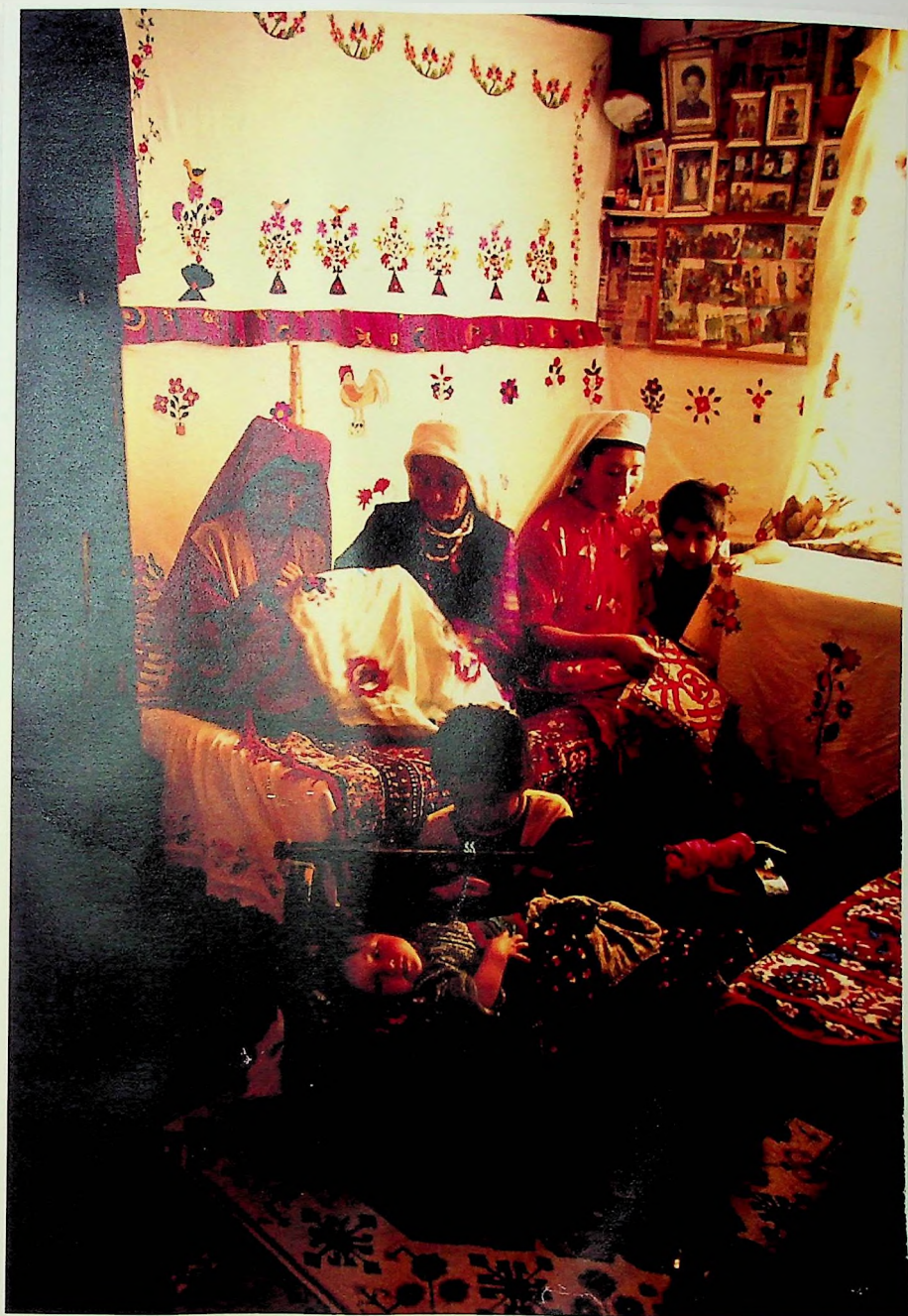


Illustration 8. Kurkit Women Working at Home.

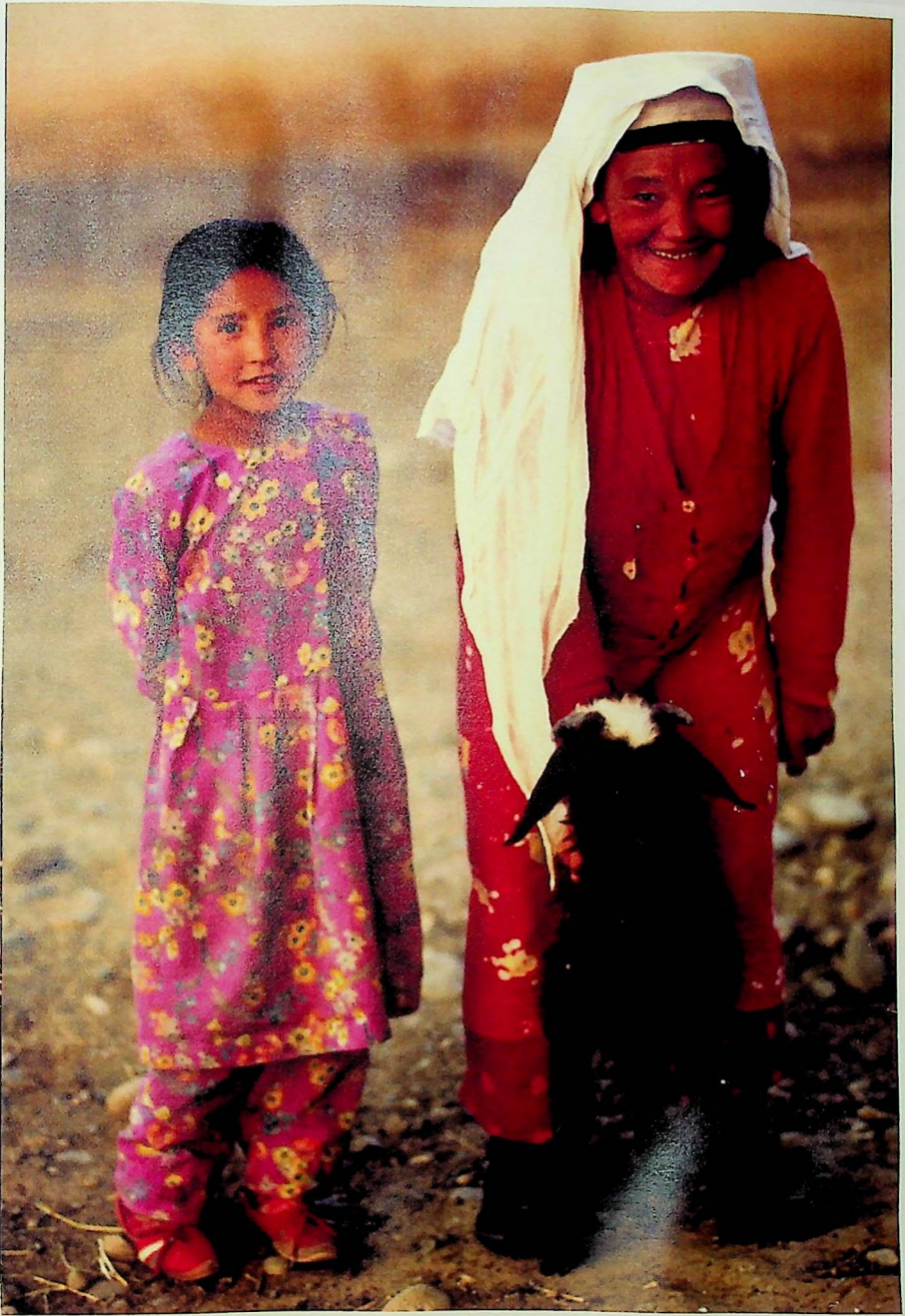


Illustration 9. Kurkit Women and Child.



Illustration 10. Aboriginals.

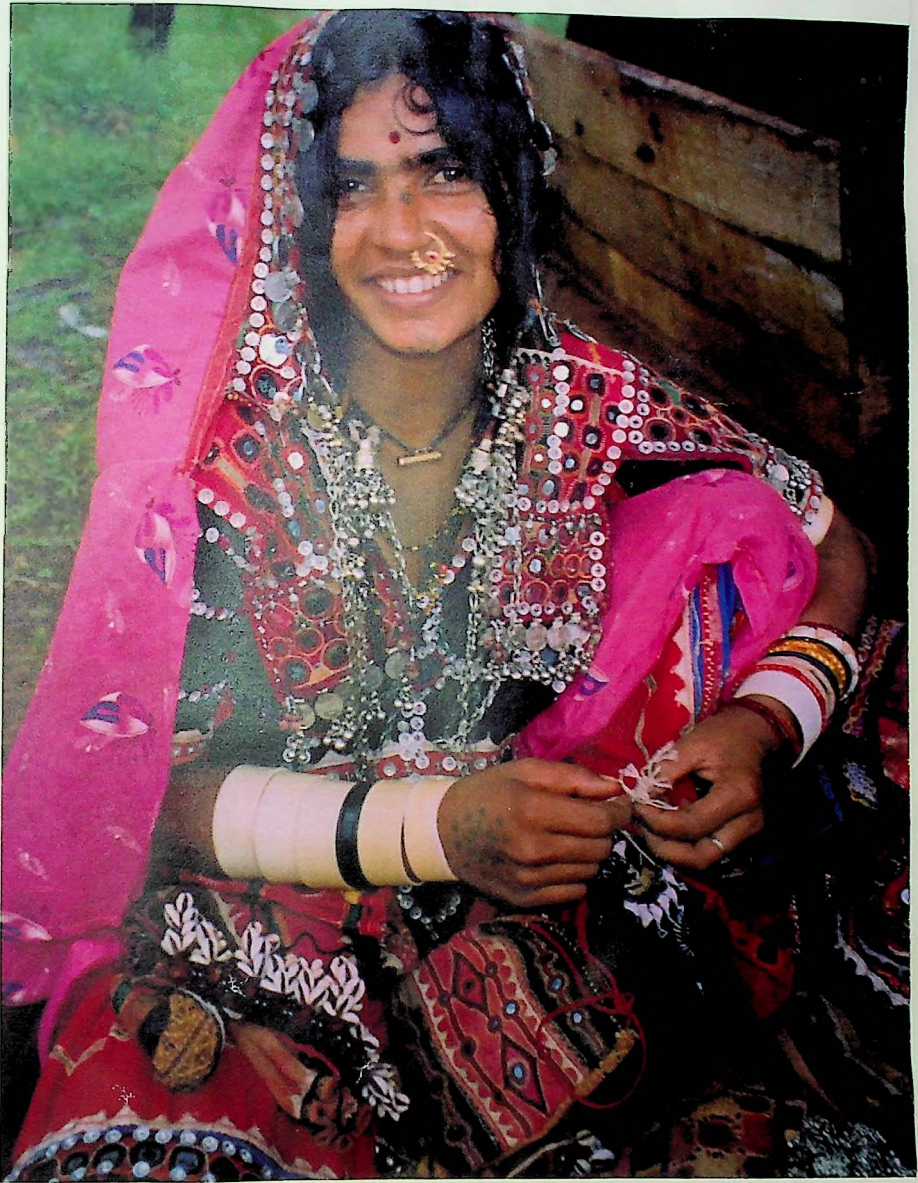


Illustration 11. Young Banjara Woman in Full Costume, "Myrna".



Illustration 12. "Sussalabei".



Illustration 13. Map of India Goa Marked.

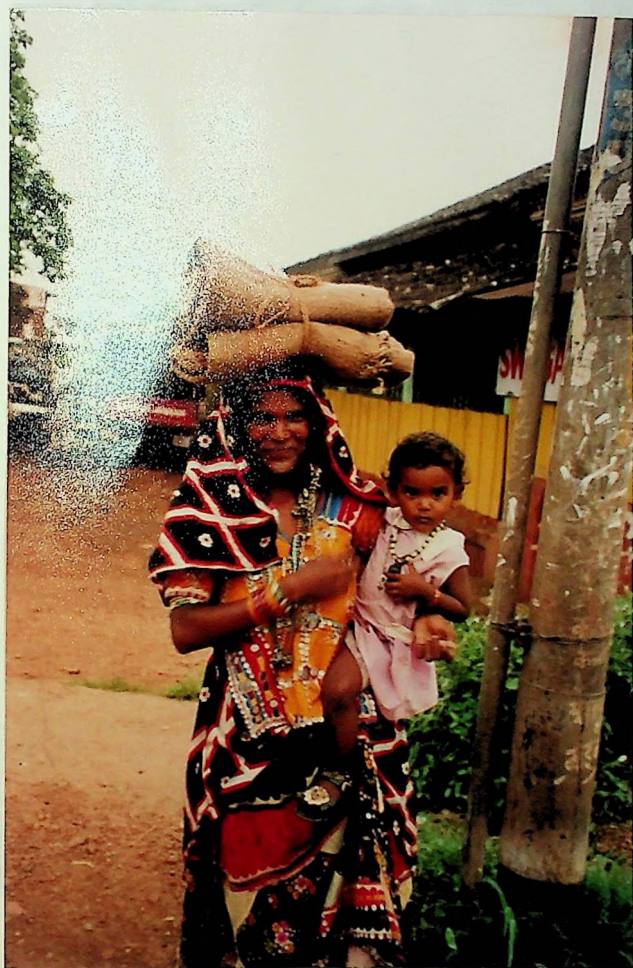
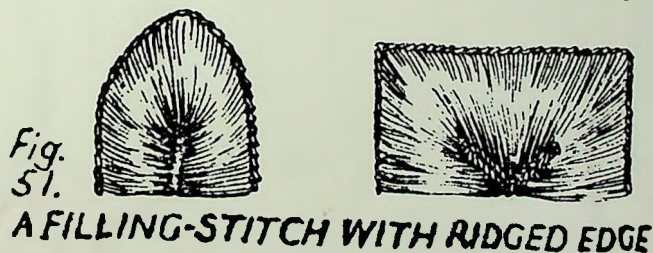
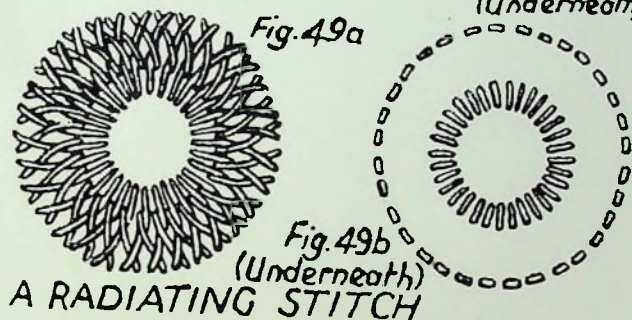
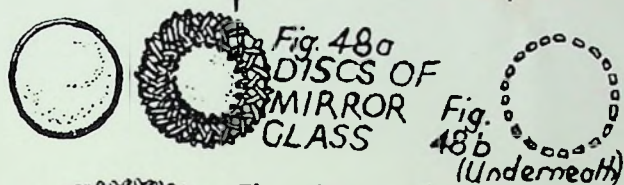
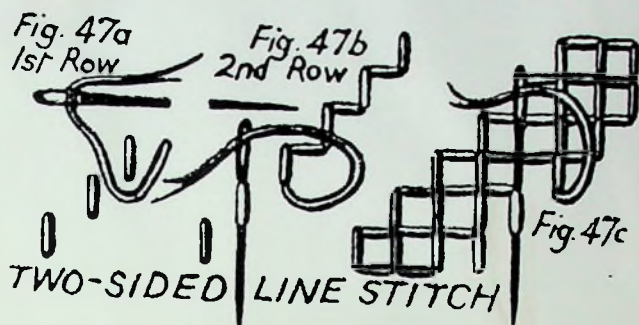
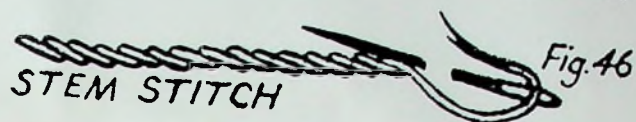


Illustration 15. Banjara Women Carrying Headload.
(Baby in Western Dress).



Illustration 16. Needlepoint Piece with Swastika and Cowrie Shells.



Glossary Figs. 37 to 51

Illustration 17. Illustration of Stitches.



Illustration 18. Piece with Mirror Work, Close up of Stitches.



Illustration 19. Worked Piece with Bobble and Lead Fitting.

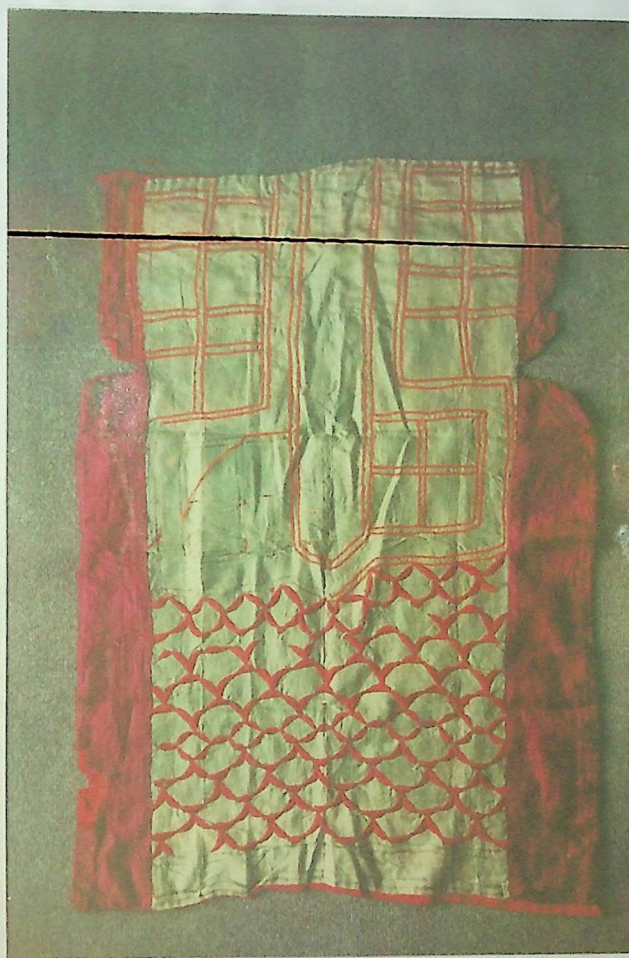


Illustration 20. Map of Stitches on Bodice Piece - Unfinished.

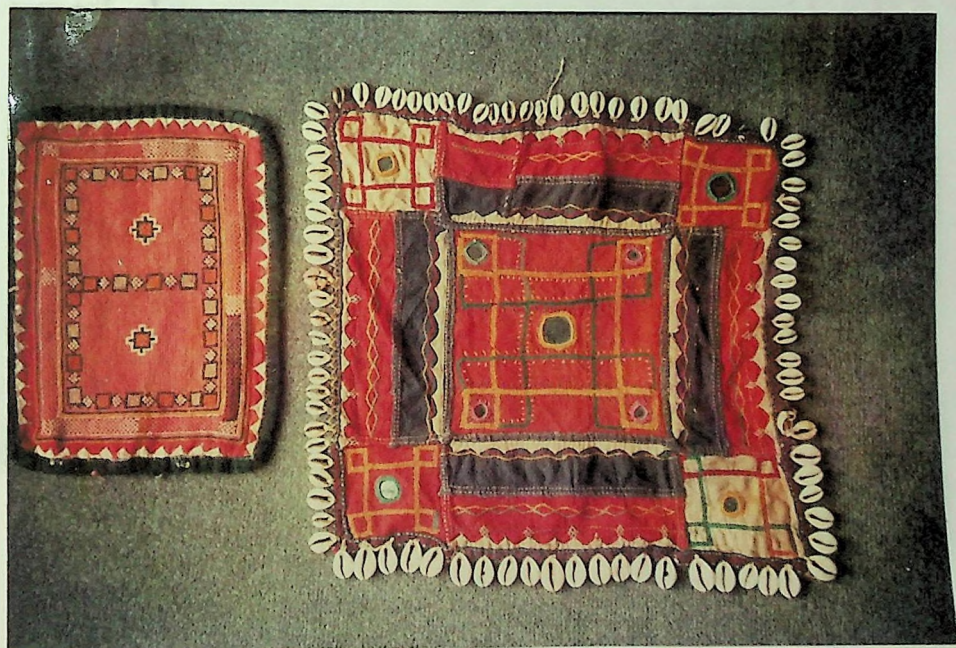


Illustration 21. Several Banjara Pieces.



Illustration 22. Butterfly Bodice Laid out Flat.



Illustration 23. Skirt.

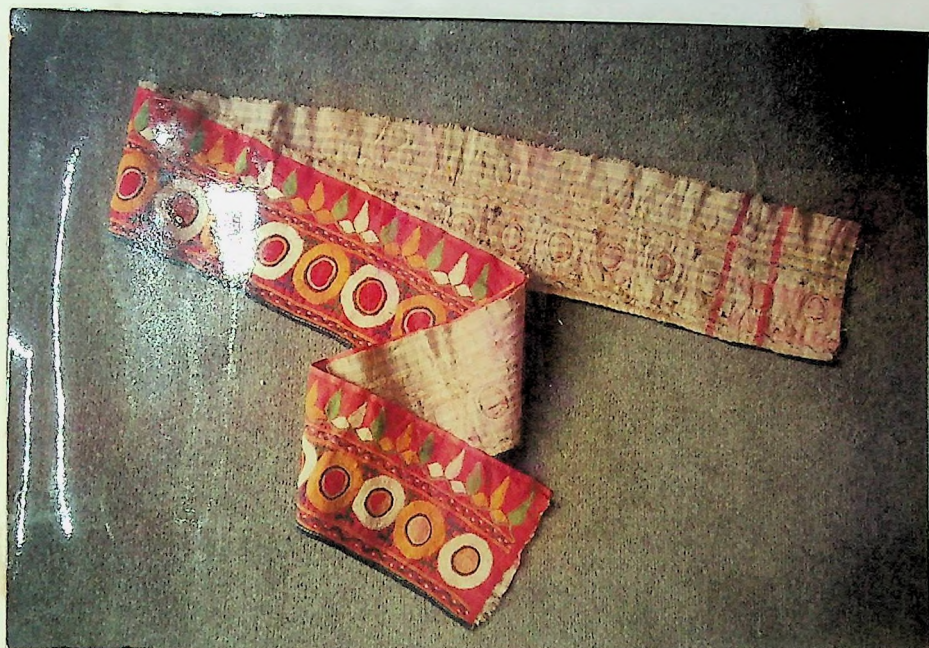


Illustration 24. Detachable Hemline.



Illustration 25. Squares with Design, for Hanging.



Illustration 26. Necklace with Coins and Beads.



Illustration 27. Brass Traditional Bracelet.