CRAFTS AND INTANGIBLE HERITAGE OF RAJASTHAN
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CRAFTS AND INTANGIBLE HERITAGE OF RAJASTHAN
Holika dahan
in progress
Some of the most vibrant and fond-est memories of my growing-up years are those linked to festivals. Perhaps this is so for many Indians—our childhoods are captured in moments that refuse to grow sepia-tinted with years, preferring instead to don the shades of pinks, blues and greens of raucous Holi, or the golden hues of the lit lamps of Diwali, flickering even in the soft focus of a memory. This is all the more so if, like me, you have grown up in Rajasthan. For, in the arid landscape of the desert, the grand festivals were what imbued in us a sense of colour, adding to the parched terrain a vibrant beauty that Mother Nature herself did not bestow.

I remember that the preparations for festivals, big or small, were always elaborate. The house would be decorated with intricate mandanas, or flour patterns on the floor; the rooms would be cleaned till they sparkled; the women would undertake fasts and we would all troop down to the temple to listen to a tale or sing bhajans and to marvel at the sights and sounds of the mela at the village square. Those are glorious memories, one that I am always willing to reflect on, and it is so for most Rajasthanis.

Hardly a month passes by without a festival being celebrated in one part of the state or the other. As in the rest of the country, the festivals have religious and mythological, seasonal or historical significance. Perhaps what’s more unique to Rajasthan is the enormous number of traditional fairs that continue to be held today. These double as photo-opportunities for tourists to see the ‘real Rajasthan’, but also remain at heart an opportunity for villagers to get together, do business and relax in the company of their brethren—just as it was decades ago.

If the fair is a religious one, then prayers and processions form an integral part of
the celebrations. There are also festivals associated with changing seasons—some to welcome the monsoon or spring, to seek the blessings of the rain gods for ensuring a plentiful harvest or to thank them if the yield is indeed good. It is worth mentioning here that the fairs are more than what they seem to be from the outside; apart from being an occasion for prayer or thanksgiving, these help in creating a sense of cohesion and solidarity among the community. Be that as it may, the joyous spirit of each and every festival remains the same, as is reflected in the colourful clothes of the people, in the bustling bazaars and in the enthusiasm with which cattle and grain are traded, or in the brisk haggling over handicrafts and clothes and household items. Here are some of the most popular fairs and festivals of the royal state of Rajasthan.

**Makar Sankranti**
In the first quarter of the year, Jaipur gears up to celebrate the annual Kite Flying Festival of Makar Sankranti, which falls on January 14. This marks the sun’s entry into the Northern Hemisphere and also signals the end of winter. On this day, the sky is dotted with thousands of colourful paper kites as families gather on rooftops playing loud music and watching kite fights. People pray for a good harvest on this day and offerings of til and khichdi are made to the sun god.

**Beneshwar Fair**
Celebrated at the end of January or the first week of February in Dungarpur, the Beneshwar Fair sees a huge gathering of tribal communities. Beneshwar means the ‘master of the delta’, the local name that has been given to a shivlinga at the Mahadeo Temple in Dungarpur. Tribal communities in the neighbouring states of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh also hold Beneshwar sacred. On the occasion of the fair, thousands of devotees gather at the confluence of the Som and Mahi rivers, where the fair is held. They sing folk songs, sometimes around bonfires at night, and there are all the other ingredients of a mela on display as well: dances, acrobatics and some magic to boot.

**Sheetla Mata Mela**
In a small village called Chaksu, located close to Jaipur, crowds gather in March to honour the Goddess Sheetla Mata at her shrine. Food cooked the night before is of-
ffered to pacify the goddess, who is believed to have the power to prevent diseases. A small cattle fair is held at this time and a market is also set up for villagers to trade in utensils and tools. The different means of transport that the devotees use to reach the mela is a sight worth seeing: buses, jeeps, tractors, camel and bullock carts, cycles and scooters. In the open ground around the hilltop temple to the goddess, people keep themselves entertained by singing and lots of dancing.

**Kaila Devi Fair**

The Kaila Devi Fair of Karauli, held in March-April, is dedicated to Goddess Chamunda. This fair lasts 12 days and attracts devotees from all over the state. For days, the roads leading to this small temple town are jammed with busloads of pilgrims. Devotees cover the distance on foot or by lying prostrate and then pulling themselves ahead. The temple courtyard resounds with songs as religious processions from nearby towns come together here. Visitors can also shop for local souvenirs.
Mahavirji Fair
Held in honour of the 24th Jain tirthankara Mahavir in March-April, this fair is where thousands of pilgrims from West Bengal, Assam, Bihar and South India congregate to offer their salutations. The venue is the Mahavirji Shrine at Chandangaon in Karauli district. A cobbler is believed to have discovered the lord’s image, now kept at the shrine, buried underground centuries ago. During the fair, the image is carried in a golden chariot drawn by two bullocks to the banks of the river Gambhiri. Pilgrims escort the chariot to the river and back, singing devotional songs. After the image is returned to the shrine, the festivity continues. Shops are set up during the fair, offering goods and knick-knacks to visitors.

Below: Handmade Gauri and Ishar dolls. Facing page: Gangaur procession

Gangaur
This is a festival celebrated by women across Rajasthan in March-April, on the day after Holi, and is spread over 18 days. The name Gangaur is a combination of the names of Lord Shiva—Gan being one of his names—and his consort Parvati, or Gauri. Many elaborate rituals are performed as part of the festival. In Jaipur, the highlight of the festival is the colourful procession that is taken out from Tripolia Gate to Chaugan and then on to Talkatora. The images of Gauri and Ishar (Shiva) are carried in palanquins, with decorated elephants, camels, horses and smartly dressed attendants for company. In the final ritual, the clay or wood images of the gods are immersed in a holy tank or lake. The lake city of Udaipur holds the most culturally evocative festivities of Gangaur, which coincides with the Mewar Festival. The celebrations are led across Lake Pichola by the royal barge from the City Palace to Gangaur Ghat where the ritual immersion of the images of Gauri and Ishar takes place.

Urs
Held in Ajmer, Urs falls on the first six days of Rajab (the seventh month of the Islamic calendar). Thousands of devotees of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, popularly known as Gharib Nawaz, gather here and pay homage to this saint, whose mortal remains are buried here. Smaller gatherings are organised in Nagaur, Tala and Galiyakot. The pilgrims make offerings called nazrana to the saint,
consisting of roses, jasmines and perfumes. Qawwali performances take place during this time and are a must-see. Kheer is distributed to devotees from two huge cauldrons or degs.

**Gogaji**
In a small village near Nohar in Hanumangarh district, a fair is held in August to honour a folk deity known as Gogaji Veer, popularly recognised as the God of Snakes. Revered by both Hindus and Muslims, the spot where Gogaji took samadhi is known as Goga Medi. Every year, thousands of devotees gather here to pay homage. The fair lasts for three days and attracts visitors from neighbouring states as well. There is a belief among the devotees that Gogaji can cure their diseases and many visitors come here to offer thanks when their wishes are fulfilled.

**Teej**
This is a celebration that starts in the monsoon month of Shravan, as the desert region gets ready to welcome the first drops of rain that will bring a rush of green to the landscape. The third day, or Teej, of Shravan is
celebrated in a big way in Rajasthan. The festival is dedicated to the union of Parvati and Shiva. Women dress in green clothes, denoting the arrival of spring. In rural areas, the festivities begin weeks before the main day of Teej. New clothes are purchased, traditional sweets made and feasts organised.

**Chandrabhaga Fair**

Held in November in Jhalrapatan, close to Jhalawar, this annual fair takes place on the banks of the river Chandrabhaga. On the full moon night of Kartik Purnima, people converge here to take a dip in the river and to offer prayers at the temple known as Chandrawati. A cattle fair is also held here, with cows, camels and bulls being sold, and traders from other states join in too.

**Ramdeoji Fair**

A folk deity revered in Runicha, a small village near Pokhran in Bhadra, Baba Ramdeoji or Ram Shah Pir was a 15th-century saint who hailed from the Tomar Rajput clan. Believed to have been an incarnation of Lord Krishna by the Hindus, Ramdeoji is worshipped for having performed miracles to help the poor. In a fair that lasts for 10 days in August and September, lakhs of devotees gather at Ramdeora to bathe in the Ramsar Tank, believed to have been constructed by the saint himself, and pay homage at his shrine-samadhi. In this religious fair, pilgrims spend most of their time singing devotional songs. The saint is said to have loved horses and to propitiate him today, devotees buy stuffed toy horses and offer these at the temple.

An attraction at the fair is the performance of *terah tali* by the members of the Kamad community. In this, two men relate the history of Ramdeoji to the accompaniment of the one-stringed *iktara*, and two women perform a dance. The performance can last through the night.
**Matsya Festival, Alwar**
Matsya festival is celebrated each year on 25-26 November to nurture the local art, culture and heritage of Alwar. Folk performances, adventure and local sports, paddle boat race, heritage walk in the old city, trekking around Bala Qila, Bhapang music are the key highlights of this festival.

**Kolayat**
The full moon in the month of Kartik (October-November) has special religious significance and dozens of small religious fairs take place in villages all over the state during this time. One such is the Kapil Muni Fair at Kolayat near Bikaner, so called after the much-revered sage Kapil Muni, who is believed to have descended from Lord Brahma. He is said to have prayed at the lake here and while pilgrims visit Kolayat through the year, a dip during the full moon is considered especially sacred. It is thought that one day spent in Kolayat is equivalent to 10 years spent in other sacred places. A beautifully located temple dedicated to Kapil Muni and 52 shaded ghats add to the sanctity of the atmosphere. A cattle fair is also held at this time when prizes are given for the best breeders of camels, horses and cattle.

**Jaipur Literature Festival**
A flagship event in Jaipur’s annual events calendar, the globally renowned Jaipur Literature Festival is a fabulous ‘feast of ideas’ held in January/February in the state capital. For five days the Diggi Palace in Jaipur glows brighter with festive hues and thrums with sounds of joy, as the literati and the glitterati converge on the Pink City from around the world. Each day starts with soothing morning ragas, followed by talks and panels on curated topics. Those into retail therapy hit the vibrant festival bazaars, an initiative to support artisans, craftsmen and young entrepreneurs.

**Rajasthan International Folk Festival**
This festival in Jodhpur is a five-day roots music extravaganza, and offers the breathtaking backdrop of the grand Mehrangarh Fort to colourful folk traditions from across the world. The annual festival is looked forward to with great gusto by music lovers for its enviable line-up of Indian and international musicians showcasing individual concerts and peppy collaborations.
In the past, Manganiyars, Langas, qawwals, percussionists, sarangi artists and the like have joined forces with folk groups from Ireland and Australia to come up with original compositions. Sets featuring rare musical instruments from lesser-known European countries, Africa and Latin America, and quirky fusions with cross-cultural influences are also a regularity. With Mewati folk and Armenian-Swiss jazz and reggae and Indian funk rock playing in the same festival, even those with the most offbeat musical tastes find their jam here.

**Shekhawati Festival**

This festival is held in February in the painted towns of Nawalgarh. Visitors are taken in jeeps and on camel safaris and cultural programmes are held. They are also introduced to Shekhawati’s heritage—the organisers hope that this move will work both ways and encourage the owners to preserve their havelis.
Rajasthan has several cattle and camel fairs in addition to its festivals. In some cases, cattle fairs are an integral part of the festivals themselves. We list below a handful of them:

**Nagaur Fair**
A prominent cattle fair is held in January-February and is renowned for the trading of cows, bullocks, oxen, camel and horses. The animals are decorated colourfully by the owners who also come dressed in all their finery. One of the main attractions at the fair is a chilli bazaar; Nagaur is famous for its fiery red chillies. Visitors at the fair can also enjoy all manner of entertainment, including folk music and dance performances, and shows by jugglers and puppeteers. One can also shop for local handicrafts here.

**Bikaner Camel Festival**
The year starts on a lively note with the Camel Festival in Bikaner held in January, organised by the Tourism Department. There are parades, races and dances by camels during the festival, which is spread over two days. Folk art performances, including fire dances, are also organised during this time.

**Mallinath Fair**
In March-April, the Mallinath Fair is held in Tilwara, Barmer, on the Luni riverbed. This is one of the bigger cattle fairs, lasting a fortnight. Bullock, camel and horse races are held as part of the fair.
TOURIST FESTIVALS

Jaisalmer Desert Festival

The Desert Festival at Jaisalmer is held in January-February and culminates on Magh Purnima (full moon day). Meant to showcase Rajasthan’s rich cultural heritage, the festival features folk dances and folk music performances set against the backdrop of the gorgeous sand dunes of Sam, near Jaisalmer. Camel races are also part of the festival. The entire city is decorated to receive visitors from all over the country. The golden fort here is illuminated and is a sight to behold.
Bundi Festival
Held in the Hindu calendar month of Kartik (October-November), the Bundi Festival is a major draw for tourists, with its popular ritual procession called the Shobha Yatra, an arts and crafts fair, turban contests, traditional sports, and folk dance and music performances. The lighting of diyas at the Chambal’s banks at Keshorai Patan by men and women dressed up in festive finery marks the vibrant festival.

Kumbhalgarh Festival
Come year-end and the mighty Kumbhalgarh Fort turns into a dazzling spectacle of celebratory sights and sounds. From traditional Rajasthani dancers and performers from all over India setting the stage on fire to the stirring melodies of classical singers of diverse schools—the cultural extravaganza is like no other. Tourists come visiting from all over the world to get a glimpse of Rajasthan’s history, heritage and grand cultural diversity.

Dancers enthral visitors during the Kumbhalgarh Festival
Braj Holi Festival and Kaman Festival
The Braj Holi Festival is held in Deeg, Kaman and Bharatpur town in Bharatpur District, in the month of March. A special highlight of the festivities is the Raslila dance. The lighting up of Deeg’s monsoon palace and its fountains bubbling with water reflecting the colours of Holi are a big hit with visitors. The Kaman Festival in Bharatpur celebrates Lord Krishna’s birth which is held in the month of August.

Mewar Festival
Coinciding with the Gangaur Festival, this festival in Udaipur in March-April celebrates the arrival of spring. Women carry images of gods to the Gangaur Ghat by the Lake Pichola. Soon after this, cultural performances are organised by the Rajasthan Tourism Department.

Marwar Festival
This festival is held annually in Jodhpur in September/October. The music and dance traditions of the Marwar region are the main theme of this festival. The performances of the folk dancers and singers offer a window into the region’s bygone days —of battles and of heroes who live on through their songs. The festival is held at various venues on the first day and on the Osian dunes on the second day.
To understand the phenomenon called the Pushkar Fair, it’s important to view it not as one fair but a conglomeration of two or even three fairs. There is the religious fair, which spans the last five days of the Hindu month of Kartik. This period, from the Ekadashi, or the 11th day, of the waxing phase of moon, to Purnima (full moon day) translates usually into five, but sometimes four, days in November. This is the most auspicious period to visit Pushkar. The cattle fair, which has acquired much international fame, has an amorphous beginning and starts taking shape about a week before Ekadashi. Once any animal arrives at the Pushkar Fair, there is a traditional taboo on its leaving before Ekadashi. From then on, the cattle fair wanes as the moon waxes; the rising full moon on Purnima evening, with the sun setting on the other side of the sand dunes, signals the closure of the cattle fair. In the interstices exists a rural trade and entertainment fair. It’s a week-long, charming extravaganza, finishing on the night of the full moon.

The fair’s origins can be traced to mythology. Legend has it that Pushkar existed during the fourth century B.C. Another legend about the Creator God, Brahma describes the creation of the Pushkar lake. According to an off-quoted legend, Lord Brahma was in search of an auspicious place to perform Yagna and was flying over the desert on his swan. Some lotus petals fell from his hand and wafted down. Miraculously, blue lakes sprang up where the flowers touched land. A lake sprang...
Hot-air balloon rides and camels are aplenty at the Pushkar Fair.
up at Pushkar. Brahma is supposed to have performed a *yagna* at this lake on Kartik Purnima, hallowing the place. A dip in the waters of Pushkar and worship at the Brahma temple ensures salvation.

**Orientation**

The spatial arrangement of the fair is best understood in terms of the three fairs described earlier. The cattle fair is held in the grounds and dunes to the northwest of Pushkar town, beyond the Brahma Temple. This area is next to the highway to Nagaur. An enclosed stadium has been designated as the mela ground and it hosts the ‘events’ organised by the administration—races, games and fireworks.

To the west of the mela ground are the sand dunes, which function as the arena for camels, horses and cattle. Tucked in between the mela ground and the northwest edge of the town is the exhibition ground, the site for the rural trade and entertainment fair, with shops, giant wheels, a circus and eating stalls.

Two days before Purnima, the town is closed to all vehicular traffic. If arriving from Ajmer, you will have to park about half a kilometre ahead of the town. Only the outermost road through the east and the north (to the cattle fairground) is accessible. From the afternoon before Purnima, the Bazaar Road is made one-way for pedestrians. This means that you can walk from the Varaha Ghat towards the Brahma Temple (east to west) through the bazaar. But on the way back, you will need to go through the bylanes to the north of Bazaar Road and can enter the bazaar only at two or three places. Travelling west to east, therefore, means taking long circuitous routes.

During the fair, for the devotee, two things are considered essential: to take a dip in the *sarovar*, and to visit the Brahma Temple. The offerings and their prices do not change during the fair. Many people take a dip and visit the Brahma Temple on all five days.

*Facing page:* Camel carts are a huge draw at the Pushkar Fair

*Below:* Visitors find amusement in shopping stalls and rides
At the ghats
On the day of Purnima, people start to take a dip in the sarovar right after midnight (i.e., the night before the full moon night). The crowd often takes a life of its own, or is given one by administrative fiat. It will absorb you in itself, leaving you little choice in selecting your path. As you approach the Brahma Temple, the crowd can be crushing, especially till about noon.

Fair play
On the full moon day, after the Brahma Temple, the crowd will steer you north and then west towards the exhibition ground. On this path takes place the charming two-way spectacle wherein two sets of dramatis personae are simultaneously acting and watching one another. There are a few rooftop restaurants occupied mostly by foreigners; below, there is the enormous moving
throng of mainly non-urbanite Rajasthanis. In this space, both of them seem to be living with the sole purpose of looking at the other, with an enthusiastic search for comprehension, and an eagerness to engage. This lane is lined with makeshift shops and the air filled with the sounds of the mela. As you come out of the town, the blaring music from the circus hits you, as does the visual of young boys doing a raunchy dance dressed in drag. The place is teeming with dhabas, offering delicious food.

Past this village fair, you climb the sands of the modest dunes, and you are in the midst of the cattle fair. Horses just behind the circus, camels further ahead, and cows beyond them. There are the mendicant musicians—men and boys playing the ravanhatta, women and girls doing a dance. Most of them, across the gender divide, sing, and many in voices that one could travel miles to listen to.

There are camels of all sorts—old and young, female and male, very shabby-looking and enormously bedecked. If you are not satisfied with only looking at the camels, and desire a closer interaction, you have the choice between riding on camelback or on a camel cart. A camel cart is a basic wooden cart padded with a mattress and bolster and can accommodate five people. A ride on camelback is recommended only to those who are healthy in body and spirit.

The mela ground hosts a camel dance, camel decoration and horse dance. This is a week-long celebration and is well advertised. Information is readily available at the Tourist Information Centres at Hotel Sarovar and RTDC Tourist Village outside the Mela ground. A part of this festivity is organised at the old Rangji Temple in Pushkar. End your day at the beautiful temple compound with folk and classical dance and singing.
I believe that Rajasthan’s folk music is eternal, for its uniqueness has caught the attention of not just classical musicians but also the doyens of Hindi film music. Some of those catchy film numbers that have the entire nation foot-tapping owe a lot to Rajasthani folk songs.

In Rajasthan, music is a way of life in more ways than one. It is not just an art form that exists for entertainment or as an expression of creativity—it is also a source of livelihood. Just as heartwarming is the fact that Rajasthan’s music becomes richer as the landscapes turn more barren. Therefore, it is in the heart of the desert that folk music is in full bloom. To illustrate that fact, consider the two well-known musical clans of Langas and Manganiyars, who are desert-dwellers. The Langas live in and around Jodhpur, and the Manganiyars in Jaisalmer and Barmer. The Langas’ main instrument is the stringed sarangi while kamaycha, a string instrument with a big resonator, played using a bow, is the exclusive domain of the Manganiyars. Langas even have two sub-castes created on the basis of the instruments they use. Those who play the sarangi are known as Sarangia...
A traditional musician plays the kamaycha at the Gadisar Lake.
Langas while those playing a wind instrument called surnai are referred to as Surnaia Langas. Today, one mostly sees Sarangia Langas on stage as the few Surnaia Langas who are in this field live in far-flung villages and prefer to perform for local patrons.

One of the main reasons why the Manganiyars and Langas have been able to uphold their tradition of folk music is because of a system called jijmani, or the patronage extended by Rajasthani families in a hereditary fashion—that is, one household supports the family of musicians attached to it for generations, with the musicians being part of all the rituals and ceremonies. Thanks to this, the artistes have a repertoire of songs to match the mood of the occasion at which they are called to perform.

The status of their patrons often decided the standing of the musicians as well. The Langas were supported by the rich Rathores of Jodhpur and the Sindhi Sepoys while the Manganiyars—patronised by the Bhati rulers—accepted help from weavers in times of dire need. Many make an incorrect assumption that the Manganiyars sought alms as the etymology of their name is thought to derive from the Hindi word maang (beg).

Whatever be their differences, as the artistes come together on the performing arena, it becomes clear that music transcends all manmade boundaries. Though both Langas and Manganiyars are from the Muslim community, they sing the devotional songs of Hindus with great fervour. Interestingly, for their part, the Manganiyars and Langas often sing the original Nimbuda song, made famous by the film *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*, claiming that it was hijacked by Bollywood!

Of course, to the other extreme is the fact that their interactions with popular artistes have left a mark on their music as well. Some even sing ghazals today. The plaintive strains of melodies such as ‘Kesariya Balam’ by the likes of Suraiya Begum and Allah Jilai Bai, form the more sophisticated genre of maand, which is comparable to classical traditions such as the ghazal and the thumri. The Langas, Manganiyars and Kalawants have kept maand alive—but credit also goes to its steady absorption into pop music and regional albums.

Instruments common to both groups include the morchang, or the Jew’s harp, held
in the mouth by the teeth, and the double flute known as satara but also referred to as algoja, which is different from the algoja that is played by the farming communities around Jaipur. The main percussion instrument used by both the communities is dholak, a double-barrel, cylindrical drum. The accompanying instrument these days for their songs is the harmonium, chosen obviously for its convenience, as it doesn’t have to be tuned like their traditional instruments, sarangi or kamaycha.

An introduction has been the use of earthen water pitchers or matkas for producing rhythm. Unlike in the classical ensemble of percussion instruments in South India, wherein they create rhythms with their nimble fingers on a ghatam (also a kind of water pitcher), here the musicians create rhythms by breathing into the pot as they throw it into the air. In between this, they manage to dance as well! Another special instrument that reflects the phenomenal skill of these musicians is khartal, which is akin to the Spanish castanets, comprised of four separate rectangular pieces of wood. Two of these are held in each hand and a rhythmic pattern is created by clashing one set against the other.

The Dholis, whose ancestors were singers in the zenana or the women’s quarters of the Rajputs, are gifted singers who were part of all the ceremonial occasions in the family. In the Muslim community, there is a group of singers called Mirasis, and one of the most well-known singers among them was the late Allah Jilai Bai of Bikaner, a Padmashri recipient. As a little girl, she sang in the court of her mentor Maharaja Ganga Singh when King George V visited Bikaner.

Another community for whom music is a source of livelihood is the Mev group, from Mewat. They sing devotional songs about Hindu gods, particularly Shiva, and their main instrument is bhapang. Over the years, they have also started playing it as a solo instrument. Though the bhapang has just one string, the musicians are able to achieve amazing variations. The Mevs also use two rarely seen instruments—the chikara, which is akin to the sarangi, and the mashak, a bagpipe. Unlike Langas and Manganiyars, this community performs for the masses, as do the Bhopas.

The ravanhatta that the Bhopas use is more famous than the community itself.
Ravanhatta is a bowed instrument with two strings, one made of horse hair and the other from threads, with a coconut shell bowl. There is an interesting legend behind it. It is believed its name is derived from the demon king Ravan, who created it with his hand.

The Bhopas play the ravanhatta while singing ballads of the folk hero Pabuji, who is said to have used his divine powers to help people. Traditionally, they used a phad or a painted scroll of Pabuji, depicting various stories associated with his life.

Some of Rajasthan’s other unique instruments include the flute used by snake charmers, called the poongi or murli. It has a bulge towards the middle, and varying pitches are created by using reeds of different lengths. They also use a single-barrel instrument called dhapli, and a percussion called dhap during Holi. Farmers in Shekhawati play a small double-barrel drum called deru, also believed to have been the drum that Shiva used while performing the tandav.

To discover this rich tradition of music, the visitor to Rajasthan today may have to depend on the festivals organised through the year, across the state. There is a good chance that musicians will get together then and you may be lucky enough to be treated to one of their performances.
Rajasthani folk dance may largely be seen as the forte of women, but it has lured men from time immemorial. Even then, as if underlining the differences on account of gender, the styles of dancing of both the sexes are distinct. In keeping with traditional mores, the dance of women has an inherent sensuous and graceful feel. Men, on the other hand, are more energetic on stage and their steps reflect vigour and dynamism.

Jaipur is one of the three principal gharanas of Kathak apart from Lucknow and Banaras, and the renowned dance form here is known for its rhythmic richness, known as layakari. It was traditionally nurtured within royal confines and later practised in temples—initially only men were allowed to perform, which is also the reason why some hold that Kathak here is marked by veer rasa, or the rasa of heroism. Both Shiva and Krishna are central themes, and performances are still held in Jaipur’s Govind Dev Ji Temple on Holi.

Always seen as a ceremonial dance of the Rajput community, Ghoomar was originally performed by the Bhils of Rajasthan as part of their worship of Goddess Saraswati. After the Kachchwahas of Jaipur (belonging to the Rajput clan) overcame
A folk dancer performs the famous Kalbeliya dance
the Bhils, the former embraced the tradition. The dance was part of all the celebrations in the women’s quarters. The steps of the princesses and the queens were coordinated to the tunes sung by the female singers of the Dholi community, who also played the percussion. As they danced, they would cover their faces with a transparent veil, or the odhani, adding a mystic aura to the graceful dance movements.

The Ghoomar starts with slow movements but towards the end the dancers form circles to the tunes of a fast beat. The dance appears deceptively simple. But the truth is that it is rather difficult to acquire the grace that the dance is known for. One sees a coordinated ‘performance’ on stage, as opposed to a more natural dance in the relaxed atmosphere of the women’s quarters. Even then, as the veiled dancers, dressed in exotic poshaks—the traditional four-piece attire—perform, their gracefulness can take your breath away. The words of the song to which the dance is performed are worth mentioning here. “Oh, my mother, it’s time for ghoomar/ I wish to perform ghoomar/ The handsome headgear of the Rathore fascinates me/ Marry me into a family of Rathores,” it goes. Of course, these lyrics are modified suitably when the dance is performed in a Rajput clan other than the Rathores.

**Folk and Tribal Styles**

If ghoomar emphasises grace, Terah Tali, performed by the women of the Kamad community in Pali district, lays a premium on dexterity. The dancers sit on the floor but their body movements are astonishing. Terah Tali started out as a devotional dance that symbolised an offering made to Baba Ramdeo, at his shrine near Pokhran, during the Ramdeoji Fair. This devotion is reflected in the dance: the men in the troupe sing devotional songs, playing the chautara, even as the women tie manjeeras or metallic discs on their arms and legs and strike them with the discs in their hands. They also balance lamps on their heads, hold swords between their teeth and strike the discs, moving their hands over and under the swords! Today, Terah Tali dance is also performed on stage.
Folk Dance
This tribal dance is primarily a tribal dance drama performed by the people of the popular Bhil tribe, one of southern Rajasthan’s oldest inhabitants. The Bhils pride themselves as one of India’s largest and oldest tribes. They have majorly resided in states like Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan for as many as 4,000 years. Today, India is home to almost 10 million, of which around seven percent call Rajasthan’s Mewar region as their home and find joy in participating in Gavari.

The dance form has been passed on to the Bhils as a heritage by their predecessors. The folk artists travel from one village to another for a month to perform the dramatic dance, which serves as a great form of entertainment for the rural folks. A gavari performance comprises tribal rhapsodies enhanced by devotional music created by objects like metal plates, ankle bells and instruments including jhanjh and manjeera.

The members of the Bhil community begin the 40-day long Gavari festival in Mewar on the day of Raksha Bandhan every year. Performed over a period of almost forty days during the monsoon, the Gavari dance gives the tribal community a sense of belonging through social interactions. Semi-musical, theatrical and religious in nature at the same time, Gavari is perhaps the most spectacular folk drama of Rajasthan.

It is performed to please Lord Shiva and his consort Goddess Parvati for a good season of rain and a prosperous life. The folk-dance form is also symbolic of the love of humans towards forests and animals. What’s fascinating to note is that the dance is only performed by men and even the female roles are enacted by them. The lead characters in the Gavari dance are known as Rai Buriya Shiva and his sons Rais and Katkuriya. The crew gathers around a particular spot after every episode of the dance drama.

The performers treat any open space as their stage and perform a series of episodes for five to six hours every day. On special
occasions, they even perform throughout the night. The performance is enhanced by the depiction of scenes which are both secular and taken from folk tales. They have a number of references related to Hindu epics and stories from daily life. Even though a part of it is comic, gavari is usually considered a solemn affair that culminates with the appearance of the performers who portray various gods and goddesses.

The plays also narrate stories about the valour of folk deities and Hindu gods. The actors adorn colourful masks and costumes and portray ancient stories by dressing up as animals, deities, demons and humans. Different colours of costumes are used to represent Lord Shiva and the demon Bhasmasur. The performances are punctuated by devotional songs and the performers also encourage the audience to participate.

During the Gavari festival, following their age-old traditions, the Bhils keep from eating green vegetables and stop sleeping on beds. They also avoid wearing any footwear and avoid consuming alcohol. They don’t even take a bath barring on a particular day called Dev Jhulani Ekadashi. The dance is performed by people of all ages. The festival ends with the immersion of an elephant effigy in a local water body.

*Inputs from Karan Kaushik*
The Kalbelia is another dance that has successfully been rescued from anonymity. The dance of the snake-charmers, kalbelia has no form if one were to look at it technically. Yet, the dancers’ suppleness, spontaneity, vigour, not to forget their stunning black attire, all combine to make it an exciting performance for everyone witnessing it.

Like the snake-charmers, another group who has made its presence felt is the tribal community of Baran district in Kota region. Their ceremonial dance is referred to as Chakri, and this name is derived from the fact that the dancer has to move fast in a circle or chakkar. The dancers dress in multipanelled skirts of vibrant colours and spin to the beats of a drummer. The dance has an element of drama in it. At first, the dancers mock the drummer, refusing to dance when he plays. Finally, as the drummer gets annoyed, they try to make peace, begging him to play. When he is charged up, they dance their best, and it is almost as if the dancers and the drummer are competing with each other, instead of performing together.

The dance that brings out all the
earthly qualities of Rajasthan is the Chari. Originally a dance of the Gujjar community living in the Kishangarh region, it is now performed by girls from other communities as well. However, the authentic form of the dance is preserved by the girls of Kishangarh. They dance to the music of *dhol* and *bankiya*, or the trumpet, even as they balance brass water pitchers topped with blazing cotton seeds on their head.

More or less similar to swang, Bhawai is performed by Bhopas and Bhopis in the areas adjacent to Gujarat, and is another dance that requires performers to balance seven to nine pots on their head and dance. The difference is that the pots used in Bhawai are earthen pitchers. The thrill is heightened even further by the element of danger that is an inseparable part of Bhawai—performers often dance on swords, nailbeds and even broken glass! The form is said to have originated during the 13th-14th centuries from Jainism’s religious verses, and is also considered a nod to the traditional rural life of the desert land. Bhawai also finds mention in court poet Abul Fazal’s *Ain-e-Akbari*.

Among the tribal communities of Rajasthan festive occasions are celebrated with dancing. An interesting dance form is the Wallar of the Garasias, in which the dancers move slowly in circles, clockwise and anti-clockwise. The dance of the Saharias of Hadoti includes movements such as that of a monkey. Some of them even dress up as monkeys and their renditions are simply incredible. Unfortunately, most of the dances can only be seen during a fair or a festival in the region as they do not perform otherwise.

In all the dances that I have described earlier, it is the women who dominate the proceedings. Dances in which the men play an important role include Kachchhi Ghodi,
Gair, Fire Dance, Dhap and Deru.

In Kachchhi Ghodi or the dummy mare dance, the men depict the moods of a pampered bridegroom. While many perform this dance today, some of the better performers belonged to the communities of Sargara and Mirasis of Marwar. Gair is also from Marwar and the deserts beyond. It was mainly performed by farmers and later adopted by the goldsmiths of Jodhpur. Today, however, the dance is seen across Rajasthan, with village after village organising Gair nights comparable to Gujarat’s dandiya sessions.

The stimulating spectacle of the Drum Dance of Jalore entails a few men of a troupe beating five drums tied around their necks with great vigour and rhythm and the others playing huge pairs of cymbals. Another dancer in the group holds a naked sword in his mouth, adding extra adrenaline to the performance.

A mystical dance that’s been raised to mythical proportions is the Fire Dance performed by the men of the Jasnathi sect, also known as Sidh. Performed as an offering to their mentor, Guru Sant Jasnath, the men dance on burning coals. As the coal turns amber, they put it into their mouths in their devotional frenzy. The belief is that nothing can hurt them as they are protected by their mentor. This interesting dance is performed in the villages near Bikaner.

Moving from Bikaner towards the incredible Shekhawati, one comes across two interesting dances: the Dhap and the Deru, both performed by dancers who also play their own drums. While Dhap is commonly seen during Holi, Deru is seen only when farmers have their own celebrations.

These are the dances that a traveller is likely to witness while travelling in the colourful state of Rajasthan. Of course, many of these dances are performed only during village ceremonies or festivals, and you would have to be very lucky indeed to see a dance in its traditional setting. But if that should happen, you can rest assured that it would be a wonderful experience. So plan your cultural trips well in advance.

Above: The breathtaking fire dance
Facing Page: A Kachchhi Ghodi dancer

Inputs from Karan Kaushik and Prannay Pathak
Folk Tales

By Kishore Singh and Karan Kaushik

The Rajasthani princes understood the importance of keeping meticulous records of everything—every telegram received and sent, every invitation accepted or declined, correspondence over loans, waterworks or the railways, and even medical histories. But nowhere are they maintained as well as in Bikaner’s Lallgarh Palace. The Anup Sanskrit Library at the palace is a treasure trove of manuscripts in Sanskrit, Urdu and other court languages, all of which found sanctuary here during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb, when writers were persecuted and their manuscripts burnt.

Thankfully, Rajasthan’s folktale tradition has always remained so irrevocably etched in the landscape and the minds of people that even authoritarian rulers could do little to obliterate it. Little wonder then that the state’s oral tradition of storytelling and keeping its folk tales (and heroes) alive can be traced to ancient times. Even today, if old-timers sit together, reciting stirring tales of conquest from the Prithviraj Raso, and if their sophisticated counterparts turn to the Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan by the state’s well-loved travel writer (Col James Tod), you can be sure that there are many villagers who still gather to listen to Pabuji’s heroic exploits.

Rajasthan is blessed with a venerable history featuring many brave men and women of substance. Rajasthani people have passed chivalry, valour and compassion to their younger generations through folk tales in the form of songs, dance, plays and puppet shows. But primarily, Rajasthan’s folklore tradition has been an oral tradition handed over from generation to generation. While the basic stories remain the same, several changes have been added over the years, since they were told orally and every narrator went on to add his or her own perception to them.

The popular folk tales of Rajasthan can be classified into various categories.
A fresco outside the Mehrangarh Fort depicting gods from Hindu mythology.
There are tales related to the lives and times of the state’s much revered folk deities, there are tragic love stories and stories of royal kingdoms and the royals who ruled them. Then there are folk dramas and ballads and folklores of the various tribes that form the rich cultural fabric of Rajasthan. From paintings and songs to poems and puppetry, every folk tale of the state has its own inspirational form.

**Tales of Folk Deities**

**Pabuji**

Pabuji was a 14th-century folk hero promoted to the status of a saint, even a god, someone who could battle everyone from evil marauders to demons. His tales are celebrated even today, when a scroll called the phad is unrolled before an audience, even as singers and dancers extol his valour and wisdom. Each episode in his life is highlighted by holding up a lantern to the scroll, and a corresponding story—usually of how Pabuji managed to tackle a particularly nasty spirit—is narrated.

Pabuji-ki-Phad is the most popular phad performed in Rajasthan. Phad is basically a life-sketch of a folk deity drawn on a piece of cloth. The story during a phad performance is narrated by a singer called Bhopa who plays instruments like jantar and ravanhatta. Phads were used in the musical performances of the Bhopa community, though initially done with vegetable and stone dyes in Chittaurgarh and Shahpura (Bhilwara), and are now sold all over Rajasthan. In Shahpura, there is only one family of painters pursuing it now.
**Ramdeoji**  
Believed to have been an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, Ramdeoji is revered by all castes, class and communities alike. The folk deity is said to have performed many miracles for the poor and needy. Devotees from different parts of the state and nearby states like Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh visit several temples across Rajasthan dedicated to Ramdeoji. Every year, a grand fair is also organised at Ramdeora. The tales of Ramdeoji are usually narrated through the Terah Tali dance form performed by the women of the Kamad tribal community. Stories from the life of the folk deity are also narrated in Bhopa-Bhopi singing performances. They have also inspired phad scroll painters and the wall paintings of Shekhawati’s Ramgarh.

**Tales of Love and Tragedy**  
**Dhola-Maru**  
The story of Dhola and Maru approximates that of Sohni and Mahiwal (a well-known tale from Punjabi folklore) to the extent that the fleeing lovers escape on a camel, are stoned to death, or are lost forever in a sandstorm, depending on who is telling you the story. Often narrated through dance and song, this bewitching tale revolves around prince of Narvar, Dhola and princess of Poogal, Maroo, who are married in their childhood. When Dhola’s father dies, he almost forgets about his betrothal to Maroo and marries princess Malwani. The king of Poogal sends a group of folk singers to Narvar, who try to remind Dhola about his marriage to Maroo. Dhola regrets his mistake and overcomes several hurdles created by
Malwani and Umar Sumar, another prince who wishes to marry Maroo, and reaches Poogal. He apologises to Maroo and her parents. However, on their journey to Narvar, a snake bites Maroo and Dhola decides to set himself on fire. A group of saints appears on hearing his cry and brings Maroo back to life with their magical powers. Dhola faces yet another attack by Umar Sumar but manages to escape with Maroo on a flying camel gifted by the saints. They reach Narvar and live happily ever after.

**Mahendra-Moomal**
The tragic tale of Princess Moomal of Jaisalmer and Prince Mahendra of Amarkot (now in Pakistan) is more poignant. Having fallen in love with Princess Moomal Mahendra would visit her secretly at her palace. Once when he got late Moomal got very upset with him, and disguised her sister in a man’s clothes. When Mahendra finally turned up and found his beloved in the company of a man, he was so angry with the princess he went away, never to return. Moomal disguises herself as a bangle seller and sets up a game of chess with the prince. Mahendra sees on his new friend’s wrist, a mark similar to the one on his beloved, and tells the stranger about how he was betrayed by his love. Moomal takes off her turban and the two lovers embrace. Unfortunately, weakened by the pain of separation, the lovers die in each other’s arms!

**Folk Dramas**

**Khayal**
The popular form emerged in the 18th century and narrates mythological tales. Khayal is performed in different forms all across the state based on the city where it’s being performed or the style of acting or the community who is performing it. Some of the popular forms of Khayal are Kuchamani Khayal, Shekhawati Khayal, Jaipuri Khayal, and Ali Bakshi Khayal among others.

**Tamasha**
This folk drama began in Jaipur during Maharaja Pratap Singh’s reign. The dialogues in a tamasha play are poetic and the play includes musical, dance and singing performances. It’s usually performed on an open-air stage called akhada. The Bhatt family of Jaipur have also added Jaipuri Khayal and Dhrupad Gayaki styles of singing in this form of drama.
**Rammat**
Exclusively performed in Bikaner, Jaisalmer and the Phalodi region, this drama form originated 140 years ago during a folk poetry recital competition. The characters of a rammat play are called khelar and start their performance by singing a devotional song in the praise of Ramdeoji. Nagada and Dholak are the main musical instruments used during a rammat performance. The folk tales narrated during these plays are drawn from monsoons, Ganpati Vandana, Lavani among other themes.

**Swang**
Swang, which goes all the way back to the 15th century, is performed by folk artists called Behrupiya, who disguise themselves as various characters.

**Nautanki**
Inspired by mythological, historical and contemporary socio-political stories, Nautanki is staged in regions including Bharatpur, Karauli, Dholpur, Alwar and Gangapur city.

**Rasleela**
The Rasleela of Rajasthan is performed to narrate stories from the puranas (the holy scriptures of the Hindus). Most common themes include leelas or acts from the lives of Lord Krishna. The main character is called Raasdhar.
The literal Hindi translation for the word ‘puppet’ is kathputli, but this can be misleading. All kathputlis are puppets but all puppets are not kathputlis, which is the name for the stylistically distinct, traditional string puppets of Rajasthan. Kathputli is a puppet made of kath or wood and the puppeteers are called Nats or Bhats, a wandering community from Rajasthan who perform their khel during the dry season and return to their villages to cultivate the fields after the rains. The puppeteers believe in the divine origin of their art and claim to have been the chief performers during the reign of the legendary king Vikramaditya, whose life and achievements they extol.

In Rajasthani puppet performances, the stories are mostly about the exploits of local heroes, unlike other Indian puppet traditions that revolve around the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. One hero who appeared often in the state’s puppet performances was Amar Singh Rathore, the ruler of Nagaur in the 17th century, who was a great patron of the Bhat community and the kathputli tradition, which traces its origin to Nagaur.

Traditionally, the puppet performance comprised 52 puppets in the puppeteers’ repertoire. Any less would be considered an incomplete puppet performance. The story of Amar Singh Rathore would be told to small groups in localities within the four walls of the mohalla or neighbourhood, ensuring the participation of the entire audience. The puppeteer would be an actor and also a puppet manipulator. Today, however, the puppet performance relegates Amar Singh Rathore to the background and tricks and turns once performed for royal amusement take centre-stage. There is the magician, the acrobat, the dancer Anarkali, the drummer Khabar Khan, a horse rider with lit torches in his hands, and a snake-charmer. Also among the cast of characters are the juggler and the Bahurupia, with two faces either carved back-to-back or so devised that with clever
manipulation, one face is covered while the other is exposed.

The *kathputlis’* heads and headgears are carved from mango wood with large, stylised eyes. They are up to 60cm tall, wearing costumes made in the period Rajasthani style as seen in *phad* paintings. Their bodies are made of cloth and stuffed rags. With a few exceptions, *kathputlis* are made without legs, and from waist down wear a long pleated skirt of light material. Traditionally, *kathputlis* were carved by craftsmen in Sawai Madhopur, Bassi and Udaipur, but the Bhats now make their own puppets.

A *kathputli* performance is presented by placing two charpoys (string beds) vertically and tying bamboos across them. The front cloth curtain with scalloped arches is known as the *tibara*. It hides the manipulator’s body and feet during the performance. The puppeteer often improvises his narrative on the spot to hold the attention of his audience, while his wit and comments enliven the performance. He speaks for the *kathputli* characters in a squeaky voice with a bamboo whistle known as *boli*, thereby creating a unique puppet language. The *dholak* player (drummer) converses with the *kathputlis* so that the audience can follow the course of the drama. This dialogue is cleverly coordinated with songs sung by the women of the family to the accompaniment of the *dholak*. *Kathputlis* are usually manipulated with only a string, one end of which is attached to the *kathputli*’s head and the other to its back. Most string puppet traditions around the world use a cross for manipulation; the weights in the puppet’s torso, feet and hands help the puppeteer to create movement. The Rajasthani *kathputli* takes no help from gravity. It is the sheer skill in the manipulator’s fingers that create the movements. The string is looped around the puppeteer’s fingers and all movements are
generated by a series of jerks on either end. A bracelet of bells, or ghungrus, is usually worn by the puppeteer on his wrists.

The dancing girl is a special type of kathputli—it has four strings and its limbs are sewn in such a manner that a range of movements such as the swinging of the hips and the arching backwards during a dance can be produced. The puppet has a needle concealed in its fingers that attaches itself to her pallu or her ghagra. Thanks to this device, the puppet can coquettishly cover and uncover her face.

For almost four hundred years now, the kathputli-wallahs have travelled far and wide throughout India, performing with their puppets and leaving behind vivid memories of their dramatic performances. They may be the best known of the twenty or more traditional forms of puppetry.

Today, there is a museum and Centre for Puppetry at the Bhartiya Lok Kala Mandal in Udaipur. Once puppet performances could be seen in every mohalla across India. Now, five-star hotel guests have replaced these audiences. The performances can also be seen on special occasions. Even with the infusion of modern techniques, a kathputli show can be as heartwarming as it was centuries ago.
In Rajasthan, layers of meaning and rituals are associated with each and every ceremony. It is on occasions such as weddings, births and funerals that one can still see the importance of clothes, colours and jewellery in Rajasthan. It’s possible then to tell communities and moments apart, from the ornamentation and apparel that people don. But as the state urbanises, these distinctions are being blurred—fortunately in several cases, as this does away with indicators of caste and unfortunately in others when lovely traditions of making clothes are gobbled up by modern machinery. But still, some traditions continue. The peeliya, the symbol of a married woman, can be worn only when she has given birth to a son.

Rajasthani men are not completely dressed until they adorn a pagdi or turban, perhaps the most integral part of their attire. These are worn wound...
around the head peasant-style as protection against the sun or with a swagger and a long tail as in Jodhpur. A turban symbolises a man’s social and economic status in the society and every individual has his own choice of colour, cloth, design and shape of his pagdi. While a common man adorns a single coloured turban, wealthy men wear designer and multicoloured turbans. During weddings, festivals and special occasions, men adorn a safa. The shape and size of a turban also varies from region to region. While the turbans worn by men in Udaipur are flat, Jodhpuris wear a safa with a curved bend and the men in capital city Jaipur prefer an angular turban.

Rajput men across the state wear a fenta, potiya or safa on their head and every season calls for a change in the colour of their turban. The colour of a turban is pink, blue, lehariya, keshariya, malyagiri, red, sinduriya, moliya, toruphula (yellow), saffron and fagunia in chaitra, vaishakh, jyeshtha, aasad, sawan, bhadrapad, aashwin, kartik, margshieersh, paus, magh and falgun months, respectively. The Rajputs of Jodhpur wear a morgardani turban in winters and a round and white turban in summers. In the rainy season, samand lehariya turbans are worn and their rainbow colours symbolise the monsoon. A basantiya or light-yellow coloured turban is worn in spring and the colour of these turbans is created with special kesula flowers.

Jodhpur, one must add, knew a thing or two about couture. The city made the bandh-gala, the short tunic with a closed collar, a style statement. It also gave the world the riding breeches known as jodhpurs, to be worn on the saddle or at formal events.

Moving down, the angrakha, a white cotton dhoti and waistband called the kamarbandh form part of the Rajput man’s attire. The upper garment can either be a bandi worn with a kurta or a tunic. Angrakha is made of cotton and can be of knee-length or styled like a frock. Men wear multi-coloured angrakhas on festivals and special occasions. The bandia-angrakha is designed like a jacket which closely fits the chest and is

*When it comes to men, no traditional dress is complete without the turban*
loose around the waist. Its long and narrow sleeves are adjusted at the wrists. Different communities have different styles of wearing the angrakha.

Daily-use angrakhas are short and tied with laces instead of buttons. Angrakha is paired with a dhoti, which covers the lower body. While white cotton dhotis are regularly worn, on special events Rajasthani men drape themselves in embroidered silk dhotis which feature a zari border. The Marwar, Shekhawati and Hadoti regions have different styles of wearing the humble dhoti.

Coming from headgear to footwear, men in the state wear jootis or mojaris made from sheep, goat or camel leather. Mojaris also have regional variations. For instance, Jaipur is known for its soft and delicate fancy mojaris featuring subtle embroidered patterns. Jodhpuri men, on the other hand wear mojaris of contrasting colours and bold patterns. Jodhpuri mojaris are well known for their exquisite kashida embroidery done on coloured velvet.

Accessories and adornment over and above clothes are the defining aspect of dress in Rajasthani men. The ensemble is made complete with attractive jewellery, which includes earrings or baalis, studs and earlobes for the ears and neckpieces made from crystal beads and semi-precious stones. The true-blue Rajasthani look is incomplete without the moustache, which men grow to astonishing lengths and decorate with great effort. Just like turban-tying contests, moustache challenges have their own fervour.

Rajasthani men love their jewellery, and at weddings they offer stiff competition
to the women. There are gold buttons on their tunics, strings of rubies and emeralds tumbling down their collars, diamonds in their lobes, turban ornaments and glittering swords. Once, some men wore anklets, too, also of gold. These were the tazimi sardars, those who attended court and enjoyed the privilege of remaining seated when the ruler walked into the durbar. They were usually trusted members of the clan who commanded the king’s armies.

When it comes to the women, their everyday attire is ghaghara, choli and odhni. These are bright and feature myriad designs. Ghaghras are ankle length skirts narrow at the waist and flared at the bottom. They are mostly made in cotton to suit the weather conditions, and feature popular prints like mothra, bandhej and lehariya. Ghaghras also come in silk, georgette and crepe fabrics. Wealthy women put antique borders on their ghaghras, which also feature Jaipuri gota-patti work. The pleats and width of a ghaghra are symbolic of a woman’s health and wealth.

The choli, also known as kanchli or kurti covers the upper body. They are mostly colourful and feature intricate designs. Depending on the occasion, they can be stitched using cotton or silk. The length of a choli depends on the caste, religion and age of a woman. Cholis are also made attractive with mirror-work, beads and sequins, coral and shells to lend an ethnic touch.

The odhni, also known as chunar, is a long piece of cloth worn as a veil. It’s mostly made from printed or patched fabrics and
boast attractive embroidery, mirror-work and beadwork. Rajput women wear different odhanis in different seasons. In Sawan (monsoon), they wear odhnis featuring lehariya and mothra prints while in Kartik, they adorn a red and yellow coloured chunari. Fagunia odhna with a red coloured central design and white base is worn in Falgun month. In the month of Asad, women wear khamka bhant odhna, which has red and yellow dots. They also wear light yellow, light peach, peer pink and other beautiful light-coloured odhnis in this month.

What sets the kanchli-ghaghara-odhni of the Rajput women apart from the traditional Rajasthani dress worn by women of other communities is the heavy embroidery and the fact that they feature zardozi, gota-patti, kundan and danka work.

Rajasthani costumes also depend on the climatic conditions and different regions. For example, the lehariya is a wave pattern created in the tie-dye process that is specially worn in the monsoons while the Fagunia odhni or mantle is intended for the spring festival of Holi.
Talking about jewellery, women accessorise themselves with jadu sets and rani haar, which go all the way to the belly button. Waist chains worn by the women are called kardhni or tagdi, while anklets are called payal, jhanjhar or pajeb, and bangles are called bangadi. Bichuwa or anvat (toe rings) and finger rings are also worn by the women. The Rakhri, Bindi and Borla are the main head ornaments. The most common earrings worn by women in the state include the bell-shaped karanphool jhumka, parrot-shaped toti and heart-shaped pipal patti.

**Tribal Costumes of Rajasthan**
The diverse dress styles exhibited by the tribal communities of the state presents a rich tapestry of colours and styles, and the resist-dyed print called nandana, found on the traditional knee-length skirts of the Bhil women, is an excellent example. Among the most vibrant tribal costumes of Rajasthan, those of the Bhils are among the foremost. The men of the community wear a pagdi, angrakha, dhoti and the potario, a lower garment tied at the waist with a knot. The women usually wear odhna, ghaghara and kapada, an upper body garment.

The men of the Bishnoi community dress up in cotton cholas, pagdis and dhotis. Gadiya Lohar men, on the other hand, pair the dhoti with angrakhas. While the Rajputs prefer a flared, ankle-length angrakha, tribal communities like it knee-length. The turbans of the Garasiya men are known for their red or white colour, known as the potiyu/pagdi. The Garasiyas are known for their unique sense of dress, and men as well as women don the jhulki, a half-sleeved jacket. The angrakha of the Gujjar men is also known as the bagalbandi, which they pair with a dhoti and gol safa in white or red.

The costumes of women are just as colourful and attractive, no matter what the tribe, and often, dress is what helps convey the distinction between younger, unmarried women and otherwise. For instance, unmarried Bishnoi women generally wear pothdis with odhnas and puthias as against the ghagharas, kanchlis (shorter, and a deeper neckline) and odhnas of their married counterparts. When it comes to the women of the Garasiya community, it’s black saris with red blouses and big petticoats that they prefer. It is graceful saris again—known as lugda—that the unmarried women of the Mina tribe usually adorn.
Odhnas are worn across the state, but there are regional variations: in western Rajasthan, Garasiya women wear Garasiyon ki phag, a veil with a yellow ground and red border, and a large round in the centre. Meena women wear dhaniya chunari while Gujjar women prefer rati chunri, and a Malan woman wears a ghaghara or skirt of asmani, dhani and chakari farad or yardage.

Rajasthan’s beautiful silver jewellery is worn by tribals, such as the Meenas and the Bhils, for whom it is as bankable as money. Worn on the head and forehead, around the neck and waist, on the wrist and arm, around the ankle and on the toes, it is exquisitely patterned. Amulets and necklaces made of coins, stones and cowries are almost universal. Bishnoi women wear elaborate gold nose rings while ladies in the Meena community aren’t known to like gold that much. Gujjar men wear gold kundals and use the precious metal to adorn their headgear.

Tribal women are also known for their brass, silver or white metal ornaments. These include earrings known as kaanbali or surliya, nosepin called nathani, armlets called bajubandh or chudla or kada. Hanslis, kanaktis, kamarbandhs and murkis are also worn by both men and women. Silver and brass kadas are worn by men all across Rajasthan. Tattooing the face and body is also an integral part of the tribal idea of adornment.
The walls in Rajasthan have been embellished with decorations from the time rudimentary hunting scenes and patterns were painted inside pre-historic rock shelters in the Aravalli Hills. The painting enthusiast will notice that there’s an absence of murals dating to the time between this early rock art and the 16th century. This, however, has more to do with the lack of surviving domestic buildings than a break in tradition. Before Islam came to India, the houses and palaces in the country were generally built of wood, none of which remain today. On the other hand, in the oldest masonry houses in Rajasthan, such as the 16th-century havelis of Chittorgarh, one can see faint traces of pictures.

Extant Rajasthani murals point to the influence of the Mughal school of art, itself a synthesis of indigenous and imported Persian styles, which evolved at Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar’s capital located to the east of Rajasthan. There, damaged wall paintings can be seen even today. The oldest discernible Rajasthani murals are in Amer, 200km away, also the nearest Rajput principality to Fatehpur Sikri.

Amer

Man Singh, Amer’s ruler from 1590 to 1614 and Akbar’s foremost general, must have been inspired by the Mughal Emperor’s freshly painted buildings. Between the brackets in the innermost section of the Amer Palace, which he built about 1600, are little pictures of animals and huntsmen. The chhatri raised in 1620 to his memory also contains murals, depicting Hindu deities, local folk tales such as Rajasthan’s favourite Dhola-Maru and even Laila-Majnu, a West Asian story that has always been hugely popular in India. Red cinnabar and blue lapis lazuli dominate the colour scheme in the paintings.

Two other painted buildings, a Muslim tomb in the Hadipura sector of Amer and a domed hunting lodge 80km northeast at Bairat, also date from the 1620s. The paintings in each are stylistically similar. The tomb, damaged by soot, contains flying birds, Persian-style angels, simurghs or Chinese pheasant-like birds that reached Mughal art via Persia, and a single European winged-head cherub. All these feature in—and were probably inspired by—a painted pavilion 230km away, built by Emperor Jehangir at Rambagh in Agra, circa 1618.
Jaipur
Founded in 1727 to replace Amer as the capital of the surrounding kingdom, Jaipur attracted craftsmen from Delhi, then the capital of a rapidly fading Mughal empire. It was soon famous for fine plasterwork, known as arayish, and for the mural painting that decorated the plaster. Teams of artists are known to have travelled from here to other parts of Rajasthan, including Jodhpur, Jaisalmer and Shekhawati.

In Jaipur, in the fresco (fresh or damp) style, a thick layer of pigment was applied onto wet plaster; this partially coalesced with the surface as it set. The paint was mixed with gum to strengthen its adherence. This technique was generally used while painting external walls, with the traditional pigments chosen being red, green, yellow, brown earth colours and lamp black. It required skill and speed to produce figures and designs over an expanse of plaster before it set. The artist sketched outlines with a sharp stylus, correcting them as he applied the colour. Once painted, the surface was burnished with a piece of agate and then wiped over with coconut oil. Details such as jewellery were added later. Often, the painted plaster surface, once dry, was cut to create geometric patterns.

Most interior work was painted secco, or in a dry style, with the pigment being mixed with gum and then applied onto dry plaster. This allowed the artist to take his time in selecting a limited area of a wall, carefully sketching each subject and correcting his outlines before filling in the colours one by one. This technique is beautifully illustrated in a 1740s’ temple in Parasrampura, Jhunjhunu District.

Shekhawati
Comprising Jhunjhunu, Sikar and Churu districts, the Shekhawati region holds the richest collection of painted buildings in India. This area, long ruled by Muslim nawabs, fell to Hindu Rajput barons around 1730 and was absorbed into the Jaipur state. Mural paintings were already established there, but generally confined to decorative designs and simple figurative work. By the turn of the 18th century, fine secco murals appeared in several temples in the east of the area. Patronised by local rulers, the fashion
of decorating forts and memorial chhatris soon spread. By the early-19th century, with the division of estates between sons, holdings diminished and the barons became impoverished. But a new set of patrons arose. A flourishing merchant community, drawn by caravan-borne trade, had concentrated in the Shekhawati region. This trade declined through the 19th century, so many young merchants shifted to Calcutta (now Kolkata) and other cities. There they made and repatriated huge fortunes.

In their desert hometown, each commissioned fine havelis, temples and chhatris, which, as a last touch, were covered with fresco paintings, largely in red and green ochres. After 1850, synthetic pigments flooded in from the German chemical industry and the dominant colours became blue ultramarine (artificial lapis lazuli) and red chrome. By the close of the century, many more colours arrived. These were often applied secco, as the process was less laborious and also because some new pigments responded badly to the fresco method.

The Shekhawati painters were mostly skilled masons drawn from the Jaipur region to service a new demand. Generally, they chose their subjects, though the patron could also suggest certain religious topics.
The Hindu epics, particularly tales relating to Krishna and Rama, were most popular, as were folk tales. The artists used their freedom to depict battles, soldiers, princes, the merchant patron, animals, hunts, erotica and women giving birth. Sometimes there were map-pictures, accurate views of local towns or Jaipur. Later pictures included those created by carefully copying foreign prints or picture labels produced by British textile manufacturing companies. In the 1920s the demand for painted buildings declined as the merchants settled their families in their new city homes.

Elsewhere
Although Shekhawati boasts of by far the richest concentration of murals in Rajasthan, they occur elsewhere too, generally in palaces or temples. Few predate 1800. Sometimes, as in Jodhpur, there is documentary evidence that the painters were summoned from Jaipur. Sometimes the suggestion comes from the pictures themselves, as with the map-pictures of Jaipur seen both in the palace at Jaisalmer and one of its havelis.

Shrines in Bhilwara District contain pictures in the same folk idiom as those painted on long cloth screens, which depict the life of god and hero Pabuji. There are painted apartments in the palaces of Bundi and Kota, the early-19th century Chitrashala in Bundi being particularly fine. There are also interesting examples in the palaces of Amer, Banswara, Bikaner, Dungarpur, Jaipur, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Nagaur and Udaipur.

Most haveli murals in Jaipur succumbed in 1876, when Maharaja Ram Singh had the city painted pink, but fine interior paintings remain in the palace. Other painted buildings there include Pundrikji-ki-Haveli (built in 1810), managed by the ASI, and Saras Sadan, now a jewellery shop, in Gangauri Bazaar. Late 18th-century murals at Galta, near Jaipur, were drastically repainted but there are some good, painted chhatris in and around Jaipur. There are also painted royal chhatris at Bikaner, Radhakund (near Bharatpur), and Rajgarh, south of Alwar.

In Udaipur, there is still a tradition of painting bright secco murals to celebrate weddings. Important, though distinct from murals, are decorations on mud buildings by rural womenfolk. These include textural motifs, such as those on bitodas (cow-dung fuel stores) around Bharatpur and blocks
of pastel colour on houses near Jaisalmer or fantastic white, stylised figures and flowers in Sawai Madhopur District.

**Miniature Paintings**

It’s possible but difficult to find pre-Mughal Rajasthani miniature painting that has survived time and religious oppression. For instance, there was some sophisticated Jain work in Rajasthan, with figures in highly stylised positions, quirky with elongated eyes, both visible on one side of a sharp-profiled face. These miniatures illustrated 12th-16th-century manuscripts, and formed the Western Indian School based in Gujarat and parts of Rajasthan. From this school emerged the surviving 16th-century Hindu miniatures seen in the Delhi-Agra region. Interestingly, these paintings show a fascination with pattern rather than realism or movement.

But it was Mughal art that inspired a change to all this. Emperor Akbar (1556-1605), who enjoyed the services of Persian painters, set them to work with their Indian counterparts. The result was a distinct, vibrant school of art. Akbar had Hindu writings on Krishna and Rama as well as Islamic and other texts illustrated.
At Fatehpur Sikri, which was for long his capital, the Rajput princes who were tributaries at his court were dazzled by the new painting method.

Miniatures were painted on paper prepared with chalk and mixed with a thin glue, rather like Italian gesso. As with murals, fine miniatures were often copied with stencils. The rich palette of colours used included ground lapis lazuli, Indian yellow made from the urine of cows fed with mango leaves, cinnabar for red, green copper chloride as well as gold and silver paints. The 19th century saw an increasing invasion of artificial pigments from Europe.

The Rajasthani schools of painting developed towards the close of the 16th century, drawing on native styles but strongly influenced by the Mughal school. The thriving Bhakti movement resulted in the popularity of Krishna among religious subjects in miniatures. A common, uniquely Indian subject was the ragamala (garland of musical modes), intended to reproduce visually the moods induced by music. The garland consists of six ragas, each having five or six subservient raganis.

The earliest-known painting of the Rajasthan school is either a ragamala created for a Bundi ruler, dated circa 1590, or another from Chawand, in Mewar (Udaipur) state, dated 1605. Bundi and Mewar both developed a style indebted to the Mughal forms, but retained the local love of blocks of strong colour, often reds and blues. In these paintings, plants are delicate items of composition, not living things, and figures appear posed, frozen in action.

Under Jehangir, Mughal art, strongly influenced by European work, reached its height. Realism was cherished and landscapes faded into the distance. These features passed onto Rajasthani work. Contrasting colours gave way to more gentle tones. Religious themes widened to include incidents from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, but Krishna’s story remained the most popular. Non-religious subjects included hunting scenes, illustrations of folk tales and portraits of local rulers and nobles.

Distance and division encouraged the evolution of a recognisably separate style at each major court. Bundi dominated neighbouring Kota, producing richly coloured, red-bordered miniatures in which flowers and banana trees decorated the background. Then Kota eclipsed Bundi during the 18th century, and hunting, particularly of beautifully portrayed tigers and lions, became a favourite subject. In the paintings, horsemen emerge precariously from rich decorative jungles set amid dramatic rocky landscapes. The Mewar genre advanced from highly stylised early work towards greater realism and more lifelike figures. There was a tendency towards making the pictures larger towards the late 18th century, and these paintings often portrayed court scenes, and boating on Pichola Lake. A strong green sometimes overwhelmed the palette.

Eighteenth and early-19th century Marwar (Jodhpur) art is characterised by horse-
The Bikaner School of Painting was defined by Mughal influences, resulting from a long association with the rulers. The elegance and subdued colour palette reflects the exposure to their miniature craft. Inscriptional evidence reveals that several master artists of the Mughal atelier came and worked in Bikaner in the 17th century. Among these was Ustad Ali Raza whose earliest work represents the beginnings of the Bikaner School, which can be dated back to around 1650. Painting portraits of artists was a unique trend by the Bikaner School and these generally feature information regarding their ancestry. They are referred to as Ustas or Ustad.

Deogarh or Devgarh was the birthplace of a distinct style of miniature painting in the 18th and 19th centuries, under the patronage of Rawat Gokuldas. Artists like Bagta, Chokha and Bajinath were prominent painters whose work echoed a strong Mewar influence. The natural surrounds of Deogarh are well reflected in the subjects of the Deogarh paintings which include anecdotes out of the Radha-Krishna story, hunts, court scenes and even portraits.

The Pratapgarh style flourished under the patronage of Rawat Pratap Singh, a devotee of Krishna. This led to Krishna’s tales being a prominent part of these paintings. Among the best known is the series of illustrations of Bhaudatta’s Rasa-Manjari with Krishna as its hero.

Some Other Schools
men with full sideburns and tall turbans, and a hill rising, nimbus-like, behind the principal figure. Amer/Jaipur painting was strongly influenced by the neighbouring Mughal School but became overwhelmed by European idioms and pigments as the 19th century progressed. Jaipur’s best creations were 18th-century busts of women in profile, a common subject in nearby Kishangarh. This tiny state developed a characteristic style in the mid-18th century, under ruler Sawant Singh. The women in the paintings have sharp features and grossly exaggerated, curving eyes, reflecting pre-Mughal Hindu styles. The courtly scenes are beautifully composed in gardens or architectural settings. Mughal art declined after the death of Jehangir in 1627, but the Rajasthani form, still in its infancy, continued to develop until the end of the 18th century.

It produced a wonderful offshoot in the Pahari (Hill) schools of the Rajput-ruled states of the Himalayan foothills.

**Folk & Tribal Styles**

**Phad**

An over 700-year-old artistic legacy from Shahpura, near Bhilwara town, phad is a type of scroll painting featuring narratives of the local deities. Serving as mobile shrines, these long pieces of illustrated cloths would journey from place to place with the priests of the Bhopa community. Not only was the musical performance of the story related to the local deities such as Devnarayanji (Vishnu), the paintings also recounted tales of the 14th-century Bhopa folk hero Pabuji. What’s unique about the paintings is that the figures featured on it are flat, and all of them face each other, not the viewer!

**Thape**

The art form features drawings on walls. Ingredients used to create these forms in Rajasthan are traditionally turmeric, geru, henna and kumkum. The drawings, largely invoking the deities, illustrate the walls on either side of a home’s entrance.

**Mandana Art**

Mandana art finds expression as wall and floor paintings in tribal homes in Rajasthan. The form features basic geometric shapes such as triangles, squares and circles. Created to ward off evil, images of nature are rendered in white, red or ochre.
Sacred Art

Pichwai

Cloth paintings, or the Pichwais of Nathdwara, are another interesting painting tradition. In 1671 the idol of Krishna or Shrinatji was spirited away from Mathura (Braj) to Nathdwara. Artists who settled around the shrine of Shrinathji (the principal image for the Pushtimarg sect, established here by Vallabha Acharya) in the 17th century also absorbed influences from the neighbouring princely states of Kota and Kishangarh, who were also followers of Pushtimarg. By the 19th century, a distinctive Nathdwara style emerged, mirrored in the dreamy-eyed cows and human figures with full bodies, bell-shaped dresses and large almond-shaped eyes. ‘Chitra seva’ was one of the important aspects of worship of the sect, which led to the flourishing of painting. The pichwai painted in bold colours was a large cloth hanging or backdrop (pichhe) to the deity Shrinathji in Vallabha sampradaya shrines. Pichwai illustrations feature leelas and episodes associated with Lord Krishna. Several pichwais are decorated with gold plating and precious stones. Nurtured over the past centuries, the Krishna-themed Pushtimarg miniature and pichwai traditions of Nathdwara continue to be preserved by the artists in the lanes around the Shrinathji temple.

Exotic Art

An art form that is rarely practised now and is, therefore, highly treasured is the tradition of Kajali paintings, which are made using lamp black (kajal). In even rarer cases, powdered semi-precious stones provide colour. Kajalis are made solely using cloth and hands, without the use of brushes or other tools. Kajali paintings commonly feature women in traditional attire, usually engaged in household work—sieving or carrying pitchers of water—or romancing couples, among other subjects. The tradition of gemstone painting has flourished in Rajasthan, specifically in Jaipur, for the past two centuries—the state being a hotbed of precious and semi-precious stones. The stones are ground to a fine powder and then pasted on glass or acrylic sheets painstakingly by artists who are guided solely by their instinct or years of experience in creating these paintings that never lose their sheen. Watercolour is used to do the outlines.
Vibrant textile traditions of Rajasthan
By Ranee Sahaney

The rich and sumptuous variety of Rajasthan’s textile traditions and their ornamentation offer some of the most vivid pictures of its cultural moorings. Driven by versatile and sustainable eco-friendly techniques this heritage is a fabulous celebration of traditional forms of art, be it the organic, back-to-nature hand block printing or the mystery of bandhej—all driven by the sun, wind, earth and water in the masterly hands of its chippa. It’s a celebration of the immense variety of its ornamentation heritage...be it the embroideries in cotton and silk, in silver and gold or the intricate applique work.

Now more than ever is it imperative that these treasured crafts be praised and preserved for posterity, not just as fossilized items in museums but as an inextricable eco-friendly part of everyday life.

Bandhej
This iconic textile, also known as bandhini or tie-and-dye work is rooted in Rajasthan’s ancient handcrafted Maru-Gurjar tradition. Though there are indications from some references that the craft found its way into Rajasthan in the form of lehariya (the much beloved wave-like print), the common belief, however, is that it entered Gujarat’s Kutchi textile
traditions from neighbouring Sindh with the Muslim Khatris, who are still largely linked to the craft. Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Nathdwara and Sikar are known to produce the best bandhej work.

Involving a very complex technique, bandhej undergoes multiple processes to achieve those beautiful outcomes in the different styles that have become so popular; chief amongst these are the ekdali, mothda, shikari and lehariya. The most prominent designs in bandhej are Dungar Shahi (hill shaped), Khat ka Laharia (single wave stripe), Laddoo-Jalebi Pomcha (yellow chunari), Chaubasi (groups of four), Tikunthi (circles and squares in groups of three), Sattbandi (groups of seven), Ekdali (one dot), Boond (small dot with a dark centre) and Kodi (teardrop).

The basic process calls for fabric (it could be handwoven cotton or silk) on which the design to be dyed is imprinted (rekhi) or outlined (with fugitive colours with either wooden or iron blocks. The marked dots of the design on the fabric are then tied with dye-resistant thread; to get rid of the design imprint, the cloth is given a thorough wash before it is dipped in the dye, rinsed, dried and then dipped in dye again. The leading colours used are yellow, red, green and black. Originally only organic mineral dyes were used for bandhej. The colour gold is used for overprinting or what is known as khan work.

*Sanganer Hand-Block Prints*

Much loved for those tiny decorative and delicate floral patterns or ‘boota-booties’ translated on fine cotton, muslin and silk the town of Sanganer’s hand block print work is an intrinsic part of Rajasthan’s textile printing narrative. With its revival back in the late 1960s, after going into decline in the 50s, Sanganer’s Calico prints (marked by their dual colour prints done repeatedly in diagonal rows) and Doo Rookhi prints (set on both side of the fabric) were transformed by their modern avatar as fashionable clothing for a growing export market.

Sanganeri prints can be found on running cloth, sarees, dupatta’s, salawar-kameez sets, skirts, scarves, dresses, soft furnishings such as curtains and light-as feather quilts and dohar blankets. In the early days Sanganer’s finest block-printed fabric was only

Decorative motifs made of wood used in hand-block print work
patronised by the royals and rich merchants. Sanganeri hand block print (chintz) which entered the European market through the East India Company, and was much treasured for the original organic mineral dyes used for printing designs. Today, available in mulmul or cotton voile, cambric and sheeting fabric by the yard, this historic textile town beautiful home craft serves a huge domestic and export market.

Hailing originally from the Punjab and the Sindh regions the dyers and printers, who settled here, are from the traditional chhipa community. The wooden blocks (bunta) used by them for printing are found in different shapes and sizes. The water from the Sanjaria River (that once ran through the land) used in the printing process had a very unique property which gave the natural dyed fabric a particular radiance. The river water used in preparing Sanganer prints resulted in darker tones on the cloth whereas the water on Bagru prints brought out a reddish tone. Unlike the block prints of Bagru village, Sanganeri block prints are done on a white or off-white base; Bagru prints favour a red-and-black background. Common floral motifs in Sanganeri prints are roses, lotuses, sunflowers, lilies, marigolds, rosettes and lotus buds.
Bagru Hand-Block Prints

The over four hundred years of block-printing history of Bagru village has formed an important chapter in the textile legacy of Rajasthan. The chhipas of Bagru who settled here originally hailed from Sawai Madhopur, Alwar, Jhunjhunu and Sikar districts.

It is no coincidence that the block-printing narratives of both Bagru and Sanganer villages reflect their humble origins and eventual rise to thriving expansion in both the domestic and export markets. Bagru is famed for two forms of block printing traditions—direct dye (typically indigo) printing and mud-resist dye printing, reflected in the Seyahi-Bagru and Dabu prints respectively. Direct printing entails the fabric being bleached first, then dyed and finally printed using the hand block by the chippa.

Bagru prints are characterised by circular designs, as well as linear and floral patterns; the motifs, inspired by the floral, vegetative and faunal world, show Persian influences brought in by the Mughals which resulted in more geometrical patterns. Bagru motifs set in bold lines tend to be bigger than the Sanganeri motifs which are finer and more detailed. Patterns were formed in hues of indigo blue, alizarin and vibrant yellow on coarse cotton cloth by the indigenous process of dyeing and printing. Bagru prints are done on off-white, ivory white or beige background. The main printing comes in black, red and maroon.

Though the made-ups may have moved up from bedspreads and quilts to kaftans and midis to attract the new clientele, there is a continuity still, in the basic techniques and colours in Bagru prints from the olden days.

Dabu Prints

Because of the scarcity of water in the Bagru region (unlike Sanganer, which had an abundance) its artisans resorted to a special resist technique (shielding the print from dye) which is translated in Dabu prints. The design, sketched on the fabric in mud-resist printing (dabu), is covered with the specially prepared Dabu paste (mud) and sprinkled with sawdust which clings to the cloth as the mud dries. The entire cloth is then dyed in different hues. The motifs made in the mud and sawdust covered area do not catch the dye and remain uncoloured. Once dyed and dried, the fabric is washed to get rid of the clay and sawdust. To add more colour it is dyed again in a lighter shade to cover the patterned area.

Lehariya

A popular print found commonly adorning phaganyodhni in the springtime during the festival of Holi, lehariya is a zigzag pattern replicating waves created by multiple mud-resistant and dyeing processes. Translated on
thin cotton, fine silk, chiffon or georgette, it finds its natural oeuvre in the form of dupattas, turbans and sarees. As recorded by World Textiles: A Visual Guide to Traditional Techniques, the fabric is “rolled diagonally from one corner to the opposite selvedge, and then tied at the required intervals and dyed”. Go for the one worked in natural dyes, multiple washes and indigo or alizarin in the last stages of its creation.

Marwari merchants and local traders in the 19th and early 20th centuries favoured the vibrant lehariya patterned fabric for their turbans, especially for special occasions and certain seasons. There’s pachrang in yellow, red, green and blue; the samudra lehar in the colours of the sea and the indradhanush, in the seven colours of the rainbow worn in the rainy season. Sombre occasions demanded more sober hues such as mauve and brown, detailed in tiny mothara. The cities of Jodhpur and Jaipur are renowned for their lehariya work.

**Mothara**

Set along the lines of the lehariya-making process, mothara requires an additional step in dyeing. The original resists are removed
and the fabric is re-rolled and tied along the opposite diagonal, resulting in the iconic checkered pattern, marked by the small mothara (lentil-sized) spaces which are free of the dye.

**Ajraks**

Geometric-themed patterns, printed on both sides of the cotton fabric by a method called resist printing, are best reflected in Barmer’s red and indigo ajraks. Again the printing process undergoes various steps including scouring, mordanting, printing, lime-resist printing, multiple dyeing in natural dyes of indigo (the key dye) and majistha (red) and washing. Printing is done by hand with handcarved wooden blocks. Barmer prints are principally featured in soft furnishing. Bedspread and bedsheets sell like hotcakes both at home and on the export market.

**Jajam Textiles**

The cultural significance of the Jajam as one of Rajasthan’s most important heritage crafts should not be underated. Traditionally created by artisans from the Chittorgarh region the unique craft of Jajam textiles, a block-printed floor covering coloured in traditional shades of red and black, is facing extinction; the best place for visitors to look upon such work is the Anokhi Musuem in Jaipur. The large patterned Jajam textile evolved out of a social tradition of village life and is often referred to as’ the people’s textile’, as it served as a thin floor covering for the community to congregate at a courtyard, temple or house—or any social occasion, religious ceremonies or festivities. It could also be a gift for the bride.

At the heart of it, the diamond-patterned cloth would feature a game-board setting for playing chaupad, the Indian-style carving.
chess game. Its borders would often feature warriors, tigers, elephants and scorpions, symbols of protection from danger.

**Kota Doria**
This exquisite, light-as-gossamer woven fabric is perfectly scripted from Rajasthan’s hot climate. This transparent weave, with its iconic square checks (khat) pattern is traditionally done on a pit loom by women in their homes in the villages of Kaithoon, Siswali and Manigroal. An indigenous solution of onion juice and rice paste is smeared on the fabric to strengthen it.

**Ornamentation of Fabric**

**Appliqué**
There are quite a few similarities between the katab work done in Gujarat’s Kathiawar region and the applique forms in Rajasthan. Appliqué work involves scraps of fabric of various shapes and sizes, tints and shades, being brought together in a pictorial pattern on the base of a fabric. The edges of these patches are then trimmed, slip stitched and finished with running stitch. Jaipur, Udaipur and Barmer district are well known for applique work.

An interesting aspect of applique work is ‘Ralli’, which comes in the form of lovely
quilts created from patchwork. Jaisalmer is well famed for these quilts where several layers of old fabrics are stitched together, with the uppermost layer made of new cotton cloth. Olive green, brown, maroon and black are the predominant colours of the patches. Tassles and sequins adorn the four corners of these patchwork quilts.

**Heer Bharat**
This form of embroidery involves a pattern being filled with thread work, most commonly by buttonhole stitch or long and short (double satin) stitch. The style finds voice in the work found in Gujarat’s Kutch and Kathiawar region as well as in Haryana and is also replicated in Rajasthan. The style is believed to have been brought to India from Central Asia by Jat migrants.

Embroidery is done with skeins of cotton, woolen or untwisted silk floss in colours of black, red, green yellow, blue, pink and purple. Heer Bharat work also features mirrors in all shapes and sizes, with geometrical motifs being the most dominant.

**Mochi Bharat**
A popular embroidery tradition in Rajasthan’s Barmer region, it takes the form of a chain stitch used in making leather footwear. Though its origins were in the humble jutti made by the local cobbler by a fine awl (called a *katharni*) or ari, it made a more sophisticated journey, appearing on hand-spun and hand woven fabric, translated into ghagharas, cholis and odhnis used by the women folk. The base colours for the embroidery were blue, red and black, but rarely green. The thread used was either cotton or silk untwisted thread called ‘Pat’. Motifs were drawn from nature... birds, animals and varieties of flora and leaves.

**Danka Embroidery**
This style of embroidery makes use of metal and beads often found on cushion covers and the like. It is an ancient tradition for embellishing fabric, garments and home furnishings, followed in Udaipur for over four centuries by its Bohra community, illustrating fabrics like satin, chiffon or silk fabric. The price of danka work is driven by its weight. Motifs in danka work, apart from the popular paisley design in a stylised form, take their inspiration from nature as well.
Mirror Work
Tradition has it that this vibrant ornamentation embroidery done with bits of shisha or mirror, entered Rajasthan’s Barmer and Jaisalmer region from neighboring Sindh where the craft is said to have reached from Persia. Initially the women would embroider bits of mica found in the desert sands on their clothing, but because these could not survive the constant wear and tear the shiny bits were replaced with mirrors, which are cut and surrounded by embroidery on cloth, sometimes featuring tie-and-dye work and used for bedcovers, wall hangings etc. Mirror work, as a matter of interest, can also be found on wall paintings and even adorning the walls in a village. Barmer, Jaisalmer, Bikaner and Sikar are also known for the works of mirror embroidery.

Mukaish
Among the oldest styles of decorating fabrics in Rajasthan, it’s done with silver wire or badla.

Marori
Embroidery done with gold threads stitched onto the surface with a needle.

Gota
A thriving skill, gota work is richly evident in the cloth in which a gold or silver border has been woven on a loom and the material cut into all kinds of shapes—birds, animals and human figures, to give it that textured look. Jaipur’s Johari Bazaar, Jodhpur’s Nai Sarak and Lake Palace Road in Udaipur are favoured hotspots for gota ka kaam. The embroiderers of Bikaner, Ajmer, Udaipur and Kota are also renowned for the quality of their work. Gota-kinari work or lappe-ka-kaam, done on the fabric with the appliqué technique, is crafted by Muslim artisans. ‘Gota’ and ‘Kinari’, gold and silver coloured pieces and laces are sewn on cloth.

Zardozi
Also referred to as zari or kalabattu this embroidery work is done with metal wires with Jaipur, Ajmer, Tonk and Jodhpur serving as Rajasthan’s most important hubs for this high-end craft. A legacy handed down from generation to generation by these artisans, some aspects of this work are still shrouded in secrecy. A more elaborate form of zari, zardozi involves the high use of spangles, beads, seed pearls, wire, gota and kinari.
War and in peace Rajasthan’s crafting traditions have been an intrinsic aspect of its culture. No wonder shopping takes on a whole new meaning as you plunge into its bustling markets all over the state, where the plenitude of jewel-toned textiles, embroidered juttis, mirror-work skirts and blouses in multi-hued shades catches our attention. Here there’s a splendid carving in marble of Krishna with his flute, there Lord Shiva sits deep in meditation. A leheriya dupatta hanging overhead romances the breeze while the sturdy tie-and-dye bedcover beckons you to take it home. The bazaars of Rajasthan are made for retail therapy.

The skills of the Rajasthani artisan have never been in doubt. Be it a temple carving, a lattice work in marble for the zenana or the ornate trappings of the royal elephant, he has faith in his craft. From the rich accoutrements of the poshaks of the royals and the nobility to jewel encrusted daggers and swords, from painterly palace walls to sculpted marvels in marble and wood, a steady hand and intrinsic dedication to his craft have paid their own dividends. From stone, marble, wood, leather, glass, silver, gold and textiles, these skilled craftsmen have created incredible works that have won the hearts of both the Mughal courts and local maharajas down the decades.
Ethnic handicrafts for sale near Patwon ki Haveli in Jaisalmer
Rajput princes, who were great patrons of art, invited skilled artisans from other parts to settle down in their principalities. This royal patronage was one of the main reasons why the artisans could work with single-minded devotion towards enhancing the quality of their craft. The Rajputs commissioned goldsmiths, printers and dyers, painters, potters, stone carvers, weavers of cotton and silk to produce works of art for them and rewarded them handsomely when they excelled in their craft. It is a legacy that lives on in Rajasthan. Each region has its own unique crafts, and every little town and village has its share of lanes where craftspersons hold sway. It is this treasure trove that tourists are privileged to discover, be it in a modern shopping centre in a big town or in a traditional bazaar in a small village.

**Textiles**

The bazaars and boutiques are awash with handcrafted textiles. Tie-and-dye work from Jodhpur, hand-block-printed motifs from Sanganer village or the earthy prints of Bagru village around Jaipur, and the lehariya prints from the villages around Jaipur and the famous block-printing work from Akola village near Bhilwara all vie for attention.

Rajasthan’s textile market spans regions and fabrics. While traditionally Rajasthan’s textiles came in vibrant colours, their look has been enriched by collaborations with designers from across the country. It is, therefore, not surprising to find a contemporary look in the most traditional of clothes.

Perhaps the most heartening fact about the fabrics is their eco-friendly production. Wooden blocks are used for printing textiles while colours are added using vegetable dyes that have no chemicals. Some famous prints include Barmer’s red and indigo geometric patterns called ajraks; Chittorgarh’s jajam prints; and Jaisalmer’s batik (wax-resist dye-
ing) and embroidery work. While tie-and-dye is popular in Sikar, Jodhpur and Jaipur, mirrorwork, appliqué and embroidery are done in Bikaner, Sikar and Jhunjhunu.

Kota doria, a lightweight fabric that is woven in the villages of Kaithoon, Siswali and Mangroal, is one of Rajasthan’s most famous textiles. One remarkable feature about the makers of these fabrics is that the weavers are all women. You can get this fabric from markets in Kota such as Gumanpura and Rampura Bazaar. For genuine handlooms, it’s better to take a trip to Kaithoon as it is only half-an-hour’s drive from Kota. Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing at Anokhi Haveli near Jaipur’s Kheri Gate has several exhibits worth mulling over. Cottons, Ratan Textiles, Soma, Suvasa and Chitta Print N Craft in the C-Scheme area of Jaipur offer a fabulous range of home furnishings and accessories. On Amber Road is Arawali Textiles, which exports handlooms around the world and sells silk and cotton textiles as well as a range of home furnishings and handicrafts at reasonable rates. Sikar House on Jhotwada Road is a good option for inexpensive, export-surplus items. Ranas in Ganapati Plaza in Jaipur stocks a superb collection of saris and bridalwear.
Embroidery
While the amazing embroidered mirrorwork of ghaghras, cholis, dupattas and saris will have you in thrall, it’s good to remember that Rajasthan’s famous juttis are not always plain either. There’s some nice detailed embroidery done on them that will make you treasure them for sure. Known as Kashidakari, it entails women artisans creating inventive designs using threads in vibrant colours such as blue, orange, green, pink and magenta, constantly checking to make sure the motifs and designs are uniform on both mojaris of a pair. The motifs on the inside are smaller, but correspond with those on the outside.

Having enjoyed rich patronage under the Mughals, embroidery is a craft that has, over time, witnessed a steady springing up of colourful, distinctive schools throughout the region. If Sikar in Shekawati is famous for its embroidery, where motifs inspired from animals

Above: Colourful Rajasthani dresses on sale in Pushkar; Below: A traditional ladies’ handbag
and birds feature on ghaghras and odhnis, little mirrors find a place in the embroidered pieces that comes from Jaisalmer. Leather embroidery enjoys a status of privilege in Jodhpur, Bikaner, Pokaran and Jaipur. Similarly, the artisan community of the Meghwals practises a form of embroidery that is big on intricately done motifs, rich colours and some fine mirrorwork.

Embroidery attains an altogether new degree of luxury with zardozi, which makes use of metallic wire (badla; when wound around a thread, it is known as kasav). Gota patti work, also known as lappe ka kaam, makes use of gold and silver lace, and is seen most often on turbans, dresses, ghaghras, saris and the like. Believed to have originated in Rajasthan, it is now famous the world over for the royal feel it affords the wearer. The sheen of an authentic gota patti piece, made resplendent by motifs such as peacocks, paisleys and palanquins, is second to none.

The exotic hues and patterns of applique work, where different cloth pieces are sewn on to fabrics, are hard to miss as it is, but the version practised in the village of Mithrau in Barmer by its resident artisans who migrated from Pakistan, takes the quality craftsmanship which is involved in the art to another level altogether. The captivating cutwork of the pieces here has drawn comparisons not just with the Katab patchwork of Kutch but also with the Egyptians!

However, it isn’t just odhnis, mojaris and other garments, but also embroidered wallets, handbags, home furnishings and cloth mobile cases that have a good market. Ornamental trappings for the royal elephants and camels too showcase the embroidery skills of the Rajasthani artisans.

**Dhurries**

Jodhpur, Bikaner and Jaisalmer are known for woollen and cotton dhurries, which are cool, light rugs. In most cases, villagers work with
businesspersons from the metros to boost their sales and to reach a wider market, and as a result, the weavers’ work reflects a harmonious blend of traditional and contemporary designs. While dhurries are more reasonably priced and easy to maintain, carpets are also great buys. Jaipur and Bikaner have many carpet outlets. Incidentally, many of the looms for making carpets are operated by prisoners, a practice that was started by the Mughals. Bikaner, for instance, is known for carpets made in prisons, popularly called jail carpets.

A floor covering that is used widely in Rajasthan is the namdah or the felted rug. It is available in mainly two styles: embroidered, or with appliqué work. Tonk is the main centre for this craft. The quality of carpets and rugs from Salawas village (Jodhpur) and Jawaja village (Ajmer) has long been cherished. The dhurries of Salawas, woven from coarse cotton, wool, goat and camel hair, were put on the world map by the legendary Shyam Ahuja. Jawaja produces thicker dhurries using strong and thicker yarns. They are characterised by geometric patterns in vibrant colours.

**Quilts**

In Jaipur, do look out for light cotton quilts in the shops opposite Hawa Mahal. These are easy to carry and prove very useful. Some shops in Chaura Raasta as well as Soma and Ratan Textiles (both have branches in Delhi) are also good places to pick up quilts. Nagaur

*Take home a quirky, vibrant quilt or two from the bazaars of Jaipur*
is not only famous for its chillies but is also known for feather-light quilts. Bikaner, on the other hand, has bazaars selling cotton and camel-wool shawls. Urmul outlets are another option. Though their quilts may not be soft, they do keep you warm.

**Jewellery**

Jaipur has long been famed for the most elegant and sophisticated jewellery made of precious and semi-precious stones. New skills in jewellery design were developed under royal patronage. It was Raja Man Singh of Amer/Jaipur who is said to have brought in Persian minakari artisans to develop new designs for the ladies in his zenana. Sawai Jai Singh II brought a clutch of jewel-smiths to his new capital when he shifted from Amer. Long recognised worldwide as a top diamond-and emerald-cutting hub, Jaipur automatically created a niche for jewellery makers over the ages. It has a dedicated hub devoted to cutting and polishing precious stones using simple, unsophisticated machinery. Jaipur has emerged as one of the leading centres in the coloured gems segment.

In the British Raj era, international designs too made a foray into the royal courts, with nobility investing fresh inspiration for the local jewellers. The city has a longstanding relationship with the royals for jewels, be it handcrafted in classic designs or modern styles. Minakari and kundan work in gold reached its zenith in enamel jewellery centres like Bikaner, Nathdwara and Udaipur.

Doing brisk business always are the ornate kundan chokers, chaandbalis, bangles and maang tikas, all popular items for weddings and celebrations. Hookahs and paan-dans from the Mughal period frequently
featured mina work. Minakari has now also surfaced on jewellery boxes, dining sets, trays, cupboards, bowls, sculptures and is now rendered in silver and copper as well. The go-to place in Jaipur is Johari Bazaar, the dedicated street for all kinds of jewellers. Gopalji ka Raasta and Haldiyon ka Raasta in Johari Bazaar, Jaipur, have a formidable reputation for their minakari and kundan work. On Jaipur’s MI Road stands Gem Palace, an establishment whose family forbears were jewellers to Mughal emperors. While Jaipur has jewellers selling gems in wholesale, in Jodhpur are shops selling handmade silver jewellery and ornaments made with emeralds, diamonds, pearls and lapis lazuli.

Once almost lost, the delicate thewa jewellery—gold filigree work on glass—which is indigenous to Pratapgarh, is gaining recognition in international markets as well as among savvy jewellery connoisseurs. Silver ornaments for both men and women have always had a ready market, be it in the urban centres or the rural landscapes. Colourful bangles made from lac (both plain and ornamented) make popular souvenirs also. Jaipur, Bundi, and Karauli are big hubs for the production of lac bangles. Manihar ka Rasta is where one heads for lac jewellery, while Bapu Bazaar and Nehru Bazaar are filled with shops selling quality costume jewellery. Nathdwara town and Udaipur’s Ghanta Ghar area are good places to shop for jewellery with traditional designs. In Jodhpur, head to Circuit House near which you will find Gems and Jewels and Gems and Art Plaza; check out the shops lining Sarafa Bazaar. Deogarh is the place to pick up some of the best silver jewellery in Rajasthan.

Paintings
An integral part of Rajasthani culture, painting is richly endorsed in its different avatars here. Miniature paintings are richly represented in Rajasthani art. Court patronage was responsible for the high finesse achieved in the medium. The popularity of miniature painting was translated in the mushrooming of styles distinctive to various regions of the state. Thus, it saw the development of the Kota-Bundi School, the Marwar School, the Mewar School, the Jaipur School, the Bikaner School and the Kishangarh School.

The Kishangarh School of Painting—in which the women have sharp features and exaggerated eyes—is well known. Paintings in this style are now available in most Rajasthani towns. If you want to buy them in the home territory, head to the old quarter near the Kishangarh Fort. Here you will find families who make and sell replicas of old paintings. Jaipur is the place for miniatures of excellent quality. In Udaipur, paintings are sold on Lake Palace Road and in the Jagdish Temple area, while in Jodhpur, Nai Sarak is a good place to scout around for the same.
In Bikaner, Swami Art, located en route to the Lallgarh Palace, has a superb collection of miniatures. This city is also where the distinguished tradition of **Usta Painting** has flourished since times immemorial. The sophisticated art form is known all over the world for its versatility in terms of the surface it is carried out upon, be it camel hide, stone and metal, and is known by names such as Manoti and Naqqashi work.

Gemstone painting was introduced about a couple of centuries ago, when semi-precious stones started to be used in place of artificial/vegetable colours. With gemstones in abundance in the state, this art was easy to practise, and gems such as agate, amethyst, citrine, jade, lapis lazuli and malachite among others were sourced. Based on the colour that was needed, the stones were ground and pasted by trained craftsmen on the canvas, which, in this case, happened to be sheets of marble, glass or acrylic. The outline, however, is created using watercolours.

**Terracotta Products and Pottery**
Each district of Rajasthan has its own distinct style of pottery. Jaipur’s blue pottery is thought to have originated in the first part of the 19th century, and came to India via Persia and Afghanistan. It remained neglected after the end of the Mughal era and was revived because of the efforts of Padma Shri award-winner Kirpal Singh Shekhawat. In 1962, while heading the Shilpa Kala Mandir in Jaipur, Shekhawat
set up a kiln of his own and made blue pottery items that could be used in daily life. Blue pottery, made from crushed quartz, is available in various shades of blue. Embellishments of painted motifs in geometrics and nature’s bounty in bright yellows, oranges and green and other colours have further enhanced it. The product line ranges from items like vases, ashtrays to bathroom accessories.

Today, reasonably priced blue pottery items are to be easily found in most shops in Jaipur. Don’t be confused if you find other colours in blue pottery items—pink, yellow, green, brown, mauve, grey and black are also integral colours for items that go under the very broad umbrella of blue pottery! Sanganer, Mahalan and Neota are also places from where you can pick up blue pottery. In Jaipur, Rajasthali and other shops on MI Road and Amber Road, Kripal Kumbh in Bani Park and Neerja International in C-Scheme, are also good places to pick up these items.

In Molela village, near Nathdwara, craftsmen are skilled at making terracotta idols of gods, often depicted riding bulls, horses, boars and dogs. This art form has been passed down from one generation to another. Because of its religious significance the craft is locally known as mur-tikala. The intricacy of the work involved and the size of the idol determine its price.

Of particular note are the large works featuring the image of the local deity Devanarayan/Dharamraj, said to have inspired religious-themed pottery instead of the pots and utensils they used to make back in Nadol, from whence they came to Molela.
Roadside vendors sell the idols in Udaipur’s markets but these are also available across the state. Alwar is known for paper-thin pottery known as Kagzi pottery, which is easily distinguishable because of the thin walls of the items. Pots made in this manner have double-walled surfaces cut into lovely patterns to augment airflow. The pots made in Pokhran have imposing geometrical etchings.

Bikaner’s painted pottery and the terracotta products of the Nohar Centre of Bikaner are equally famous. The city is also known for its gold lacquered pottery, where the patterns are done on a white-chalklike surface. Sawai Madhopur, on the other hand, is a special branch of Rajasthani pottery that is practised on the clay obtained from the nearby Banas river. The slightly greyish colour on the pottery created here is achieved by sealing the vents of the kiln before the firing is completed. The products created include decorative figurines, animals and deities on plaques, paperweights, and, of course, a wide range of pots. If you visit

*Pottery at Shilpgram, Udaipur*
Jalore and Ahore, do pick up the terracotta horses that are made here as religious offerings. If visiting Nagaur and Merta during fairs, you will find terracotta toys on sale.

**Stone Carving**

Gorgeous fretwork, carved deities, elaborate columns, garden ornaments, jaali screens, marble tabletops, lamps and candlestands all bear the fine detailing at which the Rajasthani craftsmen are so skilled. While stone carving is mostly seen in Jaipur, Makrana, Jodhpur and Jaisalmer, stone products are available in other cities as well. As far as engraving goes, for instance, Dungarpur is famous for green stone and Thanagazi for its red stone and lime pieces.

From functional domestic items that come in beautiful shapes to elegantly carved pillars and doors ornamented with brass motifs, you can find stone products of every conceivable nature across the state. Kishangarh is the best place to look for marble and stone items such as statues, fountains, table tops and lamp bases. You will find all these and more in the 50-odd shops lining NH-8.

A good place to pick up carved marble items is Khajanewalon ka Raasta in Jaipur. The Pandey Murti Kala Kendra at Narain Bhawan here offers customised idols of all sizes and di-
dimensions and for all budgets. At Silawaton ka Mohalla, the chiseling and hammering of the stoneworkers can be constantly heard. Shilpgram in Udaipur has an attractive selection of marble, stone and pottery items.

**Bone Carving and Horn Work**

As against the rather valued seep-ka-kaam of the state, bone work is a more preferred craft now since it involves less wastage of material, takes less time, and bone doesn’t chip as easily as mother-of-pearl. Humanely acquired horn (usually from bovines like cows and buffaloes) is deftly fashioned into ittardanis, combs, ashtrays and bangles, followed by ornamentation with delicate filigree work. Both of these materials form the basis for a wide array of articles including sword and dagger handles, elephant howdahs, tumblers, salvers, hukkah bases, and toys shaped like animals. They are also used to make the bartana, a unique paper knife-like tool that is used to de-stress by passing it between the forehead and the turban.

Horn- and bone-work is practised mainly in cities like Jaipur, Bikaner, Ajmer, and Jodhpur—the last one famous for its arm-to-shoulder bangles that are embellished further with materials like glass beads, gold leaf, seashell pieces and coloured lace.

**Metalwork**

Everything from tabletops to picture frames is available in a range of metals in Rajasthan. Among the brass, iron or silver items that you can pick up are pen cases, styluses and compasses. Jodhpur is known for brass toy
items—cannons, elephants, horses and camels—while Jaipur’s speciality is its brassware. Here, there are broadly three styles of engraving—chikan, which refers to floral patterns carried out over a lacquered surface; marori/chrakwan, where elaborate designs are etched on the surface and the space filled with black lac; bichi, on the other hand, refers to finely done flowers and leaves rendered over lacquered surface.

Decorative metalwork is created using a range of techniques, from hammering, perforation and chasing to repousse and piercing. Brass vases, utensils, bowls, lamps, animal figurines, photo frames and sundry trinkets often feature lacquering and enamelling. Lake Palace Road in Udaipur, Palace Road and Clock Tower Road in Jodhpur, and MI Road, Amber Road and Tripolia Bazaar in Jaipur are good places for metalware.

Koftgari is a unique weapon ornamentation technique, which, like damascening, is an overlay art where the metal surface is cut in a crosshatch pattern using a chirni (a double-edged blade). The patterned depressions are then filled with gold or silver wire and pressed using the hakik stone (agate). Koftgari, which translates to beaten work, first flourished under the Mughals in the 16th century and then won favour among the Rajputs, who considered it important to have weapons and armament ornamented. Practised mainly in Udaipur today, koftgari swords and daggers feature arresting animal head shapes and floral motifs on the hilt ends. Souvenir knives and daggers remain popular, even though craftsmen are taking this special overlay technique to jewellery, vessels and mirror frames, implanting on them styles like the Ganga-Jamuna (featuring both gold and silver) and Hara Sona (using gold-silver alloy), among others.

Koftgari sword; Top: A bicycle model made with brass wire


**Weaponry**

A tradition of weapon-making that is anything less than magnificent doesn’t befit a land that has a long history of warfare and royalty. The deadly, double-edged swords of Sirohi enjoy worldwide renown, and the credit goes to its lightweight nature. These swords aren’t bad to look at either—with their blued-steel hilts that were later overlaid in gold and carved floral motifs upon. The Sikligars of Udaipur have been the historical keepers of making new swords and maintaining and sharpening old ones. The process of polishing the swords’ blades is an interesting one: rudimentary materials/tools like ash, horseshoe, emery stone are used. The swords are then lowered into an oven and sesame oil applied over them after that. Sword and dagger making is a dying craft, so the Sikligars now make other tools such as scissors.

**Woodwork**

While one may not traditionally associate a desert land with wood items, Rajasthan has a surprisingly large number of showpieces in wood that are incredibly beautiful. The only hitch is that it may not be possible to cart everything back home—not easily at least. You will find doors and windows with beautiful carvings, beds, divans, chairs and swings in Barmer, Bikaner, Shekhawati and Jodhpur. If you are looking for something that’s smaller in size, there are plenty of options as well. Kavadhs, which are portable wooden shrines that have seven panels and are employed in the oral storytelling tradition of *kavad baanch-na*, are made by the Kumawat artisans of Bassi, near Chittorgarh. This village, famous for puppets, toys and idols (including those of Ishar and Gauri, deities of the Gangaur festival) is also where the famous set of musicians in wood and sindoor boxes shaped like peacocks can be bought.

For **Painted Wooden Furniture**, shops in Jodhpur and Kishangarh are the best options. Other pieces of furniture that make for excellent souvenirs are the jute-and leather-embroidered chairs of *Tilonia*—a half-hour drive from Kishangarh—and the carved-back, string-bottom chairs of Shekhawati. **Barmer** is known for its sleek tables and chairs made
CraFts and intangible HeRitage oF rajastHan

of sheesham, as are Jodhpur and Shekha-
wati, where pieces made of mango and acacia
arabica wood are designed and adorned with
classical Mughal patterns and motifs. If one is
looking for furniture in characteristically Raj-
asthani styles, patra chairs, low tables called
bajots, traditional screens and low chowkis
abound in the furniture mar-
kets. The folding chairs of
Jaisalmer, and low pidas of
Shekhawati are especially
famous, as are the char-
pais and moodhas made
from sarkanda.

Lacquering on wood
is central to woodworking in
Rajasthan, and the techniques
include zig-zag work, atishi, abri, nakkashi and etched nakkashi. The article to be
lacquered is first covered with a fine powder,
turned on the wheel and the lac stick pressed
against it. This is repeated several times for
layers of different colours. Afterwards, a bam-
boo stick is used to apply marble polish and
finally, scraping at the surface is done using a
pointed chisel to get the right colour.

The artisans of Barmer excel
particularly at Woodcarving, ren-
dering impeccable images of deities,
parrots, elephants and animal figures.
The craft received a major fillip after
the Indo-Pak wars of the ‘60s and ‘70s.
Wooden furniture and antiques can also
be purchased from Lalji Handicrafts,
Shekhawati Art Emporium, Rajasthan
Art Emporium and the Heritage Art
School (near Circuit House) in Jodhpur. Shekhawati has been another
Bastion of the practice of woodcarving, which is quite evident in beautifully worked doors, windows and door frames. Bikaner’s delicately carved lintels and doors and jaali-style windows also betray a strong knack for a fine woodcarving aesthetic.

No discussion on woodcarving in Rajasthan is complete without a mention of the striking, delicate, carved Sandalwood creations crafted by the Jangids of Churu. The craftsmen of the famous family are continuing the legacy left by the National Award-winner Malchand Jangid, whose creation named Rajasthani Doll won the appreciation of the then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The family has practised the craft since Mughal rule and has kept the dying art alive. The fragrant, malleable sandalwood used to make the pieces was sourced from Karnataka, and the pieces, with a filigree-like quality to them, often feature compartments that open via panels to reveal equally masterful and progressively detailed innards depicting historical events and scenes.

What elevates otherwise ordinary objects to a stately, designer degree, is the iconic craft of Taarkashi, where hardwood or sheesham sandooks and doors are embellished with flattened gold, silver and copper wire using the technique of inlay. Believed to have come from Mainpuri in Uttar Pradesh during the reign of Maharaja Jai Singh II, the craft then came to be patronised by Amber’s royal family.

**Above:** Kathputli puppets in Jaipur. **Below:** an elephant with Taarkashi work

Often seen on palace doors, thrones and howdahs, Taarkashi work today can be found on combs, jewellery boxes, photo frames, decorative pieces and the like.

**Puppet-Making**

An integral part of the family of woodcrafts in the state, puppet-making is in its own right a distinctive tradition that goes back ages. Known as kathputlis, easily be one of Rajasthan’s best-known cultural mascots, these string puppets are made from the easily available mango wood, their limbs fashioned from old rags stuffed with more rags and hay. With their animated expressions and bead jewellery, these play-
ers of a quirky theatrical tradition make for affordable mementoes, too. Kathputli Nagar in Jaipur is one of the biggest markets for these articles, while Udaipur boasts of being the oldest puppet-making centres in the state.

**Paper Crafts**

Just 14km from Jaipur’s busy Narayan Singh Circle, Sanganer is known for the diverse range of items made from recycled paper. The Kagzis—the local papermaking community—use three types of raw material to produce paper: cotton rags, silk and banana trunk fibre. Cotton-based paper makes up 90 per cent of their produce, but despite the humble raw material, the final product comes in myriad attractive finishes. There’s metalised paper, glazed to look like foil, and leatherised paper, deliberately creased to resemble leather. Then there’s paper infused with flower petals and leaves, or decorated with tinsel or even block-printed just like cloth.

Salim’s Paper and Kagzi Handmade Paper Industries (both on Gramudyog Road) and Kalpana Handmade Paper Industries at Bawri ka Bas, Nashiyon ka Rasta, are the most popular outlets in Sanganer. Chipa on Bhawani Singh Road, Khadi Ghar and the Rajasthali showroom on MI Road in Jaipur also sell handmade paper. The paper is available in sheet form and priced as such but there are also products such as frames, lamps and boxes, and trays and plates, but diaries and greeting cards far outnumber the rest.

*A man at a handmade-paper factory*
Bahi work, or the craft of making traditional hardbound accounting diaries with their covers adorned with a characteristic stitched pattern, hails from Udaipur. The cover of the bahi is made from a range of materials, including leather, zari fabric, printed cotton or silk, and is traditionally red, a colour associated with the goddess of wealth. What’s unique about bahis is that they did not need to have tables or columns drawn using ink—the makers would just carefully crimp the pages demarcating the individual areas for entries to be made.

**Leather Crafts**

Almost every town in Rajasthan has items made of leather on sale. Juttis, in all sizes and colours, are obviously big favourites with tourists. The mojari is to the Rajasthanis what the sombrero is to the Mexicans. The leather (usually camel or goat), softer on the top over the toes and the thick sole shield the wearer from the intense desert heat. The royals loved their mojaris embellished with precious stones and gems, but with time, the masses began taking to them, and more affordable adornments such as cowrie shells, beads, mirrors and the like came in.

The humble mojari can handle challenging terrain for days on end, which is why it is just as regular with shepherds and farmers as with the urban populace. Even though pairs haven’t traditionally been made according to a right-left orientation, mojaris are available in several varieties such as *gol panja* (for round toes), *chhota panja* (for small toes), and *salem shahi* (for pointed toes).

**Bikaner’s** world-famous Gesso (Usta/Naqqashi) work can be found in a delightful range of containers. The traditional centres where leather products are sold include Bikaner, Jaipur, Jodhpur and Jaisalmer. You will also get good deals at Ajmer, Bharatpur, Sikar and Sawai Madhopur. In Jaipur, the shops near Hawa Mahal stock a range of lovely juttis, as do Mojari in Bhawani Villa at Chomu House and shops at Link Road and the vibrant Rangganj Bazaar.

*Inputs from Dharmendar Kanwar and Prannay Pathak*
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Culture of Rajasthan in Indian art style

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