

Lambani Embroidery: A Vibrant Legacy of the Nomadic Lambani Tribe

Banjara embroidery, also known as Lambani embroidery, is a vibrant and artistic needlework tradition originating from the Banjara or Lambani tribe. This form of embroidery is renowned for its colourful flags, mirror work, applique, patchwork, and intricate patterns. The craft is deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the Banjara people and has been passed down through generations, showcasing their rich history and artistic expression.

Historical Background

The Banjara people, also known as Lambanis or Banjaras, were originally nomadic tribes that migrated from Afghanistan to Rajasthan. Over time, they spread across various Indian states, including Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. Historically, the Lambanis played a crucial role in transporting goods and supplies for the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb and providing food to Mughal soldiers.



Lambani Tribe

However, in the 19th century, the British authorities enacted the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871,

which severely restricted the movement of the Lambanis by branding them as habitual criminals. This legislation imposed severe restrictions on their movement and activities, stigmatizing the entire community. Despite these challenges, the Lambanis stood up against the British during the Freedom Struggle, supporting freedom fighters with their extensive knowledge of India's diverse terrain.

The Decline of Traditional Attire and Craft

Recently, economic necessity has driven Lambani women to abandon their traditional attire for more affordable synthetic sarees. This shift was necessitated by the obsolescence of traditional Lambani businesses, forcing families into seasonal migration for work. The intricate craft of Lambani embroidery, characterized by colourful ghagra cholis adorned with up to 23 stitches, slowly faded into obscurity. The harsh realities of seasonal migration and the challenges of wearing heavy traditional attire in arduous work conditions further exacerbated this situation.

Distinctive Features of Banjara Embroidery



[Banjara Dupatta](#)

Lambani embroidery is a distinctive form of textile embellishment practised by the Lambani community. This embroidery utilizes multicoloured threads, mirrors, seashells, and various stitch patterns on loosely woven fabrics. Artisans skillfully stitch together small patches of fabric to create a beautiful patchwork, ensuring that no piece of fabric is wasted. Even small rags and fragments are utilized to create lovely pieces of art.

Close to 23 different types of stitches are employed in Lambani embroidery. Small mirror pieces are incorporated into the fabric, adding sparkle and vibrancy. Brightly coloured dyed cotton thread is an essential component of this art, along with patchwork, motifs, patterns, and elaborately stitched borders.

Lambani embroidery shares similarities with textile traditions from Eastern Europe, West Asia, and Central Asia, highlighting the interconnected nature of global textile arts. A notable example of this craft is Sandur Lambani embroidery from the Sandur region of Karnataka, which received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2010, recognizing its unique cultural significance and origin.

The GI Tag for Sandur Lambani Embroidery

A notable milestone in the preservation and recognition of Lambani embroidery is the Geographical Indication (GI) tag granted to Sandur Lambani embroidery from the Sandur region of Karnataka in 2010. This GI tag is a significant achievement, recognizing the unique cultural significance and origin of this craft.

The Sandur region has long been a hub for Lambani embroidery, with many skilled artisans continuing the tradition. The GI tag has played a crucial role in protecting the authenticity of Sandur Lambani embroidery, preventing imitation and ensuring that only products genuinely originating from this region can be sold under the name. This recognition has helped elevate the status of Lambani embroidery on both national and international platforms, providing a boost to the local economy and supporting the livelihoods of artisans.

The GI tag has also encouraged efforts to preserve the traditional techniques and motifs unique to Sandur Lambani embroidery. It has fostered a greater appreciation for the intricate craftsmanship involved in creating these textiles, ensuring that the art form is not lost to future generations. Additionally, the GI tag has helped in marketing and promoting Sandur Lambani embroidery, attracting attention from fashion designers, collectors, and enthusiasts who value the cultural heritage and artistry embodied in these textiles.

Cultural Significance and Modern Adaptations of Lambani Embroidery

Embroidery holds significant cultural importance within the Lambani community. Saguna, an elderly member who has been weaving intricate designs for the past 50 years, says, "Embroidery is not just our profession but also a part of our customs and traditions. The designs that we make entail a lot of hard work, but we do it as this is what we have always been doing."

Despite the challenges, several self-help groups like Banjara Kasuti have supported the community by reducing the number of middlemen who siphon off major profits. This embroidery process is unlike conventional methods, where patterns are drawn beforehand. Lambani women embark on their embroidery journey without any predetermined designs. Instead, the pattern emerges spontaneously, and when three or four women collaborate on the same piece, whether it's a skirt or a blouse, the art has a lot of emotions involved in it, resulting in an authentic and one-of-a-kind creation.

The embroidery stitches themselves are a testament to the Lambani tradition. Stitches like **Jod Muhiya**, resembling two crossed squares with alternating rows of straight stitches, and **Chale Chundri**, resembling a three-triangle leaf, showcase the intricacy and craftsmanship of Banjara embroidery.

Transitioning Tribal Art into Mainstream Fashion

The fashion world is highly competitive, making it challenging for niche art forms to gain relevance. However, over the years, the industry has evolved, and top designers have focused on incorporating unique weaves and patterns into their collections. Some notable examples include Bhagalpuri Silk by Samant Chauhan, Bera Jackets by Yaduveer Singh Bera, Kalamkari by designers like Sabyasachi, Neeta Lulla, and Gaurang Shah, and Block print and several other arts by Ritu Kumar.

The revival of Lambani art not only entails preserving a thousand-year-old art form but also ensures that people today have access to ancient creativity. Bringing Lambani art to the mainstream provides livelihoods to thousands of women who would otherwise spend their entire lives roaming from one place to another in search of sustenance and livelihood.

How to Learn Banjara or Lambani Embroidery

Learning Banjara or Lambani embroidery can be a rewarding experience, allowing you to connect with a rich cultural tradition. Here are some steps to get started:

Fabric and Threads:

Needles and Accessories:

Learn Basic Stitches: Begin with basic stitches such as running stitch, backstitch, and chain stitch. Gradually move on to more complex stitches like Jod Muhiya and Chale Chundri. Practice each stitch on small pieces of fabric until you feel confident in your technique.

Study Traditional Designs: Study traditional Banjara embroidery designs, which often include floral, animal, and bird motifs and rangoli patterns. Try to replicate these designs to understand their structure and composition. Experiment with creating your own designs while incorporating traditional elements.

Practice and Experiment: Practice regularly to improve your skills. Start with small projects like patches or decorative pieces before moving on to larger items like garments or home decor. Don't be afraid to experiment with different colours, materials, and designs to develop your unique style.

Join a Community: Join online forums or local groups dedicated to Banjara embroidery. Connecting with fellow enthusiasts and artisans can provide support, inspiration, and opportunities for collaboration.

Support and Learn from Artisans: Support local artisans by purchasing their work and learning directly from them. Many communities welcome visitors who are interested in their craft and are willing to share their knowledge.

By following these steps, you can start your journey into the world of Banjara embroidery, preserving and celebrating this beautiful art form while developing your skills and creativity.

Conclusion

Banjara embroidery, with its rich history and vibrant designs, represents the artistic and cultural heritage of the Lambani community. Despite facing numerous challenges, the community continues to preserve and promote this beautiful art form. As the fashion industry increasingly embraces traditional crafts, Banjara embroidery stands as a testament to the enduring spirit and creativity of the Lambani people. By supporting and celebrating this unique craft, we can help ensure its survival for future generations.



[Learn Basic Embroidery Stitches](#)



[Aari Work for Beginners](#)