

RISD MUSEUM

Kutch Quilts from South Asia, November 19, 2010-April 17, 2011

This group of quilts, newly acquired for the RISD Museum collection, is compelling for its history of ownership, its remote origins, and its representation of regional traditions. The quilts were initially purchased by Anjali Mangaldas, who was born into an Indian textile family and studied textile design in England and the United States. In 1962, after returning to India from her studies abroad, she traveled to the Kutch region of northwest India, where she met with individual craftspeople and purchased quilts and textiles that captivated her interest, as well as those that might inform her own textile work.

The Kutch region shares a border with Pakistan and is home to a wide variety of both Hindu and Muslim nomadic and semi-nomadic groups, as well as settled communities of herders. Known for its rather harsh and colorless terrain, the region's monochromatic palette is brightened by the craft of the local population. As different clans and groups migrated to and eventually settled in the region, each brought their own unique textile designs and techniques, including richly embroidered styles for which the region is well known. Close proximity encouraged an exchange of ideas, and over the course of centuries there developed a recognizably "Kutch" aesthetic tying together individual community styles.

These quilts and quilt covers, while more modest in detail than many of the heavily embroidered textiles from the area, nonetheless exemplify this regional style and express the significance of textiles in daily life. In place of embroidery, most of the elaborate designs on the quilts are formed by stitching together pieces of fabric (patchwork) or by applying shaped fabrics to a foundation (appliqué). All of these textiles share the trait of having been pieced together from material that we might consider scrap, but which the Kutch craftspeople recognize as a valued and reusable source for quilts. Several of the quilts incorporate fabrics that were salvaged from worn cotton saris; similar prints and patterns can be seen in the silk sari and veil on display. Whether they are constructed from recycled or new fabric, quilts are considered a sign of a family's wealth and position and serve as a point of pride and heritage.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Kutch
Quilt, 1900s-1950s
Cotton; appliqué
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2010.62.1

This appliqué quilt was made from cotton fabric salvaged from saris. Seen on the quilt's borders, the kangri motif references the roofs of temples. The prevalence of this iconography in quilts from the region may express the importance of religion even amongst traditionally nomadic communities.



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Atri; Kutch
Quilt, 1900s
Cotton; patchwork
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2010.62.10

The saris and bag featured here were made for ceremonial purposes such as matrimony. They come from the same region of India as the quilts on view and display similar design features. Note the almost identical resist-dyed patterns of the silk sari and scarf to the fabric used in several of the patchwork quilts. Scraps of printed cotton saris and scarves similar to these were collected to incorporate into the quilts. The process used to create these intricate patterns is known as *bandhni*, which means “tying.” Very small knots are made in the fabric to create areas that “resist” the dye. Each of these knots then appears as one of the dots making up the larger design.

Kutch
Quilt, 1900s
Cotton; appliqué, patchwork
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2010.62.2

Quilt, 1900s
Cotton; appliqué, patchwork
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2010.62.3

Atri; Kutch
Quilt, 1900s
Cotton; applique, patchwork
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2010.62.4

Kutch
Quilt, 1900s
Wool, cotton; shaped, resist dyed, embroidery, patchwork
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2010.62.5

The print on the main portion of this patchwork quilt is meant to mimic the *bandhni* (tie-dyeing) technique used to create the pattern on the silk sari and scarf also on display in this gallery. The material used in the quilt was most likely salvaged from a printed cotton sari.



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Kutch

Quilt, 1900s

Cotton: tie-dye, patchwork

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2010.62.6



Kutch

Quilt, 1900s

Cotton: tie-dye, patchwork

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2010.62.7

This patchwork quilt features several small concentrations of square stitches in orange and pink, which may represent the signatures of those who contributed to the piece.



Atri; Kutch

Quilt, 1900s

Cotton, wool; patchwork

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2010.62.8

Kutch

Quilt, 1900s

Cotton: patchwork

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2010.62.9

Indian

Bag, 1900s

Cotton, mica; embroidered, appliquéd

Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.201

This bag is a beautiful example of the chain and ladder stitch embroidery for which this region is known. The technique has evolved for centuries as it was passed along from one community to another. The pointed stitching at the top of the bag, known as *kangri*, represents the tops of temples and can be seen repeated on many of the quilt borders.

The skill employed in the creation of this bag, as well as the fineness of the materials, suggests that this piece may have been a dowry sack. The small trident-like embroideries extending from the corners



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of the cross designs are called *mog pagla* (peacock's footprint) and are a symbol of courtship and love.

Indian; Gujarati

Sari/Odhani, late 1800s-early 1900s

Silk, metallic-wrapped thread; satin weave, block-printed resist

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.302

This large silk veil is known as an *odhani* (a wrap). It owes its rich, deep color to indigo, used in the resist-dye process. Block-printed onto the liquid silk surface of the veil, the iconography of dancing figures, elephants, and peacocks—all symbolic of fertility—suggests this was worn for a wedding ceremony.



Indian; Gujarati

Sari/Odhani, late 1800s-early 1900s

Silk, metallic-wrapped thread; satin weave, tie-dyed (bandhani)

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.308

The fineness of this silk sari, while seemingly simple upon first glance, is betrayed by the wide center field of small dots. This pattern, known as chundadi, represents the highest level of skill in the resist-dying technique and is the product of an adept hand.



Indian; Gujarati

Odhani (woman's head-shawl), late 1800s-early 1900s

Silk, metallic-wrapped thread; satin weave, tie-dyed (bandhani)

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.309

The colors and motifs of this particular veil designate it as a wedding *odhani* (wrap). Red is the traditional color worn by brides in India as it symbolizes purity, as well as fertility and prosperity. The elephants printed on the veil are meant to bring good fortune to the union, and the circle of dancers represents the *rasa lila* or *rasa mandala*, dance of divine love, performed between Krishna and the Goddess Radha.

