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Bandhani: Gujarat and Rajasthan’s Tie-Dye Tradition

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Bandhani: Gujarat and Rajasthan’s Tie-Dye Tradition

Bandhani is a cloth made by tying tiny knots before dyeing. The tied spots resist the dye and stay light. When the knots are opened, a pattern of dots appears. The craft is strongest in Gujarat and Rajasthan. Kutch Bandhani and Jamnagari Bandhani both hold Geographical Indication (GI) tags.

1 What is Bandhani, and how is it made?

Bandhani is a tie-and-dye method. The artisan ties the cloth tightly with thread at many points. The cloth is then dyed. The tied spots stay undyed, and they form dots, squares, waves or stripes. The word comes from the Sanskrit word bandha, which means “to tie”.



Tied Bandhani fabric, Jaipur, Rajasthan. Photo: Swapnil Karambelkar, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

What are the steps?

- The dot design is first marked on the cloth. Artisans in Kutch trace it from butter paper.
- The cloth is plucked into a tiny point with the fingers.
- A cotton thread is wound tightly round the point. This makes one dot.
- The cloth is dyed. Dyeing is repeated for each extra colour.
- The threads are removed. The tied spots show as a bright pattern on the dyed ground.

How fine can the work be?

- A metre of cloth can carry millions of tiny knots. They are called Bheendi in the local Kutchi language.
- In Jamnagar, tiny objects like nails, beads or grain are also used under the thread.
- All the work is done by hand.

Think it through. Why do the tied spots stay light?

The thread keeps the dye from reaching the cloth beneath it. So that spot keeps its first colour. This method of blocking the dye is called a resist.

What is the memory hook?

Think “tie, dye, open”. The pattern appears only when the knots are undone.

> **Quick check 1.** The tied spots in Bandhani take up the dye. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: exhibitions-khamir.org; khamir.org; search.ipindia.gov.in

2 Who makes Bandhani, and where?

In Gujarat the craft is led by the Khatri community. Kutch has many of its best-known artists. Women do the slow work of tying. Men mostly dye the cloth and run the business. The craft is also strong in Rajasthan, with its own style.

Who are the Khatris?

- The name Khatri is linked to Kshatri, and the community is believed to descend from Brahma Kshatris.
- Khatris are traditionally weavers, dyers and printers.
- All Khatri women learn tying before marriage, as a matter of community pride.

How did the craft reach Kutch and Jamnagar?

- The Sindh region is believed to be the home of the Khatri community.
- Tradition says the Kutch king Khengarji I invited people from Sindh to settle in his towns. He ruled from 1548 to 1585.
- Those who later moved to Jamnagar, Rajkot and Jaipur became known as Halai Khatris.
- Jamnagar was founded in 1540 by Jadeja Rajputs from Sindh. It is known for its bright red dyes.

Where else is it made?

- Bhuj, Mandvi, Anjar, Mundra, Abdasa and Nakhatrana are active Kutch centres.
- Khatris who moved to Jaipur also carry on the craft.
- Rajasthan work differs from Gujarat in process, pattern and colour.

Think it through. Why do people say Kutch and Sindh are linked?

A Khatri community is believed to have come from Sindh. The Kutch king invited them to settle. So the craft is tied to both places.

What is the memory hook?

Think “Sindh, Khengarji, Khatri”. The route of the craft starts in Sindh and ends in Kutch.

> **Quick check 2.** Women usually do the tying work in Kutch. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: exhibitions-khamir.org; search.ipindia.gov.in

3 How old is Bandhani?

No one can say when Bandhani began. Early clues come from texts and paintings. Bana’s Harshacharita, from the 7th century, describes a bridal veil with tied patterns. The Ajanta paintings of the 6th century show dotted dresses. Do not state one fixed date for the first Bandhani.

What are the early clues?

- Ajanta wall paintings (6th century) show women in blouses with large bright dots. These look like tie-dye.
- Bana’s Harshacharita (7th century) describes the bridal odhani, or veil, of the prince’s sister.
- Jain scripture paintings from the 12th century show women in dotted cloth.
- The traveller Ibn Battuta (14th century) is named among early writers who refer to it.
- Rajput miniature paintings of the 16th century are also named as early evidence.

What happened later?

- In Gujarat, the oldest surviving pieces are silk scraps. Jain monks used them to separate manuscript pages.
- The English East India Company began ordering tie-dyed scarves in the late 1720s. They became known as “bandannas”.
- The Kutch craft is dated to the 12th century by one craft body, and it is linked to the Khatri move from Sindh.
- After the 1956 Kutch earthquake, cheap chemical dyes replaced many natural dyes.

Think it through. Why do we call these “clues” and not “proof of the first Bandhani”?

A painting only shows that dotted cloth existed by then. It cannot show when the craft began. Earlier cloth may simply not have survived.

What is the memory hook?

Think “Ajanta paints, Harsha writes, Jains keep”. Each gives an early sign of dotted cloth.

> **Quick check 3.** Historians can name the exact year Bandhani began. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: exhibitions-khamir.org; khamir.org; search.ipindia.gov.in

4 Which Bandhani types and meanings are asked about?

Bandhani cloth is tied to life events. Different pieces mark a wedding or the birth of a child. The patterns and colours also show the wearer’s community. The most revered piece is the gharcholu.

Which pieces are famous?

- The gharcholu is the wedding odhani of Gujarati Hindu and Jain brides.
- The chandrokhani is worn by Muslim brides.
- Red and yellow cotton odhanis called piliya are worn by young mothers in Rajasthan. Pila means yellow.
- Bandhani chunaris in Rajasthan stand for womanhood and marriage.
- Laheriya means “wave”. It is a diagonal stripe pattern, mainly used in turbans.

What do the dots show?

- The newest patterns can have as many as one lakh ties on one piece.
- Patterns can be dots, squares, waves or stripes.

Think it through. Why does the same craft make a gharcholu and a chandrokhani?

Both are wedding cloths made by the same Khatri artisans. Each fits the bride’s community. So one technique serves more than one tradition.

What is the memory hook?

Think “gharcholu Hindu-Jain, chandrokhani Muslim, piliya mother”. Each name matches one wearer.

> **Quick check 4.** The chandrokhani is a Muslim bridal odhani. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: khamir.org; exhibitions-khamir.org

5 Which GI tags does Bandhani hold?

Bandhani holds two GI tags. A GI tag is a legal label that ties a product's name to the place it comes from. Jamnagari Bandhani was registered in 2016. Kutch Bandhani was registered in 2024. The two tags are separate.

What does the GI register show?

- Jamnagari Bandhani: the application was filed on 13 September 2010 by the Jamnagar Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
- It was registered with certificate number 273 on 10 November 2016.
- Kutch Bandhani: the application was filed on 26 April 2021 by the Kachchhi Khatri Bandhani Hastkala Association of Bhuj.
- It was registered with certificate number 576 on 30 March 2024.
- Both tags cover handicrafts in classes 24 and 25, which are cloth and clothing.

Why is April 2021 a trap?

- April 2021 is the date the Kutch application was filed.
- The tag itself was granted on 30 March 2024.
- So the right answer for the Kutch GI year is 2024, not 2021.

Think it through. Why can one craft hold two tags?

Each tag covers a named place and its makers. Jamnagar and Kutch are named separately. So both can hold a tag for the same technique.

What is the memory hook?

Think "Jamnagar 2016, Kutch 2024". The older tag is Jamnagar's.

> **Quick check 5.** The Kutch Bandhani GI tag was granted in April 2021. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: search.ipindia.gov.in

6 How has this topic been asked in exams?

Which traps repeat?

- Bandhani is tie-and-dye. The cloth is tied after weaving, and then dyed.
- The Khatri community is the main producer in Gujarat.
- The Kutch GI came in 2024. The filing was in 2021.
- Bandhani holds two GI tags: Jamnagari and Kutch.
- The gharcholu is a Hindu and Jain bridal piece. The chandrokhani is a Muslim bridal piece.
- Early signs of dotted cloth are the Ajanta paintings and the Harshacharita. Neither fixes the first date.

What is the memory hook?

Think “Khatri, two tags, 2024”. It keeps the maker, the count and the year together.

Practice MCQs

1. The word 'Bandhani' comes from 'bandh,' which means what?

A. To weave

B. To dry

C. To tie

D. To dye

See answer ↓

2. Tradition says the Kutch king Khengarji I invited craft communities, including Khatris, to settle from which region?

A. Rajputana

B. Malwa

C. Sindh

D. The Deccan

See answer ↓

3. Which community leads the making of Bandhani in Gujarat?

A. Meghwal

B. Bohra

C. Khatri

D. Rabari

See answer ↓

4. In Kutch, who traditionally does the slow work of tying the cloth?

A. Only temple priests

B. Men of the community

C. Government weavers

D. Women of the community

See answer ↓

5. Which Bandhani odhani is worn as a bridal piece by Muslim brides?

A. Piliya

B. Gharcholu

C. Laheriya

D. Chandrokhani

See answer ↓

6. Which statement about the GI tags of Bandhani is correct?

A. Only Kutch Bandhani holds a GI tag.

B. Kutch Bandhani was registered in 2021.

C. Jamnagari Bandhani was registered in 2016 and Kutch Bandhani in 2024.

D. Both tags were registered in 2016.

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.** To tie. The artisan ties the cloth at many points before dyeing, so the tied spots stay undyed. Memory hook: tie, dye, open. ↑ Q1
2. **C.** Sindh. Khengarji I ruled Kutch from 1548 to 1585. He invited communities from Sindh to settle in towns such as Bhuj and Mandvi. Memory hook: Sindh, Khengarji, Khatri. ↑ Q2
3. **C.** The Khatri community. In Gujarat the craft is led by Khatris, who are traditionally weavers, dyers and printers. Memory hook: Khatris tie, dye and print. ↑ Q3
4. **D.** Women of the community. Khatri women learn tying before marriage. Men mostly dye the cloth and run the business. Memory hook: Women tie, men dye. ↑ Q4
5. **D.** The chandrokhani. The gharcholu is the bridal odhani of Hindu and Jain brides. The piliya is worn by young mothers, and laheriya is a wave pattern. Memory hook: Gharcholu Hindu-Jain, chandrokhani Muslim. ↑ Q5
6. **C.** Jamnagari Bandhani was registered on 10 November 2016. Kutch Bandhani was registered on 30 March 2024. The year 2021 is only when the Kutch application was filed. Memory hook: Jamnagar 2016, Kutch 2024. ↑ Q6

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** The tied spots resist the dye and stay light. ↑ 1
2. **True.** Khatri women learn tying before marriage. ↑ 2
3. **False.** It is impossible to say when it was first made. ↑ 3
4. **True.** The gharcholu is the Hindu and Jain bridal piece. ↑ 4
5. **False.** April 2021 is only the filing date. The tag came in March 2024. ↑ 5

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