

UNDENIABLY INDIAN

TINAZ NOOSHIAN

PARZOR FOUNDATION -
NCM TECHNICAL SESSION
MUMBAI | MAY 9, 2026



PARSI CRAFT AND THE ART OF BELONGING

PARSI HAND IN GUJARAT'S TEXTILE SOUL



**PERSIA GAVE THEM
THEIR SOUL. GUJARAT
GAVE THEM THEIR
HOME. CHINA GAVE
THEM THEIR SILK.
BRITAIN GAVE THEM
THEIR SUITS. THE
PARSIS TOOK ALL
FOUR, STITCHED THEM
TOGETHER, AND
CALLED IT — SIMPLY —
GETTING DRESSED.**

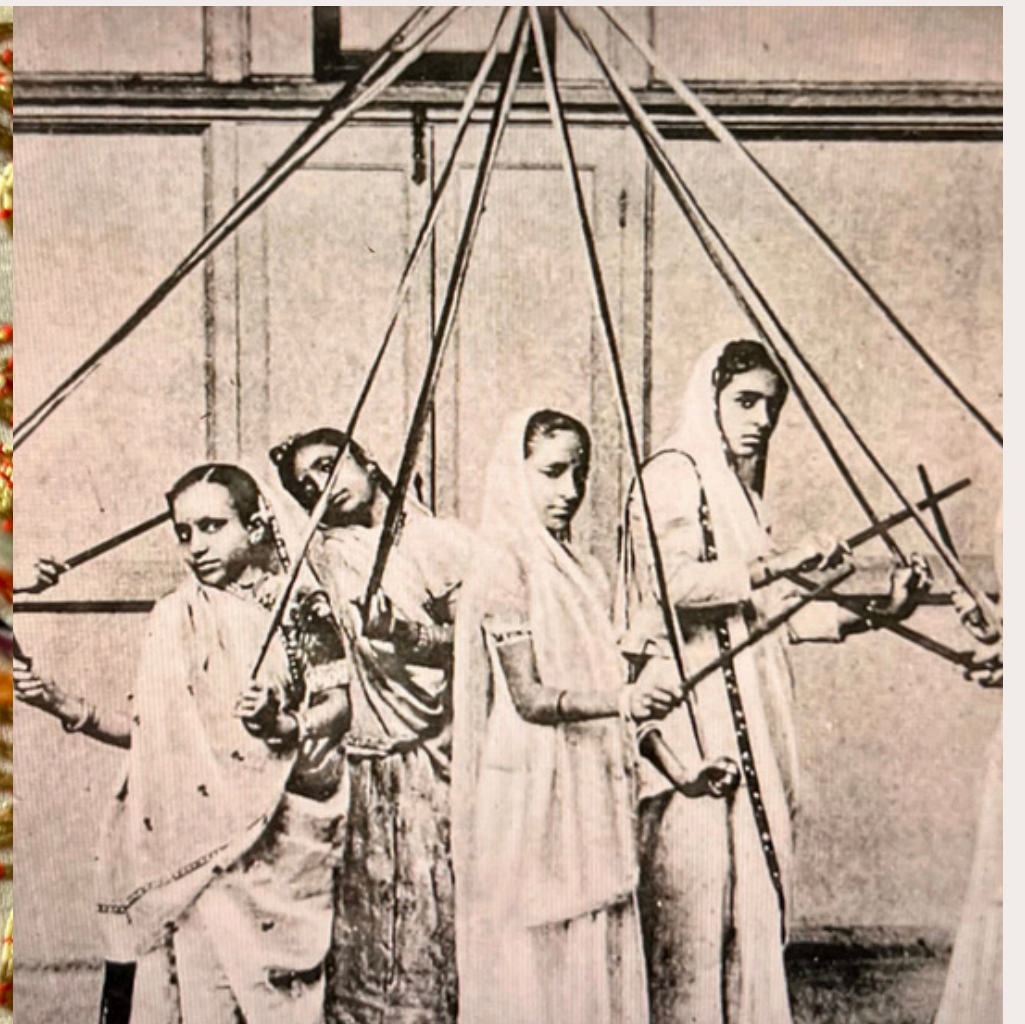
SURAT GARO

GHAT NU KAPDU

BAFETTA OR BAFTA

**GUJARAT TANCHOI SAREE;
RATI GANDHY COLLECTION**

4-WAY CULTURAL EXCHANGE



01 PERSIAN: SIMURGH MOTIF SAREE BORDER

SILK AND GOLD THREAD LAID WORK BORDER FEATURING THE SIMURGH, A MYTHICAL BIRD FROM PERSIAN LEGENDS THAT PERIODICALLY BURNS TO RENEW ITSELF.

02 GUJARATI: PARSİ & GUJARATI WOMEN AT DANDIYA

PARSI AND GUJARATI WOMEN PERFORM DANDIYA. GARBA MAY HAVE APPEALED TO THE PARSİS OF GUJARAT BECAUSE IT'S USUALLY PERFORMED IN A CIRCLE AROUND A CENTRAL FIRE.

03 CHINESE: CHEENA CHEENI GARA SAREE

SAREES, JHABLAS AND BORDERS FROM THE 1800S FEATURE SCENES OF EVERYDAY CHINESE LIFE, PAGODAS, PEONIES, AND SACRED CHINESE FUNGUS — A TAOIST SYMBOL OF WISH FULFILLMENT.

04 BRITISH: LOUIS QUINZE SHOES

INSPIRED BY BRITISH FASHION, PARSİ WOMEN IN EARLY 1940S WORE THE SAREE UNIQUELY — PALLU STRETCHING TO ANKLE; BROACH ON SHOULDER; PAIRED WITH EDWARDIAN AND VICTORIAN BLOUSES, AND LONDON-MADE LOUIS QUINZE SHOES.

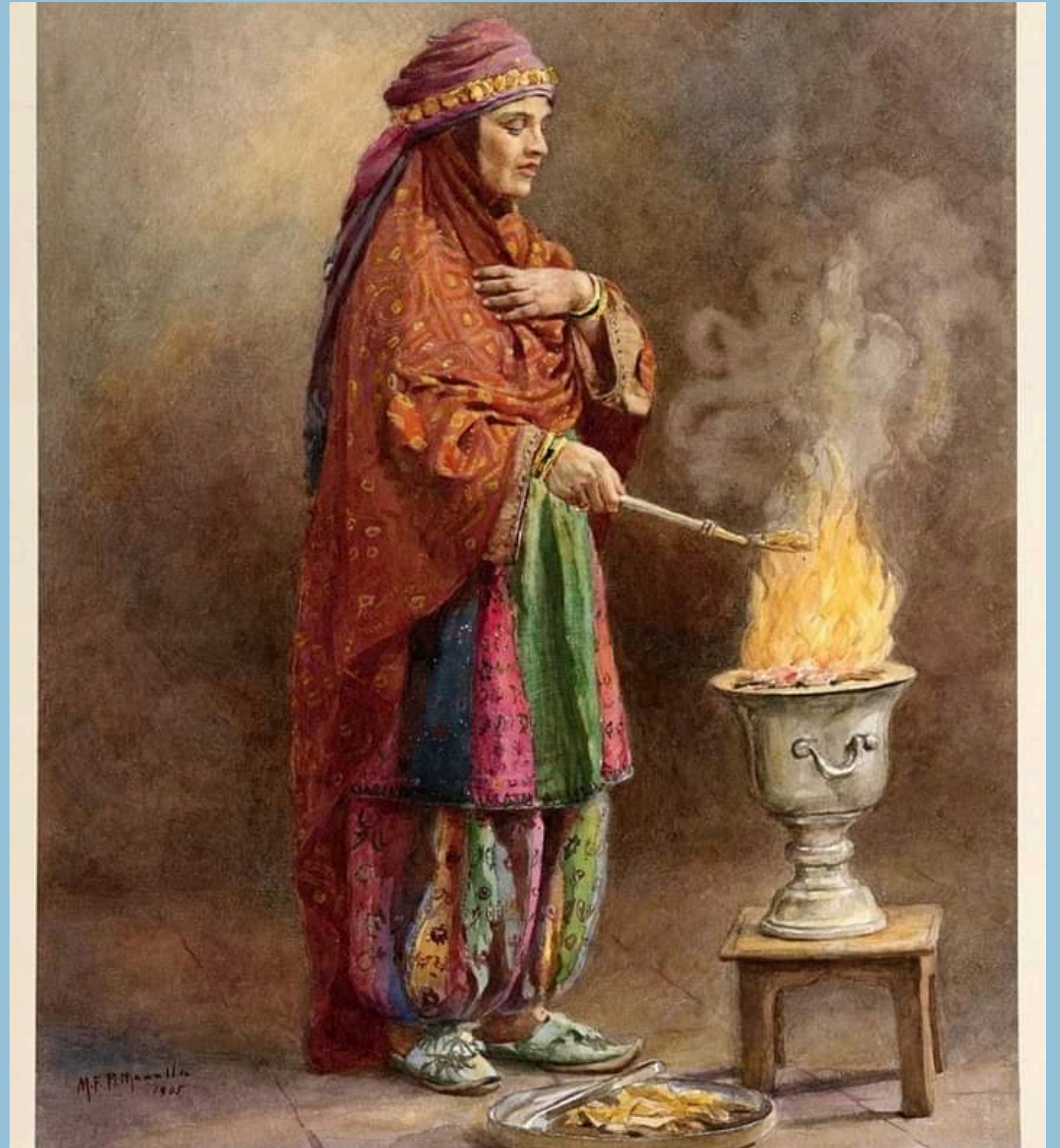
EMBROIDERY WAS USUALLY DONE ON CEREMONIAL CLOTHES AND THE MOTIFS REFLECTED THE ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION'S REVERENCE FOR NATURE.



01 DETAIL OF AN EMBROIDERED IRANIAN BRIDAL SHALVAR-QAMIS HOUSED IN THE COLLECTION OF DR BHAU DAJI LAD MUSEUM, MUMBAI, FEATURING THE TAUS AND KHURSHEED KHANUM MOTIFS.

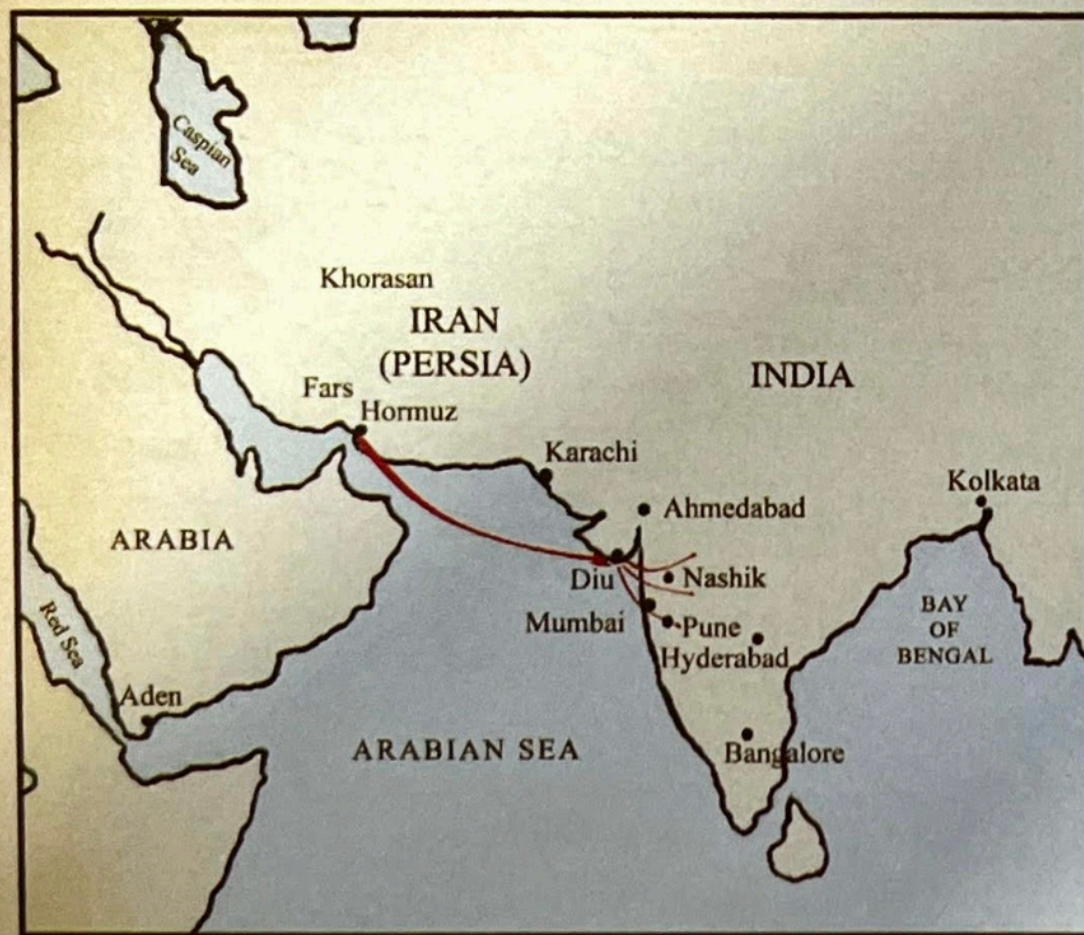
02 1905 PAINTING BY PARSİ ARTIST MANCHERSHAW FAKIRJEE PITHAWALLA. OF A ZOROASTRIAN WOMAN IN AN EMBROIDERED SHALVAR-QAMIS AND CHORGUD SHAWL. COURTESY/CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY: ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY LIBRARY

YAZDI ZARTHROUSHTI DOUZI

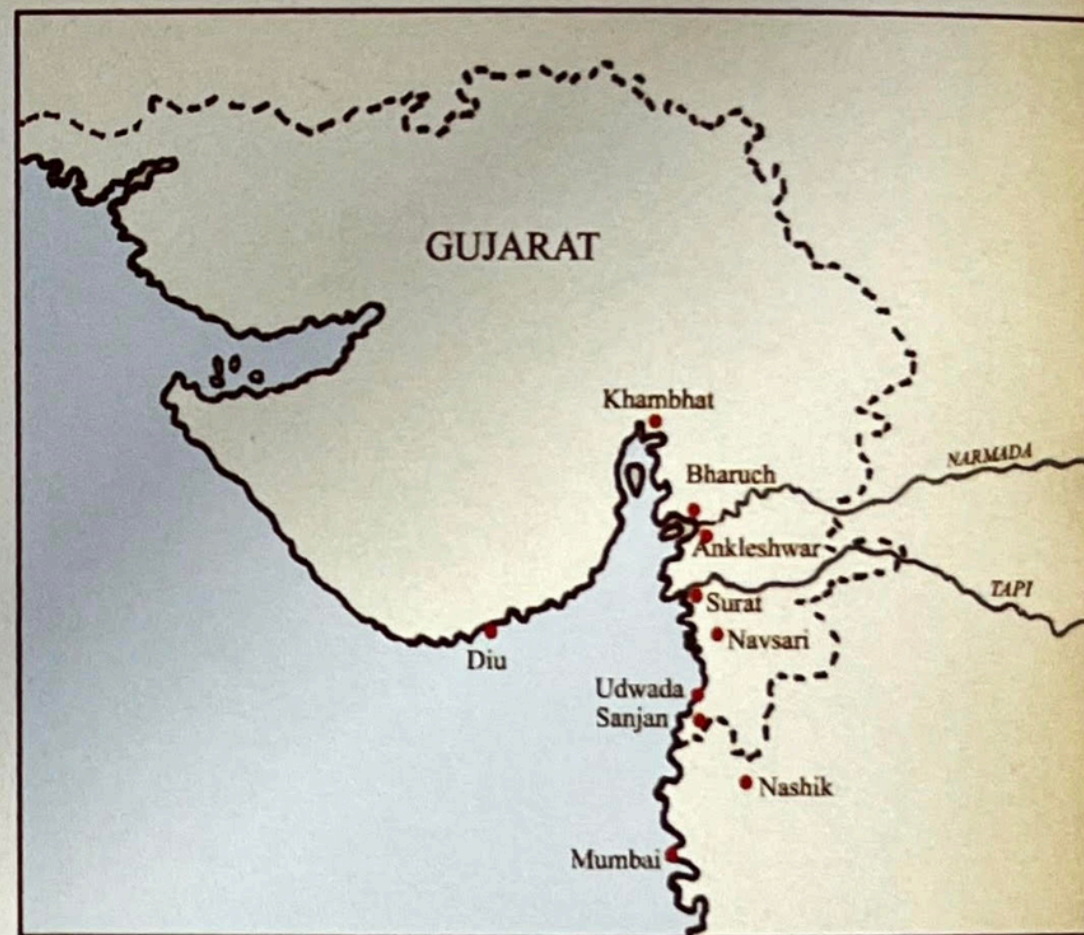


ASSIMILATION

PARSI IMMIGRANT TRAIL
AND MAJOR SETTLEMENTS IN INDIA



MAIN PARSİ SETTLEMENTS IN WESTERN INDIA (DETAIL)



Several Parsi surnames are derived from towns (mainly in western India) where families settled:
Anklesaria, Bharucha, Bhavnagri, Bhujwala, Billimoria, Coorlawala, Damania, Davierwala,
Kalyanwala, Malbari, Nargolwala, Sanjana, Surti, Taraporevala, Udwadia, Variava.

01 ZOROASTRIAN REFUGEES CONTINUED THEIR WEAVING AND EMBROIDERY TRADITIONS AFTER SETTLING IN GUJARAT. COURTESY/PEONIES & PAGODAS; ED. SHILPA SHAH, TULSI VATSAL



02 ZOROASTRIAN REFUGEES AT JADI RANA'S COURT



LOCAL DRESS & WEAVING

DECKING THE BRIDE, 1893; RAJA RAVI VARMA

THE PARSIS MAINTAINED THEIR UNIQUE RELIGIOUS IDENTITY WHILE BECOMING A BELOVED PART OF THE NATIONAL FABRIC:
COURTESY/PARSI PORTRAITS FROM THE STUDIO OF RAJA RAVI VARMA;
PRIYA MAHOLAY JARADI; KR CAMA INSTITUTE



LOOM IN SIR JAMSETJEE JEJEEBHOY'S NAVSARI HOME

ALMOST EVERY PARSIS HOME IN
NAVSARI WAS SAID TO HOUSE A
LOOM.

GUJARAT ADVANTAGE

ABUNDANT
FINE COTTON

ANCIENT
WEAVING AND
DYEING
KNOWLEDGE
SYSTEMS

BLESSED WITH
STRATEGIC
PORTS

PARSI EMBROIDERY FROM SURAT
FEATURES ON A TOPI/CAP. SAM
MANECKSHAW COLLECTION



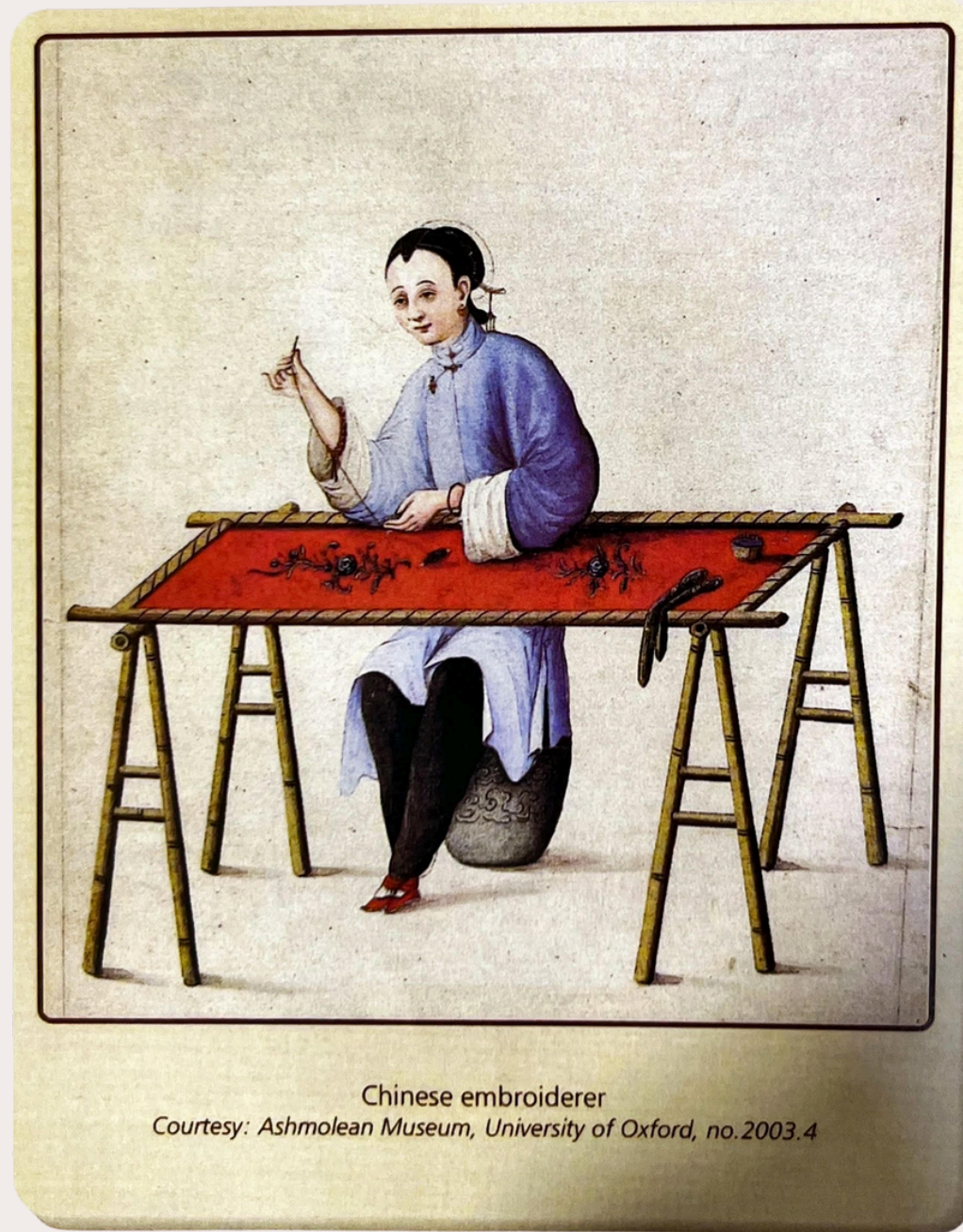
**PARSIS WERE
ACTIVE CO-
CREATORS
OF SOME OF
GUJARAT'S
ICONIC TEXTILE &
CRAFT TRADITIONS**



**BOMBAY PARSİ SADELI SILVER BOX;
19TH CENTURY**

SADELI OR MICRO MOSAIC WORK ON THE SIDES DONE IN SURAT, AND SILVER PLAQUE MADE IN BOMBAY. SADELI WORK - GUJARAT'S GI-TAGGED CRAFT - HAS ORIGINS IN PERSIAN KHATAM WORK AND WAS TAUGHT BY THE PARSIS TO GUJARATI HINDUS. THE BOXES CALLED 'BOMBAY BOXES' WERE EXPORTED TO ENGLAND IN 19TH C, AND CARRIED FINE WORK USING BONE, WOOD, BRASS AND PEWTER, GLUED TOGETHER AND CUT TRANSVERSALLY TO FORM A REPEAT PATTERN. COURTESY/MICHAEL BACKMAN LTD.

CHINA TO GUJARAT



Chinese embroiderer

Courtesy: Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, no.2003.4



02

GARA SAREE WITH TIP LEFT FREE OF EMBROIDERY FOR EASE OF TUCKING INTO WAIST; CSMVS COLLECTION



03

JHABLU IN SATIN STITCH EMBROIDERY; SHAZNEEN ENGINEER COLLECTION

01

TO MEET DEADLINE, MULTIPLE CHINESE ARTISANS WORKED ON A SINGLE TEXTILE COMMISSIONED BY PARSİ MERCHANTS

SURAT GARO



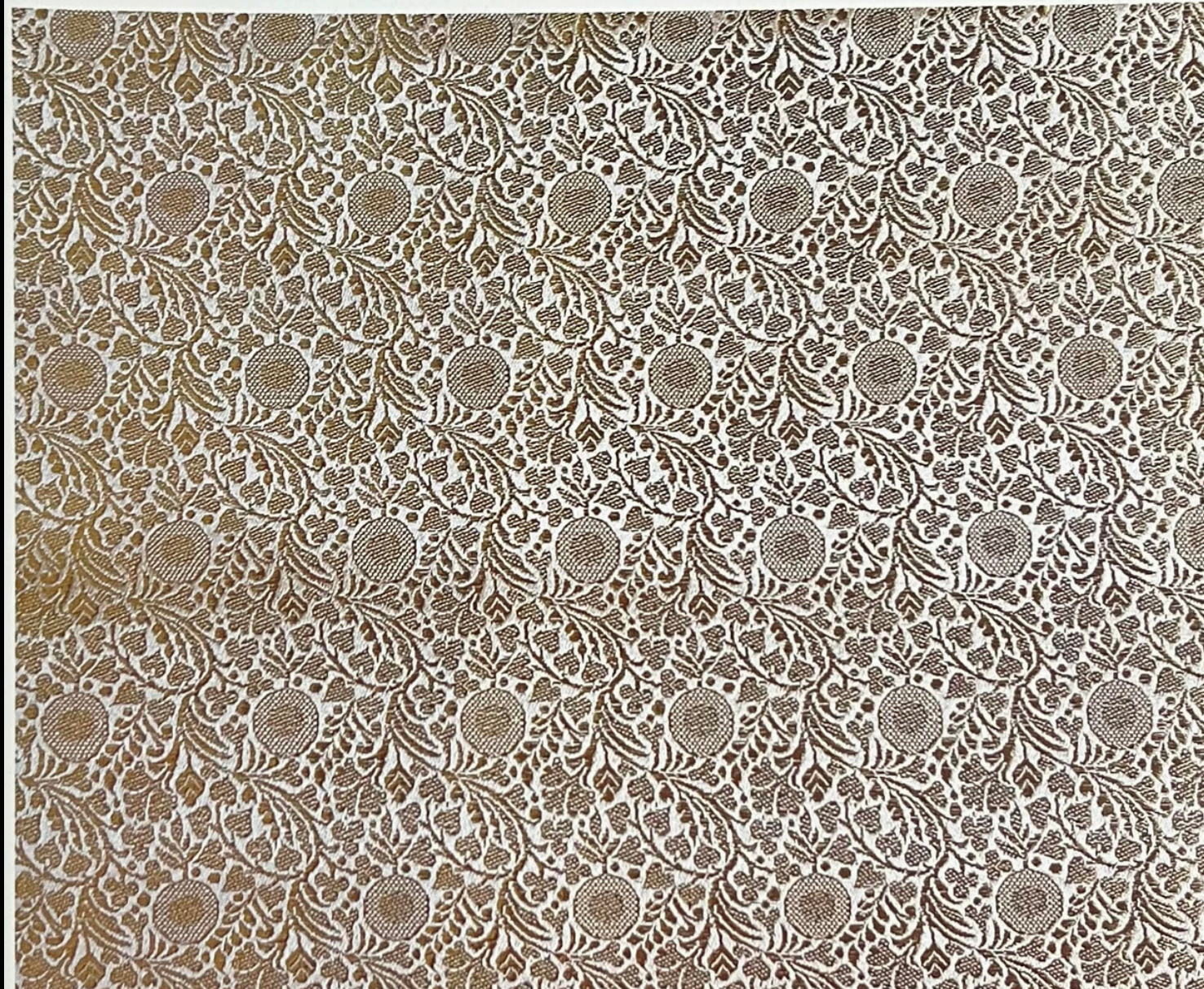
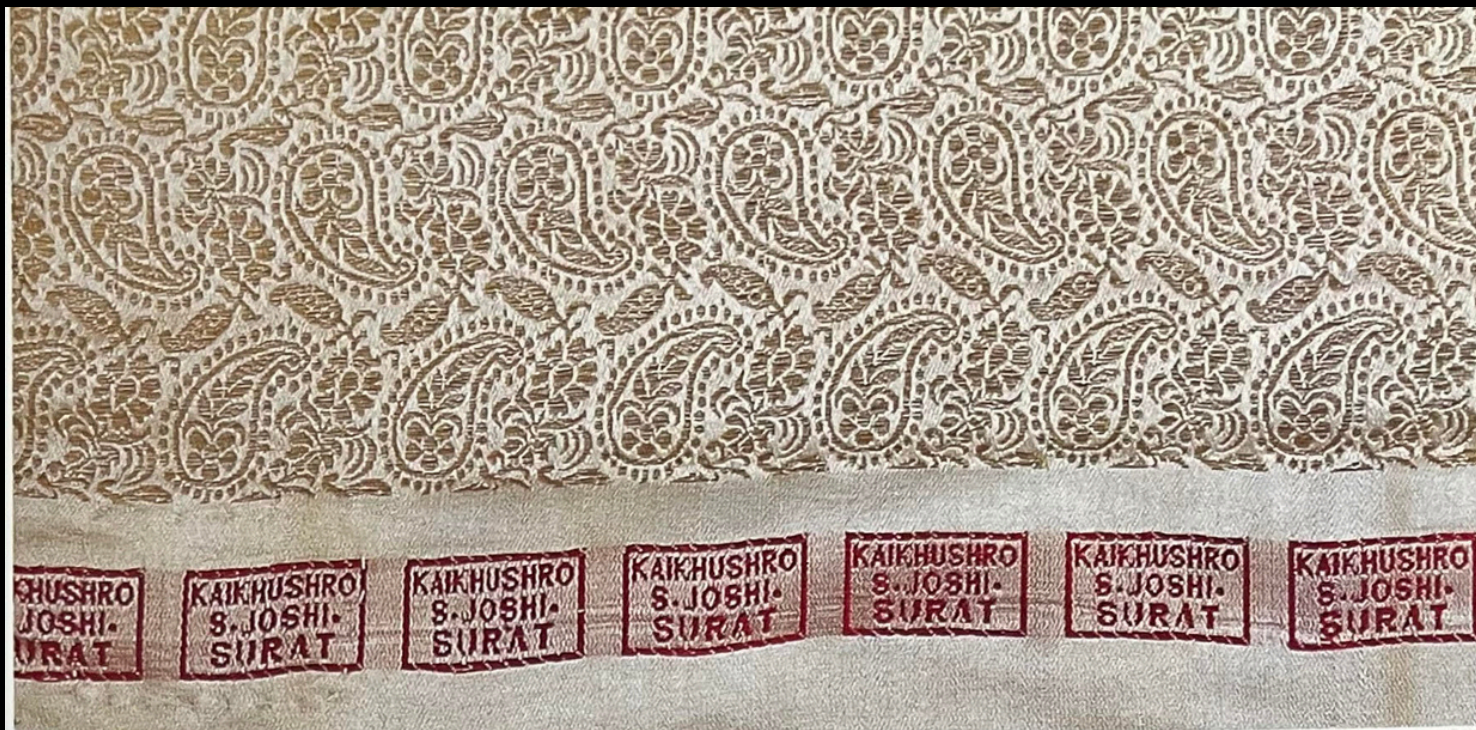
01 SAREE BORDER FEATURING A ROW OF AMBIS OR INDIAN MANGO MOTIF IN VANIYO BHARAT KAAM STITCH.



02 RECREATION OF A SURAT GARO IN RANI PINK, A POPULAR COLOUR IN INDIAN FESTIVITIES; SAM MANECKSHAW COLLECTION.




03 SURAT-MADE GARA SAREE; LATE 19TH C-EARLY 20TH C; BLENDING INDIAN AND CHINESE STYLE PAISLEY MOTIFS; SHAZNEEN ENGINEER COLLECTION.




AN ORIGINAL SINO-INDIAN BROCADE

**INDIAN
HAND-
MADE
HIGH-
CLASS
SILKS**
for
SUITINGS
SHIRTINGS
SARIS
BLOUSES, ETC.



BROCADES
for
SARIS
JUMPERS
SHOES, ETC.



Manufacturer:
KAIKUSHRO S. JOSHI
Sayed Building, Grant Road, BOMBAY
●
Factory: Turkivad, SURAT
●
The only Parsi firm remaining in this line

PARSI PHILANTHROPIST
SIR JAMSETJEE JEJEEBHOY



AN ADVERTISEMENT FOR LAST
TANCHOI MASTER WEAVER
KAIKUSHRO S JOSHI'

GUJARAT TANCHOI



INDIGENOUS SATIN WITH RUSTIC SHEEN



PEKING KNOT EMBROIDERY AKHO GARO IN
GHAT NU KAPDU; EARLY 20TH C; SAM
MANECKSHAW COLLECTION



GHAT NU KAPDU

BHARUCH BAFETTA

**JEAN-BAPTISTE
TAVERNIER
TRAVELS IN INDIA
(1605–1689)**

**“IN THIS PLACE ARE MADE A
GREAT QUANTITY OF
BAFTAS, OR LONG AND
LARGE PIECES OF COTTON.
THESE COTTONS ARE VERY
FAIR, AND CLOSE WOVEN;
AND THE PRICE OF THESE
PIECES IS FROM FOUR TO A
HUNDRED ROUPIES. YOU
MUST PAY CUSTOM AT
BAROCHE FOR ALL GOODS
THAT ARE BROUGHT IN AND
CARRIED OUT.”**



Bharuch, 1834, James Forbes (Artist), J. Shury (Engraver), Aquatint, © Sarmaya Arts Foundation (2015.3.42)



NAHAPANA COIN (119-124 AD) OF THE WESTERN KSHATRAPAS WHO LEVERAGED BHARUCH'S TRADE WITH ROMANS & GREEKS . THE CURRENCY WAS POPULAR DURING COMMERCIAL EXCHANGE AND LARGE QUANTITIES OF ROMAN AND GREEK GOLD AND SILVER COINS WERE CONVERTED INTO LOCAL CURRENCY FOR PROFIT.

TODAY'S CHALLENGES

• VANISHING HAND

- CRAFTSPEOPLE ARE AGEING; APPRENTICES ARE NOT REPLACING THEM — THE KNOWLEDGE CHAIN IS BREAKING IN REAL TIME.
- SPECIALISED ARTS LIKE DANA NI TORAN (PARSI BEAD EMBROIDERY) ARE LIKELY TO FACE NEAR-COMPLETE GENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE LOSS IN A FEW YEARS.
- THE GAP IS NOT JUST *WHO* MAKES IT, BUT *HOW WELL* IT CAN STILL BE MADE. MATERIALS AND ARTISANSHIP ARE DETERIORATING.

• MACHINE CONUNDRUM

- MACHINE-MADE REPRODUCTIONS HAVE MADE PARSI EMBROIDERY ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE — AND THIS ACCESSIBILITY MATTERS.
- BUT MACHINE AND HAND EMBROIDERY ARE INCREASINGLY CONFLATED IN THE MARKET — SOMETIMES INADVERTENTLY, SOMETIMES DELIBERATELY.
- THE RESULT: HAND EMBROIDERY IS UNDERVALUED, AND INCREASINGLY INDISTINGUISHABLE TO THE UNTRAINED EYE.
- ACCESSIBILITY AND AUTHENTICITY ARE IN DIRECT TENSION — AND NEITHER CAN BE SACRIFICED.

• TRADITION V/S RELEVANCE

- PARSI EMBROIDERY CARRIES CENTURIES OF DESIGN GRAMMAR — MOTIFS, COLOUR LOGIC, COMPOSITIONAL RULES.
- BUT YOUNGER BUYERS AND WEARERS WANT CONTEMPORISED FORMS - JACKETS, STOLES, EVEN BRIDAL LEHENGAS. RIGID PURISM RISKS MAKING THE ART A MUSEUM PIECE RATHER THAN A LIVING ONE.
- THE CHALLENGE: HOW DO YOU REIMAGINE WITHOUT ERASING OR APPROPRIATING? HOW DO YOU INVITE NEW AUDIENCES WITHOUT LOSING THE PEOPLE WHO STILL KNOW WHAT THE ORIGINAL MEANT?

VITAL IMPERATIVES

- **RESEARCH & DOCUMENTATION COMMISSION**

A DEDICATED RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION PROJECT TO RECORD THE CONTRIBUTION OF PARSI PHILANTHROPISTS AND WEAVERS TOWARDS THE GUJARAT TANCHOI — AN ORIGINAL SINO-INDIAN TEXTILE THAT'S OUT OF PRODUCTION SINCE THE 1940S AND EXISTING ONLY IN THE PERSONAL WARDROBES AND MEMORIES OF COMMUNITY ELDERS.

- **SEMINAL PUBLICATION**

SUPPORT THE PUBLICATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE, ILLUSTRATED VOLUME ON PARSI TEXTILE AND CRAFT HERITAGE — AUTHORED BY COMMUNITY RESEARCHERS & WRITERS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GOVT. INSTITUTIONS — FOR DISTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL MUSEUMS, UNIVERSITIES, LIBRARIES, CULTURAL-CRAFT FOUNDATIONS, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.

- **INCLUSION IN NATIONAL CRAFT EDUCATION**

RECOMMEND INCLUSION OF PARSI EMBROIDERY IN THE NATIONAL CRAFT AND DESIGN CURRICULUM TAUGHT AT NID, NIFT, AND STATE CRAFT SCHOOLS — SPECIFICALLY AS A CASE STUDY IN INDIAN CIVILISATIONAL ASSIMILATION, NOT AS A FOREIGN OR DIASPORIC CRAFT FORM.

- **NATIONAL ICH RECOGNITION**

RECOGNISE PARSI TEXTILE AND CRAFT TRADITIONS EXPLICITLY WITHIN THE NATIONAL INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE FRAMEWORK, ENSURING THAT "PARSI" APPEARS AS A CREDITED COMMUNITY IN NATIONAL CRAFT REGISTERS ALONGSIDE OTHER COMMUNITY WEAVING TRADITIONS.

CONCLUSION

**DOCUMENTING
INDIAN CRAFTS
WITH A PARSI
CHAPTER
ENRICHES INDIA'S
OFFICIAL TEXTILE
HISTORY**



GUEST AT A PARSI NAVJOTE
CEREMONY IN A CHEENA CHEENI
GARO. COURTESY/THE
ZOROASTRIANS OF INDIA: A
PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY;
SOONI TARAPOREVALA

THANK YOU

