

LEARN WITH THE MASTERS: A 22-DAY COURSE IN TEXTILE TRADITIONS OF KUTCH



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Contents

| | |
|--|----------|
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | 2 |
| BACKGROUND | 3 |
| THE INSTITUTE | 3 |
| THE COURSE | 4 |
| Facilities | 4 |
| Course Description and Objectives | 4 |
| Expected Outcomes | 5 |
| ABOUT THE TRADITIONAL ARTS | 6 |
| COURSE SCHEDULE AND FEES | 7 |
| SOMAIYA KALA VIDYA STAFF AND ADVISORS | 7 |
| SOMAIYA KALA VIDYA ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS | 7 |

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Somaiya Kala Vidya, an institution of education for traditional artisans, offers a 22-day course in **Textile Traditions of Kutch** taught by its artisan graduates with specializations including weaving, block printing, batik, bandhani, embroidery, appliqué and patchwork. Expert traditional artisans of the desert region Kutch, India, educated in design and business, are well prepared to teach concepts as well as skills. Close interaction with these young masters provides a richly rewarding experience in understanding traditions and an unparalleled opportunity to broaden the comprehension of art, craft and design.



"It was phenomenal- the trip of a lifetime! I apprenticed with the best practitioners. Learning about the traditions associated with the practice deepened my understanding of the craft."
-Stella Weinert

"It was an opportunity to learn weaving from the weavers and understand this craft traditionally." -Rimpal Patel

"Practical knowledge is the best process to learn something." -Tehmina Pathan

"The quality of education was awesome." -Ankita Patadiya

BACKGROUND

One of the unique aspects of India is the persistence of a broad spectrum of distinct cohesive rural cultures. These cultures are quickly marked by material culture: dress and traditional arts and crafts. The unique aspect, however, more than the dress and crafts themselves is the fact that such expressions emanate from a shared understanding of the world, a shared identity, and an environment in which art is integrated into daily life. Further, the arts are the product of traditional learning systems, which differ from the formal learning with which we are familiar. With accelerated urbanization and globalization, such rural lifestyles are today endangered. Yet, we can gain from them while they are still intact.

The Kutch region is rich in textiles. World renowned extra weft wool weaving, intricate natural dyed hand block printed ajrakh, the finest bandhani (shibori), distinctive batik, and a dazzling range of mirrored embroideries and appliqué are all practiced in this small, historic desert land, circumscribed by the great salt marsh Rann of Kutch and the Arabian Sea. In addition to textiles, Kutch is home to wood, leather, pottery, and metal crafts. The pristine seacoast fostered legendary hand building of wooden dhows that sail to Africa and the Middle East. Migratory birds of many species winter in the region. And an important Indus Valley site, Dholavira, is located in Kutch. The region has much to see.

THE INSTITUTE

Somaiya Kala Vidya, a division of K.J. Somaiya Gujarat Trust based in Adipur, is an institution of education for traditional artisans of Kutch. Its mission is to preserve and protect traditional arts, and its strengths are a deep understanding of culture and arts, and a focus on the artisan. Somaiya Kala Vidya offers design and business education for artisans of Kutch using an approach based on existing traditions, and teaches a spectrum of others about rural traditions.

Founder Director Judy Frater has worked with many artisans of the region since 1993. In 2003 she received an Ashoka Fellowship to found Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya (KRV), the first design school for artisans. In 2009, she received the Sir Misha Black Medal for Distinguished Service to Design Education for her work. The medal, likened to the Nobel Prize for Design Education, is awarded through an association of UK bodies. In 2011, Ms. Frater received the Crafts Council of India Sanman Award, and in 2014 she received the George B. Walter'36 Service to Society Award. After successfully operating KRV for eight years, she joined forces with K.J. Somaiya Trust to build the program to an institute.

Somaiya Kala Vidya's Advisory Board comprises master artisans of Kutch, and the faculty includes both local and international teachers. The effectiveness of the institution is in the relevance of the education provided. Approaching education through a vital subject, the institute enables direct access to higher education and ultimately raises the capacity of artisans and the value of traditional arts. Somaiya Kala Vidya students have increased their market reach and incomes through good design. They have been honoured with awards for excellence and invitations to participate in international programs.



Somaiya Kala Vidya does not levy fees from women artisan participants, and takes a token fee from the male artisan students. Fees from the Textile Traditions course contribute to the operation of the institute.



THE COURSE

In addition, Somaiya Kala Vidya offers an exclusive course in **Textile Traditions of Kutch** taught by master artisans who have graduated from a design program, and coordinated by Founder Director Judy Frater. The course is a rare opportunity to learn the cultural as well as technical aspects of traditional crafts from traditional artisans themselves, within an academic structure and with academic rigor.



Facilities

The Somaiya Kala Vidya campus is under construction. It will be situated on an expansive campus outside Adipur, near the commercial center Gandhidham, in Kutch. Studios for weaving, block printing and dyeing are being constructed in traditional style with stone and lime mortar, and antique wood and stone elements. These structures revive languishing eco-friendly techniques while contributing to the beautiful, inviting atmosphere of the rural campus. During construction, the course may be conducted in artisans' villages. Simple, healthy Gujarati vegetarian meals are included in the course.

Course Description and Objectives

The Course is divided into six sessions. All are hands-on, and taught by highly skilled traditional artisans and specialists. Included in each is a brief introduction on traditional textile arts and their cultural context. The sessions together provide an understanding of craft skills and the deep traditional knowledge that supports them. Course offerings include extra weft weaving on a pit loom, hand block printing, batik block printing, bandhani (shibori), and dyeing with synthetic and natural dyes. Embroidery in Rabari and suf traditions, patchwork and appliqué can also be taught. Each participant will chose a craft and specialize in it. The total duration of the course is 22 days.

Schedule Somaiya Kala Vidya Craft Traditions Course

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|-------|--|-------|---|-------|--------------------------------------|-------|---------------------------------|
| Session 1 | break | Session 2 | break | Session 3 | break | Session 4 | break | Presentation |
| 6 days | 1 day | 5 days | 1 day | 2 days | 1 day | 4 days | 1 day | 1 day |
| Introduc- tion to basic skills | | Continued Basic skills and techniques | | Aesthetics and culture of traditional crafts | | Advanced skills and techniques | | Presentation and feedback |

Total duration for the course- 22 days, with 4 break days.



Participants will learn age-old traditional techniques, and traditional concepts of color, form and patterns. A session on the historical influences and traditional artisan-client relationships that shaped products, materials, colours, techniques, patterns and motifs, will illuminate the aesthetic elements that ultimately created a holistic regional aesthetic. This is an excellent opportunity to experience the vibrant culture of Kutch. By the end of the course participants will have produced genuine textiles in the art form chosen, and have had the enriching experiencing of working directly with fascinating artisans.



Expected Outcomes

Through taking the course it is expected that participants will

- *learn one of the traditional techniques
- *learn a traditional aesthetic style
- *understand traditional art as a combination of aesthetics and skills
- *experience a traditional system of learning and expressing
- *understand traditional art as an integrated part of life that expresses a world view
- *gain a perspective of their own culture and subculture



Instructors

In all workshops, participants work with traditional artisans who have graduated from a design program-- weavers, printers and dyers, the inimitable nomadic Rabaris and other embroiderers. Profiles of instructors will be available when the dates of the course are set.

ABOUT THE TRADITIONAL ARTS



Weaving

Kutch weaving is practiced on a 4 treadle, fly shuttle pit loom. The specialty of the tradition is hand insertion of ornamental extra wefts, almost like embroidering. Traditional dhabla/ blankets which used interlocking or tapestry wefts were made with a hand thrown shuttle.

Block Printing

Kutch block printing is largely done with resist, so that the pattern is light on dark. Substances including gum Arabic and lime, or mud and millet flour are printed on the fabric with wooden blocks. When the fabric is immersed in the dye bath, the colour cannot penetrate the printed areas. Typical patterns are complex, using two or three blocks to create the motifs. The most traditional fabric, Ajrakh, is printed separately on the back and front. Thus, registration is a critical skill.

Batik

Batik in Kutch is a particular form of resist printing. The wax is applied with wooden blocks. Again, the patterns are light on dark. But the technique of printing is specifically swift because the wax must be applied while it is hot.

Bandhani

Bandhani, or shibori, is a tie dyed resist. The fabric is folded for double thickness, printed with a basic pattern, and tied with fine cotton string in knots along the patterns. When the fabric is immersed in dye, the dye cannot penetrate the knots and a dotted pattern results. The technique requires manual dexterity.

Natural Dyeing

Traditional Kutch textiles were dyed with natural substances, including indigo, iron acetate, madder and pomegranate rinds. Natural dyes on cotton fabrics require mordants. So the process is multi stepped and based on an understanding of chemistry.

Embroidery

Many styles of embroidery are practiced in Kutch. All employ intricate stitching techniques, and setting mirrors. Rabari work is renowned for its prolific use of mirrors of a variety of shapes, and its wide repertoire of stitches. Suf is worked from the reverse of the fabric in surface satin stitch counted on the warp and weft. Garasia Jat embroidery is a cross stitch variation also counted on the warp and weft, and using minute mirrors. Pako uses nearly the same techniques as Rabari work, but is denser with predominantly floral motifs.

Patchwork and Appliqué

Patchwork creates a fabric by stitching together squares and triangles of cloth. Appliqué creates patterns by stitching pieces of cloth upon the fabric. Both techniques are relatively easy to learn and can be used to make larger, utilitarian products.



COURSE SCHEDULE AND FEES

The course is currently offered on a demand basis and can be scheduled according to participants' specification. Winter months, between November and February, are ideal. Monsoons, between June and September, are not advisable. A minimum of three to four students per craft is required.

FEES

The fee for the course is US \$1200 | ₹ 88,000 per person

Fees include instruction, materials, transport to the venue, meals and tea. Assistance in accommodation can be provided.



SOMAIYA KALA VIDYA STAFF AND ADVISORS

MANAGEMENT RESUMES

Nishit Sangomla, Director, Somaiya Kala Vidya

- B.Tech, Chemical Engineering, NIT Trichy, PGP Entrepreneurial Leadership – Ladakh. Work experience of over three years, in the craft sector.
- formerly Program Manager for social enterprise Hatheli Sansthan, a society under the NGO Barefoot College (SWRC Tiloniya)
- Consultant for Himalayan Blooms, an NGO based out of Khetikhan, a village in the Champawat region of Uttarakhand.
- He is also a part of Team Lugu and was working with members of the Changpa tribe in Ladakh, over the last year.

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SOMAIYA KALA VIDYA ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

- Ismail Mohammed Khatri - block printer, Ajrakhpur
- Shamji Vishramji Vankar- weaver, Bhujodi
- Gulam Hussain Umar - tie dye, Bhuj
- Ali Mohammed Isha - tie dye, Bhuj
- Umar Faruk - tie dye, Bhadli