ARBiT
it happens here...



National Espresso Day

National Espresso Day, observed on November 23, celebrates the rich, bold and aromatic beverage that has become a staple for coffee lovers worldwide. Originating in Italy, espresso is more than just a drink, it's a cultural symbol of energy, warmth and connection. The day honours the invention of the espresso machine, which revolutionised coffee brewing by delivering a concentrated, flavourful shot in seconds. Whether enjoyed as a single shot, macchiato, cappuccino or latte, espresso fuels creativity and conversation. On this day, cafés often offer specials and tastings, encouraging people to savour the craftsmanship behind every cup.

राष्ट्रदूत
MONDAY
23 November 2026
A-B

#RABARI EMBROIDERY

A Silent Protest Against Child Marriage

The young girls found a way to turn this obligation into something unexpected. They began delaying their embroidery work, thereby postponing their marriages





When we think of Indian embroidery, names such as Zardozi, Chikankari and Kantha immediately come to mind. But India's rich embroidery heritage has another lesser-known chapter rooted in its tribal and nomadic communities. One such tradition is Rabari embroidery, an art form that does much more than decorating fabric. It tells the story of a community, reflects a woman's marital status and offers a glimpse into the world in which she lives.

The Rabari community has a long tradition of embroidery, with mirror work being its most recognisable feature. Small mirrors are carefully incorporated into colourful patterns, creating striking designs. However, there is much more to this craft than its mirrors. The embroidery acts as a visual representation of the community, its customs, traditions and the lives of its women.

For Rabari women, embroidery was closely connected to marriage. Traditionally, marriages were fixed at a very early age. Once a girl's marriage was arranged, she was expected to prepare an extensive collection of embroidered pieces. These included garments for herself and her future husband, decorative items for the home and even coverings for the camels that her husband would drive.

There was an unusual condition attached to the marriage tradition: the required embroidery had to be completed before the marriage could take place. Preparing these elaborate pieces demanded considerable time and effort. The young girls, however, found a way to turn this obligation into something unexpected. They began delaying their embroidery work, thereby postponing their marriages. What appeared to be a slow process of completing traditional craftwork became a silent act of protest against early marriage. In this way, embroidery became an unexpected means through which young girls could resist child marriage.

However, the story of Rabari embroidery took another turn when the traditional practice was banned. The decision put the craft itself at risk, and an art form passed down through generations began facing the threat of extinction.

Fortunately, efforts by NGOs and organisations working with traditional artisans helped revive the craft. Rabari embroidery gradually found a new life, allowing women to continue practising their ancestral art.

The story of Rabari embroidery is a reminder that traditional Indian crafts are not simply about colours, patterns and decoration. They often carry deeper social meanings. In this case, an art form that reflected the identity of a community also became connected to women's lives and their silent resistance against an early marriage system. Today, its revival represents an effort to preserve not just an embroidery tradition, but also the cultural stories woven into every stitch.









For one day every few years, my village fills up again. Then, the votes are cast, the cars leave, and Leelki goes back to doing what it does best.

The Day Leelki Woke Up

PART:3



Shailaza Singh
Published Author, Poet and a YouTuber

On the day of the sarpanch election, Leelki woke up before I did. By the time I came out into the courtyard with my tea, the lanes were full of a sound I had been missing all week. Voices. Car doors. Somebody's son shouting Ram Ram to somebody's uncle across the lane. Locks that had not turned in two years were turning. Windows that had forgotten what sunlight looked like were thrown open. The village had come home to vote. For one day, Leelki was full again.

The Bottle at the Door

The evening before, the men had gathered at our house. Charpais in a circle, tea going round, politics going round faster.

In the middle of it, a man came to the door and asked my father to step outside. Quietly, the way you ask for someone when you do not want the others to hear.

My father did not get up.

The man had a bottle of whiskey in his hand and a candidate's name on his lips. The bottle was for my father. The vote was for the candidate.

My father refused both.

He is an army man, and he does not believe in any of this. For him, a vote is not something you swap for a bottle. It is the one thing in the village that cannot be bought, or at least should not be.

The man left. Nobody asked what had happened. Nobody needed to. The conversation simply picked up where it had left off. I sat there doing the arithmetic. One bottle. One vote. Five years. The bottle was not the only visitor. A group of Rajputs also came to tell my father whom he should vote for. He heard them out, and then told them what he tells everyone. He would vote for whoever could bring employment to the village, telemedicine for the sick and better roads. Not for a surname. Not for a bottle.

There were two candidates. One was a lawyer whose extended family had been in politics for years. He had been quietly doing small things for the village, a library here, a little work there. The other was a man nobody in our house had ever heard of, backed, people said, by two monied men.

We supported the lawyer.

From Alto to Fortuner

In every gathering that week, the talk came back to the sarpanch. Not any particular sarpanch, of course, and certainly not either of the two men standing this time. The sarpanch as a species.

A man, they said, becomes sarpanch in an ordinary small car like an Alto. A few years later, he is in a Fortuner. After that, something even bigger. Everybody nodded. Everybody seemed to know exactly where the Fortuner came from. Budgets, contracts, cuts, they said, and very little left over for the village. Sarpanch after sarpanch, the cars kept getting bigger. The lanes of Leelki stayed exactly as they were, crooked, broken and pitch dark after sunset. At least something in the village is consistent.

I asked what a sarpanch actually earns. Later, I looked it up. It is an honorarium of around six thousand rupees a month. A Fortuner costs more than thirty lakh. By my calculation, a sarpanch would have to save his entire honorarium for about forty years, without eating a single roti, to buy one.



#THE VILLAGE REMEMBERS



Arithmetic was never my strong subject. Perhaps, someone can explain it to me. Nobody in the gathering seemed to need an explanation. They also argued about the voting itself. Some had heard of the "electric ballot" in the cities, where you press a button. In Leelki, democracy still came on paper. You put your mark on it, folded it and dropped it into a box, the way we once posted letters to people we missed.

Boondi Democracy

The polling booth was in the government school. I had not been inside it for years and it took me by surprise. A neat paved path. Trees with their trunks painted in tricolour. Swings and a slide and a climbing frame, all freshly painted.

It was the best-kept place in the village. Freshly painted swings, in a village whose children have left.

Outside, volunteers were handing out boondi and bhujia. The snacks, everyone said, were sponsored by the candidates. There was no stall and no banner. The food just appeared, the way food used to appear in Leelki when I was a child.

And everyone ate. The voters ate. The volunteers ate. The policemen on duty ate.

When I was little, any kitchen in this village would feed me for nothing. That day, the village was being fed again, only this time, the food had a sponsor. Democracy, it turns out, goes very well with bhujia.

The candidates were there too, walking about in plain kurtas and rubber chappals, folding their hands at everybody. I barely recognised them. On the posters, they had looked twice as tall and three shades fairer. In real life, they looked like anyone's chacha who had come to drop off a tiffin. That is when I understood what posters are for.

The Faces That Voted

Then, the women arrived. They came up the paved path in a long line, in parrot green and magenta, red and sky blue, like a field of flowers that had decided to walk. Every single one of them had her face covered. One hand held the dupatta over the face. The other held the voter slip and the identity card.

The identity card has a photograph on it. The entire purpose of the card is the face.

One woman had her face covered with one hand and was scrolling through her phone with the other. The veil was very old. The phone was very new. Neither seemed to mind the other.

Walking among them, bareheaded, was a little girl in a white frock. Nobody had covered her face yet. I watched her skip along beside her mother and wondered how many elections she had left before it would be her turn.

The View From Karni Mata

After I had voted, I climbed up to our Karni Mata temple. It stands on the highest ground in the village, and from its roof, you can see everything. From up there, Leelki looked full. Rooftop after rooftop, saffron flags, water tanks, dish antennas, a few solar panels shining in the haze. You cannot see a padlock from the goddess's height. You have to come down into the lanes for that. Then, I looked past the houses, at the fields. They had been ploughed. The tractor lines were still in the soil, straight and neat, waiting. The jaanti trees stood green over them as they always have, the only things in the landscape that never seem to need anything from anybody. But nothing was growing.

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A man was standing in the temple, and I asked him why the fields were empty. They had to sow chana, he said, but the rains had been erratic. Without rain, the chana would not sprout.

Rain and Leelki have a strange relationship. When the farmers need it to sow, with the fields ploughed and the seed ready, it is nowhere to be seen. And when the crop is ready to be cut and the last thing it needs is water, the rain lands up, like that one relative who arrives after the wedding is over and still expects to be fed.

Indra dev, it seems, has a sense of humour. Just not one the farmers of Leelki find funny.

Then, I asked him the question I had been carrying around all week. Why do people leave?

He looked at me as if the answer was lying right there in front of us, which it was. Without crops, he said, how do you feed your cows and your goats? How do you feed yourself? The government gives water for drinking and bathing. It does not give water to grow anything.

I thought of my relatives and their habit of enough. Yes, enough is a lovely habit. But in Leelki, it only works when the rain keeps its side of the bargain.

I looked at the fields again. The field was ready. The farmer was ready. Only the sky had not turned up to vote.

Sea Creatures in the Desert

Not everything in Leelki is waiting, though. On the edge of the village, I found the ponds. They are run by private people from outside the village.

The water under Leelki is salty. You cannot grow chana with it. But it turns out you can grow shrimp.

The ponds are lined with black plastic and filled to the brim, right next to fields that are bone dry. Little machines with green paddlewheels float in the middle, churning the water day and night so that the shrimp can breathe. Near the edge hang round feeding trays. Every day someone lifts them out of the water to check whether the shrimp have eaten their pellets.

A man scooped one out and held it in his palm for me. It was pale and almost transparent, its legs coated with feed, its long whiskers trailing over his fingers.

Someone checks every single day that the shrimp have been fed.

The shrimp do not stay, of course. Companies from Hyderabad and Andhra Pradesh come to collect them. They are packed in ice in white thermocol boxes, loaded into refrigerated trucks and driven away, to plates I will never see.

Nobody in Leelki eats them.

Think about that for a moment. The same salty water that could never grow a crop is now making money, mostly for people from somewhere else. Outsiders have come to Leelki to make a living from its land, while Leelki's own sons have gone to the cities to make theirs. The village still feeds people. It just no longer feeds itself.

Four Hundred Votes

When the result came, the lawyer had been elected sarpanch by four hundred votes. In a village where three houses out of four are locked, four hundred votes is not a small number. It means some of the people who came home on the lovely new roads came home to vote for the library man, not the moneyed men.

Whether he brings the jobs, the telemedicine and the roads my father voted for, nobody knows yet. Leelki will see.

By the next day, the cars had started leaving. The windows closed one by one. The locks turned again. The lanes went quiet.

Leelki was waiting once more. It is very good at it.

It has had a lot of practice.

Packed and Sent

So, here is the latest export report from Leelki.

Item number one: boys. They go to Mumbai, Delhi and Noida and work in trucking and packers and movers, packing up other people's homes into trucks, it is good business, while their own homes sit back in Leelki with a padlock on the door.

Item number two: shrimps. Packed in ice, in white thermocol boxes, also on trucks.

The interesting bit is that the boys at least come home for shaadis and elections. The shrimps don't even do that.

When I was a kid, Leelki fed every bachcha who walked through its doors, including a certain Cheenu Baisa who marched in uninvited and demanded food, and then, it walked us home. Now, it packs whatever grows on its land into boxes for people it will never meet. Somewhere along the way, my village stopped being a rasoi and became a godown.

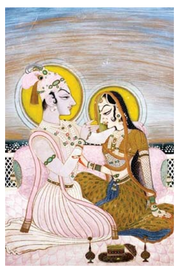
And nobody even put up a board saying "Under New Management."

Concluded.

rajeshsharma1049@gmail.com







#NIHAL CHAND

Facts about Kishangarh Paintings



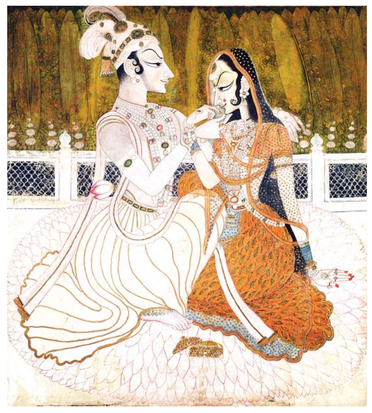
Artists used natural stone colours prepared from minerals and precious stones, they often took nearly 72 hours to mix and prepare properly before use

Kishangarh paintings are among the most elegant forms of Indian miniature art. Developed during the 18th century in the royal court of Kishangarh in Rajasthan, this style became famous for its spiritual beauty, poetic imagination, and refined artistic techniques. The paintings belong to the broader tradition of Rajput painting and reached their peak under the patronage of Raja Sawant Singh and the celebrated artist Nihal Chand.

One of the most important features of Kishangarh paintings is their devotional and romantic themes. The artists mainly focused on the divine love of Radha and Krishna. These paintings beautifully combined romance, spirituality, and poetry, expressing the ideals of Bhakti devotion. Inspired by Vaishnava traditions, especially the Vallabhacharya sect, the paintings portrayed Krishna not only as a god but also as the divine lover. The emotions of love, longing, and devotion were represented through graceful figures, dreamy landscapes, and lyrical compositions.

The Kishangarh style is also known for its connection with Ragamala paintings. Ragamala literally means "garland of ragas." These paintings visually represented musical modes through artistic imagery. In this tradition, six principal ragas were personified, and each raga was associated with five raginis. The paintings translated music into visual form by depicting seasons, moods, emotions, and romantic situations connected with each melody.

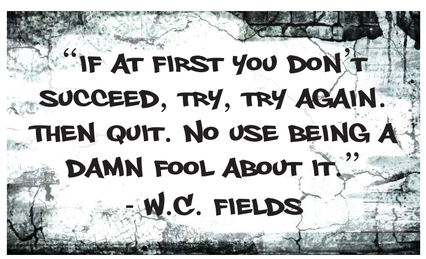
A major contributor to the glory of this school was Nihal Chand, the most renowned painter of Kishangarh. He perfected the unique style of elongated faces, lotus-shaped eyes, pointed noses, and delicate expressions. His masterpieces, especially those portraying Radha and Krishna, are admired for their emotional depth and spiritual charm. He successfully blended Mughal refinement with Rajput aesthetics to create a distinct artistic identity.



The technique of Kishangarh painting was equally remarkable. One important process was called "Ghuttai," which involved polishing the painted surface to give it a smooth and refined finish. Artists used natural stone colours prepared from minerals and precious stones. These colours required great patience and skill, as they often took nearly 72 hours to mix and prepare properly before use. The careful preparation of colours ensured brilliance, durability, and richness in the final artwork.

Thus, Kishangarh paintings are celebrated not only for their artistic beauty but also for their devotional spirit, romantic imagination, musical associations, and highly refined techniques. They remain one of the finest achievements of Indian miniature painting traditions.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES

By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



ZITS

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

