

# Preserving the fire: Some thoughts on traditional attire of *Bagri* females

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■ **ABSTRACT** : The past few decades witnessed some developments that have left a permanent mark on the life style and costumes. The traditional costumes, jewellery and other accessories as well as a traditional lifestyle have been adversely affected by various factors of the social change process and vanished into the antiquity. It is significant to document this heritage for posterity and conservation of our age-old rich traditions. The purpose of this study was to explore and document the attire of *Bagri* females of North Western India. Interview questions were mainly focused on specific information related to the upper and lower garments, headdresses and jewellery and body decoration. Findings of the study revealed that most preferred traditional dresses of *Bagri* females were *Aangi*, *Jamper*, *Ghaghro*, *Bugiyo*, *Sunkukdo*, *Chundadi* and *Pila*. In the fashion market, there are some contemporary designs of dresses and jewellery available which shows similarity with *Bagri* attire.

■ **KEY WORDS**: *Bagri*, Attire, Culture, Female, Traditional

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Society of India is composed of numerous communities and among different groups, *Bagri* community has uniqueness in their costumes and traditions. The name *Bagri* was formed from *Bagar*, which refers to the sandy tract of north-western India and eastern parts of present-day Pakistan bordering India (Mamta and Saini, 2018). The people and their language both are referred as *Bagri*. "The geographical area of *Bagri* community is mostly located between 28° 4' and 30° 10' latitude and between 72° 30' and 75° 30' longitude" (Gusain, 2000). In the past, the region was arid and barren, but today, it is fertile and irrigated due to modern day technological developments (Mathai, 2011).

According to the latest approximations from the World Evangelization Research Center (2000), the total population of *Bagri* in all over India was 19 lakh (Lewis, 2009). The people of this community are found to be friendly, hospitable and open to outsiders. *Bagri* people were mostly found in rural village communities. The primary occupations of the *Bagri* people are cultivation and animal husbandry (*Bagri*, n.d.). Also, they frequently work for daily wages. Some are employed in government jobs. Today, the largest population of this community is residing in Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana; though few of them can be found at different locations due to the large immigrant dispersion. The major population centers

outside India include the Pakistan (Native *Bagri* people remained there after partition) United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Singapore, Japan, Indonesia, New Zealand, Belgium, Australia and Russia. In Rajasthan, they are mainly found in the districts of Hanumangarh and Sri Ganganagar; also a small population living in northern Bikaner and Churu. *Bagri* people comprise a significant portion of Fazilka and Muktsar districts in Punjab state and Sirsa, Fatehabad and Hissar districts in Haryana state (Gusain, 2000 and Lewis, 2009). *Bagri* people are mostly pure vegetarian in their food habits. Their popular foods include lentils, wheat, millet, and vegetables (Mathai, 2011).

We would all be maintaining museum pieces good for nothing more than taking out and displaying for people along with other artifacts. According to Gustav Mahler, a 19<sup>th</sup> century conductor and composer, "Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire". This quote nicely encapsulates researcher feelings about studying traditional attire of *Bagri* females. Dress is an important traditional tool that can be used as an expression of social and cultural identity (Barnes and Eicher, 1993). Traditional dress represents national culture and historical heritage and includes all items, garments, and body modifications (e.g., makeup and perfumes) that embody the past for particular community (Eicher and Sumberg, 1995 and Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992). Traditional dress not only defines its wearer in terms of ethnic or cultural origin but also provides insights into cultural values and ideals (Forney and Rabolt, 1997). The costume is a special dress that enables the expression of extraordinary identity in exceptional circumstances. It can also become vehicles to instruct people about the values, aesthetics, and culture (Jones, 2017). The costumes of *Bagri* women included *Aangi* (blouse) or *Jampar* (long shirt), *Ghaghra* (long frock type clothes), *Boria* (a head ornament) and *Pila* (headdress) and a combination of all these known as *Teewal*. The embroidered *Pila* is a symbol of *Bagri* women. They also use Juttis and heavy ornaments around the neck, wrists, and ankles. *Purdah* (veil) custom is mainly in vogue among *Bagri* women. Mostly, the daily life clothing for the community is adopted based on its day to day life and culture around it. The Rajasthani clothes largely inspired *Bagri* costumes, with some adaptations from Punjabi daily wears. Traditionally, clothing was such that it could protect people from harsh climatic conditions. Like, *Teewal* would protect their body

from tough conditions in the field. *Boria* would protect their *Pila* from falling and maintaining a fixed position on their head and also it helps women to look taller and prettier (Mamta and Saini, 2018).

## ■ RESEARCH METHODS

The present study was aimed at collection of the comprehensive information regarding the traditional costumes of *Bagri* females. The study was conducted in two states namely Punjab and Rajasthan. Muktsar and Fazilka districts from Punjab and Hanumangarh and Sri Ganganagar districts from Rajasthan were selected. Then five towns/ villages from each district were selected purposively. Qualitative data were collected via in-depth interviews from 60 married *Bagri* females. A purposive, snowball sampling strategy was used. An initial list of potential participants was obtained from a key *Bagri* informant. After each interview, the primary researcher asked each participant to suggest other participants among their family and acquaintances. The participants were invited to bring photos of themselves wearing their traditional costumes to guide the interview discussion and in order for the researchers to corroborate the interview data. After gaining permission for reproduction from the owners of the pictures, some were scanned by the primary researcher.

## ■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the present investigation as well as relevant discussion have been summarized under following heads :

### Description of documented traditional costumes of *Bagri* females:

#### *Aangi*:

*Aangi* was upper garment with tight fitted half sleeved, waist length, blouse of *Bagri* women with V or round shape neckline as shown in Fig. 1 (a). *Aangi* was made from cotton or satin fabric. This was used because of its low cost and easy availability. The use of dark colours was prevalent in *Aangi*. Red, yellow and blue colours were commonly used in this. Its length reached up to the waist level, allowing exposure of the navel. This length of *Aangi* was particularly well-suited to put on in the hot climate conditions too. It had back opening which was fastened with two strings Fig. 1 (b). *Aangi* was made by joining 8-10 fabric pieces using basting



Photo Courtesy : By Author

**Fig. 1 :** Traditional upper garments (a) *Aangi* (Front); (b) *Aangi* (Back); (c) *Jamper* and (d) *Bagri* woman wearing printed *jamper*

stitch; this might have been done as a means of achieving fitting in the garment. The sleeves of *Aangi* were short in length, which were attached to the shoulder line (Fabri, 1994). Hemline of the sleeve was finished with contrast coloured fabric (Bhatt and Rani, 2015). Some *Bagri* females were using sleeveless waist coat over *Aangi*, known as *Fatui*. It was made up of dark coloured cotton fabric. It had full vertical opening in the front and finished with shirt placket. The opening was fastened with buttons.

#### *Jamper*:

It was a one piece upper garment with half sleeve, mid-calf length and semi-fitted garment with or without collar as shown in Fig. 1(c). For casual wear, the most common material was light weight cotton fabric. The reason for using cotton may be easy availability of the fabric and its suitability to the environment. Moreover, cotton fabric was quite comfortable in hot climatic conditions due to high moisture regain. *Bagri* people from low socio-economic class prefer blended cotton fabric as shown in Fig. 1 (d). Generally white colour fabric

was used for casual *Jamper*. The casual wear *Jamper* of the female had a tubular silhouette. There were slits at the side seam of the *Jamper* and the length of the slit was 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total length of the garment. The *Jamper* was stitched with plain seam and slits were finished by folding the fabric by half an inch. The garment was semi-fitted and the reason may be of ease required by *Bagri* females while working in the fields. The sleeves of the *Jamper* were short and set-in type. *Bagri* women wore convertible collared *Jamper*, which had placket opening at the front and same colour buttons were applied for fastening. The back of the *Jamper* was finished with yoke. There were side pockets on both left and right side seam of *Jamper*. These pockets were used for storing the materials such as keys and tablets etc. For ceremonial wear, they use loosely woven cotton fabric. During the marriage, bride wear two *Jampers*, one red and other in different colour. Red colour *Jamper* known as '*Mamakurti*' was gifted by uncle to the bride. This red *Jamper* was mandatory in *Phera* ceremony.

#### *Ghaghra*:

It was one piece, calf length and loose fitted garment, with or without contrast colour *Magzi*. It was tied at the waist with string. For casual wear, the most common material was light weight cotton fabric. Coloured fabrics were used for *Ghaghra* so that it would not soil easily. *Bagri* women preferred two types of *Ghaghra*, one was *Kalidar ghaghra* and another was *pat Ghaghra*. *Kalidar ghaghra* was the most popular of these attires. It was a long garment with numerous *Kalis* as shown in Fig. 2 (a). It was like a gored skirt in construction, each gore being a triangular section, known as a *Kali*. A large number of *Kalis* were sewn together to form a *Ghaghra*, which add flare at the hem. The size of each *kali* ranges but was most commonly 1 inch wide at the apex and 7 inch at the base. The number of *Kalis* in a *Ghaghra* may vary from 70 to 100. Old traditions describe that *Ghera* of *Ghaghra* would vary from 10-15 yards (Brar, 2012). As much as 20 meters of fabric can be used in a single *Ghaghra*. Usually, the length of the skirt was up to calf so that the accessories worn in the legs and at the ankles were visible. The fullness of *Ghaghra* was controlled at the top by 3-5 inch wide contrast belt which was called *Nepha*. At the bottom, the *Ghaghra* had same or contrast colour *Magzi* (cut on bias) of 1-4 inches. Another type of *Ghaghra*





Photo Courtesy : By Author

Fig. 2 : Traditional lower garments (a) Kalidar ghaghra and (b) Pat ghaghra

was pat *Ghaghra*, made of several rectangular panels of fabric, which were sewn together. Gathers or knife pleats were sewn at the waist to give the skirt fullness as shown in Fig. 2 (b). Generally, synthetic or satin is used for the pat *Ghaghra*. The *Ghaghra* had side opening of short length. It was secured at the waist with multicolour drawstring. The drawstring was made from discarded wool. During the marriage, bride wear two lower garments, one red and white striped *Ghaghra* and another colourful *Kalidar ghaghra* in satin fabric. Red and white striped *Ghaghra*, which was named '*Mamaghaghri*' was gifted by an uncle to the bride and mandatory in *Phera* ceremony.

### *Pila (odhni)*:

"The *Orhni* worn with *Ghaghra* skirt and *Choli*, a bodice front and sleeves secured across the back by ties, first appeared in pre-Muslim Gujarat in the tenth century" (Fabri, 1994). The term *Pila* refers to the colour yellow and its association with spring, blossom and joyful happiness. In the centre of the *Pila*, there was a big circular motif of pure yellow colour, known as *Chand*. The *Chand* of *Pila* was dyed with turmeric to impart properties of anti-inflammation. When a child is born in a family, the young mother's parents bring a set of clothes which include a yellow *Pila*, ornamented with the lotus motif (symbol of fertility) during visit to their daughter. The casual *Pila* was made of pure cotton fabric. The most preferred combination for resist dots on red base was white, blue, green and yellow as shown in Fig. 3 (a). Sometimes it was in black and yellow combination also. *Bagri* people from low socio-economic class preferred blended cotton fabric. The *Pila* was made by bandhani work in specified pattern. *Pila* had 2 x 2 meters



Photo Courtesy : By Author

Fig. 3 : Headdresses of first generation females (a) *Pila*; (b) *Chundari*; (c) *Pomcha* and (d) *Sunkukdo*

dimension in multi-coloured resist dot pattern that is produced by a process called '*Lipai*'. In this technique, the fabric is first dabbed with various colours according to the design, followed by tying the coloured areas to resist penetration of dye.

The tied fabric is finally dyed to obtain multi-coloured dots in localized areas on a red background. The *Pila* was embroidered in a specific pattern, in which small *Buties* were present in whole *Pila* and both lengthwise side of the *Pila* were embroidered with *Bel* design. Two sides, which had *Bel* design, were decorated with *Gota*, which was called *Kangra*. The width of *Gota* (*Kangra*) varies from 2 to 4 inches. Traditionally, *Pila* were also decorated with sitara (tiny metal discs, often of gold or silver with a tiny hole at the center often used in zardozi embroidery). For the ceremonial purpose, three headdresses were used in sequence by females which include *Chundari*, *Bugiyoo* and *Sunkukdo*, respectively. *Chundari* had combination of red, green and pink (Fig. 3 b) with heavy embroidery work which was called *Jaal*. *Bugiyoo* had small red colour circles on white cotton fabric. Occasionally, *Chand* is coloured with light pink colour and this type of *Pila* is known as *Pomcha* as shown in Fig. 3 (c). It was a head dress of newly married *Bagri* women. *Sunkukdo* was a yellow colour square fabric with or without gota work at four sides as shown

in Fig. 3 (d).

### Footwear worn by *Bagri* females:

As for as foot wears are concerned, traditionally, females of *Bagri* community moved around barefoot in the house and village. Afterwards, females started wearing leather *boonts* of black colour with silver *phooldi* [Fig. 4 (a) in front when they go outside the home. Village chamar or kuchiya prepared the boots (Fig. 4 (b)].

### Jewellery worn on different body parts:



Photo Courtesy : By Author

Fig. 4 : Footwear (a) *Juti* and (b) *Mojri*

*Bagri* females are very fond of jewellery. They possessed variety of jewellery items made in gold or silver. Most of the jewellery was made from silver. It is commonly said that more the number of jewellery items possessed by *Bagri* females, wealthy the family was. It was found that *Bagri* females had jewellery for most of their body parts. Jewellery formed the essential part of adoration among *Bagri* bride. They were also fond of neck jewellery. The description of jewellery items worn by *Bagri* females is as follows:

#### *Boria*:

It had a circular shape and worn on the head as shown in Fig. 5 (a). It was made from beads, stones and cotton fabric. Below the circular shape, a triangular base was provided with the help of fabric or cardboard. A woollen thread was attached to the jewellery which was tied to the hairs on both sides. The size and design of *boria* vary according to the choice of the wearer.

#### *Tili*:

It was a small coin size, round shape nose ornament, made in gold having red or green colour in the middle

and worn on left side of the nose as shown in Fig. 5 (c).

#### *Boojali*:

It was flower-shaped ornament worn in the ears. In the middle of flower, a black coloured pearl was present as shown in Fig. 5 (b). It was 1.25 inches in diameter. The stem of *Boojali* was very thick, so for insertion, women required a big ear hole. They put moist feathers in their ears for extension of the hole. For the ceremonial purpose, a leaf shape structure was also attached below the flower structure [Fig. 6 (b)].



Photo Courtesy : By Author

Fig. 5 : Casual jewellery worn on different body parts (a)*Boria* (head); (b) *Boojali* (ear); (c) *Tili* (nose); (d) *Om* (neck); (e) *Moort* (neck); (f) *Chhala* (finger); (g) *Chuda* (wrist); (h) *Chudi* (wrist); (i) *Kadla* (wrist); (j) *Tagri* (waist); (k) *Newriya* (ankel) and (l) *Kadla* (ankle)

#### *Om*:

It is *Om* sign in stylish heart shape. It was worn in the neck with a black twisted thread of wool. It is shown in Fig. 5 (d).

#### *Mohar*:

It was a neck ornament (Khullar, 2011). In this, 4-7 gold coins were inserted in multiple strings of black thread (Fig. 6 a).





Photo Courtesy : By Author

**Fig. 6 :** Ceremonial jewellery worn on different body parts (a) *Mohar* (neck); (b) *Boojali* (ear); (c) *Mehal* (neck) and *tadda* (upper arm); (d) *Binti* (finger); (e) *Chhelkadia* and *Pati* (ankle) and (f) *Tagdi* (waist)

**Mehal:**

It was a special neck ornament of *Bagri* community brought by groom's family at the time of marriage. It was made from 6-8 gold coins and one big temple shape structure with picture of a goddess on it, called '*Chauki*'. *Chauki* in the middle and coins on both sides were tied together with black coloured threads (Fig. 6 c).

**Tadda:**

It was made from a hollow gold pipe which had 3 or 4 twists. It was worn on the upper arm and closed with rounded knobs (Fig. 6 c).

**Tagdi:**

It had 14-16 flat square plate like structures which were arranged on black or red colour twisted thread. These structures were attached with silver beads and tied around the waist and when the lady walks, it made a

pleasant sound. It is shown in Fig. 5 (j).

**Gajriya:**

It was made from *Lac* and worn on the wrist as shown in Fig. 5 (i).

**Khapta:**

It was worn on the wrist after *Gajriya* and generally made of glass.

**Chuda:**

This was made from elephant teeth and gifted to the bride by in law's family. It was also worn in forearm after *Khapta*. The *Chuda* from front side had less circumference as compared to back side of *Chuda* as shown in Fig. 5 (g). Now it is very costly, so lac *Chuda* was worn by *Bagri* females.

**Chudi:**

This was worn on the wrist and made from glass. Red or green colour *Chudies* were preferred by *Bagri* females (Fig. 5 h).

**Binti:**

It was a ring with or without a stone, in gold or silver. It was also called *Anguthi* (Fig. 6 d).

**Chhala:**

It was worn in the finger and made from silver. It was decorated with round copper dots as shown in Fig. 5 (f). This ring also called *Chhala*, helped in controlling blood pressure of the wearer.

**Newriya:**

It was a silver ornament, worn at the ankles by *Bagri* female. In these, two thick silver wires were twisted together and silver beads were set on it as shown in Fig. 5 (k).

**Kadla:**

It was an ankle ornament made from silver. It was round thick structure that was hollow from inside having a knob-like structure at both ends as shown in Fig. 5 (l). It is made from silver and worn by widow *Bagri* women.

**Chhelkadia:**

It was a solid structure, made from silver and worn

above the *Kadla*. It was spiral in shape and thinner than *Kadla* (Fig. 6 e).

### **Pati:**

It was made in silver metal and had a flat round structure. It was worn just above *Chhelkadia* at the ankle. The width of *pati* varies from half to one inch (Fig. 6 e).

### **Body adornment by *Bagri* females:**

Traditional hair style of *Bagri* community was very interesting and deserves a special mention. For this, they took hairs from the head, divided it into four parts and made four *Mindhies* (plaits) from them. The *Borla* was fitted on head with the help of middle *Mindhi*. All the *mindhies* were attached with the main plait which was made with the rest of the hairs at the back (Fig. 7). The plaits were lengthened with the help of red nylon ribbon. Some women used adhesive for hair styling (*Goond sar*) and they wash their hair after one month. In marriage ceremony, brides tie their hair in the middle of the head in the shape of bulging ball.



Photo Courtesy : By Author

**Fig. 7 : Traditional hair style *Bagri* female**

Tattooing was observed among the people of *Bagri* community (Fig. 8). Females in this community were found with the *Tattooes* of their names or partner's name on their arms. Om or dots and sometime animal or floral designs were made at the forearm and back of the hand. The tattooing was called as *Mandna* in their local language (Bhatt and Rani, 2015). During the analysis, it was found that some people did tattooing for tradition



Photo Courtesy : By Author

**Fig. 8 : Body decoration by *Bagri* females (a) Om; (b) Peacock design (c) Husband name and flower (d) Dot**

and some of the community people treated it as remedy for nerve swelling.

### **Conclusion :**

This study on traditional costumes aimed at forming the diverse cultural aspects of *Bagri* community residing in Rajasthan and Punjab. The traditional *Bagri* costumes could be customized into new designs and value can be added to make it more attractive, adaptable, seek new dimensions and have universal appeal with the distinct essence of Rajasthan and Punjab. *Bagri* females wore *Aangi*, *Jamper* (upper garments), *Ghaghro* (lower garment), *Bugiyoo*, *Sunkukdo*, *Chundadi* and *Pila* (headdresses). Traditional hair style of *Bagri* community was very interesting and deserves a special mention. Tattooing was also observed among the people of *Bagri* community. The study could be supportive for the Indian fashion industry as the designs, cuts and styles of *Bagri* costumes possibly will work as a source of inspiration for the fashion designers. In addition, future researchers could explore the textiles used in *Bagri* community.

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