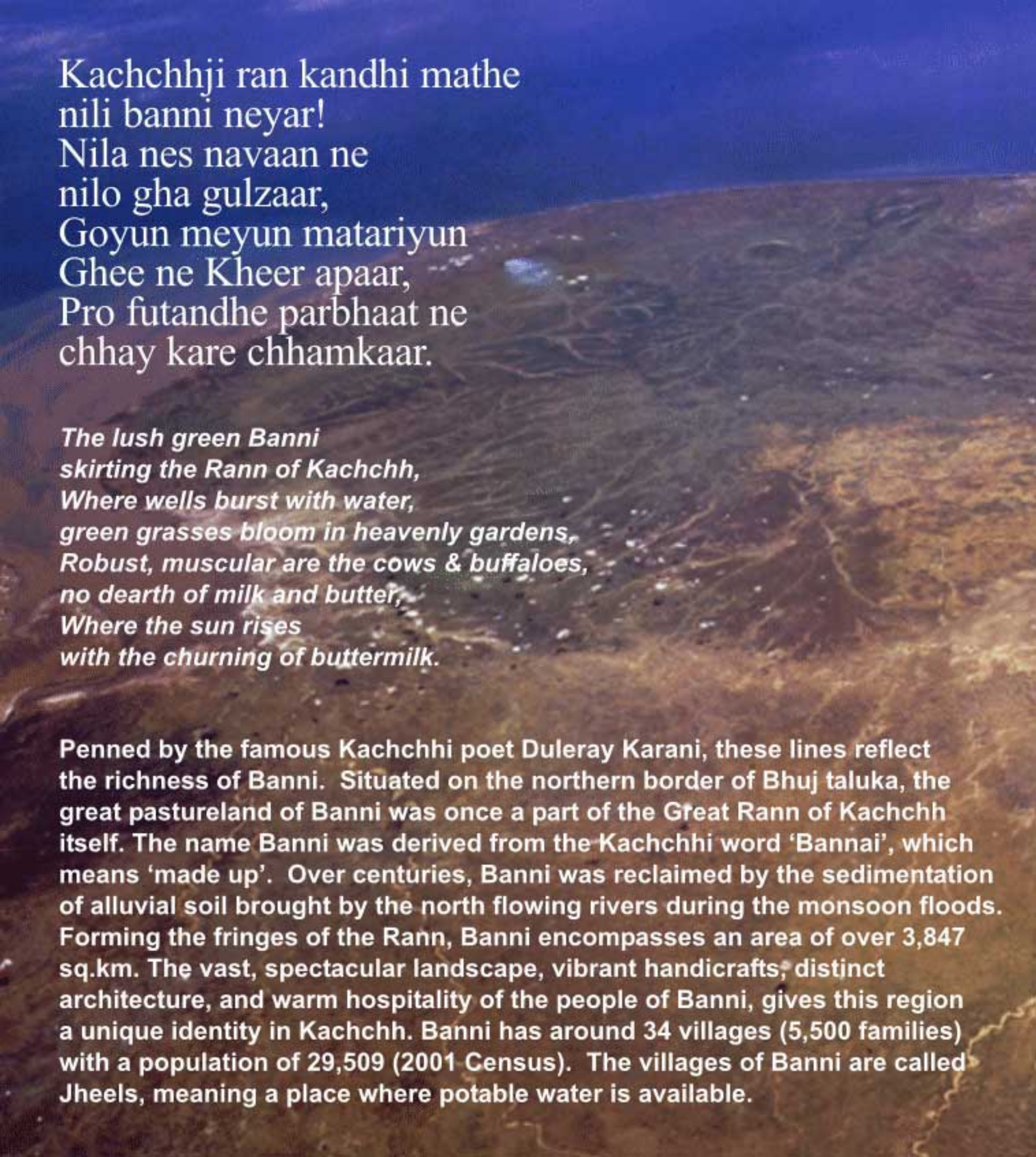


Hodka, Kachchh



Kachchhji ran kandhi mathe
nili banni neyar!
Nila nes navaan ne
nilo gha gulzaar,
Goyun meyun matariyun
Ghee ne Kheer apaar,
Pro futandhe parbhaat ne
chhay kare chhamkaar.

*The lush green Banni
skirting the Rann of Kachchh,
Where wells burst with water,
green grasses bloom in heavenly gardens,
Robust, muscular are the cows & buffaloes,
no dearth of milk and butter,
Where the sun rises
with the churning of buttermilk.*

Penned by the famous Kachchhi poet Duleray Karani, these lines reflect the richness of Banni. Situated on the northern border of Bhuj taluka, the great pastureland of Banni was once a part of the Great Rann of Kachchh itself. The name Banni was derived from the Kachchhi word 'Bannai', which means 'made up'. Over centuries, Banni was reclaimed by the sedimentation of alluvial soil brought by the north flowing rivers during the monsoon floods. Forming the fringes of the Rann, Banni encompasses an area of over 3,847 sq.km. The vast, spectacular landscape, vibrant handicrafts, distinct architecture, and warm hospitality of the people of Banni, gives this region a unique identity in Kachchh. Banni has around 34 villages (5,500 families) with a population of 29,509 (2001 Census). The villages of Banni are called Jheels, meaning a place where potable water is available.



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Be it through Sun Dried Brick, Adobe technology, Stack Wall Technology or Wattle & Daub, etc. Maati has been explored in different ways. The clay floorscape arranged in varied levels of plinths and platforms gradually rise vertically, to form the walls of circular houses. The walls terminate in pure conical roofs made of thatch. And the roof protects walls which are adorned beautifully by colourful geometric and floral patterns. Women paint different motifs with earth colours and mud-mirror work (lippan kam) on the exterior and interior walls of the Bhunga. This wall-designing activity speeds up during the month of the Diwali festival. Twenty years ago when Banni was still lush grassland, the thatched roof was always made from bamboo and grass. Today, there are more modern versions of the Bhunga in which the thatched roof is replaced by a clay-baked tile roof and twigs are replaced by stones. The traditional Bhunga is an engineering wonder. This sturdy



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The 'Mad Weed': Gando Baawal

The prominent tree species in Banni is Prosopis Juliflora, a non indigenous Baawal locally, has destroyed the existence of several native species and has eroded huge tracks of the grassland. This has also caused the ground water level to go down. The weed has been unmanaged, making the eco system fragile over the years. However, if managed scientifically, this wild shrub can prove to be advantageous, since it can be used to make charcoal. Thus, the 'Mad Weed' can not only provide means of livelihood to the local population, but also generate considerable revenue for the government.

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The residents of Banni are Maldharis (cattle breeders) or Baniyaras who practice Islam. There are around 15-20 Maldhari Muslim castes in Banni who trace their roots back to Sindh and beyond. They speak Kachchhi, a dialect close to the Sindhi language.



Banni is peopled by various Muslim sub-communities namely Jat, Raysipotra, Saiyads, Mutava, Node, Hingorja, Bambha, Kurar, Sumra, Juneja, Bhatti, Halepotra and Khattris. Hindu sub-communities here are the Meghwals and Vadhas.

The lack of documented history of Kutch has led to the tradition of an oral rendition of history.

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When men are away grazing their cattle, women put in almost 19 hours of work - accessing water, cooking, tending to the family, making the cattle feed and deftly creating the most wondrous artworks. Women of different **vas** (hamlets) get together to pore over their embroidery which they

do both for themselves, as well as the markets now. It is a family tradition wherein every young girl imbibes the skill from her mother. The girl, right from her childhood begins to develop her **stree dhan** (dowry) - a mix of **Kanjris** (long embroidered blouses), quilts and **batwas** (pouches).



The main tradition of the Muslim communities includes mutwa embroidery, catab, sebha-kudi, chopad, the very geometrical kambhira, pakko, mokka, etc.

The Meghwal community are specialists in pakko, neran, and chitki (appliqué). They paint – with their needles – motifs of scorpions, parrots, women churning milk, etc.

The Meghwal men practice leather craft – a natural outcome of the coexistence of the cattle rearers with the craft artisans. The products include embroidered mojadis (foot wear) traditionally made for the bride and the bridegroom. Hand fans, mirror frames, wall pieces and belts are also made with traditional skill. 33 families of Hodka practice leather craft as their main source of income.

Mr. Bhasar Bhura, the pride of Hodka village, has been honoured with a National Award in the year 1985 and Gujarat Kala Award in the year 1989 for his skills in leather craft. He has visited Germany, Japan and England, through the Government of India, to exhibit his skills.

The Costume of Banni as in Hodka

The cut, material and ornamentation of a costume can reveal the age, occupation, origin, caste and marital status of the people in the area.

The typical costume of maldhari men consists of a lungi (sarong/wrap), kamij (long shirt), pagdi (turban) and rumal (scarf); The more modern, contemporary youth have started wearing sunthad (loose pant) or patlun (pants) and bushkat (shirt).

The maldhari women wear embroidered kanjri (blouse), ghaghro (skirt) and odhani (scarf). Bright colours are most common in the apparels of both men and women. Widows usually wear black without embroidery.

The staple food of the people of Banni includes bajro (pearl millet), jowar, wheat, pulses, meat along with rice, buttermilk, milk products, and milk-based sweets.

Music

Music is an intrinsic part of the lives of the people of Banni. Cattle rearing being their main occupation, Maldharis spend most of their time in the grazing lands with their cattle. Music for them is a medium for self pleasure. By playing musical instruments and singing traditional folk songs, they express their love for nature and the almighty.

Bheth, Vaai, Kaafi, Daastan, Aaradhi, Maulood are the various forms of Gayaki (singing style), each sung in a unique style based on the content and the mood of the song. It has an influence of Sufi Gayaki. The creations (Sufi love songs) of the famous poet of Sindh, Shah Abdul Latif, are commonly sung by the people in almost all Gayaki. The Muslim communities mainly sing Bheth (song consisting of 2-4 lines usually sung before Kaafi or Daastan), Vaai (most ancient style of singing), Daastan (song depicting a tale), whereas Aaradhi Vaani (religious songs) and Kaafi are common amongst the Meghwals of Banni. The musical instruments include Jodiya Pava, Bhorrindo, Morchang and Surando.

The Jodiyo Pavo is a pair of two flutes of the same size generally played together. The instrument is common amongst the Maldharis who play it while their cattle are busy grazing. It is said that the cattle, familiar to their masters' musical notes, graze within the area where the sounds of the Pavo are heard. As if the sound forms the boundary for the cattle!

A traditional folk instrument, Bhorrindo, Borrindo or Borendo is a small egg like ball with three or four holes with one larger hole. It is made out of baked clay. The sound notes are produced by blowing a close to the larger hole. Finger tips are placed on the smaller holes to regulate the notes.

The Morchang or Chang is a small sounding device made of iron or brass. It has an outer frame with a string in the middle. A variety of sounds are produced by stroking the string in a slow or quick succession together with an appropriate adjustment of the tongue position within the mouth.

Surando is an ancient instrument, believed to be well-known as Sarinda in north India and Sindh. Surando is similar to Sarangi and Violin, and played in the same way. The Surando used to be played by professional bards, the Charanas, Mangatas and Manganhars of Sindh and Jats of Pakistan and Rajasthan, as a means of livelihood.

Livestock: People's Asset

The vast pasturelands of Banni are ideal for the rearing and maintenance of cattle, with the trading of calves, buffaloes, goats and cows a chief means of livelihood. 63 families of Hodka are involved in animal husbandry. Apart from sale of livestock, sale of milk, ghee, wool and manure form their source of income.

Traditionally, Banni's Maldharis rear the highly-prized Kankrej breed of cattle. Kankrej is one of the heaviest breeds of the Indian cattle and is reputed for its excellent capacity to endure droughts. A mature cow gives around 1350 to 1500 litre of milk every year, and the bullock played a major role in farming. This breed is identified by its rectangular face, a broad forehead, slightly dished in the centre and the moon shaped portion between its strong curved horns. The bulls are usually silver-grey, iron grey or black with their forequarters, hump and hind quarters always darker than their barrel.

The buffaloes of Banni are of the Kundhi breed and are well adapted to the hardy arid conditions. The Kathi breed of horse, famous for its speed, is also reared here.





Virdas: Oases in the Desert

The tough conditions and scanty rainfall have forced the Banni nomads to innovate ways to capture and manage the rare rainwater.

By studying the flow of water during the monsoon, Maldharis dig virdas – shallow pits – in the near-invisible depressions, just above the layer of salty groundwater beneath. As fresh water gets removed, brackish water from beneath moves upwards and accumulates at the bottom of the virda but not contaminating the sweet water layer above it.



Virdas were the principal means of water harvesting by the nomadic Maldharis of Gujarat. There can be over 20 virdas in one depression and depending upon the need, one virda is opened at a time. The construction of a big virda begins with the village chief making the first mark on the ground with a spade while the priest chants hymns. The normal season for digging is when the sun is at its hottest and the land is dry. The wells are lined with frames made of tree trunks & branches, and a layer of grass is placed between the different square wooden frames as well as between the earth wall column and the frames. Finally, virdas are covered with silt and sealed.

Just ten inches of rain is enough to provide sweet water for two to three months, after which it turns salty because of the gradual upward movement of saline water.

Biodiversity

Banni covers an area of 3847 sq km, which is about 8.4% of the total geographical area of Kachchh. The area is absolutely flat with an altitude pecies of grasses were present commonly, which are reduced now to only about 10-15 species. Other than the grass species, Banni also supports very rich and diverse faunal elements. While the seasonal wetlands support



migratory waterfowls, the grasslands are home to many other wild animal species including chinkara, wolf, houbara bustard, common cranes, etc. About 273 bird species were reported from Banni, which include 107 migratory species (Tiwari and Rahmani, 1997).

The Great Rann

Salt impregnated Great Rann of Kachchh is one of the most remarkable and unique features of Kachchh. It covers between 16000-17000 sq. km area with an average altitude of about 15 mt above mean sea level. It appears like a table-top surface, interspersed with small uplands (islands)

locally known as bets. The Rann owes its origin to a marine transgression in geological time scale and is tectonically an unstable area. Ecologically, it represents one of the largest seasonal saline wetland areas having 0.5 mt to 1.5 mt water depth. However, after October-November, water starts drying up and the area turns into a saline desert.

The wetland of Rann supports large number of water birds like flamingoes, Pelicans, Great Crested Grebe, Black stork, Brahminy Duck, Common Pochard, Tuffed Pochard, White Eyed Pochard, Gulls, Terns, Stints, Plovers, etc. The mixture of saline flat land and raised bets provide



ideal habitat for many other wild animal species including Wild Ass, desert fox, desert cat, Indian porcupine, saw scaled viper, krait, cobra and several species of lizards. Due to the presence of geologically diverse rocks, many bets also support rich fossilized fauna, including the skull of dinosaur and wood fossils (Singh, 2001). A large part of the Rann is covered under the Kachchh Desert Wildlife Sanctuary.

'Flamingo City'

Right in the midst of the Rann, there is a slightly raised ground where water starts receding first, thus enabling large number of flamingoes to build their mud nests or repairing of old ones. This area which is around 10 km from the Nir out-post on Karo Dungar, is popularly known as 'Flamingo City'. The local name given to this area is Hunj Bet (flamingo island). The area is famous for the largest congregation of Greater Flamingos in the entire subcontinent for breeding. The area is currently a part of the Kachchh Desert Wildlife Sanctuary.

Pachchham

Pachchham is the northern most highland ('island') of the Kachchh mainland located on the border of the Rann. Total geographical area of

the island is about 469 sq. km. The area is surrounded by the saline marsh of the Rann from the North, East and West and by flatland of Banni from the South, giving it an island like appearance. The island is hilly in nature where the highest peak of Kachchh - the Karo Dungar is located. The island supports natural habitats like scrub thorn forests and wetlands. Some rapid floristic surveys recorded more than 250 plant species from the area. On the upper reaches of Karo Dungar, the elements of dry deciduous vegetation also appears, with the species like *Sterculia urens*, *Lannea coromandalica*, *Bombax ceiba*, *Butea monosperma*, *Albizzia* sp. etc. The area also support many faunal species, including a few rare and endangered ones. Neelgai, chinkara, wild boar, and jackal are the common species, while, the endangered species like wolf, desert fox and desert cat, are also reported from the area. On the eastern most fringe areas of the island a few herds of wild ass were also reported. The island is one of the last few areas where traditional cattle breeding and trading are still practiced, and the area still support good number of cattle of indigenous breeds.

Chhari Dhand: Banni's wetland

Banni, predominantly a flat area, has many depressions where rainwater gets collected during monsoon. These shallow water bodies are locally



called Dhand, Jheel or Talav. Based on Survey of India maps, a total of 34 such wetlands exist in the Banni area. Of these, Chhari, Servo, Vakario, Khirjog, Abdha, and Luna are the major ones. All these wetlands support large numbers of waterfowl. Chhari-Dhand is the largest among these seasonal wetlands, with an area of about 10 sq.km. More than 50,000 waterfowls have been recorded from this lake. The adjoining Khirjog and Vakario reported more than 30,000 birds during winter. Endangered birds like Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*), Oriental Darter (*Anhingia rufa*), Blacknecked Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*) and Indian Skimmer (*Rynchops albicollis*) visit these wetlands almost every year. About 32 species of raptors were also recorded here.

These wetlands also attract large number of common cranes—a total of about 40,000 were recorded in 1994. The latest waterfowl count organized by Forest Department in Chhari Dhand, recorded about 55 species and 50,000 birds. Due to high concentration of water birds, Chhari and some of its adjoining water bodies are under

serious consideration to be brought under the Ramsar Convention.

Land-Locked Mangroves!

About 50 km away from Bhuj, at the northern edge of Banni along the Rann, there is a land-locked patch of mangrove about 2 ha in area. Locally called 'Shravan Khavadia' after the famous mythological character Shravan, people regard the area as a sacred grove. Clearly, this is a remnant mangrove forest which is surviving without any direct contact from the sea, the nearest coastline being about 50 km from here. Logically we can conclude that once there was a sea coast on this tract that receded due to geological transformations. However, these patches are thriving mainly due to micro-environmental conditions provided by the saline Rann and the protection due to mythological significance. A unique phenomenon of ecological adaptability, there are more such land-locked mangrove patches in the same stretch towards Lakhpat.





THE LEGEND OF BAJRO

The Sama Jadejas came from Sind, and their most illustrious monarch was Lakho Fulani, born in Samvat 976. Pearl Millet, which came to Kachchh around the 10th century was then used only as horse-feed. It was Lakho who thought that it could also be used for humans. For the first time, under his instruction, rotis were made out of pearl millet. The first experimental roti was given to an ailing old woman of the village. The woman ate the roti and not only did it not harm her but she became free of her ailment! The villagers proclaimed this 'Ba Jaro'. ('Ba' means an old woman, and 'Jaro' is to digest.) Hence pearl millet is fabled to have got its name - Bajro.

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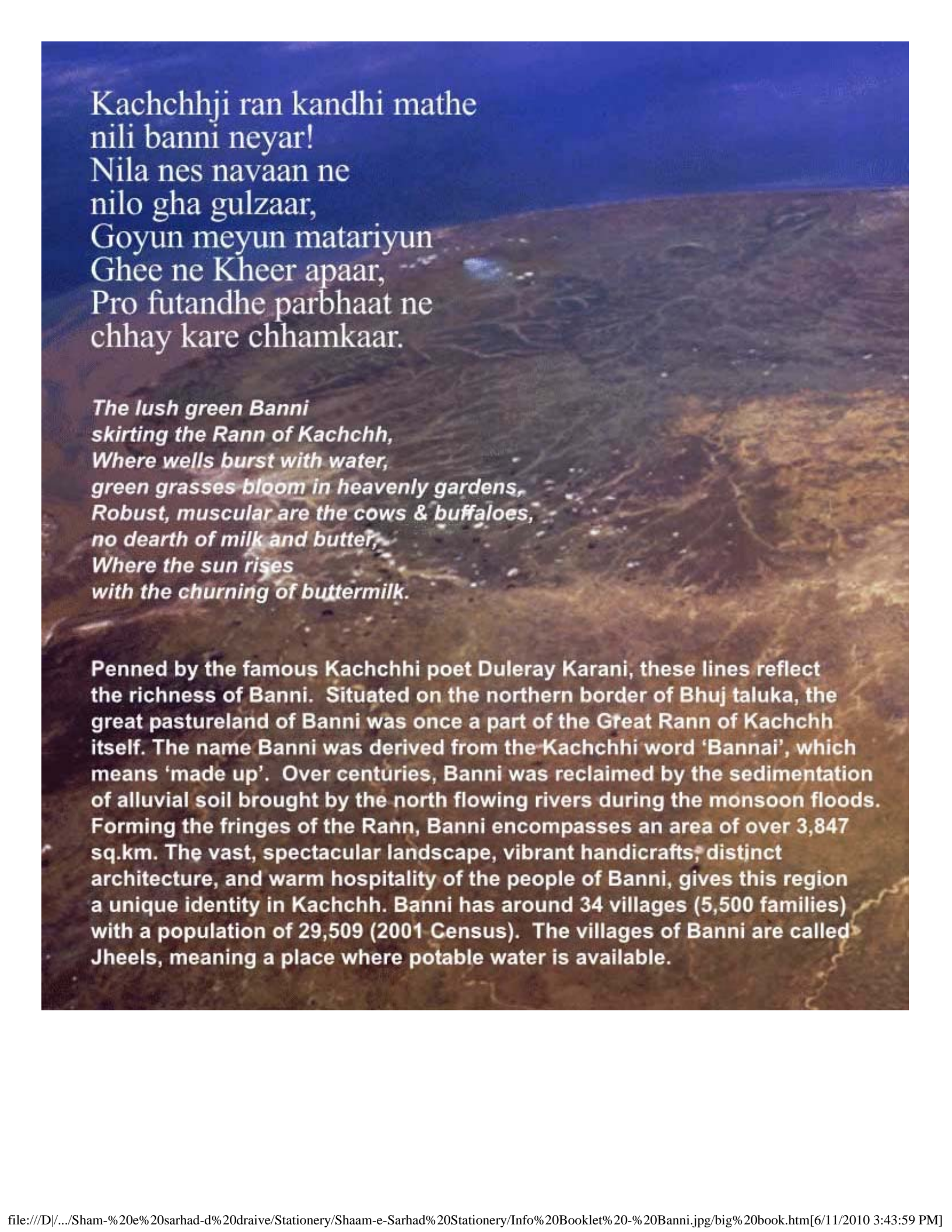
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The name Hodka is derived from the word hodi - meaning boat - as the jheel is believed to be shaped like one.

When men are away grazing their cattle, women put in almost 19 hours of work - accessing water, cooking, tending to the family, making the cattle feed and deftly creating the most wondrous artworks. Women of different **vas** (hamlets) get together to pore over their embroidery which they

do both for themselves, as well as the markets now. It is a family tradition wherein every young girl imbibes the skill from her mother. The girl, right from her childhood begins to develop her **stree dhan** (dowry) - a mix of **Kanjris** (long embroidered blouses), quilts and **batwas** (pouches).



The main tradition of the Muslim communities includes mutwa embroidery, catab, sebha-kudi, chopad, the very geometrical kambhira, pakko, mokka, etc.

The Meghwal community are specialists in pakko, neran, and chitki (appliqué). They paint – with their needles – motifs of scorpions, parrots, women churning milk, etc.

The Meghwal men practice leather craft – a natural outcome of the coexistence of the cattle rearers with the craft artisans. The products include embroidered mojadis (foot wear) traditionally made for the bride and the bridegroom. Hand fans, mirror frames, wall pieces and belts are also made with traditional skill. 33 families of Hodka practice leather craft as their main source of income.

Mr. Bhasar Bhura, the pride of Hodka village, has been honoured with a National Award in the year 1985 and Gujarat Kala Award in the year 1989 for his skills in leather craft. He has visited Germany, Japan and England, through the Government of India, to exhibit his skills.

The Costume of Banni as in Hodka

The cut, material and ornamentation of a costume can reveal the age, occupation, origin, caste and marital status of the people in the area.

The typical costume of maldhari men consists of a lungi (sarong/wrap), kamij (long shirt), pagdi (turban) and rumal (scarf); The more modern, contemporary youth have started wearing sunthad (loose pant) or patlun (pants) and bushkat (shirt).

The maldhari women wear embroidered kanjri (blouse), ghaghro (skirt) and odhani (scarf). Bright colours are most common in the apparels of both men and women. Widows usually wear black without embroidery.

The staple food of the people of Banni includes bajro (pearl millet), jowar, wheat, pulses, meat along with rice, buttermilk, milk products, and milk-based sweets.

Music

Music is an intrinsic part of the lives of the people of Banni. Cattle rearing being their main occupation, Maldharis spend most of their time in the grazing lands with their cattle. Music for them is a medium for self pleasure. By playing musical instruments and singing traditional folk songs, they express their love for nature and the almighty.

Bheth, Vaai, Kaafi, Daastan, Aaradhi, Maulood are the various forms of Gayaki (singing style), each sung in a unique style based on the content and the mood of the song. It has an influence of Sufi Gayaki. The creations (Sufi love songs) of the famous poet of Sindh, Shah Abdul Latif, are commonly sung by the people in almost all Gayaki. The Muslim communities mainly sing Bheth (song consisting of 2-4 lines usually sung before Kaafi or Daastan), Vaai (most ancient style of singing), Daastan (song depicting a tale), whereas Aaradhi Vaani (religious songs) and Kaafi are common amongst the Meghwals of Banni. The musical instruments include Jodiya Pava, Bhorindo, Morchang and Surando.

The Jodiyo Pavo is a pair of two flutes of the same size generally played together. The instrument is common amongst the Maldharis who play it while their cattle are busy grazing. It is said that the cattle, familiar to their masters' musical notes, graze within the area where the sounds of the Pavo are heard. As if the sound forms the boundary for the cattle!

A traditional folk instrument, Bhorindo, Borrindo or Borendo is a small egg like ball with three or four holes with one larger hole. It is made out of baked clay. The sound notes are produced by blowing a close to the larger hole. Finger tips are placed on the smaller holes to regulate the notes.

The Morchang or Chang is a small sounding device made of iron or brass. It has an outer frame with a string in the middle. A variety of sounds are produced by stroking the string in a slow or quick succession together with an appropriate adjustment of the tongue position within the mouth.

Surando is an ancient instrument, believed to be well-known as Sarinda in north India and Sindh. Surando is similar to Sarangi and Violin, and played in the same way. The Surando used to be played by professional bards, the Charanas, Mangatas and Manganhars of Sindh and Jats of Pakistan and Rajasthan, as a means of livelihood.

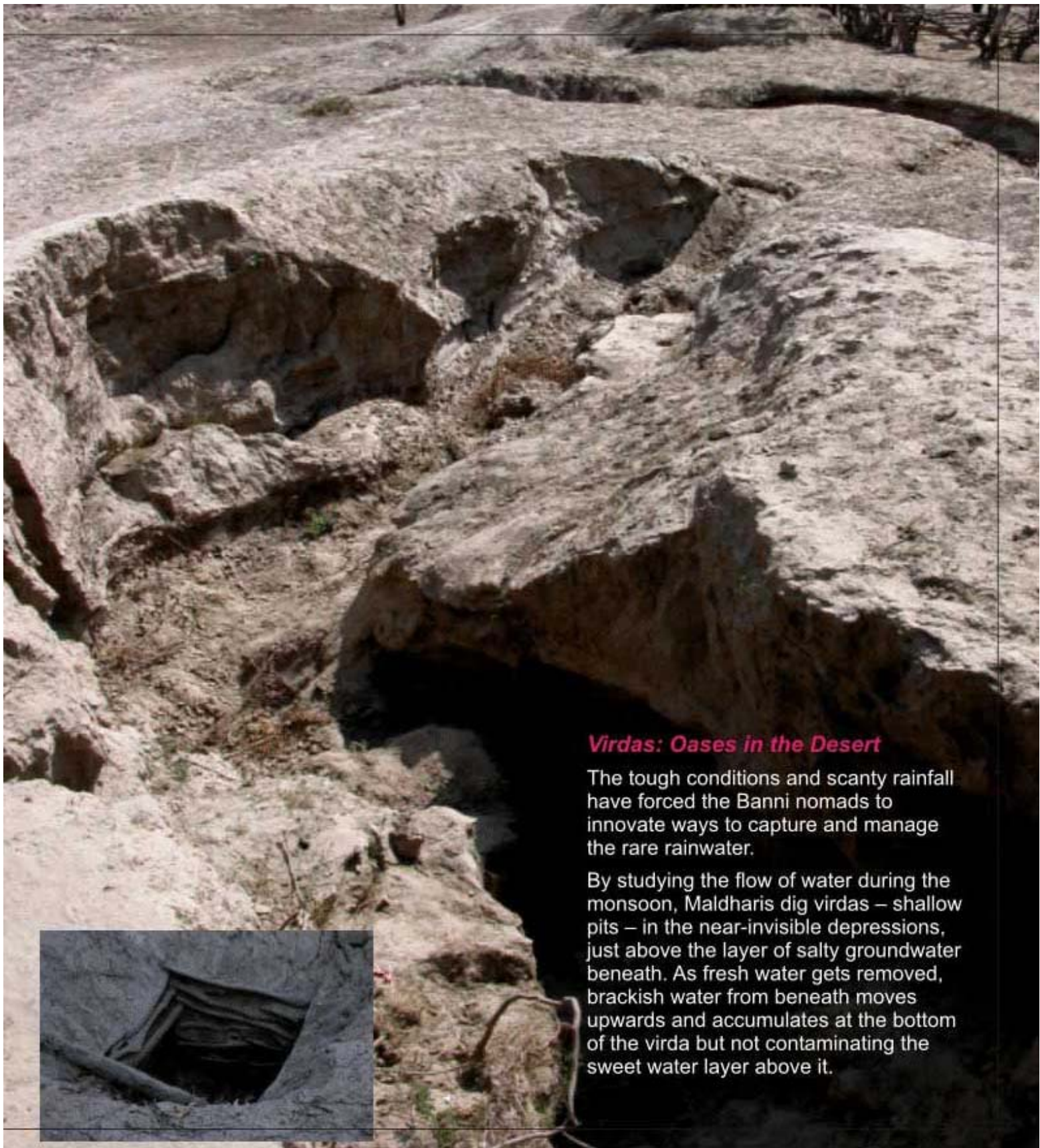
Livestock: People's Asset

The vast pasturelands of Banni are ideal for the rearing and maintenance of cattle, with the trading of calves, buffaloes, goats and cows a chief means of livelihood. 63 families of Hodka are involved in animal husbandry. Apart from sale of livestock, sale of milk, ghee, wool and manure form their source of income.

Traditionally, Banni's Maldharis rear the highly-prized Kankrej breed of cattle. Kankrej is one of the heaviest breeds of the Indian cattle and is reputed for its excellent capacity to endure droughts. A mature cow gives around 1350 to 1500 litre of milk every year, and the bullock played a major role in farming. This breed is identified by its rectangular face, a broad forehead, slightly dished in the centre and the moon shaped portion between its strong curved horns. The bulls are usually silver-grey, iron grey or black with their forequarters, hump and hind quarters always darker than their barrel.

The buffaloes of Banni are of the Kundhi breed and are well adapted to the hardy arid conditions. The Kathi breed of horse, famous for its speed, is also reared here.





Virdas: Oases in the Desert

The tough conditions and scanty rainfall have forced the Banni nomads to innovate ways to capture and manage the rare rainwater.

By studying the flow of water during the monsoon, Maldharis dig virdas – shallow pits – in the near-invisible depressions, just above the layer of salty groundwater beneath. As fresh water gets removed, brackish water from beneath moves upwards and accumulates at the bottom of the virda but not contaminating the sweet water layer above it.

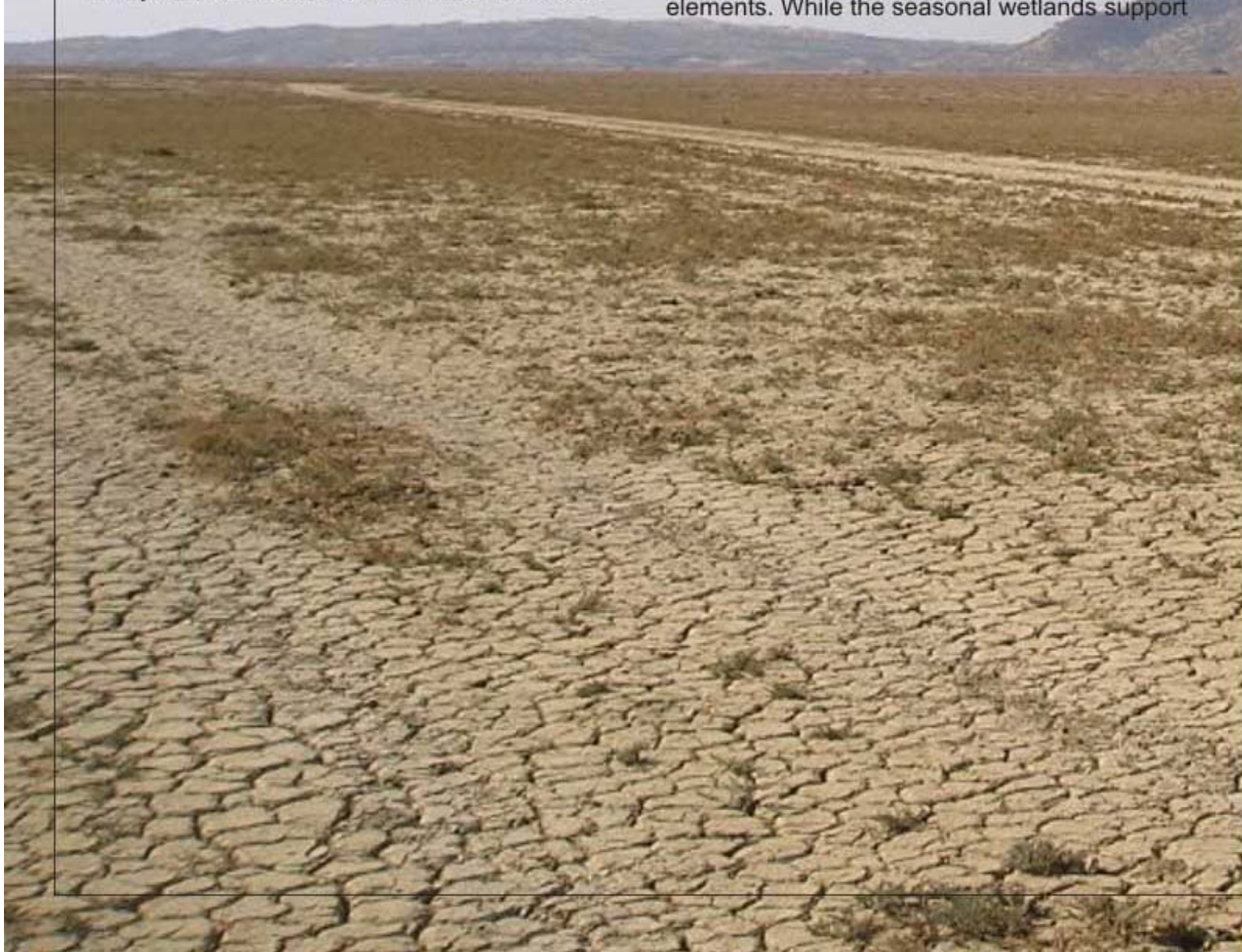


Virdas were the principal means of water harvesting by the nomadic Maldharis of Gujarat. There can be over 20 virdas in one depression and depending upon the need, one virda is opened at a time. The construction of a big virda begins with the village chief making the first mark on the ground with a spade while the priest chants hymns. The normal season for digging is when the sun is at its hottest and the land is dry. The wells are lined with frames made of tree trunks & branches, and a layer of grass is placed between the different square wooden frames as well as between the earth wall column and the frames. Finally, virdas are covered with silt and sealed.

Just ten inches of rain is enough to provide sweet water for two to three months, after which it turns salty because of the gradual upward movement of saline water.

Biodiversity

Banni covers an area of 3847 sq km, which is about 8.4% of the total geographical area of Kachchh. The area is absolutely flat with an altitude species of grasses were present commonly, which are reduced now to only about 10-15 species. Other than the grass species, Banni also supports very rich and diverse faunal elements. While the seasonal wetlands support



migratory waterfowls, the grasslands are home to many other wild animal species including chinkara, wolf, houbara bustard, common cranes, etc. About 273 bird species were reported from Banni, which include 107 migratory species (Tiwari and Rahmani, 1997).

The Great Rann

Salt impregnated Great Rann of Kachchh is one of the most remarkable and unique features of Kachchh. It covers between 16000-17000 sq. km area with an average altitude of about 15 mt above mean sea level. It appears like a table-top surface, interspersed with small uplands (islands)

locally known as bets. The Rann owes its origin to a marine transgression in geological time scale and is tectonically an unstable area. Ecologically, it represents one of the largest seasonal saline wetland areas having 0.5 mt to 1.5 mt water depth. However, after October-November, water starts drying up and the area turns into a saline desert.

The wetland of Rann supports large number of water birds like flamingoes, Pelicans, Great Crested Grebe, Black stork, Brahminy Duck, Common Pochard, Tuffed Pochard, White Eyed Pochard, Gulls, Terns, Stints, Plovers, etc. The mixture of saline flat land and raised bets provide



ideal habitat for many other wild animal species including Wild Ass, desert fox, desert cat, Indian porcupine, saw scaled viper, krait, cobra and several species of lizards. Due to the presence of geologically diverse rocks, many bets also support rich fossilized fauna, including the skull of dinosaur and wood fossils (Singh, 2001). A large part of the Rann is covered under the Kachchh Desert Wildlife Sanctuary.

'Flamingo City'

Right in the midst of the Rann, there is a slightly raised ground where water starts receding first, thus enabling large number of flamingoes to build their mud nests or repairing of old ones. This area which is around 10 km from the Nir out-post on Karo Dungar, is popularly known as 'Flamingo City'. The local name given to this area is Hunj Bet (flamingo island). The area is famous for the largest congregation of Greater Flamingos in the entire subcontinent for breeding. The area is currently a part of the Kachchh Desert Wildlife Sanctuary.

Pachchham

Pachchham is the northern most highland ('island') of the Kachchh mainland located on the border of the Rann. Total geographical area of

the island is about 469 sq. km. The area is surrounded by the saline marsh of the Rann from the North, East and West and by flatland of Banni from the South, giving it an island like appearance. The island is hilly in nature where the highest peak of Kachchh - the Karo Dungar is located. The island supports natural habitats like scrub thorn forests and wetlands. Some rapid floristic surveys recorded more than 250 plant species from the area. On the upper reaches of Karo Dungar, the elements of dry deciduous vegetation also appears, with the species like *Sterculia urens*, *Lannea coromandalica*, *Bombax ceiba*, *Butea monosperma*, *Albizzia* sp. etc. The area also support many faunal species, including a few rare and endangered ones. Neelgai, chinkara, wild boar, and jackal are the common species, while, the endangered species like wolf, desert fox and desert cat, are also reported from the area. On the eastern most fringe areas of the island a few herds of wild ass were also reported. The island is one of the last few areas where traditional cattle breeding and trading are still practiced, and the area still support good number of cattle of indigenous breeds.

Chhari Dhand: Banni's wetland

Banni, predominantly a flat area, has many depressions where rainwater gets collected during monsoon. These shallow water bodies are locally



called Dhand, Jheel or Talav. Based on Survey of India maps, a total of 34 such wetlands exist in the Banni area. Of these, Chhari, Servo, Vakario, Khirjog, Abdha, and Luna are the major ones. All these wetlands support large numbers of waterfowl. Chhari-Dhand is the largest among these seasonal wetlands, with an area of about 10 sq.km. More than 50,000 waterfowls have been recorded from this lake. The adjoining Khirjog and Vakrio reported more than 30,000 birds during winter. Endangered birds like Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelicanus crispus*), Oriental Darter (*Anhingia rufa*), Blacknecked Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*) and Indian Skimmer (*Rynchops albicollis*) visit these wetlands almost every year. About 32 species of raptors were also recorded here.

These wetlands also attract large number of common cranes—a total of about 40,000 were recorded in 1994. The latest waterfowl count organized by Forest Department in Chhari Dhand, recorded about 55 species and 50,000 birds. Due to high concentration of water birds, Chhari and some of its adjoining water bodies are under

serious consideration to be brought under the Ramsar Convention.

Land-Locked Mangroves!

About 50 km away from Bhuj, at the northern edge of Banni along the Rann, there is a land-locked patch of mangrove about 2 ha in area. Locally called 'Shravan Khavadia' after the famous mythological character Shravan, people regard the area as a sacred grove. Clearly, this is a remnant mangrove forest which is surviving without any direct contact from the sea, the nearest coastline being about 50 km from here. Logically we can conclude that once there was a sea coast on this tract that receded due to geological transformations. However, these patches are thriving mainly due to micro-environmental conditions provided by the saline Rann and the protection due to mythological significance. A unique phenomenon of ecological adaptability, there are more such land-locked mangrove patches in the same stretch towards Lakhpat.





THE LEGEND OF BAJRO

The Sama Jadejas came from Sind, and their most illustrious monarch was Lakho Fulani, born in Samvat 976. Pearl Millet, which came to Kachchh around the 10th century was then used only as horse-feed. It was Lakho who thought that it could also be used for humans. For the first time, under his instruction, rotis were made out of pearl millet. The first experimental roti was given to an ailing old woman of the village. The woman ate the roti and not only did it not harm her but she became free of her ailment! The villagers proclaimed this 'Ba Jaro'. ('Ba' means an old woman, and 'Jaro' is to digest.) Hence pearl millet is fabled to have got its name - Bajro.

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