

NOMADIC EXPRESSIONS: EXPLORING SUSTAINABILITY, COUNTERCULTURE INFLUENCE AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN BANJARA COMMUNITY CRAFTS IN GOA

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Received: 25 Sep 2025

Accepted: 26 Sep 2025

Published: 30 Sep 2025

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between the traditional crafts of Banjara community and the intersecting themes of Sustainability, influencing Counterculture expression and women's empowerment.

The nomadic and marginalized Banjara community in Goa are migrated from Karnataka 50 years ago to sell their crafts to tourists of Hippie movement. Historically, Banjaras have developed craft practices that are deeply rooted in resourcefulness, using locally sourced materials and traditionally inherited techniques that follow the principles of sustainability, which is predominantly carried out by women.

This study argues that these craft forms not only serve as aesthetic expressions but also act as subtle influencer on counterculture movement of Goa's Hippie and other movements, preserving their unique cultural identity in the mainstream societal pressure.

Further, the paper examines how the production and sale of these handicrafts and textiles contribute to the economic and social empowerment of Banjara women, providing them with livelihood, autonomy, and a vital source of income within their community.

Through an analysis of craft, interviewing women artisans about lifestyle and business and examining socio cultural influence on garments, this paper looks at the ways in which Banjara community in Goa supports the ideas of sustainability by practicing environmental consciousness, cultural preservation through counterculture influence and the empowerment of its women by navigating business routes through their artistic craftsmanship. Solutions are suggested by researchers for the challenges and barriers identified after in-depth study of the Banjara community crafts.

KEYWORDS: Nomads, Banjara Crafts, Counterculture, Sustainability, Women Empowerment

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background on the Banjara Community in Goa

The Banjara, a traditionally nomadic and marginalized community also known as Lambadi or Goar, have a long-standing presence in India. According to Professor Motiraj Rathod, (2020), a researcher and scholar on the community, the Goan

Banjara are believed to have descended from the Indus Valley civilization, migrating across northern India into Rajasthan before moving south to states like Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh. Rathod notes a strong linguistic and cultural similarity between the Banjara and Roma Gypsies of Europe, who consider them brethren. Bhukya (2010) notes that, Historically, the name "Banjara" was given to this group by the British, but their traditional names are Lambadi and Goar. This community's nomadic history is reflected in their lack of linguistic, regional, caste, or state biases, leading them to adopt the local culture wherever they settle. In Goa, those who migrated decades ago have become fluent in Konkani and, in the tourism belt, have even started learning Russian to gain a business edge. (Kulshreshtha, 2020). As Rathod (2010) highlights, the colourful clothes of the Goan Banjara, featuring unique mirror work, were historically used to protect them from wild animals during their nomadic life. He notes that this highly artistic embroidery is now considered a "languishing art." (Naik, 2000).

1.2 Banjara Craft as a Sustainable Practice and Countercultural Expression

Central to the Banjara way of life is the practice of traditional crafts, particularly handmade embroidery, which serves not only as a means of livelihood but also as a powerful expression of their heritage and history. Banjara craft embodies the principles of sustainability by preserving a unique cultural heritage through ancestral techniques and a parsimonious use of resources. (Naik, 1983) This handmade embroidery is a form of "slow craft," valuing quality over the mass production favoured by machines, and it has a minimal ecological footprint due to the use of natural and upcycled materials like cotton and repurposed textiles. (Kulshreshtha, 2020)

This artistic practice is a significant driver of women's empowerment, providing marginalized women artisans with income-generating opportunities and a means of cultural preservation. (Sabala Organization, n.d.). Furthermore, the Banjara aesthetic and lifestyle, with its emphasis on handmade, eco-friendly, and colourful products, resonates deeply with various subcultures in Goa, such as hippies, ravers, and new age groups, who have been seeking authenticity and sustainability for decades. (Devy, 2000). This connection highlights how the community's traditional craft functions as a unique form of countercultural expression.

1.3 Counterculture Expression:

The counterculture movement is a social phenomenon where a group of people, primarily youth, develops a set of values and norms that are significantly different from, and often in direct opposition to, those of the mainstream, or dominant, culture (Roszak, 1969/1995). It's a form of cultural rebellion that seeks to challenge the established social, political, and economic order through changes in lifestyle rather than direct political action.

The Banjara crafts and lifestyle, with its emphasis on handmade, eco-friendly, and colourful products, resonates deeply with various subcultures in Goa, such as hippies, ravers, and new age groups, by offering a powerful aesthetic and philosophical alternative to mass production. (Devy, 2000) This connection highlights how the community's traditional craft, functions as a unique form of countercultural expression. The vibrant, handcrafted, and uniquely embellished Lambani embroidery perfectly aligned with the hippie and bohemian ideals of individuality, non-conformity, and a rejection of industrial consumerism. By adopting these textiles, counterculture followers symbolically embraced the authentic, labour-intensive spirit of the Banjara community, using their distinctive style to visually express their opposition to mainstream fashion and values.

1.4 Research Gap

Despite the Banjara community's enduring cultural practices and a growing interest in their crafts, there is a significant gap in scholarly research. Existing studies often focus on the aesthetic qualities of Banjara embroidery, overlooking the deeper, interconnected themes of sustainability, counterculture, and women's empowerment. This paper aims to address this deficit by moving beyond a purely artistic analysis to explore how these traditional practices function within a complex, modern framework. It seeks to understand the holistic importance of Banjara crafts as a sustainable cultural practice and a driver of social change.

1.5 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following key research questions:

- How do the materials and techniques involved in Goan Banjara crafts reflect principles of sustainability?
- In what ways do these craft traditions function as a form of countercultural expression for the Banjara community of Goa?
- How does the creation and sale of these crafts contribute to the social and economic empowerment of Banjara women in Goa?
- Identify Challenges and Barriers faced by the Banjara community and propose solutions for preserving and continuing the craft.

1.6 Significance and Scope of the Study

This research holds significance for multiple academic fields. It contributes to craft studies by highlighting the functional and symbolic role of embroidery beyond its aesthetic value. For sociology and gender studies, it provides a case study on how a marginalized community, particularly its women, achieves resilience and a degree of influence within mainstream society.(Sabala Organization, n.d.; Naik, 1983). The study also offers valuable insights into environmental sustainability and the broader impact of the Banjara community's aesthetic on Goa's diverse cultural landscape. It further explores the challenges faced by today's generation of the community and proposes solutions for continuing the practice of Banjara craft to reach the global audience.

Objectives of the Study

- **To Explore the relationship of Banjara craft and Sustainability**
 - Environmental sustainability
 - Economic sustainability
 - Social and Cultural aspects of sustainability
- **To Investigate the influence of Banjara craft on counterculture movement of Goa.**
 - Study types of counterculture movements.
 - Document Hippie culture movement of Goa

- Banjara craft and Hippie movement.
- **To Study Banjara women's empowerment through their craft**
 - Aspects of women's empowerment
 - Analysis of Banjara women's Economic and Social empowerment
- **To identify the challenges and barriers faced by the Banjara Community today.**
 - Challenge related to Skills and techniques
 - Social Barrier and future of the craft
 - Customers mindset as a barrier
- **To Propose solutions for the above challenges for preserving the craft**
 - From craftsman's point of view
 - From Business point of view

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

- The present research is Qualitative research with fieldwork, interviews, observations and analysis used as a method to carry out the research.
- Study site and Sample participants: This research is carried out in North Goa where the migrant Banjara community has their settlements for the last 50 years. They have migrated from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra and made Goa their home since their business is thriving due to the tourism.
- Interviews were conducted with prominent ladies of Banjara community to get the insights about their life and business of craft creation. Several field visits were also carried out to understand the craft, learn the craft and observe the different products as well as to check which are the products that are selling well with tourists and locals.

2.2 Data Collection Methods

- In depth interviews: with Banjara women artisans, and tourists were carried out to find out about the sustainability aspect, storytelling and evolution of the craft and challenges faced by the artisans.
- Observation of crafts, processes and influence of crafts on counterculture movement: The process of craft making was learnt by visiting Banjara women in their houses and stalls. Various product line was studied to understand the business prospects of each item being sold. Tourists visiting the stall were observed particularly for the influence of Banjara craft on various subcultures of Goa and were noted down for the elements observed particular to the subculture like Hippie, Ravers and so on.

- Documentation and analysis of craft materials, techniques and motifs: This was done with the help of detailed observation and demonstration from the Banjara ladies. Different techniques were learned by the researcher to get the insights into the craft. Symbolism was understood for the Motifs and different materials used like mirrors, coins and shells for embellishments on the garments through these interaction with different groups of Banjara women.
- Visual collection of data in the form of photographs for the influence on different counterculture movements observed in Goa through media and in person observations: Various tourists visiting the stalls were photographed with the garments on site to document as evidence for the analysis of the counterculture influence depicted through the attire as well as accessories.
- Collection of secondary data on sustainability, women's empowerment and counterculture movement: Secondary data was collected through various medias like the previous studies, research papers, scholarly articles and essays, documentaries, blogs, newspaper articles to get the background information of the community and their migratory patterns along with the traditional roles of this nomadic community and their craft and social relevance.

2.3 Data Analysis

- Methods for analyzing qualitative data: Thematic analysis was carried out to look for the emerging Patterns, Themes and Ideas related to the research questions of Sustainability, Women's empowerment, Counterculture movement and various challenges and Barriers observed in the process of data collection.
- Interpreting data in relation to research question: The observed themes were analyzed in-depth and recorded in the tabular format with proposed solutions to the challenges observed during the process.
- Ethical considerations: Informed consent, anonymity and respect for cultural sensitivity

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Between December 2024 and March 2025, the researcher conducted multiple field visits to North Goa's flea markets, with a particular focus on the Anjuna Wednesday Flea Market—the oldest and largest market in Goa.

Through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and photographic documentation, the study explored:

- The relationship between Banjara craft traditions and sustainability
- The cross-influence between Banjara craftsmanship and local subcultures
- The gendered nature of this craft, which is predominantly produced and sold by women
- The contemporary challenges and barriers faced by the Banjara community

The primary interactions were with two Banjara women and their families:



Figure 1: Prema

Prema, originally from Bijapur, Karnataka, has lived in Goa for approximately forty to fifty years. Although she does not know her exact age, her appearance suggests she is between 55 and 60. She resides year-round in the village of Parra. Her husband works elsewhere and does not attend the market. They have one daughter, who sells crafts on the beach at Morjim in North Goa, and three sons.



Figure 2: Sumitra

Sumitra, also from Bijapur, Karnataka, has been based in Goa for over fifty years, returning to her hometown for two months each year. She and her husband—who accompanies her to the market—live together in Parra. They have six daughters and two sons.

3.1 Finding 1: Environmental, economic and socio cultural sustainability

The practice of Banjara embroidery intersects with sustainability on three fronts—environmental, economic, and socio-cultural—and reveals both its strengths and the barriers that threaten its long-term viability.

The products analysed hereunder are: sling bags, clutches, backpacks, pouches, mini-skirts, long skirts, choli, embroidered patches, wall hanging, table runner, embroidered belts, cushion covers

Environmental Sustainability

Banjara embroidery exemplifies a true slow-fashion approach: each mirror, cowrie shell and coloured stitch is applied entirely by hand, and no mechanized needlework is used in the decorative process. Artisans frequently upcycle scrap fabrics, repurpose products or source locally woven cottons, and they rely on traditional, low-impact dyes rather than synthetic alternatives. This low-energy, near-zero-waste model reduces water pollution and carbon emissions compared to mass-produced textiles (Fletcher & Tham, 2019).

However, many finished pieces—especially bags and garments—lack proper linings or reinforced seams. Without these structural finishes, items tear or wear out more quickly, undermining their environmental credentials by shortening product lifespans (ILO, 2021).

Handmade and Slow-Made Production

The vast majority of Banjara products are slow-made, from the groove of the needle to the final knot. As Prema—one of the women artisans—explains, “all the embroidery is still entirely handmade and no machine is used. The stitching machine is only used for assembling the bags, tops and skirts” (Prema, personal communication, 2025). This division ensures decorative authenticity while accelerating basic assembly.

Economic Sustainability

On the flea-market floor, Banjara women typically price embroidered tote bags, clutches and sling-bags between ₹300 and ₹1,000, depending on stitch complexity and patches or small pouches for a few hundred rupees. Intricate embroidery garments and home-decor items can have a tag of ₹4,000–₹5,000 but often remain unsold week after week. Moreover, several Banjara garments—for example the heavily mirrored choli and the mirror-laden skirts—are not well adapted to customers’ taste and needs, undermining their economic sustainability. The skirts are heavy because of the detailed embroidery and many mirrors. This makes them difficult to wear every day. The choli also seems tight and uncomfortable. Closures are often just ropes or strings, which don’t hold well or feel secure. Because of these issues, only a few people are interested. Many pieces stay unsold for a long time. Artists then lower their prices, which takes away from the value of their hard work.

Other more modern items with beautiful intricate motifs may be let down by poor assembly, belts poorly constructed and not fitting at the waist (the closure is a simple rope which can’t maintain the belt in place), unlined bags or handles, loosely attached zippers and missing internal pockets—shortcomings that limit customers’ willingness to pay premium prices. Coupled with aggressive bargaining, profit margins shrink to just a few hundred rupees per item, raising serious questions about whether embroidery alone can sustain household incomes (ILO, 2021). As Prema and Sumitra told to the researchers, ‘Customers always bargain, it is impossible for us to sell our products at a good price. Most buyers don’t know of the tremendous work behind each piece and push to bring the price down.’

Similarly, Banjara wall hangings, cushion covers, and table runners—though crafted by hand with intricate, seemingly antique embroidery—suffer from uncertain provenance and inconsistent finishing. Artisans often claim their pieces are 50 to 100 years old, yet without records or reliable dating methods this antique character remains unverifiable. Many runners don’t have a proper lining or a neat backing, compromising durability.

Social and Cultural Sustainability

Banjara embroidery holds deep cultural meaning. Its patterns—shapes, flowers, and mirror charms—have been passed down through generations. But recent talks and workshops show a gap. Many women now know only basic stitches. They can copy simple borders but find it hard to recreate detailed designs or explain what they mean.

To sell faster, some artisans are making the patterns simpler. This saves time but loses the richness of the tradition. The craft’s depth and history are at risk.

Banjara embroidery is slow-made and eco-friendly. It keeps old skills alive and offers a better option than factory-made textiles. But there are problems. Stitching quality can be uneven. Buyers often don’t notice the value in complex designs. Many also push for lower prices.

Prices change based on size and detail, but most people avoid the expensive pieces. Bargaining is common. There are no fixed rates, and discounts vary wildly. Sometimes, the same item sells for half or even a quarter of its real worth. This hurts the artisans and makes it hard for them to earn a fair living.

To improve things, artisans need support. Training in stitching and design can help. Workshops can bring back lost symbols. Fair-trade systems can make sure they're paid for their full creative work. Without these steps, the future of Banjara embroidery remains uncertain.



Figure 3: Bags, belts – Anjuna Flea Market Jan 2025



Figure 4: Patches – Anjuna Flea Market Jan 2025



Figure 5: Banjara stalls – Anjuna Flea Market Jan 2025



Figure 6: Banjara's Jewellery – Anjuna Flea Market Jan 2025

3.2 Finding 2: Crossed Influence between Banjara Craft and North Goa Subcultures

Between the 1970s hippie influx and today's fusion-fashion travellers, Banjara artisans in North Goa have continuously adapted their traditional embroidery to meet the shifting tastes of diverse subcultures. Prema and Sumitra both sell a core range of hand-embroidered goods—shoulder bags, bucket bags with mirror-studded patches, embroidered belts, traditional tops, mini wrap-skirts, cushion covers, dupattas, shell-and-coin anklets and tribal jewellery—that have evolved in form, color and function to appeal to Neo-hippies, Indian and Western bohos, psy-trance ravers, eco-conscious buyers and fusion enthusiasts alike.

The Goa Hippie Legacy

In the early 1970s, Goa became the final stop on the “Hippie Trail,” when Western travellers settled along Anjuna and Vagator beaches in search of free-love ideals, communal living and psychedelic music.(Hippies in Goa, 2025). These pioneering hippies spawned an open-air market culture where handmade crafts and ethnic jewellery were both worn and bartered, setting the stage for a lasting artisan-subculture dialogue. The Banjara craft may have immediately appealed to them with their colours, handmade character , and to the DIY hippie culture.

Contemporary Subcultures & Aesthetic Touchpoints

- Neo-hippies & Bohemians: long-term artists and travellers in Arambol, Mandrem, and Ashvem embracing communal living, open-air gatherings, and craft markets Favor earthy tones and artisanal textures, drawn to oversized patchwork bags and tribal necklaces. They can find in the banjara bucket bags a perfect match with their taste and needs.
- Psy-trance Ravers: warehouse and beach raves around Anjuna and Vagator driving Goa’s reputation as a global party hub Seek high-contrast, reflective details—mini mirror-draped skirts, chunky coin-and-shell bracelets—for festival stages worldwide.
- Eco-friendly Travelers, yoga enthusiasts and wellness circle (retreat-goers and instructors in North Goa focusing on holistic living).Appreciate upcycled fabric bucket bags and embroidered tops that align with slow movement ethos.
- Fusion Fashion aficionados: Blend traditional Banjara motifs into modern street style silhouettes, mixing denims with mirror works top or patches.
- Artisans & Eco-Activists. Organize artisan workshops pioneering zero-waste crafts, organic farming, and community-supported markets

Product Evolution & Mutual Adoption

- Initial Roots: Banjara embroidery was traditionally used on heavy bridal ghagras, wall hangings, and ceremonial shawls. These pieces featured fourteen types of stitches, mirror work, cowrie shells, and triangular appliqué borders (Sariya, 2023).
- Early Influence and Adaptation: In the late 1990s, artisans started making lighter items like shoulder bags and belts. These were easier to carry and became popular with hippies and bohos moving between beach gatherings and flea markets.
- Party-Driven Designs: During the psy-trance wave of the 2000s, artisans responded with mini wrap-skirts and anklets decorated with coins and shells. These designs worked well under strobe lights and were comfortable enough for dancing and long nights.
- Eco-Reframing: More recently, interest from eco-conscious travellers has aligned with the Banjara tradition of reuse. Artisans have long made pouches and bags from leftover fabric, keeping their stitch vocabulary alive while cutting down on waste.

- Contemporary Fusion: Some customers still prefer the bright colours and detailed embroidery of Banjara craft, along with tribal jewellery like chunky bangles, coin rings, and decorative clips. Others, especially neo-hippie and boho buyers, are drawn to softer tones—indigo, olive, rust—and simpler metalwork. This leads some designers to adjust, using mirror-work as subtle trim and placing embroidery on Western-styles. However, this change isn't very visible. At the Anjuna flea market, Prerna and Sunita continue to use the full colour palette.

Reciprocal Cultural Influence

Just as subculture patrons adopt Banjara embroidery for its vibrant tribal authenticity, local artisans have absorbed Goan beach-culture cues—cross shoulder bags, back packs, miniskirts, belt, anklets with shells and coins —into their craft vocabulary. This bidirectional exchange ensures that Banjara work remains both distinctively nomadic and perpetually in step with the aesthetics of North Goa's ever-shifting creative communities.

In essence, the Banjara community's own ethos—rooted in nomadic wanderings, hands-on creativity and a love of bold, colourful ornament—naturally resonates with the hippies, bohos, ravers and eco-enthusiasts of North Goa. Their hands-on way of working with textiles, the bright mirror-studded patterns, and the patchwork bags and accessories connect easily with the long skirts, handmade jewellery, and open-air markets that have shaped Goa's counter-culture scenes. There's a shared sense of movement, personal expression, and craft-based authenticity that makes Banjara embroidery feel at home in these spaces. Artisans and travellers often influence each other—through conversations, exchanges, and shared experiences—keeping the creative energy alive on both sides.



Figure 7: North Goa Jan 2025 -Neo hippies, bohos



Figure 8: Anjuna Flea Market February 2025
Boho goa



**Figure 9: Anjuna Flea Market
March 2025 Hippies, back packs**



**Figure 10: North Goa – Parra- February
2025 New Indian subcultures: music enthusiasts**

3.3 Finding 3: Economic and Social Empowerment of Banjara Women through Embroidery

In Goa, Banjara embroidery continues to be practiced almost entirely by women. It usually happens in the quieter parts of the day—late afternoons, evenings, during the monsoon, or on days when the market is slow and household chores are done. Women like Prema and Sunita teach their daughters how to stitch, while Sumitra embroiders her own choli and buys fabric at ₹70–100 per metre. But fewer young women are learning. Of Sumitra’s six daughters, only one shows real interest. The same goes for Prema’s children. Many are shifting to jewellery sales instead. Men, meanwhile, tend to stay out of the embroidery work altogether.

Coins and mirrors are stitched into nearly every piece, but most women—including Prema and Sunita—see them as decorative or lucky, not symbolic. They’re added for style, not meaning. This shows how the craft has moved away from ritual and toward personal expression and income generation.

Embroidery still offers a lot. It gives women a way to earn, make creative choices, and spend time together. But the financial side is tough. Prices are unpredictable, access to fair-trade buyers is limited, and fashion markets often expect high quality without paying fairly. As profits drop, many women stop embroidering. Fewer young people learn the skills, and the tradition starts to fade.

There are some hopeful signs. Interest in handmade work is growing globally, and Goa’s “Indian Bohemian” scene has helped renew demand for bold, colourful embroidery. Online platforms like KnotMeCute now feature Banjara designs for international audiences. But it’s not clear how much of that attention turns into income. Sunita’s daughter, for example, has a smartphone but doesn’t know how to use social media to sell her work. If she had support, it could open up new possibilities.

Reading, writing and basic education make a big difference. While spending time with Prema and Sunita on the field visit, the lack of these skills showed up in every task—setting fair prices, recording sales. They were also unaware about government schemes or potential aid from NGOs. Teaching stitches alone isn't enough. There is the need to build their digital know-how and basic bookkeeping so they can compete in today's market.

In Goa, art collectives and design studios are inviting Banjara women to work on projects that blend traditional embroidery with modern art and fashion. These collaborations can shine a new light on the craft, but if they're pushed too fast or purely for profit, the original spirit of the work can be lost.

Pros and Cons

- Pros • Provides additional income • Preserves the cultural tradition • Enables collaboration
- Cons • Unstable pricing and lack of market recognition • High quality demands erode profit margins • Declining youth interest threatens knowledge transfer • Limited digital literacy and business skills restrict market reach

Balancing these factors—through fair-trade practices, skills training and respectful collaborations—will be essential to ensure Banjara embroidery remains both a source of pride and a sustainable livelihood for its women artisans.

3.4 Finding 4: Challenges and Barriers Faced by the Banjara Community in Goa

Seasonal Work and Market Dependence

Banjara artisans in Goa rely almost entirely on the October–May tourist season, selling primarily at the Anjuna Wednesday flea market. Monsoon closures force many—like Prema—to return to Bijapur for replenishment before the next season. For most families, one market day a week represents their sole source of income, and post-pandemic declines in tourism have hit sales hard. Goa's traditional neo-hippie and budget-traveler clientele now favor destinations such as Thailand and Indonesia for cheaper prices, easier visas, fewer restrictions, and better infrastructure, further reducing Banjara artisans' customer base.

Technical and Material Constraints

Artisans struggle to maintain consistent quality with limited resources. Sourcing fabrics and mirror-work supplies can be prohibitively expensive. Creating an embroidered belt—which can take days to two months—often fails to fetch its true labour value, with customers bargaining prices down from 500 INR to 200–400 INR.

Segment changes

While women proudly wear traditional Banjara costumes (choli, gagra, hamri) to signal authenticity and attract customers, many in the broader community now opt for saris instead. Younger Banjara women are increasingly drawn to jewellery sales or other trades rather than learning the time-intensive embroidery. Men remain largely uninvolved in the craft, reinforcing its status as women's work but limiting household income diversification.

Customer Mindset and Demand Shifts

Competition from mass-produced, machine-made goods mimicking Banjara motifs undercuts the market for genuine handmade items. Budget-minded travellers expect rock-bottom prices, while premium markets demand fashion-forward, high-quality artistry. Artisans cannot afford stall fees at upscale venues—like Friday night hilltop markets—where organizers favour collaboration with established designers and more polished product lines.

Institutional and Structural Hurdles

Banjara artisans in Goa receive little to no support from government schemes, NGOs, or design studios. Without links to fair-trade networks, craft-specific training, or marketing help, they struggle to streamline production, set prices that cover costs, or reach buyers beyond their own communities. Limited comfort with online tools further reduces their ability to sell through e-commerce or social media.

Environmental and Sustainability Challenges

Maintaining eco-friendly practices such as using natural dyes, upcycling scraps, or conserving water demands time, knowledge, and capital. Financial constraints force many artisans to compromise on sustainability, threatening both the environment and the cultural integrity of Banjara embroidery.

Goa's Banjara embroidery is under threat. Artisans face low seasonal incomes, material shortages, shifting customer tastes, and almost no outside support. They need practical skills workshops, fair-trade links, wider market access, and storytelling that celebrates their heritage. Only by working together can this vibrant craft survive.



Figure 11: Older Embroidered Patches



Figure 12: New Embroidered Patches



Figure 13: Prerna at her shop: Bags and Embroidered Belts



Figure 14: Belts with Mirror Work



Figure 15: Bags priced 200 INR



Figure 16: Anklets with Coins

3.5 Discussion and Findings interpretation

Findings Summary and Possible Solutions

Table 1: Finding 1: Environmental, Economic and Socio Cultural Sustainability

Dimension	Definition	Strengths	Weaknesses	Solutions
Environmental Sustainability	The use of hand-made embroidery, upcycled scrap, fabrics, patches and low-impact dyes to minimize waste and energy use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • True slow-fashion, zero-waste approach • Upcycling scrap fabrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of reinforced seams and linings shortens product lifespan • Items tear or wear out quickly, undermining eco-credentials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training in durable finishing techniques (seams, linings) • Introduce quality-control checklists • Collaborative workshops on eco-friendly reinforcement methods
Economic Sustainability	Crafting and selling embroidery products for household income, balancing price with labor intensity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides supplementary income • Highlights unique artisanal labour • Enables micro-entrepreneurship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy bargaining compresses margins • Poor assembly (missing pockets, flimsy closures) • Bulky/heavy pieces limit market appeal • Inadequate styles of tops and skirts • Inconsistent provenance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair-trade partnerships to guarantee minimum prices • Skills training in garment construction and functional design • Standardize pricing guidelines and educate buyers on labour value • Collaboration with fashion designers.

Socio-Cultural Sustainability	Transmission of traditional motifs and techniques across generations, preserving heritage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rich symbolic vocabulary Intergenerational mentoring sessions Community identity and cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decline in complex-pattern knowledge among younger artisans Simplified designs erode cultural depth Unverified “antique” claims weaken trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a motif-catalogue and digital archive Host master-artisan workshops to teach complex stitches Certification or heritage-branding to authenticate provenance
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Table 2: Finding 2: Crossed Influence Between Banjara Craft and North Goa Subcultures

Definition	Strengths	Weaknesses	Solutions
A bidirectional exchange in which Banjara artisans adapt their embroidery—forms, colours and functions—to North Goa subcultures (neo-hippies, bohos, psy-trance ravers, eco-travellers), while absorbing beach-culture motifs and silhouettes into their craft vocabulary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appeal to the diverse subcultures present in Goa Drives product innovation and diversification Expands artisan reach to global travellers Fosters ongoing creative dialogue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demand tied to transient trends, leading to sales volatility Risk of diluting traditional authenticity Inconsistent quality control under price pressure Decrease of tourism after pandemic Various style not well adapted to customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define a core “heritage” collection to preserve authenticity Collaboration with fashion designers Train artisans in quality-assured adaptations Diversify sales channels to include stable retail and fair-trade partnerships

Table 3: Finding 3: Economic and Social Empowerment of Banjara Women through Embroidery

Definition	Strengths	Weaknesses	Solutions
The role of hand-embroidered Banjara textiles as a predominantly women-led craft that provides income, creative expression and social cohesion, yet faces barriers in market access, pricing and skill transmission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grants financial agency and supplementary income Fosters creative autonomy Builds social bonds through group stitching Preserves cultural heritage through intergenerational mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inconsistent pricing and aggressive bargaining compress margins Limited access to fair-trade and premium markets High quality standards erode profitability Declining youth interest in embroidery Digital and business skills gaps hinder market reach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish fair-trade partnerships and minimum price guarantees Offer digital-literacy and social-media marketing workshops Provide business-management and record-keeping training Create youth engagement programs (design competitions, mentorship) Develop quality-control protocols and design masterclasses Promotion of Ethical Tourism: Encouraging tourists to support local artisans can boost demand for authentic crafts

Table 4: Finding 4: Challenges and Barriers Faced by the Banjara Community in Goa. Seasonal Work and Market Dependence

Definition	Strengths	Weaknesses	Solutions
A complex set of seasonal, material, socio-cultural, market and institutional barriers that undermine income stability, product quality and sustainable practices for Banjara artisans in Goa.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep-rooted artisanal skills • Eco-friendly, slow-fashion ethos • Strong cultural identity and community networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income tied to October–May tourist season, high off-season vulnerability • Expensive, inconsistent supply of fabrics and mirror-work • Customer bargaining and mass-produced imitations devalue craft • Limited digital literacy and no institutional support • Limited general primary education and alphabetisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop off-season sales channels (online platforms, local retail partnerships) • Create material-purchasing cooperatives to lower input costs • Offer bundled training in advanced construction, business management and digital marketing • Forge fair-trade linkages and heritage-branding campaigns • Advocate for targeted grants, NGO partnerships and government schemes to support sustainable production • Ensure primary education

Potential Solutions

- Teach basic finishing: linings, strong seams, sturdy closures, and simple quality checks.
- Offer digital and business training: social media posts, online selling, pricing, and basic record-keeping.
- Build fair-trade links: guaranteed minimum prices, ethical-tourism ties, and off-season shops or online outlets.
- Form cooperatives for eco materials: buy local cotton, natural dyes, mirror bits, and recycled fabrics in bulk.
- Host design meet-ups: pair artisans with modern designers to mix traditional stitches and new shapes.
- Create an online archive and brand: record patterns, confirm authenticity, and sell heritage alongside trend-led lines.
- Engage youth with mentorships, design contests, and master workshops to pass on stitch skills.
- Boost ethical tourism: run craft tours, pop-up stalls at retreats, and festival booths highlighting real Banjara work.
- Run public campaigns to show that handmade Banjara embroidery is true art.

4. CONCLUSION

Mutual Influence

Banjara embroidery in Goa blends a centuries-old nomadic art with Goa's vibrant subcultures. The work appears in neo-hippie gatherings, boho markets, raves, eco-travel events, and fusion-fashion shows. This combination keeps the craft fresh and anchored in Goa's free spirit.

However, the Banjara artisan faces many challenges. Their income varies with tourist seasons and parties. Machine-made imitations and bargaining drive prices down. Many artisans lack digital literacy and new businesses education. Declining heritage teaching erodes the craft's depth.

Practical workshops, fair-trade partnerships, and material cooperatives can boost quality and stabilize earnings. Digital marketing and business training help artisans set fair prices and sell year-round. Collaborative design experiences can merge traditional stitches with modern silhouettes. An online archive can catalogue motifs and prove authenticity.

Youth programs, ethical-tourism events, and awareness campaigns will highlight Banjara embroidery as a living cultural practice. Coordinated support in skills, markets, design, and heritage preservation can secure steady income, cultural pride, and ongoing creative renewal.

Over decades, Banjara embroidery in Goa has been shaped by a two-way exchange. Nomadic craft meets local subcultures—neo-hippies, bohos, psy-trance ravers, eco-travelers and fusion-fashion fans. The artisans' mirrors, shells and bright threads draw these groups in. In turn, their taste for bags, clothes and jewelry inspires new boho pieces, festival wear and home décor. This exchange keeps the craft fresh and rooted in Goa's free spirit.

These shifts also bring real challenges. Many Banjara artisans rely on tourists and party people for most of their sales. Their earnings climb when visitors come, then fall off sharply in the off-season. The customers often push for steep discounts, and cheap machine-made imitations undercut prices. When popular tourist spots move on, makers can lose their main markets. At the same time, limited computer skills, scarce business training, and fewer chances to learn original stitch patterns from elders all weaken the craft's richness.

Addressing these issues means pairing respect for traditional techniques with hands-on help. Practical classes on sturdy seams, neat linings, and secure closures can raise product quality. Fair-trade agreements and buying cooperatives for eco-friendly supplies can keep prices stable. Simple courses in online selling and basic bookkeeping can guide artisans in setting fair rates and reaching buyers year-round. Workshops that bring stitchers together with contemporary designers can spark fresh ideas while preserving core stitches. A straightforward online archive of patterns and a heritage-label scheme can record key motifs, prove authenticity, and hold a core collection even as new styles emerge.

Youth programs, ethical-tourism events and public outreach can highlight Banjara embroidery as both a way to earn and a living tradition. By linking skill building, market access, design innovation and heritage preservation, this craft can stay a source of pride, steady income and creative renewal—reflecting the nomadic spirit that has always driven it.

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