

MARWAR

PEOPLE CULTURE LIFESTYLE



GRIT ACROSS GENERATIONS THE JAINS OF INOX

**THE FLAVOUR OF
SUCCESS**

SHANTANU KEJRIWAL

**ACROSS THE TRADE ROUTES
OF RAJASTHAN**

DR ABHIMANYU SINGH ARHA

**ON MARWARI
SUCCESSION**

VANDANA SHROFF

TRAILBLAZERS: RICHA AGARWAL, ANUP & SMRITI BOHRA, DR ALKA RAGHUVANSHI, AVNI JHUNJHNUWALA

CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

A more liberal outlook towards education and globalisation has triggered a transformation in Marwari society in recent times. **MARWAR** spoke to entrepreneurs and a professional from the community to find that conservatism is a thing of the past and that both the older and younger generations today are quite receptive to cross-cultural influences, be it in business or lifestyle.

Compiled by * Crystal D'sa



SHIVANI KHETAN

Founder & Managing Director, People Solutions

The new generation Marwari has a global outlook owing to the unitary family system and exposure brought about by the worldwide media boom. Today, Marwari girls are encouraged to pursue higher education and are often sent abroad for the same. Working Marwari wives are quite common nowadays as well. Wired for hard work genetically, Marwaris have imbibed the global culture too. Cross-cultural marriage is no more a taboo with most Marwari families, especially in urban areas. They may appear to have abandoned traditional values, but those that are relevant in the contemporary world are still embedded in all Marwaris who are adaptive, pragmatic and progressive!



NIKHIL AGARWAL

Sommelier & Director, All Things Nice

To be honest, I haven't grown up in the most traditional of Marwari households. In our family, as long as you live life intelligently and aren't reckless, your choices are respected. Yes, my mother doesn't eat non-vegetarian food but that doesn't restrict me. With drinks too, if one is responsible, how does it matter? I think we need to lift the veil. Tons of Marwaris are part of the All Things Nice member base who enjoy wine and food from the world over. In fact, some of our biggest clients are Marwari business houses. I believe the younger generations are independent and smart enough to take their own decisions, whether it is about their diet or career choices.



ATHANG JAIN

Management Trainee, Jain Irrigation Systems Ltd.

International commerce, mass media and connectivity have exposed us to cultures that are very different from ours. Change in cultures is similar to the concept of evolution inasmuch that traits which are no longer necessary for survival eventually phase out. The only way to know which change to welcome is to be open about ideas and discuss them. The choice of a vegetarian diet by most traditional Marwaris has its origins in the principle of non-violence. It is not just an irrational blanket ban on meat. Certain other customs like sati have been abolished. Instead of blatantly opposing or accepting something as gospel truth, we must debate the reasons behind them.

THE TIMELESS TURBAN

If there is one aspect about a traditional Marwari attire that arrests immediate attention, it is the turban. Vibrant, colourful and structured, they come in as many styles and types as one can perhaps imagine, variously symbolising a man's honour and dignity, heralding his identity, status and roots, or even marking a season or occasion. **MARWAR** unravels the many shades and hues of the timeless pagri.

Text ✨ JOSEPH ROZARIO

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URBANS, POPULARLY KNOWN AS pagris, are an essential feature of traditional Indian attires. They cut across geographic, social, ethnic and religious barriers, and have been an indispensable part of Indian tradition since time immemorial. There is more to turbans than meets the eye, especially in Marwar, or for that matter, Rajasthan at large, where they weave a multi-hued saga of honour, prestige, tradition, ethnicity and festivity.

Facing page: Painting showing olden-style shop and pagri-clad shopkeeper with prospective customers



Mark of dignity

Apart from offering shelter from the elements—especially in the Thar where the blazing sun and biting cold nights merit wearing protective headgear—the pagri transcends its protective role. The colour, design and style of the turban says much about the wearer's identity and background as regards his occupation, community, social status and land of origin—sometimes even making a verbal introduction unnecessary. Iconic agriculturist and agronomist, Bhavarlal Jain of Jain Irrigation, whose penchant for wearing a pagri is well-known, offered us a glimpse of Marwaris' fascination for the pagri during a recent interaction: "The fact that Marwaris have had a great fascination for wearing pagris or *petas* is well-known. *Petas* in those days were taken to be a symbol of prestige, power and position. They also offered a manly look to the person wearing it, and we continue to wear them even today on special occasions and ceremonies."

But most importantly, as with so many other Indian ethnicities, a Marwari's pagri or *peta* symbolises his honour and dignity which explains the royal patronage they have received down the ages. Rajasthani folklore is rife with instances where a vanquished prince or chieftain had placed his pagri at the feet of the victor. Laying one's pagri at someone's feet would then seem as the ultimate sign of submission. It actually is. But what once used to be a mark of royalty has percolated down to wider sections of society over time and today they are worn by all and sundry. A corroboration of this can be found in the rest of Rajasthan too, where they find universal appeal today, adorning the heads of both monarchs as well as the least of their subjects. Voluminous, colourful and imposing, pagris are worn with the same fervour even today by those in the rural regions. And, of course, we have the Sikhs, for whom wearing a turban is de rigueur.

An ancient tradition

Turbans in India actually date back to the Vedas where references of men wearing head wraps are not uncommon. The headgear worn during those ancient times constituted cloth worn around the head by the upper strata of society, especially the royalty, and during religious ceremonies. Later known as the *usnisa*, one such headgear can be seen

adorning Gautama Buddha's head.

Millenia later, turbans have neither lost their significance nor charm. Marwaris' love for the turban in fact is so intense that wherever their ancestors went in their quest for a better life, this was the one thing that they never left behind.

From the pages of history

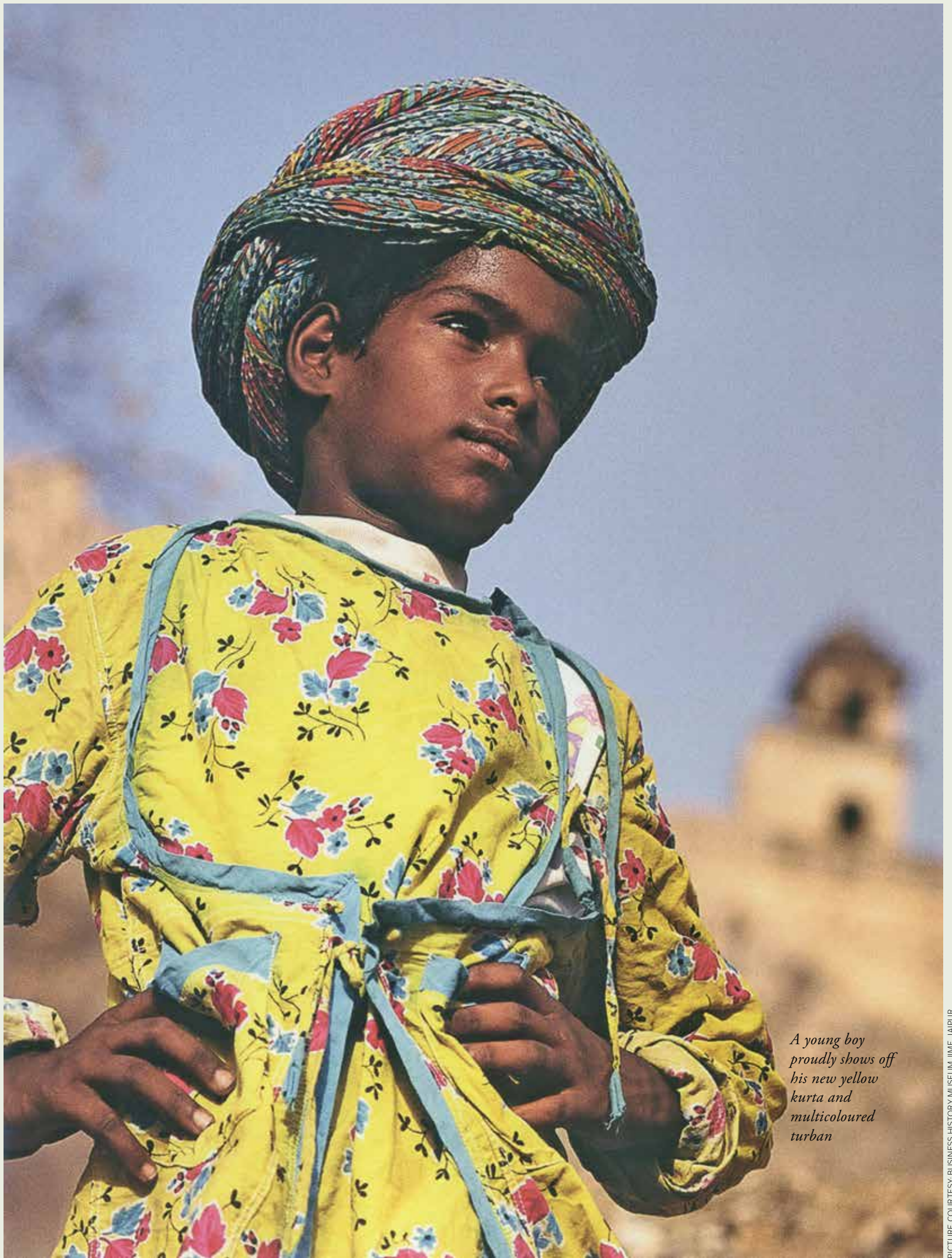
Calcutta (now Kolkata) was among the very first places that saw an influx of peregrinating Marwaris. As emigrant tradesmen, mostly from the Shekhawati region—who according to native Bengalis were from "Maru Desh" (land of the desert)—they stood out so prominently from the rest of the populace with their outlandish attires that they came to be referred to as *pugridhari Marwaris*



The colour, design and style of the turban says much about the wearer's identity and background as regards his occupation, community, social status and land of origin ...

(Top) Bhavarlal Jain wearing a chunri pagri; (below) a man tying a pagri





*A young boy
proudly shows off
his new yellow
kurta and
multicoloured
turban*

*L-R: Rai Bahadur Multani
Mal Modi; Ghanshyamdas of
Tarachand Ghanshyamdas*

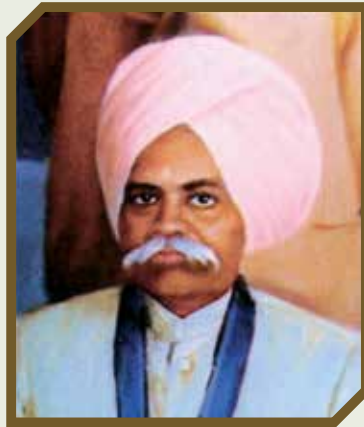
(Marwaris who wore turbans). With time, they amassed wealth and prospered and their traditional attires changed, but the pagri continued to find favour as a much-cherished remnant of their proud heritage. One of the most enduring symbols of this new breed of prosperous Marwaris and their quintessential pagris is perhaps Rai Bahadur Multani Mal Modi (1875–1957), the patriarch of the Modi business empire. There are others too, of course. Going back to the nineteenth century, we find a more modest version adorning the great Ghanshyamdas of the legendary firm Tarachand Ghanshyamdas, which is said to have contributed enormously to laying the foundations of Marwari enterprise in Kolkata. In sharp contrast, ex-mayor of Kolkata, Anandilal Poddar's (1914–1961) pagri, we find, lacks the usual fanfare of the majority of Marwari turbans.

Varied and multi-hued

While the ubiquitous pagri no doubt formed a crucial part of the ensembles of all ethnic denominations once upon a time, very few have evolved as much as those worn by Marwaris (especially *safas* which are shorter than pagris). Given that the arid, barren regions of Rajasthan hardly lent any colour to the landscape, Marwaris' affinity for vibrant colours is understandable. Their thirst for colours manifests in the myriad

Marwaris' love for the turban in fact is so intense that wherever their ancestors went in their quest for a better life, this was the one thing that they never left behind.

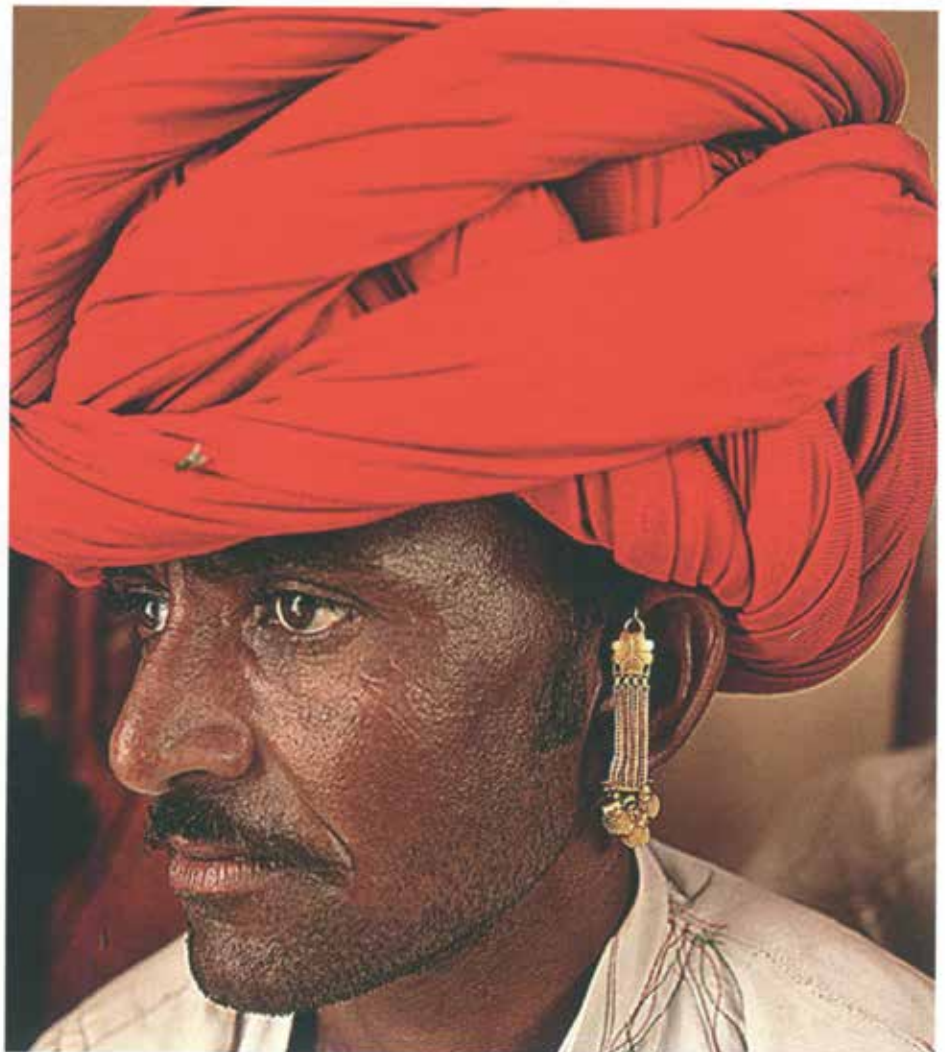
Man sporting a red pagri, usually worn during special occasions



PICTURE COURTESY: ANJU PODDAR



PICTURE COURTESY: ROHIT PODDAR



PICTURE COURTESY: BUSINESS HISTORY MUSEUM, IIM, JAIPUR



PICTURE COURTESY: RAVI PODDAR



PICTURE COURTESY: NEELIMA DALMIA ADHAR

*L-R: Anandilal Poddar;
Rama Krishna Dalmia
Below: Seth Govindramji
Seksaria; G D Birla*



PICTURE COURTESY: RAJKUMAR SEKSARIA



PICTURE COURTESY: AMAN NATH AND FRANCIS WACZIARG

While the ubiquitous pagri no doubt formed a crucial part of the ensembles of all ethnic denominations once upon a time, very few have evolved as much as those worn by Marwaris ...

shades, designs and sizes of their pagris and *safas* that range from large elaborate flamboyant reds and magentas to saffrons, greens, blues and yellows to modestly sized ochres. Then there are *chunri safas* and those produced by the tie-dye method of printing such as the striped multicoloured ones called *leheriyas*. There are in fact hundreds of types of pagris and *safas* and almost as many styles of wearing them! Indicative of the wearer's status, they also vary according to the season and occasion and go by regional names such as *potia*, *peta* or *pag*. Essentially a long piece of unstitched cloth that varies from rich brocaded varieties intended for more affluent wearers to more mundane ones worn by farmers, tying the pagri requires remarkable dexterity to ensure that the pleats, the tail or *poonch* and the characteristic tilt are all intact.

Undying appeal

However, tying pagris seem to be a dying art, as becomes evident from the plethora of ready-made ones that are available in the market today. Visually grand though they may be, claiming a fair share of today's wedding turban market, they lack the appeal of the original, hand-tied variety. It's not unusual either to see top notch, safari-clad Marwaris sporting spectacular *safas* even today at important occasions. They may have come a long way from their desert mode of life, conquering almost every peak of India's corporate space and adopting dramatically changed lifestyles, but many treasured remnants of their past remain, and the pagri is one of them. ✨



PICTURE COURTESY: ANJU PODDAR

Ram Coowarji Bangur