Bandhani is a tie-dye technique practiced in Gujarat and Rajasthan with Kutch being best-known as the center of its production. Experts believe the technique was brought to Kutch by Khatri craftsmen from Sindh, probably in the 16th century. Traditionally Khatris made bandhani only for themselves but today, women of all castes and religions wear bandhani for auspicious occasions such as marriage and men wear bandhani turbans. Bandhani has a robust, wide-ranging market and provides income for women with limited mobility, so it continues being passed down, artisan to artisan.

The Khatris use gaji (satin), habotai (silk weave), tassar (wild silk), and maheshwari fabric (silk warp/cotton weave). First, the fabric is folded in half and bast-ed together. A pattern is then created and stenciled onto the fabric using butter paper or a string dipped in red mud. The fabric is given to a tie artist who ties small knots along the patterns using fine cotton string. The fabric is then dyed. If there are two colours, the pattern is tied again after the first dye, and then dyed again.

“I think anything can be done in bandhani,” says Adil, who creates his designs along with his wife, Zakiya. Both artists learned their crafts from family members whose knowledge was passed down over generations. “We Khatris are dyers,” points out Adil. “Traditionally we all did block printing, batik, and bandhani—three forms of resist dyeing. Taking these as bases, we add new ideas to take our art forward.” Studying design and business at Somaiya Kala Vidya, a school for artisans in Kutch, encouraged the pair to strive for unique innovations in their art. The Khatris’ works have been recognized with the Gujarat State Award for Craft Excellence, the Crafts Council of India Kamala Award for Young Artisans, and a World Crafts Council Seal of Excellence.