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A PIONEER IN PROMOTING TODA EMBROIDERY

JULY 24, 2022

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Image: Toda embroidery. Image courtesy of [**Anuradha Halan**](#)

“Evam Piljen Wiedemann was a mother-figure for many Toda women. She encouraged them to embroider textiles for sale at a time when they embroidered shawls for themselves and family members”, says [**Anuradha Halan**](#), a young woman who continues Evam’s endeavours from the Wiedemann family home in Ooty, in the Nilgiri Mountains, Tamil Nadu state, South India.

Evam belonged to the Toda community native to the forested Nilgiri Mountains that are part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. The traditional attire of the Todas features striking shawls of a white ground embroidered with bands of motifs inspired by nature. Of the shawls, the large, densely embroidered Puthukuli is worn during rituals and ceremonies.

Toda embroidery is worked from the reverse, by the counting of the yarns of fabric weave, with black

and red thread; white represents purity, red youth, and black wisdom. The neatness of the work makes the textile reversible: the main face has a heavier look and the reverse a lighter look.



Image: Toda embroidery. Image courtesy of [Anuradha Halan](#)

“Evam’s father converted to Christianity when he was young. She did an MSc in Nursing from CMC, Vellore, and went to London to work in the early 1950s. Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru met her at a program on International Nurses Day in 1953 and mentioned to her to return to India to work for the welfare of the Toda community”, says Anuradha.

Evam resigned her job and returned to the Nilgiris. With a mobile medical van she reached out to different tribes, and learnt more about the beliefs, rituals and ceremonies of the Todas. Having studied and worked, she realized the importance of women earning a livelihood while working from home. She encouraged Toda women to embroider shawls and non-traditional textiles such as runners for sale.

Evam married Claus Wiedemann, a German agronomist. The couple settled in a charming cottage in Ooty and worked for the welfare of indigenous communities. There are beautiful old Toda embroideries at their home. Evam passed away in 2012 at the age of 89. Anuradha continues to work with the Toda community and sources a variety of embroidered textiles including shawls, runners, bags and cushion covers. These may be purchased by visitors at their home and are also sent by courier.

Blog courtesy of Brinda Gill



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Hallo

Evam Wiedemann war die Ehefrau meines Onkels Claus Wiedemann. Ich würde so gern Kontakt mit Onkel Claus haben.

Würde ihm gern berichten dass ich 3 Kinder habe, welche schon 36,34 und 22 sind und dass ich 2 Enkelkinder habe . Nochmal danke dass man Ihnen schreiben kann. Liebe Grüße Maresa Wiedemann

MARESA WIEDEMANN • FEBRUARY 27, 2024

The Nation is proud of dedicated persons like Evam, Weidemann and Anuradha. Their selfless lives are an inspiration to every person involved in building this great Bharath.

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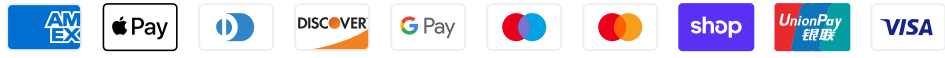
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