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Trip For Two



Neeta Deshpande of Banjaras talks about the launch of her line of stoles and dupattas at a boutique in Paris

crafted saris, stoles and *dupattas*. "Each one is hand block printed, handwoven or hand painted. It's art on cloth," says Deshpande, who has travelled to villages across the country to work with artisans and weavers. "We work with weavers and printers based in 11 Indian states, from Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu to Orissa, West Bengal, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Ikat, block prints, Maheshwari and other Indian weaves define Banjaras," she says. If her silk is sourced from Assam, she gets it printed in Bhuj; if she sources tissue from Maheshwar, she gets Kantha work done on it. Urban Masala in Paris has bought a range of these handcrafted stoles and *dupattas* from Banjaras over the last two years. This

made a couple of purchases but this association is in too nascent a stage to talk about. Another artist from Belgium has sourced a lot of our *dupattas* which, apart from being worn, are used as wall hangings, sofa throws, runners on tables and so on," Deshpande reveals.

She has even made a short film - 'The Karavan's Path' which traces her travels to remote parts of the country, her interactions with weavers and the tough conditions under which the artisans work. "I have had no formal training for this industry. Whatever I have learnt is through the weavers. Even when I travel to their villages, I stay in their homes," she reveals. Ask her about her next journey, and she says, "We have been invited for the summer market in Chatillon."

NUPUR CHAUDHURI

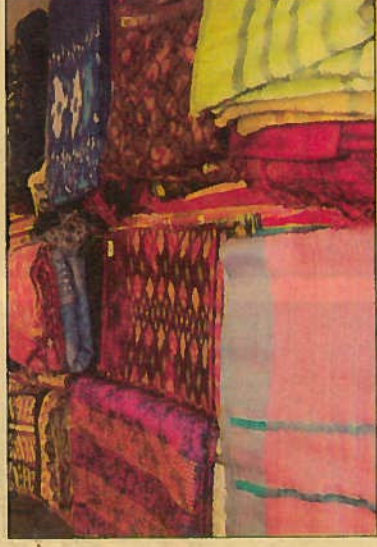
THE temperatures dropped below two degrees. Yet, the Christmas spirit prevailed at the Bazaar at the small town of Chatillon, France. One among the many vibrant counters was by Pune's Banjaras (Aundh). Over a hot cup of *masala chai*, Neeta Deshpande, owner and wardrobe consultant of Banjaras, displayed pouches, wallets, folders and stoles at the market. "We make these knick-knacks out of every piece of fabric that's left, the last

thorn. We have a group of rural women who work on these. The articles even occupy a little corner of our store here," says Deshpande. Her main purpose of visiting France was to launch Banjaras' line of stoles and *dupattas* at Urban Masala, a store in Central Paris.

"While there, we were invited by the Deputy Mayor of Chatillon, Isabelle Robineau, to display our drapes and gift articles at their annual Christmas bazaar," she says. Banjaras, which turns 20 in June, has a niche clientele for its hand-

range will now sell in the store under the Banjaras tag.

This is not the first time that the store has stepped outside India. "In 2011, a weaver based in the US visited our store and then covered us in the Fibre Arts magazine, US. A store in Germany has also



The collection of stoles; (top) Deshpande with visitors at the Bazaar in Chatillon