

STYLING MY HANDLOOM

Reimagining Indian Heritage



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REIMAGINING INDIAN HERITAGE



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Concept and Design by
National Institute of Fashion Technology, Mumbai
www.nift.ac.in

Concept and Styling
Ms. Neena Lokare,
Assistant Professor, Fashion Design Department, NIFT Mumbai

Layout Design
Ms. Shankhalina Choudhury,
Assistant Professor, Fashion Design Department, NIFT Mumbai

Shoot Direction
Ms. Dipti Bhole

Content Editor
Ms. Santarpana Choudhury

Contributing Authors in Alphabetical Order

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 01. Ms. Anjali Bhatnagar | 09. Ms. Pavithra Muddaya |
| 02. Dr. Anjali Karolia | 10. Mr. Ramesh Vanjre |
| 03. Shri. A. Ayaz | 11. Mr. Sandeep Kidile |
| 04. Ms. Bhamini Subraminiam Ayyar | 12. Ms. Savitha Suri |
| 05. Ms. Bina Rao | 13. Ms. Shalinidevi Holkar |
| 06. Ms. Geeta Patil | 14. Ms. Veena Upadhyay |
| 07. Ms. Pankaja Sethi | 15. Mr. Vinay Narkar |
| 08. Mr. Paresh Patel | |

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संदेश

कॉफी-टेबल बुक-"स्टाइलिंग माई हैंडलूम-रीइमैजिनिंग इंडियन हेरिटेज" की आगामी रिलीज पर मैं अपना हार्दिक अभिनंदन एवं शुभकामनाएँ प्रेषित करता हूँ। भारत की अद्वितीय हस्तकला विरासत को सम्मानित करने का यह अनूठा प्रयास इस बात का प्रमाण भी है कि हमारा राष्ट्र परंपरागत शिल्पकला को समकालीन सन्दर्भ से संरक्षित एवं प्रोत्साहित करने के लिए प्रतिबद्ध है।

हैंडलूम केवल वस्त्र ही नहीं हैं, बल्कि ये समुदायों, विरासत और दृढ़ता की कहानियों का प्रतिबिंब भी हैं। इस शानदार प्रकाशन के माध्यम से, हथकरघा विकास आयुक्त कार्यालय तथा नेशनल इंस्टिट्यूट ऑफ़ फैशन टेक्नोलॉजी ने हाथ से बुने गए वस्त्रों और बुनकरों की आजीविका का समर्थन करने के प्रति अपनी प्रतिबद्धता को दोहराया है। यह पुस्तक एक कहानी कहती है जिसमें पारंपरिक और आधुनिक हैंडलूम साड़ियों दोनों का विस्तार से विश्लेषण करते हुए ऐतिहासिक पहचान का आधुनिक डिजाइन के साथ सहजता से मिलन कराया गया है।

मैं हथकरघा विकास कार्यालय की टीम को उनके निपट मुंबई के माध्यम से किए गए असाधारण प्रयासों के लिए हार्दिक शुभकामनाएँ देना चाहता हूँ। यह पहल, जिसमें कारीगर समुदायों के साथ अटूट संवाद और ड्रेस स्टाइलिंग के नवीन दृष्टिकोणों को अपनाया गया है, अपनी आने वाली पीढ़ियों के लिए स्थायी प्रेरणा स्रोत साबित होगी।

मुझे पूर्ण विश्वास है कि यह कॉफी टेबल बुक इतनी सराहना प्राप्त करेगी कि यह न केवल पारंपरिक हथकरघा शिल्प को नई ऊर्जा देगा, बल्कि युवा पीढ़ी, डिज़ाइनर्स, और संस्कृति प्रेमियों को अपनी राष्ट्रीय विरासत पर गर्व करने के लिए प्रेरित करेगी। मैं इस अपेक्षा के साथ की सस्टेनेबल फैशन को और ज्यादा बढ़ावा देने में अपना योगदान प्रदान करते हुए इस क्षेत्र में स्थायी प्रभाव उत्पन्न करेगा, इस प्रयास की प्रशंसा करता हूँ।

(गिरिराज सिंह)

Shri. Giriraj Singh
Minister of Textiles
Government of India



MESSAGE

It gives me immense pleasure to learn that the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms, in collaboration with the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), has launched the coffee-table book ***“Styling My Handloom- Reimagining Indian Heritage”***. This remarkable publication reflects the vitality of India’s handloom tradition and its continued relevance in the contemporary fashion landscape.

The book stands as a compelling documentation of India’s diverse weaving traditions, reinterpreted through creative draping techniques that bring a fresh perspective to our rich textile heritage. The imaginative styling and evocative visual storytelling breathes new life into age-old crafts, presenting them in ways that are both contemporary and culturally rooted.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to all those involved in this significant endeavour. I am confident that this work will inspire readers to rediscover and appreciate handloom as a meaningful expression of our cultural identity and a conscious choice towards sustainable living.

Shri. Pabitra Margherita
Minister of State for External
Affairs and Textiles
Government of India



MESSAGE

The publication “Styling My Handloom – Reimagining Indian Heritage” is a timely and commendable contribution to India’s ongoing handloom movement. It blends heritage with innovation, tradition with contemporary styling, and artistry with education.

The support from the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms and the National Institute of Fashion Technology has been instrumental in making this initiative a reality. The book not only showcases the visual splendor of Indian handlooms but also educates readers on the nuances of regional weaves, traditional drapes, and the cultural significance attached to each textile.

I deeply appreciate the tireless efforts of the creation team. The book has immense potential to make a meaningful impact on the global fashion industry. It is unique in its presentation of sari draping, intertwining rich handloom traditions, contemporary fashion, and the way forward.

I am confident that this book will contribute meaningfully to our efforts of positioning India as a leader in sustainable and culturally rooted fashion.

Smt. Neelam Shami Rao, IAS
Secretary,
Ministry of Textiles,
Government of India



MESSAGE

It is with immense pride and satisfaction that I present my appreciation for the coffee-table book “Styling My Handloom – Reimagining Indian Heritage.” The handloom sector, rooted in sustainability, heritage, and artisan livelihoods, is beautifully celebrated in this publication.

The National Institute of Fashion Technology’s contribution to the research, styling, and documentation of this book reflects its commitment to academic and cultural excellence. Their continued partnership with the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms in promoting and preserving India’s textile wealth deserves special mention.

Ms. Neena Lokare’s work as the author is particularly noteworthy. Through innovative styling, academic insight, and deep cultural engagement, she has elevated the story of each handloom sari into a compelling visual and textual experience. Her social media advocacy and research-driven styling have carved a niche that is both inspiring and impactful.

This book will serve not only as a visual treat but also as a call to action—to value, support, and celebrate the weavers of India.

Dr. M. Beena, IAS
Development Commissioner
(Handlooms),
Ministry of Textiles,
Government of India

Location: Weavers Service Centre, Mumbai



Location: Weavers Service Centre, Mumbai

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Dr. Sharmila J. Dua has shaped design education in India for over three decades, including 33 years at NIFT where she served as Dean (Academics) and led its largest curriculum transformation across 10+ programs. She spearheaded national initiatives like IndiaSize, Visionxt, NIFT's Incubator, the Centre of Excellence for Khadi and led the Ministry of Textiles' project of setting up Design Resource Centres. Her PhD traced the evolution of Ajrakh textile motifs from the 11th century, which not only contributes to academic discourse but has also been instrumental in developing curriculum modules that integrate traditional craft knowledge into modern design education. Her ongoing work spans advising, consulting, research, and mentoring—bridging academia, industry, and policy to strengthen India's fashion & textile ecosystem which is culturally rooted and globally relevant.

Dr. Sharmila Dua is wearing a Benaras brocade sari. This sari is a cherished family heirloom, part of her mother's wedding trousseau, and holds within its threads the memory of a bygone era. Woven nearly seventy years ago on a traditional handloom, it features the exquisite jala technique, once mastered by the renowned naqshabandhas of Benaras. This laborious technique—now lost to the brocade weavers of today—involved creating intricate design frameworks by hand, enabling unparalleled precision and complexity. The sari is crafted in pure silk interwoven with fine silver threads, forming an intricate overall jaal (patterned grid) that leaves only glimpses of silk peeking through. The result is a breathtakingly exquisite textile that appears less like fabric and more like molten silver in motion, shimmering with timeless elegance and craftsmanship rarely witnessed in contemporary weaving.

FOREWORD

India's handloom tradition is not merely a textile legacy - it is a living, breathing expression of the country's history, identity, and artistry. Woven into every thread are stories of communities, regions, resilience, and remarkable craftsmanship that span generations. In the rich tapestry of Indian handlooms, the sari stands as an eternal symbol of grace, elegance, and tradition. Yet, as trends evolve and time moves forward, many of these timeless pieces - especially those that have been passed down through generations - often find themselves relegated to the back of the wardrobe, their beauty buried under layers of dust. These textiles, though once the crown jewels of a family's heritage, begin to fade into the background of modern life.

This book is a celebration of the forgotten textile, the languishing piece that has long been overlooked but still holds within it stories of love, heritage, and craftsmanship. It is a reminder that even in our rapidly changing world, there is room for the old and the new to coexist harmoniously. Through the pages of this book, the sari reclaims its place - not only as a symbol of tradition but as a canvas for creativity and individuality. It presents not just fabric, but memory and meaning - the essence of people and a place.

The juxtaposition of traditional drapes and contemporary interpretations worn by eminent personalities offers a visual dialogue between past and present, tradition and innovation. Styling these textiles in a contemporary context, with innovative twists, allows them to reclaim their purpose, adding new life and relevance to these textiles. Whether you are reviving a treasured family heirloom, a vintage silk, or an exquisitely handwoven cotton, the beauty of this quintessential drape lies not just in its fabric but in the way it makes you feel - connected to your roots, yet free to express your unique style.

Equally compelling are the personal stories of those featured in these pages - individuals whose lives and work reflect an unwavering commitment to preserving and promoting India's handloom legacy. Their voices lend authenticity, emotion, and purpose to the fabric they wear and support. Through a rich historical narrative, fifteen iconic handloom textiles have been explored and featured, each rooted deeply in its cultural and regional identity. The book guides you through that journey, offering creative ideas, practical styling tips, and a fresh perspective on how to embrace the sari in modern times.

At the heart of this incredible venture is Neena Lokare - a passionate advocate, creative storyteller, and devoted supporter of the weaving community. With an eye for detail and a heart committed to tradition, Neena has brought together history, artistry, and personal narratives to craft a visual and cultural journey unlike any other. Through her extensive engagement with artisans across the country, she has not only highlighted the richness of regional crafts but also helped sustain the communities that preserve them. On social media, Neena has become a powerful voice for handloom, known for her innovative sari drapes that beautifully blend classic elegance with contemporary style. This coffee-table book is a reflection of her vision - one that honours the past, celebrates the present, and looks ahead to a future where the sari continues to thrive as both art and identity.

May these pages inspire you to see beyond the weave- to the hands that craft, the heritage that sustains, and the future we must collectively preserve.

- Dr. Sharmila Jayant Dua
Ex- Dean, NIFT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This book, *Styling My Handloom: Reimagining Indian Heritage*, is not just a collection of visuals and essays; it is a tapestry woven with support, guidance, trust, and shared passion. As I look back on the journey of putting together this coffee table book, my heart is filled with immense gratitude to those who made this dream a tangible reality.

My foremost and sincere thanks to Dr. M. Beena, Development Commissioner (Handlooms), Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, for her invaluable support and for entrusting me with this creative responsibility. I also extend my heartfelt appreciation to the Office of the DC Handlooms, particularly to Shri Ashok Kumar Verma, Deputy Director, for his faith in my vision and the consistent encouragement that helped shape this book.

A special note of gratitude to Ms. Tanu Kashyap, Director General, NIFT, whose inspiring leadership has strengthened my conviction in preserving and celebrating our handloom heritage.

Embarking on an unfamiliar path can often feel daunting—but it becomes far less so when someone walks beside you, pointing out the hurdles ahead and showing you how to navigate them with confidence. Thank you, Prof. Dr. Sudha Dhingra, Dean (Academics), NIFT, for being that reassuring presence and for guiding me every step of the way.

For every person to grow, the right guidance is essential. We all need that one person who becomes our guiding star illuminating the path. For me, that guiding star has been Ex-Dean Dr. Sharmila Dua. Her unwavering support, insightful mentorship, and constant encouragement made this book a reality. Without her, this journey would have remained incomplete.

This project would not have been possible without the cooperation and support of Mr. Khushal Jangid, Director, NIFT Mumbai, who stood by me throughout the process. Your encouragement gave me the confidence to pursue this vision relentlessly.

The soul of a coffee table book lies in its visuals, and this one owes its essence to the direction and aesthetic eye of my little sister and talented photographer, Ms. Dipti Bhole. Her ability to understand, interpret, and translate my vision into powerful frames has elevated the book to another level.

We all need that one person who holds the fort behind the scenes, who understands the silences and stands strong when the winds get tough. For me, that steadfast source of support has been Ms. Shankhalina Choudhury. Her resilience and creative inputs kept the momentum going, even during the most testing times. I will always hold deep gratitude for her.

To all the Authors, I offer my warmest thanks. Each chapter is a vital thread that gives strength and substance to this book. When I met each one of you, I was struck by a profound similarity: your deep love for Indian handlooms. Your enthusiasm, commitment, and spirited participation, even during photo shoots and conceptual discussions, have truly made this book a shared labour of love. You are visionaries, and I have learned immensely from each of you.

A sincere gratitude to all the faculty and staff at NIFT Mumbai for being so supportive throughout. A big shout-out to Dr. Kundlata Mishra for her decision making qualities and forward-thinking attitude, which helped me making vital choices.

Last but not least, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Anjali Karolia and Dr. Rugmai Venkatadri for generously giving their time to review this book. Your involvement reflects not just your scholarly excellence, but the grace and humility with which you carry it. Thank you both for believing in this work, and for being true examples of what it means to lead with both intellect and heart.

PREFACE

The Indian handloom is more than just a piece of fabric; it is a living canvas of heritage, identity, strength, and everlasting art. Every thread has a tale to tell, and every textile has a legacy that is both personal and passionately national. As a stylist and researcher at the National Institute of Fashion Technology in Mumbai, I have frequently worked with handlooms. It often crosses my mind: how can we get these beautiful heirlooms into the wardrobes and dreams of the next generation? This question led to the creation of ‘*Styling My Handloom: Reimagining Indian Heritage*’.

There are more than 136 known handloom clusters in our country, each with its own weaving style, pattern vocabulary, dyeing procedure, and regional character. Every weave is a consequence of years of hard work and cultural exchange. From the intricate Jamdanis of Bengal to the bold Ikats of Odisha, the regal Kanjeevarams from Tamil Nadu to the subtle Maheshwaris of Madhya Pradesh, and the bright Paithanis from Maharashtra, all are a testimony to India’s diverse handloom heritage.

But in the age of rapid fashion, many of these handwoven wonders are either forgotten or only used for special occasions. As a stylist who likes modern fashion and is equally passionate about heritage textiles, the thought that there has to be a way of wearing tradition without feeling like you have to, kept reverberating in my head.

This book is a mix of memories and modernity, of design and documentation. At its core are fifteen amazing revivalists- academicians, weavers, entrepreneurs, cultural custodians, and government officials, each promoting a textile from a different part of India. Their work is based not only on rebirth, but also on making sure that their craft is economically viable, helps the community, and stays relevant.

Each chapter comes straight from a revivalist’s desk. More than a collection of saris, this book is a reflection of these individual journeys. This book is thus a collection of impassioned voices, speaking from these varied experiences. To add to these stories, my team and I travelled all over India to visit each revivalist and learn about their journey. The revivalists were photographed alongside their selected textile to pay homage to their craft.

I believe in the power of visual narrative, thus I have reinvented each sari in a modern setting. The styling in this book is a love letter to adaptability. It shows how to mix and match conventional drapes to make fluid designs that will appeal to younger generations. It is also a silent protest against the idea that saris are hard to wear, old-fashioned, or just for special occasions.

Curating this book has been a transformational journey for me. Learning from these revivalists has made me even more appreciative of the heritage Indian textile.

For me, styling these saris has been a wonderful way to show respect. It was fun to find out how draping might show power, independence, playfulness, and elegance, all while being rooted in tradition. I didn’t want to change the sari into something new by taking away its meaning. I wanted to convey that tradition can transform without losing its core. In ‘*Styling My Handloom- Reimagining Indian Heritage*’, you’ll find a story with many layers. Not only is it a coffee-table book, but it is also an opportunity to learn about other cultures. To everyone who reads this book, I hope that these pages provide you a sense of connection, curiosity, and creative boldness, whether you are a designer, student, policy maker, fashion lover, or handloom connoisseur.

— Neena Lokare, Assistant Professor at NIFT Mumbai, Stylist, Author, and Handloom Advocate

ABOUT CURATOR

Neena Lokare is wearing a Bichitrapuri sari from Odisha. There are three borders on this sari: one on each side and one in the middle. The rest of the region between the three borders is covered by the *saktapar* checkerboard design, which is made by double ikat. The bichitrapuri pallu is woven with supplementary weft weave patterns. It is one of the oldest design elements of the *bandha* saris from Odisha. It has repeated patterns of fish, lotus flowers, elephants, deer, and other animals.

Ms. Neena Lokare

Location: National Institute of Fashion Technology,
Mumbai

With more than 20 years of teaching experience, Neena Lokare is an academician, designer, and textile enthusiast. She is currently employed as an Assistant Professor at the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), Mumbai. Neena holds a postgraduate degree in fashion management and a fashion design degree from NIFT Mumbai, and is working toward a PhD in Indian textiles with an emphasis on the connections between tradition, sustainability, and modern expression. On social media, Neena is well-known as 'Naari in a Saari' where she displays her distinctive sari styling in contemporary, wearable formats. Her work effectively combines modern aesthetics with traditional craft knowledge to promote India's rich textile heritage to younger, international audiences. One drape at a time, she hopes to weave stories, identities, and opportunities into India's handloom legacy, making it not only relevant but also inspiring for the next generations.



INTRODUCTION

India's heritage is not just carved in stone or written in scriptures. It is also spun, dyed, and woven into cloth. Our textiles are living documents of culture, identity, memory, and pride - wrapped around generations in the form of saris, turbans, dupattas, and *angavastrams*. From mythology to monarchy, from trade routes to temple rituals, textiles have always been present - often silently witnessing the making of Indian civilisation. To understand Indian textiles is to understand India. Each region, each community, each time period has given birth to its own unique weaving traditions. These textiles are more than aesthetic expressions. They are narratives of geography, community livelihoods, natural resources, rituals, and royal patronage. They carry within them the stories of people- their beliefs, their struggles, their art.

Textile traditions in India go back over 5,000 years. The earliest evidence of fine woven cloth was discovered at Mohenjo-daro, where archaeologists unearthed spindle whorls and dyed fabrics. Later, Buddhist sculptures at Sanchi and Amaravati depicted finely pleated garments and patterned textiles worn by monks and royalty. By the Gupta era, textile production had become a highly developed art, with mention of "Kasikas" (fine cottons from Varanasi) and "Chinapatta" (silk from China). However, it was during the medieval and early modern periods that textile production reached its zenith, thanks to royal patronage. The Mughal emperors were connoisseurs of luxury, and their courts became centres of textile innovation - from the famed muslins of Dhaka, fine Jamdani weaves, brocades of Benaras, to the Kalamkari from Golconda. Many princely states continued this tradition.

So, what does it mean when we say a textile is "languishing"? Languishing is not just the absence of demand; it is the erosion of memory, meaning, and market. A weave goes into languish when its economic value declines, when its motifs are forgotten, when younger generations stop weaving it, and when consumers move toward trend-driven, industrially-produced garments. Revival, then, becomes resistance. It is revivalists - like the ones featured in this book - who recognise the cultural, historical, and aesthetic value of a textile and take deliberate steps to bring it back. Sometimes that means revisiting old looms and decoding forgotten techniques. Sometimes it means training new weavers, creating markets, building fashion relevance, or making a traditional weave more wearable for the modern customer. More than a reproduction, a revival is a reawakening. The story of revival begins where the story of neglect takes root. As machine-made fabrics flooded the markets in the 20th century, many handloom traditions began to disappear. The looms fell silent, the weavers migrated to other professions, and the collective memory of a textile tradition began to fade.

Revivalists are the guardians of these endangered legacies. From the resurrection of Chanderi by master weavers and designers, to the reemergence of Patteda Anchu from Karnataka, or the Gollabhama saris of Telangana - each revival is a tale of resilience, research, and respect for tradition. In every revival, there is a deep commitment to sustainability - not just of the cloth, but of the communities that make them.

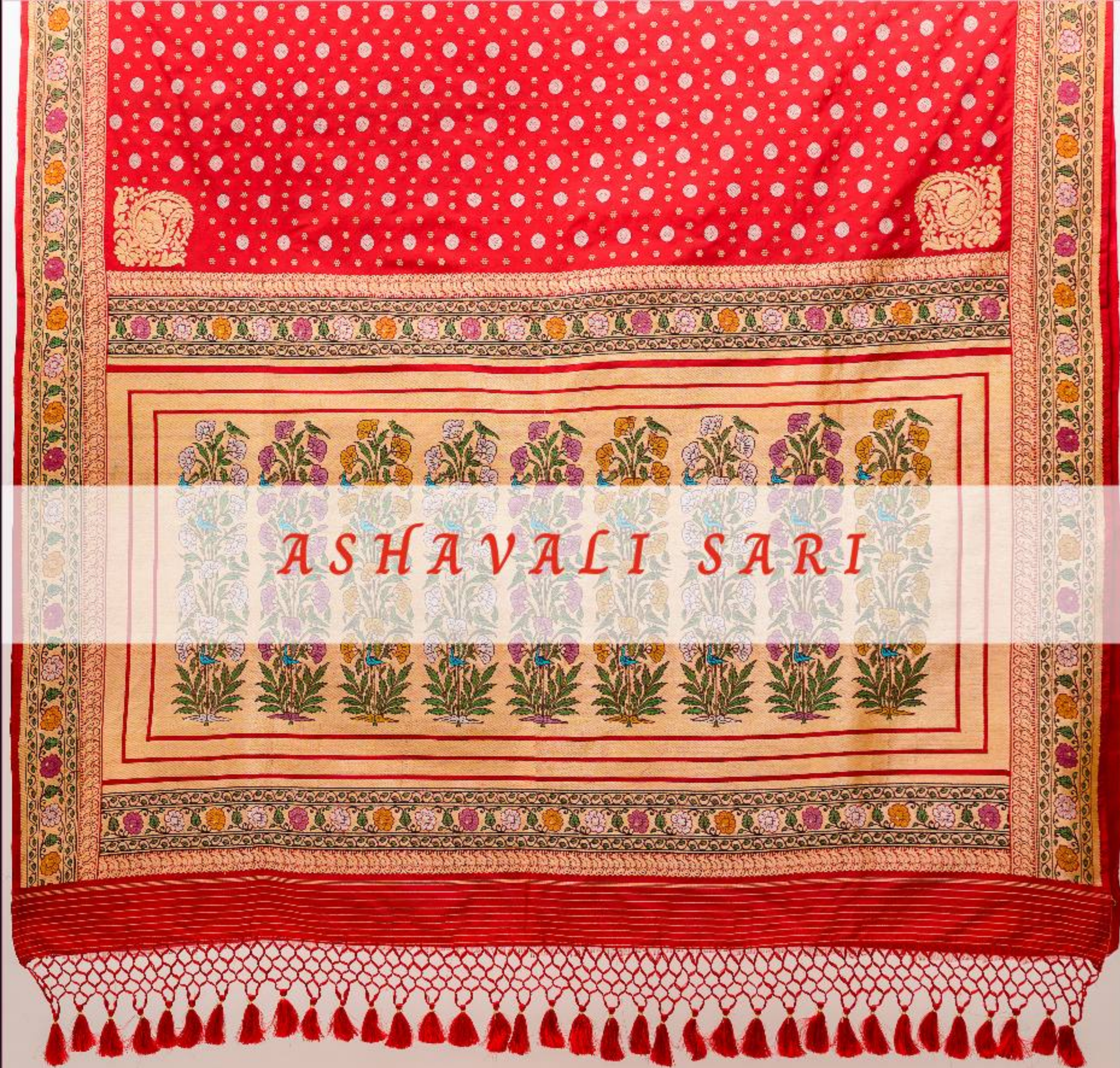
Handlooms are expressions of identity, slow fashion, and cultural memory. When we wear or support them, we are not just consuming fashion; we are sustaining livelihoods, empowering rural artisans, preserving eco-friendly practices, and keeping India's textile grammar alive. They are our pride because they are unique, rooted, and

irreplaceable. In a world of mass-produced fashion, they stand out as pieces of art and integrity. To purchase a handloom product is not charity; it is cultural investment. To flaunt a revival weave is not elitism; it is education. We must inspire the younger generations to see handlooms not as their grandmother's choice but as a statement of rooted modernity. Platforms like Instagram, Pinterest, and fashion reels must become tools of education and pride. A Kanjeevaram can be paired with a hoodie. A Jamdani can be worn with boots. But what matters is that the weave lives on, proudly, visibly. Cinema and Cultural Memory Popular media has an undeniable influence on perception. International shows like The Crown, Bridgerton, and The Royals have reignited interest in vintage fashion and monarchy aesthetics. Similarly, Indian cinema has created some landmark moments for handlooms. Films like Sujata, Charulata, and Pakeezah visually celebrated the Indian textiles in its diverse forms. But it is the offbeat cinema that has really dug into the weaver's world. Sui Dhaga showed the strength of self-reliance. Malleshham paid tribute to a real-life innovator from Telangana who revolutionised the weaving process for Pochampally ikat. Susman, a powerful film by Shyam Benegal, portrayed the socio-political challenges faced by weavers. These are more than stories - they are social commentaries. They reflect how hard a weaver's life is. How fragile the ecosystem is. And how urgent the need is for us to value the human story behind the fabric.

I often ask the weavers I meet - "What will your children do when they grow up?" Their answers hurt. "*Kuch bhi karenge, lekin weaving nahi* (anything but weaving)," they say. And why wouldn't they? When a parent weaves a sari over 15 days, only to earn Rs. 800 or less, what future can they imagine for their children? As citizens, designers, consumers, and storytellers - this should disturb us. If we don't create economic and cultural value around weaving, these ancient crafts will become extinct - not because of lack of talent, but due to apathy. This is the gap we need to fill. Through policy, awareness, pricing, education, and recognition. A weaver should not be seen as a relic of the past but as a creative entrepreneur of the future.

We, as citizens, have a role. A textile you wear, a gift you choose, a reel you post - all of it becomes advocacy. Awareness begins with affection. Textiles of India need not just admiration, but active support. Let this book be a starting point. Let each story, each chapter, each image in this book be a reason for you to think about what you wear, who makes it, and why it matters. Handloom is not just India's past. It is its pride, its possibility, and its poetic future. Let us normalise traditional textiles in workplaces, colleges, parties, and airports. Let us inspire influencers, stylists, and fashion schools to use Indian textiles not as ethnic props but as mainstream material. And perhaps, with the right stories, styles, and sentiments, we will not just revive handlooms - we will reimagine them.







Mr. Paresh Vishnubhai Patel

Location: Own Studio, Ahmedabad



Paresh Vishnubhai Patel is a third-generation handloom weaver from Gujarat, passionately reviving the centuries-old tradition of Ashavali brocades. In an era dominated by power-looms and fast fashion, he continues his grandfather's legacy by weaving intricate brocades on traditional pit-looms. Through his brand, Royal Brocades, Paresh focuses on sustainable textile development using eco-friendly natural dyes and authentic handloom techniques. His work reflects a deep respect for heritage, ethics, and craftsmanship. The brand creates festive silk saris, odhanis, men's wear, and wall pieces- each a blend of tradition and innovation. One of its standout creations is the natural-dyed single ikat sari with Ashavali zari borders, showcasing collaboration across artisan communities. Committed to purity and environmental consciousness, Royal Brocades stands as a beacon for mindful fashion. Paresh's mission is not just to preserve a craft, but to offer textiles that endure in both quality and cultural memory.



ASHAVALI SARIS: THE GLORIOUS LEGACY OF GUJARAT'S EXQUISITE BROCADE

THE GLORIOUS PAST

The origin of brocade weaving in Ashaval, Gujarat is not known because of the dearth of literature and evidence. However, Habib & H (2012) have documented in the Atlas of Ancient Indian History that the woven cloth was manufactured near the Gulf of Khambat during BCE 410 - CE 130. Also, literature suggests that silk weaving was predominantly done in the western region of India during CE 1-300, while cotton weaving was practised in other parts of the Indian subcontinent. The silk weavers of Gujrat have found mention in the writings of scholars like Abul Fazal, traveller Sir Thomas Herbert and others for their fine quality. Gujarat's silk weaving was renowned not only in India, but even in other parts of the world like Iran, Turan (parts of Central Asia), Egypt and Syria. The work of weaving, dyeing, washing, calendaring, etc. was done so well in Ahmedabad that the same could not be replicated elsewhere. Silk brocades of Ahmedabad, woven with real gold and silver zari, were sold in Bombay, Kathiawar, Central India, Rajputana, Nagpur and the Nizam's Dominions. Tin and electroplated zari were also used in some brocades.

The characteristic of an Ashavali sari is that it is woven in twill weave. A 1/7 twill is used in the brocade twill construction. Borders with outlines and motifs of flora and fauna are woven using this technique. Animal figures like peacocks and parrots with multi-colour *meena* in borders and an elaborate *pallu* comprise a signature ashavali weave.

Historically, Ashavali brocades have been used in various forms. Following is a summary of the same:

- Mughal *Patka* (waistband): The *patka* was a long strip of textile, woven and worn widely during the Mughal period. These waistbands with end panels woven on both the edges had 5-6 traditional floral *buta* woven in the panels. During the Mughal era, the royalty wore this brocaded sash across the waist. These Mughal *patka* were perhaps woven on the Indian draw looms in the royal workshops at Ahmedabad. These sashes were up to 4 metres long and could measure between 48 and 62 cm in width. These were narrower when compared to the 114-119 cm width of the Ashavali saris, but had similar motifs, construction techniques and layouts. Master weavers of Ashaval wove with metallic yarns the striking patterns like stylised paisleys, floral borders and creeping vines.
- Pichhwai: Pichhwai is the large cloth that is hung behind the idol of Shri Nathji at Nathdwara and other temples of the Pushti Marg sect, a Vaishnav tradition followed by many prominent families of the merchant community. The literal meaning of the word Pichhwai is 'at the back'. This backdrop depicts various expressions, moods of the day, spirit of the seasons and themes of festivals revolving around the life of Lord Krishna. For instance, a

Pichhwai depicting lotus ponds and shady groves of mythical Vrindavan was used during the summer season. Nowadays, Pichhwai is famous as a painting, but in ancient times, the weavers at Ashaval wove it for the religious sect of Pushti Marg. In Pichhwai, motifs comprising human, animal, birds and objects of worship were woven in blue, red and green colours. The face, feet and hands of Srinathji were woven with gold and silver metallic yarns.

- *Toran*: Decorative woven brocades were hung at the entrance of the home. The *toran* was woven with traditional motifs of *hansa* (swan) with a string of pearls in its beak, Lord Krishna playing the flute, creepers and floral *buti*. Apart from these motifs, the *toran* was adorned with a metallic border.
- *Kinkhab*: *Kinkhab* is the brocade in which the motifs were woven with gold or silver yarn as an extra weft to create a design and lustre on the fabric surface. The silk base is hardly visible on the surface. *Kinkhab* was traditionally woven on drawlooms using the *jala* system, with metallic yarns as extra weft running continuous from selvedge to selvedge on the silk warp and weft base. In 1851, Sheth Maganlal Karamchand wrote, "In the whole of Hindustan, the *kinkhab* of Ahmedabad and of Kashi are praised, and *kinkhab* of an equal quality is made nowhere else. However, it is said that the Ahmedabadi *kinkhab* is better than the Kashi one in terms of colour, sheen, fabric and patterns. It is also said that in comparison to the *kinkhab* of other places, this *kinkhab* is more durable and does not lose even a little colour or lustre for a long time. The fabric is so good in terms of aesthetics, that it is popular as the fabric with flowers of gold. The inlay work on Ahmedabadi *kinkhab* is also way better than that of Kashi." It is believed that the reason for the lustre on this *kinkhab* was due to the water used for washing the fabrics. This special water was obtained from the wells located near Kankariya Lake. The *kinkhab* was sent from Ahmedabad to various parts of India and abroad till the year 1851. In India it was sent to Bombay, Vadodara, Poona, Gwalior, Rajputana, Mewar, Sindh, etc. It was also exported to foreign countries like Afghanistan, Arabia, Iran and China. The *kinkhab* was woven in yardages to be cut and stitched into different garments. The royalty and members of the court generally wore exclusive garments made of *kinkhab*. The male members of the royal family wore *choga*, *achkan* and *sherwani* whereas the females wore *chaniya-choli* with *odhani*.

A special *kinkhab* ranging between 22 to 27 inches in width, was made in Ashaval exclusively for the Saurashtra market. This fabric would then be sewn to make the front of blouses. Other varieties like a 27 * 27 inch square, and four *gaj* long *kinkhab* fabrics were also woven that could be used for constructing garments. Canopies and saddlecloths were also developed from *kinkhab*.

PROCESS OF MAKING ASHAVALI BROCADES

Developing Ashavali brocades is an intricate process. It requires fine skill and excellent craftsmanship. There are several stages of work involved in pre-weaving, weaving and post-weaving tasks. Raw materials need to be processed as per the requirement of the weave. Pit looms are used for weaving these exquisite textiles.

- Warp and Weft: Ashavali saris are made in mulberry



A typical parrot motif used in an Ashavali brocade

silk which is procured from Bangalore. 2-ply silk of 18/20, 20/22 denier is used for the warp and three strands of 2-ply yarns are twisted to create a 6-ply weft of 20/22, 28/32 denier. Traditionally, untwisted silk yarn was used for weaving these saris and other Ashavali brocades.

- Extra-Weft: Both silk and metallic yarns are used as extra weft. *Kasab* is the local name of the metallic yarn (zari) that is used for weaving these brocades. *Kasab* has a cotton or silk core depending on the requirement of the design or quality of the fabric to be woven. The size of the *kasab* depends on the count of the core. Both silver and gold *kasab* have been used traditionally to weave these brocades. The making of *kasab* is also an elaborate process.



Use of *kasab* in an Ashavali sari

REASONS FOR DECLINE

The period from 1980 to 1990 was a very difficult time for Ashavali saris. The demand had fallen drastically, and it became extremely challenging for the weaving community to sell their work. Typically, a weaver family would weave Ashavali saris at home and try to sell them in the Manek Chowk market of Ahmedabad. They had to take a bus to the city, but connectivity was limited at that time. Moreover, due to falling demand, there was no guarantee of sales, even after making the commute. Going all the way there and returning without selling a sari would result in huge losses for the weaver.

Often, the weavers were forced to sell their saris at a discount because the *seths* (shopkeepers) would keep them waiting till late evening, taking advantage of their desperation. This lack of fair pricing and dignity for their craft was one of the major reasons for the decline of the Ashavali brocade.

Weaving an Ashavali brocade required not just skill, but was also a significant financial investment. To start weaving, the weaver first had to get a *jala* or punch card prepared - a process that involved hiring a *naksabandh* (pattern designer), who charged for each new design. This meant that weavers had to produce multiple saris in the same design to make it financially viable. But customers were not interested in buying the same design repeatedly, which made the entire process expensive and unsustainable. Gradually, from 1995 to 2000, most villages gave up weaving altogether. It was during this challenging time that my grandfather and father made a critical decision that helped change our course. We began taking direct orders from customers, understanding their preferences, and weaving saris tailored to their needs. This strategy worked. Slowly, we rebuilt trust among consumers, and demand for the sari grew. As a result, we could establish our studio. In spite of our efforts, even today, Ashavali brocade is considered a languishing craft of Gujarat, as this fabric is woven in only one village, Ridrol.

PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

I have been associated with our weaving unit since birth as our home was the studio. After completing my high school education, I travelled across India to deepen my understanding of this craft. I visited brocade weaving clusters in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh to gain firsthand experience and insight into different weaving traditions. I also explored various handicraft and handloom hubs within Gujarat to understand new interventions being applied in weaving, dyeing, and printing techniques.

Today, I work as a weaver-entrepreneur in our studio situated in Ridrol, named Royal Brocades. It was established with a vision of building a branded organisation rooted in sustainability. We began training weavers in natural dyeing, reviving a nearly forgotten skill, and undertook several initiatives to expand and strengthen the unit.

To add variety to the Ashavali saris, we began collaborating with artisans across India. So far, we have collaborated with craftspeople specialising in Patola, Ajrakh, and single Ikat in Gujarat and Hyderabad. These collaborations have given rise to saris with contemporary bodies paired with traditional Ashavali *pallus*. This approach has helped reconnect with long-time clients who already owned classic Ashavali saris and were seeking something new.

We also developed a series of Ikat-Ashavali saris in partnership with Thai weavers. Another important collaboration has been with artisans in Japan to revive brocade traditions for the historic Nara temples, as well as to develop indigo-dyed denim in silk.

To connect with the younger generation who often shy away from the bright, flamboyant colours of traditional Ashavalis, we introduced a new colour palette using natural dyes. These pastel-toned Ashavali saris with minimalistic patterns have been well received by modern audiences.

Another significant move was product diversification. We began producing naturally dyed stoles, dupattas, and wall panels to meet the tastes and needs of a wider audience. Collaborations with designers and industry stakeholders also led to the development of a series of indigo wall panels, a few of which are now part of the indigo collection at The Kasturbhai Lalbhai Museum in Ahmedabad.

We continue to actively engage the public through indigo dyeing workshops held in Ridrol and Dubai, welcoming both Indian and international visitors. Recently, we have showcased Ashavali saris at exhibitions and events in France, Japan, Thailand, Malaysia, Dubai, and Melbourne, Australia - each event a step forward in our mission to keep this glorious tradition alive and evolving.





Contemporary Look with an Ashavali Sari



Contemporary Look with an Ashavali Sari



BAIGA SARI



Shri. A. Ayaz

Location: Bilasa Handloom, Raipur



Shri. A Ayaz is currently posted as the Joint Director of Handloom under Chhattisgarh Village Industries Department. He was appointed as the Assistant Director Handloom (Administration) by Madhya Pradesh Public Service Commission in 1994. After the formation of the new Chhattisgarh state in the year 2000, Chhattisgarh State Handloom Development and Marketing Co-operative Federation was formed to provide employment to the weavers of Chhattisgarh. Shri. Ayaz was one of the founder members of the Federation and served as the General Manager. During his tenure, he initiated a large production programme to provide employment to the weavers of the state and played an important role in implementing the Government Textile Supply scheme. At present, about 47,700 residents of the state are getting year-round employment through the handloom weaving initiatives of the department.



THE BAIGA SARI OF CHHATTISGARH: WOVEN BY EARTH AND SPIRIT

The Baiga tribe of Chhattisgarh is one of numerous indigenous groups that make up India's rich cultural tapestry. They are known for their spiritual worldview, forest-based lifestyle and unique textile legacy. The traditional Baiga sari is central to the identity of Baiga women. It is not only utilitarian, but has deep cultural significance. Handwoven in coarse cotton and adorned with symbolic patterns, the Baiga sari is an enduring emblem of a community that lives in intimate harmony with nature and myth.

THE BAIGA TRIBE: PROTECTORS OF THE FOREST

The Baiga are native to the Kabirdham, Bilaspur, Korea, Rajnandgaon, Mungeli and Gorela-Pendra-Marwahi districts of Chhattisgarh. The Government of India has recognised them as one of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). According to the 2011 Census, there are 89,744 Baiga people living in the state. They mostly live in hilly and forested areas, where they prefer secluded hamlets over village settlements. These residential clusters are known as *Baigapara*. They reside in mud houses surrounded by thorny twigs and wooden fences called *Bari*. Baigas have always been shifting cultivators and forest dwellers who live on minor forest produce, subsistence farming, and limited animal husbandry. This close relationship with the land and their environment is reflected in their worldview, lifestyle, and material culture, including their textiles.

THE STORY OF NAGA BAIGA: MYTHIC ORIGINS

Baiga folklore is steeped in cosmological narratives. One such origin myth speaks of Naga Baiga, a manifestation of Lord Shiva, who meditated in a primordial world filled entirely with water. When a crab, bearing mud in its claws, was disturbed by a vulture, a clump of that mud fell before Naga Baiga. He used his divine powers to mix it with water and spread it out, making the surface of the earth. By means of his spiritual powers, Naga Baiga made the first person and equipped him with a bull, a *kudali* (hoe), and a *gaiti* (pickaxe) to earn his livelihood. These kids of Naga Baiga grew up to be the Baigas, who would live as forest farmers and protectors of nature.

This origin tale highlights the tribe's deep spiritual linkage to the elements of nature - earth, water, animals, and tools of sustenance. Their clothing, especially the Baiga sari, is seen as part of this sacred ecosystem.

THE BAIGA SARI: FORM, FUNCTION AND IDENTITY

Baiga women wear the Baiga sari, which is also known as *Chakhana-Mungi* as a cultural marker and an everyday outfit. These saris are characterised by their coarse cotton texture, rich red base, and minimalistic, yet symbolic patterns. A Baiga sari is approximately 7.5 metres long and 37 inches wide. Due to the nature of their livelihood, this sari's narrow width makes it ideal for the traditional knee-length drape of the tribe. It has a unique design as it has endpieces on both the ends.

The preferred base colour is deep red, symbolising fertility, strength, and connection to the earth. Patterns are rendered in white, yellow, grey, and black threads, applied with precision in geometric and linear forms. The motifs are not merely decorative; they often reflect tribal beliefs, natural elements, and daily activities.

What sets the Baiga sari apart is its functionality. The coarse 10s count cotton yarn makes it strong and heavy (up to 1600 grams), making it ideal for the physically demanding work Baiga women undertake. Women tie one end of the sari around their waist or use it to carry infants on their backs when they harvest forest products or work on farms. This shows the garment's versatility in daily use.

TECHNIQUES AND TRADITIONS OF WEAVING

The Baiga saris are not woven by Baiga women themselves. Instead, experienced handloom weavers from nearby communities, especially the Panika and Dewangan castes, who are famed for their textile skills, do. They procure the required yarn for weaving from the local market. These craftsmen are an important part of the rural economy and generally work out of modest home-based units with traditional pit looms.

The weaving process is meticulous and entirely non-mechanised. For warp preparation, artisans use the ground warping technique, stretching threads up to sixteen metres manually. The traditional Baiga sari is prepared from 100 percent cotton thread of 10s count. The same type of 10s cotton yarn is used in the warp and weft.

A wooden slab is employed to create designs - a technique known locally as *khapa* weaving. Coloured yarns that are used for the weft are spun using a charkha and wound into the bobbin. These coloured yarns of the weft are woven into the warp using the bobbins by manually lifting the warp using the wooden slabs. The number of shuttles used corresponds to the number of colours in the design, which can be highly labour-intensive. The handloom width for traditional weaving is fifty inches, and designs are manually lifted by pick-up methods, requiring great skill and patience. There is a sacred geometry to these textiles - not just in visual design but in the harmony of hand, eye, and tool.

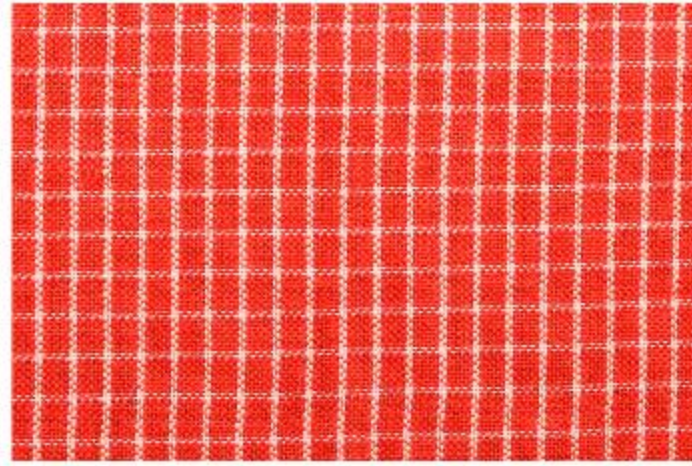


Woven patterns made in *khapa* technique

DESIGN LANGUAGE: SUBTLE POWER

Baiga saris are marked by their strength, symmetry, and subtlety. Their power lies in their simplicity, unlike other elaborate Indian weaves. The sari worn by the women of the Baiga tribe have a designed *pallu* of about one metre each at both ends. A plain red band usually makes up the border of the sari. Yarns in colours like white, yellow, black and gray are used in the weft for making the *khapa* stripes. The sari has a woven chequered pattern over the entire body. Mostly the base colour is red and the patterns are worked out using a white coloured yarns. Apart from the red saris, the women also wear saris in off-white and grey colours.

Although only geometric motifs are used in the saris, they reflect natural forms- leaves, insects, or tools - interpreted through tribal visual vocabulary. The design reflects a sense of restraint and continuity, as if each sari is a piece of cloth that tells a story in the language of the forest.



The signature chequered body of the sari

A CHANGE TOWARDS REVIVAL AND MARKET INTEGRATION

In the past, these saris were made with coarse 10s count cotton yarn, which made them heavy and rough to the touch. However, with changing times and evolving markets, interventions have been made to preserve the traditional motifs while enhancing wearability.

The Chhattisgarh State Handloom Development and Marketing Co-operative Federation, in collaboration with various co-operative associations, has been instrumental in reviving these designs. The Federation procured the traditional Baiga sari worn by the women of the tribe from the weekly market held in the villages of Kabirdham and Bilaspur districts of Chhattisgarh for analysing the design language in order to revive the craft while maintaining its authenticity.

The Federation sourced 2/80 finer count cotton yarn and gave it to the weavers. This has reduced the sari weight to about 700 grams, while retaining the originality of patterns. This adaptation has made the sari more appealing to urban consumers, enabling artisans to connect with new markets without diluting their craft ethos. These exquisite handloom saris produced by the state weavers working with different co-operatives are sold through Bilasa Handloom Emporium. Variants like dupattas and stoles featuring Baiga motifs have also been introduced. Weekly haat bazaars in rural Kabirdham and Bilaspur remain primary points of sale for the traditional saris, keeping the rural economy and tribal livelihood cycles intact.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT BODIES

The transformation and preservation of Baiga saris have been made possible by a network of 327 weavers' co-operative societies under the state federation, employing over 47,700 artisans. These bodies supply raw materials

like cotton, polyester, and tussar silk and help in capacity building and marketing. For many families in remote districts, weaving these saris remains a vital source of livelihood, passed down through generations.

This system ensures that while the sari continues to evolve, its production remains community-based, ethical, and craft-rooted.

BEYOND FABRIC: THE BAIGA SARI AS RESISTANCE AND REPRESENTATION

In recent years, the Baiga sari has transcended its utilitarian origins to become a symbol of identity and cultural resilience. In an era where indigenous communities face displacement, marginalization, and ecological upheaval, the sari becomes a narrative of survival. It is a reminder that craft can embody dignity, tradition, and voice - all while sustaining economies.

Moreover, when worn outside the Baiga community - in cities, fashion events, or cultural exhibitions - it invites viewers to engage with the story behind the weave. It challenges mainstream perceptions of luxury and tradition, placing tribal craftsmanship at the center of India's textile story.

CONCLUSION

The Baiga sari is not merely a textile, it is a living archive of tribal memory, resistance, and rootedness. From the meditative soil of Naga Baiga's creation tale to the rhythmic hands of weavers crafting designs without machines, each sari holds within it the wisdom of forests, the weight of heritage, and the simplicity of need.

In a world seeking sustainability, authenticity, and meaning, the Baiga sari offers all three- spun with purpose, woven with soul, and worn with pride.





Contemporary Look with a Baiga Sari



Contemporary Look with a Baiga Sari





Ms. Veena Upadhyay

Location: Author's Residence, Patna



Veena Upadhyay began her career in corporate marketing with leading firms like Indian Express, Trikaya Grey, and Reckitt & Coleman. In 2006, driven by a passion for grassroots change, she shifted focus to rural Bihar, working with UNICEF and UNDP on sanitation and healthcare. Witnessing the challenges faced by marginalised women, she launched initiatives promoting literacy and dignified livelihoods. Co-founding Srijani under Sulabh International, she revived Bihar's traditional crafts and showcased them at venues like Kala Ghoda and Dastkar. In 2014, she led the revival of handloom weaving in Siwan's Jamalhata village, later founding Bun.Kar Bihar, which now supports over 150 weaver families and 500 artisans. Recognised nationally and internationally, Veena's mission blends heritage revival with women's empowerment-proving that crafts can be catalysts for transformative social change.



THE BAAVANBUTI SARI FROM BUN.KAR BIHAR: REVIVING A LOST LEGACY

“It takes an endless amount of history to create even a little tradition.” - Henry James

The indigenous crafts of a region serve as living testaments to its cultural heritage. Among Bihar's rich textile traditions, the Baavanbuti sari stands as a remarkable example of intricate handloom weaving, embodying centuries of artistic evolution. However, like many traditional crafts, it faced near extinction due to industrialisation, migration, and shifting market demands. This is the story of why I founded Bun.Kar Bihar and its tireless efforts to revive, promote, and sustain this exquisite weave - not merely as a museum artefact, but as a cherished garment for sari connoisseurs worldwide.

THE CRAFT: A LEGACY OF MOTIFS AND MEANING

The Baavanbuti sari derives its name from the fifty-two (*baavan*) motifs intricately woven into its fabric using an extra weft technique. Historically woven in South-Central Bihar, particularly Nalanda district, these saris were once considered auspicious gifts, exchanged during festivals and celebrations. A common saying among families was:

“*Kuchh na bhejalthu, kam se kam baavanbuti to bhej dehalthu.*”

(“Even if nothing else is sent, at least a Baavanbuti sari should be sent.”)

The motifs were deeply rooted in daily life and nature - betel leaves (*paan ka patta*), pointed gourds (*parwal*), peacocks (*mor*), and cowrie shells (*kauri*) adorned the fabric, reflecting the weavers' surroundings. Over time, influences from Buddhist and Jain architecture in the region introduced more intricate designs, transforming the sari into a canvas of cultural storytelling.

While there is no official documentation on why the number fifty-two (*baavan*) was used, there are several folk interpretations. One links it to the *Chhapan Bhog* offered to Lord Vishnu - fifty-six delicacies, suggesting a sacred association. Another ties it to a dilapidated estate house near Basawanbigha village, rumoured to have fifty-two doors and 102 windows, inspiring generations of imagination. Yet, I personally feel, the explanation could be far simpler: the saris featured fifty-two motif placements, evenly distributed across the fabric.

Originally woven in hand-spun cotton (20's count), the later incorporation of Tussar silk, thigh-spun yarn, and Korean silk in the late 20th century added richness to the weave. However, the absence of formal documentation has made tracing its evolution challenging, relying instead on oral histories passed down through generations of weavers.

THE TECHNIQUE: PRECISION IN EVERY THREAD

The Baavanbuti sari is woven using an extra weft technique, a meticulous process that elevates it beyond ordinary handloom textiles. Here's how it unfolds:

1. Base fabric creation: The loom is set with warp threads, and the shuttle moves to interlace the weft, forming the foundation.

2. Extra weft insertion: A separate spool of yarn is used to manually insert additional weft threads, creating raised motifs.

3. Graph-based precision: Each motif is first drawn on graph paper, guiding the weaver to place the extra weft with exactitude.

This labour-intensive process demands exceptional skill and patience - even experienced weavers require multiple attempts to perfect a single motif's placement and form. The result is a textile of unparalleled beauty, where every motif tells a story.

What's fascinating is the codification of motifs and colours, a system as remembered and shared by Kapil Dev Prasad ji, a key figure in this weave's history:

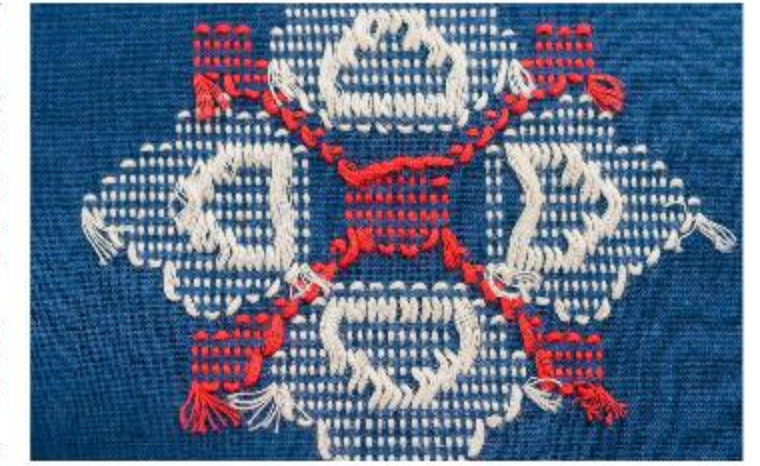
Popular Motif Codes are as follows:

Elephant (*Hathi*) - 345, Ox (*Bail*) - 174, Peacock (*Mor*) - 160, Cowrie (*Kauri*) - 178, Betel leaf (*Paan*) - 265

Popular Colour Codes are as follows:

Red - 1, Black - 3, Sky Blue - 9, Green - 19, Yellow - 38, Light Yellow - 39, Golden Yellow - 40, Orange - 36

Coffee - 28, Maroon - 75, Blue - 54, Pink - 14 Bottle Green - 83



Extra weft insertion technique as visible from the reverse side of the sari



Horizontal stripes in Red-1 and White *Ujala*

This system allowed customers to order textiles using only numbers (mid-20th century to late 20th century).

Elaborating on the range and significance of the motifs, Kapil Dev ji informed Veena:

“*Teen sau se upar buti theen, hare ek ka number aur rang tha*” (There were more than 300 motifs in use, each with a number and colour code)

The motifs were often woven in white (*ujala*) and yellow (*peela*), laid over popular base colours like red, maroon, bottle green, and blue.

These motifs were woven into bed covers, curtains, and table covers under the guidance of the visionary Upendra Maharathi, a government-appointed designer in the 1940s

who foresaw the decline of sari demand and expanded the scope of extra-weft weaving into home textiles.

THE DECLINE: HOW A CRAFT FADED INTO OBLIVION

Until the 1930s-40s, Baavanbuti saris flourished under the patronage of royal estates and affluent landlords. However, several factors led to their decline:

Industrialisation: The rise of mill-made fabrics undercut handloom weavers, making their craft economically unviable.

Middlemen exploitation: Weavers were forced into producing low-quality *thaans* (fabric rolls) with mercerised cotton and artificial silk, sold cheaply in local markets.

Migration & lost livelihoods: Hindu Taanti weavers shifted to Punjab's powerloom mills, while Ansari weavers moved to *beedi* factories, leather industries, and eventually Gulf countries.

Tourism over Craft: With Bihar's Buddhist circuit development, many weavers abandoned looms for jobs in roadside motels and eateries.

By the late 20th century, Baavanbuti saris had nearly vanished, surviving only in home textiles (curtains, bedsheets) supplied to government emporiums and exported to Germany and Japan.

THE REVIVAL: HONOURING THE MASTERS

1. Mr. Upendra Maharathi: The visionary designer

In the 1940s-70s, Upendra Maharathi, a renowned artist and government-appointed designer, played a pivotal role in preserving Bihar's crafts. Recognising the decline of Baavanbuti saris, he adapted the technique for home furnishings, introducing motifs like lotus flowers, temples, and elephants to suit modern tastes. His efforts kept the craft alive, albeit in a different form.

2. Mr. Kapil Dev Prasad: The last weaver guru

A product of Bihar's Half-Time School (where children learnt weaving alongside academics), Mr. Kapil Dev Prasad emerged as a custodian of Baavanbuti weaving. Despite the craft's decline, he preserved its techniques and later mentored me, sharing invaluable knowledge before his passing. His words resonated deeply:

"Ab aapko baavanbuti ki sari kahaniyan malum hain."

("Now you know all the stories of baavanbuti.")

3. Design interventions by national experts

In the late 20th century, designers like Rta Kapur Chisti, Rajeev Sethi, and Pradeep Pillai briefly worked with Nalanda weavers. However, without sustained market linkages, their efforts remained short-lived.

BUN.KAR BIHAR'S INTERVENTION: WEAVING A NEW FUTURE

When I began working with Nalanda weavers in 2009, I encountered disillusionment and resistance. Decades of neglect had left weavers sceptical of revival efforts. However, with the support of Tata Trusts (2015), I launched

Srijani Foundation's Weaving for a Living in 2015, focusing on:

1. Revival of hand-spun cotton: Reintroducing kisan charkha (spinning wheel) to produce authentic yarn.
2. Baavanbuti sari resurrection: Training weavers to return to traditional motifs while adapting designs for contemporary markets.
3. Women's empowerment: Teaching rural women in Siwan district to stitch Delhi Public School uniforms, breaking dependency on middlemen.
4. Market linkages: Showcasing Baavanbuti at prestigious exhibitions (Kala Ghoda, Dastkar, Maison Objet Paris).

CHALLENGES & TRIUMPHS

Initial reluctance: Weavers feared losing existing meagre incomes.

Skill relearning: Many had not woven baavanbuti for decades, requiring patience and practice.

Trust-building: Ensuring fair wages (Rs.14,000–24,000/month) and consistent orders was crucial.

Today, over 150 weaver families and 515 artisans work with Bun.Kar Bihar, producing wearables like saris, stoles, dupattas and home textiles like cushions, dohars (quilts), and towels.

THE WAY FORWARD: SUSTAINING LEGACY

Henry James once said, "A tradition is kept alive only by something being added to it." Bun.Kar Bihar has embraced this philosophy by:

- Collaborating with designers Amit & Richard, Amrich Designs to modernise motifs.
- Training the next generation in both weaving and entrepreneurship.
- Expanding global reach through exhibitions in Paris, Delhi, and Mumbai.

A CALL TO CONSCIOUS CONSUMERS

The survival of Baavanbuti weaving depends on awareness and patronage. Each sari purchased sustains:

- A weaver's livelihood
- A family's future
- A cultural heritage that refuses to fade

CONCLUSION: MORE THAN A SARI-A MOVEMENT

The Baavanbuti sari is not just fabric; it is history, resilience, and revival. Through Bun.Kar Bihar, a craft once on the brink of extinction has been rekindled, proving that tradition, when nurtured, can thrive in modernity. As we drape these saris, we wear the legacy of Bihar's master weavers, ensuring their art endures for generations to come.





Contemporary Look with a Baavanbuti Sari



Contemporary Look with a Baavanbuti Sari



DONGRIA SHAWL
KAPDAGANDA





Ms. Pankaja Sethi

Location: Author's Residence, Bhubaneswar

Pankaja Sethi is a textile designer, artist, and researcher dedicated to exploring indigenous textile traditions of Odisha. A recipient of prestigious fellowships and awards, she was honoured with the Devi Award by The Indian Express (2023) and was a TEDx speaker at KIIT University (2022). Her textile artworks have been showcased globally, including The Flaming Womb at the Nairobi Summit (2019) and 'The Reflection of Time & Nature' at Bhubaneswar Art Trail (2018). She presented her 'Odisha Weaves' collection at Lakmé Fashion Week (2018). Her research includes fellowships from the Ministry of Culture Sahapedia-UNESCO, Nehru Trust at V&A Museum, and Karun Thakar Fund. Her work delves into Dongria Kondh, Gadaba, and Mahima Dharma textile traditions. Pankaja Sethi holds Master's in Textile Design and Development from NIFT, New Delhi and Social Anthropology from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. She continues to bridge art, craft, and activism through community-based practice.





CLOTH OF THE MOUNTAINS: KAPDAGANDA SHAWL OF THE DONGRIA KONDH

A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE TEXTILE

The Kapdaganda shawl is an embroidered shawl made by the Dongria Kondhs, an indigenous community of Rayagada and Kandhamal districts of Odisha. The embroidered shawl is a distinctive cultural identity of the Dongria Kondhs and a rare indigenous textile of India.

The Kapdaganda is a sacred textile embodied with beliefs and values of the tribe. The patterns on the Kapdaganda shawl represent the Niyamgiri hills. It is the story of the sacred world of Niyamgiri and the Kondhs' reverence for nature.

Dongria Kondh men and women both wear Kapdaganda to celebrate and honour the Forest God on occasions and rituals. The textile is made of coarse-count, hand-woven cotton with intricately embroidered patterns that represent the intangible relation of the Dongria Kondhs with forest and nature gods. Traditionally, the ground fabric has been woven, on a pit loom, by Dalit Dom weavers living in nearby villages. Dongria Kondh women would purchase the fabric and embroider it into a Kapdaganda shawl. The art of embroidery is passed across generations. Adolescent girls learn the art of weaving from their seniors while living in *dhangirisala* (dormitory for unmarried women).

REGIONAL AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Dongria Kondhs belong to the Kondh group, the largest tribal group in Odisha. They speak the Kui dialect, which belongs to the Dravidian linguistic group.

Dongor translates to hill in Kui and therefore, Dongria Kondhs means hill dwellers. They believe Niyamgiri is the forest god who created the land, trees, plants, flowers, streams, and indigenous communities. According to the Kondhs, Niyamgiri is omnipresent and found everywhere. The Earth Goddess lives in the centre of the village and protects the Kondh from evil spirits.

The Dongria Kondhs respect nature and live in harmony with the forest. The importance of the forest is reflected in their visual language, oral traditions and day to day life. The symbols of hills, the Forest God and the Earth Goddess are rendered in the form of embroidered motifs on the Kapdaganda shawl.

The attire of the Dongria Kondhs is distinctively vibrant and heavily adorned. Kondh men and women both are fond of textiles and ornaments. The base cloth worn by Kondhs is coarse count unbleached cotton and locally woven. In earlier days, Kondh men wore a loin cloth to cover their bottom half along with a shoulder cloth. Women wear *ganda*, an unstitched running fabric, which means cloth in the Kui dialect. Locally produced *ganda* were short in length and narrow in width, making it ideal for their regular work.

Ganda is draped by covering the bottom part of the body and creating a pocket by folding and tucking fabric around the waist fastened with the help of metal waist band or cord; the end of *ganda* is taken from front covering the torso minus the back and tied with a knot behind the neck. Kondh women used to wear local white *ganda* woven by weavers, with time they have started wearing coloured and printed textile for everyday wear because of availability of surplus material in the local market.

Metal and beaded ornaments are commonly worn by both men and women. For instance, men wear two nose rings, while women wear three. Along with the *ganda*, Kondh women adorn themselves with colourful beaded jewellery, metal jewellery around the neck and multiple earrings. Their parted hair with one sided hair bun is decorated with multiple U-pins, flowers and a small *katuri* (sickle shaped tool for multipurpose use) is fixed to the hair bun. Kondh women make their own beaded jewellery from the beads bought from the local *haat*. Dhokra metal jewellery is bought from the local Dalit Pana community. Their bodies, face and hands are tattooed with motifs of God and Goddess of Niyamgiri. Along with *ganda*, embroidered Kapdaganda is worn by men and women during special occasions.

DISTINCTIVE TECHNIQUES AND CHARACTERISTICS

In earlier days, many Dalit Dom weavers used to weave cloth for the Dongria Kondh and other local communities for sustenance. They weaved various types of cloth which were used as loincloths for men, the plain *ganda* for everyday wear for women and the thick shawl for embroidering a Kapdaganda. Over time, the number of Dom weavers in surrounding villages declined drastically due to the availability of surplus textile in the market. Also, the weavers found other lucrative occupations.

The construction of the Kapdaganda cloth is similar to a basket weave. It is loosely handwoven with *kora* cotton, which is raw, unbleached cotton yarn having red and yellow borders on both sides of the selvedge and towards both ends. Dongria Kondh women purchased the cloth from the weaver. Nowadays, the thick cloth is also made available to the women by a local development agency.

Reflecting their connection with nature, red, maroon, green and yellow are the colours used for embroidery. Each colour has its own significance. The Forest God and Earth Goddess demand blood sacrifices, represented by red and maroon. Yellow is the colour of turmeric that is locally grown and auspicious for Kondhs. The forest is represented



The basket woven base fabric used in Kapdaganda shawl

by green.

Women sit together in groups and embroider Kapdaganda after completing their agricultural work. During the rainy season, women embroider whilst singing songs in honour of Niyamgiri. The embroidery is worked with a long needle called *suji* and threads called *nulu* in Kui. The embroidery threads bought in the form of hanks from the market are slowly separated. Threads are gently plied by hand for embroidery work. The embroidery begins from one end of the cloth. Kondh women embroider by counting the threads of the base fabric, making it a counted thread embroidery. They embroider uniformly along the woven construction of the fabric, as a result the motifs appear symmetrical on both sides. Sometimes yarns of the ground fabric are loosened or removed in order to create the design. The main embroidery stitches used in the shawl are similar to running stitch, satin stitch and blanket/buttonhole stitch.

Each motif on Kapdaganda has a meaning and is representative of their strong connection with Niyamgiri. *Keri* motif is the slanted line which is embroidered together in a single row to form patterns on both ends of the shawl. The multi-coloured slanted lines in red, green and yellow colours represent the Niyamgiri fields. These slanting lines, rendered in multi-coloured threads, depict the cultivated land.

The large triangular motif with two slanted divisions represents the *kudalinga* motif – that is, Dharini, the Earth Goddess, symbolising her power. The small triangles, in floating stitches with threads of two colours are also called *kudalinga*. The motif represents the sacred world of the Niyamgiri hills where the tribe has been residing for generations.

The circular pattern in between the motif is called *kanka*, the eyes of the Goddess. She guards and protects the Dongria Kondhs from misfortunes.

The straight line in between each pattern, worked in running stitch, is called *hippa* or *hida*. It is embroidered like a border to end each pattern to mark a boundary.

There is a row of a slightly curved small triangular motif called *kana* at either end, representing the axe. Kapdaganda shawls typically have tassels at both ends. A thick border wrapped in satin stitches at the end of the shawl is called *vata*. Some shawls also have tiyan which means flowers; these are similar to pom-poms made of threads. The whole shawl thus narrates the story of Niyamgiri – the land, culture and Gods.



The distinctive motifs of a Kapdaganda shawl

REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE CRAFT

With time, there has been a significant decline in the number of weavers as well as women who embroider the shawl. As agriculture is the main occupation of the community, embroidery of Kapdaganda is practised only after the main agricultural work is over and therefore, is a secondary activity of the people.

The Kapdaganda embroidery process is very tedious and very few women know the art of weaving. Hence, the textile is produced at a smaller scale. To ensure its sustenance, younger generations from the community should be encouraged to practise this heritage craft. Most importantly, the craft should be endorsed by local people for wider audiences, nationally and internationally.

The art of embroidery has been replicated by many weavers in Odisha. The popularity and richness of Dongria Kondh shawl design has reached worldwide. However, the weavers who replicate the design on looms may not have the same sacred association with the textile.

PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT, CHALLENGES FACED, REVIVAL EFFORTS, INNOVATIONS, AND COLLABORATIONS

I travelled to Niyamgiri in 2006 for the first time to meet Dongria Kondh women and to see the process of making the Kapdaganda textiles. I worked with Dongria Kondh women for a design workshop supported by DHCI to develop new designs for the shawl.

During the workshop Dongria Kondh artisans were hesitant to make new designs. As a designer, I wanted to create a collaborative process where we both learn. Moreover, I did not want to impose anything or introduce ideas which may be unfamiliar to them. Therefore, I adopted a different approach and asked the women if they were willing to create a bag using their textile. They wholeheartedly agreed.

Together we created products which could be used for personal purposes that were true to their roots. In spite of the language barrier, I learnt the names of the motifs using gestures.

Coming from a design background, while working on indigenous Kapdaganda textile, I realised there is a language beyond design. The motifs on textiles represent the sacred world of Niyamgiri hills.

The deep relation of Kondhs with nature is such that they can listen to nature and understand its language. When something goes wrong, they know Niyamgiri is unhappy.

Whilst understanding Kondhs' relation with forest, it enlightened my own reflections of human relation with the environment; it rekindled my thoughts about people and land, how and in what ways we see ourselves connected to nature in the present milieu.





Contemporary Look with a Kapdaganda Shawl



Contemporary Look with a Kapdaganda Shawl



GARBH RESHMI SARI



As Smt. Shalini Devi Holkar is not currently residing in India, her photoshoot could not be done.

Smt. Shalini Devi Holkar

Padmashri Sally Holkar, also known as Shalini Devi Holkar is a Stanford graduate in Political Science, who moved to India after marrying Prince Richard Holkar of the Indore royal family. A visit to Maheshwar in the late 1960s sparked her deep connection with Indian handlooms. Disturbed by the decline of the Maheshwari weaving tradition, she co-founded the REHWA Society in 1978 to revive the craft and empower women through weaving. In 2003, she established the WomenWeave Charitable Trust, creating collaborative networks among weaving clusters like Maheshwar, Chanderi, and Bhagalpur. Her pioneering Gudi Mudi project enabled marginalised women to hand-spin and weave local cotton, bringing inclusive employment to hundreds. Her visionary efforts have impacted over 3,000 artisans and positioned Maheshwar as a global source of ethical, handcrafted textiles making Shalini Devi Holkar a leading revivalist in India's handloom story.



Image Courtesy: Ms. Nidhi Kamath

As Smt. Shalini Devi Holkar is not currently residing in India, her photoshoot could not be done.



LEGACY IN LOOM: REWEAVING THE GARBH RESHMI SARI

BACKGROUND

The town of Maheshwar in Madhya Pradesh has evolved into one of the most progressive handloom weaving clusters over the past five decades. It is known for its beautiful saris - sheer, breezy, and filled with vibrant colours.

The flourishing handloom scene in Maheshwar traces back to the era of the Maratha queen, Ahilya Bai Holkar who is regarded as the mother of the handloom industry of this town. After the death of Maharaja Malhar Rao Holkar in 1739, Rani Ahilyabai wanted to live away from Indore, in a village facing a Shiva temple on the banks of the river Narmada. Thus, she selected Maheshwar as her capital and it was under her able administration that the city thrived. At her request, the weavers of Maheshwar created new, yet simple designs that adorned the royal family of Indore. It is believed that she designed the simple borders for the saris, which were strikingly beautiful. Maheshwari saris are particularly known for their geometric border patterns, inspired by the intricate carvings of Maheshwar's 18th century stone fort located on the banks of the holy Narmada River.

Over time, Maheshwari saris have evolved - from the pure cotton *Indoori* saris to the silk and cotton Garbh Reshmi varieties. Today's more popular versions, known as Neem Reshmi, are woven using 1-ply mulberry silk and fine 80s count cotton, offering a soft and transparent texture.

Despite these changes, two things have remained constant: the use of fine 80s cotton and the classic geometric borders woven with the traditional dobby technique.

THE REVIVAL OF GARBH RESHMI SARI

The weaving of Garbh Reshmi saris started disappearing from Maheshwar's looms in the mid-20th century due to the tedious process and high cost. More than 50% of the raw material consisted of 2-ply mulberry silk, which was unaffordable for most weavers. After India's independence, the lack of royal patronage and support further contributed to the decline.

Gradually, weavers shifted to using 1-ply mulberry silk in the warp, which was less expensive and avoided the labour-intensive process of warp preparation required for Garbh Reshmi. Over time, the knowledge and practice of Garbh Reshmi weaving were completely forgotten.

While living in Maheshwar in the 1960s, a chance visit with a weaver made me realise the beauty of the

Maheshwari sari, its potential and also the plight of the weavers. Since then, I have been working closely with the handloom weavers to provide them with better opportunities. It was much later in 2012, the revival of the Garbh Reshmi was initiated by inviting weavers to create the facilities and processes necessary to bring the saris back to life. Senior weavers such as Mr. Ganesh Bichchhve, Mr. Ramchandra Bichchhve, Mr. Jagdish Bichchhve, Mr. Mehmood Ansari, Mr. Prahlad Sharma, and Mr. Radheshyam Bile - who had seen Garbh Reshmi being woven in their childhood - came together to share memories, discuss the technique, and identify the skills and resources required to restart the process. The revival was built upon this fading but valuable knowledge.

One of the first critical steps was to install pit looms and find artisans who could do street sizing of 80s count cotton yarn. Mr. Ganesh Bichchhve and Mr. Mehmood Ansari helped with loom parts, while Mr. Radheshyam Bile - coming from a traditional dyer's family - helped recall the names of traditional Garbh Reshmi colours, such as *jaamli*, *popti*, *rama*, etc.

Sample swatches available at the Government Handloom Office in Maheshwar were also studied to understand the border patterns used in the 1950s.

Street sizing of the 80s non-mercerized cotton was a crucial and challenging part of the revival. Historically, this was done in Shaalipura Mohalla by women from the Maru community. Fortunately, two senior women artisans - Ms. Tulsa Bai Dhakle and Ms. Chandrakanta Shravanekar - could be located. They were around seventy years old at the time and had preserved the traditional sizing instruments, including the wooden brush. Later, Tulsa Bai's daughter-in-law, Ms. Meenbai Dhakle, also learned the process. It is customary in the weaving community never to destroy or burn these tools - they are simply left to weather with time.

PRE-LOOM PROCESS

The process begins with warping. Filled bobbins are mounted onto a wooden warping frame locally known as *tantaal*. This technique had not been practiced in decades, but a senior woman artisan, Ms. Umabai, remembered the process and successfully revived it.

Once warping is complete, weaker yarns are identified and removed by the women handling street sizing. The remaining yarn is soaked in a paste of *jowar* (sorghum) flour to strengthen it. Sometimes, almond oil is added to enhance softness and flexibility.

This intricate starching technique is called *pajni*, and its most critical step is *ochna* - a method where warp threads are counted and divided rhythmically using the fingers. The threads are then detangled with flat wooden sticks called *kamde*. The yarn, while still wet, is repeatedly brushed with a hard-bristled wooden brush and stretched using iron hooks at both ends to ensure even drying.

This slow and meticulous process takes 2-3 days just to stretch the yarns, while the entire *pajni* process takes nearly a week. One of its most remarkable aspects is that an 11-metre warp is gradually stretched into 44 metres. This fourfold elongation refines the yarn, making it finer, stronger, and smoother by removing cotton boggles and impurities.

REINTRODUCING THE WEAVING

Finding weavers willing to take on the challenge of weaving Garbh Reshmi - which uses 80s cotton in the warp - was difficult. None in the community had ever woven it before, leading to hesitation.

However, a group of young weavers - Mr. Ganga Kanere, Mr. Joheb Ansari, Mr. Mujammil Ansari, Mr. Vishal Solanki, Mr. Haroon Ansari, among others - agreed to try after several discussions. They were already undergoing training as part of a programme aimed at developing micro-entrepreneurship, which made them more open to experimentation.

Later, women weavers like Ms. Anju Bai, Ms. Anita Mansore, Ms. Vandna Tapaal, and male weavers like Mr. Gopikishan, and Mr. Ajay joined in. With their collective effort, a dedicated production unit with ten looms became operational.

WEAVE CONSTRUCTION OF GARBH RESHMI

The Garbh Reshmi is a timeless creation that blends mulberry silk and fine 80s count cotton, giving it unmatched softness and durability. It is particularly known for its delicate checks in vibrant, contrasting colours.

This textile is woven on pit looms with a reed count of 72, which allows a spaced construction. The warp consists of 2-ply silk (for lustre) and 80s *pajni*-treated cotton yarn (for strength).

The sari borders are traditionally woven with silk using a 24-lever dobby, creating heritage patterns without zari. Some of the signature border designs include *bugadi*, *kamal mandal phool*, *rassa*, and *paan*.

The body of the sari features various check patterns such as:

1. *Gunji Chowkda* (1*1 checks)
2. *Phutani Chowkda* (2*2 checks)
3. *Gunji Patti* (3*3 checks)
4. *Chaand Taara* (broad checks)
5. *Gunji Ratti* (combination of large and small checks)
6. *Meerani Chowkda* (uneven checks)

The sari includes a plain blouse piece with silk-cotton checks, using colours like:

1. *Chutney* green and *Mehndi*
2. *Sattalu* and *Rani* pink
3. *Jamuni* and German blue
4. Golden yellow and *Biscuti* peach
5. Rama blue
6. Classic black and white

The *palla* (end-piece) is distinct, with three contrast-coloured stripes bordered in half-bleach white to frame and accentuate them.

A defining feature of these saris is the sun-shadow effect created by weaving with two different coloured yarns - adding depth, lustre, and a subtle play of hues.



The chequered pattern of the body with a distinct geometric border

WHY GARBH RESHMI STANDS OUT

Garbh Reshmi saris are softer and more durable compared to those woven with silk warp alone. The silk-cotton blend offers better comfort and breathability, ideal for humid and hot climates.

The sari has a luxurious appearance but remains lightweight with a better drape, unlike pure silk saris that tend to cling.

The distinctive finer and smaller checks give Garbh Reshmi a unique visual identity.

The revival project has successfully brought back the weaving of Garbh Reshmi saris through a small but dedicated group of weavers in Maheshwar. However, in place of 80s non-mercerised cotton, 2/120s mercerized cotton is currently used by the local weavers due to the lack of trained artisans for traditional street sizing.

To ensure the sustainability of this rare craft, efforts are now focused on training more women in street sizing through our organisations.





Contemporary Look with a Garbh Reshmi Sari.



Contemporary Look with a Garbh Reshmi Sari.



JOTH SARI





Mr. Vinay Narkar

*Location: Author's Residence,
Solapur*



Vinay Narkar, a textile designer from Solapur, left a thriving legal career to revive the rich textile traditions of Western Deccan. Through his initiative 'Vinay Narkar Classics', he recreates rare saris and explores Deccan aesthetics via crafts like Maratha miniatures, jewellery, and sculpture. His innovative use of Gadwal's three-shuttle weaving, notably in his collection 'Steps', has earned national recognition. A committed researcher and writer, Vinay's Marathi book *Vastragatha* won the Krushna Mukund Puraskar. He regularly contributes through columns like *Virat Chalalele Dhage*, *Vastrankit*, and *Vastranveshi*. His work has been showcased at *Sutr Santati*, *Women in Design 2020*, and *Vastrakathi*, with thoughtfully recreated saris drawn from history and literature. Vinay continues to commission Maratha-style crafts and revive lost weaves, blending art, poetry, and scholarship to celebrate Maharashtra's textile legacy.



DRAPED SHE THE JOTH GREEN: REDISCOVERING A FORGOTTEN SARI OF VIDARBHA

Some textiles come down to us draped in time and memory, carried not just in museum archives but sung softly from mother to daughter, generation to generation. Among these is the Joth sari of Vidarbha - a humble, yet distinctive weave that would have been lost to time if not for the tenacity of a single folk verse that survived in oral tradition. This chapter is an attempt to gather its scattered threads - to chart the history of the Joth, understand its regional identity, trace its craftsmanship, and reflect on what its revival means for India's intangible textile heritage.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

References of the Joth sari (also spelt *Jote*, *Jyot*, *Zhot*) are found in Vidarbha's devotional literature as an offering to the Goddess *Matamay*. While historical records on Joth are sparse, the few that exist show that this sari was once common in villages like Achalpur, Pavni, Bhandara, and Umred. These regions were well-known weaving pockets, contributing to the larger Deccan handloom heritage.

Colonial-era Marathi-English dictionaries like Molesworth's offer fleeting mentions of *Jote*, describing it as a fabric incorporating silk borders and striped or checked designs, sometimes made with multiple shuttles. Such notations, though brief, confirm its recognition as a distinct cloth within local textile lexicons. The earliest weavers recall Joth saris being woven at least until the 1980s. After that, changing fashions, the onslaught of powerlooms, and declining local patronage led to the craft's gradual disappearance.

Curiously, despite its unique patterns, the Joth never became part of India's mainstream textile identity in the way that Paithani or Chanderi did. It lingered instead in folk memory - in *Jogwa* songs sung during Dussehra, in hymns recited before the local Goddess, and in heirloom saris folded away in rural trunks.

REGIONAL AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Joth sari's most telling cultural marker lies in how it appears in devotional *Ovi* verses dedicated to *Matamay* - a mother Goddess embodying fertility, the Earth, and feminine energy. In these verses, draping the best fabric on the Goddess signifies the offering of one's finest possession to the divine.

तेला तेलाने बाई न्हाल्या
तोही लोट गेला फुलझाडा

She bathed using different oils
The run-off went to flowering trees

फुलझाडाच्या करया मोठ्या दाट
तया बाई नेसल्या हरिव्या जोट
हरिव्या जोटाले कासूया मोसूया रेघा
वरी वरी शणि मोतीयाच्या

Dense were the trees' branches
Draped She the Joth green
Which had black and grey stripes
And lines formed of pearls

Such references are not merely poetic. They are subtle, yet crucial documentation of everyday life and craft. When an *Ovi* says "Draped she the Joth green", it records a specific colour, weave, and social custom. The Joth was not just a garment; it was part of a ritual continuum that connected the loom, the weaver, the wearer, and the divine.

DISTINCTIVE TECHNIQUES AND CHARACTERISTICS

What sets a Joth apart? From fragmentary descriptions, folk songs, and surviving specimens, a clear picture emerges of its defining elements:

1. **Base Material:** A silk-cotton blend. Often, the body would be primarily cotton with silk threads for borders and motifs, striking a balance between affordability and opulence.
2. **Body Pattern:** The sari features horizontal *rasta* stripes - black or grey lines running parallel across a solid- coloured field, frequently green, red, or maroon. This understated body contrasts with more intricate borders.
3. **Borders:** The borders of the Joth sari are its signature. They carry woven geometric patterns typical of Marathi design vocabulary - the *karvat* (saw-tooth) and *motichoor* (scattered pearls). The latter resembles dotted zari lines that catch the light when the sari is draped.
4. **Ikat Band:** Perhaps the rarest detail is the slim *chutki* Ikat stripe tucked within the border. Ikat - a resist-dyeing technique - is not generally associated with Maharashtra. Its presence in Joth saris testifies to a lesser-known pocket of Ikat craftsmanship in Vidarbha. Locally, weavers in Nagpur, Achalpur, and neighbouring villages mastered this small-scale Ikat work, which they used exclusively for narrow border bands.
5. **Pallu:** The *Ganderi padar* - a flowing *pallu* section - roots the sari firmly in the Marathi aesthetic, similar to Paithani's simpler counterparts.

This combination of dobby weaving for motifs and Ikat dyeing for the border required two separate but synchronised skills. It is precisely this fusion that made the Joth distinct and, ironically, contributed to its decline when these specialised techniques began disappearing in Vidarbha.

THE DECLINE: FROM LOOM TO OBSCURITY

From the mid-20th century, rapid industrialisation, rising urban tastes, cheaper synthetic fabrics, and the spread of powerlooms made handwoven saris less commercially viable. Younger weavers abandoned looms for factory jobs or migrated to cities. Those who stayed found themselves



A close-up view of the combined dobby and ikat technique for the border

squeezed by middlemen, fluctuating cotton prices, and lack of organised market support. In Vidarbha, repeated agrarian crises further weakened the handloom ecosystem. Unlike in Telangana or Gujarat, where Ikat weaving found robust patronage and global markets, Vidarbha's weavers did not receive the same institutional support or branding opportunities. The unique craft knowledge of combining Ikat dyeing with dobby weaving was fragmented across regions, leaving no one weaver or community with the complete skill set to produce a true Joth.

PERSONAL JOURNEY: RESEARCH AND REDISCOVERY

My journey with the Joth began not in a library or a museum, but during an unplanned conversation with Mrs. Nileematai Inamdar, an esteemed elder with a priceless collection of folk songs. Over a cup of tea, she recited the *Ovi* that contained the curious word “Joth.” While the other saris mentioned in her verses were familiar, this one word set off a hundred questions in my mind about the Joth.

Initial enquiries yielded little. Elderly weavers remembered it vaguely, scholars could not point to definitive records, and textile dictionaries offered only cryptic hints. A breakthrough came with Molesworth's mention of *Jote* and a blurred reference in *Of Fibre and Loom*. Further reading led to an old photograph captioned “Nagpur Joth,” which gave visual confirmation that the sari once existed as described in the song.

Next came the challenge of locating a physical sample. Through contacts in local weaving communities, we managed to acquire an heirloom Joth sari, folded away in a household for nearly 80 years. Examining its weave, patterns, and distinctive Ikat band matched the *Ovi* description perfectly.

ACHALPUR: THE FORGOTTEN LOOMS OF ELLICHPUR

Achalpur, once known as Ellichpur, was the capital of Varhad (Berar) during the Mughal era and later a flourishing textile hub under the British. Its vibrant weaving tradition included not only the famed Joth sari but also *satranjis* (rugs) and *pagotis* (traditional headgear) in nearby towns like Akot and Balapur.

When we travelled to Achalpur to trace the roots of the Joth, we were guided to the humble home of a Tadav weaver family still practising their ancestral craft. There, we met 98-year-old Grandpa Bashir - sharp-eyed, clear-voiced, and brimming with memory. The moment he saw the old Joth sari we carried, he exclaimed, “*Ye to hamare Achalpur ka hi lugda hai!*” (“This is our very own Achalpur sari!”). His words confirmed the sari's origin and revived our dwindling hope.

Grandpa Bashir recalled how, around India's independence, demand for the Joth sari was so high that weaving continued through the night, yet never met the market's appetite. A younger family member took us to Mr. Bhende, President of the local weavers' community, who too recognised the sari immediately. He spoke of how these saris were heirlooms - preserved with care, worn only for special occasions, and passed from mother to daughter.

He described Achalpur's dawn market, held every Wednesday and Saturday from 4 to 6 a.m. in Samaraspura. Traders even came from as far as Karachi. Within two hours, 1,500 to 2,000 saris would be sold out, and the looms would start humming again until late into the night.

At Mr. Bhende's urging, we met Kamble Kaka, a senior weaver now in his eighties. When he saw the Joth, his face lit up - a living bridge to a vanished craft. He told us how, at fifteen, he wove Joth saris at home, in solid colours, with *rasta* stripes, or *butti* motifs.

Standing there, among Achalpur's old weavers' lanes, we knew the Joth was more than fabric - it was living history waiting to be woven once more.

THE REVIVAL: OBSTACLES AND COLLABORATIONS

Discovering the sari was only half the journey. The real challenge lay in bringing it back to life on the loom. We knew from the elders at Nagpur's State Weaving Institute that Vidarbha no longer had weavers capable of producing the Joth's unique combination of dobby and Ikat techniques. Cotton sari weavers in Nagpur examined the sample and, though eager, admitted they lacked the Ikat dyeing expertise.

This meant turning to Telangana - to towns like Pochampalli and Gadwal, renowned for their Ikat and dobby weaving respectively. Here too, the skills were split: Pochampalli weavers could dye Ikat bands, but were unfamiliar with dobby looms for intricate borders. Gadwal weavers mastered dobby borders but did not practice Ikat dyeing.

Combining both required delicate negotiation and trust-building. Ikat bands were specially dyed in Pochampalli, then transported to Gadwal where the weaver modified his loom to insert the narrow Ikat strip precisely at the border. Even sourcing the raw silk posed challenges. The minimum dye lot demanded by the Ikat dyer was enough for 300 saris - far more than we intended to make. Yet, to proceed, we agreed to produce all the Ikat bands and find ways to use the surplus later.

It was painstaking work. Threads had to align perfectly so that the dyed Ikat pattern matched the border motif's rhythm. Any slip would distort the design. But the final result, when the first recreated Joth sari emerged from the loom, was worth every hurdle - a faithful revival based on the folk verse, the archival sari, and the weavers' inherited genius.

INNOVATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

This project's true innovation was not in the weave itself - which faithfully followed old patterns - but in the collaborative model it demonstrated. We learnt that the revival of lost textiles rarely lies within one village, family, or artisan anymore. It demands an ecosystem approach, connecting weavers across states, blending techniques once held in a single region, and building new supply chains for old crafts.

CONCLUSION: DRAPED SHE THE JOTH GREEN, AGAIN

Today, when I hold the revived Joth sari, I think back to the line “Draped she the Joth green”. That single phrase launched a journey through archives, dusty trunks, village looms, and living memories. It reminds us that folk literature is not an idle song — it is a cultural ledger, a map to hidden crafts that once shaped communities.

By reviving the Joth, we honour not just a sari but an entire ecosystem - the forgotten weaver, the patient dyer, the village singer, the goddess in her sanctum, the devotee offering her best cloth. Each drape of the Joth reconnects us to a vision of textile heritage that is intimate, local, and powerfully alive.

In this story lies a quiet hope: that somewhere, another hidden word in a song, another half-remembered pattern in an old chest, waits to be traced, revived, and celebrated - so that India's textile story continues to be written, not just by powerlooms and global markets, but by the timeless poetry of its people.





Contemporary Look with a Joth Sari



Contemporary Look with a Joth Sari





Ms. Bhamini Subramaniam Ayyar

Location: Author's Residence, Mumbai

Bhamini Subramaniam is an acclaimed educationist and design thinker, with over four decades of experience in textile, fashion, interior, and product design. She is best known for her eco-friendly, hand-painted silks under her signature label 'Bhamini'. Her notable collaborations include Christian Dior, Shyam Ahuja, and KVIC, among others. In 2024, she became the first Indian designer to receive the Award of Fellowship in Colouration from the UK-based Society of Dyers and Colourists. A champion of sustainability and Indian heritage crafts, she is a core member of Paramparik Karigar and has worked with TRIFED and the Development Commissioner (Handlooms). "A firm believer in Ahimsa, vegetarianism and eco friendliness, my design philosophy is guided by the principles of Truth, Goodness and Beauty, to make the world a better place to live in. How we strive to materialise this thought successfully into our micro or macro scheme of things becomes a constant challenge and source of happiness in every design I create."





WOVEN EDGES, WOVEN LEGACIES: THE STORY OF KARVAT KATHI SARIS

“Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past”

-T.S.Eliot (Four Quartets)

Little did I realise, to my great delight, that the research I conducted on Karvat Kathi saris of Nagpur during my student days nearly thirty years ago would still hold relevance today. In the ongoing discourse surrounding skill preservation, revival, and sustainability, it has emerged as a significant topic in the domain of Indian textiles and fashion.

Symmetry, precision and cultural significance symbolise the Karvat Kathi sari. Inspired from the *gamchha* (functional hand towels) spun around 1732, this coarse fabric was transformed into beautiful Karvat Kathi saris. The *gamchha* used to be woven with rough cotton yarns of 20s count. Later, two different unreeled twisted yarn called *dongri* tussar was introduced as weft. Over the years, it refined to smoother yarns for royal use as towels, *angavastram* or stoles, and unique design input of zigzag borders, and the combination of silk tussar body with cotton borders, the beautiful Karvat Kathi sari was born. The Karvat Kathi sari gained patronage in the 18th century under the Peshwa rule, who encouraged the Koshti tribe of weavers to practise this craft.

ESSENCE OF THE KARVAT KATHI SARI

The word *karvat* in Marathi refers to a saw, while *kinar* means border or edge. Hence the name Karvati or Karvat Kathi. Right angled tooth shaped edges formed a beautiful neutral design to join as well as mark the separation of the tussar body from its well defined cotton border. This distinctive saw-toothed zigzag border is believed to be inspired from the sculptures of Ramtek.



The signature saw-tooth border of the Karvat Kathi sari

Karvati saris are woven on hand operated pit looms. The body of the sari is made using tussar yarns, which is meticulously interlocked with cotton borders in contrasting colours. The cotton borders and *pallu* have ornamental lines and motif woven aesthetically with either a silver-white extra warp or an extra weft.

Worn during rituals, marriages and festivals, the Karvati sari was a reflection of the local culture. The characteristic borders of the Karvati sari included geometrical shapes like triangles, circles or rectangles, flowers or the *rudraksh* motif. The unevenness of the handloom cloth contributes to its breathable quality and suppleness. Its perfect fall coupled with a sturdy border and durability, makes Karvat Kathi one of the treasures of Indian Handloom. The 90s were a Renaissance of sorts in India, when the Handloom Board worked hard on the revival of our lost textile heritage. From this treasure trove was revived the Karvat Kathi. Later, in the year 2017, it received a Geographical Indication tag.



The contrast border in cotton yarns and body in the golden hue of Tussar silk

VIDARBHA TUSSAR

Tussar sericulture farms for cocoon breeding and silk extraction are found in and around Vidarbha and Nagpur, in places like Chandrapur, Gondia, Almodi, Andhalgaon, Ambegaon, Pauni and Gadchiroli, which is unique to this region.

The best yield of tussar comes from the *supari* cocoon or *dongri* tussar which are golden in colour and get deeper golden with every wash. There are different varieties of basic tussar used as weft in Karvati saris. They are locally known by names such as *shukhandia*, *ramnad*, *railee*, *dabha*, *jadau dabha*, and *barfeela*. Usually, the names determine the diameter or thickness of the yarn and their quality.

The silk yarn and cocoon distribution is controlled by the Maharashtra State Handloom Corporation (MSHC) through tenders and auctions. The yarns are distributed to the weavers through state government-appointed mahajans. Due to the taxing nature of the work and low incomes, the craft was declining, particularly among younger generations. Post Covid, there has been an added impetus by the Maharashtra Handloom Board, as well as committed revivalists like Dr. Ulhas Burade to revive handloom weaving in the region. The latter can be credited with inspiring the youth and women to take up the craft in Andhalgaon.

THE SARI TODAY

Today, Andhalgaon alone boasts of about eighty looms as compared to their humble beginnings with twenty looms. Average minimum income per weaver is Rs.10,500 per month if production is at least four handloom Karvatis of the *sada* (plain) weave type with body, border, and *pallu*. Plain *pallus* contain line design of the border colour along with maybe an additional colour or two. Today we have more motifs added in the body and *pallu* area, along with a new

variety with a fully designed *pallu, jaalapallu*. Elaborate designs take about twelve days to weave and the weaver is paid Rs. 4200 per sari.

MSHC, which markets through its ‘Indrayani’ label, preserves the originality of the Karvat Kathi sari by using only metal complex dyes conducive to tussar, and vats and reactive dyes for the 2/20 cotton yarns used in the borders. Chinese tussar warp yarns of 35 denier, which come in unbroken long rolls, now facilitate faster weaving and ensure smooth warp finish without threads snapping and a continuous flow of work. The tussar reel yarn is only used in weft to retain the original hand woven look of the sari.

PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

The Freelance Designer Programme was assigned to me by Weavers Service Centre in the early nineties to work on Karvat Kathi saris. The Development Corporation Of Vidharbha (DCVL) under Development Commission Handlooms worked in close collaboration with me on this project. While visiting the weavers, I was amazed by their high moral ground of being *atmanirbhar* (self-sufficient) and the pride that came from hand-mind-body coordination as compared to machine manipulation. It was important to understand their psyche and design sensibilities. I made subtle and basic changes in border and Karvat design motifs, layout in pallu and colour schemes to maintain the essence without moving away from the original design. This resulted in an enriching personal experience for me and for Indrayani(DCVL) now known as Maharashtra Handloom Board.

The then Development Commissioner of Handlooms appreciated my presentation on Karvat Kathi saris and my design inputs translated to huge sales for Indrayani. I was further given more design challenges for innovative ideas in surface textures on Karvat Kathi and plain Vidarbha tussar saris and fabrics. This time, I used the techniques of hand block printing and hand painting with silk dyes to befit the handloom weave in my design studio. I worked on a series of signature saris, scarves, stoles, dress materials and made ups in tussar fabric. The huge response from exporters and high-end retailers has kept me on my toes to this day.

NEED FOR SUSTENANCE

It is high time we preserve the Karvat Kathi sari from being overtaken by powerloom lookalikes. If powerlooms are important for prosperity and development, then it becomes all the more necessary to retain the unique and intrinsic features which belong singularly to each individual handloom art. The reverse side weave which looks the same as its correct side due to skilled techniques are a treat to the eye, a far cry from the power loom slub threads which get entangled into bangles and ear rings and other kinds of surface. The uneven and rugged appearance of handloom silk gives it an authentic appeal. After the natural treatments at the yarn, weave or finishing stage, the handloom sari becomes more resilient, supple, breathable and easy to drape. In matters of sustainability, the tussar variety of Nagpur is said to be bacteria free, hence its longevity and easy maintenance.

It is definitely up to the urban customers, designers, handloom NGOs, upmarket sari outlets and our fashion conscious youth to publicise and create an awareness about the all-encompassing value and pride of the Karvat Kathi sari. Stylists should drape their celebrities to make the Karvat Kathi highly visible with endorsements in social media nationally, and maybe even a walk down the international fashion carpets. One can take a leaf out of the books of Indian legislators’ like Smt. Smriti Irani and Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman who have endorsed the Karvat Kathi on different occasions. Even our honourable President Smt. Droupadi Murmu has been spotted wearing the Karvati with elan. It is well worth remembering that every little effort from buyers, exporters, and consumers to boost sales is an encouragement to the weavers in raising their confidence in their product. It gives a sense of purpose to preserve their art. Most importantly, a sustainable handloom Karvat Kathi sari generates a sustainable livelihood.....surely this one wins hands down for culture and posterity!!





Contemporary Look with a Karvat Kathi Sari



Contemporary Look with a Karvat Kathi Sari



KHANA & ILKAL SARI



Ms. Geeta Patil

Location: Owen Studio, Bangalore

Bangalore-based textile designer Geeta Patil has been dedicated to the craft sector for nearly two decades. An alumna of the National Institute of Design, her unwavering commitment to excellence led her to establish Kubsa in 2019. The initiative works closely with handloom artisans of northern Karnataka, aiming to foster change and development through design at the grassroots level. Hailing from the region, Geeta found it imperative to infuse new life into once popular textiles like Khana and Ilkal, cherished and worn by women across parts of northern Karnataka and southern Maharashtra. Her work is designed to bring back traditional weaving techniques with a contemporary aesthetic. She sees textiles not only as a means for cultural expression, but also as a channel to empower artisans to express their creativity, aligning with her mission of creating sustainable livelihoods.





WEAVING THROUGH TIME: A BRIEF HISTORY OF KHANA & ILKAL

One cannot talk of *kubsa*, a bodice made of *khana* fabric without the mention of Ilkal sari, because they are often seen paired together. These textiles have been produced in northern Karnataka clusters but are worn in both regions of northern Karnataka and southern Maharashtra. Ilkal, woven in and around the town of Ilkal in Bagalkot district, and *khana* - also known as *khunn* or *khun* - was always produced at only one centre: Guledgudda.

Growing up in this region, I always saw women from across castes and classes wearing Ilkal saris with *khana* bodices. Perhaps that is why these textiles were not widely documented or patronised by royal families. Hence, there is little to no information about the history of these crafts and their evolution over centuries.

North Karnataka is a cotton-growing belt with rich black soil and rain-fed agriculture, and weaving has always flourished in this region. From a variety of saris and dhotis in cotton with silk to coarse-count *gudars* (coarse cotton durries) and *kamblis* (handspun Deccani wool blankets), the region has a rich textile heritage.

Historically ruled by various dynasties such as the Chalukyas, the Vijayanagara Empire, the Bahmani Sultanate and the Marathas, the influences can be seen in its crafts, textiles, culture and language. The deep-rooted history of weaving has played a crucial role in the region's economy, culture and social fabric.

KHANA: A HUMBLE NARROW WIDTH TEXTILE

Khana (also known as *khunn* or *khun*), a traditional blouse fabric from Guledgudda in Bagalkot district, North Karnataka, is known for its extra-warp silk motifs inspired by local flora, fauna, deities, and daily life. It was typically crafted in bright colours featuring a dark silk ground warp, black cotton weft, and rich maroon borders of 5–6 inches on either side, creating a striking visual contrast that adds to its identity.

Khana, mostly misunderstood as a jacquard fabric due to its complex patterns and sheen, is a dobby-woven textile and is used to make a bodice called *kubsa*. A *kubsa* bodice is stitched using just one *khana* piece, which measures 30 inches in width and 20 inches in length. *Khana* is crafted using the extra-warp technique and woven on a pit loom.

However, after interviewing several elderly people and speaking to my own relatives in the region, I have come to believe that *khana* was also once woven in full cotton - or with a cotton ground warp and only the extra warp in silk. Especially because silk was not native to this region and was measured like gold and used very judiciously. The ground warp cotton and the weft were always indigo dyed.

Little is known about the history of indigo dyeing in this region. Today, only one family continues the practice and, unfortunately, no longer uses the traditional methods. The indigo-dyed weft was eventually replaced with coarse

cotton dyed with synthetic black.

The extra-warp patterns feature motifs of flowers, plants, celestial bodies, and creatures from Hindu mythology - creating an artistic and intricate tapestry that tells tales of ancient reverence. Popular designs include:

Suryanarayana (the face of the sun God), *Siddeswar Mukuta* (the face of the God Siddeswar), *Theru* (chariot), *Aane Hejje* (footsteps of an elephant), *Tulsi Pan* (holy basil leaf), *Bormal* (traditional jewellery), *Sewantigi* (chrysanthemum), *Sooj Malligi* (a fragrant jasmine flower), *Aane Navilu* (elephant and peacock)

More than just fabric, *khana* is a cultural emblem of North Karnataka - woven with identity, ritual, and refined craftsmanship.

ILKAL SARIS: A HALLMARK OF THE REGION'S PRIDE

Ilkal sari gets its name from the town of Ilkal in Bagalkot district of Karnataka. The sari consists of a cotton body, plain or checkered, and a silk *pallu* with a dobby border in red or maroon. Traditionally, the body was always dyed in indigo, creating a dark base for the checks in colours or for Kasuti embroidery.

Initially woven only in cotton, it is believed that merchants introduced silk in the 18th century. Silk, not regional to this area and expensive, was limited to just the *pallu* or end piece - which could have given rise to a unique interlocking technique called *kondi* (chain). This technique involves interlooping the cotton of the body with the silk of the *pallu* during the warping process. So each sari requires individual warping, and once the warp is laid on the loom, the *pallu* is woven first. The cotton warp loop is then cut and extended to achieve the full length of the sari - giving a silk*silk *pallu* and cotton*cotton body. This age-old ancillary technique is not just a structural necessity but a hallmark of the sari's identity, performed skilfully on traditional pit looms.



Interlocking *Kondi* technique for *pallu* and body

MOTIFS USED IN ILKAL

Traditionally, the silk *pallu* is always woven in red and adorned with three bands of *tope teni* motifs in undyed silk - symbolising Shakti and devotion to Goddess Banashankari, worshipped by the weaving community. *Tope teni* is inspired by the millet *jowar* (sorghum), a staple in this region. *Teni* means the fresh crop, which is also used in wedding rituals. Another key motif is the *lattiguni*, resembling the rolling pin. Both these design elements are woven using the three-shuttle technique and require two weavers to work in tandem. These motifs celebrate everyday tools and harvests, reflecting a life connected to land and labour. The red or maroon dobby borders, in patterns such as *chikki paras*, *gomi*, *gadi dadi*, and *gayatri*, form a part of the sari's design identity - set against the dark cotton body and the striking red *pallu*. The *pallu* - adorned with strong geometric bands like the *latti gunni* (rolling pin) and *tope teni* (jowar) - forms the core design identity of an Ilkal sari. The length of the *pallu* varied from 19" to 22" .

Art silk replaced the cotton warp a few decades ago, and only the weft remained cotton. The indigo weft was further

replaced with black synthetic dye.

Various checks with different colour proportions have emerged, each with a distinct name - like *dhapla*, *chowkhani*, *sada khaddi*, *kondi chikki*, and even a latest addition called *shirting*, inspired by the striped shirting fabric found in men's wear.

The other end of the sari is woven with 2–3 plain bands in cotton and is referred to as the *valagina sheragu*, or the inside *pallu*.

Originally, the Ilkal sari was woven in nine, eight, and seven yards, and there were three different kinds of drapes commonly worn in this region - without a sari petticoat and with the red *pallu* covering the head. Ilkal sari, with all its design features, made it ideal for the hot climate of the region and has survived because women wore these every day, whether working on the farm or attending a wedding ceremony. Its cultural significance is deep, and it represents a sense of regional pride and grassroots craftsmanship.

RITUALS, MEMORY & EVERYDAY MEANING

During religious ceremonies, a fragment of *khana* textile (measured as one *khana*, 30”*20”) - folded into a triangle - is traditionally offered alongside an Ilkal sari, coconut, and green bangles to the goddess as a mark of reverence. This fabric holds deep symbolic value and is considered a sacred token of fertility and marital bliss. It is a living tradition that has been practised in this region for ages.

During Lakshmi Pooja, it is believed that the woman of the house embodies Goddess Lakshmi, and the Ilkal sari offered to the deity is then worn by her - symbolising abundance and divine presence within the home.

The baby shower ceremony, done either in the fifth or seventh month of pregnancy, is also called *kubsa madodu*. The expectant mother was traditionally given the *khana kubsa* (*khana* textile) and a green Ilkal sari as a sign of fertility.

Weddings also see many Ilkal saris gifted to the bride and groom's mothers and other older women in the family. It is interesting to note that even widows wore the same Ilkal sari and *khana kubsa* that they had always worn through various stages of life - giving us an insight into how deeply these two textiles have remained constant as daily-wear garments, transcending time, social constructs, and marital status.

COMING HOME: A PERSONAL JOURNEY WITH ILKAL & KHANA

Growing up in the rural northern Karnataka region, I always saw my grandmother and other family members wearing Ilkal saris and *khana kubsa*. As a child, I often clad myself in one.

After studying textiles at National Institute of Design(NID), Ahmedabad and working in the craft sector for over a decade, I realised that the North Karnataka region had not seen many opportunities through organisations or designers actively exploring its crafts and textiles. Although Ilkal was awarded the Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2007 and *khana* in 2016, the number of weavers practising the craft was diminishing by the day.

The market for these traditional textiles had become smaller, tied to the perception that only older women wore them. But there was an imperative need to revive these textiles - especially with powerlooms and artificial fibres devaluing the craft on one hand, and the drastic dwindling of traditional markets on the other.

With a few handlooms still operating, I could see the huge potential these two textiles held - and the need to bring them back. My decision to deep-dive into this journey led to Kubsa being established in 2019, and eventually, the Kaayaka Craft and Livelihood Foundation.

REVIVAL THROUGH DESIGN: TRADITION MEETS INNOVATION

Through Kubsa, my mission was not just to revive the textiles, but also to ensure a sustained effort to enrich the ecosystem. Both these textiles - and the community behind them - had suffered at the hands of traders and due to a lack of demand. But as a designer, I could see how a holistic design approach could shine light on these almost - lost crafts and reignite the pride the artisans once felt. The product was not the only focus; the process of achieving it took centre stage. With *khana*, it seemed obvious to me how we could breathe new life into this fast-fading textile - to ensure the hand-weaving practice continued and a new market emerged for it. The *khana*, which was only 30 inches in width and traditionally used only for blouses, was converted into a broader width by experimenting and manipulating the existing small looms.

Our first *khana* sari opened the door to different experiments - with natural fibres and dyes, on-loom techniques, and design explorations - to reimagine this everyday textile into something with endless possibilities. Staying true to the *khana* design repertoire, we used only traditional patterns and techniques. It was not an easy feat, because any change first requires altering the mindset of the makers. The first year became a training ground, as the weavers and ancillary artisans had to relearn skills they had long forgotten. Doing something new was met with constant resistance - but it also brought hope.

Fine pure cotton with pure silk woven using *kondi* technique and dyed in natural dyes was reintroduced. This elevated the humble but cherished Ilkal sari. Adding beautiful blends of silk and cotton to an otherwise plain cotton or checkered body gave it a soft, luxurious texture - making it a sari that could be worn in a boardroom or to a wedding. We have continued to reimagine the Ilkal sari with a deeper understanding of the techniques it offers and the endless possibilities it holds. Completely contemporising the sari with the design elements of three-shuttle weaving and the *kondi* technique created a renewed textile - one that can become a modern heirloom.

Personally, for me, design is one of the means for the survival of a craft - especially in the context of *khana* and Ilkal. When traditional markets and consumption shrink, it becomes vital to think beyond the obvious - without compromising on the values or identity of the craft. And design, in this context, doesn't pertain to just the physical product - but to the people, the systems, and the culture.

With Kubsa, we have brought these two forgotten textiles to light. And what is exciting is the ripple effect now seen in this cluster. It gives me hope - and gives the weavers a renewed pride.

CRAFTING A FUTURE: SUSTAINABILITY AND COLLECTIVE HOPE

The sustainability of a craft depends on many aspects - but one driving force is the connoisseurs and consumers who value it, making it conducive for artisans to thrive. This journey needs support from organisations that can create a larger impact, while an initiative like Kubsa, though small in scale, can demonstrate the immense possibilities and set an example.

Although small, the wave of change in the weaving community is palpable. And one day, I hope to see the younger generation come back and reclaim it.





Contemporary Look with Khana & Ilkal Sari



Contemporary Look with Khana & Ilkal Sari





Ms. Bina Rao

Location: Author's Residence, Hyderabad



Bina Rao is a renowned Indian designer and co-founder of Creative Bee, a Hyderabad-based sustainable fashion label committed to eco-friendly practices and reviving endangered Indian textile crafts. With a Master's in Fine Arts from M.S. University, Vadodara, and a textile design background from NID, Ahmedabad, Bina has spent decades empowering over 10,000 grassroots weavers and dyers across India. A former Governing Council member of NID and advisor to government handloom committees, she has also worked globally as a senior consultant for the United Nations in East Africa. Her passion for preserving traditional crafts is reflected in her ongoing project - a series of books titled Legacy of Indian Textiles. Bina's vision includes creating a national value chain model linking rural artisans directly to sustainable markets. She was honoured with the Stalwart of Handloom Award (2023) and Best Woman Achiever Award (2025) for her pioneering contributions to handloom and handicraft.



KOTPAD TEXTILES: REVIVING ODISHA'S LIVING HERITAGE OF AAL-DYED TEXTILES

The tribal village of Kotpad, nestled in Odisha's picturesque Koraput district is home to one of India's most sustainable and culturally rich handloom traditions- the Kotpad. Integrating natural dyeing and traditional weaving techniques that rely purely on resources from the surrounding environment, the Kotpad is an exemplar of the symbiotic relationship between indigenous communities, nature and their textile traditions. The knowledge of dyeing is passed matrilineally: mothers and mothers-in-law teach younger women through daily chores and rituals. Similarly, men specialise in weaving skills inherited from their forefathers. This complementary division of labour keeps the tradition alive through centuries and deeply ingrained in the local culture. The Kotpad serves as a living heritage bequeathed through generations, encapsulating the knowledge, traditions, and narratives of the tribal communities.

HISTORICAL LEGACY

Tracing its roots to the first millennium BCE, Kotpad textiles are part of an ancient heritage of dyeing and weaving. Archaeological findings, including red-dyed fabric fragments along Mediterranean trade routes and at Mohenjo-daro, suggest a link to the famed Turkey Red- an esteemed colour once patronised by Turkish nobles. Interestingly, similar dyeing techniques using the same *Aal* tree (*Morinda citrifolia*) exist across Southeast Asia, underscoring a broader textile tradition. The Mirgan community in Koraput has been continuing this tradition in recent centuries. They have preserved these time-honed techniques, producing textiles worn during ceremonies and community events by the Panika, Muria, and Gond tribes.

RECOGNITION THROUGH GI TAG

Kotpad weaving was awarded a Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2005-06, cementing its status as a unique artistic and cultural heritage of India that continues to evolve while maintaining its ancient traditions.

NATURAL DYES AND YARN SOURCING

The Kotpad textile's uniqueness lies in the use of natural dyes made from the root of the *Aal* tree. The upper layer is dried, ground, and blended with natural mordants to produce earthy hues. The *Aal* tree itself was revered in the community and was an object of worship. Mirgan weavers were mindful about not exploiting the tree barks and roots. After each cut, a poultice was applied to the wound, thus aiding the tree's healing. Now fading with time, these rituals show the deep respect these communities held for nature.

Another distinctive feature is the use of indigenous hand-spun cotton for both warp and weft, woven with narrative

motifs on traditional pit looms using the extra-weft technique.

MOTIFS, SYMBOLS, AND DESIGN

The motifs on Kotpad textiles reflect the culture, myths, everyday life, and natural surroundings of the tribe. Some common motifs include:

Objects- Axes, Boats, Huts, Temples

Wildlife- Tortoises, Crabs, Birds, Butterflies

Geometric motifs- Cat's paw (*Billi khoj*), Fish head (*machi mundi*)

These motifs are intricately woven into the fabric's edges and *pallu* (the decorative end) in geometric and symmetrical patterns. Other than their obvious aesthetic purposes, each motif is imbued with meanings tied to fertility, prosperity, and spiritual guidance.

These motifs also hold deep cultural significance for the community. Different colours and patterns are associated for births, marriages, and funerals- rendering the Kotpad fabric an expressive means of communication.



Fish motif used in Kotpad saris

THE DYEING PROCESS

The dyeing process is a laborious, time-consuming method. First, the yarn is soaked in castor oil-water mixtures and later covered in cow dung solutions. Wood ash or soda ash is used as an alkali to help fix the dye, followed by foot-kneading to ensure even absorption. Women play a pivotal role at this stage and it is not uncommon for them to interweave the kneading with their everyday household responsibilities. The yarn is then sun-dried and thoroughly washed in river water, a 3-hour process that underscores the link between water access and textile quality. After this, multiple cycles of dyeing in boiling *Aal* baths yield the final hues.



Natural hues of *Aal* and pure black dyes

The knowledge and use of pure black colour was lost over many centuries, until a few years ago when the ancient practice of making black dye was revived by myself and Mr. Kesav Rao. While training a group of Kotpad youth, we further innovated with other locally available items like jackfruit, indigo, and used tea to develop newer colours. The availability of more colours is expected to reduce the appeal of chemical dye, which is gradually penetrating the area.

STARCHING AND LOOM SETUP

After dyeing, the warp yarns need to go through a process of starching to provide stiffness, thus enabling easier weaving. The starching also helps maintain the definition of extra-weft motifs. This starch is washed away during the final washing process.

This century-old process imparts this unparalleled texture of the fabric against the wearer’s skin and therefore, I have strived diligently to not only preserve the textile, but also the technique of weaving.

Setting up a pit loom demands thorough understanding and a great deal of patience. Typically, the loom frame is constructed from bamboo or wood. The warp threads are stretched vertically and adjusted for proper tension. Afterwards, the weft threads are woven horizontally to create the fabric. Every phase is laden with implicit knowledge that can only be gained through years of watching and practising. Each item can take several weeks or even months to finish, depending on its intricacy. This painstaking process enhances its worth.

EXPANDING THE PRODUCT RANGE

Kotpad textiles, traditionally celebrated for their exquisite handwoven saris, have diversified into a wide array of clothing and lifestyle items that embody both cultural heritage and modern innovation.

In addition to saris, designers are now creating contemporary kurtas, stoles, dupattas, skirts, and jackets from Kotpad fabric, appealing to modern preferences while honouring tribal artistry. The use of breathable, organic cotton and natural dyes ensures that these garments are not only eco-friendly, but also comfortable and gentle on the skin, attracting environmentally conscious consumers. Fashion brands and artisans are exploring fusion styles and gender-neutral designs, expanding the reach of Kotpad textiles in both Indian and international fashion scenes.

Furthermore, Kotpad fabrics have found their way into home décor and accessory products. Items such as cushion covers, table runners, bags, and even wall hangings made from Kotpad textiles introduce a rustic, yet elegant touch that brings a slice of indigenous Odisha into contemporary interiors.

CHALLENGES IN CONTINUITY

Despite these advancements, Kotpad weaving encounters several obstacles. With contemporary options inundating the market and decreased interest from younger generations, the craft is witnessing a steep decline in the number of artisans actively practising the craft. Moreover, the pricing of Kotpad textiles often fails to reflect the labour and time involved, acting as a barrier for wider uptake among weavers. With fewer people practising the craft, the ancient knowledge of *Aal*-dyeing is now held by only a few artisans, putting the craft on the brink of extinction. While some products have found buyers in museum shops abroad, the community still lacks consistent support and infrastructure. The craftsmanship that once represented the community’s pride is in danger of being forgotten.

REVIVAL INITIATIVES

I have been handholding Kotpad weavers for over two decades, contemporising the product line and styles. Academicians like Dr. Sudha Dhingra from NIFT Delhi have conducted in-depth studies on Kotpad, raising awareness in academic and design circles. Some younger designers have also contributed to promoting these textiles. However, due to the geographical isolation and logistical challenges their efforts have borne limited fruit.

RECOGNITION AND MASTER ARTISANS

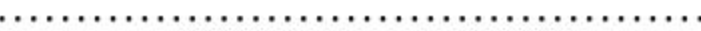
Several Kotpad artisans have been honoured nationally. Padma Shri awardees Mr. Govardhan Panika and Mrs. Jema Panika, along with awardees like Mr. Jagbandhu and Mrs. Parvati Samrath, have kept the tradition alive. Other dedicated weavers include Mr. Purushotam, Mr. Bhaskar, Mrs. Leela, Mr. Dhannajay, Mr. Minoketan, and Mr. Dayashanker, who continue the craft against all odds. These artisans are not just creators, but torchbearers of an ancient legacy.

CONCLUSION

Kotpad textiles represent more than just a handloom creation; they are a vibrant tradition reflecting sustainability, cultural heritage, and community values. Every textile is a historical artefact, meticulously crafted with skill, attention, and deep cultural importance. Although there are challenges to their preservation, there are numerous opportunities for their revival as well.

“We are on the brink of losing the thread of knowledge of *Aal*-dyed Kotpad textiles, but I remain hopeful and committed to ensuring sustainability for these master weavers.”

- Bina Rao





Contemporary Look with a Kotpad Sari



Contemporary Look with a Kotpad Sari



LUGRA SARI





Ms. Savitha Suri

Location: Author's Residence, Mumbai

Savitha Suri is a Mumbai-based author, chronicler, and textile researcher with a rich back-ground in documenting and reviving India's textile heritage. She has co-authored notable works such as 'Assam - A Journey Through Its Textiles', and contributed to academic research and authorship on weaving clusters. A passionate market revivalist, Savitha has led successful crowd-funded initiatives to revive the market for traditional textiles like the Udupi sari and Kunbi kaapod. As a curator, she has organised award-winning digital festivals and international exhibitions. She frequently conducts heritage walks, lecture sessions and workshops across India. Savitha collaborates with independent artisans to build their literacy and digital skills. As former President of the WICCI Maharashtra Handloom Council, she empowered women entrepreneurs and led impactful textile projects. She is the founder of ANVAYA, a knowledge-sharing platform for handcrafted textiles, and is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Business Administration.





SONKARI LUGRA AS A CULTURAL MARKER: A HISTORICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNEY OF THE EAST INDIAN CHRISTIANS OF BOMBAY

Textiles serve as potent, yet often overlooked cultural markers, reflecting social hierarchies, occupational identities, and historical transitions. They are more than mere garments; they are repositories of cultural memory.

Textiles, garments, and accessories of the affluent are documented and frequently well-preserved in museums or as collectors' items. Unfortunately, the same can't be said for the common man's textiles. This is even more pronounced in a city like Mumbai, which has attracted people from far and wide, making it the unique melting pot of cultures. The city is not all steel and concrete as it appears at first glance. A walk around the old neighbourhoods gradually peels away the layers and reveals centuries of history- of its people and their lives.

A heritage walk around Bandra, an upscale neighbourhood of Mumbai, transported me several centuries back to a time when the Portuguese held fort over the region. The British eventually gained control, making them the undisputed rulers of the area that is now one of India's foremost metropolitan cities. In their quest to create 'Urbs Prima in Indis' (First City in India), they began reclaiming land to connect the separate land masses and create a cohesive city. Some of the first land tracts were acquired from the Kunbi farmers who lived in what is now Bandra. The land tracts were exchanged for jobs in the East India Company (hence the name 'East Indian Christians'). This gave the community early and easy access to the Anglicisation of their culture, starting with their clothes.

In many ways, it was this insight that led me to the textiles of the East Indian community of Bombay (as it was known then). Acknowledged as among the first inhabitants of the islands that later became Bombay, the East Indian Christians have a distinct and interesting cultural legacy that includes their textiles, food, music and language.

Having previously worked on the *kaapod* of the Kunbis of Goa (who were farm labourers), the erstwhile Kunbis (farm owners) of Bandra got my immediate attention. A heritage walk through the villages of Uttan, Manor and Dharavi island of North Mumbai led me to a fortuitous meeting with East Indian culture researcher, custodian and guide, Mogan Rodrigues.

The in-depth conversations with him led to the recreation of one of the community's treasured textiles – the Sonkari Lugra. Later, a research grant awarded by the Asiatic Society of Mumbai helped me put together a comprehensive research document on the community and its traditional textiles.

Recreation of the Lugra and the research paper played a key role in enhancing my understanding of how textile history is shaped. But more importantly, it helped bring members of the community together in an effort to share oral

history and find ways of keeping the memories alive for their own sake.

If we are to attempt understanding this textile journey, then it is important that I divide this conversation into three key sections:

- Historical Context: The origins of Christianity in the Bombay region and socio-political shifts that influenced textile production
- Traditional Textiles: The Lugra and other garments as markers of identity among East Indian Christians
- Revival and Challenges: The Sonkari Lugra project and its broader implications for cultural preservation

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Early Christianity in Bombay

Christianity in the Bombay region predates Portuguese colonisation, with evidence suggesting apostolic missions by St. Bartholomew and St. Thomas in the 1st century CE. The Chalukyan and Shilahara dynasties facilitated trade connections with the Persian Gulf, bringing Christian communities into contact with Arab and European merchants. By the 16th century, Portuguese missionaries systematically converted native populations, including Brahmins, Pathare Prabhus, Kunbis, and Kolis, creating a syncretic Christian community with distinct caste-based divisions.

Portuguese and British Influence

The Portuguese (1534-1739) introduced European clothing norms, particularly among upper-caste converts who adopted Portuguese attire to signify social mobility. The British (1661 onwards) further transformed sartorial practices, with Western clothing becoming a marker of education and employment in colonial administration.

TRADITIONAL TEXTILES OF THE EAST INDIAN CHRISTIANS

The Lugra, a traditional, unstitched textile varied in length, fabric, and colour based on the wearer's marital status, caste, and occupation.

- Length: Vintage samples with East Indian Christian families and oral history suggest that women wore nine and eleven-yard drapes. On certain occasions, the usage of the ten yard Lugra was also observed. The draping style varied among the various sub-communities, each style becoming an identity of that community.
- Colour: Red symbolised fertility and was worn for weddings and by married women, while widows were obligated to wear dark blue and purple-coloured Lugas.
- Design: Influences from North Karnataka weaves suggest migratory patterns of weavers into the Konkan region.

SUB-COMMUNITY VARIATIONS

- Samavedi Christians: Some Brahminical customs were retained; women wore a dark red Lugra, while men wore distinctive red caps.
- Koli Christians: Fisherfolk who adopted printed textiles, but retained patchworked blouses of *khunn*. Known as the *kubsa*, this patchwork blouse can be identified with a specific pattern and stitching style common in North Karnataka.
- Urbanised East Indians: Abandoned traditional attire for Western clothing as a marker of upward mobility.

Other textiles of the community include *vol*, which is a white veil used during ceremonies and occasions. Most of these textiles are not in use by a vast majority of the community anymore. White wedding gowns have replaced the red Lugra, and men wear suits. Powerloom versions of the Lugra are available and worn by women in some East Indian pockets on special occasions like the *Agera*. These are not always authentic or traditional in design, having either machine embroidery done or other design elements that cater to the modern-day consumer.

THE SONKARI LUGRA REVIVAL PROJECT

In 2021, Uttan resident, Mogan Rodrigues approached me with his grandmother's trousseau Lugra dating back to the year 1945 with a request to see if it would be possible to recreate the piece. Worn by the bride on the third day after marriage, when she leaves her natal home for her marital home, the Lugra traditionally has a green-coloured body with a red border (green symbolises prosperity while red symbolises fertility).

In relatively good condition, the nine-yard Lugra was an unusual one- made in silk cotton with red borders, its body was green shot with red. We have not come across a similar colour in any vintage piece since.

However, recreating only one piece was not feasible. We, therefore, explored the idea and opportunity of making a capsule collection in nine-yards (for the members of the East Indian community) and in six-yards for non-East Indians. Mogan, being well known in the community, especially for his initiatives to promote their indigenous culture, was confident that the idea would be positively received.

We created a google form to gauge interest and take orders for a crowd-funded initiative. The crowd-funding was necessary since no one could invest the amount required to produce the capsule collection. The minimum order size was set at one whole warp or thirty Lugras.

The initiative involved 5 stages-

- Technical Analysis: Reverse-engineering vintage samples for yarn, dye, and motif replication (the border motif is endearingly known as *kombdichi paay* or feet of a chicken and is a variation of a more common motif used in North Karnataka called the *Gayathri*).
- Cluster Survey: Identifying weavers in North Karnataka familiar with the design language of the Lugra and willing to set aside a traditional pit loom to weave a relatively small order.
- Crowd-funding: Securing pre-orders to ensure financial viability where a person had to pay 60% of the total amount as an advance and the balance before delivery. A nine-yard Lugra cost Rs. 6900/- and six-yard Lugra cost Rs. 5400/- inclusive of packing and shipping.
- Production
- Dispatch



A red sari border featuring the *kombdichi paay* or feet of a chicken

Suvarna Gouri of the Goa Home Science College had earlier worked on recreating the Kunbi Kaapod of Goa and was the technical expert of this initiative. We divided the key focus areas and responsibilities amongst ourselves, with Mogan taking the responsibility for promoting the initiative within the community. Gouri was responsible for production and finance, while I handled research, documentation and marketing.

Yarn was procured based on the technical analysis of the original swatch. A pit loom weaver was identified in a village in North Karnataka to weave the Lugra.

The body of the Lugra was 2*120 double combed premium quality cotton yarn, while the weft was 20 denier 2 ply mulberry silk. An 88 reed count was used for the body.

The border had 2*100s (4 yarns /dent), while the *pallu* was with 20 denier 3 ply mulberry silk. The border had a variation of the traditional *gayathri* motif (known as *kombdichi paay* among the community) in two bands.

The weave- a plain weave - used a traditional pit loom with the *pallu* dyed before the warp was done. The twenty-five-inch red *pallu* had five-inch bands in white, each white band falling between four red lines.

Despite meticulous planning, the project faced initial setbacks:

- Climate variability: Unseasonal flooding destroyed the pit loom, and brought us back to square one. Everything had to be rebuilt from scratch resulting in loss of time and money.
- Weaver attrition: Relying on a single weaver proved to be a huge drawback. The weaver fulfilled only half the order quantity before abruptly disappearing. It was much later that we learned from credible sources that he was notorious for abandoning projects midway and had relocated to another state for work.

Pre-orders were refunded, and we went back to the drawing board. We revisited our earlier initiative, identified loopholes, and prepared strategies to eliminate them for our second iteration.

The second iteration of the Lugra Project is now underway with a fresh set of weavers - alumni of Somaiya Kala Vidya, Bagalkot. The trials are completed, and work is set to begin shortly on production.

The Lugra itself received appreciation, but more importantly, the project got the community interested in their own textile heritage and sparked several serious conversations and workshops on the Lugra and its draping.

The fact that people were willing to wait for another iteration of the textile despite the roadblocks is a testament to the commitment, transparency and integrity with which the initiative was carried out.

We have been able to document in great detail the textiles of the community that lays claim to being the earliest inhabitants of Mumbai. This adds a valuable chapter not just into their history, but also to the textile history of Maharashtra.

The revival project highlights the fragility of indigenous textile traditions in the face of globalisation. This project is also the first of its kind that came as a response to a demand from the community itself. This is an important step in textile revivals and one that gives the textile back to the community – on their terms and conditions without compromising on the symbolism and sanctity of the textile.

While technical expertise exists to revive such crafts, policy support and sustained interest from the weaving and indigenous communities are essential if we are to create successful revivals.

Textiles remain a vital, if fading, link to the East Indian Christians' past. Their preservation is not merely an act of nostalgia, but a reclaiming of identity in a homogenising world.





Contemporary Look with a Lugra Sari



Contemporary Look with a Lugra Sari



MOLAKALMURU SARI



Mr. Ramesh Vanjre

Location: Author's Residence, Bangalore

Ramesh Vanjre is a master weaver of the GI-certified, handwoven Molakalmuru silk saris from Karnataka. A torch-bearer of this exquisite tradition, he has received numerous accolades, including the prestigious National Award in 2015, in recognition of his tireless efforts to revive and sustain the Molakalmuru sari heritage. Hailing from a traditional weaving family, Ramesh made a significant personal sacrifice by discontinuing his formal education after SSLC (10th grade) to fully dedicate himself to his family's craft. His unwavering commitment has not only preserved age-old weaving techniques but has also brought in thoughtful design innovations, helping to ensure both the continuity of the tradition and the well-being of the weaving community.





MOLAKALMURU SARIS: A NARRATIVE OF CRAFTSMANSHIP AND HISTORY

Situated between the states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, Molakalmuru is both physically important and culturally vibrant. The town is located approximately 245 kilometers from Bengaluru. The name is rooted in myth, and can be translated into “broken knees” in Kannada.

Local legend has it that British troops incurred wounds on the rocky ground during a conflict with native warriors, which gives the town its dramatic moniker. Molakalmuru today is notable not only for its historical importance but also for its centre of traditional silk weaving.

This chapter delves into the history, cultural significance, weaving methods, materials, and design features of Molakalmuru saris - a craft that has been appreciated world over for its look and complex craftsmanship.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The weaving tradition of Molakalmuru dates back to the late 19th century, with the migration of the Sourashtra (Swakulasali) community from Maharashtra, and the Padmasali community from Andhra Pradesh to Molakalmuru. Additionally, the town is a melting pot since it lies at the junction of two states with equally rich handloom histories. The synthesis of these weaving traditions culminated in the unique Molakalmuru weave. Molakalmuru saris are renowned for their intricate designs and motifs, predominantly inspired by nature. They are characterised by their rich silk fabric and unique weaving techniques.



The intricate *pallu*, hallmark of the Molakalmuru weave

These saris are known for their vibrant colours like green, magenta, blue, red etc. The body is in contrast with the border and *pallu* in terms of colours. Woven in fine quality silk and zari, the characteristic feature of the sari is its intricately worked pallu. Under the royal patronage of Nalvadi Krishnarajendra Wodeyar, the Maharaja of Mysore, this craft flourished.

GEOGRAPHIC INDICATION (GI) TAG

Acknowledging its special legacy, the Molakalmuru sari was awarded Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2011. This accreditation not only preserves the sari's authenticity but also supports regional workmanship (on a worldwide basis) thereby strengthening the local economy. The GI marking guarantees that the sari reflects the technical and cultural knowledge of its artisan groups and is a product anchored in the Molakalmuru area.



Complimentary colours like red and green used to create contrast between body and border
Use of zari stripe seen in the border



Chalu Technique seen on the reverse side of the sari in between body and *pallu*

TECHNIQUES OF WEAVING

The quality of Molakalmuru saris stems from two primary weaving techniques as follows:

Kuttu Technique: Using multiple shuttles, the *Kuttu* Technique entails the manual interlacing of the borders and body weft. The weaver must control the shuttles to ensure a seamless design, which requires a great degree of expertise and coordination.

Chalu Technique: Particularly at the junction between the body of the sari and the *pallu*, the warps are interlaced which is known as the *Chalu* Technique. This is a complex technique and can be executed only by a skilled craftsman.

LOOMS

Molakalmuru saris are woven on classic pit looms. Set up below the floor level, these looms let weavers manage the tension of the yarns more freely while weaving. Perfect for the delicate patterns and motifs unique of Molakalmuru saris, pit looms are especially useful for complex weaving.

YARN AND MATERIAL

The raw materials used greatly affect the nature of a Molakalmuru sari. Use of mulberry silk for the warp provides a clean finish and great strength. Charkha spun silk is used for the weft which offers a softer texture to the sari. The silk can be 2 ply or 3 ply of 20 to 22 deniers depending upon the usage. Extra weft insertion technique, often with zari, is used for creating intricate motifs.

DESIGN ELEMENTS

The motif directory comprises common motifs inspired from nature, such as swan (*hamsa*), *rudrakshi*, lotus, peacock, mango, and *Vanki* (an old armlet pattern). Geometric and symmetrical motifs have also been incorporated to the saris, providing a modern appearance.

Some unique motifs used in these saris include the *Vale Butta* and *Gandaberunda*.

Vale Butta is a motif featuring plants, square patterns and parrots in a composition. *Gandaberunda* refers to a two-headed *Garuda* bird motif. This bird motif is placed on either side of the body near the *pallu* in a traditional Molakalmuru sari. These motifs are so distinctive that saris have been named after them.

The borders are generally thick and in contrast with the body. The borders have either complex zari designs or stripes running parallel woven in zari. The zari used is usually golden and adds an element of elegance to the sari.

Butta, on the other hand, refers to little decorative patterns such as classic icons, leaves, or florals. These are generally strewn all around the sari body.

The *pallu* is richly designed and often contrasts with the body of the sari, utilising a strikingly different colour to emphasise its beauty.



The signature Gandaberunda motif



The signature Vale Butta motif

MODERN RELEVANCE AND CUSTOMISATIONS

With the efforts of master weavers, cultural champions and government initiatives, Molakalmuru saris are finally getting the attention they have long deserved. Workshops, shows, and partnerships with designers have helped Molakalmuru saris to gain prominence at a national level. Modern methods and business operations are being taught to weavers so they may keep their cultural integrity while competing in a globalised market.

PROBLEMS AND THE PATH AHEAD

The Molakalmuru weavers have various difficulties notwithstanding their praise:

- Declining interest among youth: As the work is physically taxing, many younger members of weaving families are choosing urban jobs.
- Rising prices of quality silk and zari influence manufacturing expenses.
- Market share of handwoven originals is threatened by the proliferation of machine-made saris and imitations.

Dealing with these problems calls for:

- Promote mentoring projects and skill-based training for the interested youth.
- Provide raw materials, financial support and subsidies to the weavers.
- Design approved labelling and quality control systems to set apart real handloom saris.
- Encourage digital marketing channels to let weavers personally interact with customers.

PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

Under the guidance of the Government of India's TANTAVI Scheme, I have actively worked on weaving a variety of special sari designs such as Vale Butta, Gandaberunda, Pooja Sari, and Simhasana Sari, along with reviving many other traditional handloom saris. Coming from a traditional weaving family, it was an honour for me to work on the Molakalmuru saris as it is a part of my family's legacy.

- I routinely visit numerous weavers' units to provide guidance on weaving techniques
- Every year, I mentor students from NIFT Bangalore, offering them foundational knowledge on how to build designs from scratch, including insights into design evolution and modifications in 240-hook jacquard systems and card designs.
- I currently oversee and guide a team of fifty to sixty weavers.





Contemporary Look with a Molakalmuru Sari



Contemporary Look with a Molakalmuru Sari



MUBARAKPUR SARI





Ms. Anjali Bhatnagar

Location: National Crafts Museum & Hastkala Academy, Delhi

Anjali Bhatnagar is a seasoned professional in the craft sector, with over 18 years of experience working with artisan communities across India. A graduate of the Indian Institute of Crafts and Design (IICD), Jaipur, she specialises in soft material applications and blends traditional craft knowledge with contemporary design thinking. She has worked with leading organisations such as the Aga Khan Foundation, AIACA, Asian Heritage Foundation, and Kumaon Grameen Udyog, focusing on capacity-building, enterprise development, and sustainable market linkages. At AIACA, Anjali led the Craftmark certification program and was instrumental in developing Craftmark Green, India's first eco-label for sustainable handmade products. Her expertise lies in aligning artisanal traditions with evolving market demands through design-led development and CSR-backed initiatives. Anjali's holistic approach integrates policy, enterprise, and grassroots engagement, empowering craftspeople while ensuring the relevance and sustainability of handmade traditions in the modern economy.





REVIVING THE WEAVES OF MUBARAKPUR

LOCATING MUBARAKPUR

Once a thriving hub of excellent silk weaving, the small town of Mubarakpur is tucked away in Uttar Pradesh's Azamgarh district around 100 kilometres from the ancient city of Varanasi. Renowned for its luxurious satin weaves with zari motifs, Mubarakpur was home to about 4,000 handloom weavers.

THE HANDLOOM TRADITION

Beginning in the 14th century, accounts of Mubarakpur's handloom tradition can be found in the writings of medieval traveller Ibn Battuta, who praised the high-quality of fabrics produced here. For centuries, its luxurious satin weave with zari motifs has historically been the hallmark of this area.

But the town's close proximity to Varanasi, another renowned weaving hub, turned out to be both a blessing and boon. As Varanasi's fame rose, Mubarakpur's star waned. Over time, most handloom weavers shifted to powerloom. Many of them began manufacturing for bigger traders of Varanasi and became mere suppliers.

The once famous centre was lost to obscurity

THE REVIVAL JOURNEY

A small, committed team from the All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association (AIACA), New Delhi drove the revival of Mubarakpur's handloom tradition. The team started out on an ambitious goal- transforming this dying art of handloom weaving into a viable, sustainable enterprise. This was doubly challenging since the community did not have any archive or oral history surrounding the motifs, colours, or overall design.

Nevertheless, armed with a small grant and strong faith, they set out on their plan to motivate some weavers from the Bohra Muslim community of Mubarakpur. The goal was to collectivise the weavers who had given up all hopes on the handloom and moved on to working with powerlooms. The polyester threads of powerloom were easier to work with; designs and colours were pre-decided by traders, and the saris were sold to wholesalers. The weavers earned little and essentially, worked as wage labourers. The decline in status of these weavers to wage labourers was a huge blow to the pride and dignity of the community and craft.

Initially, only two weavers could be motivated to start weaving on their handlooms with a promise of fair, better and timely wages. The pride and glory of Mubarakpur, its satin weave, was going to be the focus of this project. It was decided that smaller off the loom products like stoles, dupattas and saris would be developed.

A designer was taken on board to design the motifs and develop a contemporary colour palette. Yarns were bought and dyed. Two looms were set up, and work on a small selection of satin weave stoles with exquisite zari designs started.

At the end of the first fortnight, the weavers were stunned when they got their entire, agreed-upon pay, without any deductions or delay. Their prior experience with traders had never included such transparency or fairness. This news spread like wildfire amongst the members of the jamaat (community), and soon enough five more weavers were ready to join the project.

This was a positive sign; the team at AIACA was enthusiastic, but still wary. Running handlooms call for a large raw material investment, hence the team had to tread carefully with their limited funds. Nevertheless, the project began with brisk steps as quick results were expected.

The first set of stoles were received in Delhi - a city celebrated as a hub for connoisseurs of fine handloom products. The network of AIACA too had seasoned professionals who would help with sales and promotions. It was believed that craft exhibitions, online stores, and other boutiques and shops will be ready to grab these beautiful textiles with an amazing story of revival.

The initial response seemed to be encouraging. With high hopes, I reached out to an online store with my bagful of stoles, fresh off the loom in shades of pink. Mutual terms and conditions were agreed upon for showcasing the products online. I believed, with a proper catalogue shoot offered online, our products would sell like hot cakes. Expectantly, we kept checking the website to see the sales. To our utter disappointment, not even a single piece had sold. By this time, some saris too had arrived. The weavers were happy as they were getting their payments on time but the inventory kept piling up in our office.

"The fabric is too thick for this weather". "The patterns look like they have been cut out from a *thaan* and made into a stole". "There are only pink coloured pieces". The feedback was harsh, but true.

This was concerning for both the funder and the team. The unique satin weave was somehow not appealing to the buyers. There was an urgent need to rethink the strategy and plan the way forward. It was decided that a new designer has to be taken on board to bring a fresh perspective. Parallely, the branding and awareness for these textiles were also looked into. A new logo and identity was created for the brand, an email and social media presence was also developed.

With a lot of hope, a new designer was identified and assigned the task. The brief was simple: we wanted these weavers to become a self sustainable enterprise and needed designs that would sell in urban markets. We requested the designer for one design almost overnight who agreed to share the design for one dupatta. Meanwhile, the weavers were getting ready to participate in an exhibition in Bangalore for the very first time.

This event was a silk expo in an upmarket venue. The weavers were excited and carried almost everything that they had in stock with them. They were competing against fake silk products similar to the ones they earlier made on powerlooms.



Use of zari and satin weave in motifs

The dupattas made in the new design sold out almost immediately. More orders were placed for the same design of dupatta. This brought a new ray of hope to the entire team. It was confirmed through interaction with the customers. Customer feedback confirmed that the new design was dressy, perfect for all weathers and very affordable, unlike other zari handloom dupattas. We had found our USP!

Around the same time, two weavers were invited to Delhi for an exposure visit. Most of the weavers had seldom set foot outside Azamgarh, and this provided a rare opportunity. These two weavers were taken to Dastkar Nature Bazaar, Kairi Exhibition by Delhi Crafts Council, Kamala Store and Dastkari Haat Samiti, and National Crafts Museum. The weavers were warmly received everywhere and their handloom was much appreciated, providing fillip to their spirit. Ms. Purnima Rai from Delhi Crafts Council, Ms. Charu Verma from Dastkari Haat Samiti, and Ms. Shelly Jain from Dastkar were among the people who made this visit a success, encouraging the weavers, answering their questions and accompanying them to exhibitions. Facilitating this exposure visit for the weavers was a very satisfying experience for me as well.

In spite of our minor success, the major roadblock at this stage was the sustainability of the entire initiative. We developed a new range of designs and decided to participate in an event organised by Dastkar in Delhi. The first few days were slow, but gradually we started making good sales. The customers were highly satisfied with the look, feel, fabric, designs and price points of our products. This event proved to be a turning point as executives from the global brand, Fabindia, spotted our designs and called for a meeting. The meeting turned out to be very successful as FabIndia placed a bulk order with our weavers. The whole team at AIACA was overjoyed and the looms were finally operating in full swing.

EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS

Post this success, the weavers started participating in events all over the country. Direct interaction with customers made the weavers well aware of market demands. During these events, they started taking orders for customisation as well. Customers were keen on getting other garments sewn from these fabrics and therefore, a new range of yardage got introduced. This not only increased their confidence, but also ensured more and more weavers joined hands.

OTHER INITIATIVES

For establishing a sustainable enterprise, a Self-Help Group was formed with ten weavers. A President, Vice President and Treasurer were elected as part of the SHG's mandate. To conduct smooth business, the weavers were equipped with bank accounts, Udyog Aadhaar and GST registrations. Financial literacy sessions were also organised for them to make sure they are well aware about business operations and could deal with buyers in an informed way. Capacity building trainings were also organised to train the weavers on basics of colour and compositions, costing and pricing, quality control mechanisms, visual merchandising, etc.

STUDYING AT THE HANDLOOM SCHOOL, MAHESHWAR

Another feather in the cap of the collective was a chance to study at the Handloom School in Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh. This helped two young weavers from the community to study design and weaving technicalities. These two weavers gained a lot of exposure and developed contacts in the industry. They even participated at a national level

Fashion Show, further boosting their morale.

SUTRAKAR SAMMAN

In 2016, two years after the exposure visit to the Delhi Crafts Council, a weaver Mr. Abdullah was awarded the highly prestigious 'Sutrakar Samman' by the Delhi Crafts Council. This is a special award given to a handloom weaver by the Council who has potential for growth and has shown immense talent in their work towards preservation of the skill.

CURRENT STATUS

At present, the SHG operates ten looms to produce new designs of saris, stoles, dupattas and yardage. They continue to participate in various exhibitions. AIACA has been continuously supporting them with design inputs, support towards working capital, and digital financial literacy. Recently, ten girls from the community have been trained in digital content creation to cater to the growing online universe. The SHG continues to work on orders and develop new designs based on the customer requirements.

PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

Since I was managing the Enterprise Support Program at AIACA till 2021, I worked closely on all aspects of this revival project. I designed their logo, tags and collateral. As part of my job, I developed the brief for the designers and also designed some pieces when needed. This was a very special project for me as the transformation was unfolding right in front of me – from being with the weavers on the exposure visit to witnessing the Sutrakaar Samman and looking at the Mubarakpur pieces as part of the Fabindia ad campaigns felt that I have made a positive change in an artisan's life and the weaving community.





Contemporary Look with a Mubarakpur Sari



Contemporary Look with a Mubarakpur Sari



PATTI KINAR SARI





Mr. Sandeep Kidile

*Location: National Institute of Fashion Technology,
Mumbai*



Sandeep Chandrakant Kidile is an Associate Professor in the Department of Textile Design at NIFT Mumbai. He holds a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Textile Technology, with academic and research interests spanning fibre science, weaving, smart textiles, and technological innovations in textiles. Mr. Kidile has played a key role in establishing state-of-the-art infrastructure at the newly inaugurated NIFT campuses in Shillong and Bhubaneswar. In his capacity as Head of Projects and Centre Coordinator, he has been instrumental in bringing numerous Central and State Government initiatives in the handloom and handicraft sectors to fruition. His work on product diversification and design development for Odisha's handloom products - carried out in collaboration with the Central Silk Board, Bangalore, and SADHAC - was widely appreciated. He has also published extensively in reputed journals in the field of textile technology.



BORDERS OF IDENTITY: THE STORY OF PATTI KINAR SARIS FROM DHAPEWADA

A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE TEXTILE

Maharashtra is renowned for its nine-yard-long sari, locally known by various names such as Nauvari, Lugra, and Kashta. Nagpur, the winter capital of the state, has long been recognised for its many handloom traditions. It is famous for the nine-yard Kashta and Nagpuri sari. The region is home to many varieties of saris, including Khangadi of Khapa, Momin sari of Kamthi, silk-cotton sari from Nagpur, Bhivapur, Umred and Paoni, Karvati of Aandhalgon and Mohadi from adjoining Bhandara district and Patti Kinar of Dhapewada.

The origin of Patti Kinar in Vidarbha's weaving tradition is deeply rooted in the cultural, social, and spiritual fabric of the region. The Vidarbha region, comprising the districts of Nagpur, Bhandara, Wardha, and Amravati, has long been a centre for cotton cultivation and handloom weaving due to the presence of black soil and access to rivers for dyeing processes. These cotton saris are recognised for their soft texture, understated elegance and the distinctive *patti* or border that defines their identity. These saris have symbolic significance for the community and were worn by local women across caste and community lines.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the weaving industry flourished under the patronage of the Bhonsle dynasty, which ruled Nagpur as a Maratha princely state. Saris from this region, especially those with structured borders and restrained colour palettes, were worn for daily use. They were also woven for special offerings in temples and as part of wedding trousseaus. Oral histories suggest that each Patti Kinar motif held specific significance, such as *ruī phool* (cotton flower) symbolising purity. The broad borders signified strength and were chosen for grander occasions.

Weavers of the region primarily belonged to communities such as the Koshtis, known for their technical expertise, and the Meher and Momins, who often practised fine cotton weaving. These saris were influenced by styles prevalent in both North and South India. Floral motifs inspired by Mughal-era textiles are visible in the Patti Kinars and so are the broad borders of Narayanpeth saris. The weavers used throw shuttle pit looms and developed techniques with Nagpuri wooden dobby and *jala* attachments to create structural motifs along the borders. These looms allowed them to create highly stylised, repeated stripe patterns (*patti*) that framed the body of the sari with symbolic emphasis. There was no documented motif repository of the weaves as the knowledge was transmitted orally between generations.

Following the British annexation of Nagpur in 1853, the weaving traditions saw a significant shift. British

colonial policy favoured mill-made yarns and products, and many Indian crafts, including Vidarbha's handloom saris, suffered from neglect and declining patronage. The introduction of Manchester mill yarns, often of poorer quality but cheaper and more uniform, disrupted local economies and disempowered traditional artisans. Saris like Patti Kinar were gradually replaced by printed mill saris, leading to the decline of many handloom clusters by the early 20th century.

However, despite the economic setbacks, Patti Kinar saris retained a sacrosanct role in religious and ceremonial occasions in rural Vidarbha. Older women continued to preserve heirloom saris as family legacy pieces, particularly in areas like Ramtek, Kalmeshwar, Saoner, Dhapewada, Adasa and Koradi, where temple traditions integrated textile offerings as part of worship.

REGIONAL AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CRAFT

Originally a nine-yard sari, these saris have gradually transformed into modern six-yard saris due to changing consumer needs, while preserving their comfort and tradition. Yet the survival of this craft faces major obstacles.

The number of weavers with the knowledge to create this sari is rapidly reducing. Additionally, the particular yarns once used to produce the authentic softness and durability of these saris are increasingly hard to find. Over the decades, the dominance of industrial textiles and changing fashion trends led to the disappearance of Patti Kinar saris from one's everyday wardrobe, placing the tradition on the verge of being forgotten.

NEED FOR REVIVAL

The revival of Patti Kinar saris is not merely a cultural endeavour; it is an economic and social necessity. It opens avenues to re-engage skilled weavers and train new artisans, ensuring the continuity of this unique craft while providing sustainable livelihoods in the region. Importantly, unlike most Indian handloom saris that are reserved for ceremonial or festive occasions, Patti Kinar saris stand out for their everyday wearability. Their breathable cotton texture and lightweight comfort make them ideal for daily use, offering a rare opportunity to integrate handloom into regular life, beyond celebrations.

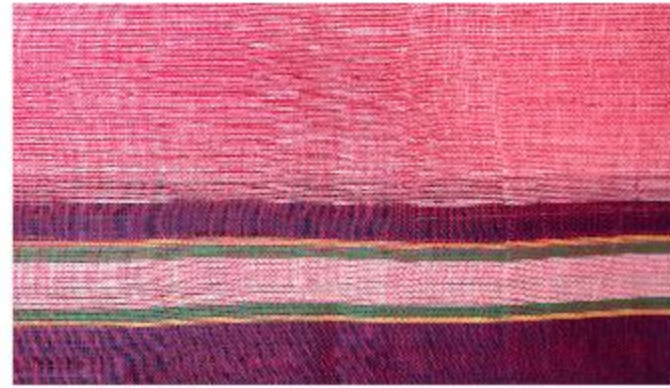
Promoting these saris can help redefine how handlooms are perceived and used in modern India- as practical, stylish, and comfortable options for daily wear. In doing so, we not only safeguard a dying craft, but also ensure that the timeless legacy of this Nagpuri sari continues to live, breathe, and evolve with the present.

DISTINCTIVE TECHNIQUES AND CHARACTERISTICS

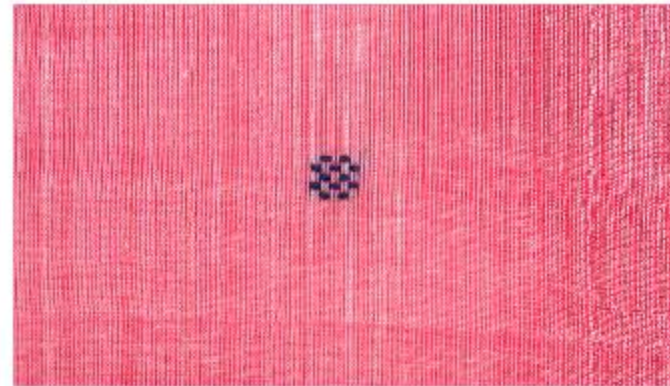
Traditional Patti Kinar saris are recognised by their striped borders (*patti*) and elaborately woven *kinars* (edges). They often feature motifs inspired by architectural and natural elements, including *ruī phool* (cotton flower), *gomi, jaiful* (jasmine), *jalidar, panchpanka*, and *vel-buti*. These motifs were commonly derived from flora and fauna from the surrounding region. Influences from textiles of North and South India are evident in the Patti Kinar saris.

Patti Kinnar saris are an exquisite example of traditional craftsmanship, meticulously crafted from single cotton yarn. These saris are known for their intricate *butis*, which are skilfully woven using the extra weft method, a technique that allows for the creation of detailed patterns and motifs. One of the most prominent motifs is the *fuli (besar)*, along with stripes of varying thicknesses on the border and *pallu*.

The weaving is done using a throw shuttle, where artisans work on traditional pit looms to produce this elegant piece of art. The size of the motifs plays a significant role in determining the price of the sari, reflecting the level of detail and craftsmanship involved. Each sari measures 6.5 metres in length and features a 3-inch plain border, providing a simple, yet elegant frame having a modern touch with its pastel palette. The sari has a very distinct feature where the pastel shades were more prominent because of white yarns exclusively used for warping and vibrant colours used in the weft. The saris are available in a variety of colours, allowing for a range of stylistic expressions while maintaining the authenticity of the craft. Colours like *tamatar* (tomato red), *baingani* (purple), *jamuni* (deep purple), and *kattha* (brown) were prevalent.



The striped border of the Patti Kinar sari



Variations of yarn as seen in the warp, weft and extra weft

REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE CRAFT

These saris, lightweight and rich in narrative, are not only visually appealing, but they also represent a thoughtful, sustainable choice.

The story of Patti Kinar saris from Dhapewada, Nagpur is not merely about conserving an endangered craft; it embodies a subtle form of defiance against environmental destruction. It stands as a declaration for sustainable livelihoods and conscious consumption. These artisans are not merely safeguarding their cultural legacy; they are interweaving the groundwork for a more sustainable and resilient future, thread by thread.

With the active support from the Ministry of Textiles, Office of Development Commissioner (Handlooms) and Office of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), National Institute of Fashion Technology, Mumbai, has taken this cluster under its Craft Cluster Initiative for the past two years. Students from the Textile Design Department have visited this cluster to unfold the untold stories of this historical region, rich in handloom legacy. The objective of this study was to try and connect the lost links and the ecosystem required to promote this languishing craft.

PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

As part of my academic engagement, I, along with my students, visited the beautiful village of Dhapewada, which was developed as a new weaving cluster by Weavers Service Centre, Nagpur. Weavers Service Centre (WSC), Nagpur, Ministry of Textiles, Govt of India, has started their training programme 'Samarth' to empower the women of Dhapewada to revive its lost legacy. More than 250 women have been trained in handloom weaving so far. Officials from WSC, Mr. Sandeep Thubrikar, Deputy Director, and Mr. Mahadev Paunikar, Assistant Director, were

great sources of information. They helped us understand the front and backend supply chain of the craft produced in the region.

Once a thriving craft practised by approximately 200 Halba Koshti weaver families, only six looms were operational during our visit. We observed that all the six weavers were elderly with one weaver Sh. Shankar Adhau being around 84 years of age. Other weavers included Sh. Hiraji (73 years), Sh. Mahadev Godbole (64 years) and Sh. Beniram Hedau (65), who is the only weaver who weaves the nine-yard Lugra today. The raw materials procured from the middleman are of a substandard quality and the weavers earn meagre wages from the craft. These raise major concerns regarding the future of the craft.

Traditionally, pre-loom work like bobbin making for warp and weft was handled by the woman members of the family. Coloured yarns were readily available, but with time, the entire supply chain got disrupted.

Along with my students, Mr Darshit Tripathi, Ms. Nidhi Nangre, Ms. Parul Goutam, and Ms. Swapnali Ghewari, I started exploring the availability of the right raw materials to make the saris. Sadly, the materials were not readily available in the market.

Sh. Pritam Pandhurnikar, a local small scale entrepreneur, provided assistance in procuring the raw material and setting up the warp. After getting the necessary pre-weaving steps done, sampling was the major challenge we encountered. We faced two more hurdles while sampling. The warp produced at Nagpur needed to be a minimum of 60 to 65 metres which meant developing a smaller sample of one to two saris was not possible. Secondly, the colour combinations that we wanted were not viable as the dyes were not available with the local dyers. Thankfully, Weavers Service Centre, Nagpur stepped up and assured us of getting the bleaching and colouring of yarn we required.

The next challenge was to motivate weavers to weave the sari on the handloom. We did not interfere with those weavers who had prior commitments with their respective vendors so that their daily earnings would not be disturbed. We were able to connect with Sh. Hiraji Godbole and his wife, Smt. Suman Godbole who agreed to make the Patti Kinar sari on their loom. Our first sari didn't come out as anticipated. The colour as well as the density were not as per our expectations. The same weft yarns were redyed to get the desired shades and the colour defect was rectified. We tried different combinations of the yarn quality and count. Both the colours used in the weft were pretested on white warp to understand the colour synergy and to get an idea of the look of the final fabric. The reed parameters were also changed to achieve better quality.

We have collaborated with the local people of Dhapewada, who are keen to preserve this craft in order to connect to their ancestral legacy. Our major source of our information was the narration of stories from these people is. The craft is an integral part of the lives and livelihood of the weaving community of this region.

We would like to acknowledge the weavers of Dhapewada for their continued association. We are immensely grateful to Weavers Service Centre, Nagpur (WSC), and K. K. Handlooms for their support in providing the required processing facility and raw materials in this endeavour.

In the time to come, these initiatives will help the handloom culture of Dhapewada and the surrounding region.





Contemporary Look with a Patti Kinar Sari



Contemporary Look with a Patti Kinar Sari





Ms. Pavithra Muddaya

*Location: Vimor- The Museum of Living
Textiles, Bangalore*

Pavithra Muddaya is a renowned handloom design practitioner based in Bangalore, with over 50 years of experience in reviving and innovating India's textile heritage. In 1974, Pavithra and her mother, Chimy Nanjappa, established Vimor - initially a small sari revival initiative run from their home. She has played a pivotal role in restoring rare weaves by blending traditional aesthetics with contemporary needs. Her people-centric approach empowers artisans through co-creation, design ownership, and sustainable livelihoods. Pavithra emphasizes simplicity in design, enabling artisans to independently reproduce and evolve their craft. Her revival of the Kuruba Kambli tradition and support for women-led craft initiatives have significantly enhanced economic opportunities in rural communities. Recognised with a Ministry of Textiles Certificate of Merit and an Ashoka Fellowship, she serves on various national textile advisory boards. Pavithra continues to mentor the next generation, digitally archive forgotten weaves, and foster global dialogue around heritage crafts. Her vision centres on artisans as leaders in shaping the future of Indian handlooms.





SACRED THREADS: THE LIVING LEGACY OF THE POOJA SARI

ORIGINS AND INITIAL DISCOVERY (MID-1970S)

The Pooja sari first entered Vimor's collection when it was acquired from Mr. Bhandari, who had sourced it from temple auctions. As documented in Vimor's records: "The Pooja was given as a reference name by Chimy (Vimor) and Mr. Bhandari as its borders resembled that of the *Angavastram* (shoulder cloth worn with the *dhoti*)". At the time, its origins were shrouded in mystery. The artisans at Vimor were puzzled because "Ikat work and Jamdani technique were not prevalent anywhere in the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu as per our knowledge at that point".

The original sari was a masterpiece of textile craftsmanship, displaying several distinctive features. The body of the sari featured double *muthu* lines (dotted lines) forming perfect squares, with each square's centre adorned by a tiny Ikat design resembling a dash or hyphen. The border showcased the *navilu-kannu* (peacock eye in Telugu) pattern, while the *pallu* was elaborately decorated with the *kalasha* motif - a coconut sitting on mango leaves atop a small pot of water used in Hindu ceremonies. The final touch came in the form of minute birds woven using the Jamdani technique at the end of the *pallu*.

FIRST RECREATION ATTEMPTS (1978)

The original Pooja Saris were acquired from temple sari auctions. These saris were plain, silk saris with *navillu-kannu* borders. Developed sans zari, these saris could be woven by the less skilled weavers. When the weavers were well acquainted with the process, silk saris with original zari threads were introduced. This provided a huge scope for the weavers to take up this challenging task while earning a steady income. Mr. Kondanna, a weaver from Dharmavaram, Andhra Pradesh successfully experimented and recreated one of the first Pooja saris.

The initial revival efforts focused on adapting the design to the skills available among local weavers. The first prototype was created by substituting the original Ikat patterns within the checks with a single white thread using a dash or dot technique. This innovation achieved a cleaner look with less float behind the design. The sari was woven using a single shuttle construction. The *pallu* featured a shot-colour effect, created by using different coloured warp and weft threads.

This medium-weight silk sari was particularly innovative for its time. As Vimor noted: "Around this time, medium-weight silk was not very common, and only heavy Kanjeevarams were in high demand. This new, medium-weight plain Pooja sari was affordable with its classy, aesthetic appeal." This combination of affordability and elegance made it an instant favourite among sari connoisseurs.

THE KONDANNA STORY

The first weaver to take on the challenge of recreating the Pooja sari was Mr. Kondanna from Dharmavaram. His dedication to the craft was evident in the precision of his work. Tragically, his sudden death created a crisis for his family. Vimor's records poignantly note: "Due to the untimely demise of Mr. Kondanna, his family was left with no income. His fourteen-year-old son was forced to become the breadwinner of the family".

Vimor's response to this tragedy demonstrated their deep commitment to both the craft and the artisans. They continued production to support late Mr. Kondanna's family and introduced the idea of incorporating Kasuti embroidery into Dharmavaram saris. The Kasuti version used four basic colours - red, green, blue, and mustard - in different orders for the warp and weft. This adaptation not only preserved the traditional design, but also provided sustainable livelihoods for the weavers.

EXPANSION ACROSS SOUTH INDIA

The Pooja sari's design soon spread through multiple weaving clusters across South India, each region adding its unique touch while maintaining the essence of the original.

ARNI REGION

In Arni, the revival was led by weaver Mr. Govindan, who began his journey as a newly married man determined to support his family. He started modestly, arriving at Vimor with his box of saris. Through perseverance, he mastered the complex checks of the Pooja sari. His dedication paid off as he eventually moved from operating just two looms to managing twenty, becoming one of the biggest sari manufacturers in the region.

KANCHIPURAM

Mr. Tulsiram's journey was equally inspiring. Starting as a humble weaver, he went on to become a successful entrepreneur, owning eleven houses in his town. His most notable contribution was creating the first zari *pallu* Pooja, adding a new dimension of grandeur to the traditional design.

SEVUR VILLAGE

Sevur, the neighbouring village of Arni, developed its own simplified version of the Pooja sari. The weavers chose to create rectangles instead of square boxes, making the design more accessible. This adaptation proved so successful that the entire village began weaving these saris, supplying them at half the cost of the original. The range expanded to include various materials like silk, polyester, cotton-silk blends, dupattas, and even power loom versions.

POCHAMPALLY

In Pochampally, master weaver Mr. Lakshmaya took on the challenge of recreating the Pooja sari in his own unique style. His initial attempts focused solely on the body of the sari before tackling the border. Later versions incorporated the peacock eye border and used 6-ply silk, staying true to the original's intricate detailing.



Traditional peacock-eye motif as seen in the borders

TECHNICAL EVOLUTION

Different regions adapted the Pooja sari design based on their unique capabilities and resources.

TAMIL NADU VERSION

In Tamil Nadu, where traditional Ikat wasn't feasible, weavers like Mr. Veeraraghavan innovated by using single lines as an alternative. They also modified the borders, replacing the *mailkan* (peacock-eye in Tamil) pattern with dashes. Mr. Veeraraghavan's most notable contribution was introducing the *Manipuri pallu*, which added a fresh aesthetic to the classic design.

MOLKALMURU RECREATION

Mr. G.M. Swamydeva, a weaver from Molkalmuru, was adamant about recreating the sari in gold. His persistence paid off, and he later enhanced the design by adding thread work. His versions used thinner yarn, subtle colours, and a zari *pallu*, staying true to the region's weaving traditions. Today, the Molkalmuru region holds a GI tag for the silk Pooja Checks Sari, with various weavers creatively reinterpreting the design over the years.

POCHAMPALLY IKAT

The Pochampally weavers focused on perfecting the checks with Ikat dots at the centre, a hallmark of the original design. Over time, they incorporated the diamond *navilu-kannu* border, completing the sari's authentic look.

MARKET IMPACT

The Pooja sari achieved remarkable commercial success, becoming a favourite among diverse clientele.

Client Base:

The sari's appeal crossed boundaries, being worn across India by the likes of former PM Smt. Indira Gandhi and acclaimed writer and cultural activist Smt. Pupul Jayakar. It became a classic piece for all of Vimor's clients, cherished for its timeless elegance.

PRODUCTION SCALE

The Pooja sari remained in production for over forty-eight years in its different versions, impacting handloom weavers across various regions in South India. Its popularity led to the creation of 'big Pallu Pooja' through collaborations with master weavers like Mr. S.R.S. Sri Ram, Mr. Murugan, Mr. Raj Shekar, and MR. Pochampali (Bala).

MATERIAL VARIATIONS

The adaptability of the Pooja sari allowed it to be woven in different materials:

Plain cotton Pooja sari-from Jalandani, Gumudipondi, Salem, Rasipuram, Coimbatore, Choda, and Penpalayam Arni.

Silk Pooja sari with checks- from Molkalmuru, Arni, and Kancheepuram (Sevur).



Silk Pooja sari with checks and Ikat dot in the centre

Mixed Yarn Pooja sari with checks- from Coimbatore, Polycot, and Penpalyam.

LEGACY AND CONTINUING PRODUCTION

The enduring appeal of the Pooja sari is well-documented in Vimor's records. After forty-eight years of trial and production, it remains one of our classic pieces. The sari is available in different variations, some closer to the original and some in redesigned forms. Over the last five decades, it has thus continuously provided work for weavers across generations.

Vimor's design philosophy has always been centred around the empowerment of artisans. This philosophy is evident in the production history of the Pooja sari. The antique design was studied as an inspiration and then recreated by matching the skill of the weaver to the complexity of the reinterpretation. Weavers were given an advance and a buy-back, alongside mentoring throughout the process. This allowed them to work in a risk-free environment, imbibing them with the confidence to execute the intricacies of each design. Ownership of the design stayed with the weavers, beyond the brand, allowing them to flourish. Due to this open-source design model, many weavers across the aforementioned regions that are linked to the Pooja sari have seen a robust undertaking of its revival over the years, with Vimor's efforts setting off this chain-reaction. In this process, many weavers have become a part of Vimor's family. I have had the privilege of training second and third generations of weavers.

CONCLUSION: A MODEL FOR REVIVAL

The Pooja sari stands as a testament to the power of thoughtful design revival. It represents:

1. Technical adaptation: Design revival by blending tradition with innovation in terms of motifs, techniques and materials.
2. Economic empowerment: The sari transformed lives of many weavers by contributing to stable returns and economic growth.
3. Cultural preservation: Maintaining Molkalmuru traditions while allowing regional interpretations kept the craft alive and relevant for a wider consumer base.

As Vimor beautifully notes, "This is a story of prosperity through designs". The Pooja sari's journey exemplifies how traditional crafts can thrive when supported by innovation, dedication, and sustained market relationships. Its legacy continues to inspire new generations of weavers and wearers alike.





Contemporary Look with a Pooja Sari



Contemporary Look with a Pooja Sari



TANGALIYA





Dr. Anjali Karolia

Location: Author's Residence, Pune



Prof. (Dr.) Anjali Karolia (Retd) is a distinguished academic in Clothing and Textiles with over four decades of teaching and research experience. She served as Dean, Director of the Institute of Fashion Technology, and Head of the Department of Clothing and Textiles at The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. A former President of the Home Science Association of India (2016–2020), she earned her Ph.D. in 1988 as a UGC Senior Research Fellow. A recipient of the Fulbright-Nehru Visiting Lecturer Fellowship in 2010, she was affiliated with the Department of Textiles, Apparel and Design at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, where she instructed a graduate course titled 'Indian Textiles and Costumes Perspectives and Potential'. Her acclaimed two-volume book 'Indian Handcrafted Textiles of India' is a definitive contribution to textile literature. She has guided 17 Ph.D. theses, published over 100 research papers, and received several awards for innovation in design and textile research. Her global engagements promote India's rich craft traditions through education, exhibitions, and policy dialogue.



TANGALIYA REIMAGINED: WEAVING NEW NARRATIVES

Surendranagar district, situated in the heart of the Saurashtra region of Gujarat has a rich historical backdrop and was initially known as Jhalawad. Often referred to as the “Gateway to Saurashtra”, the district plays a vital role in connecting various parts of the region and facilitating economic activities. Surendranagar is notable for its diverse population, particularly the myriad pastoral communities that inhabit the area. Among these groups are the Rabari, known for their distinctive clothing and livestock herding; the Ahirs, who traditionally engage in dairy farming; the Charans, renowned for their poetry and warrior heritage; and the Bharwaads, skilled in sheep rearing and weaving. Overall, Surendranagar stands as a testament to the fusion of history, culture, and craftsmanship, making it a significant and captivating part of Gujarat’s tapestry.

In addition to the other textile traditions, Surendranagar district is famous for a unique textile woven from local sheep wool, known as Tangaliya. The history and origin of this craft have largely gone unnoticed, with few written records documenting Tangaliya weaving and the origins of the Dangasiya community who weave them. Tangaliya textiles showcase a distinctive weaving technique that is truly one of a kind, characterised by its remarkable surface designs. With a rich legacy spanning 700 years, Tangaliya weaving utilises locally sourced sheep’s wool, typically in its natural shades of black, brown, or cream, or dyed with natural hues. This unique weaving technique creates intricate, bead-like patterns by wrapping bits of yarn around the warp threads, forming small dots. These dots, known as *daanas*, are arranged in various configurations to produce bead-like motifs that are pleasingly similar on both sides of the fabric. Tangaliya shawls are deeply rooted in the vibrant weaving heritage of the Dangasiya community, which emerged from an inter-caste marriage between the Bharwaad group, known for their pastoral way of life, and the Vankar community, celebrated for their weaving artistry. These beautiful shawls reflect not only the skilled collaboration between these communities but also stand as a powerful emblem of the Bharwaad community. The women of the Motabhai Bharwaad community traditionally wear the Tangaliya, also known as *tangaliyo* locally. This wraparound skirt is unstitched, serving as their lower attire and extending from the waist down to the ankles. Bharwaad women typically complement the Tangaliya with red or green *odhanis* and a blouse, enhancing the overall aesthetic of their traditional attire. The etymology of the term ‘Tangaliya’ is thought to have been derived from two Hindi words: *tang*, which refers to legs, and *liya*, meaning for, collectively implying a garment meant for covering the legs.

Traditionally, Tangaliyas are presented to daughters during their wedding and again following the birth of their first child. Women typically wear them wrapped around their waist, complemented by a *kapdu* (blouse) and an *odhani* (veil). The fabric features distinctive motifs and patterns that are woven directly into it, a rare technique in textile production

worldwide. The craft of Tangaliya weaving is passed down through generations. Male family members usually take on the task of weaving, while women assist with functions such as reeling and winding the bobbins. Most families have a fly shuttle pit loom, and creating a Tangaliya shawl can take anywhere from ten to fifteen days, depending on the weaver’s skill. This rich tradition remains alive in villages, such as Wadhvan, Dedadhara, Vastadi, Salya, Tikar, Dervada, Vadala, and Godawari in the Surendranagar district of Saurashtra, as well as in Dharnidhar and Adhoi in Kutch. Tangaliya products showcase the historically intertwined relationship between the Dangasiyas and the Bharwaads. The Bharwaads supplied wool and grain, while the Dangasiyas crafted garments in exchange.

THE PROCESS OF WEAVING TRADITIONAL TANGALIYA TEXTILES

Typically, a weaver’s home houses a traditional pit loom, where the men engage in weaving. This compact and simple loom, locally known as *Khadahath shal*, is set up in a pit. The weaver positions himself in the pit with his legs down below, using two-foot pedals to operate the loom. This unique arrangement keeps his hands free for the *daana* work, which requires precision and focus.

Making of *Daanas* or dots:

Daanas (dots) are crafted from various coloured wool, using single-ply yarn for a smaller size. Only the white dots are made from raw cotton yarn. Now, the weavers use cotton or acrylic yarns to create dots. The warp threads are grouped in pairs per dent. During the process, three warp yarns are selected to make each *daana* (dot), ensuring they stay secure within the fabric by interlocking with the picks. A minimum gap of three warp or weft threads is maintained in both directions.

Steps for making *daanas* or dots:

- Warp yarns are counted, and the *daana*’s placement is planned according to the motif. Three warp yarns are raised above the rest and held up.
- The raised warp yarns are twisted, and the *daana* yarn is held in the opposite hand, gently twisted with the warp to secure it.
- The warp yarns are then twisted in the opposite direction, allowing the *daana* to wrap around them.
- The *daana* is pushed close to the fabric edge using the thumb and forefinger. The weft is inserted between the yarns to pack the *daana* tightly and minimise gaps before the next one is woven.



A zoomed in view of the *Daanas*

TYPES OF TANGALIYA SHAWLS

Three types are Tangaliyas that serve as lower wraps, while two are *odhanis* or veils used for head covering or shawls by men as detailed below:

- *Ramraj* is the most ornate, worn by newlyweds, featuring vibrant dots in vermilion, fuchsia, and green on a black base with zari borders.

- *Charmaliya* has simpler vertical maroon and black stripes and is worn by older women.
- *Dhunshla* is a basic shawl, worn by elderly women and widows, using only white and maroon dots.
- *Gadia* is an all-black *odhani* for widows, with white dots only at the borders.
- *Lobadi* is a red-dyed woollen shawl with minimal dot work, worn by women during religious occasions and by men as a shoulder drape.

DESIGNS AND MOTIFS

Tangaliya textiles are characterised by distinctive designs reflecting their unique technique and inspiration taken from the natural environment. Key motifs include the house or *ghar* (representing safety), the temple or *deri* (symbolising worship), and plant motifs such as the mango tree and peacock (expressing appreciation for nature).

Contemporary elements, such as aeroplanes and buses, have emerged alongside traditional geometric patterns. Notably, the peacock, symbolising immortality and love, is a central motif. Overall, Tangaliya designs consist of intricate compositions made up of small units.

Filler motifs: A few motifs are also used to fill the empty spaces between two motifs, giving a unique and heavy look to both traditional and contemporary Tangaliyas.

- *Ladvo* or button: A button is a small circular motif, consisting of nine *daanas*, eight to form a circle and one in the centre. A *ladvo* is not widely used by itself as a motif. It is most often part of a larger motif.
- *Phandi*: *Phandi* is a cluster of *ladvo* made up of five *ladvos* and nine *daanas*, which together form a complete *phandi*. The term *phandi* refers to a short shrub.
- *Nani Phandi*: *Nani phandi* refers to a smaller *phandi*.
- *Navghari*: The *Navghari* is a small motif shaped like a diamond, consisting of nine *danaas*. The overall design features eight *danaas* in white forming the outer structure, with one red central *danaa* in the middle.
- *Savlu*: *Savlu* is a small motif in the shape of a diamond, made of five dots.
- *Pag* or Foot marks: The *pag* is the zigzag motif that runs below the main design. It is called *pag* because it resembles the footprints of the *mor* (peacock), which is depicted at the top of each motif. Since it is positioned at the base of the motif, the name is well-suited.

Ghaara or Kor (Border): The border below the motifs is referred to as *ghaara* or *kor*, consisting of three black bands known as *kaani*, and two lines of white or gold yarn, called *raami*. Additionally, a line called *leeti* runs parallel to the *kaanis* near the selvedge.

The Chheda or the Pallu: The *pallu* or the end piece of a Tangaliya, ranges from six to eighteen inches. It typically features ten bands, with every other band containing *daana* embellishment, resulting in five embellished bands. These bands are referred to as *aas*, each beginning with the *pag* motif.



Various traditional motifs like *ladvo*, *navghari* etc. seen in a contemporary Tangaliya

COLOURS

In traditional Tangaliya, the primary colours are black, maroon, and white. Black and maroon form the base, while white *daanas*, made from cotton, add vibrancy. These *daanas* come in various shades like orange, purple, red, and green. Artisans primarily use black wool, influenced by community superstitions that black garments ward off evil spirits. For craftsmen, black provides an ideal backdrop to highlight other colours and motifs.

CHALLENGES FACED

The decline of Tangaliya as a traditional craft can be attributed to several interconnected factors. Historically, Tangaliya products were tailored specifically for a pastoral community that thrived within a barter-based rural economy. However, as this community gradually embraced modern lifestyle and urban clothing preferences, the demand for coarse woollen shawls waned. Additionally, the strong association of Tangaliya with a single community limited its appeal in broader markets. In urban settings, these products would be perceived as rough, outdated, and incompatible with contemporary fashion sensibilities.

The raw materials used in Tangaliya weaving further constrained its growth. Traditionally crafted using coarse sheep wool, the textiles lacked the refinement expected by urban consumers. Moreover, before institutional interventions, there was little effort to modernise the craft or diversify its design repertoire. Weavers struggled to adapt to shifting consumer tastes, access larger markets, or innovate without significant support or incentives.

INNOVATION

Award of the GI tag to Tangaliya in 2009 provided the initial impetus for its revival. In the following years, collaborations between academic institutions, independent designers, NGOs and the tireless efforts of artisans laid the foundation for its revival. Sustained efforts in innovation, documentation, education, and global collaboration have revitalised this craft, transforming it from a fading tradition into a thriving art form. Responding to the evolving market, Tangaliya artisans have diversified their product range. Today, alongside traditional shawls, they produce saris, stoles, jackets, kurtas, dress materials, and home furnishings. In addition to expanding market coverage, this diversification has rejuvenated interest among younger weavers.

Equally important has been the transformation of raw materials. The use of coarse sheep wool has given way to finer options like merino wool, acrylic yarns, mercerised cotton, *kala* cotton, silk, and blended fabrics. These softer, more refined textiles appeal to both urban and international consumers. Aesthetic innovations like contemporary colour palettes, hybrid weave structures, and collaborative design approaches have infused new life into Tangaliya without compromising its authenticity.

Tangaliya's survival and growth depend on harmonising its rich heritage with contemporary relevance.

Enriching India's tapestry of textiles, Tangaliya continues to adapt to modern tastes while preserving its cultural roots; it stands as a testament to the enduring spirit of artisans and the significance of safeguarding cultural legacies.

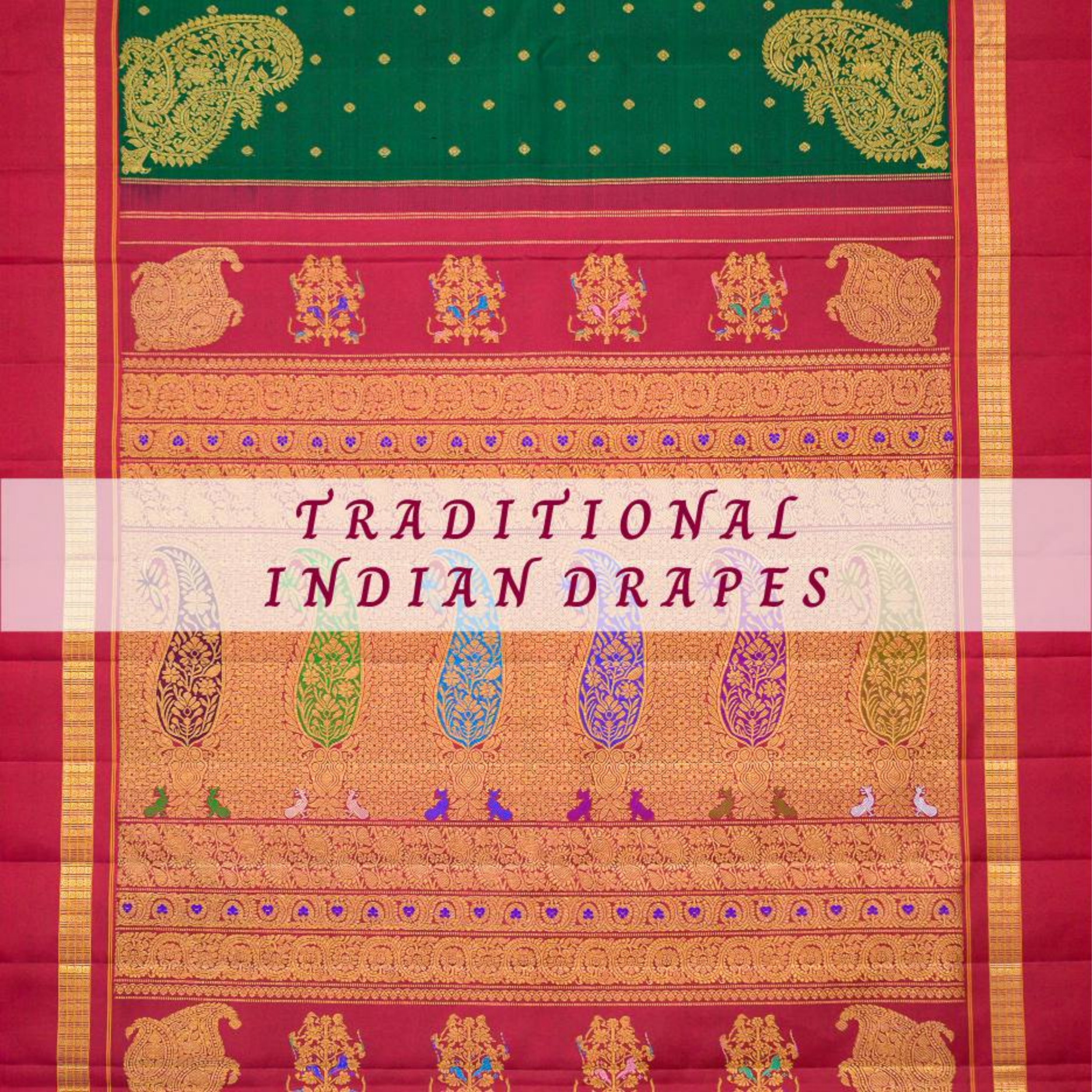




Contemporary Look with a Tangaliya Sari



Contemporary Look with a Tangaliya Sari



TRADITIONAL INDIAN DRAPES

INTRODUCTION

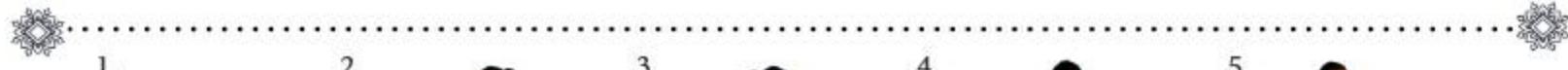
The sari is synonymous as the primary attire for Indian women. It is an unstitched piece of fabric directly on the body of the wearer. The origins of the sari are lost in the annals of time, but inferences about its evolution can be drawn from the remnants of various historical periods of India. Excavations from the Harappan Civilisation have revealed that the people were well aware of the art of growing as well as dyeing cotton. One of the earliest depictions of a sari-like drape is seen in one of the sculptures dating back to the Sunga Period (200 BCE to 50 CE). Sculptures from the Graeco- Indian Gandhara period (50 BCE to 300 CE) show the sari draped in various ways.

India's diversity is underpinned by its vast geography and near-unbroken history for millennia. Therefore, there are many distinct cultures that coexist in the subcontinent, each with its own attire, beliefs, customs. But, the use of an unstitched length of fabric is a common denominator that remains constant across all the cultural attires of women: be it in the form of a sari, a lower wrap or an *odhani*.

There are different types of saris. Variations are seen in terms of the fabric, surface ornamentation, dimension, etc. In general, the length of the sari ranges from 4 to 8 metres and the width is about 4 feet. This length of fabric is draped around in different ways to cover the maximum portion of the body. The sari has three distinct sections, the borders, the end piece (called *pallu*), and the body or the field. Each section reflected the ethnicity, class, caste, marital status, etc. Additionally, each region had developed its unique style of draping the sari which was rooted in its traditions. Gradually, as machine-made saris started flooding the markets, the regional saris started fading out. Similarly, the regional drapes also started getting replaced with aristocrats opting for the *nivi* style of drape. Today, an overwhelming majority of urban and middle-class women favour this particular style.

With Indian culture being represented in international runways, red carpets and magazines, saris have finally received its well deserved attention. However, the various indigenous draping styles are not known to the world, let alone to their countrymen. Although India is witnessing a growing trend of draping the sari in innovative ways, people are unaware of its glorious past. To pay tribute to this art form, the next section of this book explores fourteen such regional drapes, along with a step-by-step guide to drape the sari in a number of indigenous styles.

- Shankhalina Choudhury
Assistant Professor
NIFT Mumbai



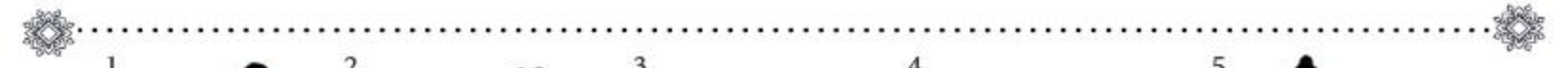
FRONT VIEW

SIDE VIEW

BACK VIEW

Name of Draping Style:
Nadia style of draping
from West Bengal

Type of Sari: 6 yards



FRONT VIEW

SIDE VIEW

BACK VIEW

Name of Draping Style:
Coorg style of draping
from Karnataka

Type of Sari: 6 yards



FRONT VIEW

SIDE VIEW

BACK VIEW

Name of Draping Style:
Boggili Posi Kattukodam
style of Draping from
Andhra Pradesh
Type of Sari: 9 yards



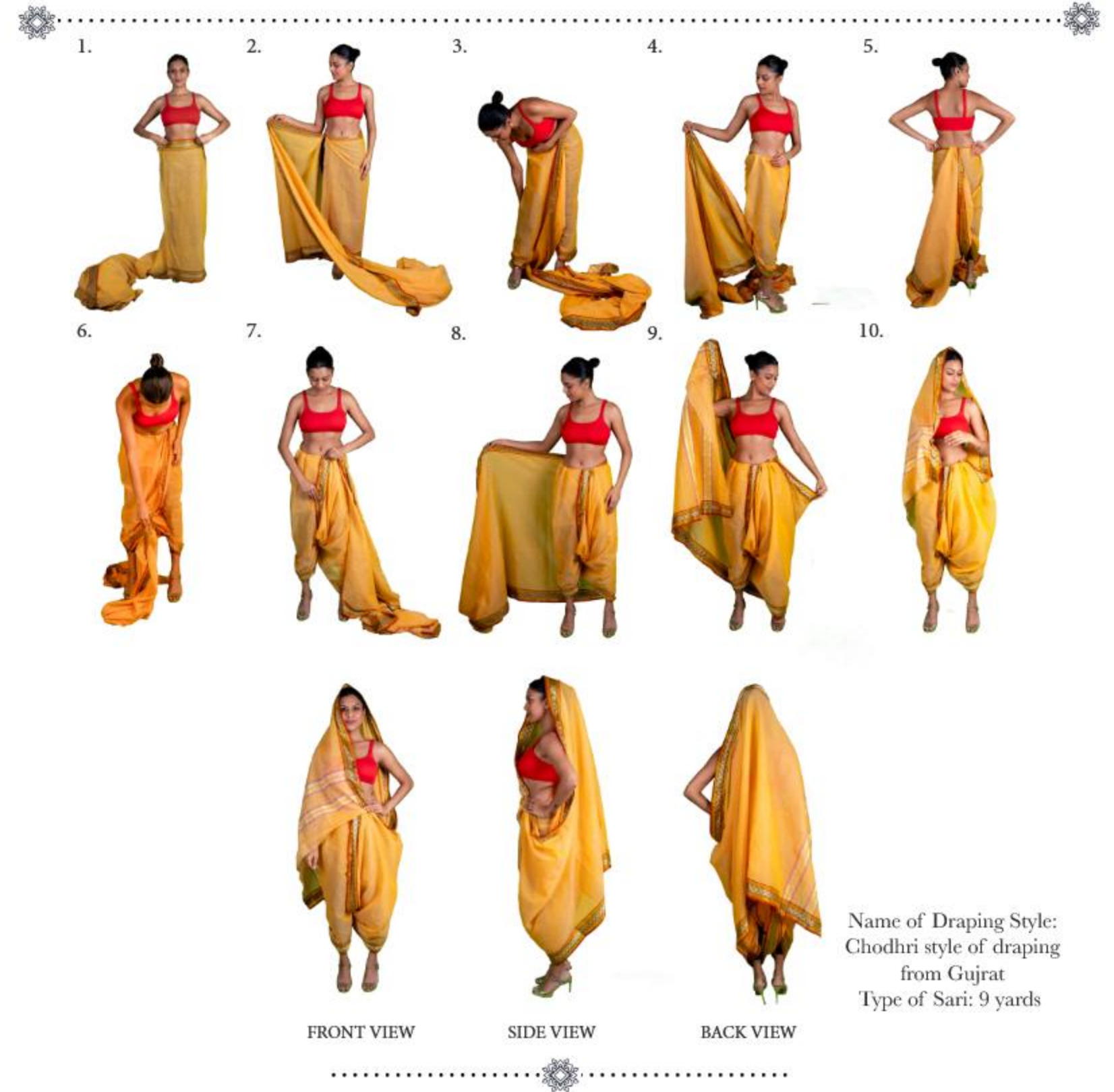
FRONT VIEW

SIDE VIEW

BACK VIEW

Name of Draping Style:
Karnataka Kachhe style
of draping
Type of Sari: 9 yards







FRONT VIEW

SIDE VIEW

BACK VIEW

Name of Draping Style:
Palamu Mahuadanr
style of draping from
Jharkhand
Type of Sari: 6 yards

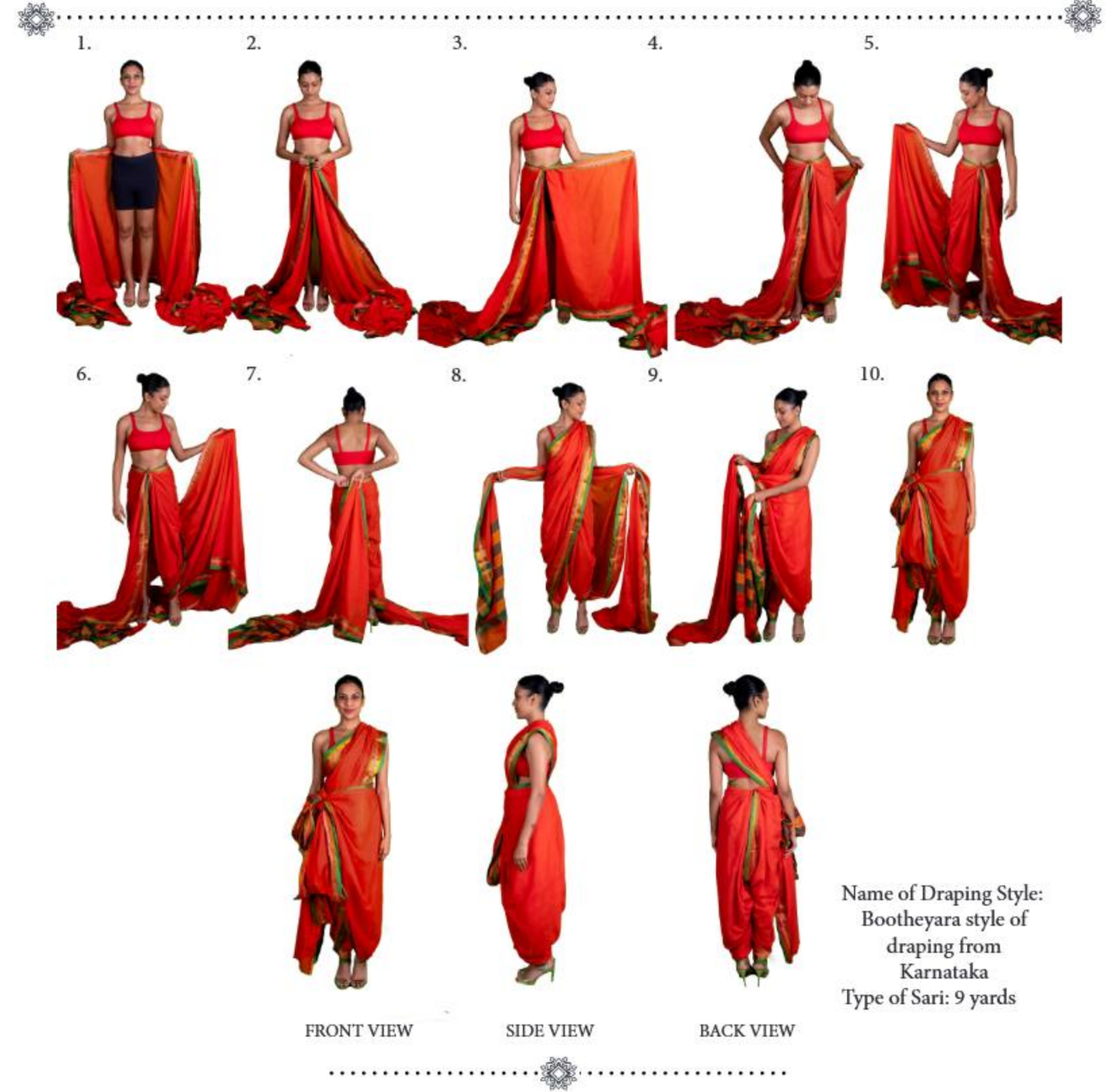


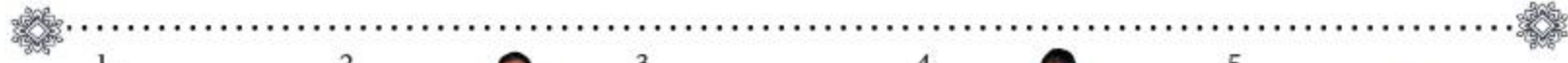
FRONT VIEW

SIDE VIEW

BACK VIEW

Name of Draping Style:
Thakkar style of
draping from
Maharashtra
Type of Sari: 9 yards





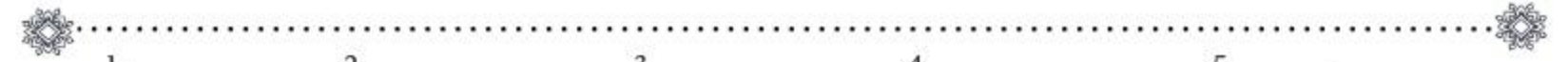
FRONT VIEW

SIDE VIEW

BACK VIEW

Name of Draping Style:
Nivi style of draping
from West Bengal

Type of Sari: 6 yards



FRONT VIEW

SIDE VIEW

BACK VIEW

Name of Draping Style:
Santhal Pargana
draping style from
Jharkhand
Type of Sari: 6 yards



OFFICE OF DEVELOPMENT COMMISSIONER HANDLOOMS

Development Commissioner for Handlooms was set up as an attached non-participating office on 20th November, 1975 under the Ministry of Commerce. At present it is functioning under the Ministry of Textiles. The Office of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms is headed by an officer of Additional Secretary/Joint Secretary level having its headquarters at Udyog Bhawan, New Delhi.

Development Commissioner (Handlooms) office is assisted by 29 WSCs function across the country. Weavers' Service Centres play a pivotal role in skill up-gradation, capacity building and disseminating the technological interventions for reducing the drudgery to the handloom weavers and better productivity, thereby improving earning of the weavers. They provide design input to the weavers through their designers, arrange training programmes for the weavers in various pre weaving, weaving and post weaving disciplines such as winding, warping, sizing dyeing, dobby jacquard pneumatic weaving, design making (CAD), dyeing, etc. WSCs also sponsor weavers in various trade fairs, Expos, to help them in establishing direct market linkages.

Office of Development Commissioner (Handlooms) also oversees implementation of Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act, 1985 through its Enforcement Wing, with the regional offices at Chennai and Ahmedabad.

The Office of the National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC), is functioning under the Chairmanship of Development Commissioner (Handlooms) basically to provide input support through procurement and distribution of yarn, dyes, chemicals and marketing of handloom fabrics.



NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FASHION TECHNOLOGY

Set up in 1986, NIFT is the pioneering institute of fashion education in the country and has been in the vanguard of providing professional human resource to the textile and apparel industry. It was made a statutory institute in 2006 by an Act of the Indian Parliament with the President of India as 'Visitor' and has full fledged campuses all across the country. Over the years NIFT has also been working as a knowledge service provider to the Union and State governments in the area of design development and positioning of handlooms and handicrafts.

The National Institute of Fashion Technology, a premier academic institute of design, management and technology, aims at establishing the benchmark for the quality of professionals that go into the fashion industry. The Institute provides comprehensive and state-of-the-art infrastructure and equipment to impart both practical and theoretical training.



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At the heart of this incredible venture is Neena Lokare, a passionate advocate, creative storyteller and devoted supporter of the weaving community. With an eye for detail and with a heart committed to tradition, Neena has brought together history, artistry, and personal narratives to craft a visual and cultural journey unlike any other. Through her extensive engagement with artisans across the country, she has not only highlighted the richness of regional crafts but also helped sustain the communities that preserve them. On social media, Neena has become a powerful voice for handloom, known for her innovative saree drapes that beautifully blend classic elegance with contemporary style. This coffee-table book is a reflection of her vision, one that honors the past, celebrates the present, and looks ahead to a future where the saree continues to thrive as both art and identity.

May these pages inspire you to see beyond the weave, to the hands that craft, the heritage that sustains and the future, we must collectively preserve.

Dr Sharmila Jayant Dua (Ex Dean NIFT)



वस्त्र मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF
TEXTILES



Development Commissioner (Handlooms)
Ministry of Textiles, Government of India

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