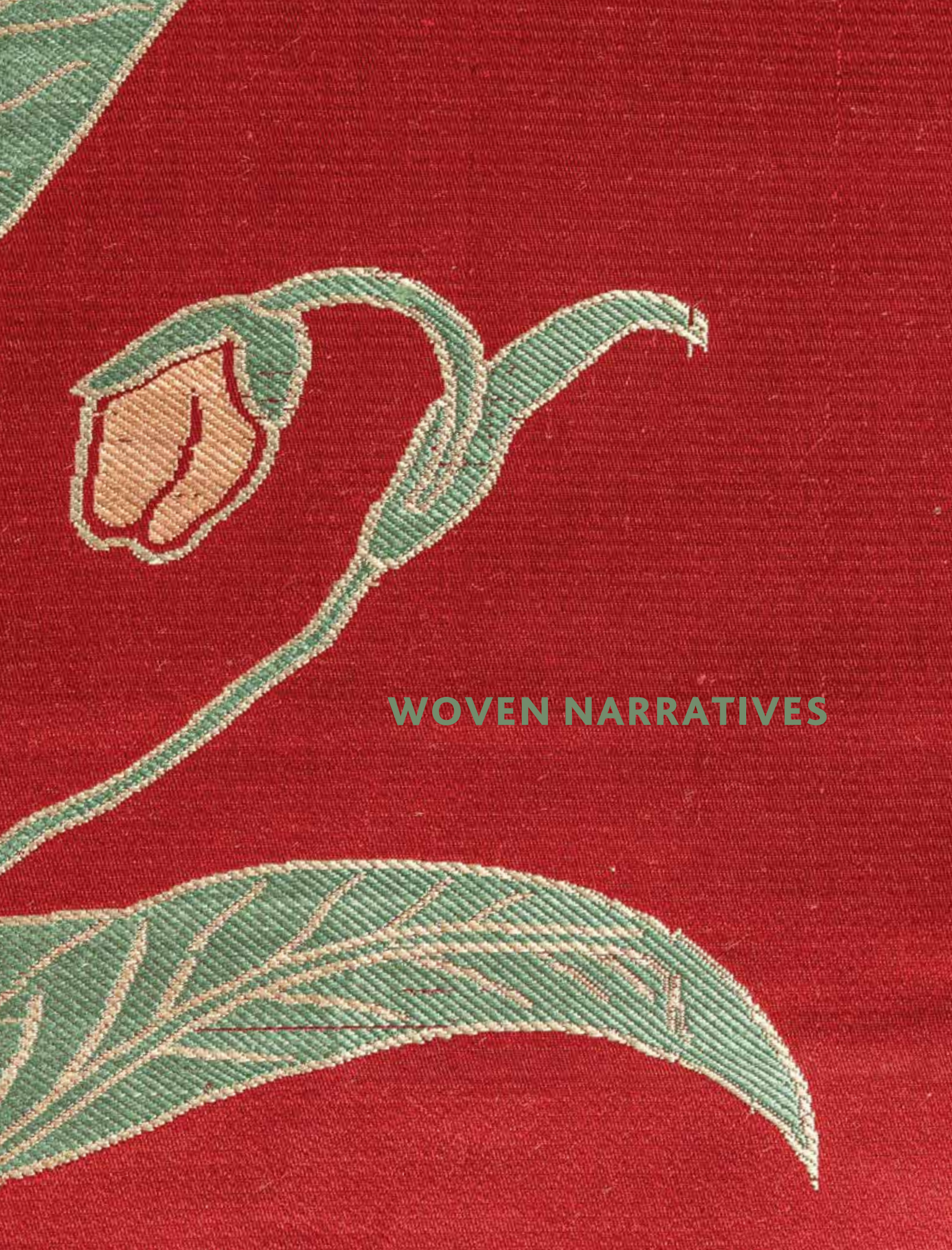
WOVEN NARRATIVES

WOVEN NARRATIVES

Woven Narratives, an exhibition presented by Culture Working Group (CWG), Ministry of Culture under India's G20 Presidency, 2023, held at Hampi Art Labs, Vidyanagar Township, Karnataka in support with JSW Foundation.

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JSW Foundation

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Textiles from the collections of
Devi Art Foundation (Mrs Lekha Poddar, Co-Founder) and Mrs Sangita Jindal

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Detail of Tent Panel (Qanat piece)
Velvet with gold leaf, 18th Century, Rajasthan, 103.5 x 59.2 in.
Acc. no. 48.7/20, National Museum, New Delhi

अमिताभ कांत
Amitabh Kant
जी20 शेरपा
G20 Sherpa

सत्यमेव जयते

G20 भारत 2023 INDIA

Message

By harnessing the transformative power of culture, the Culture Working Group (CWG), under India's G20 Presidency, aims to revitalise multilateral and multicultural cooperation at all levels. With a focus on shaping future global cultural policies and initiatives and establishing culture as a distinct goal beyond 2030, the CWG seeks to foster renewed collaboration and understanding. This is reflected in the four priority areas of the CWG as well, Protection and Restitution of Cultural Property; Harnessing Living Heritage for a Sustainable Future; Promotion of Cultural and Creative Industries and Creative Economy; Leveraging Digital Technologies for Protection and Promotion of Culture which are interconnected and derive from one another, and being transversal, reinforce the broader vision of global economic growth.

The impact of Indian cultural and creative industries on the global creative economy has always been significant. The Indian Presidency is dedicated to promoting cultural and creative industries as we are cognisant of their national and global economic potential. Our presidency has given us the opportunity to place cultural and creative industries and the creative economy at the forefront and we aim to forge a consensus towards building policy support for the sector. With this in mind, the Ministry of Culture has curated a special exhibition called 'Woven Narratives' for the third G20 Culture Working Group meeting in Hampi, Karnataka.

The theme of the exhibition is based on the CWG priority area 'Promotion of Cultural and Creative Industries and Creative Economy'. 'Woven Narratives' will present an overview of Indian handloom traditions that are still in practice. The handloom sector is one of the 12 sectors comprising India's creative economy. It is a significant driver of the growth of India's creative economy. Today, Handloom production remains one of the largest economic activities after agriculture, providing direct and indirect employment to 35.23 Lakh weavers and allied workers' and over 95% of the world's hand weaves are sourced from India.

The exhibition will showcase the diversity of handlooms, in terms of materials, processes, and designs from regions across the country, and discuss their intrinsic skills, and the art of master weavers. At a time when innovative and sustainable solutions are needed to overcome contemporary global challenges, the exhibition will convey the immense possibilities that handlooms provide in the sustenance and growth of cultural industries and the creative economy.

I congratulate the CWG Team under India's G20 Presidency, Ministry of Culture and JSW Foundation for creating this exhibition to amplify the CWG's campaign 'Culture Unites All'—a conscious step towards recognizing the resonances and commonalities of different cultures and celebrating humankind's varied and dynamic cultural expressions.

Warm Regards

Yours sincerely,

(Amitabh Kant)

Dated- 28/06/2023
Place- New Delhi

वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्
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सचिव
Govind Mohan
Secretary

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संस्कृति मंत्रालय
नई दिल्ली–110001
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF CULTURE
NEW DELHI-110 001

June 30, 2023

MESSAGE

The Culture Working Group (CWG) under India's G20 Presidency is aimed at placing culture at the heart of policymaking and informing the future course of global initiatives. Through our CWG we look forward to promoting a more equitable and sustainable future for all, guided by the principles of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* while celebrating the cultural diversity of the world.

The key priority areas ascertained by the CWG under India's G20 Presidency strive towards the protection and restitution of cultural property, harnessing living heritage for a sustainable future, promotion of cultural and creative industries and creative economy, and leveraging digital technologies for the protection and promotion of culture. These priorities share linkages with one another addressing the most pressing challenges faced by the Culture sector.

Culture being a binding force cuts across sectors and navigates societies towards forging sustainable, resilient, and robust economies. The creative economy is increasingly being considered as an untapped resource, not just as a contributor to economic growth and employment, but also as a crucial enabler in building human capital and resilient societies. Moreover, the creative economy has a wider impact on the social ecosystem due to its ability to embrace marginalized communities and strengthen cultural identity and diversity, while promoting freedom of expression and cross-cultural dialogue.

The exhibition 'Woven Narratives' is a specially curated project for the third G20 Culture Working Group meeting (July 9 to 12, 2023) in Hampi, Karnataka, under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. The concept of the exhibition is predicated on and reflective of the third priority of the CWG i.e., Promotion of Cultural and Creative Industries and Creative Economy, with a focus on Indian handloom textiles as one of the leading cultural and creative industries of India.

'Woven Narratives' presents a selection of outstanding handwoven textiles representing India's diverse geographies, artistic expressions, and cultural legacy. The exhibition draws attention to some of the significant economies and ecologies of handloom production and consumption in India today, and its connections with other parts of the world through historical and present trade networks.

I hope that the exhibition creates awareness amongst visitors, professionals, and policymakers about the role of cultural and creative industries in sustaining traditional practices along with promoting socio-economic development. The global community must work together to promote and protect the diversity of cultural expressions and leverage the economic potential of the cultural and creative industries and creative economy.

(Govind Mohan)

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नई दिल्ली–110001
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF CULTURE
NEW DELHI-110 001

MESSAGE

The Culture Working Group (CWG) under India's G20 Presidency is predicated on the idea of 'Culture for LiFE' *(Lifestyle for Environment)* promoting an environmentally conscious lifestyle as a campaign for sustainable living for a cleaner, greener, and bluer future for all. The Culture Working Group under India's G20 Presidency reflects and projects the emergence of culture as a critical theme on the global stage, reaffirming its role in renewing multilateral and multicultural synergies. CWG's hallmark campaign 'Culture Unites All' embodies this approach by promoting international cooperation for enlarging opportunities. Placing it at the core of our vision, we believe that the G20 community can unlock the potential of cultural and creative industries and the creative economy by providing a conducive environment for their development. Our efforts are geared towards tapping the economic potential of the culture sector, which epitomises inclusivity within diversity.

The culture and creative industries have grown to become one of the great powerhouses of our times, whose contribution to economic growth and sustainability is increasingly being acknowledged around the world, stirring increasing policy engagement at the national, regional and international levels. Building on the pillars of commerce, collaboration and connectivity, the Culture Working Group under India's G20 presidency promotes tapping the full potential of the creative sector to not only generate employment but also to embrace innovation and sustainability, providing significant opportunities for entrepreneurship and value creation.

Centred around the third priority of the CWG, 'Promotion of Cultural and Creative Industries and Creative Economy,' the exhibition 'Woven Narratives' highlights the unique socio-economic and cultural contexts of India's hand-weaving traditions. The exhibition has been conceptualized and curated by Mr Mayank Mansingh Kaul and Devi Art Foundation under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture with the support of JSW Foundation.

The exhibition also spots lights the handloom sector as a cornerstone of the culture and creative economy. The idea is to develop a deeper understanding of the role of the handloom sector in sustaining livelihoods and driving economic growth, both locally and globally. The exhibits on view are conceptualised and created by those who practice as artisans, Crafts persons, artists and designers, employing a range of expertise and skills in handweaving. The processes they engage also include pre loom activities such as spinning, yarn preparation and dyeing, with aspects such as finishing and surface embellishment comprising post production procedures. The makers are also dependent on a variety of raw materials, tools, equipment and devices unique to the requirements of handlooms. Fabrics reach markets through different modes of transport, are sold through a number of retail and wholesale formats, and transformed into apparel, home furnishings and other kinds of products. From such perspectives, the links with other sectors of the economy prove to be vital.

(Lily Pandeya)

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Foreword

Our diverse creative traditions are part of the living heritage of India.

Among the nation's greatest strengths, our folk and popular art practices project an irrepressible love for colour and a staunch devotion to detail. These practices and their amazing themes are testimonies to the layered lives led by our people.

JSW has been involved in creating a bridge that spans disparate cultural worlds – those of contemporary art, modern design and traditional craft forms. Over the years, we have cultivated a dedicated approach to support and project India's expressive practices and imbue them with innovative energies.

To put our handloom weaving communities at the centre, *Woven Narratives* creates a tapestry of meaning, forging connections between distinctive textiles, various material cultures, processes like spinning and dyeing, ornamental techniques, and historical contexts. The exhibition also charts the journey between creation and consumption, exploring the dynamics of production and patronage. It is a showcase that brings our home to the world.

It is a privilege to be able to present the country's extraordinary range of fabrics and fashions, patterns and designs, to the G20 delegates and other esteemed visitors. I sincerely hope that these narratives of sustainability help bring us together, establish our deep inter-connections, and weave our hearts and minds to look at a common, prosperous future.

SANGITA JINDAL

Chairperson
JSW Foundation

Unbound: Textile Cultures as Creative Industry

Dr Ritu Sethi

Shaped by one of the most sophisticated textile cultures of the world, the making and use of handmade cloth endures unbound in India, valued and transformed into robust practices adapted to contemporary times!

The inheritance of handmade textiles in the country is shaped, with responsiveness and innovation, by an entire ecosystem of professionals — from spinners, weavers and colourists to designers, as well as markets in India and overseas. From students and academia to museums and collectors; and from the development sector to the fashion industry; their vast ecologies run a seam through all stratums of society to be the most visible of Indian contemporary mores.

Handloom production today is "one of the largest economic activities after agriculture, providing direct and indirect employment to 35.23 lakh weavers and allied workers." With a share of over 15% of cloth production that is consumed within the country, and exported overseas; over 95% of the world's hand-weaves are sourced from India.[1] From its countrywide production spread, the diversity of techniques and skills, its aesthetic and design possibilities remain unrivalled, with the handloom industry a significant participant and driver of growth of India's creative economy.

Under India's G20 Presidency, the Culture Working Group's Background Paper on Priority 3 on the promotion of cultural and creative industries has included the handloom sector in the listing of the 12 sectors comprising India's creative economy.[2] This recognition of the multi-dimensional and transversal nature of its ecologies go beyond the quotidian global mappings of the cultural and creative industries, as, through this inclusion India has widened its classification scope. For it now goes, definitionally, beyond just individual creativity to encompassing community creativity that is handed down through generations. This will have a far reaching impact as it will allow for greater inclusivity and equity.

In addition, this will sharpen the lens on the mounting threat from misappropriation through copying and faking that is rife in the marketplace, which deprives handloom practitioners of the social and economic rights

over their cultural product and its associated knowledge. Within India, there is legal recourse through the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 (GI Act)[3]. While the law is only applicable within the union territory of India, it enables GI tag holders to differentiate their products, and is an effective marketing tool. Of the 483 GIs registered to date over 74 are classified as handloom.[4]

However across national borders, there are persistent gaps in intellectual property laws, as this age of digitisation and dissemination has left handloom creators largely unprotected against unauthorised overseas commercial appropriation. The results of this oversight being that misappropriation from across borders remains profitable as it is lawfully permissible and creators have no legal recourse against it. There is thus a need for developing international legal instruments that would provide for this cross-border protection.

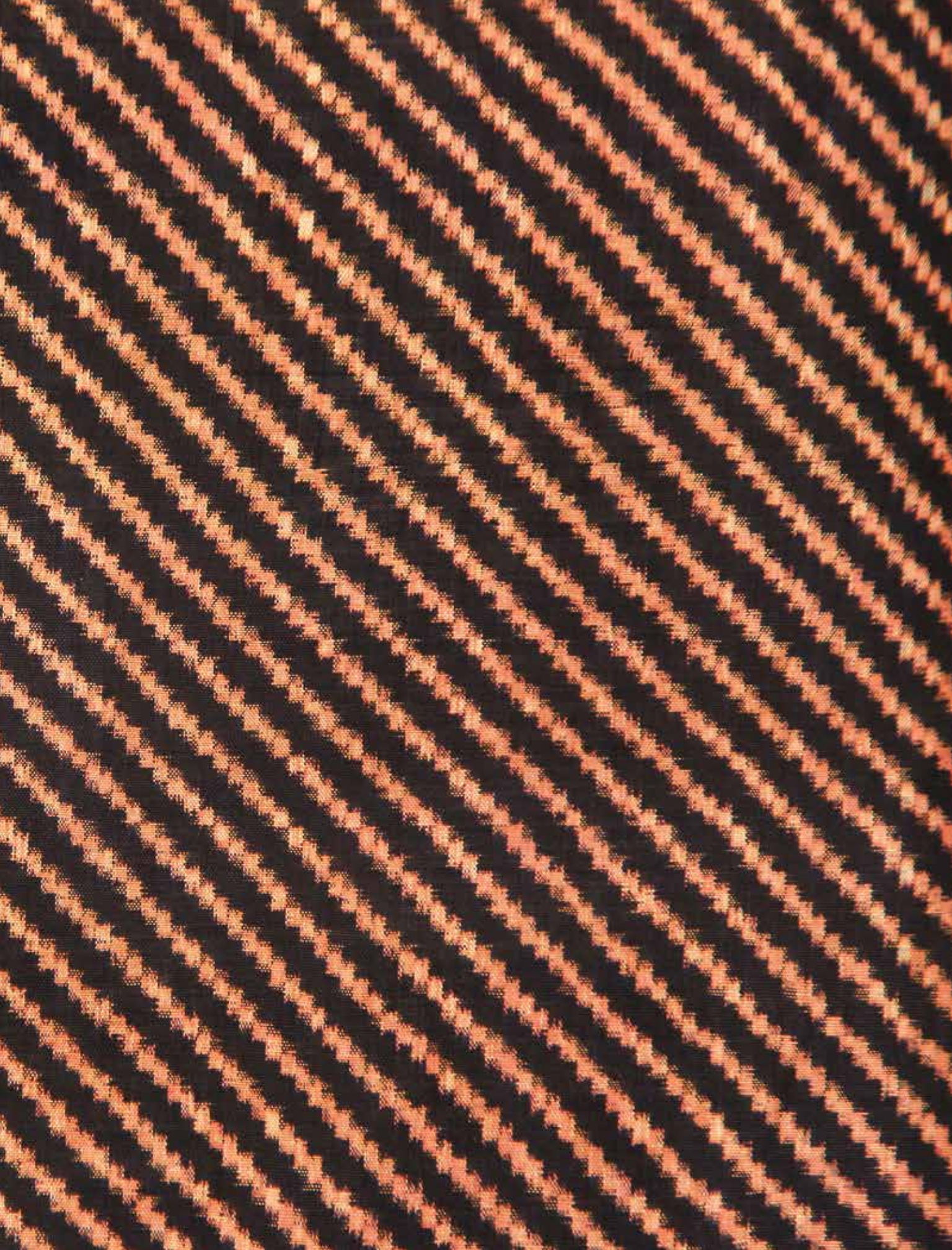
Unbound and limitless, the creative and cultural power of the handloom industry lies in its potent mix of the inherited with the innovated, of luxury with the everyday, of the local with the global.

[1] Ministry of Textiles Annual Report 2020-21. https://texmin.nic.in/sites/default/files/AR_Ministry_of_Textiles_%202020-21_Eng.pdf

[2] Culture Working Group. Background Paper Promotion of Cultural and Creative Industries and Creative Economy https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/04/India%20CWG%20Background%20Paper%20Priority%203.pdf

[3] Defined as "an indication which identifies such goods as agricultural goods, natural goods or manufactured goods as originating, or manufactured in the territory of a country, or a region or locality in that territory, where a given quality, reputation or other characteristic of such goods is essentially attributable to its geographical origin and in case where such goods are manufactured goods, one of the activities of either the production or of processing or preparing of the goods concerned takes place in such territory, region or locality, as the case may be." http://www.ipindia.gov.in/about-us-gi.htm Accessed on June 5, 2023

[4] Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India. Geographical Indications - https://search.ipindia.gov.in/GIRPublic/ Accessed on June 5, 2023



WOVEN NARRATIVES

Indian Handlooms as Creative and Cultural Industries

Mayank Mansingh Kaul

This exhibition brings into focus the role of hand weaving across India's creative and geographical contexts, by drawing attention to their distinct ecologies of manufacture, trade and use. These may be seen as forming specific economic sectors while equally expressing varied individual, social and cultural meanings for the communities involved. The selection of textiles represent some of the most prominent textile-producing regions in the country, narrating their diverse histories, visual and material features, as well as the aesthetic and technical connections many of them share with other parts of the world. Woven textiles, thus, become metaphors for both national identity and development as much as for the recognition of shared, global cultures.

The exhibits on view are conceptualised and created by those who practice as artisans, craftspersons, artists and designers, employing a range of expertise and skills in hand weaving. The processes they engage include pre-loom activities such as spinning, yarn preparation and dyeing, with aspects such as finishing and surface embellishment comprising post production procedures. The makers are also dependent on a variety of raw materials, tools, equipment and devices unique to the requirements of handlooms. Fabrics reach markets through different modes of transport, are sold through a number of retail and wholesale formats, and transformed into apparel, home furnishings and other kinds of products. From such perspectives, the links with other sectors of the economy prove to be vital.

With India celebrating the 75th year of its birth as a nation in 2022-23, the exhibition further serves as a reminder of the handmade, especially *khadi* — handspun and handwoven fabric — as a legacy of the freedom struggle. Mahatma Gandhi's ideals for Indian nationalism since the early 20th century, included the concept of *swadeshi*, a self-reliant economy, with an emphasis on strengthening village, home-based, small scale manufacture.

Detail of Coverlet (Rumal) with Chikankari work
Cotton, embroidered
20th Century, Lucknow
35.4 x 34.2 in.
National Museum, New Delhi

He saw these as essential means of resistance to colonial policies which had caused widespread devastation of the subcontinent's wealth and enterprise built over millennia.

In this way, we can see him as having pre-empted the present global concerns of environmental sustainability as well as the power of decentralised, collective and community-led action. In thinking about economics and livelihood generation, he pressed upon the importance of self worth through cultural identity. This insistence on the local, however, did not take away from his philosophy of, equally, aspiring to universal, humanist values across people in different countries, continents and civilisations.

Since ancient times, India has participated in trade beyond its borders. This has brought it, historically, in contact with the Americas, Europe, Africa and other parts of Asia. It has been noted that until the Industrial Revolution, a significant component of such commerce was in textiles, with a majority of cotton fabrics traded and used worldwide being Indian. Such cloth was woven from handspun yarns, the finest of which was muslin. Textiles woven, patterned, dyed, printed and embellished in a range of techniques and artistic styles found their way to cultures far and near, forging new, syncretic traditions.

It was the immense potential for profits from mercantile activity in Indian textiles which brought Europeans to its shores, eventually leading to colonisation. While historical specimens remain rare for the period before, from the 17th century onwards, for almost two centuries, we know of prolific production and commerce in an astounding number of genres — from embroidered silk panels for the Portuguese market produced in Bengal, pashmina Kashmir shawls for the French to hand-painted and block printed furnishings from the Coromandel Coast for the Dutch, among others. To eastern Africa went cloths with patterns of checks from south India which were called injiri, to the Arab world ikat *telia rumals*, to Indonesia travelled the double ikat *patolas* from Patan in Gujarat and to Japan, fabrics called sarasa which were used as revered objects in ritual ceremonies.

Within the subcontinent, luxury fabrics furnished palaces, aristocratic mansions and homes of the mercantile elite as much as they adorned sacred shrines. Trade prospered between courts and regional markets. The preference for fabrics, their colours and patterns were deeply

embedded with class and social markers in the past, even while some of this symbolism continues till date. It were perhaps these layers, giving personal and societal meanings to its users, which prevented them from entirely dying out through the colonial period as traditional manufactures were systematically destroyed. Governmental efforts in the following, immediate decades of Indian independence were channelled not only in the revival of such production, but in the transformation of such meanings themselves for a new era.

Khadi for instance, became increasingly popular as a luxury product for Indian designers. Block printing offered a creative resource for local brands as well for international labels as exports received stimulus, further influencing the contours of global fashion. Metallic surface embellishments started finding wide markets in festive and occasional wear as well as for bridal trousseau. Several Schools of hand painting of the *mata ni pachedi* from Gujarat, *pichvai* from Rajasthan, *kalamkari* from Andhra Pradesh and *patachitra* from West Bengal, among others, evolved their repertories to include non-religious themes for decorative purposes in urban interiors.

And even as the country made significant strides in the mechanised textiles sector, the role of handlooms in providing employment, enabling businesses, boosting the domestic economy and earning foreign exchange, among other economic-financial aspects has rested on their creative possibilities, their capacity for cross cultural dialogues and to shape identities for its makers and users. One of the most visible reflections of this is the way in which handlooms have become a popular subject of discussions on social media. This has, particularly, become a means to bind the Non-Resident Indian population with those in the country, increasing the influence of Indian designers abroad as well as connecting weavers and craftspeople directly with clientele across the world.

The textiles here are presented in groups which illustrate the role of hand weaving in art and design, farming and agriculture, nomadic and indigenous traditions, fashion and apparel, and patronage and philanthropy. Key words which constitute these ecologies guide viewers through related information, along with individual descriptions on each exhibit. These form the catalogue section of this publication. Additional essays written by leading experts and scholars of Indian textiles are included as another section. These aid readers to gain further insight into the ways in which handwoven fabrics have informed creativity and culture, as well as the contours of the Indian economy.

Art and Design

Hand weaving plays a visible role in shaping contemporary identities of art and design in India. This is a phenomenon which the country shares with its neighbours — where ancient legacies of hand-craftsmanship have been observed to inspire several generations of artists and designers — reflecting the deep connections that the cultures of South Asia share with their aesthetic histories. While some such creative practices in India draw from the artistic styles of its past, some imbibe global influences, and yet others aspire to a conversation between them, towards innovative forms of tapestries and sculptures.

A selection of these comprise this Group, further representing the present ecology of urban galleries and studios, curated exhibitions, biennales, art schools and colleges. Their networks involve a range of professionals, from researchers, technicians to art managers, aside from the makers themselves. This ecology further creates platforms for cultural diplomacy while promoting cultural tourism. This Group also includes a selection of draped garments through which we see how a new design idiom has developed in Indian weaving traditions beyond conventional motifs and patterns.

Monika Correa is one of India's most senior contemporary artists. Spanning six decades, her practice has focussed on the exploration of tapestry weaving, bringing a painterly quality to textiles. Rooted in a cosmopolitan urban Indian milieu, her artistic language equally alludes to expressions of international modernism in the 20th century. In this textile, we may see an abstract representation of the iconic Tree of Life image which appears in Indian textiles across several centuries, as well as media of cloth beyond weaving, from hand painting, printing to surface embellishment.

TREE ONE

Installation
Monika Correa
Dyed Cotton
2021, Mumbai, Maharashtra
36 x 57 in.
Collection of Sangita Jindal

UNTITLED

Installation
Bappaditya Biswas
Linen, Wool, Felt, Sequins and Indigo natural vat
2022, Kolkata, West Bengal
46 x 59 in.
Collection of Sangita Jindal

Bappaditya Biswas is a textile designer and artist known for his **innovative experiments** in hand weaving. The technique of hand inlay which he employs is shared between India and Bangladesh, broadly referred to as the *jamdani*. Used conventionally to create sarees, scarves and yardages, in this textile we see its radical re-imagination as an installation or sculpture. The use of indigo as a colour brings to mind the country's historical association with the plant-based dye, which brought India renown and fame in the past and continues to inspire an association well into present times.

Artist Boshudhara Mukherjee's ouvre is synonymous with hand weaving in materials which go beyond those usually used in Indian handlooms. In the process, she also frees the act of weaving from the loom itself. In recent years, there has been a noticeable rise in the use of cloth and fibre among artistic practitioners across age profiles. This sculpture is especially representative of a young generation who find in fabric and its methods of making, metaphors to convey notions of tradition and change, the feminine and familial, the individual and community.

U TURN

Installation
Boshudhara Mukherjee
Mixed media on canvas
2013, Bengaluru, Karnataka
57 x 95 in.
Collection of Sangita Jindal

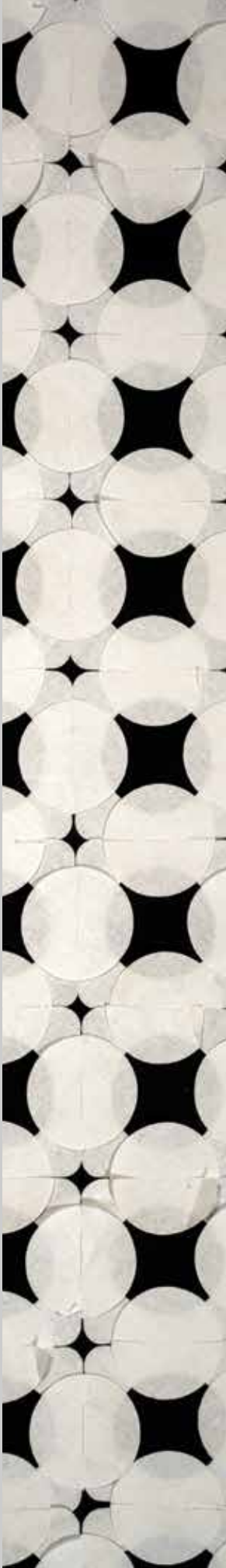
"Conventional loom-woven fabrics depend on two sets of perpendicular elements - warp and weft - for their primary structure. The rigid geometry constrains their dimensional form and flow. While most cloth has always been woven on looms, a far greater variety of non-loom textile-making processes have employed a single yarn element that engages with itself to create fabric. Knitting, macrame and crochet are examples of such techniques. The inherent flexibility and versatility of such textiles have enabled some of the earliest and most significant advances in architecture and technology in human civilisation...

This idea is given an unusual turn by graphic designer and sculptor Sachin George Sebastien, who creates an endless yarn from a self-interlocking unit of commonly-used buckram. A backing material normally hidden from view beneath a decorative textile or garment, the buckram takes centre-stage in this installation. Interlocked units come together in a potentially infinite expanse, creating an architectural passage with openings that lead one onward. In the process, these mechanical buckram units are transformed into free-flowing fabric walls of great lightness and fluidity." [1]

[1] Page 83; Fracture — Indian Textiles, New Conversations; Edited by Rahul Jain and Mayank Mansingh Kaul; Devi Art Foundation; 2015

UNTITLED

Installation
Sachin George Sebastien
Buckram Fabric
Hand Interlocking
2014, New Delhi
72 x 108 in.
Collection of Devi Art Foundation



FLYING RUG

Designed by Chandrashekhar Bheda
Created by Mahender Singh
Plain tapestry weave on vertical loom
2014, New Delhi
120 x 420 in. (when flat), 96 x 252 in. (when displayed)
Collection of Devi Art Foundation

"Textile designer Chandrashekhar Bheda's work has focussed on breaking away from the square grid of woven textiles. Altering this fundamental principle, he conceptualises a radical weave where warps and wefts no longer conform to traditional loom principles. From one end to the other and from the bottom to the top, the character of the fabric keeps changing. Curvilinearity and weight vary continuously. A surface chequerboard of black and white diamonds, constantly advancing and receding in scale, heightens the illusion of space...the result is a highly dynamic object that defies gravity and perception, floating freely like the proverbial flying carpet." [2]

Flat woven rugs in cotton and wool produced across India are referred, broadly, through the term *durrie*. Some of their prominent centres are Badhoi in Uttar Pradesh; Panipat in Haryana; Ludhiana and Bhatinda in Punjab; and Warangal in Telangana. They form a visible aspect of interior furnishings in the country, with most sections of the population using some such form of floor coverings. In many cases they are used in social gatherings, with residents of neighbourhoods across Indian villages, towns and cities often using large-sized versions of them to meet informally. The *jajam* in Rajasthan is an example of a regional type, also a metaphor for community building. Further, a present relevance in shaping a cultural identity for their makers is evident in the registration of a Geographical Tag for the *Navalgund durrie* in Karnataka.

Indian *durries*, along with woollen and silk carpets, form a lucrative category of exports. They have been in demand — at different price points of the home furnishings market — around the world from the 1960s onwards. They have also seeded the birth of some of the country's most well known brands. Among carpet weaving traditions, those in Kashmir deserve a special mention, where the hand-knotting skills involved in their creation are among the most sophisticated in the world. Their refinement carries forward the aesthetics of a past, when elite patronage ensured that carpet weaving achieved the highest levels of technical excellence. A continued appreciation for them can enable a next generation of practitioners to carry on these historical legacies.

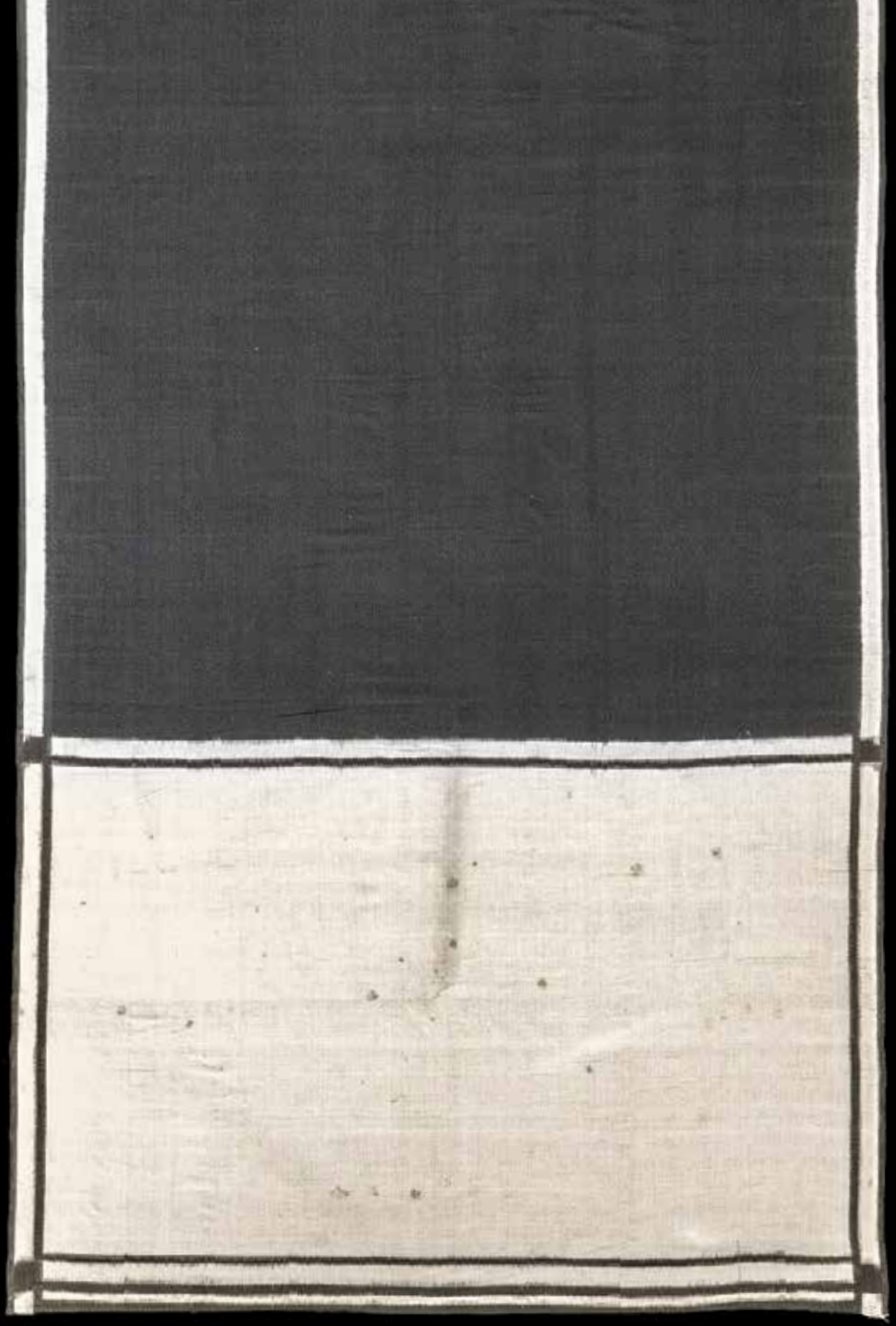
[2] Page 44; Fracture — Indian Textiles, New Conversations; Edited by Rahul Jain and Mayank Mansingh Kaul; Devi Art Foundation; 2015

Ikat textiles

Among India's most accomplished textile traditions are those which employ a hand-intensive process of patterning through the tying and dyeing of yarns before hand weaving. This technique is globally referred to as ikat, while in the country the term *bandha* is widely used. Its main centres of production lie in the States of Odisha — known for a curvilinear style of rendering vegetal, animal and calligraphic motifs; as well as Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Gujarat — known for their geometrical designs. While practitioners of Indian ikat who carry forward skills within families have found it relevant to expand inherited repertories of motifs over several decades, this group of textiles brings attention to the role of designers in reinterpreting them as well.

The designs of these sarees (white and black, diagonal stripes) are reflective of a wave of innovations from the 1960s to 90s in the country which rendered textile techniques consciously in a modernist visual language. They are designed by one of India's foremost textile designers Rakesh Thakore, and bring attention to the mathematical precision and skill required in double ikat — where the tie and dye takes place in both the warp and weft — for the achievement of a starkness of colour and sharp definition in patterns. In contrast, a contemporary version of shawls (red calligraphic textile) worn by male priests in temples in Odisha uses single ikat — where the tie and dye takes place in the weft alone — to pattern devotional verses in Odia, the script used in the region.

With ikat itself being a Malay word, India shares the practice with other parts of Asia, which variously use the technique to weave different fibres and designs. In Uzbekistan for instance, yardages of small widths of single ikat are woven with bold motifs in silk satin. Such fabrics are transformed into stitched garments locally, but have also become increasingly popular for use in home furnishings in the global luxury interiors market in recent years. Satin ikats are also known to have been produced and used in the past in the Deccan in India which are called mashru. In Japan, a variety of ikat to render repetitive forms is referred to as kasuri, while striking ikat patterns combined with resist dye painting and printing in cotton form a special genre of Indian textiles which were exported to Japan as far back as the 17th century.



SAREE

Designed by Rakesh Thakore
Cotton
Plain weave with double ikat
1990s, Telangana
45 x 244 in.
Collection of Devi Art Foundation

SAREE

Designed by Rakesh Thakore
Created by Chhotalal Salvi
Silk, Metallic yarn (zari)
Plain weave with double ikat
1985, Patan, Gujarat
48 x 210 in.
Collection of Devi Art Foundation

SCARF

Mulberry Silk
Plain weave with single ikat
1990s, Odisha
53 x 140 in.
Collection of Devi Art Foundation

The towns of Paithan and Yeola in Maharashtra are renowned for a special variety of sarees called *paithani*. These are created with a distinct form of weave, versions of which are used in the weaving of pashmina shawls in Kashmir and woollen shawls in Himachal Pradesh. Such *paithani* sarees are primarily worn by women on special occasions such as weddings and religious festivals, with motifs ranging from the lotus, flowering vines and the peacock. The multi colour palette usually includes bright tones of yellow, red, blue, green and purple. Breaking from these conventions, the *paithani* here attempts a contemporary take in grey with geometrical patterns, retaining however its quintessential use of heavy metallic yarns. Called zari, such copper, silver and gold-based threads are a signature feature of high-end fabrics across India. Their production comprises a lucrative segment of Indian handlooms, with Surat in Gujarat and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh being prominent centres for such zari-production.

SAREE

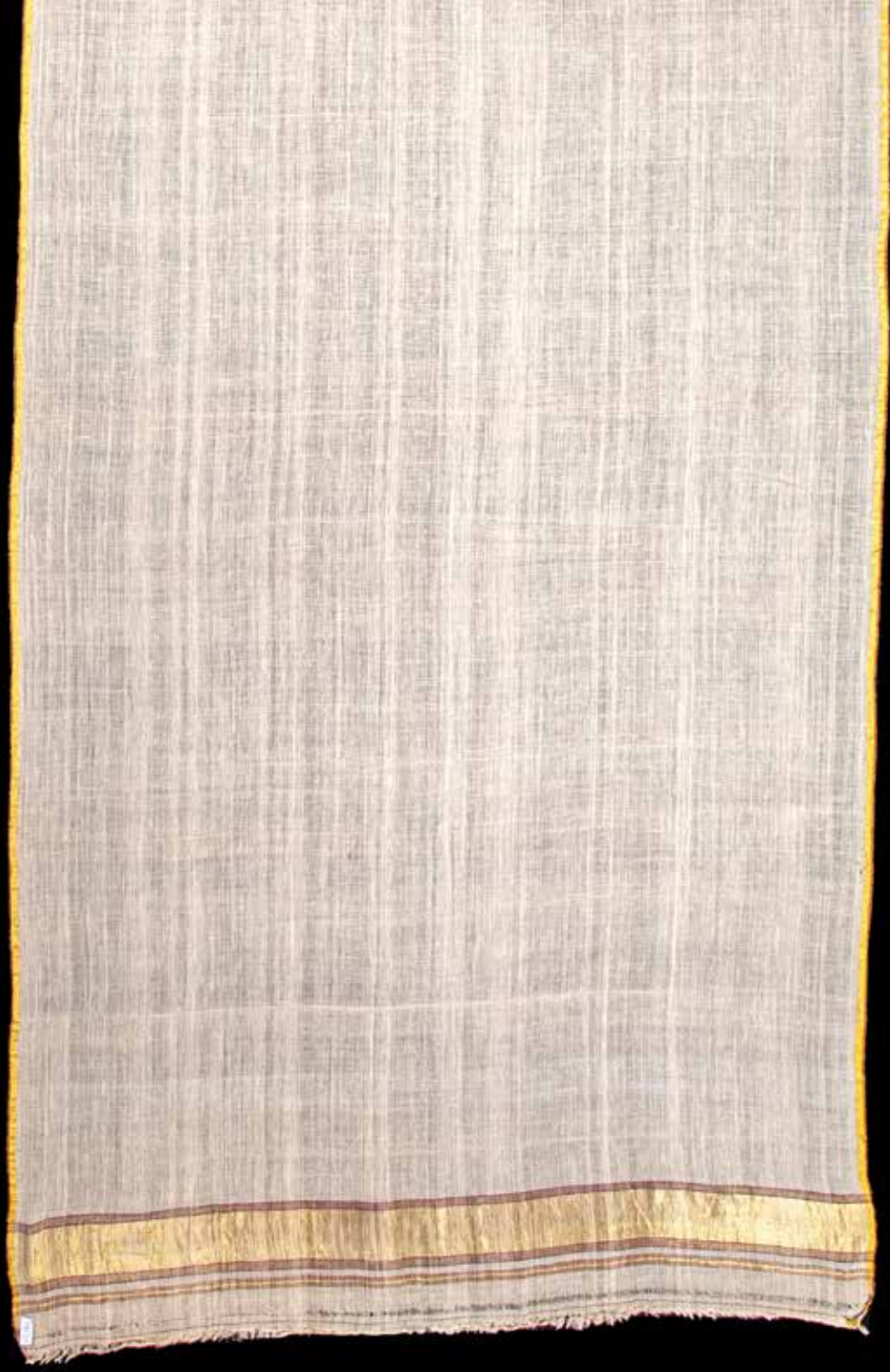
Designed by Meera Mehta
Created by Shantilal Bhangade
Silk, Metallic yarn (zari)
Complementary plain weave (interlock tapestry technique) with discontinuous and continuous supplementary weft; Supplementary warp (border)
1990s or 2000s, Paithan or Yeola, Maharashtra
45.5 x 240 in.
Collection of Devi Art Foundation

Farming and Agriculture

The relationship between hand weaving and farming practices has been complementary since ancient times, with cloth production centres often being situated in regions which grow the raw materials that they use. While cotton forms the largest component of this phenomena in India, a rise in the production of fabrics made of nettle, banana, water hyacinth and ramie, among other plant-fibres, has been observed recently. The demand for handloom products made of silk has also exponentially expanded, especially in the formal and occasional wear segment of the apparel sector. This is an animal-based fibre, with its distinct types of yarns spun from the cocoons of worms, which in turn feed on the leaves of plants such as mulberry — for mulberry silk, castor — for eri silk, som —for muga silk as well as asan and arjun — for tussar silk. Their rearing is dependent on specific kinds of cultivation which informs an aspect of agriculture in India with its own network of experts and expertise.

The sarees here are handwoven from cotton yarns, which are handspun (red cotton) and semi-handspun (light blue). They were commissioned for a series of privately funded exhibitions between 2001-02 which emerged from researching the status of hand-spinning cotton in the country at the turn of the millennium.[3] In the almost two decades since then, the number of centres where such activity takes place have increased, likely an indication of a commensurate increase in the value of such fabrics as luxury products. From the perspective of livelihood generation, such hand-spinning and related fibre processing methods, constitute a means of additional earning for farmers along with agriculture. In the non-farming months of the year, occupations related to handlooms further provide a seasonal source of income.

[3] Khadi - The Fabric of Freedom; Amar Vastra Kosh and The Volkart Foundation



SAREE

Red Cotton, Metallic yarn (zari)
Plain weave
2000-01, Andhra Pradesh
49 x 252 in.
Collection of Devi Art Foundation
and Saris of India, Martand Singh Archives

SAREE

Cotton, Metallic yarn (zari)
Plain weave with discontinuous supplementary weft (inlay)
2000-01, West Bengal
49 x 273 in.
Collection of Devi Art Foundation
and Saris of India, Martand Singh Archives

Nomadic and Indigenous Traditions

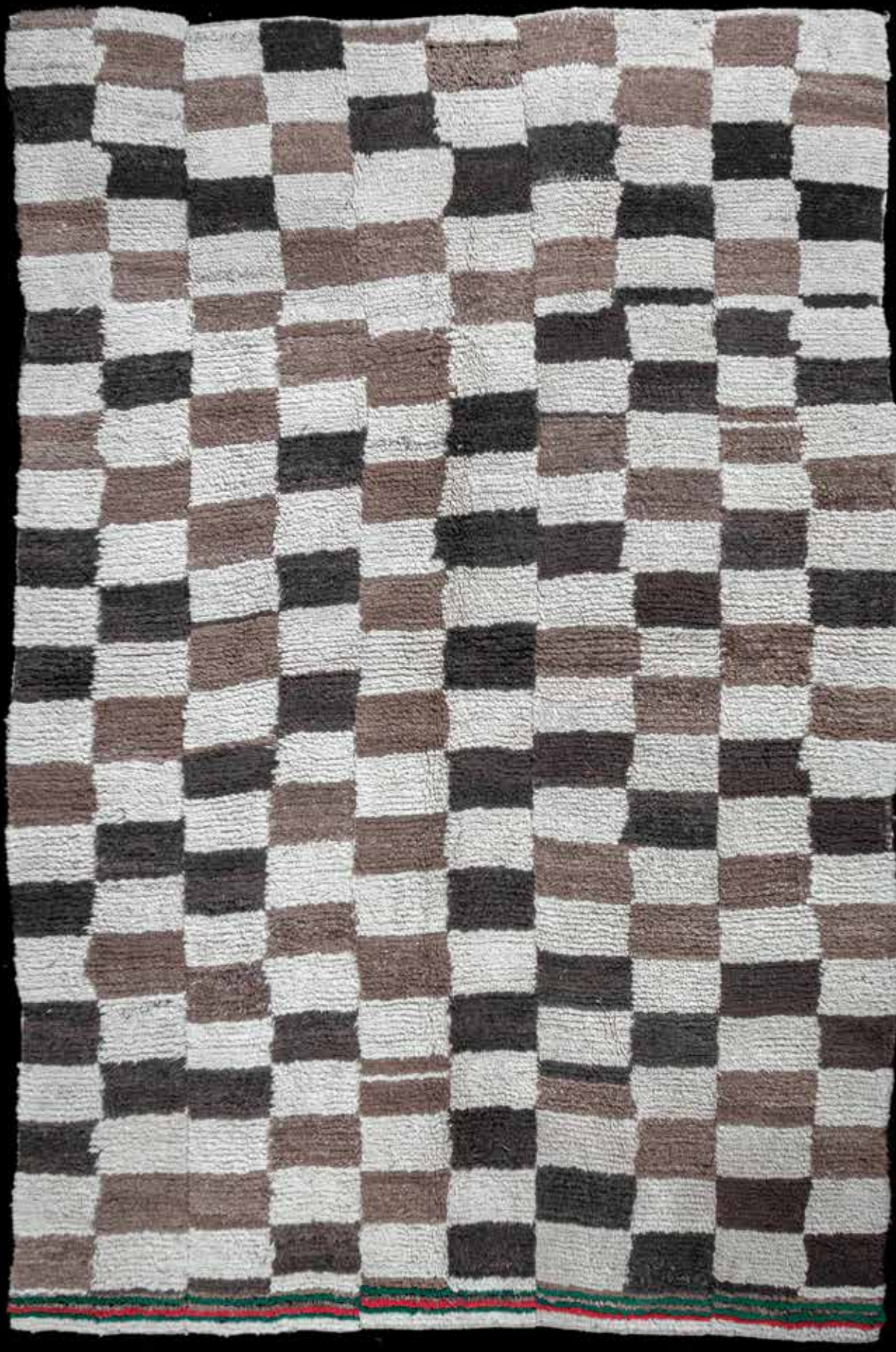
Communities in many parts of India live a nomadic way of life, far from urban spaces, such as high mountains and the desert. They rear animals — goats, sheep and camels, which act as their main source for food, protection as well as fibre, which they use to weave fabrics for their requirements of clothing and shelter. These provide an identity to members of the community, and in some cases are also a means of barter with others. An example of such a textile, this blanket (ladakhi blanket) is woven on a backstrap loom by nomadic pastoralist women who live in Changthang in eastern Ladakh. It uses the pile technique of weaving and is made up of five strips that have been hand stitched along the length.[4]

In other parts of the country, indigenous communities live in close contact with forests — across geographies — which are their primary means of sustenance. Textiles are created by them for use in special occasions as well for everyday sartorial and furnishing purposes. This ceremonial cloth from the northeastern State of Nagaland is an example of the former kind (shawl with human motifs), while the saree (dark brown saree) from Kotpad in Odisha of the latter. Both express a bold, powerful, energetic and primeval visual language, found across civilisations of the past, which resonate till the present.

In nomadic and indigenous communities, changes in inherited ways of life and occupations in recent decades have brought them into the relatively mainstream economy. One way through which such linkages are being established, are in the re-thinking of their textile making practices to evolve new products for markets beyond their own. Some such efforts have been initiated by community leaders, to enable regular livelihood generation. Yet others are led by collaborators who see in the materials and aesthetics of their fabrics the possibility to help emerge and sustain home-grown enterprises and brands which have wide appeal.

Many weavers in such circumstances are women. Such livelihoods provide the chance for them to work from their homes, allowing a flexibility to simultaneously manage household matters. Such self-employment suggests a form of decentralised production in Indian handlooms which became relevant during the Covid-19 pandemic. An increase in online marketing and sales ensured that the demand for products from such weavers was not impacted in some exceptional cases, and earnings for them remain unaffected.[5]

[4] I am grateful to Dr Monisha Ahmed for providing this information
[5] I am grateful to Jesmina Zeliang for related insights from Nagaland

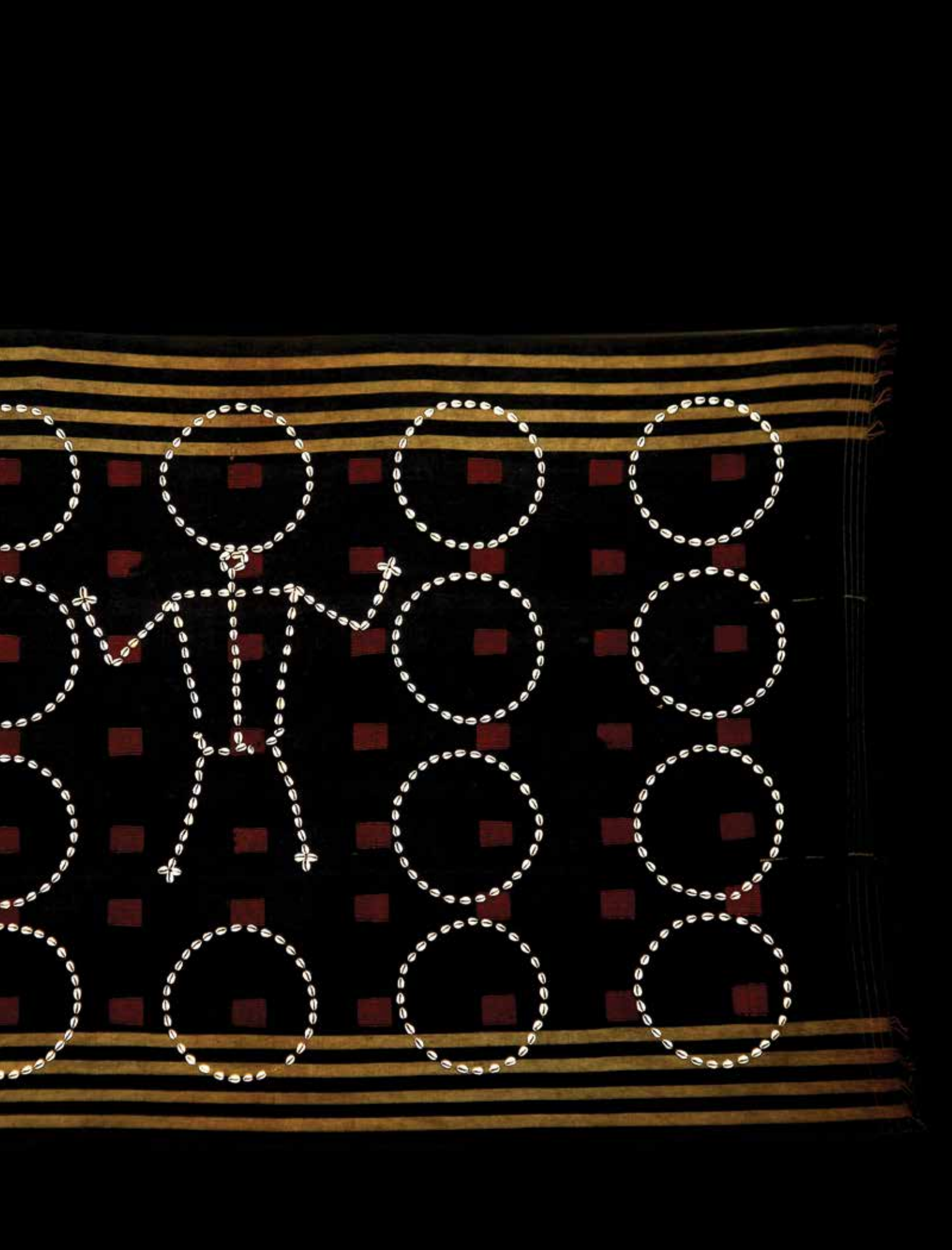


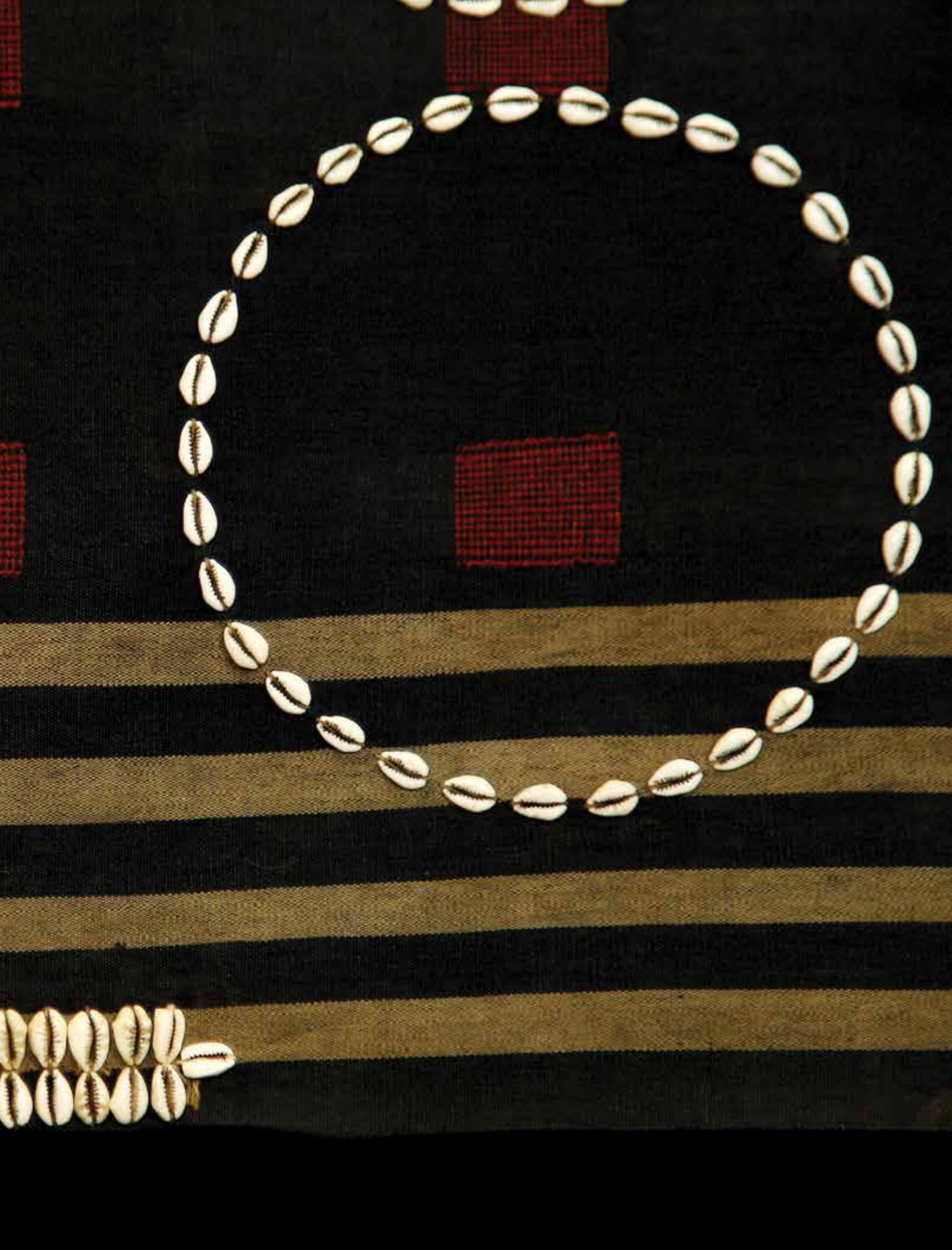
BLANKET (*SUKTUL / SUK-TUL*)

Cotton, Sheep wool, Yak wool, Natural dyes
Plain weave with pile
Early 2010s, Ladakh
60 x 92 in.
Collection of Monisha Ahmed

SHAWL

Cotton, Cowrie shells
Plain weave with supplementary weft (hand stitched panels)
and surface embellishment
20th Century, Nagaland
37.5 x 62 in.
Collection of Devi Art Foundation





SAREE

Cotton, Natural dyes
Plain weave with three shuttle technique
and discontinuous supplementary weft
20th Century, Kotpad, Odisha
41 x 208 in.
Collection of Devi Art Foundation

Apparel and Fashion

Brocaded fabrics form a specialised genre of hand weaving in India, primarily catering to the requirements of festive and occasional wear. They emerge from looms as finished apparel like sarees; upper drapes like odhnis, dupattas, scarves and shawls; lower drapes like dhotis and lungis; or yardages which are designed and fashioned into stitched garments like blouses, kurtas and, increasingly, Western-style dresses. This is a part of highly profitable seasonal markets which revolve around religious festivals as well the burgeoning wedding economy in India. Here, designs are governed by decorative patterns associated with communities, rituals, rites of passage and ceremonies, and colour has a high level of significance.

The sarees in this Group represent such cultural aspects of Indian handlooms: indigo sarees are worn in Maharashtra for *Sankranti*, a harvest festival which also marks the end of winter and in east India as the *nilambari* for *diwali* (blue *jamdani*); yellow sarees or the *pitambari* are worn to celebrate spring as well as for certain pre-wedding rituals (yellow *jamdani*); red sarees or the *raktambari* are a prominent colour worn by brides across the country (red *jamdani*); a light tone of pink called *gulabi* — akin to the rose flower — is associated with early summer in north India (pink *chanderi*); and white is reserved for sombre occasions, indicating asceticism and widowhood among Hindus, as equally as bridal wear for women among Christians.

Centres of brocade weaving in India have, historically, also been important centres of trade. Situated, often, along rivers — which were conduits for profitable mercantile activity — they were revered pilgrimage sites as well. Varanasi in the north, Paithan in the west, and Kanchipuram in the south, are examples of such cities and towns which have designed, produced and traded in distinct varieties of brocaded handlooms, and where such cultural and economic legacies have been received well into present times. From such perspectives, attention is drawn here to the role that tourism which revolves around sacred spaces of worship plays in sustaining artistic forms and professions. These are intrinsically embedded within a vibrant ecology of local architecture, heritage conservation, craftsmanship and building skills, even as they contribute to job creation through the hospitality industry and transport facilities for travellers.

Jamdani sarees

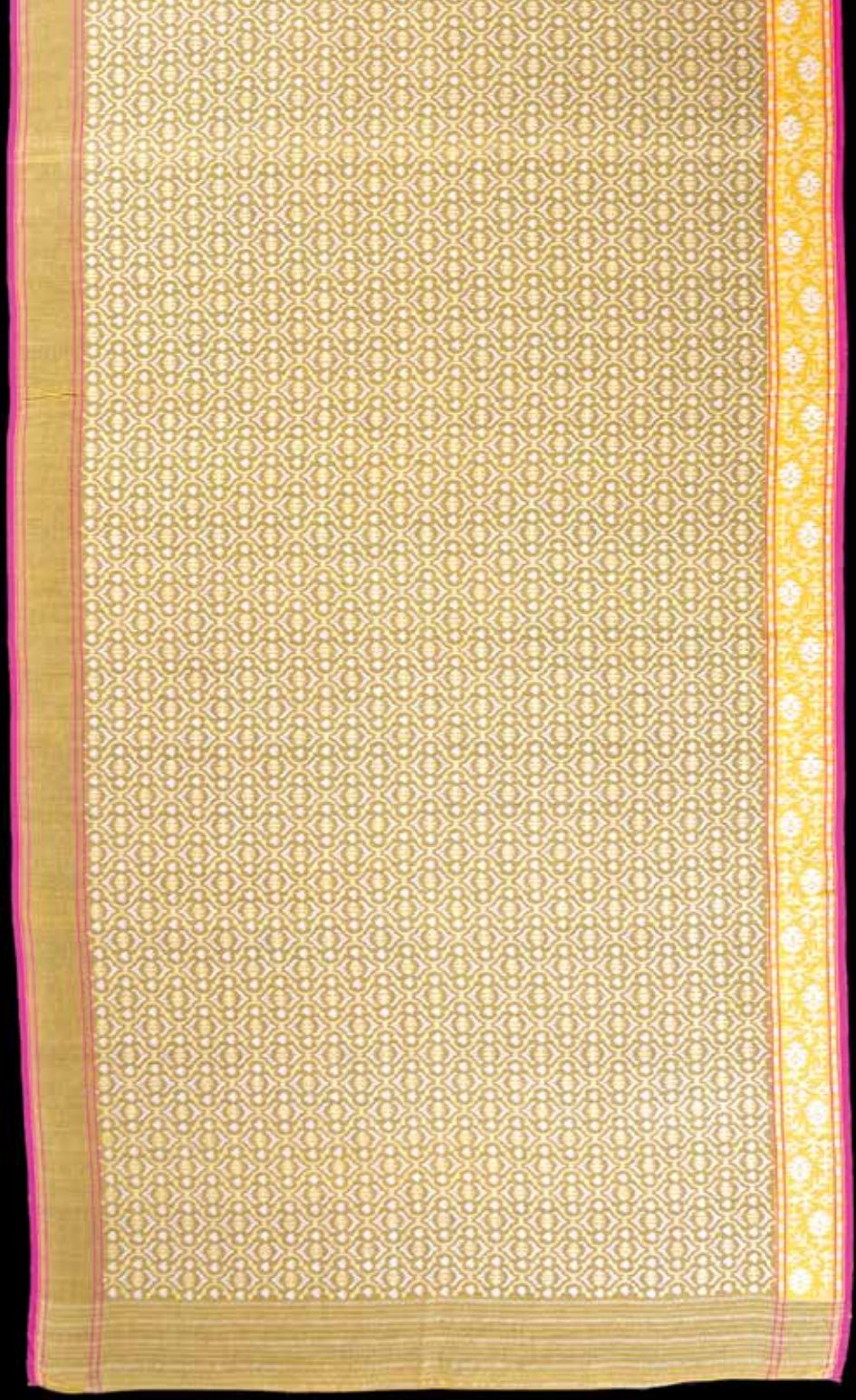
Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh is one of the most prolific brocade centres in India. Its history of textile production is traced to ancient times, and its several styles of hand weaving have developed through dynamic cross-cultural influences. These include fabrics and sarees in the genres of silk *tanchoi* with origins in Gujarat associated with the Parsi Zoroastrian community, *baluchari* with origins in Murshidabad in West Bengal and *gyaser* with origins in China, among others. One such genre is of fine cotton muslins patterned with a time and skill intensive inlay technique called *suti jamdani* by its practitioners. The sarees here are versions of this tradition, in which fine, gossamer silks fabrics are also woven in the same technique.

"...dyed the colour of the sky, ambar, *of dark indigo blue,* nil. *The* nilambari *sari, which was worn in Bengal on the moonless autumn night celebrated in India as* Deepavali, *the 'festival of light'. Women wore the sari for the* devi puja, *a ritual invocation of the great goddess* Devi, *which precedes a spectacular communal lighting of lamps. The goddess, 'dark as sapphire' in a description in an early scripture, is worshipped on* Deepavali *night as a harbinger of grace and prosperity as well as the annihilator of darkness. The traditional* nilambari *sari woven in Bengal had a plain or striped field of midnight blue, which was edged with a glowing yellow border. Early in the 20th century, the colours of the* nilmabari *were assimilated into the design of the most intricately patterned cotton sari of the region, a* kalka konia jamdani, *which was woven of white muslin brocaded laboriously in a hand-manipulated inlay technique, known as* jamdani, *with dense floral paisleys and borders. The result was a modern hybrid design – the* nilambari jamdani." [6]

[6] Page 216; Rapture - The Art of Indian Textiles by Rahul Jain; Niyogi Books; New Delhi; 2011

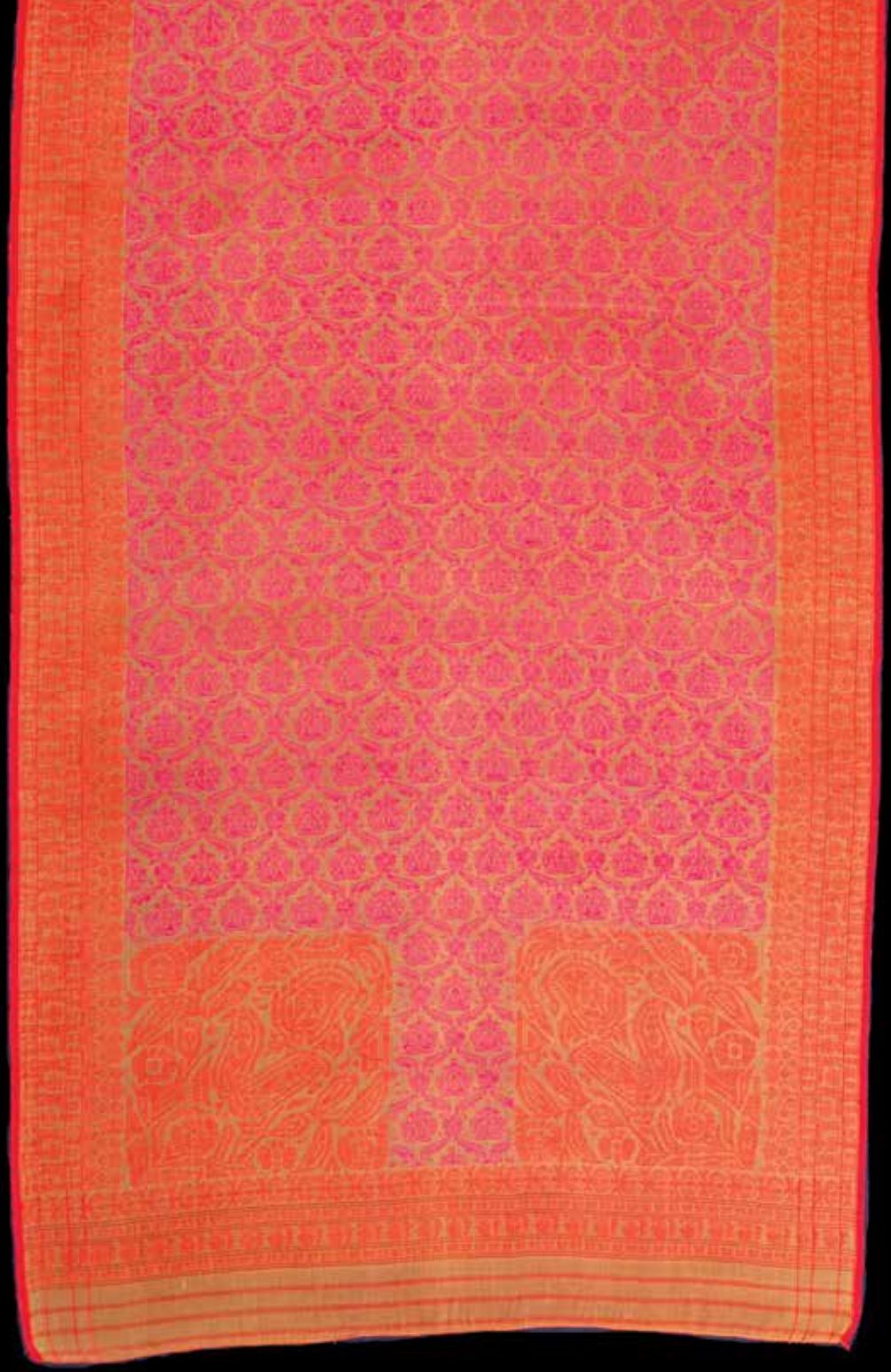
SAREE

Cotton, Metallic yarn (zari)
Plain weave with discontinuous supplementary weft (inlay)
Late 20th Century, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
46 x 242 in.
Collection of Sangita Jindal



SAREE

Cotton, Metallic yarn (zari)
Plain weave with discontinuous supplementary weft (inlay)
Late 20th Century, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
46 x 222 in.
Collection of Sangita Jindal



SAREE

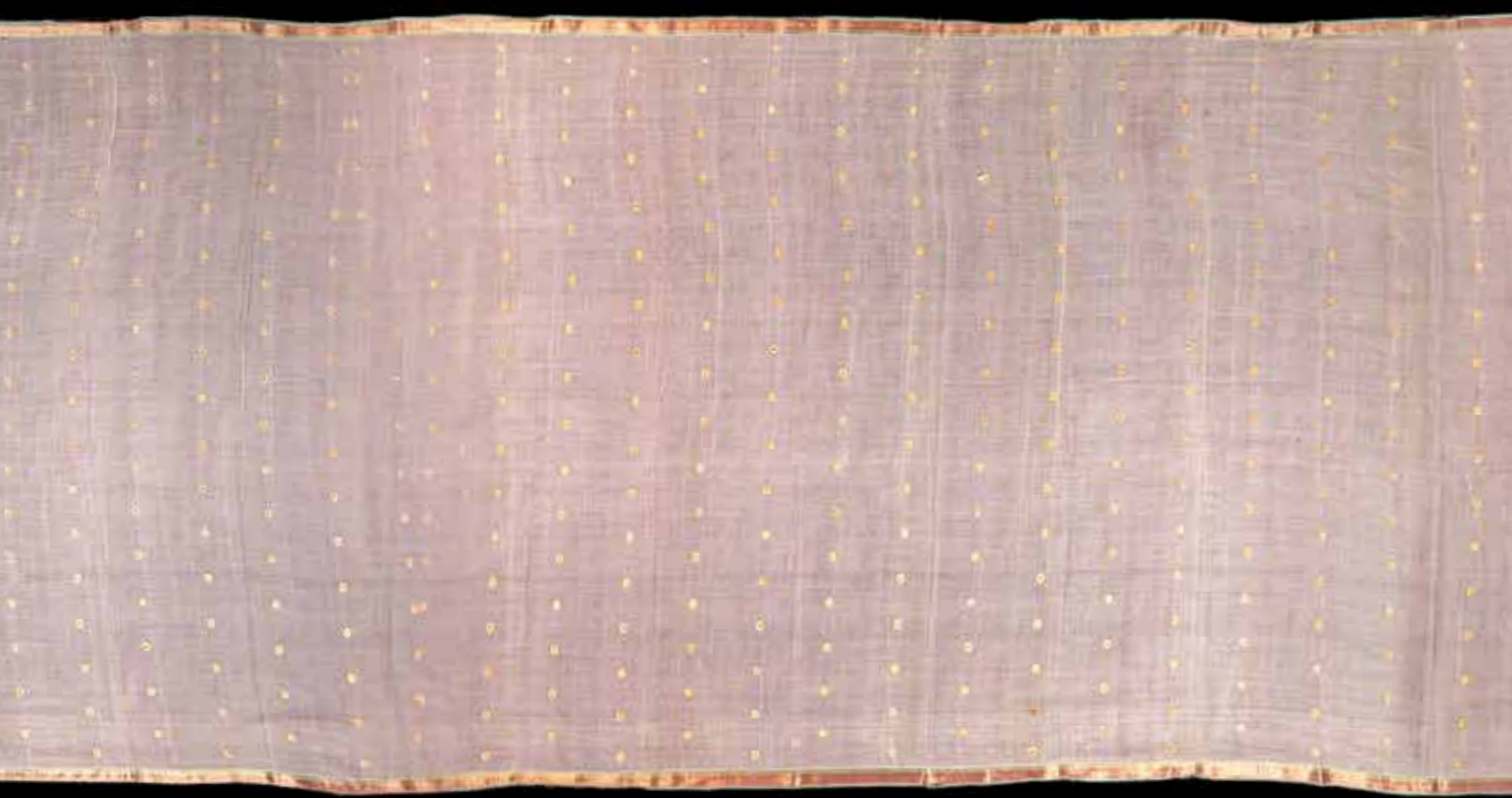
Cotton
Plain weave with discontinuous supplementary weft (inlay)
Late 20th Century, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
47 x 228 in.
Collection of Sangita Jindal

SAREE

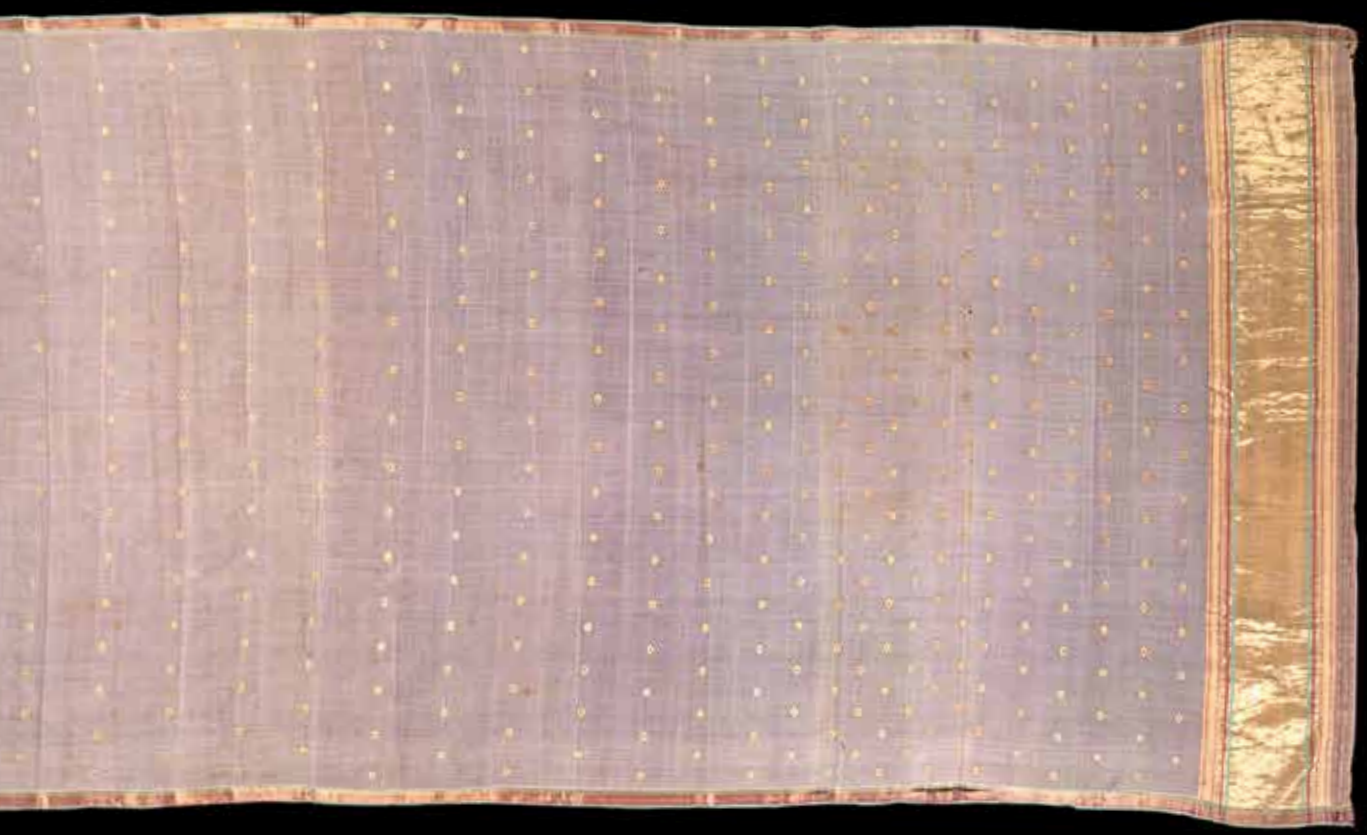
Cotton
Plain weave with discontinuous supplementary weft (inlay)
Late 20th Century, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
44.5 x 214 in.
Collection of Sangita Jindal

SAREE

Cotton, Metallic yarn (zari)
Plain weave with discontinuous and continuous weft; supplementary warp (border)
20th Century, Chanderi, Madhya Pradesh
55 x 353 in.
Collection of Devi Art Foundation and Saris of India, Martand Singh Archives



Chanderi in Madhya Pradesh in central India is synonymous today with a lightweight and translucent fabric woven with silk and cotton. When brocaded with patterns in zari, this is ideally suited for sarees which offer a formality in dress in the largely warm climate of India. Presented here is a classic version, with a light tone of colour and restrained use of gold. The small-sized motifs are another characteristic, as is the fine chequered pattern. Such Chanderi sarees — over a century from the early 1900s onwards — have been preferred by women from the Maratha courts and nobility. In the last decade however, designs have diversified, giving wider appeal to the handloom centre's products than before. This has provided a major stimulus to its volume of production, furthering the rise of a new generation of entrepreneurship.



Once known for its cotton fabrics, Kanchipuram in the southern State of Tamil Nadu since the 1940s has achieved wide fame for a particular genre of silk sarees which are coveted, among other reasons, for their luxurious drape. They are conventionally patterned with a unique combination of geometrical designs and those drawn from the region's historical architecture — with elaborate, ornamental stylisations of floral, vegetal and animal motifs. A distinct feature of such sarees is also their use of bright colours, often in contrasting schemes, and specific weaving techniques called *korvai* and *petni*. In this saree, we see another prominent aspect of Kanchipuram textiles, that of heavy brocading in metallic yarns, creating an overall effect of a sheet of gold.

In a country where the use of precious metals in clothing and jewellery symbolises both the financial status of its wearers as well as spiritual, sacred and talismanic properties, brocade weaving centres like Kanchipuram keep alive an aesthetic which is deeply linked to India's past. The preference for such sarees for festive occasions makes them a part of ceremonial rituals which provide a means to connect contemporary times with history. They also provide an endless resource to creative practitioners for the reinvention of handloom products, enhancing opportunities for profits and the sustenance of livelihoods which often rely on inherited skills within artisan families.

SAREE

Silk, Metallic yarn (zari)
Plain weave with continuous supplementary weft
Late 20th Century, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu
48 x 194 in.
Collection of Hemal Shete

"The handlooms of Varanasi have been associated with a variety of jamdani, *woven both in fine muslin as well as silk. Here, the technique's quintessential ability to render non repeat patterns is taken to a never-before seen large scale. This is combined with the rare technique of* rangkaat, *known for its typical colour blocked geometrical patterns, but attempted – for the first known time – in the creation of organic, free hand drawn-like forms.*

The composition is drawn from topographical drawings of Sunaina Jalan, making the textile an ode to Indian rivers, evoking the association such water lifelines have had in the shaping of textile cultures in the subcontinent. In this way... the textile is an offering to the Ganga, on the banks of which Varanasi has achieved its renown as a spiritual centre, as well as of commerce and trade..."[7]

[7] Sutr Santanti — Then, Now, Next; Edited by Mayank Mansingh Kaul; Baldota Foundation; Hospet; 2023

SCARF

Designed by Swati Agarwal and Sunaina Jalan
Created by Lallu Kanojia and Bachhi Ram
Cotton, Metallic yarn (zari), Azo free dyes
Complementary plain weave with discontinuous supplementary weft (inlay) and complementary plain weft (rangkaat)
2022, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
36 x 113 in.
Collection of Sangita Jindal

PANELS

Created by Sribhas Chandra Supakar
inspired by artworks of Nandalal Bose
Cotton
Plain weave with discontinuous supplementary weft (inlay)
2000s, Tanda or Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
16 x 16 in. each
Collection of Devi Art Foundation

The textiles featured in this and following pages of this Group are artworks which use handlooms conventionally popular in apparel.

These panels were woven by — perhaps — the last generation of weavers from families who once specialised in an inlay technique of brocading in fine counts of cotton in Tanda in present day Uttar Pradesh. In the 19th century, such light weight and translucent fabrics were used for the creation of couture, sophisticated apparel commissioned by the royalty and aristocracy of the region of Awadh in the north and Bengal in the east. Here, the technique becomes a device to translate the drawings of one of India's most well known artists, Nandalal Bose, into works of textile art. In this exhibition, they highlight the niche ways in which Indian textiles once handwoven for clothing have suggested a new means for artistic expression.

HANGING BY A THREAD III

Lakshmi Madhavan with Aravind Jayan & Family
Kasavu Mundu Veshti, Thread, Wood
2022, Balarampuram, Kerala
26 x 52 in. (each)
Collection of Devi Art Foundation

One of the most recognisable fabrics from Kerala is the *kasavu*, un-dyed or white coloured cottons woven with zari borders and brocaded with a variety of patterns. This is used to create sarees and other kinds of upper and lower drapes. Contemporary artist Lakshmi Madhavan transforms them into panels through a use of text not seen before in their designs, in an art installation which becomes a comment on the role of cloth in defining social identities. In the process, we are made aware of the history of one of the most prominent centres of weaving in the south-western State, Balaramapuram.

"Hand-weaving in Balaramapuram dates back to the era of Balarama Varma (1798 to 1810), ruler of the erstwhile Royal State of Travancore...It is reported that his Dewan Ummini Thampi settled 7 weaver families of the Shaliar community, originally from Valliyur, in Thiruvanthapuram to weave apparel fabrics for the royal family. Eventually, in the memory of the ruler, this site came to be called Balaramapuram..." [8]

[8] Sutr Santanti — Then, Now Next; Edited by Mayank Mansingh Kaul; Baldota Foundation; Hospet; 2023

7 YOKINGS OF THE FELICITY

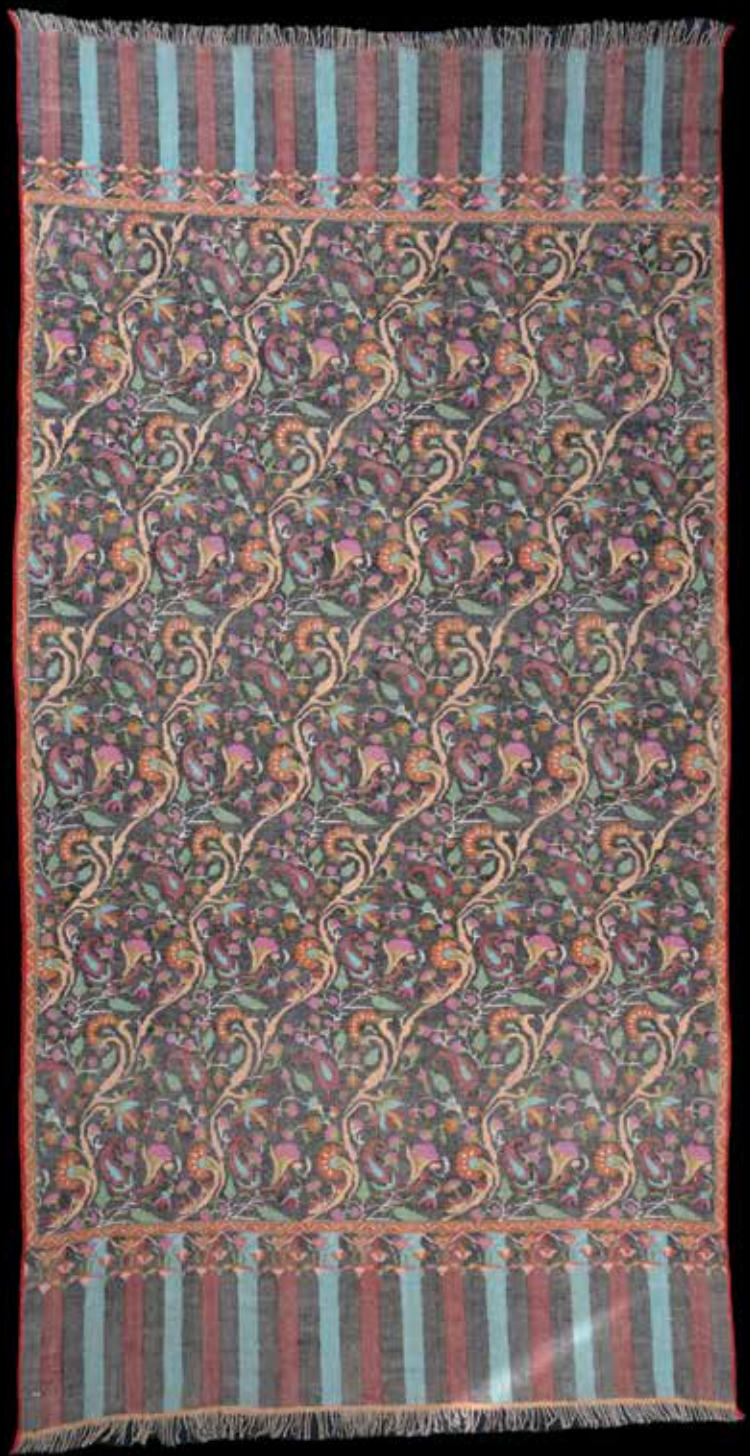
Installation
Astha Butail
Silk, Metallic Yarn (zari)
Fabric — Satin weave with discontinuous supplementary weft
2013-14, Gurgaon, Haryana and Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
144 x 312 in. (installation size)
Collection of Devi Art Foundation

The selection of this installation in the exhibition is meant to present the ways in which Indian handlooms can be brought into conceptual, artistic practices which have a universal, aesthetic appeal. *Gyaser* — a tradition of fabrics woven in Varanasi largely meant for use in apparel, furnishings and ritual objects in Buddhist monasteries — is revisited here through an inventive sculpture by the artist Astha Butail. Its theme is inspired by references in the *Rig Veda*, a compilation of hymns from the Vedic period in India. Gold comes through as a glorious metaphor in ancient Indian mythology as well as for the striking, reflective quality it helps generate in tactile materials.

Patronage and Philanthropy

Indian handwoven textiles, created at the highest levels of design and technical excellence, have been a consistent part of the luxury market in the country and abroad. This Group presents two of its key aspects. The first brings into discussion the handspun pashmina shawls of Kashmir which were, historically, commissioned for trade within the subcontinent as well as with Europe. They are often celebrated for their paisley designs, which have influenced global fashion and textiles for interiors for a long time, and remain popular today. More recently, innovations have also come in, seeding the birth of several prominent Indian brands. In this dense, floral version (black pashmina) the contrast of the colours used in its motifs against a contemporary, black-coloured background highlights the intricate *kani* technique used to weave such pashmina shawls. There are few, if any, comparable textile traditions in the world.

The second, has emerged in just over the last two decades. This involves the revival of complex hand-weaving techniques which were lost to India over centuries, through rigorous research and experimentation. Such efforts have been supported through connoisseurship, patronage and not-for-profit platforms. Three exceptional textiles represent this phenomena here, created in the Asha Workshop established in the early 1990s in Varanasi with a focus on reproducing historical masterpieces in techniques which were once patronised by the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal courts (velvet jacket, tent panel, minakar dupatta). These are not only a reminder of the artistic accomplishments of the past, but as a fitting finalé to this exhibition, of what Indian handlooms can be in the future.



SHAWL

Pashmina / Cashmere (goat hair)
Complementary twill weave
20th Century, Kashmir
41.5 x 80.5 in.
Collection of Devi Art Foundation

COAT

Designed by Rahul Jain
Created by Shamim Ansari - Asha Workshop
Garment by Vivek Narang
Silk, Velvet
2009, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
37 x 52 in.
Collection of Devi Art Foundation

PANEL

Designed by Rahul Jain
Created by Asha Workshop
Silk
Brocaded lampas weave
2016-19, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
39 x 80 in.
Collection of Devi Art Foundation

SHAWL

Designed by Rahul Jain
Created by Anwar Ansari - Asha Workshop
Silk, Metallic yarn (zari)
Brocaded lampas weave
1999, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
46 x 104 in.
Collection of Devi Art Foundation

Ritual Textiles and the Cult of Ikat

Jasleen Dhamija

The act of weaving is a powerful act, linked with the rhythms of the human body. The loin loom, also called backstrap loom, used by women throughout the world from ancient times, has one of its warp bars strapped to the waist and the weaver uses her body weight to create the tension. This is linked with *prana*, the breath or life force. As the weaver inhales the tension is built and the weft is beaten into the warp; as she exhales she lifts the reed creating a shed for throwing the weft thread.

One of the oldest looms of Laos and southern China uses the human body as the loom. The weaver sits on the floor with her legs stretched in front of her. The outer warp beam is held in place by the feet, stretching the warp threads, while the weaving end is strapped to the body. The circular warp is thus not only rotated as the weaver weaves, but also rolls to accommodate a longer length of warp than the length of her legs. It is an extraordinarily skilled operation, which uses the human body as a *yantra*. This truly is a loin loom, for the pressure is on the loins, on the small of the back, as in the process of giving birth.

While the woman weaver's creation of a cloth is considered akin to giving birth, for a male the weaving process is associated with his masculinity. The stretched taut warp that is the base of the fabric is a symbol of the male potency, while the pliable weft that unites represents female fecundity.

In the loin loom, patterns are woven in as though they are emerging from the weaver's very being. The act is like a form of yoga, with controlled breathing and disciplined movement, and the weaver goes into a state of *dhyana*, meditation, brought about by the continuous rhythm. The woven patterns emerge as a manifestation of introspective concentration.

Rhythm is central to our being, for the act of breathing – inhaling and exhaling – is the very essence of life along with the rhythmic beat of our heart. These rhythms are multiplied in the entire functioning of our body, which in turn is linked to the diurnal rhythm, placing man in contact with nature and with the overall environment. It is thus natural that the weaving of cloth, even stamping, embroidering, stitching have rhythms, which are as important in the act of creation as is the mastery of the technique. In fact that rhythm can only be maintained and contained by a master (Dhamija 1979).

It is no wonder that for many a master artist this rhythmic aspect becomes a part of religious

expression; weaving becomes a form of prayer. *Zikr*, *simran* or the litany is often recited during creative work, as is the case with the felt-makers of Central Asia (ibid.). *Ya Ali, Ya hou, Aum Aum Aum, Hari Hari, Hail Mary*, are repeated with each throw of the shuttle, with each stitch of the needle. Kabir, the mendicant weaver-poet whom we revere, meditated on the Lord while working the warp and weft. As he writes,

I sing with the humming shuttles.
I dance with the moving threads, O Lord!

The Sufis of some orders call upon Hazrat Ali as they embroider their caps or their bags. With each stitch they call "*Ya Ali, Ya hou, Ya Ali*," until their workshops ring with his name, imbuing the finished article with the spirit of their worship. The Mansuris of Kutch, who also belong to a Sufi order, are traditional carders of wool and cotton and makers of *namad* or felt. They probably migrated from Central Asia where, too, the *namad*-makers were Sufis. The rhythm of creating the *namad* was associated with going into a state of *hal* or divine ecstasy, for they too called on Hazrat Ali as they rolled the *namad*.

The women of eastern Punjab used to embroider special fabrics known as *Darshan Dwar* that carried multiple images of the door of the shrine where they had taken a vow to offer the embroidery for the fulfilment of what they were seeking. The symbolism was that they had come to the door of God to seek his intervention in overcoming their difficulties. Amongst some communities, a specially woven or embroidered cloth that has been dipped in holy waters is kept by older women to be used as a cover for their final journey.

Thus, while the creating of a textile is an act of worship, the wearing of sacred cloths is an important aspect of rites of passage, invoking the strength of the creative act as well as protection. For instance, during my research work in Tripura, I gathered some interesting information at the Weavers' Service Centre. Amongst the Reang tribe of this northeastern state, the breast-cloth, the *riah*, worn by the bride at her marriage ceremony, is woven by her and embodies her spirit – it represents a true expression of her spiritual being. Girls are brought up with stories about weaving and the taboos associated with it. One story describes how a woman defied the taboo and wove the forbidden *naga* or snake pattern on her *riah*. When she wore it, the *naga* came alive and bit her. Another story is of how an orphan girl who was maltreated by her foster family wove a *riah* with a thousand and one butterflies. When she put it on, the butterflies came alive and carried her away to the land of the fairies. Thus from early childhood the girls are filled with awe at the power of this magical gift of weaving.

This tradition of the sacredness of the act of weaving continued even as cloths began to be woven by professionals. Most professional groups of weavers have their own legends of the origin of weaving and their progenitor. The *Padmasalis*, weavers of southern India, have an extraordinary origin mythology, which even today is closely linked with their life. Every event begins with a prayer to their progenitor, *Bhavana Rishi* who emerged from the ashes of a sacrifice offered by the great sage *Markandaya*. *Markandaya* had been asked by the gods to weave for them and since he did not have the knowledge he offered a grand sacrifice. *Markandaya's* offering resulted in *Bhavana Rishi* appearing from the ashes holding a ball

of thread in his hand. The thread was made from the stem of the lotus (*padma*), which emerged from *Vishnu's* navel, on whom *Brahma*, the God of Creation, rested. It was from this thread that the first cloth was woven. Thus the weavers came to be called *Padmasalis*, the lotus-born (Ramaswamy 1985). They believe that they are linked, through their progenitor, to the umbilical cord of *Vishnu*, the God of Preservation. Thus only the very best can be created by them, and each setting of the loom is decreed by *Bhavana Rishi* (Dhamija 1980). Similarly the *Devangas*, weavers from Andhra Pradesh, have their own traditions; they have written texts, legends and dedicated weaving sites.

The *Ansaris*, the weavers of the famed Benares brocade – and especially the *Nakshabandas*, the designers who create the jacquard pattern or *naksha* – trace their origins to the Pir of the Sufi sect of the *Nakshabandas* of Bokhara, as I learnt from Mohd. Jafar Ali, a well-known *Nakshabanda* of Varanasi. The act of preparing the yarn for weaving is a secret shared by the women of the household. The hank of yarn purchased from outside has to be purified by the young bride, who is being initiated into her new family. The washing and drying are carried out in the outer courtyard of the household by the new entrant and it is then introduced into the inner area of the house. The first reeling of the yarn is done by the female head of the household in the innermost part of the house – the nuptial chamber, and next to the nuptial bed. The reeling is carried out in the squatting position, the traditionally used position at childbirth (Mehta 1997). This ritual reeling is called giving birth to the cloth, and is followed by the act of warping and weaving. For the *Ansaris*, the weaving of a pattern is known as "*likhie*", the written word, which in Islamic tradition is held sacred (ibid.). Each pattern, each motif, has a deep significance. The weaving of charms hidden in the woven pattern is a further accentuation of the significance of the cloth.

It is in this context that we have to look at sacred cloths, taking into account who weaves them, for whom they are woven and for what particular occasion they are to be used. The circular uncut cloth woven on the loom was used by shamans for ceremonial purposes and was an important part of their ritual attire (Elwin 1959). The circular uncut skirt or sarong was used in most traditional societies in Southeast Asia and seen as a protective cloth. Amongst some of the tribal communities in Tripura and the Chittagong hills of Bangladesh it continues to be the only cloth used by the women. The strength of the cloth is enhanced by edging it with beads and embellishing it with cowrie shells, which have varying significance depending upon the tribe that is using them. The cowrie can "sing" its meaning, as they say. It can signify the all-seeing eye, it can signify a human head and it can also signify the vulva (ibid.).

The Islamic kingdoms had special workshops for weaving fabrics. These originally wove the robes worn by the Caliph, which carried Quranic verses and were known as *tiraz*; the ateliers were known as *tirazkhanas*. The ritual talismanic cloths and robes were considered as not only purifying and strengthening the wearer but giving magical power to him (Daniel Walker, personal notes on talismanic jacket, shared with author, 1974). Later, others who were permitted by the Caliph could wear the special fabrics (Dhamija and Jain 1990). However these later

talismanic cloths, though made in provincial *tirazkhanas*, may not have conformed as strictly to Islamic tenets.

The *puja* cloth woven with checks signifies the powerful grid associated with the *chowk* – the sacred space (Dhamija 1994). The word for the check is *chowk*, which is the grid used in creating a temple, a temporary shrine for a ritual and a temple town. It also defines a space in dance movement, as well as in perfect textile design. Formed by the crossing of equidistant parallel lines it creates the perfect grid for the chart describing the movement of the constellations, and is used for drawing the horoscope. It is linked with the *nakshatras* or nine planets that govern our lives, and with the *mandala* used for meditation. It is the sacred grid which is associated with the creation of a sacred space, be it temple or mosque. The grid has been sacred in all traditions, and the cross has been used as a universal indicator of the four directions, as for example the *swastika* or swirl, which epitomized diurnal movements.

It is no wonder that the checked material woven in India found its way all over the world. In West Africa, it was known as Real Madras Handkerchief, Guinea Cloth, Indi or George Cloth. It was rich in symbolism and was an important part of their rites of passage. It was also seen as currency, thus the name Guinea Cloth. It was used in the slave trade for buying and selling, as well as for clothing the slaves. In Southeast Asia it was worn by women on all ritual occasions, and continues to be used even today in Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia.

In West Asia the cotton scarf with natural silk check, which was elaborately embroidered in Bengal, was used as a head cloth and became known as *Rumal-e-Haj*. This developed later into the Palestinian headgear, becoming a symbol of nationalist identity.

Cloths woven, embroidered or printed with incantations of gods' names, formerly only used by *Ramanami* devotees, sadhus or mendicants who have given up the world and those practising esoteric tantric rituals, are today common wear in India. Among certain sects of *sadhus*, young disciples embroider a bag for their guru while reciting a *jap* or prayer given to them by the guru. The bag is not only a sign of the disciple's devotion, but is imbued with the power of the chanted prayer.

The act of painting with dyes on cloth is another act of creation and worship. The itinerant *Vaghris* of Gujarat (who have now settled in Ahmedabad) produce the *Matani-Pachedi* (literally meaning "behind the Mother Goddess"), rectangular cloths printed and painted in red/maroon, black and white. These are used to create an enclosure for the shrine of the goddess within which she is invoked and appeased (Fischer, Jain and Shah 1978). The central part of this textile has a depiction of the goddess in one of her many avatars, seated on a throne or on her animal or bird *vahana*, wearing a crown and other ornaments and holding her attributes like trident, sword, cup for sacrificial blood, etc. In front of her is shown the *bhopa* or priest leading the black goat or buffalo to be sacrificed to her. The rest of the space is filled with scenes of devotees, mythological episodes and figures of other gods and goddesses.

When an individual has made a vow to the goddess and his/her wish is fulfilled, a ceremonial sacrifice, usually of a black goat, and a community feast are offered in thanks. The

sacred cloths are used to enclose the goddess's shrine and platform, before which the *bhopa* lights a lamp and conducts a ritual with singing, chanting, blowing of horns and beating of drums and cymbals. The *bhopa* not only invokes the presence of the goddess, but becomes possessed by her as do other worshippers. The sacrifice of the animal and the overnight ceremony release them from their trance. After the ceremony the sacred textiles are removed and put away until the next occasion. In present times, however, *Mata-ni-Pachedi* are more commonly used as decorative wall hangings in urban homes, and it is feared that the art of creating these ritual textiles may soon be lost.

IKAT TRADITIONS

Ikat is a weaving style common to several cultures all over the world, including South, Southeast and Central Asia, Japan, the Philippines and countries in Central and South America. It is an ancient form of textile-making, whose name derives from the Indonesian/Malay word *mengikat* – to tie or bind. The technique of ikat, known in India as *patola* or *bandha* – to tie, bind or link – involves the binding of the threads with dye-resistant material, and then dyeing them – *rangana*, which comes from the root word *raga*, the musical mode, and which means to tint with the touch of emotion with devotion. The dyed threads are then woven.

The art of dyeing has always been linked with alchemy, with magic, with transformation, with the mystery of the unknown. This mystique gets reflected on the practitioners. The dyer was an alchemist, who collected herbs, roots, scales of insects, natural minerals and used these to transform plain cloths of cotton, wool or silk into myriad hues.

There is magic in the transportation of the pattern from the land of dreams into reality, by hiding parts of the threads through tying, then dyeing, then opening and re-tying and redyeing. The bound parts of the threads remain free of dye, while the rest are coloured. Then, with the weaving, the final pattern emerges with its characteristic jagged-edged or featherеffect patterns.

The completed ikat was considered a powerful magical cloth, imbued with the ability to cure, to heal, to purify and to protect. The symbolism of the bound parts of the threads retaining their pure and intrinsic quality, while the rest are imbued with the powerful dyes, is what gives this fabric significance the world over. The dyeing of thread and the process of its weaving are interlinked in the creation of the pattern.

Traditionally it was women who dyed the threads, and even today in cultures where weaving is done for the household it is the women who are the dyers. In areas where ikat became a commercial production it was the work of men, and the dyer community formed a recognized guild of *ranga-razan*, *rang* meaning colour and *razan*, those who know the secrets (*raz*) of dyeing. Thus the magical connotation of the fabric was retained.

There are three main types of ikat: the first two are single-ikats, where the dye is applied to the tied threads of either the warp or the weft; the third and most prized is the double-ikat, where both warp and weft threads are tied and dyed and then woven for the magical fabric to emerge. Associated with sacredness, purity and powerful magical strength, the *patolu* (plural: *patola*) of Patan in Gujarat was important as a ritual cloth not only in India,

Sari (Patola)
Silk; resist dyed, 19th Century, Gujarat, 141 x 51.5 in.
Acc. no. 83.68, National Museum, New Delhi

but also in Southeast Asia. This sumptuous double-ikat fabric was meticulously dyed in the warp and the weft and then woven on a slanting beam, often by a husband and wife united in the sacred act of weaving, which is ritually considered powerful. With the help of a long needle, the weft thread was made to sit precisely on the matching dyed warp threads.

The *Salvis*, the ancient weavers of silk who specialize in *patola*, were originally *Digambara Jains*, the sky-clad ones. They probably migrated from the Deccan and settled in Gujarat attracted by royal patronage. Though they follow the Jain religion, they have a goddess shrine in Mehsana district, 30 kilometres away from Patan, where the entire *Salvi* community congregates once a year. The weavers of *patola* offer the ends of the warp threads (that were wrapped around the beam of the *jantar* or loom) as doorway decoration (*toran*) at the temple to appease the goddess. The weavers of the sacred *patola* are considered even today the most important members of their community.

The *patola* used by different communities were an essential part of their family wealth. In most Gujarati communities it was not the bride but her mother, as the nurturing figure who protects and blesses, who wore the red *patola* sari at the time of the ceremony. Usually the white or cream *panetar* sari, with red ikat only on the border and end pallav, was worn by the bride. The red *patola* sari was too powerful for the young virgin, who had not yet attained her position as a *grihastani*, a married woman.

In some communities, the bridegroom would wear the *patola* as an upper garment to protect him as he journeyed to take the marriage vows, as it was at this stage that he was believed to be most vulnerable to attack by evil influences. The bridegroom would be further protected by tucking a *patola* cloth under the saddle of the horse, so that the horse should not be possessed by any evil spirit and cause harm.

It was only when the bride was seated next to the bridegroom in front of the sacred fire and the marriage vows had been completed, that she was wrapped in the red *patola* sari, signifying her emergence from the stage of *kanya*, the virgin, to that of *vadhu*, the bride, who would become awakened to her own powerful sexuality.

The *patola* sari would be worn by the young bride at the celebration of the seventh month of her pregnancy, when the unborn child had developed into a form in which it would finally emerge into the world. The textile protected both the mother and the unborn child.

Patola are never discarded. A worn-out piece may be stitched into a quilt for wrapping a baby, or fragments of it tucked into the baby's cradle as a protective charm, so that the *dayans*, the witches who suck out the life of the unguarded sleeping infant, are kept at bay. Even rags of *patola* will be washed, immersed in rose water and rolled into a wick and burnt in pure *ghee* with camphor, to make the *kohl* for babies' eyes, so that their vision will be pure, sharp and farseeing.

Patola were used for ritual purposes in Kerala and were known there as *verali pattu*. The textile was used by priests for the worship of the powerful mother goddess *Bhadrakali* and also to protect the image of *Bhadrakali* when it was carried in procession to survey

its domains and offer *darshan*, ritual viewing, to worshippers. Later, when *patola* cloth was not available, the temples painted the *patola* patterns on walls to act as protective elements.

H.T. Harris, in his 1906 monograph *Carpet Weaving Industry of Southern India*, has three photographs of *patola* at the Trivandrum Palace. These are traditional *patola* and do not carry the typical tumpal pattern introduced into the *patola* woven for the Indonesian, Thai and Malaysian markets. The tumpal design consists of a row of triangles along the edge of the textile – a stylized representation of the temple, similar to the temple design in south Indian textiles. The tumpal pattern, widespread in Indonesia, was absorbed by the beginning of the century into the repertoire of the patolamakers and can be seen on the *pallavs* of a number of saris woven for local clientele.

It is not clear as to how the *patola* became an important part of Kerala's religious life. Some scholars trace this to the Arab and Gujarati traders, who dealt in spices from Kerala and Malacca. They were the main suppliers of *patola* (for barter against cloves) to Malacca, the metropolis from where the *patola* was distributed to Indonesia and the Malayan archipelago, and they might have found a market for *patola* in Kerala as well. However, it is possible that *patola* were known in Kerala as powerful cloths from ancient times. As mentioned above, the *Salvi* weavers of the *patola* originally came from the Deccan and probably also the western coastal Karnataka area, which was a well known centre of *Digambara* Jains. The *Salvis*' ancient image of the Tirthankar, which they had carried with them when they moved to Patan, is of the *Digambara* sect, whose deities were unclad, as were the members of their religious orders. It was only because of the local influence of the *Shvetambara* sect, which was dominant in Gujarat, that they began to cover the image with a brass lower garment.

We know that by medieval times the weaving of ikat was widespread throughout southern parts of India, double-ikat being practised by those excelling in the technique. A reference of the 14th century, quoted by Dr Moti Chandra (1973), mentions that Alauddin Khalji was presented with a *patola* from Deogiri, near Aurangabad in the Deccan.

Ikat weaves throughout the world have acquired a cultic quality. The act of their creation and their use are steeped in mystery. Besides the *patola* of Patan in Gujarat, ikats such as the *Vichitrapuri* sari of Sambalpur, Odisha, the *Pochampally* saris and *telia rumal* from Chirala and Puttapaka in Andhra Pradesh, the *pua kumbu* of the Iban people in Sarawak, Malaysia, the *mudmee holle* of Thailand and Cambodia, the *sayan* with ikat stripes worn by *Yoruba* people in Nigeria, the powerful ikat undergarment of the *Fulani* nomadic herders of Benin, and the ikat of Guatemala – each of these is not just an expression of a people, but in many ways representative of their inner secret life. Ikat textiles also became closely linked with the monetary system of several countries.

Patola were known as *cindai* in the Malayan region and find mention in the *Malay Annals* as an effective form of protective fabric to be worn during battle. Late 18th- and 19th-century records of Indian traders point to special *patola* woven for export to Malacca, Burma, Cambodia and Indonesia. Examples of

some of these cloths are preserved throughout the area. They were unlike the heavy silk saris worn in India. They had thick borders, but the body was of a fine silk. A range of patterns was used. The most distinctive were the large elephant patterns, or a series of elephants enclosed within a trellis. There were also *patola* with rampant lion motifs. The interesting thing to note is that the main motifs of the elephant or the lion are in white, the original colour of the fabric, which has been bound from the very beginning, so as to resist the colour. It is these motifs that were considered the powerful elements in the magic cloth.

In the islands of Indonesia the women inherited the family ikats, and when they moved to their husbands' homes the powerful protective cloths moved with them. In the island of Sumba, the funeral procession to carry the body to its last resting place could be held only when the requisite number of *patola* cloths and ikat *hingis* (cotton warp-ikats that are prestige and ritual objects, also used by men as waistbands or shoulder cloths) were collected. Until then, the body was kept in the house and the women worked hard to weave the cloths and collect *patola* to cover the body. *Patola* are among the most important cloths needed for the funeral, and are not interred with the body. The cloth is returned to the family, purified and reverentially kept for the next occasion, be it a celebration of birth, puberty rites, marriage or death.

Ikat-weaving is called *bandhakala* in Odisha. The *bandha* of Odisha and the *telia rumals* of Andhra have a combination of double- and single-ikat (Mohanti and Krishna 1974). *Bandha* has a remarkable similarity to the cloths woven in Indonesia, especially for their sarongs.

Odisha has an extraordinary repertoire of weft-ikats and their combination with rich double-ikat geometric patterns in the intricately woven *Vichitrapuri* saris has produced some of the finest textiles in the world.

It is this *Vichitrapuri* sari that is worn for the Odia marriage ceremony. It was also worn by the *devadasis*, the maids of Lord Jagannath, the most popular deity of the state, when they were ritually married to him in the *garbhagriha* (sanctum sanctorum) of the main temple at Puri. Lord Jagannath, the lord of the universe, was himself draped with a shawl woven with *shlokas* of the *Gita Govinda* in ikat technique. Ikat-weaving, which symbolizes the ability to resist the intrusion of *maya*, the illusionary temptations of the world, has always been considered a powerful magical technique. Here it is used in the creation of special cloths for the deity, with the prayers written into the threads using the resist-dyeing process.

The weaving of some ikat *mandala* forms is even more complex. The extraordinary *nagamandala* credited with the ikat technique represents the coiled snake mingled with words and numbers. This complex *mandala* created in the ikat technique can only be read and interpreted by the initiated.

The *telia rumal*, the square cloth woven in Andhra, was also of ritual importance and was not only known in the Deccan, but also exported to East and West Africa and the Persian Gulf, as well as Southeast Asia. The sacredness and magical quality of the ikat technique was so well established in different cultures, that the Indian ikats carried by the traders became an integral part of the rites of passage in these places.

The *geringsing* is a double-ikat ritual cloth used by the inhabitants of the *Tenganan Pegeringsingan* in Bali. The *Desa Adat* community is a religio-cultural society, whose way of life is closely linked with the rites of passage and diurnal rhythms. The community keeps to the traditions set out for them, according to their ancient beliefs. It is the *geringsing* and other forms of textiles that complete their rituals. When the *telia rumal* and the Real Madras Handkerchief were brought into the Indonesian market they found immediate acceptance, the intricate geometric motifs and the use of the square grid in the patterning already being part of the ritual and ceremonial life of the people.

The Thai ikat known as *mudmee* or *matmi* was primarily a weft-ikat used mainly for religious or social occasions and ceremonies. *Mudmee* cloth was mostly owned by the rich, and could be loaned to those less fortunate when required by them. The textile would then be purified and returned to the family to continue its role as the powerful magical ikat fabric, which protected the family and the community, and reflected the state of the community.

Thus, a powerful textile technique became a cult, weaving its way into the ritual and magical life of people throughout the world. It protected the child in its mother's womb, guided its steps from birth to puberty rites to marriage, and finally helped the spirit on its last journey to rest with the ancestors.

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A Mahasiddha weaving on a foot-loom. Detail from a cave painting, Saspol, probably 14th century.
Image courtesy: Monisha Ahmed

'Weaver at work in the courtyard'. A weaver works on the traditional foot-loom, he is weaving *nambu*, the woollen cloth used for all robes in Ladakh. Image credit: Sebastian Schmitt, 1907 to 1913.
Image courtesy: Gisela Müller

Textile Arts of Ladakh - Nomadic Weaves to Silk-Brocades

Monisha Ahmed

Ladakh has a highly diverse textile tradition that reflects its physical, socio-economic, and cultural environment. The range of fabrics used extends from elaborately patterned prestige garments made from trade textiles to simple homespun materials produced from locally available resources of wool and pashmina. While serving as apparel or as containers and coverings, their role also includes fulfilling religious and social obligations. *Khatak* (*kha btag*, white ceremonial scarves made from cotton or silk) are used as offerings to deities and high monks. *Dar chog* (*dar Icog*, prayer flags) made from square cotton pieces in the five auspicious Buddhist colours of green, blue, red, white, and yellow are printed with religious texts and used to mark sacred points in the landscape. A woman's dowry is placed over a rope and is literally known as *zong thag* (*rdzong thag* or "woven goods"), as almost all are made from cloth. They are given as obligatory gifts by her parents and relatives, and are a vital key to understanding social connections between people. From the 17th century onwards textiles also functioned as a marker of alliance beyond the confines of Ladakh when the Lopchak Mission included gifts of cloth among the presents to be given to the Treasurer of the Office of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa.[1]

ORIGINS OF WEAVING AND TEXTILES

It is believed in Ladakh that the loom and the art of weaving are modelled on the mythical loom of Duguma, wife of King Gesar of Ling who is the legendary hero-god in the Buddhist world of the Himalayas.[2] While no one is able to say for certain what kind of loom this is, some Ladakhis believe it might be a backstrap loom since women in Ladakh usually use such looms. Ladakhis claim that Duguma continues to work on this loom, weaving one row a year, and that when she completes her fabric the world will come to an end.

Apart from the mythological legend of Duguma, not much is known about the historical development of weaving in Ladakh. Few, if any, early sources and records exist on this subject and archaeological excavations have yielded little information. However, since the looms used in Ladakh and Tibet closely resemble each other, it is commonly believed in Ladakh that weaving first entered the area from Tibet. According to Diana Myers, weaving of some sort probably extends as far back as one can chart human habitation on the Tibetan plateau since clay spindle whorls have been found in large numbers at Neolithic sites in Tibet.[3] When speaking to outsiders Tibetans

generally follow the convention of attributing the introduction of most things to the Chinese; weaving is no exception as Myers mentions that according to popular tradition in Tibet looms were first introduced there "... by the Chinese wife of Emperor Songtsen Gampo in the seventh century".[4] But more importantly she says that "Chinese annals of the same period, however, mention general weaving activity among the tribes of what is now Tibet".[5]

In Ladakh it is believed that the tradition of weaving is an ancient craft. The Ladakhis talk of a time before weaving, when their ancestors wore clothes made from animal skins, straw, and the bark of trees.[6] Later they learnt how to spin and weave their own clothes. Animal skins are still used in Ladakh to make clothes and most probably this dates back to their earlier traditions. In central and western Ladakh women wear a goatskin on their back known as *logpa* (*slog pa*). In winter, among the nomadic pastoralists of the northeast, women wear yogar (*yo sgar*, felt capes) lined with skin from the lamb or kid, while men wear a robe (*shan lag*) made from several sheepskins with the fur side turned to the body for warmth.[7]

Paintings on monastery walls and ceilings are a valuable source of information regarding the historical development of textiles in Ladakh. They inform us about the prevalent fashions, particularly those worn by the wealthier patrons who commissioned the paintings, as artists were free to follow the trends prevalent at a given historical moment. Some of the earliest examples can be seen at the Sumtsek (*gsum brtsegs*), one of the three temples forming the monastery complex at Alchi which dates to the 12th and 13th centuries. The murals document the flourishing trade history of Indian and Central Asian textiles as they demonstrate a variety of international techniques, motifs, and styles with roots in India, Central Asia, Iran, and West Asia. Men and women wrapped in woollen shawls, clearly a product of Kashmir, are evident along with men wearing cotton turbans and long robes adorned with chequered ornamentation or Sassanian roundels. The ceiling of the Sumtsek consists of 48 panels which reproduce textiles of various techniques of manufacture, some of which were produced in Ladakh, others that came in through trade, such as brocade, lampas, and embroidered fabrics.[8] The textile patterns which cover the ceilings are also shown on royal garments in the wall portraits in the Sumtsek, providing confirmation that these reproductions of textiles are not a figment of the painters' imagination, but that they were in actual use at the time when Alchi was being built and decorated or at least they had been seen by the artists in the 11th century and later.

Apart from monastic murals, textiles are the basic materials for many sacred images throughout the Mahayana Buddhist world. Thangkas (scroll paintings) are painted on cotton cloth and then framed in silk brocade. They were used by itinerant monks to take the word of the Buddha to people with little access to monasteries. Thangkas are also commissioned by individuals at the time of illness or adversity, a birth or death in the family, or in connection with a particular religious practice. Some of the earliest fragments of such paintings on cloth come from Dunhuang which was an important Buddhist pilgrimage centre during the 8th and 9th centuries. Mimicking the scroll paintings there are also numerous fine 12th- to 13th-century

pictorial banners woven in silk, *kesi* (*ke 'u tse*), that came to Tibet from China.[9] Silkbrocade, also from China, was used to make large applique and patchwork thangkas for display in monasteries, such as the 17th-century image of Guru Padmasambhava shown every twelve years at Hemis.

WESTERN ACCOUNTS OF LADAKHI TEXTILES

The processing of wool, from the shearing of sheep to spinning and weaving, has been a long-standing activity in Ladakh and was often noted by travellers to the region. When the Greek scholar Marco Pallis visited Ladakh in 1936 he wrote:

Whatever else he may be doing, whether walking or sitting, the Ladaki is always assiduously spinning coarse woollen thread; his little shuttle hangs from the end of the thread and revolves merrily under dexterous twists periodically administered, while a thick skein of crude wool is hung over his elbow. The finished thread is wound on a stick. In this way a continual supply of yarn is spun for weaving into clothes ....[10]

One of the earliest references to Ladakhi woollen cloth is made by the first European travellers to Ladakh—the Portuguese priests Francisco de Azevedo and John de Oliveira in 1631. Azevedo writes that on leaving Leh, the king, Senge Namgyal "... presented him with a horse very much like Don Quixote's, four pieces of woollen stuff, [and] two tails of hyacas [yaks]".[11] Almost 200 years later William Moorcroft, who lived in Ladakh for two years, described the woollen cloth in the country as being thick and strong, but also soft, and of a regular thread and fabric.[12] Frederic Drew, the British governor of Ladakh in 1871, remarked on the clothing made from this cloth:

The men wear a *choga*, or wide and long coat, ... confined at the waist by a woollen kamarband [belt], or scarf. ... The women wear a gown the skirt somewhat gathered into pleats, of vertical strips of woollen cloth, generally blue and red alternately but sometimes patterned, sewn together.[13]

Apart from written accounts, visitors to the region also amassed collections of material culture amongst which are examples of textiles. These range from women's robes to silk-brocade hats, yak-hair tents, lengths of woollen cloth, and embroidered boots. One of the most significant of these is a set of five dolls commissioned by the American Mrs Barrett in Leh in 1927. Mrs Barrett had five dolls made especially for her to depict the dress and ornamentation worn at that time in Ladakh. The five dolls represent a Buddhist monk, a Buddhist man and woman, and a Muslim couple.[14]

TEXTILE PRODUCTION IN LADAKH

While sheep are reared throughout Ladakh, pashmina goats and yaks are only raised in the northern and eastern parts of the region. Livestock are the main source of fibres for weaving: sheep wool (*baf*), goat hair (*ral*), yak hair (*sidpa*), and yak wool (*ku lu*) are the most commonly used. Pashmina (*le na*), though widely available in Ladakh, is used in small quantities; the greater part is traded with Kashmir.

Weaving is found throughout the region

though the practice differs between central and western Ladakh, where agriculture is widespread, and the nomadic pastoralists of the northeast. In central and western Ladakh weaving is exclusively a male occupation. The male weaver is called *thagskan* (*'thags mkhan*) and he weaves on a *thagsha* (*'thags cha*, foot-loom) which is portable, and can be dismantled and reassembled within minutes. In fact in these areas there is a prohibition on women weaving. Male weavers allege that if a woman were to weave her hands would burst into flames, or that the mountains would collapse. It is also said that if a woman should touch the loom she would become infertile. Not all men in a village weave and though weaving tends to be a hereditary skill it is not always the practice. It is common to find one, two, or even three weavers in a village. But there are also villages without a weaver, and so weavers often travel between villages providing their services. People either take their wool to the weaver or each family calls him in turn to their home to weave their wool, in return for which he is paid in cash or kind.

The male weavers largely make the woollen cloth known as *nambu* (*snam bu*), woven in a simple twill weave, which is the fabric used for all clothes worn in Ladakh. Woven in a single colour, usually white, the fabric is dyed brown or maroon before it is cut and stitched into robes—the *sul ma* for women and the *gos* for men. The basic design of male and female robes is the same throughout Ladakh. Men wear a full-length robe that overlaps on the left side and is buttoned from the left shoulder down the length of the robe. It has a Chinese-style collar and slits along the sides. The woman's robe is a roundnecked, long-sleeved dress with gathers around the waist and knee-length slits. It has no buttons and is held together by a belt, generally a narrower length of the same woollen fabric but with a geometric pattern or tie-dye circles at either end. The garment is made in different lengths—ankle-length robes are for special occasions, while the shorter ones are kept for daily use when there is work to be done. The same fabric is also used for trousers, belts, the uppers of boots, and lining for hats.

In contrast to central and western Ladakh, among the nomadic pastoralists of the northeast both women and men weave, each on a different loom. Women weave using a *skethags* (*sked 'thags*, backstrap loom) and men sathags (sa 'thags, fixed-heddle loom). There is a difference in the fibres women and men work with—women weave with sheep and yak wool, men with goat and yak hair. Women also work with coloured yarns, men only with natural coloured fibre. The nomads make a wide range of textiles—women weave coverings for saddles and floors, tent walls, and blankets; containers for foodstuffs and personal belongings; as well as the woollen fabric used to make all clothes. Men weave blankets, saddle-bags, and tents. The men also make felt, but this is no longer very common as machine-made felt is now easily available in Ladakh. Amongst the nomadic pastoralists textile production has several symbolic interpretations.[15] For instance the making of cloth on both looms is regarded as a metaphor for procreation and the finished cloth symbolizes the birth of a child.[16] Because of the association between weaving and procreation the craft is a prerequisite for every young woman, whose skill at weaving is a sign of her fertility, and thus makes her much sought after as a bride.

Throughout Ladakh it is the men who usually

do the cutting and stitching of clothes. While there are professional tailors, most men know how to stitch and they generally make the everyday clothes their families wear. It is only for festive occasions and more expensive fabrics, such as brocade and velvet, that the services of a professional tailor will be engaged. Apart from making clothes these tailors also make hats and boots. In addition, some do applique and patchwork and make saddlecloths and bands that carry a bell and encircle the neck of a horse.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE MORAVIAN MISSION

The Moravian Missionaries who came to Ladakh at the end of the 19th century, from England and Germany, had a significant influence on the development of textiles there. The wives of Moravian Missionaries introduced knitting in the region; soon after coming to Ladakh they set up a Knitting and Sewing School in Leh. Ladakhi women were mainly taught to make gloves, hats, and socks which were sold in the bazaar in Leh, much as they are today.

In 1939 Walter Asboe, an English missionary, started an Industrial School in Leh where weavers could work, train others to weave, design, and market their produce.[17] He also introduced the fly shuttle loom into Ladakh. He brought women into the centre for training and to work on the fly-shuttle loom even though local prohibitions prevented them from working on such foot-looms. However, there was little opposition to this as the loom was larger in size than those used traditionally in the villages, and the women were not weaving the *nambu* but shawls and blankets. Asboe's School also trained a number of apprentices in Tibetan carpet weaving on the frame or vertical loom.[18] At that time, the only weaver in Ladakh who wove carpets on the frame loom was Sonam Paljor, a Christian man from Khalatse, who had learnt his trade from Tibetans visiting Ladakh and by examining Tibetan carpets.[19] Asboe invited Sonam Paljor to teach carpet weaving at his school in Leh. When the Industrial School closed down in 1947 Asboe gave all the equipment to the Indian government who in 1955 set up government sponsored handicrafts training centres, many of whose instructors had first trained with Asboe.

TRADE TEXTILES

Ideally placed on the trade routes coming from Central Asia, Russia, Tibet, China, and India, trade has flourished in Ladakh from the time the Namgyal dynasty was established there in the 10th century to the present day with textiles forming a significant part of the goods to be bought and sold. The traders who came to Ladakh brought with them wool carpets, felt floor coverings, bales of cotton and silk fabric, velvet, brocade, animal skins, and commercial dyes amongst a host of other commodities and luxury goods. Some of this merchandise they traded in Ladakh itself, and the rest they carried with them on their further journeys. Many of the textiles acquired through trade were highly valued in Ladakh—for instance, imported fabrics and not local cloth were amongst the gifts sent with the Lopchak Mission.[20]

During his stay in Leh, Moorcroft writes that amongst the merchandise he saw arriving there was imported cloth such as European broadcloth, Russian velvet, Chinese satin and brocade, cotton stockings from Kashmir and Kabul, ornamented leather boots from Lhasa,

and felt from Yarkand.[21] The Ladakhi writer Elijah Joldan mentions that from Central Asia items mainly meant for Ladakhi customers were "rough cotton cloth and some silk cloth, ready-made garments, mostly cottonpadded, long shoes called Charoks, saddlery items, ... warm sheep-skin garments, and big cotton bags and saddle bags".[22] From Sinkiang there was rawsilk thread, felt, carpets, cured lamb-skins, and manufactured silk cloth; from India there came chemical dyes of all colours, mostly German-made, indigo, artificial silk cloths (mostly Japanese), muslin, velvet and cotton cloths, otter fur, beads, sewing machine needles, and threads.[23]

Traders visited Ladakh in the summer months when the passes were open. When they reached Leh or Kargil, the two main towns of Ladakh, they would stay in serais.[24] While the traders had the option of conducting their business directly from the serais, they could also set up temporary shops in the bazaar. For instance, traders from Yarkand are remembered for setting up their shops in tents in front of the mosque in Leh bazaar. When it was time to leave, the traders would generally sell their remaining goods directly to shopkeepers in Leh and Kargil, who would then sell them at a profit.

Many of the trade textiles still survive in Ladakh's homes, mosques, and monasteries, partly because they were preserved as symbols of prestige, and also because the climatic conditions in the region are such that they have largely been free from damage by light, moisture, and insects. The Shangara, one of Leh's wealthiest mercantile families, the other being the Radhu, have kept a wide range of garments made from a variety of trade textiles.[25] Other families do not possess as many pieces but the few they have are cherished possessions. In Chushot, near Leh, brides in Saira Bano's family continue to wear the same *kinkhwab* (Urdu: silk-brocade) robe first worn by her husband's grandmother at her marriage. The silk-brocade came from Banaras, and was popular with the Muslim population of Ladakh as it was devoid of Buddhist symbols. Abdul Hakim Shanku, from a well-known trading family, still owns carpets from Yarkand purchased by his father from Yarkandi traders in Leh bazaar in the early 1930s. Wool carpets patterned with Chinese and/or Buddhist symbols, as well as geometric designs combined with stylized flowers, came from Yarkand, Tibet, and Bhutan. These carpets also came as saddle-covers, usually in a set of matching pairs—a large piece which is placed below the wooden saddle and a smaller square one which is draped over it. Felt floor coverings (known as *numdahs*) also came from Yarkand but very few of these survive in Ladakh today as over the years they have been replaced by wool carpets.

Plain silk fabric came from Yarkand and was used to make belts for both men and women, as well as the long-sleeved blouse with a soft collar that rolls over the neck of the female robe. At the time of a woman's wedding it was considered a sign of prestige if she could afford to wear more than one blouse. Three blouses meant the family was very wealthy; two, they were middle-class. The blouses would be of different colours, and it was quite common for brides to wear a pink one with a green or white one. Velvet came from China and was used to make male and female robes, as well as the *stothung* (*stod thung*, a short sleeveless jacket) with a Chinese collar that women wore over

their robes. Velvet was popular in black or dark shades of blue, green, and maroon. Cotton was also a trade textile and mainly came from India or Yarkand. It was used to make trousers—a loose salwar-type for men, and for women a churidar. Cotton fabric, usually maroon or yellow in colour, was also used to make monks' robes. Red and white cotton or silk belts (*arti*), worn by men at special occasions, came from Assam.

Silk-brocaded textiles were probably the most prestigious of textiles that were traded in Ladakh, and they came from both China and Banaras.[26] The high cost of these fabrics made them luxury textiles. As symbols of status their use was restricted to the royal family, nobility, and the clergy. The most important use of the silk-brocades was in the religious world of the monastery. Here, these fabrics were used for altar and seat coverings, canopies, door hangings, and pillar covers. They were also used as mountings for thangkas, and for making the patchwork pieces in applique thangkas. The fabric was used to make elaborate robes worn by the monks at monastic festivals, as well as edging for their hats and boots.

In the lay community, brocade was used to make robes for women and men, capes, and hats. While hats were worn on a daily basis, the robes and capes were generally worn on special occasions such as weddings or religious ceremonies. The common people who could not afford to make entire robes out of brocade would use just a little bit to embellish their garments. They would stitch a narrow strip of brocade on to the cuffs of their sleeves or the slits of their robes, or they would use it to make the Chinese collar of the male robe. In fact, during the reign of the Namgyal dynasty the common people were not allowed to use or wear these brocaded textiles.[27] However, when the powers vested in the royal family declined in the 20th century, those Ladakhis who could afford to buy these luxury textiles also began to wear them. By 1947, most of the trade routes into Ladakh from Central Asia closed. By the early 1960s, as a result of the Chinese occupation of Tibet, Ladakh's trade with Tibet also came to an end.

TEXTILES IN CONTEMPORARY LADAKH

Textile production and weaving continue in Ladakh today but traditions have also changed and transformed. Commercial dyes and new fibres such as merino wool and acrylic yarns in a wide range of colours have entered the market, as have synthetic fabrics such as polyester and nylon. Leather jackets, jeans and shirts or t-shirts are widely worn by men, while older women tend to wear the Punjabi-style salwar kameez. Younger women in Leh and neighbouring villages prefer Western-style dress, often aping what they see in fashion magazines or on television. Local dress is kept for attending formal social or religious functions or for wearing in the winter months.[28]

In the last fifty years women have also started tailoring and weaving on the footloom, learning the crafts at handicraft centres set up in post-Independence India. However, women tailors usually make Indian-style garments and not traditional Ladakhi dress. Women weavers continue to make blankets and shawls much as their predecessors did at the Industrial School. There has also been an influx of tailors from north India (mainly Bihar and Uttar Pradesh) whose work is similar to that of the women tailors. While women weavers amongst the

nomadic pastoralists continue to weave, in central and western Ladakh local people are complaining that there has been a drop in weavers as few young men want to pursue the profession, turning instead to the new jobs available in the region.

In an effort to prevent the recent decline in the availability of *nambu* in central and western Ladakh, a women's organization in Leh has been training women to work on the traditional foot-loom. However, they are mindful of the prohibitions associated with this and so approach the endeavour with some trepidation. The ease with which commercial dyes, acrylic yarn, and fabrics are available has meant that women can choose from a wider colour palette. It has also meant that the demands on women weavers have increased as they are expected to display a discerning artistry for combining colours and new designs.

Though the trade routes closed, textile goods from various parts of India—now also other parts of the world—continue to enter Ladakh. While textiles from Central Asia can no longer be seen in the bazaars of either Leh or Kargil, those from the plains of India and China are sold there in abundance. Tibetan carpets and saddle-covers are also widely available in Ladakh as these are now made at handicraft centres set up by Tibetan refugees in India. Old trade textiles are either securely ensconced with families, mainly for sentimental reasons, or sold to antique dealers. Mechanization is slowly entering the process of textile production. In 1999, Abdul Rehman, who comes from a trading family, set up a woolprocessing factory at Thikse with machinery from Ludhiana in Punjab. Now the local people take their wool to him for cleaning, carding, and spinning—processes previously done by hand. In 2004 a pashmina dehairing and processing plant, inaugurated by Congress President Sonia Gandhi, opened in Leh with machinery from China. Costing USD 1.8 million, it was jointly funded by the Hill Development Council, United Nations Development Project, and the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. It has long been the Ladakh government's intention to increase the local value addition of pashmina in the region as their contention is that Kashmir, and not Ladakh, reaps all the benefits from pashmina. The plant has been set up with the hope of encouraging the use of pashmina by local weavers in Ladakh, as well as promoting the export of processed pashmina outside the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Despite the transformations in the making and use of textiles, they continue to play a significant role in Ladakhi life. Presented as offerings or obligatory gifts, markers of sacred or secular space, and indicators of fertility, they persist as "silent storehouses of information".[29] Whether or not the next generations of Ladakhis will continue to recognize this importance remains to be seen.

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NOTES

[1] Under the Treaty of Tingmosgang, signed after the conclusion of the Tibeto-Ladakhi-Mughal war in 1684, two missions were set up. The Lopchak (*lo phyag*) was a biannual mission that went from Leh to Lhasa, under which the king of Ladakh would send a variety of gifts which were offerings to the Dalai Lama for his protective blessings (John Bray, 1991, "Ladakhi History and Indian Nationhood", *South Asia Research* 11(2): 115–33, p. 117). The other mission was the Chaba, an annual trade caravan that went from Lhasa to Leh and carried with it 200 animal-loads of tea (John Bray, 1990, "The Lopchak Mission from Ladakh to Lhasa in British Indian Foreign Policy", *The Tibet Journal* 15: 75–96, p. 78).

[2] Monisha Ahmed, 2002, *Living Fabric: Weaving among the Nomads of Ladakh Himalaya*, Bangkok: Orchid Press, p. 14.

[3] Diana K. Myers, 1984, *Temple, Household, Horseback: Rugs of the Tibetan Plateau*, Washington: The Textile Museum, p. 21.

[4] Ibid., p. 26.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Interview with the late Aba Palle, retired superintendent of Handicrafts Industries, Leh, 1995.

[7] Recently, the clergy have told people to stop wearing animal skins, especially if the animal is killed to make the garment. While there is a decrease in the wearing of goatskin capes among women in central and western Ladakh, I have not observed the same among the pastoral nomads.

[8] "The copying of textiles in paint on the ceilings may derive from the custom of fixing actual pieces of cloth under the ceilings of Ladakhi buildings, partly as embellishment but also for the practical reason of preventing dust or mud particles of the ceiling construction from falling into the rooms below." (Roger Goepper, 1996, *Alchi, Ladakh's Hidden Buddhist Sanctuary—The Sumtsek*, London: Serindia Publications, p. 225). This practice continues to be followed in most homes in Ladakh today.

[9] Valrae Reynolds, 1997, "Luxury Textiles in Tibet" in *Tibetan Art: Towards a Definition of Style*, edited by J.C.

Singer and P. Denwood, London: Laurence King, pp. 123–24.

[10] Marco Pallis, 1946 (fourth edition), *Peaks and Lamas*, London: Cassell, pp. 234–35.

[11] C. Wessels, 1924, *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia 1603-1721*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, p. 110.

[12] William Moorcroft and George Trebeck, 1841, *Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan and the Punjab* (1819–25), 2 vols., London: John Murray, p. 323.

[13] Frederic Drew, 1875, *The Jummoo and Kashmir Territories, A Geographical Account*, London: Edward Stanford, p. 240.

[14] The Barretts' commission for the "dolls" indicates the ways in which items such as these were used by Westerners to categorize ethnic types. Such dolls were commissioned by museums in the West from the 19th century onwards especially in India (personal communication Clare Harris). Another pair of Ladakhi dolls (Buddhist man and woman) is in the Moravian Mission Museum in Fulneck, near Leeds.

[15] Much of this is covered in chapters five to eight in Monisha Ahmed, *Living Fabric*.

[16] While the finished product in both looms represents the birth of a child, in the male loom the warp represents the male and the weft the female—thereby signifying the sexual union between man and woman. In the female loom the warp is female and the weft the child growing within her womb (ibid., pp. 91–92).

[17] Ibid., pp. 24–25.

[18] In the rest of Ladakh carpets were woven on the backstrap loom in strips, which were later stitched together.

[19] Pallis, *Peaks and Lamas*, p. 296, also mentions that the only man with any reputation for weaving rugs lived at Khalatse.

[20] The gifts of cloth included six rolls of cloth of Hor (Mughal or Mongol) manufacture and one roll of soft cotton cloth (Zahiruddin Ahmed, 1968, "New Light on the Tibet-Ladakh-Mughal War of 1679–84", *East and West* 18: 340–61, p. 354).

[21] Moorcroft and Trebeck, *Travels in the Himalayan Provinces...*, pp. 322–26.

[22] Elijah Joldan, 1985, *Harvest Festival*, Srinagar: Kapoor Brothers, p. 70.

[23] Ibid., pp. 71–72.

[24] These inns were three-storey buildings—the ground floor was used to keep horses and feed for the animals, the first floor to sell merchandise as well as store it, and the second floor for the lodging of visiting traders.

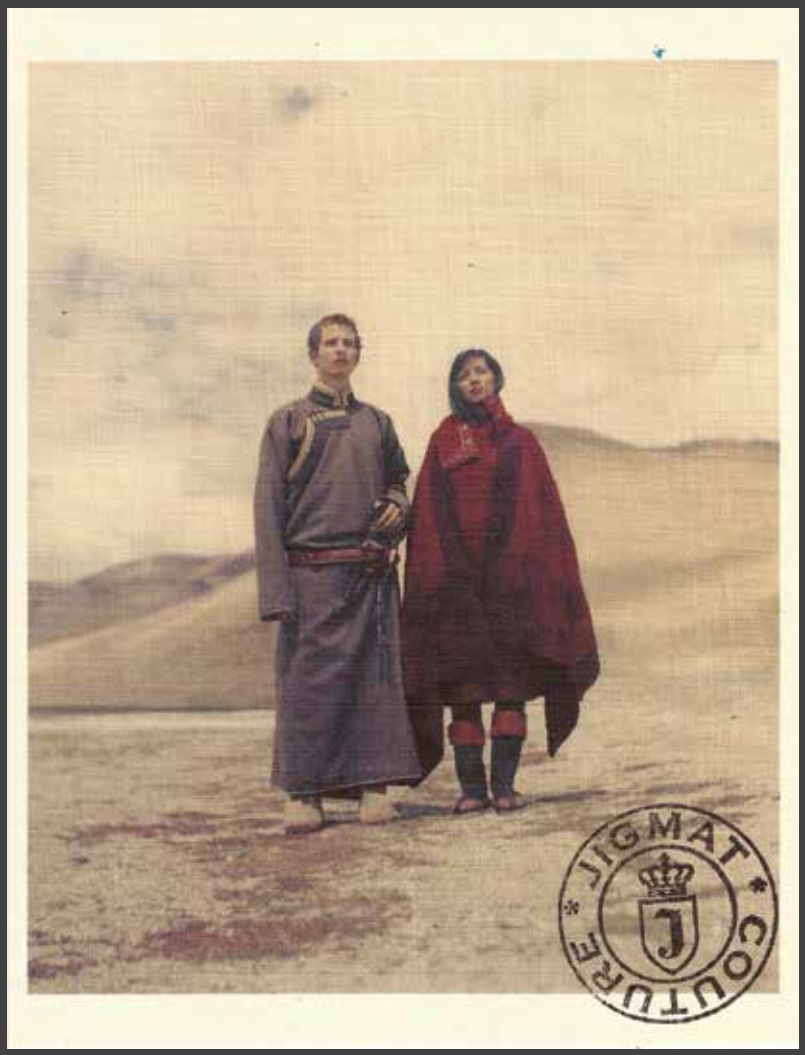
[25] I am grateful to Jigmet Wangchuk, from the Shangara family, for showing these to me.

[26] In the Ladakhi language Chinese silk-brocade is known as *gos chen*, Tibetans call it *rgya ser*. In contrast, silk-brocade from Banaras was known by the Urdu word *kinkhwab*. For a discussion on the subject see Monisha Ahmed, "From Benaras to Leh—The Trade and Use of Brocaded Silk", Paper presented at the 8th Biennial Symposium of the Textile Society of America—"Silk Roads, Other Roads", Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, September 26–28, 2002.

[27] It was the same in Tibet, where imported materials were luxury goods and used as marks of rank by both the clergy and aristocracy. Valrae Reynolds, 1981, "From a Lost World—Tibetan Costumes and Textiles", *Orientations* March 1981: 6–22, p. 7.

[28] In 1998 the Ladakh Buddhist Association ruled that it was mandatory to wear traditional clothes at religious festivals and public gatherings. While the Association imposed a fine against those who disobeyed this rule, it has not been formalized in any manner.

[29] Judy Frater, 1995, *Threads of Identity—Embroidery and Adornment of the Nomadic Rabaris*, Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, p. 202.



A contemporary creation by Jigmat Couture based on traditional style
Image courtesy: Jigmat Couture

Sari, Cotton, 19th Century, South India, 326 x 43.3 in.
Acc. no. 62.1705, National Museum, New Delhi

Handloom Saris of the South

A Walk Through

Pavithra Muddaya

Indian textiles have been appreciated all over the world. The wrapped clothing, sari, sarong, lungi continues to be used all over India, with each region having different styles of draping and thus a multitude of weaves. The sari has been worn for over two thousand years.

In South India, women have always draped themselves in the hand-woven sari. Within Southern India there were different styles which were influenced by the climate, customs, vocations and social status of the user.

According to folklore, in ancient times men and women clothed themselves with bark and leaves. They prayed to Shiva to clothe them. Shiva created a god – Jineshwara/ Jiveshwara, who in turn commissioned seven other minor gods and introduced seven colours of the rainbow in the weave. The woven weave was the thread extracted from the Lotus stem. Shiva's only condition was that the fabric that was to be woven should be as fine and beautiful as Mother Parvathi.

The "Devanga" and the "Padmashali" were the predominant weaving communities; there were other localized communities, who also wove. They worshipped Goddess Chowdeshwari, a form of Shakti.

Weavers had their own hierarchy where some were permitted to weave only for the Gods and Temples, others for royalty and aristocracy and others for the common man.

The handloom industry created an inter-dependent society where each community specialized in its different aspects. The farmers grew cotton and the spinners created the yarn, the stems of jowar were used to make the reeds. The carpenters built the loom. The reed-maker, the graph-maker, the specialist to balance weights – were indispensable for setting the loom, as well as the artist who tied the Adai (in Tamil) - the indigenous jacquard to create the pattern.

Adai was a process which utilized threads and knots to manipulate the warp and weft on the loom in order to create the desired design. This process was the only way to weave a complex design. Today this is replaced by the computerised Jacquard cards.

The pre-loom preparations were a precise science, and street sizing, warp beaming, setting the warp and other related activities were a necessary part of the process. The weavers showed mastery over mathematical calculations which were quite complex to

create a sari. The weavers were both artists and mathematicians; this aspect is mostly unknown.

The units of measurements were referred to as "Kuligai" in Tamil and "Maney" in Kannada. Dyeing of the yarn was a time-tested method that was also colour fast. The natural dyes and techniques used were environmental friendly. Certain water bodies were considered to have special mineral properties and the sand, the weavers believed, was responsible for the colour fastness.

The different techniques and designs woven in South India is basically the effort of the family. Every child in a weaver's family absorbs and learns the skill of weaving almost intuitively and the sound of the loom is their lullaby.

The apprentice begins as a helper in all the pre- loom activities; the setting of the loom, the necessary measurements, the street-sizing and other nuances to create the perfect textile. Invariably, only when the master- weaver or elder thinks he is fit and competent will he move onto more complex weaves.

KERALA

The Kasavu *mundu*, *veshti* of Kerala are woven in very fine cotton, only in cream colour with solid banded border made of real *zari* [gold]. The Kasavu *mundu* was a wrap-around like the *lungi*, it was the traditional attire of the women of Kerala but today it is woven as a two piece Kasavu sari- one piece serves as the *mundu* or wrap- around and the other piece is worn more like a modern sari's *pallu*, thrown over the shoulder.

The Balarampuram sari of Kerala was along the same lines as the Kasavu but had an ornate *pallu*. Originally the Jamdhani technique was used in the *pallu*. Today there is no trace of this skill to be seen in the region.

Apart from the sari, the white dhoti /*mundu* was and is woven in fine cotton counts. The demand for them is high as it is the standard formal clothing for men. The chequered lungi is the standard attire of the working man in Kerala, and till a decade ago it was very common for women to wear it as the *mundu* along with a shoulder cloth - the Malabar *thorathu* [towel], along with a simple blouse. The fine cotton fabric suited the people who lived in these hot and humid conditions.

DHARMAVARAM

Among the silk saris woven in the south we have the Dharmavaram which earlier was a very simple plain silk with minimal design and gold band in the borders. The gold borders were referred to the Bavanchu and Banaras twill.

Bangalore plain silks were also famous with the gold Bavanchu borders. Later on *Meena* work (coloured threads) were used in the *pallu* as well as the borders. Most often the Dharmavaram and Bangalore silk saris had only one sided borders and a single gold line for the upper border.

The heavier Bangalore silk saris were famous for a contrast border which used a satin weave technique to achieve the contrast (Korvai) look. The earlier saris from Arni (Tamil Nadu) were always plain with a simple border and *pallu*. Later on small checks in the body became characteristic of the light-weight silk saris. Today the weavers weave the most elaborate

designs in Arni & Dharmavaram. They are woven on handlooms with a jacquard box; despite the huge influence of the power-looms, hand-looms are still prevalent.

The state of Karnataka supplies most of the silk yarn to the country. Sericulture was given importance during the time of Tipu Sultan and supported by the Wodeyars after they returned to power in Mysore. The success behind the sericulture industry was the structured and scientific approach to it.

Ramanagara (Karnataka) is the biggest silk cocoon producing centre, and they are auctioned here.

The Royals of Mysore also helped set up factories for spinning and weaving, these were responsible for the exquisite crepe silks. Now the crepes are produced by KSIC of Karnataka. These are preferred for their beautiful drape and their non-creasing quality.

The areas of Mangalgiri, Guntur and Nellore (Andhra Pradesh) wove plain cotton saris with small borders and simple plain *pallus*. They used 60's and 80's count of cotton yarn. The Guntur cotton saris usually featured a single border with simple motifs and did not have an elaborate *pallu*. These saris were woven in a single colour and used only one shuttle.

Let us move onto the *Korvai* (inter-lock) border technique. The world famous Kanchipuram/ Kanchivaram saris are a proud possession every mother aspires to give as part of her daughter's trousseau. These saris were passed down from mother to daughter and are woven in pit looms using heavy quality silk which translates to its heavier weight. The weavers here believe that the waters of the Palar River give the lustre and strength to the yarns which are dyed in this water.

The distinguishing mark of a Kanchivaram sari is the contrast colours in the body and borders. The technique which creates this effect is called *Korvai*. The loom has three shuttles. Two shuttles are for the borders and one shuttle for the body. They begin weaving from one side, which has the border colour. The shuttle is taken up to the end of the border and interlocked with the thread of the body. The shuttle warp threads of the body take it to the second border, interlock with it and throw the third shuttle to the end.

This technique completes the entire sari, usually the *Korvai* technique is achieved with the help of an assistant. It is a time consuming process and it has become very difficult to get it woven today.

GADWAL

Gadwal in Andhra Pradesh is also famous for this contrast (Korvai) technique. It featured a fine cotton body with an attached silk border. The weaver and designer could play around with an amazing range of colours and designs. This created a classic status for both the Kanchivaram and Gadwal sari. The Gadwal was the choice of the elite and aristocracy in society. The cotton used was very fine and it necessitated a very skilled weaver to weave elaborate *zari pallu* with mango *butta* motifs in the *pallu*. Earlier only pure *zari* was used in the Gadwal saris.

Molkalmuru in Karnataka always wove saris with contrast borders in silk. Saris woven here

were equivalent to Kanchivaram saris, both in quality and design. They used to have a ten inch border with elaborate *zari pallu*. Today there are only computer based designs on jacquard looms in this area. It is very sad to loose so many beautiful designs which reflected the traditions and skills of the area.

Jamdhani technique was prevalent in Andhra. The Jamdhani is akin to doing embroidery on the loom. It is basically an interlocking system using small 2" bobbins instead of a needle. Most often the old soft silk waste fabric is wrapped over a small stick like bobbin. Over this, *zari* is wrapped and used when the design necessitated the use of gold thread. This method ensured that gold threads would not break. Working in this technique required great mastery and took many man-hours to weave; as such the saris with the Jamdhani technique are expensive. Nowadays, one of the most sought after saris are Uppada saris, which incidentally use the Jamdhani technique. Uppada is in Andhra Pradesh and is a thriving centre for silk and cotton saris.

Kodali Karupp in Tamil Nadu is another fabulous example of the Jamdhani technique. The test of this work is in the reverse side. The motifs must be smooth on the reverse side and one can see the weave interlock which is very neat.

Paithani saris are famous for the multi-coloured designs woven on the *pallu* using the interlocking technique. The design was originally woven by counting the warp threads, but today many weavers use a drawing kept below the warp threads to facilitate their weaving process.

These techniques thrive only if there is patronage and support. Today the market dictates the demand and price. When there is no support and demand for the product the sari dies a natural death along with the technique. At this point it is not wrong to state that once a weaver shifts to computerized designs he is unwilling to do this "difficult" Jamdhani work.

Every woman, I am sure, has seen or possesses a sari with the temple motif in some form. To weave this, a slight variation of the interlock technique is used. The sizes of the temple spires vary according to the fashion and also the weaver's whim and fancy. In fact there is a temple variation called "Pilliyar Mukku" i.e. Lord Ganesh's tusks. This is set as two smaller temple motifs on either side of a larger motif. The amazing aspect of our handlooms is that every object, real or imaginary, could be woven.

The Ilkal saris of North Karnataka are area specific and also design specific. These usually have small woven borders with a body of varied checks. The speciality is in the contrast *pallu* (usually red with white temple in between), which is referred to as "*Tope Teni*". They are woven in cotton and a type of rayon, called *Chamka* in these areas. Most of the Ilkals are now woven on power- looms and only few handlooms remain in this area.

Despite being woven and worn by the women of Northern Karnataka, the vast majority of the production caters to Maharashtra. Traditionally woven to a length of nine yards and worn in the typical Maharashtrian style (pant- like lower half), nowadays it is largely made as a seven yard sari. It is believed that every Maharashtrian bride received nine of these saris as part of her trousseau, irrespective of the truth behind it – it has created a demand for this sari and enabled

a thriving industry.

The Shahpur sari of North Karnataka is another distinct design along with the Belgaum sari. Weaving checks seem to be the favourite of the Kannadigas; we find them in all sizes from the mustard seed sized checks, to the tennis ball sized checks. Weavers used seeds, grains, lentils and other objects to identify the size of the checks. The Chadran-Chukki design used to be very popular in saris woven in Hubli.

The Ilkal saris always had checks, but they were not always found on the border of the sari. Though not uncommon, the checks were found in the borders of some saris in both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. In Tamil Nadu it was originally woven in Kornad and hence was referred to as the Kornad sari. It was mainly woven in cotton with a variation of checks and a contrasting *pallu*.

This was referred to as "Kaal-yerang-ne-duh" in Tamil Nadu, which literally translates to "lowered to the leg".

The Kannadigas and Tamilians referred to the checks as "*Popli*" and as "*Kattam*", respectively. Salem was also famous for its chequered saris.

The Chettinad saris had bold colourful bodies, either plain or with checks or stripes, and were woven in the *Korvai* technique. Some of the most stunning cotton saris have come from this area. They were woven in both silk and coarse cotton respectively, with short-colour *pallus*. The cotton saris however did not feature an attached *pallu*.

As a matter of fact, checks were woven all over the country. The precision of setting the warp and calculating the necessary weft lines is most important to obtain consistent and accurate checks.

Moving on to another beautiful technique, the Ikat or tie-dyed technique is a very ancient art that was perfected to an art form in different parts of India. This technique spread to South-east Asian countries through maritime trade, religion, and royalty. Ikat fabrics were a major export and drew the attention of the world to Indian textiles. The stories behind its origin are clouded, but it is a historically documented fact that weavers from the Karnataka-Maharashtra-Andhra Pradesh regions moved to Gujarat as they received royal patronage for their art. Another aspect is the migration of people from Southern states to Gujarat when Jainism became prevalent in the country.

The tie and dye work found in the Southern states are basic and simple with the exception of the famous Pochampally saris in Andhra Pradesh. In Madurai, Tamil Nadu where it is referred to as "*Sungadi*", this tie-dye work is done mainly on the body of the sari in small dots with a single colour.

In Karnataka tie-dye was done on the borders of Molkalmuru saris earlier. These were basically a "V" pattern and a diamond pattern. The interesting thing was that it was routinely done in the shape of a small dash/hyphen on both saris and blouse pieces. They were referred to as "*Chukki*".

Another very important woven fabric that developed along with the sari in North Karnataka-Maharashtra- Andhra areas was the "*Kanna*". These were heavily woven pieces of fabric, woven in cotton warp, and silk thread

work were made specifically as pieces to be used as a blouse/*choli*. Indigenous techniques, loom accessories were very specific to this area.

The width of the fabric was woven to suit the style of tailoring the *choli*. Currently the *Kanna* is woven in Guledgudda in Karnataka; it is however woven in rayon/polyester as the demand in Maharashtra dictates the pricing and quality of production.

Along with the *Kanna*, simpler blouse fabrics were also woven in simple checks with borders all throughout the central and north Karnataka region, bordering Andhra Pradesh.

There was always cloth that needed to be woven, given the demand in earlier times. This gave scope for the fabulous handloom saris and other clothing to be created. That demand existed till the advent of the power-loom and how it was thrust upon the people. It created cheaper fabric which outdid the demand in surplus quantity.

The traditional unstitched garment used by Indian men deserves its rightful mention as well. *Dhoti*, *Dhotar*, *Panche*, *Lungi*, *mundu*, *veshti*, are some of the names and variation it is referred to in different linguistic areas. The yardage of the cotton *dhoti* varies according to the style it's worn or tied in. Each region had its own draping style and was most often woven in pure cotton.

The more ornate wedding *dhoties-veshties* were always woven in pure silk with good zari as these were for special occasions. Sometimes this also referred to *dhoti-angavastram*.

Angavastram is the shoulder cloth that often sported borders and sometimes *zari*; it complimented the *dhoti*/*veshti* of the elite. The common man usually sported a plain shoulder cloth that often doubled as a towel.

The head-dress was woven specifically for men and has a lot of names and variations throughout the country; one may call it a *pagadi* or a *peta* nowadays. Very fine cotton was used to weave the turban cloth and the length depended on the community that the weaver catered to. The quality of the fabric, the design and styling reflected the status of the person who wore it.

Generally there was no design or embellishment on them; however, elaborate silks with intricately woven zari ends were specifically commissioned for royalty, aristocracy, and certain communities. Today there are hardly any weavers in the South weaving this turban cloth since pre-stitched turbans were made available. The famous Mysore *Peta* (turban) is used in Karnataka, Andhra and Tamil Nadu for rituals, ceremonies, and felicitations.

The Marathi influence is visible in the turbans of North Karnataka, and the neighbouring regions of Andhra and Maharashtra. In South India we do not see many variation of surface embellishment, unlike the range of *zardosi* work one sees in North India.

Moving onto embroidery, the Kasuti embroidery is endemic to Hubli- Dharwad regions of North Karnataka. This was done by women between their household chores.

It developed more as a hobby and a space for creative expression. This was mostly done on the *pallus* of Ilkal saris. The workmanship

was so neat that one can hardly differentiate between the front and reverse side of the fabric. Motifs were from the artisans' immediate environment and the *Ratha* (chariot) was a central motif. Kasuti work still exists and has a healthy demand.

The region of Kodagu/Coorg had a similar type of embroidery called the "*Kuri polla*" which again displayed fine workmanship and was indistinguishable when seen from either side. This is an extinct art form now.

Colourful embroidery, patchwork, and embellishment were the trademark of the formerly nomadic Lambani people. The vivid colours and rich embellishment was a respite from the daily hardship and harshness of the environment which these wandering communities traversed. The Lambani people are found in Central and North Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

The Toda tribe of the Nilgiris also create their distinct woven shawls with embroidery. They usually work only on plain white fabric with only black and red coloured threads in geometric patterns.

Having given a brief account of the prevalent handloom designs/techniques of Southern India, I would like to also mention, in my knowledge, some of the many beautiful textiles that have been lost.

The original Armur sari which I attribute to the border region of Andhra -Maharashtra is not found any longer in that region. Armur is currently a town in Telengana. The sari had small borders with the peacock eye design similar to Paithani (which was common to Southern India), small *buttas*, and an elaborate *pallu* with *meena*-work, also featuring the rose water sprinkler "*Panner-dhani*" & elaborate circular "*chakra*" *buttas*.

The Siddipet designs in pure cotton were woven with an elaborate pallu that featured milkmaids carrying a pot on their head. These were referred to as "*Golla baama*" saris.

Paathuru saris woven close to Nellore were cotton with silk checks and silk borders, with elaborate *pallus* that generally featured birds and floral themes.

Moving to Karnataka, the Anekal sari was woven in cotton, the body was indigo dyed cotton and the checks/ lines on the body was silk dyed in turmeric. There were two varieties of borders and checks. These had a shorter width since they were meant for working in the fields and hence reached only down to the shin.

Mandya was known for the "*Thalak-vaadi*" sari, which featured checks in 3 colours, usually a pale pink, pale green and mustard, all naturally dyed.

Similar varieties of saris in checks alone that have been lost are the Hale-Angadi, Basrur, Udupi, and Holalkere.

The Bagalkot, Surpuru, Shahpura and Ram-Durga saris have disappeared as well. Ram-Durga saris were cotton saris with an extra weft to make a horizontal in design in white thread.

The Bagalkot saris featured Tulsi and *rangoli* motifs in the *pallu*, checks in the body with a simple border. It was woven in rough counts.

Tamil Nadu has seen a lot of its famed saris disappear. Variyur, located close to the temple town of Sri Rangam was famous for its 120's fine count cotton saris with minimal zari on the borders. The quality made it ideal for the heat of Tamil Nadu.

Salem saris were famous for their checks and later got woven with art silk and synthetics and came to be commonly referred to as "Hippie Saris". Chinnalapatti saris were also an unfortunate victim that got woven in synthetic yarns and eventually disappeared. They were simple cottons with small *butties* and checks. Puddupalyam was famous for small thread work borders similar to the Mangalgiri saris but were woven in pure cotton alone.

Vadamanapakkam was a centre famous for its cotton saris and Korvai technique; those were marketed as Kanchi-cottons. This once thriving centre is now highly dysfunctional and reduced to weaving mundane saris.

Almost every village in Southern India had its weavers who made small changes in sari designs to put in place some sense of branding so their product and area stood out. Most of the handloom areas earlier had weavers utilizing the different techniques of weaving from around the country in their own back-yards.

With rural women shifting to mass produced synthetic saris which had the advantage of no maintenance, the death knell for low priced hand-woven saris that were woven with rough yarn, was sounded.

Power-looms with their ever evolving designs and low cost were embraced by the urban women – the students, the working woman and the house wife. This became a visible shift.

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Sari, Silk brocaded with silver-gilt thread, 19th Century, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, 153 x 43 in.
Acc. No.: 85.353, National Museum, New Delhi

Dreaming On

Kinkhwabs and Varanasi

Dr Ritu Sethi

In the diverse ecologies of textiles that India has been famous for, the *Kimkhwab* occupies a special place. Literally meaning 'what dreams are made of' — derived from the word *Khwab* meaning 'dream' — these brocaded fabrics were coveted by emperors and courts since ancient times. Their splendour and radiance made up luxurious garments, opulent interiors and magnificent drapes for animals. In Varanasi, their hand weaving has sustained, irrespective of the vicissitudes of time, and their imaginings and reimagines remain unbroken upto the present. This essay focusses on their history over less than two centuries, since they were first exhibited publicly.

IMPERIAL POMP AND GRAND SPECTACLE

In 1851, the first ever international exhibition of its kind was inaugurated in London, the then seat of the British empire. The "Great Exhibition of the works of Industry of all Nations" was a global display of art and manufacturing with 50 nations and 39 British colonies participating. 30,000 square feet were allotted to India and the brilliant collection of objects displayed included a Sikh Chief's fully outfitted costume of a 'Kimkwaab' coat with its epaulettes studded with magnificent jewels. These *Kinkhwaab* brocades on display were particularly commented on, as "It was evident that the weavers' skill had risen to high perfection in India....". The Jurors professed "...so perfect, and of a taste so original, as to afford an example to all of Europe — of something to learn".[1]

In the next International Exhibition in London in 1862, a note on the textiles in the India Pavilion stated "...the brocades from Benaras stand unrivalled. The workmanship is of the highest finish, whilst the interweaving of the gold and silver threads with the silks show exquisite taste. The kinkobs or brocades are very rich".[2] The exhibited *Kimkhwabs* included a range of patterns of royal hunts, scrolled floral and foliage, to *minakari* enamelling. They were used as material for wedding robes, in interiors, canopies, drapes and elephant and horse trappings, besides, of course, clothing for royalty, courts and the wealthy. TN Mukharji from the Indian Museum, Calcutta (now Kolkata) acerbically commented "...for not only as they can afford to wear such costly cloths, but also as those who look upon such gorgeous apparel do so with admiration and awe".[3]

The next grand spectacle was realised in 1886 at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London. The potent mix of imperial pomp and splendour

was stirred in with the all-important aspect of commerce and profit that underlined these theatrics. At its grand inauguration Queen Victoria, now anointed Empress of India was seated on a throne positioned under a canopy made of "Indian cloth of gold". Allotted more than one-third of the space the Indian section was by far the largest. Here too the "magnificent array of textiles" was commented on, especially "the gorgeous and beautiful Kinkhabs and gold brocades from the looms of the holy Banaras"; adding that they "... command attention as the most effective of all the fabrics shown."[4]

This was also the first large-scale exhibition that had 36 Indian artisans demonstrating their craft, the largest contingent being 6 gold brocade and *Kimkhwab* weavers from Varanasi. Mukharji, one of the organisers commented "... of considerable interest to the natives of England was the Indian Bazaar where Hindu and Muhammadan artisans carried out their avocation, to witness which men, women and children flocked from all parts of the kingdom. A dense crowd always stood there, looking at our men as they wove the gold brocade, sang the patterns of the carpet, and printed the calico with the hand".[5] These exhibitions set the leitmotif of the others that followed.

BEHIND THE GRAND SPECTACLE

Though cloaked in theatricals, there was a close correspondence between these exhibitions and the aggressive commercial objectives of the empire. This was pivotal to the imperial project, for a prerequisite attendant to Britain's growth and industrial development was the unceasing supply of cheap raw material, and a ready market for its finished products — both to be fulfilled by colonised nations. There was a synergy between exhibitions and the often final resting place of the objects on display, with the origins of the Victoria and Albert Museum rooted in the first exhibition of 1851: first baptised as the Museum of Manufactures, its foundation stone was laid in 1852. It morphed into the Victoria & Albert in 1857. The objects from the Exhibition formed the nucleus of its collection. Other objects from 1851 and subsequent exhibitions set a template for the future, and also fed the British Museum, the National History Museum and the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, with its huge repository of natural dye plants, seeds and rare medicinal plants.

Another manifestation of hard-headed business priorities that privileged the colonisers was an adjunct to the exhibitions. This was the wide and systematised collection of advantageous knowledge that would aid the building of British manufacturing and design sensibilities. A whole host of publications on art manufactures ensued with detailed monographs on production techniques, patterns and designs. These instructive techniques and processes can be likened to a large-scale public offering of confidential manufacturing secrets, but here I reference just one that had a deep and long lasting impact — the publication 'The Textile Manufactures of India' that was compiled by John Forbes Watson, Reporter on the Products of India. Its 18 volumes contained 700 textile samples, each one of commercial value, as the objective was "...to enable the manufacturer to reproduce the articles if he wishes to do so."[6] The sample pieces in a size of 35 x 20 cms each, were annotated with information on the place of its manufacture or where it was sourced, how it was worn or used, the price, size and

weight of the fabric. The volumes produced were distributed, among others, to Chambers of Commerce, Town Halls and Art Schools in textile manufacturing towns in Britain. There were 14 samples from Varanasi that Forbes Watson felt suitable for British manufacturers to copy.

STEPPING INTO AN INDEPENDENT INDIA

By the early years of the 20th century the crumbling of the empire had been set in motion as the Indian nationalist movement was gathering momentum, and by 1918 nationwide campaigns began escalating demands and direct action was initiated that included boycotting British goods with a push towards the revival of domestic production. The hard reality of India in 1947 was of an economy that had been deindustrialised. The partition of the country had brought in its wake — riots, loss of life and destruction of property with a large migration of population who crossed over to one or the other side of the newly created borders.

FESTIVALS AND BEYOND

The aims and impacts of exhibitions in the Post-Independence period were very different from the 1851 exhibition, with the first such international exhibition on Indian textiles being held in 1955 at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York. Titled 'Textiles and Ornaments of India' it was on view for two months and had a record 3 lakh visitors. Among the over 1000 objects displayed, were gold and silver *kimkhwabs* of Varanasi. The MoMA press release described the exhibition as "the most comprehensive showing of these traditional and contemporary native crafts ever presented in this country".[7] The business angle connected importers to the Indian Trade Center in New York. But it took another 35 years for the 'big textile event' that would bring fame and result in a change of fortunes and shaped the future of the master weavers of *kimkhwab*.

Titled 'The Festivals of India', a decade-long series of diplomatic engagements to bring to the world an understanding of the culture of India as well as spark business interest, were planned by the Indian government. Extending from 1982 to 1992, their first outing was in Britain, followed by USA, France, Sweden, the erstwhile USSR, Japan and Germany. Alongside events of performing arts, culture and scientific achievements, were the *Vishvakarma* exhibitions that projected the textile arts of the country and their continuities. These exhibitions and the entire infrastructure that underpinned it were the widest, most in-depth, government supported exercise conceived till the time, meticulously reinforced by an equally ambitious documentation of handloom and handcrafted textile centres. Financed by Government of India's Ministry of Textiles, the impetus and depth that fuelled this exercise gave access to raw materials, human resources, and opened the doors to the network of Weavers Service Centres, which had been established in the early 1950s to facilitate the contemporisation of handmade textiles in India. The textiles for the exhibitions were not borrowed from museums but were specially commissioned from master-artisans and weavers.[8]

For the commissions in *kimkhwab* from Varanasi, the groundwork of building trust with a network of weavers had been fostered through the work of the Weavers Service

Centre in the city headed by Jadunath Supakar. He was a graduate of the prestigious Shanti Niketan art school, who had studied there under the tutelage of the great Indian artist Nandlal Bose. Suparkar built binding ties with the great weaving masters of Varanasi and was key to the innovations that followed. Singh sought to widen the contemporary appeal of the *kimkhwab* and *gyasers* — the densely patterned Buddhist textiles customarily used as ceremonial dress, as offerings, backing-cloths for *thangkhas* and monastic hangings. The experiments and trials were largely concentrated at Kasim Arts in the atelier of Haji Moinuddin, also known as Bade Haji Sahib, who was at that time 70 years of age and had been apprenticed in this trade from early on in his life. Others whose experiments included the *kimkhwab* and the *gyaser* were Swaleh Ansari of the company Modern Saris in the locality of Raja Katra Chowk, and Prabha Traders in the locality of Kunj Gali.

The *gyaser* experiments brought these textiles that were replete with sacred symbolism, into the temporal and worldly space by largely paring down the strong religiosity of its traditional patterning. In the *kimkhwab* examples an elegant minimalism was introduced through a re-sizing and re-scaling of the motifs, with experiments in their spatial composition. In parallel, technological and production expertise were pushed to balance the weight of the textiles with the density of their weaves to allow for use in contemporary interiors and apparel.

AFTERLIVES & CONTINUANCES

The Festivals of India through *Vishvakarma* had a quiet afterlife as the ferment cross-pollinated. In the case of the *gyaser* and *kimkhwab*, textiles seeped out of the *karkhanas* as retailers and designers leapt at the chance to work with the makers. The initiatives had seamlessly linked an entire ecosystem of design, designers, weavers, and others towards innovation through curation, to actualisation of commercial potential and a rethinking of contemporary usages. The timing was fortuitous as the Economic Reforms of 1991 led to high economic growth and growing disposable income in the Indian, domestic market. The rise of Indian fashion consumerism and the mushrooming of the Indian wedding market gave the Indian handloom sector further impetus. From senior designers like Ritu Kumar to a young generation comprising Hemang Agarwal and Sanjay Garg, a host of Indian fashion brands have since worked with the famed metallic brocades of Varanasi.

Seminal exhibitions which have exhibited textiles from Varanasi have, at the same time, continued to challenge notions of what could be achieved. Some of these call for special notes. Now underwritten by private funds their intent pushed the boundaries of possibility. At the National Museum, New Delhi in 1997, an exhibition inspired by museum-quality samples of *patka* / waist-sashes titled 'Minakar — Spun Gold and Woven Enamel' was mounted. The textiles harked back to those woven under the patronage of the Mughal courts. The extinct technique of complex patterned cloth, woven on traditional drawlooms had been reinvented in the Asha Workshop established in Varanasi in 1993 by textile specialist and historian Rahul Jain. After years of experiments with structure and techniques, working with expert *naqshabands* / pattern masters, using specially commissioned silk, gold and silver yarns the

weaves were masterfully recreated.

In 2015 the intent of the special commissions for the exhibition 'Fracture: Indian Textiles, New Conversations' was enunciated by co-curator Mayank Mansingh Kaul as "...projects that would suggest a use of traditions of the handmade, while enquiring into what innovation could mean for them."[9] Of the many outstanding pieces two from Varanasi deserve mention: a *kimkhwab* designed by the internationally celebrated fashion designer Manish Arora, whose experimentation pushed the oeuvre further, while fashion designer and artist Astha Butail, extended the skill of shaping patterned traditional garments on the loom to create woven-to-shape three-dimensional abstract sculptural textiles. Further, in 2019 the exhibition titled 'Pra-Kashi: Silk, gold and Silver from the city of light' was mounted in the National Museum with 47 contemporary textiles woven at the Asha Workshop.

What really stands out and lies at the core of these engagements, revisions, recreations and new editions is the remarkable versatility and adaptability of their weavers, demonstrating their singular receptivity to innovate, to adapt and to make it of Varanasi by keeping *Kimkhwab* production alive, effervescent, and in continuance in the holy city, retaining its grip on our imagination both in the present, and I hope in our continuing futures. For they say of Varanasi that in this place of creation and renewal you will find all you seek and what you do not find here you will not find anywhere else.

[1] 'The Crystal Palace and its contents being an illustrated Encyclopaedia of the Great Exhibition of the Industry of all Nations, 1851; embellished with upwards of five hundred engravings, with a copious analytical index', London : W.M. Clark, , 1851-52. p 66

[2] John, Hollingshead. The International Exhibition of 1862: The Illustrated Catalogue of the Industrial Department [London]: Printed for Her Majesty's Commissioners. 1862. p. 110

[3] Government of Bengal. Official Report of the Calcutta International Exhibition, 1883-84 Vol.2 Calcutta: 1885. pp 382-383

[4] Cundall, Frank. Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition. London: 1886. pp12

[5] Mukharji, T. N. A Visit to Europe. 3rd edition. Pub. Arunodaya Roy. Calcutta. 1902. Chp 3. p 99

[6] Forbes Watson, John. The Textile Manufactures of India (1866). Indological Book House. Varanasi. p 1

[7] Monroe Wheeler, Pupul Jayakar, John Irwin. Textiles and Ornaments of India: A selection of designs - Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.) 1956 Pub. The Museum of Modern Art

[8] Further Reading: The Master Weavers: Festival of India in Britain, Royal College of Art, 1982

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