



A PROJECT ON BALUCHARI SARI

Ms. Amrita Rathi *1✉

*1 Faculty of INIFD, India

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v8.i8.2020.744>



Article Type: Research Article

Article Citation: Ms. Amrita Rathi. (2020). A PROJECT ON BALUCHARI SARI. International Journal of Research -GRANTHAALAYAH, 8(8), 389-402. <https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v8.i8.2020.744>

Received Date: 18 July 2020

Accepted Date: 31 August 2020

Keywords:

Project
Baluchari
Sari

ABSTRACT

In India, the epic story of the sari is not less than 2000 years of romance. The essential simplicity of a sari is an untailed length of cloth, measuring between 4 and 9-meter-long and approximately one meter wide with highly sophisticated design vocabulary. Thomas Carlyle once said, "Society is founded on cloth". India's sari evolved out of a complex physical, historical and cultural environment that differs from region to region and community to community. While the sari remains an overarching symbol of Hindu vestimentary practices, it is the harmonious coherence of design and techniques of production that impact a distinct identity to the tradition. Ethical, moral and political dictums of social codes have always guided the core of design philosophy for saris since ages. Such regulations have forever posed a challenge to seek the scope for independent expression of the weavers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The sari is the national dress for Indian women. Nothing identifies women as being Indian as strongly as the sari. Sari comes in various lengths and from textured hand-woven fabric created in remote mountain areas to luxurious silk from tropical regions. They are now being also made at textile mills in Mumbai (Bombay), Ahmedabad, Delhi and a few mills in South India. They vary in texture depending on the fineness, or thread count, of the threads that are used. These have usually multicolor, printed designs while some are block printed by hand. An Indian cottage industry thrives making them on handlooms.

1.1. HISTORY OF SARI

The origin of the sari is obscure, partly because there are so few historical records in India. Yet, we know that Indians were wearing unsewn lengths of cloth draped around their bodies long before tailored cloths arrived. This elaborate body-hugging style represented in the terracotta may have evolved among India's temple dancers in ancient times to allow their limbs freedom of movement while at the same time maintaining their standards of modesty.

There are many sculptures of Graeco-Indian Gandhara civilization which show a variety of different sari draping styles. The concept of beauty in ancient India was that of small waist and large bust and hips, as is evident in the sculptures of those times. In this regard, the Sari seemed to be the perfect dress to flaunt those proportions as it

exposes the waist of a woman and emphasizes the waist and bust with the pleated fabric. Sometimes women wore accessories like girdle (a belt) with elaborate design around their waist to emphasize the hip area.

1.2. ORIGIN OF A SARI

The origin of Indian textiles can be traced to the Indus Valley Civilization. The art of fine weaving of hand and loom embroidery and the complex processes of bleaching and dyeing were perfected by the people of the valley long before textile industry was modernized. References in ancient history indicate that a variety of costumes made of silk and cotton fabrics were used in India. Excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo Daro have unearthed household items like needles made of bone and spindles made of wood, amply suggesting that homespun cotton was used to make garments, with fragments found at the sites.

The first literary information about textiles in India can be found in the Rig Veda, which refers to the art of weaving, The ancient Indian epics - Ramayana and Mahabharata also speak of a variety of fabrics of those times. The Ramayana in particular refers to the rich styles worn by the aristocracy on one hand and the simple clothes worn by the commoners and ascetics. The story speaks of a garment of considerable length and drapery. Over the centuries there have been changes. The diversity of the Indian people is reflected in a variety of materials used for a sari and the way it is draped in different parts of the country. "The sari," it is said, "was born on the loom of a fanciful weaver. He dreamt of Woman; the shimmer of her tears; the drape of her tumbling hair; the colours of her many moods; the softness of her touch. All these he wove together. He could not stop. He wove for many yards, and when he was done, the story goes, he sat back and smiled and smiled and smiled."

The past traditions of the textile and handlooms can still be seen among the motifs, patterns, designs and the old techniques of weaving still employed by the weavers. The magical combination of material and colour has led to the creation of a myriad of traditional sari styles.

Tailored clothes arrived in India with the arrival of Muslims. Hindus believed that any cloth pierced by needles was impure. It is commonly believed in India that today's petticoat or "Ghagra" and the blouse or "Choli" which are worn under the sari are later additions which started with the coming of British in India. Increasing number of upper class women in the early 20th century adopted items of European style clothing in the form of fitted blouses and slim petticoats. This was also adopted due to the prevalent fashion of draping the transparent chiffon saris during the particular period.

1.3. HISTORY OF BALUCHARI SARI

Textile and ancient literature when blended together can create a unique learning experience. The national costume of the Indian woman — the 'sari' which dates back to 2800-1800 BC — expresses these sentiments. Every state of India, defines its sari styling with different motifs and patterns based on its cultural influence and habitat. The southern states of India derive their designs from carvings made on temple pillars and archways. One particular eastern style of sari known as the Baluchari specializes in depicting folklore and translates momentous scenes from the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata on fabric. This royal art of weaving became world famous for the portrayed of the royal lifestyle and trends. The Baluchari tradition dated back to the 7th century A.D and since then it has undergone several changes in style and technique. In spite of this silk weaving of the Baluchari continues to be an important landmark Bengals's handloom tradition

The history of the Baluchari goes back centuries. During the rule of the Mughals, Baluchari was in high demand. It was mostly reserved for the elite class due to its high quality. Only royal families and members of the royal court used to wear Baluchari. During Mughals were ruling Indian from their Delhi throne in the 14th or 15th century, a group of experienced weavers from Varanasi, Gujarat migrated to Bengal, for reasons not particularly known and settled in Baluchar a village near Jiaganj in the Murshidabad district of Bengal, 23kms North of Behrampur. The term "char" means a delta created due to slit deposit from a river. The village Baluchar obviously was created due to the slit deposit from the river Bhagirathi. It was under the Mughal rule that the craft flourished with the weavers competing to produce more complicated pieces. The Muslim nobility had these beautiful fabrics fashioned into tapestry and robes while Hindus nobility ordered for saris. Although in reign of Mughals, royal women wore only saris. The presence of wealthy patrons and nobility gave importance for the craft to survive. Murshid Quli Khan, the Nawab of Bengal (18th century) transferred the capital of Bengal to the Murshidabad, to name and after him the

area around Murshidabad has been famous as a silk growing district especially in ancient times and is well known for its silk called Murshidabadi silk. This availability of raw material could also be a reason for the development of the craft here. The Baluchari tradition of weaving reached its pinnacle of excellence during the reign of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan, who extended lavish patronage to the art. Baluchari saris are originally from Murshidabad in west Bengal a time honored silk weaving center where weavers use untwisted charkha silk for making brocades with distinctive pallav designs that resemble miniature paintings. The pallavs are intricately woven with contrasting colours in warp and weft. The narrative motifs are derived from aristocratic lifestyle. A quantum leap in terms of technique was witnessed during the 18th century with the emergence of Baluchar saris in the region of Murshidabad, possibly due to the direct patronage of the Nawab who ruled Bengal and Bihar. The Baluchari is a unique phenomenon both in concept and technique, a combination of the Islamic and Hindu in the spirit and echo of its visual imagery and the most elaborate of extra weft techniques in body and border. Strong artistic values of the Mughals are commonly displayed by patterns and design of these saris. The most distinctive feature of Baluchari is the use of human brocade figures to adorn the borders and pallu.

The experienced weavers of Baluchar were famous for their skill in weaving beautiful weaving designs on tassar and mulberry silk fabric mainly used as saris. These weavers were patronized by the Nawabs and nobles to manufacture exclusive dresses for them. These famous weavers were gifted cultivable land, ponds, etc. by Nawabs in exchange for the woven fabrics made by them. Though normally the width of saris even at that time was 45 inch, these saris were woven 38 inch width, with a specific purpose to permit exhibition of ornaments worn on the ankles and above by the female folks belonging generally to the families of kings and nobles. Thus the weavers used to remain busy throughout the year having average productivity of 2 to 3 saris per family per annum.

With abolition of the rule of the Nawabs rule in Bengal, following the British Raj the weavers of Baluchar were denied the patronage and gradually it became difficult for them to survive. To add to their misery, Bhagirathi washed away village at Baluchar compelling the weavers to migrate to Jiaganj and other places in Murshidabad district. As a result of this, they lost the properties that they had and competition from the cheaper mill made fabrics acquired from the Nawabs. The lack of patronages, natural calamities were thus the dissertation of this weaving and added to the death of the lone weaver practicing this art in mid forties, led to the near death of the Baluchari art of weaving. Thus this flourishing art declined, especially during British rule, due to political and financial reasons and the weavers were compelled to give up the profession. At the time of the British, Bengal silk was very popular, mostly because it was high in quality and cheap. The silk industry of Bengal flourished at that time and gave employment to many silk weavers.

Later in the first half of twentieth century, Subho Thakur, a famous artist, felt the need of reviving the rich tradition of Baluchari craft. Though Bishnupur was always famous for its silk, he invited Akshay Kumar Das, a master weaver of Bishnupur to his center to learn the technique of jacquard weaving. Das after learning the art went back to Bishnupur and worked hard to weave Baluchari at home. With hard work and appropriate planning the first piece of baluchari was produced after a lapse of several years in the year 1957 AD. Bishnupur was the capital of Malla dynasty and different kinds of crafts flourished during the period under the patronage of Malla kings. According to another legend the Malla kings introduced Baluchari weaving of Bishnupur as a mark of glory for queens and princesses about 500 years ago. The weaver families had migrated from different parts of the country to help the classical sari industry grow. The excellence of the weavers as a prime product of south Bengal first got export consignment during the time of the Malla rulers.

A major influence of these temples can be seen in Baluchari sarees. Mythological stories taken from the walls of temples were woven on Baluchari saris.

Of all the villages in the Baluchar circle, the name Bahadurpur stands out predominantly because it was the native place last of the master weavers. Dubraj a legend in the traditional gharana (mode) of Baluchari art. The two monographs of silk fabrics, written in 1892 and 1903 offer some clue to the period when Dubraj dominated the scene. Dubraj belonged to the chamar caste (leather workers). He actually began life as a maker of drums in which leather was used. But it seems that art was in his blood and he changed profession entirely and became the leader of a group of kaviyals (impromptu singers). He possessed a natural literary gift and in spite of lack of formal education he could compose verses extempore. His life had a sudden turn when he became an apprentice under a weaver artist of Baluchar. From him Dubraj acquired the technique of setting looms for turning out exquisite patterns. He has also woven religious texts on fabrics in place of ornamentation. His expansic artistic vision enabled him to keep pace with changes in contemporary taste and style. To set the loom to work out a new pattern according to the demand and trend was beyond the capacity of any weaver. Dubraj was the only surviving artists of his time who “could set the

loom for any patterns possible". Even for old patterns if any loom got out of order, the weaver concerned would come to Dubraj for restoration or readjustment of the loom. In spite of this extraordinary mastery, Dubraj did not part with his exclusive knowledge and trade secret. In fact, during his time, his saris were the best pieces of fabrics, both heavy ornamentals and plain elegant comparable only to the best products of Kashmir or Varanasi could not.

With the death of Dubraj Das, the last of the master weaver of the Baluchari sari towards the end of 19th century without imparting the skills to anyone, the glorious tradition of weaving these exquisite saris perished ended. Many of Dubraj's work beautifully depicting the social activities of that era can also be seen in section of the weaver artists of the Baluchar style as no one could grasp the complicated process of reproducing Dubraj's patterns. Even Mrityunjay Sarkar-the finest plain silk weaver from Murshidabad failed to achieve this reproduction. Subsequently, several schemes have been launched by the Government to revive the ancient Baluchari tradition.

The figured Baluchari, which once dominated the Indian textile panorama, began to register downward trend towards the last quarter of the 19th century. The foremost reason was on the change of the taste of the patrons due to the contact with the Europeans. The modern elites were attracted to European elegance and considered the figured traditional Baluchar clumsy. Dubraj attempted to cater to this altered taste by removing figures in the anchal or end piece and craftsmanship and confining the designs to Kalka panel, intricate borders and floral ornamentation but there was none to keep the flame alight after his death. Moreover, competition with European mill products as well as the active hostility of the English to Indian textile industry pushed this art further to its decline. The English wanted raw silk rather than the finished goods. Further, gold embroidered Banaras saris set new trends in taste as they proved more attractive and comparatively cheaper. Consequently, this Baluchari art of weaving became totally extinct by the end of the 19th century. Although attempts have been made by the weavers of Ahmedabad and Banaras to revive the figured Baluchari, the imitations never attained the splendor of the original. A revival of the traditional weaving style was sought by showing the pieces to various craftsmen. Finally one weaver from Varanasi figured it out and was able to replicate it, but it proved to be very expensive and unviable. This glorious fabric stood for an age and the sophisticated revival of the mere art form cannot redeem the lost era.

The craft, in its much-diminished glory is now being practiced in Bishnupur located in Bankura district, where the Baluchari style has been superimposed on an existing silk weaving tradition. The intricately carved terracotta temples of Bishnupur provide ample inspiration for the weavers who reproduce whole epics on the pallu of the sari. The ground colors range from sober beige, to resplendent blues and reds with contrast borders, all on fine mulberry silk. While the present-day Baluchari may not be as grand as its ancestor, it still has a unique appeal, making the wearer stand out in a crowd.

The Silk Khadi Seva Mandal, a voluntary organization dedicated to the production of khadi and village industry-based goods continued its effort to fully revive this baluchari art of weaving to its original glory in its own way. Since the ancient process of production of this sari was time consuming, it caused an escalation in the cost of each sari which resulted in a fall in its market demand. To tide over this crisis, the jacquard loom with punched cards was introduced. This ensured higher production, higher wages and lower cost of production. However, it could not replication on the uniqueness and quality of the traditional Baluchari. The modern Baluchari produced with the help of the jacquard does not have reversible designs nor are the designs fine and minute as those found on the traditional ones. In fact the efforts made around 1960 by the All India Handicrafts Board to reproduce two old Baluchari sari designs at Bishnupur on a Jacquard loom with 400 hooks failed, the product lacking the softness and vitality of the original.

1.4. WEAVING TECHNIQUE

Fragile and delicately woven Baluchari fabric is wrongly interpreted as the "sister fabric of Jamdani". It is true that Dacca figured muslins and Baluchar figured silks and the weavers of both textiles were the Hindus but the treatment of subject and techniques employed were widely different. The high-class texture of the silk, the extra judicious color harmony and pictorial splendor combined have conferred unsurpassed charm, elegance and dignity to it. Although the silk industry was in the hands of Muslims, they were not allowed to wear pure silk since it was considered unlawful for Muslims to wear pure silk. Murshidabad silk was outstanding for its purity since there was no admixture of cotton or jute even in the cheapest and coarsest varieties. Thus, Murshidabadi silk was in great demand which the Hindus used during all their religious and auspicious occasions. The Murshidabad weavers belonged to the Hindus castes and were hereditary weavers Baluchari is woven with two varieties of silk threads

one from Bangalore and the other indigenous from Malda, West Bengal another silk used for extra weft was Assam dupion silk. Baluchari saris are similar in appearance and in weaving techniques to many Banaras Brocades although they never contain zari threads, only silk is used. Fine twisted silk set vertically as the warp and heavy silk is set horizontally as the weft on the special looms. The patterns on the border and pallav were woven using untwisted silk. This combination of silk gave it softness, a unique drape-ability and a certain texture.

In keeping with the times, these saris are also being woven in cotton. Before fixing the threads on the loom, the silk threads are repeatedly washed in boiling water containing soda to soften the silk. It is then dyed by using vegetable colors that remained fresh and improved with every wash. Today however synthetic colors are also used. Then the threads are rolled on the spinning wheels.

A casual observer could easily mistake the weaving of these saris for embroidery such was the fineness of the weaver's craftsmanship. The weavers of the traditional Baluchari used an indigenous system, a contraption like device in wood colloquially called "jala" meaning web in Hindi. The origin of this Jala is usually traced to the mid-18th century. The Jala could be called a precursor to the modern-day jacquard looms. The same jala could be used for weaving saris having similar motifs but different color combination, or jalas could be tied singularly for exclusive one-of-a-kind pieces. The tradition of using jala looms to weave the Baluchari was revived in the bed of *jalas* — Benares and it was Shri Ali Hasan Alias Kalloo Hafiz a famed Naqshaband of Benares who attempted this revival and was successful in recreating the splendid textiles of yore, weaving it the traditional way. Today, this proud tradition is being carried on by his great grandson Naseem Ahmad of Benares (Kalloo Hafiz is his father's grandfather). A skilled Naqshabandi he successfully learnt the craft of tying and making the *jalas* expertly from his grandfather and today weaves Baluchari panels and saris, apart from traditional Benares brocades. A National Awardee, the Delhi Crafts Council awarded him the Sutrar Samman for 2011.

In the modern Baluchari saris designs are first sketched proportionally on the graph paper. This transformation will ensure the proportionality of the figures and how they will ultimately look on the sari. Rectangular cards used on the Jacquard looms are punched in accordance with the pattern on the graph paper. It is through these cards, punched at the appropriate places that the silken threads pass. Thus, the cards have punched holes, which correspond to the design. Thousands of punched cards are required for one sari design. The number of cards in a sari varies depends on the intricacy of the design - some highly stylized pallav could have more than 18000 such cards. A separate punch card sequential is used for the pallav depending on the depth of the weave. As the chain of the punched cards move during weavers, and the hooks carrying the warp threads move against it, the hook meets a hole on the card and raises the warp threads. These hooks can be connected to more than one thread, allowing weaving of multiple repeats in a pattern. On a jacquard loom it takes 5 - 8 days to weave a simple sari while a complicated one could take as much as 20 days, the time being directly proportional to the intricacy of the work. Jala versus Jacquard is the predecessor to the jacquard technique but what sets it apart is that the great degree of flexibility and the ease with which diversity of patterns can be created on it as opposed to jacquard. The *jala* patterning can be tweaked and fiddled around with, but with jacquard large motifs and a variety of patterns on one piece is difficult and works out very expensive. Also once made, changing the jacquard pattern is not possible while it can be played around with in the *jala*. Thus, jalas once made last almost 100 years. Also, in the *jala* system one can use more colours and designs.

The original 19th century versions could easily have taken 6 months to one year to weave. If the present punch card involves so much calculation, it is a wonder how it was done earlier by the tying of the jala. The designer then was not only good at mathematical and graphical calculation but was also well versed in the repertoire of stories to be told through the panels. Baluchar is the only sari created on the drawloom, which contains complicated mechanisms for weaving multi-warp and multi-weft figured textiles. It is believed that this loom was developed in Persia in about 300 AD, and the technology arrived in India during the influx of immigrants following the Islamic invaders sometime between 700 and 1200.

A story usually heard is that of a persistent lady who had got panels of Baluchari sari to show to the Naqshabandi of Benares asking them if they can recreate ancient looms or *jalas* to make these. The lady Prabha Shah who along with Pupul Jayakar was instrumental in reaching the Baluchari sari pieces to the Naqshabandi of Benares. Of the samples handed out, only one man was able to succeed in recreating it and with him is tied the story of revival of weaving Baluchari sari on the traditional *jala* looms. Today, that is the world of Naseem Ahmad, National Award winner who now is using the same *jalas* to weave traditional complex Baluchari saris and panels as it was once done.

1.5. COST

The price factor of baluchari sarees also varies with the quality of manufacturing. The making of the *jala* for such a piece translating the pattern on to the *machan* takes about four months if worked on continuously, while the weaving takes up to one and a half months. Since the production of the sari is painstaking and time consuming, they are highly priced.

1.6. COLOUR

The decorative artifices in beautiful colors bear eloquent testimony to the extraordinary skill of these weavers who raised a fabric to the status of fine art. Extremely colorful, a traditional Baluchari is set to have been woven in 17 different colors. The weavers usually did their own dyeing though professional bleachers and dyers were occasionally employed. Silk thread was dyed first to work out desired patterns. Among the different colors used in the Baluchari saris, different shades of red, purple, green, yellow, chocolate and white were most common. Occasionally short colored effect was also created. Blue came in vogue in the last phase of the 19th century. There was no black dye. In order to obtain the effect of black, deep indigo and deep chocolate colors were used. The absence of pure black was either due to the non-availability of the desired shade from the vegetable's dyes or due to the Hindu prejudice against black as an auspicious color. Moreover, black dyes adversely affected the durability of the silk fabric materials.

The colors were mostly obtained from lac, turmeric, sunflower, and indigo. The magnificent colors of traditional Baluchari relics have grown richer and mellower with the passage of time and it appears that the Baluchari weavers did resist the temptation of fugitive aniline dyes, which were gradually accepted by other weaving establishments. Hence the traditional Baluchari is proved genuine and lasting and withstood even rough washing. Almost all saris are woven from pastels to deeper shades of blue, purple, red or black. The ground colors range from sober beige, to resplendent blues and reds with contrast borders, all on fine mulberry silk. Double shaded effect is achieved by having different colors on the warp and weft. The panels or borders are woven using 2 or more contrast colors. Complicated ones using as many as 6 – 7 colors. The buties are usually woven in extra- weft using cream, white, red, gold, orange and yellow hues. The motifs are woven in single or at most two colors. The other colors are used sparingly to highlight certain portions of the motifs. This gives an almost enameled effect to the motif. The pictorial were woven with silk threads of lighter colors like cream which look like old gold, white, yellow ochre, light green and mauve giving an enamel effect. Unlike other saris woven in the country, these use very little zari (gold thread) in its weave.

In spite of richness in patterns, the Baluchari was free from strong contrast and the pattern color harmonized so well that there was no scope for monotony. In the color scheme of Baluchari art, though red in different shades, purple, green yellow, and chocolate were popular, blue came into vogue in the last phase of the 19th century. Modulation of color tone was achieved by dexterous mingling of different shades of the same color and accentuated by specks of different tints.

1.7. DESIGNS

Baluchari sari is inspired from the Jamdani Saris of Dhaka in Bangladesh. They have intricate supplementary weft or warp borders and end pieces created in untwisted silk threads of colors that contrast with the ground, with elaborate floral border. Baluchari saris are famous for its designs. Baluchari the traditional silk sari from this tiny village was hallmarked for its spectacular elaborate having pictorial designs woven on it using high quality silk along pallav with the same design running across the border of the sari. They truly signify religious views of Hinduism. The intricately carved terracotta temples of Bishnupur provide ample inspiration for the weavers who reproduce whole epics on the pallu of the sari.

1.8. LAY-OUT OF THE SARI

Borders: The sari is about 5 yards long and 42 inch wide. The Saris have 4"-5" borders on both sides intricately ornamented by supplementary weft or warp threads. The pictorial views of sun, moon, stars and mythological scene are portrayed on the border of the saris

Body: Against the lavishly ornamented end-piece, the ground or field of these saris is usually designed with floral sprays or small booties or motifs, both large and small. Judicially distributed over the entire field. The body is usually covered with little motifs of drops, circles coins, flowers, paisley, or just one tiny panel from the story. They are often in dark colours with purple dark brown and deep red being common. While the wide range of colours found in the supplementary threads forming the booties or designs are always in lighter colours viz. white, yellow, orange and pink. Sometimes short-colour effects are also found in the saris where the warp and the weft are in different colours. A traditionally simpler version of these saris is a group of saris called Boottidar Saris. Like the Balucharis, they are figured silks, but usually have supplementary warp borders instead of the weft ones and supplementary weft discontinues booties in the field. They are called Boottidar Saris because of the large volume of small supplementary weft booties woven in the field.

End piece: The saris are characterized by a wide end piece (often 14 inch to 32 inch long) running throughout the length of the sari ornamented with the diversified designs. This part of the sari is the most attractive features end was woven with utmost skill so much so that the motifs could be looked upon as the reflection of contemporary life style and were considered as valuable art pieces and source of historical information. There are rows of large floral "Kalka" in the centered of the end piece which are characteristically surrounded by about 3 boxes like rows contain a repeat motif of human figures usually placed within architectural arcades. Various motifs are arranged around these boxes. The motifs mainly comprised of human figures(often dressed in the Mughal style or European clothes) in action viz smoking "hookah" , riding a horse or smelling a flower other popular motifs commonly used include royal court scene, domestic or travel scenes, palanquins, Taj Mahal, the stylized peacock, the bee, the rose, the lotus, the bridal alpanas of Bengal etc.

1.9. MOTIFS

An interesting feature of the earlier Baluchari saris was the stylized word and animal motifs, often incorporated in the paisley motifs and other floral decoration, gradually pictorial representation of various subject came to be included and the contemporary ones are characterized by the presence of human figures in there. The thematic presentation of stories in the weave designs of these saris was astounding. They were followed on all parts of the sari. The wedding scene is a typical charming one. the pallav could rose of 4 or 5 panels, the centre one showing the exchange of garlands, the smaller ones the playing of musical instruments, the palanquin bearers set to take the bride away or taking vows by going around the fire. Lord Krishna forms the theme for many a piece – dancing with his consorts, with his beloved Radha etc.; Lord Krishna expounding on the Geeta to Arjun is a story drawn to the last detail from chariots, Lord Krishna playing his trademark flute and so on; forest scenes come replete with deer, a typical cottage, petting a deer, the stylized swans and peacocks, trees and bushes. Although today the saris a replica of 19th century originals in terms of types of threads, colours and design used but now 'fashionable' versions are woven depicting among other things, scenes in the form of historical end, legendary stories like the Mahabharata, the Ramayan, the Krishanlila, Dushayan- Shukuntala, Harishchand- Taramati etc. These scenes along with flowers and birds are usually made in only 2 colors. Some of the popular, motifs are listed below

- **Scene of Ramayana** - Hanuman crossing ocean to get Sita, Ahiliya Uthar, HaAro Dhonu Bhango(breaking of famous arrow by Ram).
- **Scenes of Mahabharata**- Karrna Wadh, Dhusyasab Wadh, Arjun- Draupadi Mala Bodol, Pach Pandav, Bishma Saro- Saja(Bishma Pitama on bed of arrows), Subhadra Haran, Karan Rath Chakra(wheels or Karan's Chariot), Arjun Lakha Bhad.
- **Scenes from Krishanaleela**- Krishana and Radha dancing with Gopis(Raasleela) or playing holi with them, Swinging(jhula) or Riding a boat(Nauka). Other popular scenes include Madan Mohan Drishti, Madan Mohan Kaman Daga, Madan Mohan giving tobacco to king's servant, Madhav.

- **Wedding Ceremonies** – Mala Bodol(exchange of Garlands), Subho Drishti(auspicious sights), Agniskshi(sworn by the fire), Phulo sajjā(bed of flowers), Boor- Bohu on Palki(bride and groom on palanquin).
- **Lata - Paata – Kalka** - Flowering shrubs, tress of life, floral motifs, meandering, creepers and mango motifs.
- **Geometric** – Bridal alpāna motifs of Bengal
- **Animal and birds** - Figured swan and other animals motifs- deer, tiger.
- **Miscellaneous**- Pathorr Dorja(door made of stones), Hauda Haathi with Jhalar, Rasmancha, Nawab Nobelman smoking a hookah, a pair of ladies with birds in their hands or in conversation, seated lady holding a flower, lady riding on a horse back, prince proceeding to a battle holding an unsheathed dagger, Nobelman with falcon in their hands, Nobelman riding elephants with the mahout holding a flag, cannonries in panel, legendaries stories of Bishnupur, etc. When the British took over Bengal, 'sahibs' replete with a hat and pipe and 'mehsahib's' appeared, sahibs smoking while mehsahib fanning herself, the advent of railways, trams and steam boat was also interestingly documented on these saris.

A remarkable feature of the Baluchari sari is the introduction of human figures in their contemporary costumes and modes. A scrutiny reveals a transition from one period of history to another whereby Hindu motifs yield place to the Muslim motifs and they in turn are replaced by the European figures. Nevertheless, the pictorial element of these fabrics retains a degree of continuity and evidence of assimilation of diverse cultures giving rise to a distinctive art form that was neither stagnant nor fanatic but accommodative and secular. The artists' awareness of the political changes is meticulously brought out in the natural tendency to highlight the ruling authority. The Baluchar Boottidar saris produced in British times show the introduction of European motif.

The old designs gradually transformed into newer forms by the introduction of human motifs with Muslim setting. The distribution of human motifs was usually confined to intricately decorated panels with floral designs as a ground work, leaving bare a central rectangle which was ornamented by four mango motifs in the corners and human figures were arranged in rows along the sides of the rectangle. The figures were in architectural frameworks and resemble portraits and each motif had its own frame.

Pictorial representation of subjects included a seated lady holding flower, a lady riding on horseback, a lady smoking a traditional hookah, a pair of ladies with birds in hand or in conservation. Male figures represented nobility on horseback, a prince proceeding to a battle holding an unsheathed dagger, nobleman smoking hookah with falcon in hands, riding on elephant with mahout holding a flag, a lion or tiger hunter and cannoners in panels. The scrutiny of these pictorial panels will reveal a marked projection of Muslim environment in respect of their dress, hairstyle, posture and décor. Some authorities feel that these were so because the weavers wanted to please their Muslim patrons or the contemporary Muslim nobility had commissioned them.

Subsequent changes in motifs where European faces made their appearance in their conventional mores and life style along with Indian figures are illuminating. European men and women holding conventional flowers or other objects resembling wineglasses, in their circular hats and bonnets with tight fitting dresses and prominent side burns are indicative of the artist sensitivity to the current political changes. The first locomotive that was introduced in India in the mod 19th century did not escape the weavers' notice. Thus, the dominance of locomotive engine in the designs of the art relics available offer an idea of the degree of fascination and awe inspired in the imagination of the artisans.

The European figures, however, appear decorative and stylized. It may be that the Europeans carried themselves in a stiff air of superiority or that the average people were mortally scared of the \Europeans and artist being no exception to it gives expression to this feeling in his own way. Against this lavishly ornamented anchal or end piece, the rest of the ground of a sari was designed with traditional butti or motifs of floral spray distributed to emphasize the contrast.

1.10. PACKAGING

The packaging of the Baluchari sari is a simple process. To pack a sari two persons are needed simultaneously. First the whole sari is rolled down on a round shaped beam. The beam is taken out from the loom and brought it to an open space, where enough sunlight is there. Though water is put during weaving for polishing, enough sunlight is

required for drying. After drying two persons start folding the sari stretching it from both the side tightly. A thin metal rod is kept on each fold temporarily to give it a precise fold. A thin starched brown paper is put inside the sari to give the fold a proper shape. The last step is to put the saree inside a thick transparent polythene bag.

1.11. MARKETING

Producers of the Baluchari have fixed market in Kolkata and other big cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore etc. generally the weaver sell the saris through middle men. People from nearby cities like Durgapur, Kolkata, and Burdawan buy saris directly from the Mahajans at Bishnupur. In these cases the saris is sold slightly cheaper price as the Mahajan himself plays the role of the middlemen between the weaver and the customer.

Weavers also participate in different fairs and exhibitions through organizations like West Bengal Handicrafts Development Corporation, Crafts Council of West Bengal were buyer purchase products from them directly.

Saris are also supplied to West Bengal Handicrafts Development Corporation and sold at the government emporium- Manjusha, Tantuja and Tantushree.

1.12. SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES RELATED TO THE SAREES

1.12.1. ECONOMICAL ISSUES

A complete Baluchari sari cost more than Rs. 2500 of which the weaver only, gets Rs 450 to 500 per sari from the Mahajans. Each sari is completed by two craftsmen, thus after sharing the wages each of them gets only about Rs 200 to 250 per sari. Weavers can make maximum of 5 saris in a month. Thus, there monthly income is only about Rs 1000- 1250. On the other hand, weavers having looms at their own house can earn about Rs 1000 per sari. However, they have to do the dyeing, spinning of the yarn and other small jobs on their own.

1.12.2. EDUCATION AND LITERACY

Bishnupur has several higher secondary schools and colleges. The entire craftsman's send their progeny girls and boys alike to school, and they are keen to teach their children properly before they join the family business. Rate of literacy is remarkably high.

1.12.3. GENDER ISSUES

Women take equal part in the making of the sari. Besides their household work, they do the process the yarn. Some also participate in the weaving the sari.

1.12.4. HEALTH ISSUES

- 1) During the rolling of tussar thread, the worker mostly women stretches both their legs in front and rolls the thread from cocoon on the upper level of their thigh. During this process the skin of that particular portions become tender and the yarn sometimes cuts through the skin.
- 2) To concentrate on weaving minute designs, only one lights hangs on the top of the loom and rest of the loom doesn't get much light. Though the major part of the weaving is the precision job, it is strenuous for the eyes. Most of the weaver reportedly gets spectacles after weaving for a short period.
- 3) When they weave, the take-up beam where the sari rolls down, strikes on their stomach causing permanent abdominal pain.

1.12.5. SOCIO- CULTURAL ISSUES

People involved in Baluchari making, belong to weaver's community. Locally they are called Tantis. Now because of the prosperous future of the craft, lots of people from other community have also adopted this profession.

Traditional weavers of this sari had being conferred with the title 'Khan' the local Malla kings. Rich weavers have more than one loom at their workshop. Locally they are called Mahajans.

There are two kinds of weavers in Bishnupur: -

Some of these weavers come to Mahajans to work at their looms. They weave the sari in shifts for the Mahajan. All raw materials are provided to them by Mahajan. These weavers work for four to five hours at a stretch and they work eight to nine hours in a day. Two weavers work on one sari. These weavers are more in number at Bishnupur.

There are other kinds of weavers who have looms at their own house. The Mahajan provides them all necessary raw materials. They weave the sari for the Mahajan within a certain time period. They fix up a price for the sari with the Mahajan, and the weaver is bound to sell the sari to him at that price. Except the weaving part, there are other processes like processing of yarn, motif making, which is done by other people. They do these jobs as part time basis.

1.12.6. DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

Sampling and cataloguing systems are not yet in practice. There are no have proper records of works already done and designs created.

1.13. ISSUES AND SOLUTION

Introduction of Jacquard loom itself is a remarkable development which has taken place in this sector. This mechanical loom has enabled them to produce high quality saris in much lesser time. State government started a scheme of providing loan to poor weavers, and they organize yearly handicrafts fair at the state capital. Weavers participate in important fairs like "Textile Fair", "Kamala Mela", through the help of NGO'S like Crafts Council of West Bengal. They participate in fairs at foreign countries like England; Canada etc. Mechanization of small tools saves their time, eg (Mechanization of yarn rolling machine).

At Bishnupur most of the weavers are very poor. Their one and only way of earning is weaving. But the system of work prevailing here is exploitation of poor weavers by rich Mahajans. State and Central Government organizes awards for master craftsmen every year. But surprisingly the award always goes to the middleman who actually makes their work done, not to the poor craftsmen who puts his skill. These poor weavers always live in oblivion without any recognition. State government provides loan for the poor weavers. The problem this business faces is the steep decline in sales all over the country. The growing trend in recent years has been that fewer women are wearing saris, because taking good care of them is expensive and difficult, besides the fact that they are not the easiest of clothes to wear for the mobile and active young women in today's crowded, jet-set world. These saris are marked up by a huge margin when sold outside.

A co-operative exists here called Baluchari Workers Co-operative. It is the organization of mostly wealthy weavers. All Baluchari workers see no hopes from this cooperative. In Bishnupur mostly saris are in production. As product diversification they have not yet experimented much, though they possess a rich design vocabulary. These weavers just produce shawls and blouse pieces using same designs of saris.

Some Bishnupur weavers are not able to find employment on a regular monthly basis and work part time as weavers and the rest of the time work as farm labor or vegetable vendors. The weavers fear that if the demand continues to stagnate many of these handloom units may have to be shut down. The problem here seems to be a lack of imaginative thinking to come up with ideas and designs. The same, monotonous items may be putting off the buyers. If other products, such as scarves, tablemats and handbags with the same motifs were to be marketed, may be the sales and employment would increase. But this may turn out to be self-defeating if given the wide variety of choices the consumer has today, he or she finds it pointless to buy products using the same Bishnupur designs that are used on saris. One needs to carry out some market research to find out what new, useful items could be made by these artisans and weavers using their age-old skill

1.13.1. PROBLEM FACED BY THE WEAVERS

The problem the weaving business faces is the steep decline in sales all over the country. The growing trend in recent years has been that fewer women are wearing saris, because taking good care of them is expensive and difficult, besides the fact that they are not the easiest of clothes to wear for the mobile and active young women in

today's crowded, jet-set world. These saris are marked up by a huge margin when sold outside Bishnupur. Sari that costs Rs. 1500 in this town sells for Rs.3000 in big cities and they are certainly not for daily wear. In any case, the demand for special occasion saris is on the decline all over India.

Some Bishnupur weavers are not able to find employment on a regular monthly basis and work part time as weavers and the rest of the time work as farm labor or vegetable vendors. The weavers fear that if the demand continues to stagnate many of these handloom units may have to be shut down.

The problem here seems to be a lack of imaginative thinking to come up with ideas and designs. The same, monotonous items may be putting off the buyers. If other products, such as scarves, tablemats and handbags with the same motifs were to be marketed, may be the sales and employment would increase. But this may turn out to be self-defeating if given the wide variety of choices the consumer has today, he or she finds it pointless to buy products using the same Bishnupuri designs that are used on saris. One need to carry out some market research to find out what new, useful items could be made by these artisans and weavers using their age-old skills.

Though the village of Baluchar is forever lost, this craft is being pursued in many places in Bankura like Bishnupur, Kenjakura, Panchmura, Jiaganj and Sonamukhi. In spite of the grandeur of the craft, the weavers of Bankura are sunk into a profound gloom. There are several reasons behind this:

- 1) Generally, they suffer from an acute deficiency of food and nutrition due to abject poverty. So the jacquard paddle proves too heavy for them to lift up so often.
- 2) Poor lighting condition with such an optically strenuous job compels them to wear spectacles because of poor eye sight developed after joining this work.
- 3) Exploitation of these artisans by mahajans is common. Every year the central and state governments arrange awards for the master weavers for their creative excellence. But most of the time this award is snatched away by the middlemen who only represent the sari on behalf of the relevant artisan. They live thus without any recognition, honor and acquaintance.
- 4) Though a cooperative was set up by the Weavers' Society, the wealthy weavers generally run it. The poor people seldom get any facility from this organization.
- 5) The Baluchari weavers are mostly restricted to the sari production. They are less aware about the products that can be brought forth with this technique.
- 6) Grossly the Baluchari production of this district is suffering from lack of space, low supply of raw materials, lack of proper transportation facilities, knowledge of proper business transactions, fund to purchase adequate looms etc.
- 7) Sometimes government announces several schemes for reviving this craft cultivation. But their mere ignorance about schemes sets them back from the contemporary competitive market.
- 8) Computer technology still remains a subject of fantasy to them. Lack of technological knowledge and inability for adaptation to these advancements are great hindrance in saving a good amount of time and producing a large amount of silk during the same time.

But these craftsmen again can witness a revival of this age-old creation through following a few steps.

- 1) The weavers have to be accustomed to producing more items other than saris. Women's scarf's, furnishing fabrics, dupattas and other utility items have to be incorporated in their production list.
- 2) They have to remain updated about the current market trends and try to expand the marketing chain by supplying the products in bulk. They have to struggle for satiating the customer's choice too.
- 3) They have to participate in various fairs and expos which enact as a great platform to bring these precious craft out to the craving buyers.
- 4) They have to appoint masters for their proper training and learning about the international weaving standard and proper marketing strategies.
 - Lack of space
 - Lack of raw materials
 - Lack of variety in color shades to try new variations.
 - Lack of transport
 - Lack of official staffs for managements of business transactions
 - Lack of funds to purchase looms.
 - Lack of funds to start a dying section in the village.

1.13.2. PROMOTION

The craftsmen do not make many efforts for the promotion for the craft. Government has been putting efforts for their upliftment. They have opened handicrafts marketing centre where they have registered craftsmen's name. They have given them identity card, through which they are invited in fairs and exhibitions organized by State and Central Government. NGO's and cooperatives are also helping these craftsmen to market their products.

But because of the lack of awareness and ignorance craftspeople cannot take full advantage of these schemes. There are renowned designers who are using traditional crafts skills in their work. If their attention focuses on to this craft pocket, it will be a major help for the craftsmen.

1.14. STEPS TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT

In West Bengal more than five lakh families are dependent on the handloom industry; out of every sixty, one man is a handloom man. 500 million fabrics are woven in India, and 270 million meters comes from Bengal alone. The government is endeavoring to bring 60% of these weavers to a cooperative scheme.

By the March 1980 statistics, 23.2% (41,200 weavers) have bought under the cooperative scheme in West Bengal. There are 1261 handlooms cooperatives in Bengal of which 813 are active. It is hoped to commence at least another 550 cooperative societies. India has 23 weavers service center, of which one is in Kolkata. They work for the development of and refinement of handloom designs and to provide the required outputs.

1.15. PROBLEMS OF HANDLOOM SECTOR IN WEST BENGAL

Silk Khadi Seva Mandal could sustain this art for last three decades; have to pass through many ups and downs. The problem however is the high designs cost and various traders who lured away weavers by paying advances and encouraging Baluchari of substandard quality. This gives bad name to the beautiful art the weavers are duped and finally many talented weavers forgets the art they learnt over the years by producing substandard Baluchari. All concern has to think for an appropriating planning to sustain this wonderful art that could be revived with so much difficulty due to labor and organization.

The financial institution financing the production of Baluchari provides working capital on the basis of production value but no fund was ever provided for design work. This fund constraint caused hindrance in further expansions which has in fact encouraged production of sub standard Baluchari. There was a problem of marketing to some extent. Although production of Baluchari now too less than actual demand, the market in India remained seasonal. Fabrics of such high cost are usually sold either during festive occasion or marriage seasons and afforded only by people belongings to higher middle class and above. This causes uneven cash flow. To tide over this crisis attempts should be made to tap export market since it is told that Baluchari has good demand not as a apparel but as a interior decoration piece.

- 1) Lack of working capital,
- 2) Uncertainty of sales,
- 3) Shortage of raw materials

The Government has been spending a considerable amount of money on buying cooperative shares with the objective of strengthening their financial base and to help them to attain qualifications to receive bank loans. After much efforts the Reserve Bank of India has come up with a refinancing scheme for the handloom industry, through which financial aid was given. Without a well defined marketing channel the weavers will neither get guarantees or interests for undertaking new productions or for evolving new designs. The state apex cooperative association and the state handloom and garments rights association has united with them and is taking liabilities incurred for marketing garments of new designs. The cooperative association with the help of its 90 handloom selling centers called "Tantuja" and "Manjusha" and the development corporation with their 30 "Tantushree" shops are selling handloom products both within and outside the state.

1.16. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Agnimitra took up the revive-Baluchari project in earnest when, after the “overwhelming response” to a jute collection she did a few years ago, she turned to the weave from Bishnupur to experiment, only to realize the “lack of infrastructure and funds” dogging the artisans. “Changing a loom is costly and this is difficult without government support,” she says. This prompted her to write to Manas Bhuniya, the minister then for irrigation and waterways, micro and small-scale enterprises and textiles, suggesting ways to revive the textile. Instead of working with motifs only from the Ramayana and Mahabharata on a whole sari, new designs that are contemporary could be used and at the same time have a touch of artistic Bengal. The same old colour combinations and designs are not finding takers and the weavers are afraid that their off springs won’t be interested in pursuing this career,” says Agnimitra, who also touched upon issues like government-controlled pricing and marketing the products in both metros and smaller towns.

1.17. SUGGESTIONS

Generally, these craft products have less utilitarian vision, this way the market of the product becomes very limited. New products which meet urban trends and fashions should be produced. The new product range could be shawls, scarves, dupatta etc. The craftsmen are not aware of the changing market trends, thus they end up producing the same stuffs for ages. The craftsmen should be made aware of current market trends so that they can accustom themselves in the present scenario.

The products are not tagged, which actually hampers in their promotion. It is important to give an identity to these products, which can be given by tagging them. The tags should have information about the craftsmen and the production. This can be very well used as an effective promotion strategy. The competitive advantage here is the product itself which represents a rich weaving skill. It is very necessary to make the weaver aware of this fact and train him to encash this advantage. Handloom expos at the national level seems to be a potent strategy for the marketing of the handlooms, as no other medium offers the customer such a variety of products from all over India as these expos do. Most expos are immensely successful and hence prove the need for more of these marketing channels for handloom products in the future.

2. CONCLUSION

Most of the pieces woven during the 19th century are either museum pieces or prized possessions of private collectors. The famed Baluchari sari of Bengal, which finds few takers today, is on the verge of getting a fresh lease of life. A group of around 300 Baluchari weavers will come together in Bishnupur on May 8, 2003, where the textile commissioner of Bengal, Barun Ray, the district magistrate of Bankura, Md. Ghulam Ali Ansari, and city-based designer Agnimitra Paul will help them draw up a roadmap for the revival of the traditional silk weave.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author have declared that no competing interests exist.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

None.

REFERENCES

- [1] Behera B.K., Traditional Textiles Designs of India, published by department of textile technology, Indian Institute of technology, New Delhi, pg no-66-69.
- [2] Chakrabarti Siten and Bari Krishna Radha, Handicrafts of West Bengal, Institute of art and handicrafts, India (1st published in July 1991) pg no- 56-59.
- [3] Das Shukla, Fabric art heritage of India, Abhinav Publication, India (1992) pg no-26-34.
- [4] Dhamji Jasleen and Jain Jyotindra, Handwoven fabric of India, Mapin publishing pvt ltd, India (1989), pg no-133-135.
- [5] Durgesh Shankar, Crafts of India and cottage industries, UBS publisher, India (1st edition in 2003), pg no-68-69,80,83.
- [6] Gupta Das Samira and Biswas Rabirranjan, Heritage tourism: - An anthropology journey to Bishnupur, Mital publication, (2009).
- [7] Gillow John and Barnard Nicholas, Indian Textiles, Om book international, India (1st edition 2008).
- [8] Gillow John and Barnard Nicholas, Traditional Indian Textiles, Thames and Hudson, London (1993),pg no-129-135.
- [9] Ghosh Shukla, Indian Textiles Past and Present,APH publishing corporation, India(1995),pg no- 14to54.
- [10] Hudson and Thames, The book of silk, Phillippa Scott, London (1st edition - 1993), pg- 62-64,73-76.
- [11] Hudson and Thames, The sari, Linda Lynton, London (edition 2002), pg- 7-14,18,47-49.
- [12] Katiyar Singh Vijay, Indian sari, wisdom tree, India (2009), pg- 44-50,69,165-172.
- [13] Mukherjee Ajit, Designs in Indian Textile, Published by The Indian institute of art industry, (India) pg no-7,39.
- [14] Sen Prabhas, Crafts of West Bengal, Mapin Publisher, India (1994), pg no- 64-80.
- [15] Shoin Kyoto, Textile arts of India, super book house, Japan (1993), pg-360.
- [16] Singh Martand and Chishti Kapur, Sari of India (Bengal and Bihar), Wiley Eastern ltd, Co published by NIFT and Vastra kosh, India (1995), pg no- 151-153.
- [17] Singh Martand, Tradition and beyond handcrafted Indian textiles, Rahul Jain luster press roli , India,(edition 2000), pg-111.

WEBSITES

- [1] <http://www.observerindia.com/cms/sites/orfonline/documents/orfwps/orfwps1.pdf>
- [2] <http://www.craftscouncilofindia.org/images/CCI%20Newsletter%20August%202011.pdf>.
- [3] http://westbengalhandloom.org/htm/h_baluchari.html
- [4] <http://www.pandqmagazine.com/article.aspx?a=4835>
- [5] http://www.telegraphindia.com/1120507/jsp/entertainment/story_15458876.jsp#.UB4p_u0YWXJ