



Fig.4.1 : Nana Phadnis wearing *mulmul jama*
Tempera painting, Deccani, Satara
Copy made in Satara in 1854, CSMVS Acc. No. 27.15

The CSMVS Museum boasts a considerable volume of historically important textiles, predominantly from India. The collection also includes several textile samples produced in contemporary times, specially acquired for research and study. The collecting began simultaneously with the Museum's inception in 1905, and one important textile lot was acquired in 1915 from one of the earliest collectors of Bombay, Seth Purshottam Mavji (1879-1929). This includes a number of significant textile specimens from the treasures of Nana Phadnis (1741-1800), the most important and influential minister of the Peshwas, Fig.4.1. It is believed that Nana collected textiles and other antiquities from the distress sales of the disintegrating Mughal empire. The encyclopedic collection also consists of treasures from Satara *Darbar* as well as some personal belongings of Nana.¹

Later on, the collection was further augmented through the bequests of Sir Ratan Tata in 1922 and Sir Dorab Tata in 1933. This was followed by the School of Art Collection which contains several textiles from West Bengal, particularly the *Balucharis*. Over the years the collection has been enriched through purchases made by the Trustees of the Museum as well as in the form of gifts from several individual donors.

Although the textile collection of CSMVS is particularly rich in textiles from Western India, it also has some key historical pieces from Bengal that need a special mention.² These are *mulmul* yardages, Figs.4.4 & 4.5, embroidered cotton pieces, Fig.4.3, *kantha* bedspread, Fig.4.6, *nilambari* sari, Fig.4.7, *jamdani* sari, Fig.4.8, *batik* saris, Figs.4.9, 4.10 & 4.11, and, most importantly, the *Baluchari* and *Bishnupuri* saris, Figs.4.12, 4.13, 4.14 & 4.20. The collection also includes design layouts on paper for *batik* executed around 1940s, Figs.4.15 & 4.16, and some photographs, Fig.4.17, all from Santiniketan.

The Dhaka *mulmul* is considered as the jewel of Bengal textiles. The collection includes three *mulmul jamas* belonging to Nana Phadnis, Fig.4.1. These *jamas* have a large circumference ranging from 37 to 50 feet but each *jama* weighs just between 350 grams to 500 grams. This indicates the fineness of the thread and weaving. Unfortunately, the utterly fragile state of these costumes does not allow straightening and hence poses a challenge for photo-documentation. One Dhaka *mulmul* yardage, Figs.4.4 & 4.5, which is 20 yards in length and 1 yard in height was acquired by the Museum in 1996 from Shri Pradip Kumar Basak. Along with this yardage, a paper document dated 01.01.1940, signed by Ganga Das Basak, Fig.4.2, was handed over mentioning that this original Dhaka *mulmul* was made in the firm Netaicharan Shaymbandhu Basak. According to this document, the yardage is 147 years old and can be passed lengthwise through a finger ring and weighs just 7.75 *tolas*, i.e. less than 80 grams approximately.

A silk *batik* sari produced around 1940 at Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan, Fig.4.12, is a prized collection of the Museum. The sari was designed by Nandalal Bose (1882-1966), a renowned artist of the Bengal school, for a performance to be staged in front of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. It was executed by Gauri Bhanja (1907-1998), the daughter of Nandalal Bose. The *batik* textiles have their own historical importance as the genre was introduced in Santiniketan by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore after his visit

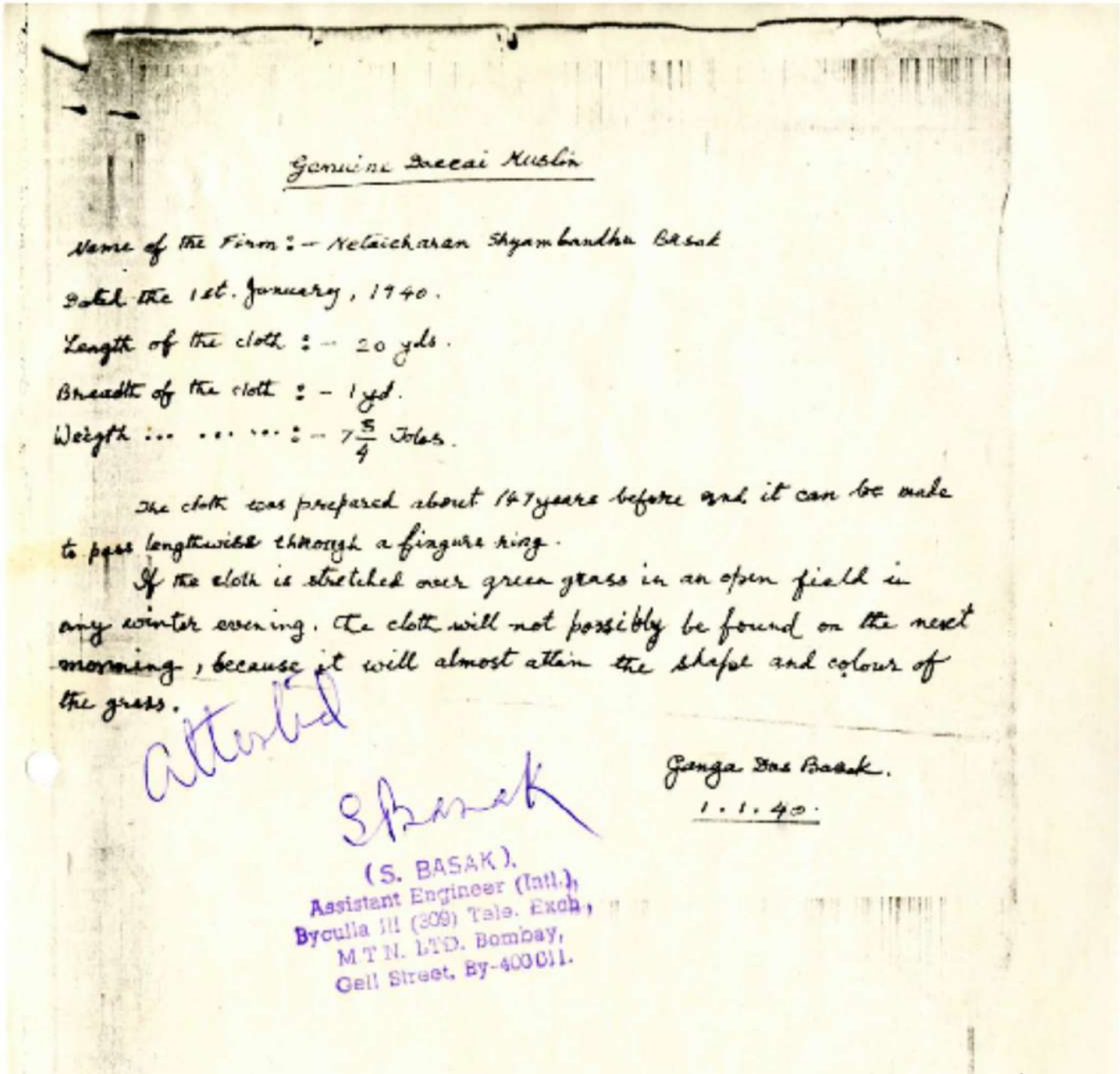


Fig.4.2 : Paper document dated 01.01.1940, signed by Ganga Das Basak, CSMVS

to Java in 1927. He was accompanied by Surendranath Kar, an artist and architect of Santiniketan who learned there the *batik* technique of wax-resist negative dyeing process. Tagore was fascinated by the use of *batik* textiles in Javanese dance-dramas and household decorations. While returning from Java, he also brought several *batik* textiles. Pratima Devi, the daughter-in-law of Gurudev, played an important role in the development of *batik* technique at Santiniketan.³ The Javanese *batik* is done with a spouted tool called *tjanting*.⁴ Pratima Devi and Surendranath used instead brush, *tuli*, for the execution of designs and therefore, the Santiniketan *batik* is called *Tuli Batik*. Gradually, *batik* became a part of the academic curriculum at Kala Bhavan and Gauri Bhanja, who has executed the design of the present sari, was one of the pioneers to develop the unique idiom of Santiniketan *alpana* (floor decoration with liquefied rice-paste) and designs for *batik*. The elaborate composition of *alpana* patterns frequently used in *batik* includes lotus, hibiscus flowers, elaborate floral creepers, peacocks, fish and geometric tassels, Figs.4.10 & 4.11. An excellent example of Gauri Bhanja's design innovation, the sari has an elaborate *pallu* and



Fig.4.3:
Embroidered piece
Cotton, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Late 19th century CE
CSMVS, Acc. No. 96.1/3



Fig.4.6 : Infant's bedspread
Shishura Bichana
Kantha embroidery
on Cotton
West Bengal
20th century CE
Gift of Kalpana Desai
CSMVS Acc. No. 2005.1/13



Fig.4.7 : Nilambari Sari, Cotton, West Bengal, 20th century CE, CSMVS Acc. No. 2016.70



Fig.4.8 : Jamdani Sari
Cotton, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Early 20th century CE
Gift of Bansi Mehta
from his wife
Sushila Asher's Collection
Acc. No. 97.12/1



Fig.4.9 : Batik Saree, Silk
Shantiniketan, West Bengal
20th century CE
Gift of Kalpana Desai
CSMVS Acc. No. 2017.18



▼ Fig.4.10 : Detail of Fig.4.9



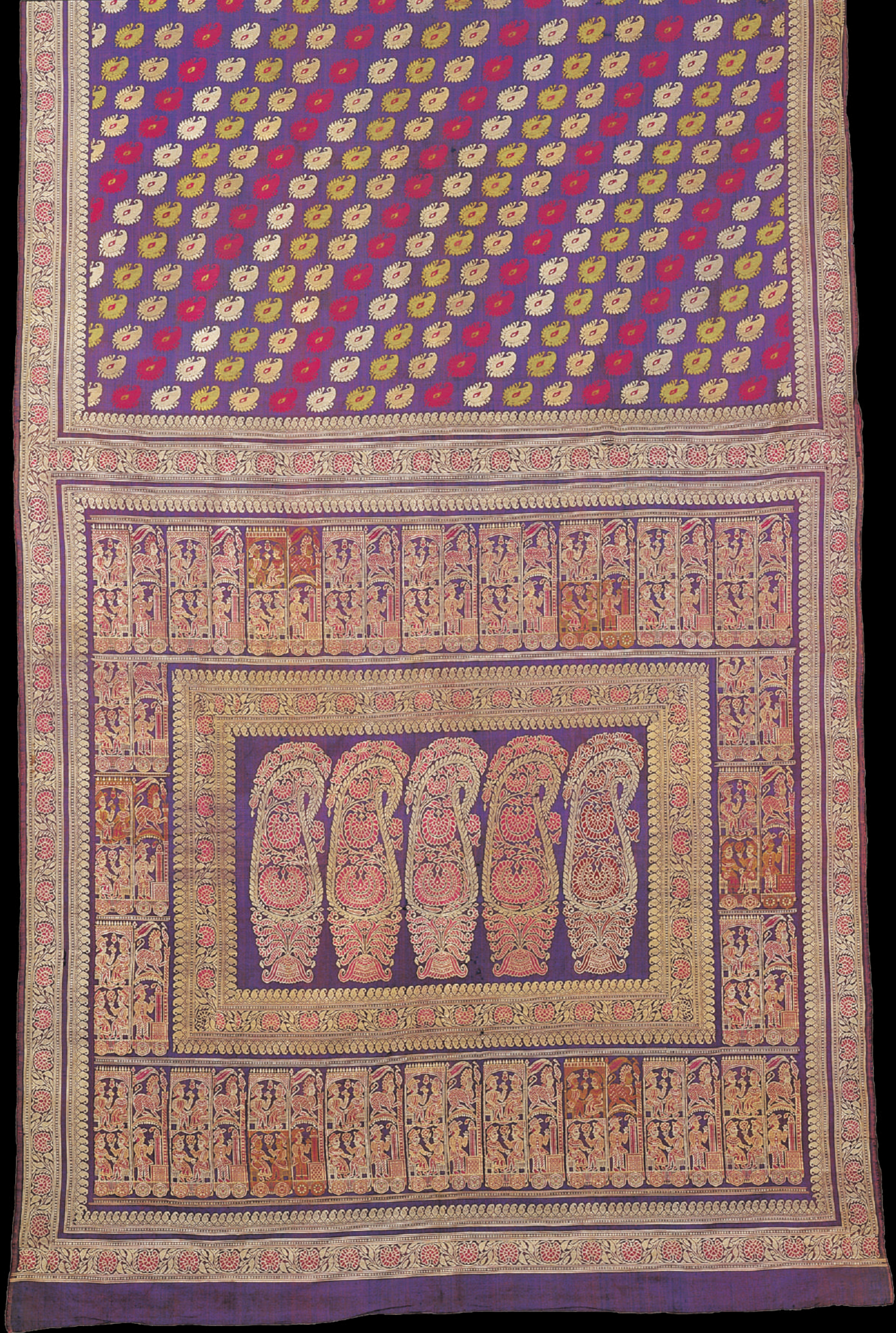


Fig.4.12 : Baluchari sari, Silk
Baluchar, Murshidabad District, West Bengal
Early 20th century CE, CSMVS Acc. No. 79.93/1



Fig.4.13 : Bishnupuri Sari, Silk
Bishnupur, Bankura District, West Bengal
20th century CE
Gift of Anita Garware
CSMVS Acc. No. 2016.75



Fig.4.14 : Detail of Fig.4.13

Figs.4.15-4.16 : Designs for batik
Water colour on paper
Shantiniketan, West Bengal
Early 20th century CE
Gift of Kalpana Desai
CSMVS Acc. No. 2019.28





**Fig.4.4 : *Mulmul* yardage, Cotton
Dhaka, Bangladesh
Early 19th century CE
CSMVS Acc No. 96.1/1**

Fig.4.5 : Detail of Fig.4.4





Fig.4.11 : Batik sari, Silk
Shantiniketan, West Bengal
Designed by Nandalal Bose
1935-1939 CE
Gift of Bansi Mehta
from his wife
Sushila Asher's collection
CSMVS Acc. No. 97.12/2



Fig.4.17 : Photograph of Sushila Asher wearing batik sari designed by Nandalal Bose

borders and matching ornamentation in the area of pleats.

The *batik* sari designed by Nandalal Bose belonged to Sushila Asher, a student of Santiniketan. She wore it while performing the famous dance-drama *Shyama* and *Natir Puja* in 1940, in the presence of Gurudev Tagore^{5&6}, Fig.4.17. The Museum has received additionally, several photographs and relatable drawings from Santiniketan, Figs.4.15 & 4.16, as gift through Dr. Kalpana Desai.

Out of seventeen *Baluchari* saris in CSMVS, three saris carry the weaver's signature. There is one inscribed with the name of the master weaver Dubraj Das (died in 1903), and two others have the name of Yajneshwar Kar,⁷ who perhaps worked closely with Dubraj Das. An exquisite off-white *Baluchari* sari, Figs.4.18 & 4.19, has the name of Yajneshwar Kar of Ramtanugram woven with the design weft of the same hue at the concluding end of the *pallu*. A sari, Fig.4.20, belonging to Jnanadanandini Devi (1850-1941), wife of

Satyendranath Tagore (1842-1923), elder brother of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, is a classic example of mid-19th century figural *Baluchari*. She contributed uniquely towards conceptualizing the costume of Indian women keeping in mind a progressive and modern India. A sari-draping style with a blouse and petticoat against the traditional Bengali style of wearing the sari without a blouse and petticoat was, certainly, her remarkable innovation. Jnanadanandini Devi improvised with the Parsi style of draping *pallu* over the right shoulder and created her own style of draping the *pallu* over the left shoulder, setting free the right hand. She developed this draping style while staying in Bombay with her husband Satyendranath Tagore, the first Indian to join the Indian Civil Service. She had to invent this particular style as she had to attend several social gatherings with her husband, and, eventually, this style of draping was called "Bombay style" in Tagore family and others called it "the sari-wearing style of the Tagore family". It was also called *brahmika* sari as it was the style widely followed by ladies belonging to the Brahmo Samaj.⁸ Later on, Jnanadanandini Devi introduced frontal pleats in draping the sari which is largely followed by Indian women today.

The sari, Fig.4.20, with imposing paisleys and depiction of steam-engine train seems to be a prized possession of Jnanadanandini Devi and was passed on in the family as heirloom. It reveals a high level of craftsmanship and is a typical example of a *Baluchari* sari with depictions of Europeans. She gifted this sari to her daughter-in-law Sangya Devi, wife of Surendranath Tagore (1872-1940). Later in

Fig.4.18 : *Baluchari* sari, Silk
Woven by Sri Yajneswar Kar Gra
Ramtenugram (Ramtanugram), Baluchar
Murshidabad District, West Bengal
Early 20th century CE
School of Art collection
CSMVS Acc. No. 28.6112



Fig.4.19 : Weaver's signature
(detail of Fig.18)





Fig.4.20 : Baluchari sari
belonging to Jnanadanandini Devi
Silk, Baluchar
Murshidabad District, West Bengal
Mid-19th century CE
CSMVS Acc. No. 2008.370

1927, Sangya Devi gifted it to her daughter Jayashree Sen (nee Tagore) during her wedding. Jayashree was married to Kulaprasad Sen. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore was the *acharya* for this wedding. The Museum acquired this sari from Haimantee Dattagupta, the daughter of Jayashree Sen, who was presented this sari at her wedding in 1963.⁹

The varied range of Indian textiles have journeyed a long way—from their status as articles of clothing, as furnishing for the court and temple, and as canvas of art, and, also, a medium of expression and livelihood for artisans and weavers. As the time passed by, these fascinating textiles became a veritable source of information, unravelling lesser known aspects of cultural history.

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Image Courtesy

Trustees, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai

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