



**B**anaras has absorbed the brocading techniques of highly accomplished weavers from all parts of Uttar Pradesh, at least since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the import of British fabrics began affecting the livelihood of skilled weavers, especially of the sari. Prior to this, the city was known as a centre of the finest cotton and silk saris for visiting pilgrims from all over the country, and had perfected a range of sari-weaving skills especially for each region such as Banaras for Bengal, Banaras for Gujarat and Banaras for South India, specifically for Tamilnadu. In the Mughal period, probably there were state-sponsored *karkhanas* in the city that brought in skilled weavers from as far away as Iran and Turkey. Banaras catered to markets not only in the immediate region of South Asia and Tibet but also West Asia, Europe and North America over at least four hundred years or more.

Sari-weaving has provided a widespread base of support to the finest hand-skills both in cotton and silk. The sari is conceived in the two dimensions of warp and weft but its structure required the weaving of a three-dimensional garment with variations of density in the body, its two borders and the two end-pieces. Therefore, it is the patterning on different parts of the sari that creates the three-dimensional structure and drape. This variation is created with the classic use of either multi-heddle *gethua* weaving or the pattern harness *jala* which have now become almost extant, but localized brocading, *kadhava* (lit. "loom embroidery") and throw shuttle weaving, *pherkwan*, are still prevalent. In the mid-50s, *katarva* technique or "cutting all through shuttle back threads" was introduced by the artist-designer K.G. Subramanyan (1924-2016) at the Weavers Service Centre, Varanasi. This was a significant endeavour to create, by adopting a simpler and faster method, opaque and transparency in the sari or yardage. If these weaving techniques are well-supported financially and aesthetically, they could well pave the way to higher levels of skill and virtuosity unparalleled. Such a sustaining infrastructure could create its own pyramid of high-hand skills, medium and base-level skills so that weavers could aspire and compete for a better livelihood with higher skills. They ought not to compete with mechanized weaving as it is a losing race that they are being pushed into. Sadly, volume production is being given precedence over quality by hand which Banaras is uniquely gifted with.

In fact, one has just to recount the range of its silks and cottons that have created the wide spectrum of Banarasi saris, such as *buti-dar* or small motif patterned, *aripatti-dar* or diagonal patterned, *khadi-patti-dar* or weft-oriented pattern, *bedepatti-dar* or winding pattern, *jal hunar* or all over net pattern, *jangla hunar* or all over trellis, sari with *konia* or diagonal corner-motif, *thakka* or syncopated discontinuous pattern, *patti-paloo* or end-piece in bands, *bada-paloo* or enlarged end-piece, *buta-paloo* or end-piece with large motifs, to mention the major designing styles. All these could be woven in twisted *katan* or chiffon, georgette or untwisted *patbana* or *sappe*, low twisted silk. These could be woven in mixed cotton and silks or sheer organza, with a weft of gold tissue in basket, twill, satin or plain-weave, with multiple wefts constituting a variety of vine, floral or grain-inspired borders.

The permutations of fabric and pattern structure is immense and wide-ranging and there is no reason that market support cannot be found for not only saris but the sari-range can even inspire the widest gamut of fabrics for multiple contemporary use, stitched or unstitched, apparel or home-products.

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- Fig.2.1 : Sari: *buti-dar* with *konia*, *kairi*/hooked-paisleys on the *pallu/anchal*, Banaras early-20<sup>th</sup> century, silk and metallic yarn (*zari*), Coll. Ajay Bhoj, New Delhi
- Fig.2.2 : Sari: *buti-dar*, *thakka pallu*, Banaras, contemporary, silk and metallic yarn Coll. Ajay Bhoj, New Delhi
- Fig.2.3 : Sari: *chaudani* on *pallu*, *daud ki pat bel*, Banaras, contemporary, Coll. Mohd. Shahid Zubair, Varanasi
- Fig.2.4 : Sari: *jal hunar* on the field, twin *konias* and *thakka* on *pallu*, Banaras, early-20<sup>th</sup> century silk and metallic yarn, Coll. Ajay Bhoj, New Delhi
- Fig.2.5 : Sari: *jangla hunar* on the field, twin *konias*, *kairi-dar anchal*, Banaras, mid-20<sup>th</sup> century silk and metallic yarn, Coll. Ajay Bhoj, New Delhi
- Fig.2.6 : Sari: *bedepatti-dar*, *shikargah bel* and *pat bel*, Banaras, contemporary, silk and metallic yarn Coll. Mohd. Yasin, Varanasi