



Sushama Swarup

“**T**he period of 1722-1856 is an important period in the history of textiles in Awadh, as the nawabs (governors appointed by the Delhi court) gave birth to a specific costume style. This was achieved by assimilating the syncretic Indo-Persian culture, the renowned *ganga-jamuni tehzeeb*, a blend of Persian aesthetics and Indian artistic tradition. Nawab Shuja-ud-Daula (r.1754-1775) took the initiative for the development of arts and crafts in Awadh. The cultural heritage of Awadh continues to be highly valued in the world of contemporary fashion and design.

The textile industry was the dominant sector in Awadh, with a significant portion of the workforce involved in activities such as weaving, dyeing and printing and embroidery. During this period, the courtly textiles achieved their beauty from the variety of materials used, whether it was the delicate muslin from Bengal or Tanda *jamdani*, fine *chikankari* or the opulent *zardozi* embroidery. The use of vibrant colours and intricate embellishments of *kamdani* and *chatta-patti* are very distinctive ornamentation techniques popular in Awadh. Some of the motifs used in the textiles of Awadh not only added beauty and intricacy to the fabrics but also contained deep meaning and spiritual significance.

*Mulmul* was the preferred textile of the nawabs, as it was well-suited to the climate. The delicate diaphanous *mulmul* (mull, muslin) was used for *choga* and *jama*, *angarkha*, *chapkan* and *achkan*. Muslin, a plain-woven cotton fabric was known for its high thread density which contributes to its fine texture. During the *Nawabi* era in Faizabad-Lucknow, as the demand for muslin increased, production spread to nearby villages around. Mau in Azamgarh district gained recognition for striped muslins, known as *doria* while Mahmudnagar specialized in producing plain muslins called *addhi* and *tarandam*. A

◀ Fig.13.1 : *Lehenga*, Varanasi  
early-20<sup>th</sup> century  
silk brocaded with silk  
length 104 cm, girth at waist 38 cm  
girth at hem 360 cm  
Private Collection, Milan, Italy

variety called *sharbati* was produced in Lucknow and was valued for its extreme fineness and light texture. This type of weaving declined towards mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Awadh *jamdani* is a flowered muslin with extra wefts of thicker white cotton used to create patterns on loom. The motifs were woven with such precision that they appeared as if they were part of the fabric's inbuilt design. It is believed that the *jamdani* industry was established under Nawab Shuja-ud-Daula who patronized immigrant artisans from Dacca/Dhaka, making them settle down in the neighbouring towns of Jalalpur and Akbarpur. Another kind of flowered muslin was *tanzeb*, chiefly produced in the town of Jais. It originated in the reign of Asaf-ud-Daula (1775-1797). "The credit for its origin goes to a weaver named Bhika, who, in an attempt to excel, prepared a *kurta* and a turban from a piece into which he wove the name and praise of the nawab. The latter appreciated the new device, and henceforth, this craft began to flourish in Jais."<sup>1</sup> Under the patronage of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah (1847–1856), a special variety of Tanda *jamdani* was woven at Tanda near Faizabad, which attained great excellence. The motifs were woven using thicker yarn, giving them a dimensional effect. The yarns of varying densities created the effect of light and shadow. "The body of the cloth is a fine *tanzeb* (muslin). The pattern is interwoven while on the loom, being made up by a series of weft threads of suitable length. Between each pair of weft threads a pair of threads of the figure to be woven is put in, the heddles being raised or depressed after one has been inserted, the figures are made from memory or from a pattern drawn on paper."<sup>2</sup> The floral motifs were of Persian origin and a charming range of flowers and flowering shrubs were predominantly featured in this type of muslin.

The nawabs of Awadh also showed a preference for the brocades of Banaras for *choga* and *angarkha* and patronized these artisans. The artisans of Banaras wove special varieties of *kimkhab* according to the designs of the *choga*. Awadh was also renowned for its indigenous silk products. The variations of *sangi*, *ghalta*, and *gauze* were modest imitations of the Banaras brocades crafted in Khairabad and Basti, Barabanki, and Lucknow. *Sangi*, originating from Barabanki, featured a design called *khanjari* or *leheriya*, with undulating lines running horizontally across the width. *Sangi* derived its name from the technique of treating two warp threads as one, with the warp typically coarse and the weft fine. *Ghalta*, primarily produced in Khairabad, acquired its name from the Persian term *ghaltidan*, meaning "to roll", referring to the process of achieving a smooth, glazed surface by passing the fabric through hot cylinders.<sup>3</sup> *Mainaphal* is a type of cotton brocade from Awadh with multi-coloured *butis* woven on a coloured base.

In the textile industry of Awadh, embroidery played a crucial role; no garment was considered finished unless adorned with embroidery. Embroidery thrived as a skill among the women of the upper class, who were known for their expertise in the craft.

*Chikankari* (white-on-white embroidery), a remarkable innovation of the master embroiderers of Awadh, was generally used to embellish the neckline, borders, sleeves of *chogas*, *angarkhas*, *kurtas*, *chapkans*, and caps for the royalty during the early-19<sup>th</sup> century. It is known for its ethereal and elegant aesthetic beauty. There are 36 stitches, each with an individual name, a specific number of threads, and a specific use. *Anokhi chikan* was invented in Lucknow in which the stitches were almost invisible at the back.



Fig.13.2 : A velvet border, embroidered in *zardozi* technique with motifs depicting everyday life, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh 19<sup>th</sup> century, warp pile/weft pile velvet, made from silk, dyed in dark red, 820 x 3 cm, Private Collection, Milan

Fig.13.3 : *Angarkha*, made of *doria jamdani* yardage, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, 19<sup>th</sup> century plain weave cotton patterned foundation with cotton weft, length 114 cm, shoulder 36 cm, sleeve 65 cm Private Collection, Milan





Fig.13.4 : *Chapkan*, made of muslin, intricately embroidered with *chikankari*, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, early-20<sup>th</sup> century plain weave foundation, foundation warps: cotton, foundation wefts: cotton, white in colour, full length 114 cm shoulder 36 cm, sleeve length 65 cm, Private Collection, Milan

Fig.13.5 : *Chapkan*, made of *mashru* adorned with the wallpaper pattern of blue and cream stripes, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh late-19<sup>th</sup> century; satin weave foundation, foundation warps: silk, foundation wefts: cotton, dyed in turquoise and cream full length 78 cm, shoulder 36 cm, sleeve length 54 cm, Private Collection, Milan





Fig.13.6 : *Bar ka pyjama*, with *paat* (upper part) made of Banaras *kimkhab* and *gote* (skirt) is embellished with *chatta-patti* work in zigzag pattern, a *chasak* of *zardozi* and embossed *gota* separates the upper section from the lower, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, 19<sup>th</sup> century, twill weave foundation, foundation warps: silk foundation wefts: silk, dyed in fuchsia, pattern weft of gold *zari*, full length 130 cm, width of each section 320 cm Private Collection, Milan

Fig.13.7 : *Angarkha*, made of Tanda *jamdani* yardage with floral motifs, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, 19<sup>th</sup> century plain weave foundation, foundation warps: cotton, foundation wefts: cotton, supplementary weft: cotton all in white, full length 115 cm, shoulder 36 cm, sleeve length 60 cm, Private Collection, Milan





Fig.13.8 : *Choga*, made of *kimkhab* yardage with floral motifs, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh late-19<sup>th</sup> century, twill weave foundation foundation warps: silk, foundation wefts: silk dyed in orange, pattern weft of silver *zari* length 120 cm, girth at hem 180 cm, sleeves 59 cm Private Collection, Milan ▲

Fig.13.9 : A *mainaphal* brocade *odhni* fragment with floral *butis*, Barabanki, Uttar Pradesh early-20<sup>th</sup> century, plain weave foundation foundation warps: cotton, foundation wefts: cotton dyed in mango-hued yellow (*amrasi*) multi-coloured pattern wefts of cotton length 200 cm, width 110 cm

▼ Private Collection, Milan



*Zardozi* reached its highest level of sophistication during the *Nawabi* period. It is an embroidered extravaganza using gold and silver threads, *tilla*, *gird*, and *chaptia* (flat), *kasab* (sequins), *tiki* (flat sequins), *katori* (cup-shaped sequins), *pot* (small beads), and pearls. In *zardozi* embroidery, the fabric is tightly secured onto a wooden frame (*adda* or *karchob*), and a *muthia* (crochet-type hook) is used for the embroidery on *makhmal* (velvet). *Zardozi* was profusely used for decorating *lehengas*, *odhanis*, *farshi pajamas*, *gharara*, *batuas*, and *chapkans*, *achkans*, waistcoats, caps, and shoes. A particular design, *shikargah*, became very popular in the brocade weaving of Banaras. During the *Nawabi* period, professional storytellers gained the patronage of the nawabs and the textile artisans, inspired by these accounts, started depicting the stories and everyday lives of people in *zardozi* embroidery, creating an aura of magnificence and opulence.

*Chatta-patti* is the most unique technique employed in the ornamentation of costumes in Awadh. According to Attia Zaidi, an award-winning *chatta-patti* artisan of Lucknow, "*chatta-patti* involved stitching together diverse pieces of cloth of varying colors according to a pattern traced onto cardboard, known as *farma*."<sup>4</sup> This craft boasted a wide array of patterns, with the most valued being the *mahapusht*, resembling fish scales, possibly inspired by the emblem of the *Nawabs* of Awadh.

*Daraz-ka-kaam* is another distinctive method of joining, usually two pieces of muslin lengths using concealed stitches hidden within the *daraz* (fissure), creating a decorative see-through effect like an applique work. Various motifs, such as *phool daraz* (flower), *macchli daraz* (fish), and *patti daraz* (leaves), are used for embellishing the seams.

## References

1. Trivedi, Madhu, *The Making of the Awadh Culture*, Delhi, 2013, p.230.
2. Silberrad, Charles Arthur, *A Monograph on Cotton Fabrics Produced in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh*, Allahabad, 1898, p.68.
3. Trivedi, Madhu, *op.cit.*
4. Swarup, Sushama, *Magie dell'India Dal Tempio alla Corte, Capolavori D'Arte Indiana*, Treviso, 2013, p.65.

**SUSHAMA SWARUP**, Ph.D., is an avid collector and scholar of costumes of Awadh. Besides authoring a book on Costumes and Textiles of Awadh, and numerous articles on costumes, she has exhibited her collection in over 10 prestigious venues, including EXPO Milan 2015, Palazzo Isimbardi (Milan), Casa dei Carraresi (Treviso), Castello Visconteo di Abbiategrasso and various others with combined visitors of 150,000. Presently, she is a regular speaker in Italy. She is based in Milan, Italy. [sushama.swarup@gmail.com](mailto:sushama.swarup@gmail.com)

