Chanderi Saris

1. Introduction

The sari is one of the most popular outfits of the women in India as it is worn by the rich and the poor, the destitute and the affluent alike, cutting across the boundaries of caste, creed and faith.

A sari is an unstitched piece of fabric that is normally 5-5.5 yards long and is draped around the body in various styles depending on the region.

As the web site http://www.india-emb.org suggests, 'The first proof that the Indian sari was worn was found with the small statues of Sumer that date back to 2000-3000 B.C. This was the time of the Indus Valley civilization. There are many references to the sari in the premier works of Sanskrit literature. The Rig Veda that goes back to 1200 B.C. tells us about the bright golden sari and perhaps about the brocade. In the heroic epic of Mahabharata, there is a reference to the pearl-embroidered sari. Mural paintings in the Ajanta caves feature the bandana sari or the warp and weft weave. This is in addition to dyed saris that were made of silk and cotton muslin. The sculptors of Ajanta particularly refer to the use of metrical models such as lines, angles, circles, squares, points and curves in sari designs.'"

1.1 Chanderi

Chanderi is a small town in the newly formed Ashoknagar district of Madhya Pradesh. It is around 230 kilometers from Bhopal, the capital of the state. The nearest railway station is Lalitpur in Uttar Pradesh (on the Delhi-Mumbai railway line) which is around 40 kilometers from Chanderi. There are trains to Lalitpur from Delhi at regular intervals, and transportation is easily available from Lalitpur to Chanderi.

Chanderi is a town of looms. The major concentration of the looms is in the older part of the city called Bahar Shahar (the outer town) where the streets are filled with the noises of the looms working. On an average, today there are more than 2500 looms in Chanderi which are owned by the artisans. Normally each artisan has two to four looms in his/her home where all the family members work.

The artisans get the raw material from the big traders on the basis of weight, the designs and the order to produce the sari. They take it home, work on it and bring the finished product back to the trader who pays them agreed wages which is based on the number of meters of cloth woven.

1.2 History of Chanderi

Chanderi is an old town which was an important stop in the ancient trade route to Malwa from Delhi. Therefore, it is full of historical monuments built during the medieval times. The most well-known constructions belong to the Khilji dynasty of the Malwa rulers in the 15th century. Although the exact dates are not known, handloom production was present in Chanderi since early medieval times.

(http://www.chandericluster.org/about.htm)

The Madhya Pradesh tourism web site gives the history of Chanderi in the following lines:

'The documented history of Chanderi goes back to the early 11th century and is a kaleidoscope of movement and activity prompted by its strategic location. On the borders of Malwa and Bundelkhand, the town dominated the trade routes of Central India and was proximate to the arterial route to the ancient ports of Gujarat as well as to Malwa, Mewar, Central India and the Deccan. Consequently, Chanderi became an important military outpost, prized by rulers with power or ambition, and repeatedly experienced the might of men who molded the destiny of Hindustan.'
(http://www.mptourism.com/dest/chanderi.html)

2. Regions of the Chanderi Handloom

Chanderi silk is a brand name in the Indian garment market. However, as there are no registered bodies to control the use of this brand, there is an increasing incidence of counterfeit products that are not made in Chanderi being sold as Chanderi handlooms. Many units that produce and sell counterfeit Chanderi handlooms are in the nearby areas of Chanderi like Jhansi and Tikamgarh. The artisans of Chanderi argue that such practices are wrong as Chanderi silk has distinct features that products from other places do not have.

Although Chanderi handloom have distinctive features and design that give it a separate identity in the market, there are other clusters in the country that have specialized silk handloom weaving traditions. These include:

1. Amru, Navrangi and Jamneri saris of Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh)
2. Patola silk saris of Gujarat
3. Cotton and silk saris* of Maheshwar (Madhya Pradesh)
4. Kanjivaram and Tanjore silk saris of Tamil Nadu
5. Baluchari silk saris of Murshidabad (West Bengal),
6. Sangareddy of Andhra Pradesh
7. Paithani and Kosa silk saris of Maharashtra
8. Sambhalpuri* saris of Orissa

(www.india-crafts.com)

3. Producer Communities

The artisan community involved in the production of Chanderi silk is a heterogeneous mix of various communities dominated by the Kohlis and the Muslim Julaha community. Apart from these, artisans belonging to the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Other Backward Communities (OBCs) are also involved in the weaving of these saris.

4. Raw Materials

The raw material for Chanderi handloom comes from different parts of the country. The main raw materials are cotton, silk yarn and zari (golden thread).

4.1 Cotton

[Photograph 1: Silk, Cotton and Zari rolls]

The cotton yarn for the weft is mainly procured from Coimbatore. The specifications are: 100 Number for the normal weft and 120 Number for the border. The normal rates are Rs. 450-500 per kilogram.

4.2 Silk

20/22 and 16/18 mulberry silk is used as the warp. These are purchased from dealers in Bangalore. The rates of silk are very high. It was Rs. 1300 per kilogram (on 4 September 2004). One kilogram comprises approximately three bundles of silk.

4.3 Zari

Zari is used mainly in weaving the beautiful borders of the Chanderi saris. It is procured from Surat (Gujarat) at a rate of Rs. 1000 per kilogram (as on 4 September 2004).

5. Tools Used

The various tools used in the Chanderi weaving are as follows:

5.1 Taana or Warp Mechanism

[Photograph 2: Taana Mechanism]

Instead of using a *taana* machine like in most of the sari handloom industry, the Chanderi artisans use the older technology of preparing a *taana* roll where they open the bundles, stretch them and further roll them on to the *taana* roll which is held on two loop-like iron hooks plugged in the ground. In order to keep the threads from getting entangled with each other, they are made to pass through a frame of two bamboo sticks. These two sticks are tied to each other with thread, leaving a slit in between and thus act as a frame with the help of which the threads are spread across the width of the loom. Thus, instead of using less space in the *taana* machine where the stretching and rolling of *taana* is done simultaneously, in this system the threads are manually stretched first and are rolled later. This process requires more time and manpower but it is prevalent here as a tradition.

5.2 Handloom

[Photograph 3: Pit Handloom]

The handlooms in Chanderi are predominantly pit looms, which are less bulky than those in Maheshwar. These wooden looms have been used in this region traditionally. They are installed inside a pit which is about three feet deep. The weaver sits on the wall of this pit with his legs inside the pit. The looms are permanently installed in these pits and are hardly moved from their place. As most of them are in the homes of the weavers themselves, they enjoy better ventilation, lighting and space to move around. Since the artisans own the looms, they bear the expenses of maintenance and repairs on the looms.

5.2.1 Rucch

[Photograph 4: The Rucch]

The rucch is a part of the loom which has two wooden frames on which the nylon threads are used to provide a mesh through which the threads of the warp pass. These two frames, that fit parallel to each other in the loom, are connected to two foot pedals that provide them with an up-down movement. With the threads moving up and down through these frames, the threads of the warp are woven in an interlocked manner with the warp thread locked between them. This provides extra strength to the fabric.

5.2.2 Jacquard/Dobby mechanism

[Photograph 5: Jaquard Mechanism]

A miniature Jacquard mechanism, normally referred to as the dobby, is installed on top of the loom. It provides the design of the border of the sari.

5.3 Charkha

[Photograph 6: Charkha]

A *charkha* is used to open the weft threads and convert them into small thread rolls called bobbins that are placed inside the flying shuttles. The bundles that are utilized in this process are either the plain silk or the colored ones supplied by the dealer.

5.4 Dyeing Apparatus


[Photograph 7: Dyeing apparatus]

This includes the various types of dyes, the tubs in which the dyeing is carried out, etc.

6. Process of Chanderi Weaving

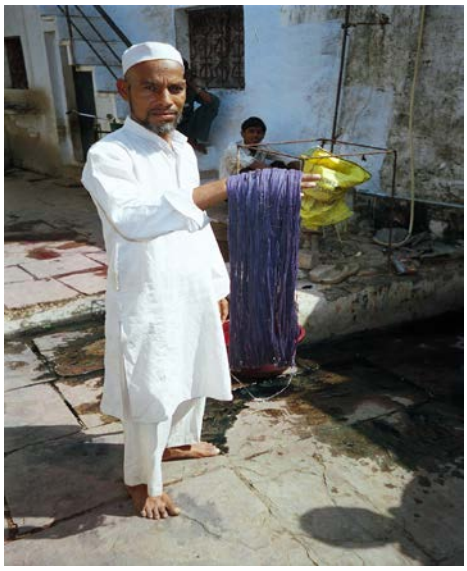
The process of Chanderi weaving has the following steps:

6.1 Designing

Two types of designing are done in the case of Chanderi weaving. One is the main design for the sari itself that contains various aspects like the border, the kind of motifs to be used, color combinations, etc. This is usually provided by the ordering party. This procedure is informal in the case of the local dealer but in the case of the big trading houses, a laminated paper with the design, the threads to be used and the location of motifs, etc., are provided to the weaver as a sample.

The other is the more exquisite motif or *booty* designing which is done by the master weaver on a graph paper. This is provided to the weaver depending on the terms of the order.

6.2 Dyeing



[Photograph 8 & 9: Dyeing in progress & Dyed Thread]

Dyeing is an important part of the whole process, as both cotton and silk require dyeing before they can be used on the loom. The process of dyeing is normally carried out by specialized technicians who work for the dealer and are paid by him. There are different kinds of dyes for coloring silk and cotton. For cotton, a readymade fast color dye is used while for silk special dyes called Sando Silk are used which are also readymade dyes.

The process of dyeing starts with dissolving the readymade fast color dye in warm water. The threads are dipped into this solution and left for a while before being taken out. Depending on the quality of the dye, they are dipped into the solution again for some time. After this they are washed in with plain water and then soaked in a solution of warm water, detergent and soda. Finally, the threads are washed once more and hung on bamboo poles to dry. Once they are dry, they are sent back to the weavers for further processing.

6.3 Yarn Opening for Weft

[Photograph 10: Yarn Opening with Charkha]

After dyeing the yarn is normally received by the weavers in the form of bundles. Both in the case of the weft and the warp, the thread needs to be disentangled and stretched in order to make it tighter. It is taken through a process of reeling by using a *charkha* and thus the bundles of thread are converted into small rolls called bobbins.

6.4 Warping

[Photograph 11: Weaver making Warp rolls]

Chanderi artisans use the older system of preparing the warp roll. Upon receiving the roll of silk thread from the agent, they open and stretch it. Three to four people are normally required for this process. The threads are adjusted on two

iron hooks plugged into the ground. Since silk threads are very delicate and there are always chances of them getting entangled with each other in this process, therefore, they are made to pass through two parallel, thin bamboo sticks which are almost as long as the warp roll itself. The ends of the threads are tied to the warp roll at the desired interval that the weaver wants to keep between the two threads of the warp. This is normally three to four inches. Thus the threads are distributed evenly on the *taana* roll log. After this, the bundle is stretched to about 15 to 20 feet and after every six to seven feet the threads are tied to the bamboo sticks through which they are passing, so that they don't get entangled. Using a rod passing through the *taana* roll log, the log is rolled to wind the threads on it. The threads are wound on the roll till they reach the bamboo sticks. After this, they are untied from the bamboo sticks and the bamboo sticks are again tied at a distance of six to seven feet from the *taana log.* The whole process is repeated till the log is finished.

6.5 Weaving

The process of weaving starts by placing the warp roll at the extreme end of the loom from the position of the weaver. The threads are then attached to the threads coming out from the rucch (left over from the previous weaving work). The length of the warp is 50 meters and the width of the weft is 48 inches. After this, the weaver gets involved in three different actions simultaneously. With her right hand she operates the string that provides motion to the shuttle carrying the bobbin of the weft across the threads of the warp.

[Photograph 12: Showing right hand motion]

With her left hand, she provides an up and down motion to the heavy wooden frame of the loom that falls on the threads of the warp and weft to provide them with their respective places in the cloth.

[Photograph 13: Showing left hand motion]

With both her legs she provides the motion to the rucch which helps the threads of the warp to interlock, taking the weft threads with them. Thus, the process of weaving proceeds with the threads of the warp being interlocked with the weft threads that are being carried across the warp threads through a flying shuttle that is controlled with the movement of the strings in the right hand.

The process of weaving is difficult and time-consuming in the case of heavily designed saris which, as a result, are expensive.

6.7 Finishing

After the weaving is completed, the fabric is taken off the loom and sent for cutting. The normal length of a sari is about 5-5.5 yards. It is then folded properly and packed and ready to be marketed. At this stage no ironing or further printing is required.

7. Use of the Product

Chanderi silk is used mainly for making saris and suit pieces. Apart from them, it is also used for making *dupattas*, scarves, etc.

[Photographs 14 & 15: Chanderi Sarees]

8. Marketing

Since Chanderi silk is in great demand across the country, both for the saris as well as suit pieces, the problem of marketing does not arise. The finished product is either bought by the local dealer (who provides the raw material to the weavers and ensures a buy back once the product is ready) or the big trading houses of Delhi and Mumbai which provide the raw materials along with the designs while placing the order. Recently United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) opened its office in Chanderi for the development of Chanderi silk production.

9. Changes in the Recent Years

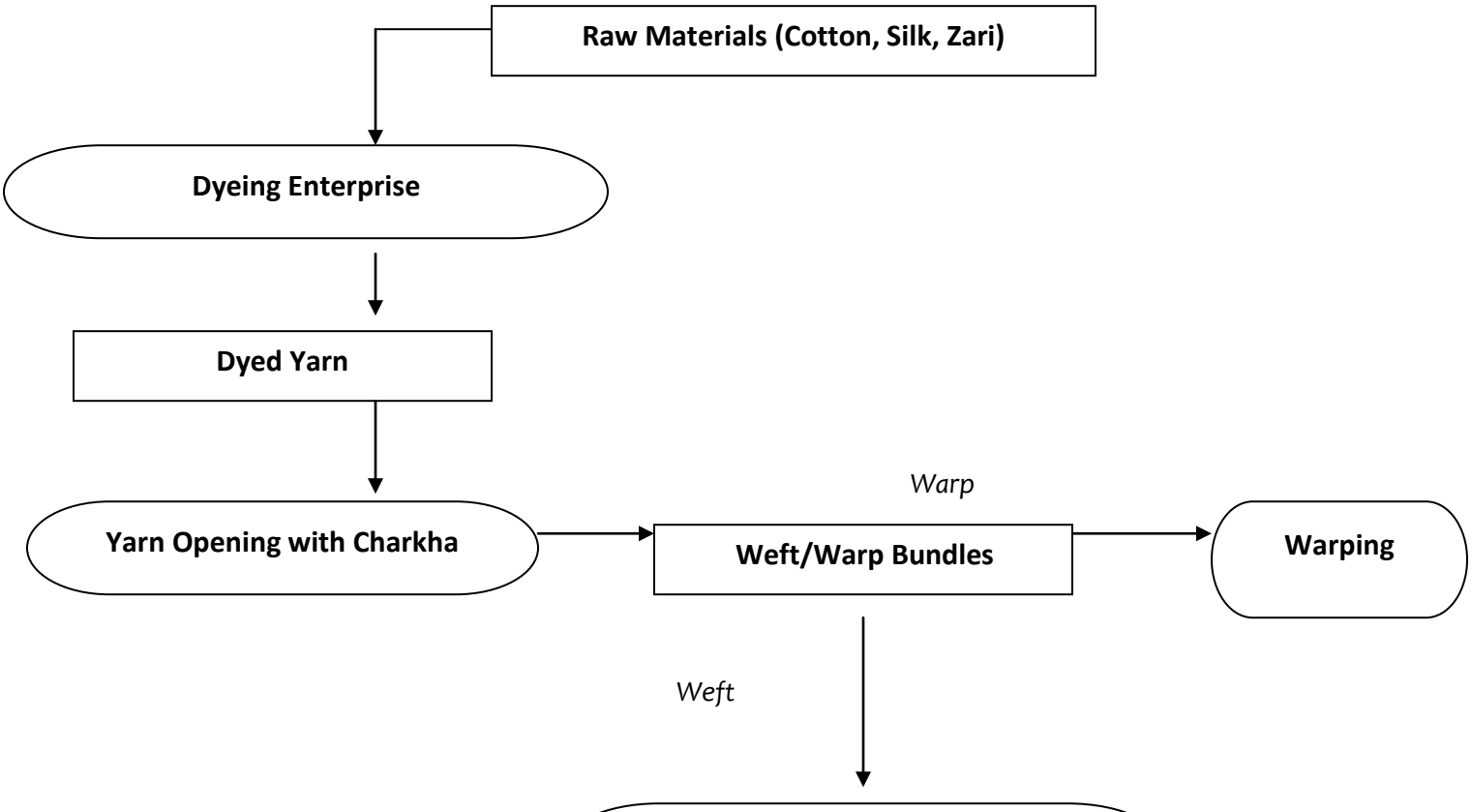
Chanderi silk has witnessed a lot of changes in the recent years. In terms of technology, several changes have been induced by the Benares silk industry as the exchange of artisans between the Benaras industry and that in Chanderi has taken place quite often in the past. About 20 to 25 years ago, the Jacquard mechanism for the border of Chanderi saris was introduced in Chanderi by the artisans from Benaras who also introduced the rolling log at the same time. The Sling mechanism for carrying the shuttle across the warp was introduced by artisans from Nagpur in the 1960s. Before that, an animal horn with a hole at its tip was used for taking the weft threads across the warp threads.

Regarding the market scenario, the demand for Chanderi products had declined drastically around seven years due to sluggish market conditions and increased competition. At that time, only the sari was produced in Chanderi. The industry was bailed out when one of the artisans from Chanderi, Mr Shamsuddin, was able to bag an order from Mumbai for producing silk suit material. It was a great success, and from then on the artisans of Chanderi received a lot of orders for suit pieces from all the big cities and today almost half of the total order is for suit pieces.

Difference between Chanderi and Maheshwari Silk Saris

1. In Chanderi saris the designs are created on weft while in maheshwari saris the designs are created on warp in the beginning itself and the weft remain same.
2. While Maheshwari saris use around 4000 strings in warp, Chanderi saris use more than 5600 strings and are therefore much more intricate and delicate.
3. Maheshwari saris normally use more linear patterns and less motifs while Chanderi saris use a lot of motifs and they are mostly traditional floral.
4. The motifs used in Chanderi saris are more intricate than those in Maheshwari saris.
5. Maheshwari saris use broad borders which follow patterns similar to those on the walls of the fort of Maheshwari. Chanderi saris use a variety of designs in the border.
6. Maheshwari saris symbolize grace whereas Chanderi saris are bolder.

APPENDIX I: Thematic Representation of the Chanderi Sari Weaving Process



APPENDIX-II: Sources of Secondary Information

1. *http://www.chandericluster.org/about.htm*
2. *http://www.india-emb.org.*
3. *www.india-crafts.com*
4. *http://www.mptourism.com/dest/chanderi.html*