

The Magnificent weave of Banarasi Jamdani

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ABSTRACT: Banaras has long lived practicing, experimenting and mastering in the art of weaving. Over the centuries, its master weavers have developed different styles & techniques of the brocade; kimkhwab, Tanchui, Cutwork, Gethua, Gaysar are to name a few. But, Jamdani is the most expressive, delicate and exquisite product of Banaras Handloom. Popularly known as “Figured Muslin” and “Woven Breeze”, Banarasi Jamdani is a variety of fine muslin weave with figures and flowers woven directly on the loom. Motifs in Jamdani are woven with the use of extra weft on a transparent and light colour background. Traditionally the motifs were woven on a cotton base with zari and cotton threads. But when silk became popular, weaving on the silk surface with silk and zari threads also came in trend. The genius craftsmanship is manifested in the designs, effect of light & shade and opaqueness in this brocade. Jamdani is a time consuming art and needs dedication, devotion and labour. At one time, because of the lesser returns and absence of patronage, this beautiful Banarasi art was on the verge of extinction. The central government came forward to its rescue at that stage and patronised master craftsmen of Banarasi Jamdani at weaver’s service centre, Varanasi. Further, a Jamdani Cluster was also setup at Chhapra, Varanasi. From memory to paper; Paper to Naqshas, and now treadle operated jacquards; the journey of Jamdani is very interesting and innovative. Objective of this study is to document the developments in this lively art with details of used yarns, colours, designs, equipment and techniques.

This study is based on the survey, observation and interview method. The primary data is based on the available books & materials, Visits of museum in Varanasi, Lucknow and to Private Collectors. The secondary data is derived from the questionnaire based interaction with the weavers and experts of Banarasi Jamdani.

Key Words: Banarasi Jamdani, figured Muslin, zari and cotton threads, Extra weft, light colour

I. INTRODUCTION

Jamdani is a Persian word, signifying intricate weaving of flowers & figures with fine muslin on the loom¹. It is a variety of sophisticated muslin weave, where motifs are directly woven on the loom with the use of extra weft on a transparent and fine background, generally of pale colour. Though we find ancient references of the textile of this nature, it is hard to determine that how and when this word was used for this variety of cloth.

Banaras was famous for its fine and soft cotton. We find its description with the name of *Varanaseyyaka*², *Kashikuttama*³ (Pali Literature), *Kasiya*⁴, *Kasika*⁵, *Kasika-Vastra*⁶, *Kasi*⁷, *Kasikamsu*⁸ etc. in the ancient literature. Even the ‘*Mahaparinibban Sutta*’ related to the last rituals of Lord Buddha describe the wrapping of his body with cloth woven in Banaras⁹. *Divyavadana*¹⁰, *Bhaishajyaguru Sutra*¹¹ and *Lalita Vistara*¹² have description of beautiful cotton cloth of Kashi. The *Majjhima Nikaya* mentions that the great development of fine cotton production in Banaras was due to the growing of high quality cotton. Banabhatta’s (7th century A.D.) *Harshacharita* is one of the richest sources of ancient Banaras textiles. He has recorded several kinds of textile in his book; one of them is *Pushpapatta*, a flowered textile¹³. Describing the costume worn by Goddess Lakshmi, Banabhatta speaks of a garment white as foam, waving in the breeze, ornamented with flowers and birds¹⁴. At another place, he describes these fine transparent cloths as having the appearance of slough of a serpent. One more variety of fine cotton textiles, Chitravirali or picture muslins have a

mentioning in the ancient texts; Other than this, while detailing the dress of the nobles in the court of Patliputra, Megasthenes describes them as woven flowered muslins; very similar to *Pushpapattas*. Characteristic of these ancient cloths have a striking resemblance with *Jamdani* fabrics. *Ukti-Vyaktiprakarana*¹⁵ of Jain literature has specific mentioning of the manufacturing and trade of Banarasi cotton fabrics, zari and brocades. Ralph Fitch (1583-91) describes Banaras as a thriving centre of cotton textile industry. These references prove that art of *Jamdani* weaving is an age old tradition of Banaras. Sari, Dupatta, Angarakha, Jama and Chonga were some prominent product of Banarasi *Jamdani*. This weaving technique was locally known as *Dumpunch*. Such was the passion for *Jamdani* in Varanasi that once a ruler of this city got a woollen cloth woven in Kashmir in the similar pattern. Bharat Kala Bhawan, BHU has a piece of this cloth in its collection along with some other fine samples of Banarasi *Jamdani*. Lucknow Museum too has some fabulous samples of Banarasi *Jamdani* in its collection. The Mughals contributed extensively to this splendiferous craft through their unstinted patronage. Banarasi *Jamdani* underwent a major change during this period, when silk and zari was introduced in this pure cotton weave. The fine and intricate samples of *Chaukora* and *dupatta* of Banarasi *Jamdani* in the Bharat Kala Bhawan, Varanasi speaks about the glorious history of Banarasi *Jamdani*.

II. METHODOLOGY

In the earlier days, Madanpura, a city locality in Varanasi was the centre of *Jamdani* weaving. But with the passing of

time it got shifted to other localities, Bajardiha and Chhapra; the city and rural area of Varanasi respectively. The weavers of Chhapra have earned much of fame in the last few years. The reason to choose this centre as an area of study was that not only it has the maximum number of *Jamdani* weavers, but some of the National awardees too. A detailed interview was done with a weaving family having a proud history of more than 100 years of *Jamdani* weaving with three National awardees in its clan; which includes a 'Sant Kabir' Awardees; the highest Indian award for Handloom weaving. The motive of this study is to know about the artistic aspect of this magical weave, such as motifs, designs, colours, material used, techniques, instruments, and the finally the finished product. A field study was done to know about the ground reality and to draw inference & conclusion from the actual data. It was a three level study having the interviews of the weavers and designers, propagators & dyers, and the physical observation of the instruments, tools, technique and whole of the process as the part of it.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Chhapra is located on the Varanasi-Azamgarh road, nearly 16.5 kilometres away from the district head quarter of Varanasi. There are four government and a few non-government schools in this area. Religion wise it has a mixed weaving class with nearly 15 families of Hindus as well as Muslims practicing the weaving profession. In general, these families are still maintaining the joint family system. The main languages here are Hindi and Urdu, but interestingly during discussions they communicate with each other in Bhojpur. Their houses are brick made and have facilities of specified area of weaving. Although all the children go to school, the highest degree of education attained by anyone here is graduation in males and higher secondary in females. The young boys of the family assist the elders in weaving, which also helps them in learning of the technique. Normally they begin to learn the process at the age between 14 to 16 years. The most appreciable fact is that, this learning is not confined to the family or kept as a secret. The family of National Awardees have till now trained more than 50 persons in this art of weaving; they now working independently. This weaving clan has nearly 35 looms in their house, where along with the family members, many other weavers also work on daily wage basis. The male members do the purchasing of materials, preparations of warp, twisting, dying, designing, graphing and setting of the loom; while the females, have the responsibility of sizing the warp, filling the bobbin etc. The task allocated to the females might look unimportant, but in fact they are given the most important, delicate and matter of efficiency work. The whole study has the information based on the interviews of artisans between 40 to 80 years of age.

IV. TOOLS AND EQUIPMENTS

Loom is the most important part of any weaving. The loom used for *Jamdani* weaving is generally of the traditional pit-style, but I also found *Jamdani* being weaved on the frame looms. The pit-loom is set up on an approximately

three feet deep pit (figure-11), with the treadle inside and sley and the heald shaft above the pit. These looms are known as fixed-loom or *Do-dama* in local language. Weaving is done by sitting on a wooden plank placed on the pit. The first generation *Jamdani* weaving was done on the simple pit-loom, where the motifs were weaved directly by looking at the design on the paper. Then after came the *Naqsha* or *jalatechnique*; where the motifs were weaved on a draw-loom. This process involved four persons; two of them used to lift the design warp, while the rest two did the job of weaving. The present technique is the latest one, where jacquards (figure-09) are being used to weave the motifs. Different numbers of jacquards are used to make different sizes of design. Generally 160 hooks jacquard is used for the surface (*jamin*) design, 240 hooks, to make the end piece (*anchal*) and 120 hooks, to make the border (*kinaki*) design. Other accessories such as shuttles and spindle (*sirkies*) were used in weaving process. The spindle is about two inches long and is made of bamboo sticks, many spindles are used when there are floral ornamentations across the width of the cloth.

V. THREADS

Traditionally, Banarasi *Jamdani* was made by using cotton warp and weft and its designs were developed using extra weft of cotton and *zari*, but now it is being developed with silk threads too.

VI. WEAVING PROCESS

- The process of *Jamdani* making is very intricate and elaborate. Depending on the design, it takes one to six months to weave a sari. A richly designed *jamdani* can take six to one year to weave.
- Preparation of the cotton, silk yarn (Figure-1) or silk twisting comes first in the process. Twisted threads are mainly used for warping. (Figure-2)
- Second step is the decolonization or bleaching and degumming of silk yarns (figure-3). Initially, the fibres have a gum like substance of cream colour in their composition, which had to be removed for bringing sheen & softness and penetration of the colouring agent in the yarn. This process requires much experience and care to avoid damage to the yarn or weakening it.
- Dyeing of yarn is done in the third step. Earlier the threads were dyed by vegetable dyes only, but with the changing time, where the labour and time consumed in this process did not match with the earning, the dyers and weavers started using aniline colours for this purpose. The vegetable dye based *jamdani* are now made only on demand. The weavers are working on a new range of colours in natural dyes like Onion Skin, *Jatropha gossypifolia* (ratanjot), *Acacia Chundra* (Kattha), *Indigofera tinctoria* (Indigo), *Punica granatum* (Pomegranate), and *Helianthus annuus* (Sunflower). These natural dyes are specially developed with the help of Weaver's Service Centre, Varanasi.
- Next step is the preparation of warp thread (Figure-5). The dyed thread is starched properly for necessary stiffness; it is strengthened and softened by solution of rice water starch, allowing the women to wind it more easily onto the bobbins (Figure-4). It is a tedious work, done early in the

morning between 4 and 9 to save the threads from drying in the increasing heat and making it difficult to handle. The wound bobbins are sent to another worker, who prepares the warp on a beam. Afterwards, the warp is sent to the weaver's house where it is set up on a loom (Figure-6).

- Pattern making comes in the fifth step. The designer draws the design on a paper and the *Naqshaband* (Graph maker) translates the design on the graph paper (figure-7). This is a very important step in the making of a *Jamdani*.

- Punching of the cards (figure-8) comes in the sixth step. After the punching, the cards are set on the jacquard (figure-9, 10, 11) of the loom.

- Now comes on the final step of weaving. The process of *Jamdani* weaving is very intricate, time-consuming and requires great workmanship. Brocading is the most important feature of this process and is weaved on the loom with the help of passing an additional pencil shuttle or small needle-like spool (simple pencil of bamboo, locally known as *sirki*) in and out of the warp threads, as per the need of the pattern (figure-12, 13, 14). This method of weaving resembles with the tapestry work, where small shuttles having coloured, gold or silver threads are passed through the weft. *Jamdani* is woven by throwing the shuttle to pass the regular weft and transfixing the pattern thread between a varying number of warp threads in the proportion to the size of the design.¹⁶ As every weft of woof thread passes through the warp, the weaver sews down the intersected portion of the pattern with one or another of the needles as might be required, and so continues till the pattern is completed. The designs are made repeating this whole process. Thus, it is also called "loom embroidery". Very often, two persons work together on a sari and depending on the design; it takes two to eight months to weave a sari.

- After completion, the product is taken out of loom and is polished for glaze.

Technical detail of *Jamdani* Saris:

Material	Thread No.	Reed No.	PPI (Picks Per Inch)	Weight of Sari
Cotton threads for surface weaving Cotton threads for design weaving	100s (single) count 100s (double without twist) count*	120	60 to 65	250-300 gm.
Mulberry silk threads for surface weaving	20-22 denier	100	70 to 75	300 - 450 gm.
Pure <i>Zari</i> (for design)	Two ply/three ply	Coated with 98.5% pure silver wire with gold polish		

*The ornamentation in cotton *Jamdani* is done by using two threads of yarn of the same count as in the background, they are introduced into the cloth by means of extra spools, the

threads of which are passed under and over the ornament as many times as is required to form the design.

VII. COLOURS

Jamdani sari was weaved in white colour with same colour designs on it. The variety was popularly known as *Shwetambari*. Other than this, sometimes it is developed in some other popular colours too and was named accordingly, i.e. *Nilambari* (Blue), *Pitambari* (yellow) and *Raktambari* (red). Now days it is also being made in colours matching to the emerging trends and fashion, i.e. *Gulabi* (pink), *Tarbuji* (pink-red colour), *Piyazi* (light pink), *Badami* (light buff), *Moongia* (olive green) etc. Another special feature of *Jamdani* weave is "*Rangkar*"; (figure-13) here ten different colours (using ten shuttles, fig. 12) are used to make the surface of the sari, while the designs are developed using *zari* threads.

VIII. DESIGNS

We find rich designs in Banarasi *Jamdani* with innumerable variations of floral and geometrical patterns on it. Generally different designs are weaved on the border, Pallau or end piece and the body. The designs are named according to their presentation; some of the names are,

Aribel: - creeper or climber; diagonally arranged running figures.

Laharia: - Lahar or wave; figured like the waves of the sea.

Harava: - Straight or wave-like vertical lines interspersed with small flower like motifs.

Kharibel: - Horizontally arranged running figures

Kangura: - Border (figure-15, 19) for saris, *dupattas*, blouses, etc.

Aribel bhanjvara: - Big flowers, 2" apart.

Saro: - Vertical pillars or stylized Trees

Lahar: - Horizontally arranged waves.

Chanda: - Moon shaped design

Harava: - Like Aribel, running vertically across.

Patri: - Horizontally running figures.

Jaldar: - Ornamental figures arranged in the form of net (jal; net).

Phuldar: - Flower (figure-17) like ornaments in the body of the sari.

Buta: - Single ornamental motifs (figure-16) within the body of the cloth.

Fardibuti: - Closely arranged small dots.

Masurbuti: - Small ornamental motifs of the size of a Masur dal.

Makkhibuti: - Small dots of the size of a fly.

Shahibuta: - Design made by the use of one *Sirki* (small spindle).

Jamewar: - Intricate all over design in cotton.

Ishqapench: - Pattern of fine leaves arranged in a creeper form.

Chaukora: - Moon-shaped design in the centre surrounded by floral decorations.

Konia: - Combination of kairi and petals design (figure-18) used in corner of the sari pallu or dupatta.

Butidar:- Small flowers design (figure-17) diapered on the fabric.

Some flower motifs very frequently used in this weaving are Chameli, Pomera, Genda buti (Marigold flower), Panbuti (Beatle leaf), Tircha (Diagonal stripes) Mogra, Kamana, Juhi, Harsingar and Phulbanjari. Aribel, Kangura, Jaldar (figure-3), Saro, Lahar, Kharibel. Present day Jamdani saris have designs of rose, Jasmine, lotus, Tree of life on them.

X. SPECIALITY OF JAMDANI WEAVING

Jamdani technique is a bit different from the weaving technique of other fabrics. The magic of this weave is that the motifs are created in their specified place with the use of extra weft in the running weave. This technique is locally known as *Dampanch* or *Karhuwan* weave. This process doesn't leave any embossing effect on the surface (figure-20). While, although being weaved in the similar process of creating motifs with extra weft, the finished product of *Kamdani* weave has embossed surface, created due to the filling of *urtu* with that very extra weft. It has its own special character of binding the figured designs on ground fabric by using extra weft designs thread (*Urtu*) (figure-21). Thus, *Jamdani* is very different from other weaves of its nature and stands as a delicacy of weaves.

XI. ARTICALS

In earlier time, *Jamdani* weaving was used for ornamentation of the fabric, such as Cap (topi), Angrakha, Jama and Sari. Now this craft is used to create gorgeous stoles, running fabric, *dupatta*, dress material and saris in cotton and silk, that exudes a charm that is almost sensual.

XII. CONCLUSION

Today Cholapur and its adjoining villages of Varanasi have revived this age old cotton glory with the introduction of contemporary designs and colours in trend. It has secured a distinct place in the world of textiles. The innovative experiment of weaving in the combination of silk threads and gold or silver zari has given it an awesome look. It is much in demand and is being exported all over the world. The credit of reviving this dying art goes to the Ministry of Textile of Government of India, which patronised it by

opening a *Jamdani* cluster at Cholapur Varanasi. Here, the government provided technical skill training, Designs, dyeing of threads and other facilities free of cost to the weavers for two years. The establishment of Central facilitation centre has been a great help to the weavers; here they get weaving materials and loom related parts at a heavily discounted rate. Other than this, here they also get designs of their choice. Today, this small area of Cholapur is proud of catering the needs of *Jamdani* product to the Government sales centres, ace clothing brands, renowned fashion designers and many others.

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Fig.1- Raw Material Shop



Fig.2- Twisting of Yarns



Fig.4- Filling Reels & Sirki

Fig.3- Dyeing of Yarn



Fig. 5- Warp Preparation



Fig. 6- Join the Warps (locally known as "Murrribandh ana")



Fig.7-Making of Design & Graph Paper



Fig.8- Card Punching



Fig.9- jacquard



Fig.10- Cards attached with Jacquard



Fig.11- Pit Loom



Fig.12-Weaver

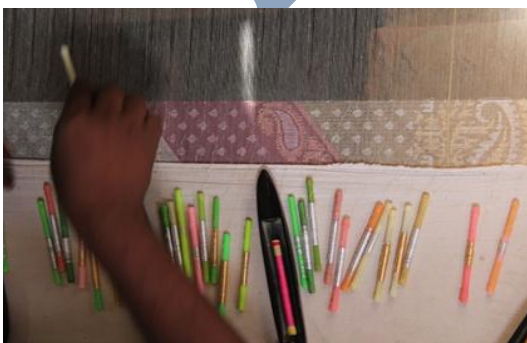


Fig. 13-Use of Sirki& Shuttle in Weaving



Fig.14-Sarion Loom



Fig.16-Buta Design



Fig.15-Border Design



Fig.17-Buti Designs



Fig.18-Konia design



Fig.19-Border Design with Kangura or Jhalar



Fig.21-Fornt & Back side of Jamdani Weave



Fig.22-Urtu based Banarasi Brocade