

# ‘Baluchari Saree’ of Bishnupur a Sign of Beauty, But Not For The Weavers



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## Abstract

In this article scholar would like to discuss about the origin of the ‘Baluchori saree’ which is important industry in Bishnupur, a small town of west Bengal. Roughly in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C. a group of skilled weavers from Varanasi migrated to Bengal and settled in Baluchar. They were famous for their weaving skill. A special type of saree they have weaved for queens apart from ‘Jamdani’ & ‘Maslin’ that called ‘Baluchori shree’. During British rule, due to political and financial reasons it became a dying craft as most of the weavers were compelled to give up the occupation. After a long period ‘Baluchari’ had got back its glory, not in Mursidabad but in Bishnupur of Bankura district, west Bengal. Baluchari sarees has created its own global identity due to its unique designs and craftsmanship of weavers. It occupies a special status even in the era of modern fashion. The Baluchari silk saree of Bishnupur is also unique for its richness of colours, textures and elegance. upto 1986 there was no great demand of this product. 80 percent of this trade has been controlling by the Mahajan at present. At the time of flourishing, co-operative societies were help to setup some looms with all aspect. Not a single loom has not established in last fifteen years by them. Some Weavers are not able to find employment on a regular monthly basis and work part time as weavers and the rest time work as farm labour or vegetable vendors. The weavers never demanding more remuneration due to fear for losing of their job. Several causes are there behind the dwindling process in this industry. Some important measure has been taken from different angle to overcome the situation or to develop the industry, but it has not survived even now . scholar has also proposed some proposal to develop the industry .

**Keywords:** Baluchar, Bishnupur, Co-Operative, Mahajan, Dwindling, Middleman, Handloom Cluster.

## Introduction

‘Baluchori’ the name derived from the word ‘Baluchar’ (sandbank of Bhagirathi) an area comprising of several villages namely Belepur, Ranasagar, Baligram, Baghdhara, Dubrokhali and Amuipara etc in the dist. of Murshidabad, west Bengal, now it called Jiaganj.<sup>1</sup> Roughly in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C. a group of skilled weavers from Varanasi migrated to Bengal and settled in Baluchar Village near Jiaganj in Murshidabad district of West Bengal .They were famous for their weaving skill. In the first half of 18<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Mursidkuli Khan had transferred his capital from Dhaka to ‘Murshidabad’ . Nawab came to know about the artisan class of Baluchar and order them weave a special saree for queens apart from ‘Jamdani’ & ‘Maslin’. As a result of the order Baluchari became visualize. Their fine artistic weaving of silk fabrics was beyond explanation. Exclusively they were patronized by the Nawabs and aristocrats of the society.

During British rule, due to political and financial reasons it became a dying craft as most of the weavers were compelled to give up the occupation. Baluchari was too costly for the common people, so its production failed to be economically viable in the absence of royal support. On the other hand, the weavers from Baluchar kept the craft confined to their own community, thereby leading to its extension.<sup>2</sup> Lastly Baluchar village was submerged by floods, and the weavers were constrained to move away here and there. Thus the Baluchari art and its artists from Murshidabad were ultimately worn-out from the textile map of India.

After a long period ‘Baluchari’ had got back its glory, not in Mursidabad but in Bishnupur of Bankura district, west Bengal. There are different opinion about the re-introduction of Baluchari sarees in Bishnupur . These opinions are as follows

1. After submerged of the artisan village of Murshidabad, a group of weavers came to Bishnupur and revived the wanderfullsaree.
2. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Akshay Kumar Das a silk saree weaver went to Sonamukhi for watching a village festival, there he saw a woman with a beautiful saree and came to know that was the 'Baluchari', since then he had a dream to create as such saree and lastly he has created it.
3. ManiklalSingha wrote in his book, after independence government of India had taken initiative to restore the saree. As a result assistant Director of Regional Design Culture sriSyamadas Babuselected Bishnupur to revived the saree . With the help of Hunuman Das Sarada, an organizer of 'Bishnupur silk khadisebaMondal', Akshay Kumar Das (Pathranga) invented the weaving method of Baluchari.<sup>3</sup>
4. Another opinion i.e after independence 'Design centre' of India government accepted a plan to stimulate the weaving industry of India. At that time Suvo Tagore was the regional director of the Calcutta Design centre.<sup>4</sup> In fact Shri Tagore was from legendry Tagore family & also a renowned artist. Suddenly some old sample of such sarees came to him from a privet collector. Knowing about the expert weavers in Bishnupur he had gone there with the previous sample. He took away the old experience weaver ShriAkshay Kumar Das and depute him as a 'government Designer' of Calcutta Design centre, but within his( AkshayKr.Das) service period no design centre of west Bengal & south India could not achieve the target .in 1956 he has been retired.<sup>5</sup> After return to Bishnupur, Sri Das engaged in 'Silk Khadi Seba Mondal' which was established in 1953. Hunuman Das Sarada was an organizer of this institution. This institution expenses Rs.5000 in 1957 to create the historical saree . Sri Das designed and prepared punching card for it. Here has an important name 'Gorachand Deasi', a contractual weaver of Seba Mondal had first created the fantastic Saree with the Jacquard machine in 1958/59. You can see the saree in the head quarter of the silk khadi sebha mondal even now. 'Shmiriti rekha' (memory line), the first Baluchari saree from Bishnupur ornamented with the daily life of a Nawab.<sup>6</sup>

#### **The Problem/Objective of the Study**

Baluchari sarees of Bishnupur has created its own global identity due to its unique designs and craftsmanship of weavers. It occupies a special status even in the era of modern fashion. The Baluchari silk saree of Bishnupur is also unique for its richness of

colours, textures and elegance. The problem of this study is that In 2011 a survey had released "Around two hundred workers are involved in the designing, weaving and sale of the saris. Especially skilled are the weavers, who sit the whole day in front of huge Jacquard looms making the saris, It takes a weeks to complete a sari and the workers are paid around Rs. 200 to Rs.300 a day" Some Weavers are not able to find employment on a regular monthly basis and work part time as weavers and the rest time work as farm labour or vegetable vendors. The weavers never demanding more remuneration due to fear for losing of their job. Most of the child of weavers is not ready to accept this work. They engage in deferent shop as helper on daily payment. Why they are not interested on it, which is the main question.

#### **Review of Literature**

ManiklalSingha (1983) wrote about the evolve of Baluchori Saree in Bishnupur. Who is the creature of the saree. How the weaver make design on it.

Manoranjan Chandra(2002) discussed about different type of Baluchori Saree like 'Smritirekha' 'Agnibina' 'MadhabiManjuri' 'Malancha' 'Malabika' & 'Rangini' 'Ruchirekha' etc. He aPadmaja Naiduhad welcomed with a 'smriti rekha' Baluchari Saree, Smt. Indira Gandhi also welcomed (former Prime minister of India) with a 'malabika' saree. Even Elizabeth 2<sup>nd</sup> the queen of England, visited India, govt of India presented her a beautiful baluchari saree as a token.

Geographical Indications Journal (2011) wrote about its mechanism. It made of pure silk/ pure tussar or a combination of two of these, along with zari works. These sarees are hand woven no machine or power is used in the production process.

Ranjit Bhattacharjee (2014) wrote in his article about the theme of the Baluchari. weaving remains focused to depict mythological stories and folk tales on the pallus of sarees. Some of the designs include tales of Ramayana & Mahabharata. Motifs are interspersed with flowering bunches, animals, architectural scenes.

#### **Concepts and Hypothesis**

Present conditions of the weavers of Bishnupur, who are engaged to produce Baluchori saree are not so good. Scholar's concept is that At present 80% of this trade has been controlled by the mahajan. They also provided the loom, yarn, designs. Instead of that they acquire the finish goods from weavers. Some weavers wove the product with the Bani. Fewer purchase the raw material from the Mahajans. So that, they are bound to sale their production only to the mahajans, not to open market. In this system only Mahajans can make profit from this business, not the weavers.

**Research Design**

Necessary data for the present study have been collected both from primary and secondary sources. Primary data have been collected through interview with the help of structured questionnaires from deferent weavers of Bishnupur. Secondary sources are collected from different books, article and web link. After scientific analyze of the collected data here I try to establish my opinion. To establish the study unquestionable sources are indicating here very carefully here.

**Findings & Discussion****About the Saree**

Here I will try to discuss about the saree. It is made up of pure silk/ pure tussar or a combination of two of these, along with zari works. These sarees are hand woven no machine or power is used in the production process. Length of saree varies from 5 to 6.5 meters. Width of saree varies from 11.6 cms to 122 cms. Weight of saree depends upon the silk/tussar used along with the amount of zari works done. However, the weight of the saree is not less than 400 grams.<sup>7</sup> Baluchari sarees are mainly distinguished for their elaborate borders and fabulous pallus. The borders are ornamental and surround kalka motifs within it. A series of figures is designed in rows and motifs, which are woven diagonally. Mostly the motif designs are in four alternative colours on a shaded background. The most popular colours of Baluchari saree designs include red, green, white, blue and yellow. Initially these motifs were woven on silver zari, which has subsequently been replaced by various shining threads. The theme of the Baluchari weaving remains focused to depict mythological stories and folk tales on the pallus of sarees. Some of the designs include tales of Ramayana & Mahabharata. Motifs are interspersed with flowering bunches, animals, architectural scenes.<sup>8</sup>

Baluchari sarees has created its own global identity due to its unique designs and craftsmanship of weavers. It occupies a special status even in the era of modern fashion. The Baluchari silk saree of Bishnupur is also unique for its richness of colours, textures and elegance. In 1962, at the time of Indo-China war smt. Padmaja Naidu, Governor of west Bengal had came to Bishnupur for war assistance. She had welcomed with a '*smriti rekha*' Baluchari Saree, Smt. Indira Gandhi also welcomed (former Prime minister of India) with a '*malabika*' saree. Even Elizabeth 2<sup>nd</sup> the queen of England, visited India, govt of India presented her a beautiful baluchari saree as a token.<sup>9</sup> Thus the fame of Baluchari gradually spread all over the world.

Already I have told that, in 1958/59 Baluchari of Bishnupur had been started to product. upto 1986 there was no great demand of this product.

Only 30<sup>th</sup> loom were there in Bishnupur for Baluchari, but in 1986/87 Baluchari created peoples' demand for its newly design and marketing policy. In 1986 Tapas Das, a handicap and young designer from Dhulapara in Bishnupur frist prepared a 'story type' design for Baluchari and Gurudas lakhhan, a state awarded artist (1984) woven the first beautiful saree. The saree contains six different pictures with a story; first story was 'Sita Haran'. Demand of the saree sprung up gradually. From 1987 to 1996 there were 550 looms developed in Bishnupur. Even Brambhin, Bauri, kayasta, karmarkar (Blacksmith), kumbhakar (Potter), sarnakar (goldmaker), sutradhar (carpenter), Dhopa (washer man) were attached with the industry.<sup>10</sup>

**Present Position of the Industry in Bishnupur**

The scholar has gone to see the present position of the industry. There are three manufacturing structure in the industry. 1<sup>st</sup> has been running under cooperatives, 2<sup>nd</sup> under Mahajans & 3<sup>rd</sup> by some proficient weavers. Currently only three cooperative has working there, they are 'Bishnupur Bayan silpi Samabai Samiti', 'Tanthin Tant Sramik Samabai Samiti' & 'Co-operative Weavers Society' among them last one is not involve with the Baluchari production. Only they are running a shop. At the time of flourishing, co-operative societies were help to setup some looms with all aspect. Not a single loom has not established in last fifteen years by them.<sup>11</sup> In this system all necessary goods are supplied by cooperative society. Weavers only complete the work with a certain 'Bani' or wages. Now they may get Rs.1000/-for mina saree, Rs.800 for one colour small pallu/anchal, Rs.1200 for zari works. Overall they can get between Rs.800-1500 as per their work. Sanjoy Das (owner of a loom) told me that, two weavers can complete the job within 3/4 days subsequent to complete the preparation. It takes 25-28 days to setup or ready to woven.<sup>12</sup>

Making of motifs for 'pallus' & other parts of Baluchari saree, is itself a complicated process. For an average design 20000 to 30000 cards are needed that take five to six months.<sup>13</sup> Near about Rs.30000 be able to get a designer & a card maker jointly during five to six months. Though computerize design has been in progress, but most of weavers depend on manual making. Kartick Hens, Tapas Das, Chandan Das are good designer in Bishnupur now. Pravakar Khan was also a prominent designer in the town. Joydeb Pal, Arun Pal, Tarun Pal, Barun Pal, Bapi Das, Pranab Dutta, & Debi Pal (female) are engaged in card making process at present.<sup>14</sup>

80 percent of this trade has been controlling by the Mahajan at present. They also provided the loom, yarn, designs. Instead of that they acquire the finish goods from weavers. Some weavers wove the product with the Bani. Here they can obtain Rs.400

Rs.500 for small pallu, Rs.450 to Rs.550 for mina & Rs.800 to Rs.1000 for zari saree. Fewer purchase the raw material from the Mahajans . 'Warp' that is basically of Bangalore in a rate of Rs.16000 per four kg, for 12<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup> sarees. 'Weft' is of Malda, is Rs.2500 per kg that is sufficient to make 3 pieces of saree. After purchasing materials they prepare saree and move to sale, but not in open market but to the Mahajans. We can see the present rate chart:

small pallu/anchal-Rs.3100 to Rs.3200,	In market-Rs.4200/-
Mina-Rs.3400 to Rs.3600.	In market – Rs.4800/-
Zari-Rs.3800 to Rs.3900.	In Market-Rs.5200/-

If we observe critically, weaver would not get much money form a saree . For making a small pallu saree a weaver spent Rs.2166 for warp & weft, along with supplementary yarns (for creating designs and motifs) and a helper with Rs.2000 per month or approx Rs.65 per day, other expenses are there. Thus to produce a small anchal Baluchari, weaver will spent near about Rs.2600 to Rs.2700/- then profit will be only Rs.500 to Rs.600 per saree or maximum Rs.150-200 in a day. Amusing news is that Mahajan can get profit from those saree average Rs 1000 in open market. From a survey, organized by Observer Research Foundation, we can perceive the truth. "This sarees are marked by a huge margin when outside Bishnupur. One that costs Rs.1500 in this town sells for Rs. 3000 in big cities"<sup>16</sup>

Last system is that, a group of affluent weavers who has their own handloom to entwine Baluchari, they purchase all raw materials from open market and also sells the finishing product in open market. Here they can find profit approximately Rs.200 per kg in different yearn, and also from the sarees . They are fully free from the shackle of Mahajan. Although the number as such weavers is very little in Bishnupur.

#### **Condition of the Weavers**

From the above discussion we may observe the condition of the weaving section and also the industry. Weaver, those who are engaged in cooperative pattern, they earn Rs.800 to Rs.1500 as Bani per saree but under in Mahajan they earn only Rs.400 to Rs.1000. To complete a saree two weavers must take 3/4 days, consequently a weaver can't earn more than Rs.125 to Rs.250 in a day but in Mahajni system that will be come down in Rs.70 Rs.165. The situation of Designer and card makers are same. Already I have discussed that Rs.30000 will be spent to create a design & card making. It will take 5/6 month. Naturally two artists separately are able to receive only Rs.3000 per month. A helper can get only Rs.1200/- to Rs.2000 per month.<sup>17</sup>

In 2011 a survey had released that "Around two hundred workers are involved in the designing, weaving and sale of the saris. Especially skilled are the weavers, who sit the whole day in front of huge Jacquard looms making the saris , It takes a weeks to complete a sari and the workers are paid around Rs. 200 to Rs.300 a day"<sup>18</sup> Some Weavers are not able to find employment on a regular monthly basis and work part time as weavers and the rest time work as farm labour or vegetable vendors. The weavers never demanding more remuneration due to fear for losing of their job.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Causes of Decline**

Several causes are there behind the dwindling process. Few persons are bothering about it; they try to find out these.

1. Facing competition from its comparatively cheaper rival, the Banaras silk, And changing tastes, Baluchari is in bind. The designs have been typically drawn from Hindu texts since past, hence a mental barrier has been developed among other religious community innocently.
2. 80% of the Industry has been controlled by Mahajan. Some people have interest in Baluchari, they want to spent money for this, but the money goes to the Mahajan.
3. The growing trend in recent years has been that fewer women are wearing saris, because it is not the easiest of clothes to wear for mobile and active young women in today's crowded, jet-set world.
4. Lack of imaginative to come up with ideas and designs.
5. Gradual Decline of the cooperative system. They cannot adopt with the open market economic policy and also its ill operating system.
6. In a weak circumference of cooperative system, master weavers become like middleman, they consume all type of profits in cluster system.
7. 'Handloom reservation act 1965' has not applied hardly so duplicate saree has been creating a market in low price.
8. Delinked the weavers from market. A new type of middleman has arisen called 'product handler' they aware about all type of modern technology. Weavers are depended on them.

#### **Effort for Improvementby State Government**

Some important measure has been taken from different angle to overcome the situation or to develop the industry. I have gathered small among them from different sources.

1. Bankura district administration has now decided to give Baluchari a nifty touch under the Rastriya Sam VikasYojna (RSVY), a focused joint Centre-state development programme. The National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) has been

roped in to train the weavers in software it has created for evolving newer designs. NIFT will instruct them in phases. Bishnupur's KG Engineering College will provide the infrastructural support.<sup>20</sup>

2. The latest development in weaving technique of Balucharisaree inspired scientists of Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute, Durgapur to develop a machine to reduce the time of Balucharisaree weaving with an attractive finish. The innovated machine is called Jaquard Card Punching Machine which can be operated for weaving of computerized designs also. This machine will help a Master Weaver to complete weaving of an exclusive BaluchariSaree within 10-12 days and will facilitate replacing of traditional motifs and theme with an attractive and latest concept. The machine is likely to cost Rs.1.5 to 2.0 lakhs if commercially manufactured, NABARD has also taken up Baluchari as part of its plan to promote traditional crafts of Bengal like terra Cotta and Bell Metal work. The weavers of Baluchari will have easy excess to CAD/CAM facilities due to promotional efforts of NABARD.<sup>21</sup> West Bengal Khadi and Village Instruction Board have been taken some stapes to upgrading such ancient industry. They wrote in their web site – we are introducing scientific technology and modern styling without interfering its tradition. With this objective, an assignment is initiated at the Sonamukhi near Bishnupur under district of Bankura.<sup>22</sup>

#### **Effort for Improvement by Central Government**

Central Government has make some planning in favor of handloom weavers in India those are subsequent underneath.

1. The handloom (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act 1965.
2. Integrated handloom cluster development skim.
3. Health planning.
4. Mahatma Gandhi Banker insurance policy.
5. Handloom apex society (only for four state not for Bengal)
6. Formation handloom mark.
7. Technical development planning
8. establishment of Yearn mound
9. Integrated handloom training planning.
10. Export planning for handloom commodity

State government policy to enrich the handloom weavers (The West Bengal Textile Policy-2013-2018 shall come into effect on and from the 1 September 2013)

1. 6% interest discount on working capital loan taken by PWCS and Handloom Clusters/Groups.
2. Scheme for housing-cum-work shed, health insurance and other welfare schemes

amalgamated with the schemes of GOI shall be put on fast track.

3. All weavers shall be covered within a period of one year under health scheme and Mahatma Gandhi BunkarBimaYojana (MGBBY) within two years of beginning of this Policy with GOI and State Government funding.
4. Power consumption in a weaver's household shall be treated as domestic consumption.
5. State government shall provide additional Marketing Incentive of 5% over and above the existing 10% M.I. (contributed equally by Gol and State Government), subject to ceiling of Rs. 5 lakh per PWCS.
6. 10% subsidy shall be provided on the sale value of handloom fabrics exported to a country outside India.
7. Clusters/Groups shall be set up in each potential district.

#### **Conclusion**

Although after taken as such huge planning to develop handloom industry directly or indirectly for Baluchari, has not change the worse situation. Income of the weavers has been come down gradually. Weavers are not aware about all planning. I came to know by talking with weavers, computer training had been given to them but that is not use in practical field. Only one or two master weavers can use it. Most of the weavers are doing work in previous system. They said, they have no money & education to build up a new system. Some weavers who are engaging in cooperative system, received spectacles allowance, old age allowances & also bonuses in a rate 8.3% of their work value in a year. They have known regarding 'cluster' but not known what is the function of it's clearly. They are fear from any type of loan, because the uncertainty of the Industry. The largest part of the next generation are not interested in weaving Baluchari Saree. Rather they like to job as a worker in big shop with monthly remuneration.

We know handloom industry has enormous employment ability next to agriculture in India. So it is not a matter of profit & loss only. When the capitalist world tries to make profit squeezing human employment, govt. will must take genuine stapes for the nation. Not only Government but also conscious people of our country should be extent their helping hand.

#### **Suggestion**

1. Restoration of handloom cooperative society.
  - i. Construct Clarity in account &work; try to come out from the control of local businessman.
  - ii. Compassion should be on the efficiency of a cooperative society. Incentive must be depend on total sell of the cooperative.
  - iii. Bring Simplicity in loan system.

- iv. National handloom Development Corporation may build up a virtual Yearn depot & from which different cooperative can perches it by internet directly.
- v. Build up a brand (BishnupurBaluchari)
- vi. Build up a fund to develop new designing & advertisement
2. One need to carry out some market research to find out what new, suitable items could be made by these artisans and weavers using their age-old skill.
3. Need to GI protection for (BishnupurBaluchari) .The Geographical Indication (GI) refers to the products originated from a particular place with a given quality reputation and other characteristic attributed to its geographical origin.
4. In present open marketing system, corporate capital may be tag with it as a social accountability scheme.
5. Bishnupur is the first heritage city in the state for its ancient terracotta temple along with different handicraft works. That can be focus to tourists by assemble under one roof.

**Endnotes**

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