ABSTRACT

The idyllic township, the birthplace of the most enduring creations of Madhya Pradesh- the Maheshwari Sari and Chanderi Sari.

The Maheshwari Sari was conceived and designed by Queen Ahilya Bai. The cotton and silk fibers of the Maheshwari Sari draw up a picture of grace itself. Deriving inspiration from Ahilya Bai’s beautifully carded palace walls; the Maheshwari stands elegantly complete with its elaborate patterns and intricate borders. Serene in its simplicity. Majestic in its design. Determined in its strength. Feminine in its softness.

Soft, tender drapes. Delicate, luminous sensations. A melody in fabric. A sweet lullaby that lulls you to sleep. A tune that soothes the senses. Such is the charisma of the velvety, translucent Chanderi. Delicately woven threads in subtle hues. The textural luminosity and lissom drape of Chanderi silk makes it a favourite dress for special occasions. The astounding grace and dignified poise of Chanderi is a sight worth beholding. It is indeed a scintillating symphony of softness.

Keywords: Chanderi, Grace, Maheshwari, Threads

Introduction

A land of diversities and colors- India, famous for its regional arts and crafts while having many different states, cultures, traditions. India is a place of fabrics, handicrafts from its different regions.

The largest cottage industry in the country is comprised of handlooms which is an important craft product. Millions of looms across the country are engaged in weaving cotton, silk, other natural fibers.

In fact, India’s every village contains their precious tradition of weaving and culture in form of their weavers and craft artisans.

From ancient times India is a place where the fabrics are weaved and presented in beautiful forms. The weaving is done on different looms to produce intricate fabrics of different textures and different looks.
In India, there are many places where we can find different fabrics from different regions. The regions like Surat, Ahmedabad are famous for their cotton fabrics while other regions like Banaras, Kanchipuram are famous for their silk fabrics.

Similar to these there is one region that is rich in both cotton and silk weaving in the central India – Madhya Pradesh. A regional hub of handlooms and crafts Madhya Pradesh is surrounded by lush forests and soothing solitude with superb craftsmanship that adds to its vivid contrasts and enchanting lure. The exquisite weaves of resplendent fabrics and intricate carvings- the handwork of Madhya Pradesh is like sheer poetry. These are like age-old poetry that lives on vibrant and evocative as ever. A visually stimulating tale told by bards to children and they listen to it in wide-eyed fascination. And each tale is more exciting, more imaginative, and more magnetic than the last.

Among the different cultures of India, the clothing style is also different but there is one wear accepted by the whole of India and that is a Sari.

Fascinated by the dressing of Indian women people from all over the world try to wear a sari at least once in their life as it is the most elegant wear of dressing for a woman.

A Sari contains sophistication, resembles elegant and style in itself. It can never be out of fashion. Hence it is considered the most classic fashion among women.

In the thousands of years of its evolution, Sari has come a long way. It has risen above the regional usage and achieved widespread preference and fame amongst women. From time immemorial the ubiquitous Sari, worn by Indian women across the country have stood up as the tangible symbol of ethereal grace and beauty. Madhya Pradesh contains two of the most unique Saris- Maheshwari Sari and the Chanderi Sari.

**Maheshwari & Chanderi Saris of Madhya Pradesh**

**Maheshwari Saris**

Maheshwari Saris are known for their simplicity. The town of origin of these Saris is Maheshwar in Madhya Pradesh. That’s why these Saris have got their name as Maheshwari Saris. The origin of Maheshwari Saris dates back to the 18th century. It was established by the austere Queen Ahilya Bai of Maheshwar, Indore. According to the legends, Queen Ahilya Bai ordered craftsmen from Surat and Malwa to design a special 9-yard sari to be gifted to the royal guests and relatives. Maheshwari Saris became popular which were produced by their craftsmen.

Soon Maheshwar became well known for its 80s to 300s count cotton saris and turbans with Zari in the border. It is believed that Queen Ahilya Bai herself created the design of the first sari. Once patronized by the royal house of this region, the magnificent Maheshwari Sari was worn by the queens and princesses.
But now, it is available in international markets too. As a result of that time and under the princely state the weaver’s art flourished and specialized into the present day Maheshwari cloth. Earlier there was only cotton weaves, from 1950s silk was started being used in the warp and slowly it became the norm.

The growing industrialization was cruel to Maheshwar handlooms at the starting of 20th century. Simple traditional things got tagged “old-fashioned” and the fashion was being searched somewhere else. By the 1970s the Maheshwari Saris was being threatened with extinction. So the son of Queen Ahilya Bai decided to start a Rehwa society- a weaver’s collective that would give fair wages and benefits to the weavers to revive the craft.

Because of the efforts of that time looms are clacking everywhere in Maheshwar and the cloth is moving in the markets all over India and abroad.

**Characteristics of Maheshwari Sari-**

The Maheshwari saris are woven from silk and cotton fibers, the smooth fabric with its natural luster appears even more magnificent when embellished with the golden zari. The gold thread in exquisitely woven patterns and motifs on the flowdah (body), kinari (border) and aanchra (pallu) of the sari gives it an inexplicable and yet simple grandeur. The motifs, taken from the pristine world, include guldasta, ghungroo, chatai kinar, mayor, chand tara among other exotic names to match the wondrous patterns of leaves and flowers.

Maheshwari saris are famous for their strength and elasticity of the fiber, the royal Maheshwari is particularly distinguished for its reversible border, which can be worn on either side. The story of its glory completes its regional tradition in fabulous hues.

The looms used earlier for the weaving of Maheshwari saris were shuttle looms but now fly shuttle looms are used for weaving and producing a weekly structured version of the simplest 34s by 34s and 60s by 60s cotton Maheshwari saris. At present, the standard structure of 80s by 80s are used for producing borders not heavy as earlier.

The names of the hues that take place on the Maheshwari Sari are derived from the rich dialect, evoking images of vibrancy in an unadulterated form. So angoori (grape green), gul bakshi (magenta), rani (deep mauve pink), kaasini (light violet), all take form on the large canvas of silk and cotton in chequered, plain, and striped
patterns. The pallu particularly distinct with its five stripes, three colors alternated with two whites.

**Chanderi Saris-**

Chanderi Saris are known for their lightness and suitability to both the winter and summer seasons. Similarly to Maheshwari Saris, it is also originated from a town of Madhya Pradesh called Chanderi and it very clear why it got its name as Chanderi Saris. Chanderi is primarily a weaver’s town that produces fine Chanderi Saris which are famous for their delicate borders and motifs of the utmost delicacy. Traditionally, Chanderi weavers were mostly Muslims and the trading of the fabric was done by Hindus.

Chanderi Saris are mainly woven by women due to whom the empowerment of the women has increased. As with most Indian handlooms and handicrafts, the skills of Chanderi weaving have also been passed down through generations in weavers families. It is said that when British introduced mill-made fabrics to compete with Indian handlooms, the weavers of Chanderi created the present form of Chanderi Sari. The fame of the Chanderi cotton competed with the famed muslins of Dhaka.

Today, Chanderi weaves are produced by importing the material from other Indian states and China, Japan, and Korea. The production of the Chanderi has been protected by India as a Geographic Indication. Due to its fineness, softness, and transparency, these saris were worn by queens and princesses of royal families of Gwalior, Indore, Kolhapur, Nagpur, Baroda, etc. They used to wear these Saris on occasions like childbirth, marriage, etc. and till now they use to wear it on these ceremonies.

Chanderi produces a range of Saris appropriate to the taste of its clients, the royalty and mobility of Gwalior, Baroda, and Nagpur, and beyond. Echoing the grandeur of a bygone era the drape, delicacy, artistry, and sheer majesty of the Chanderi Sari is a secret passes down from generation to generation.

**Characteristics of Chanderi Sari-**

In Chanderi Saris, the craftsmen traditionally used silk as warp and cotton for the weft, but now the looms adorn silk in both, though the pastel cotton remain favorite summer wear, owing to the easy agility that they allow.

The silk zari carry a scent of Varanasi style, reflected in their luxurious gold border and two gold bands on the pallu.
In some, the richness of the Chanderi is enhanced with gold checks and small lotus roundels or butis all over. The saris hold 300s count for fine fabric earlier but now it ranges from 120s to 200s. Careful attention is paid to the motifs that embellish the damin (body), kinar (border) and the aanchal (pallu).

The delicate colors and tender tints of the lyrical Chanderi gain an added mysterious romance when the vernacular names of colors are encountered. Nature is at its glorious best eulogized in the reference to native fruits, flowers, leaves, and birds are it the vivacious kesari (saffron), the tender badami (almond), the frolicsome angoori (pale green), the playful morgardani (peacock neck), the sensorial mehendi (chinna green), the boisterous anandi (turquoise) or the resplendent rani (Indian pink).

The colors take on an enigmatic gloss when they envelop the Chanderi, be it in harmony with the border or the striking and lively Ganga - Jamuna contrasts.

**SOME MOTIFS**

(i) Buti Designs

(ii) Border Design

Sneha Yadav is licensed under
(iii) Nature inspired designs

At Present-

Everything changes with time so the Maheshwari and Chanderi Saris are also not untouched by the changes.

Every experiment was done results in a very own kind of thing. First, it was Queen Ahilya Bai Holkar of Maheshwar who ordered the craftsperson and experimented with new designs which resulted in beautiful 9-yard Maheshwari Saris. Then the weavers of Chanderi experimented with weaving techniques to provide Chanderi Saris to compete with the British fabrics of that time. This all were because of the experiments done.

A chance visit by the present Holkar ‘Maharaja’ Richard Holkar and his American wife, Sally Holkar, went a long way in mitigating the plight of the weavers. The couple, especially Sally, took a special interest in their work and established the Rehwa Wearing Society in 1978. The couple also made a tremendous effort towards marketing Maheshwari sarees both in India and abroad. Sally Holkar, the granddaughter-in-law is working in the improvisation of Chanderi and Maheshwari Saris for the last 30 years. She is running her organization named as Women weaves.

Today, Maheshwari and Chanderi fabrics are popular not just in India but also in other parts of the world and have a market in Germany, Canada, and the USA. Women weaves is an organization dedicated to empowering and improving the lives of women who weave in rural
India. They contributed a lot in promoting Maheshwari and Chanderi Saris of Madhya Pradesh. Its headquarter is in Mumbai.

A lot of experimentation concerning to the fabric and motifs has been done in Maheshwari Saris no doubt to increase its appeal in a market of changing and varied tastes. The use of zari and kinari is the unique point of the Maheshwari Sari.

With time the Chanderi patterns woven into the sari have also become more complicated. These days very few Chanderi Saris sports the traditional ginni (coin) or booti (tendril) motif. One of the innovations that it made was to have the body of the saree embellished with vibrant vegetable prints while maintaining its original essence. The results have been phenomenal.

**Diversification:**

The Chanderi and Maheshwari Saris faced various kinds of diversification them. In the starting, there were only saris but now there are suits, dress materials, stoles, etc. has come. The colors of the fabrics also diversified with time. Earlier there were only basic colors like the yellow, cream, beige and colors from natural sources but nowadays synthetic colors have also started being used in a natural means.

New products have been introduced, partly on the demand from the buyers and partly due to the realization of the changing markets. Soft Furnishings which include bed covers, table covers, curtains, cushion covers ad well as apparel such as lady suits and dupatta have been introduced. It has increased the possibility of reaching to a larger range of outlets in the market. Combination of yarns For example, silk - silk, silk - cotton, silk - 2 cotton, silk – 3 cotton, etc. were used to make products which can cater to the customer demands and goes well according to the popular trends.

Some of the examples of the experimentations going with the Chanderi and Maheshwari Saris are:-

**Innovations on the international market**-

For the issues of sustainability of traditional form of weaving, it became necessary to search for new design idioms that could connect with the aspirations of modern consumers in high-value markets for the benefit of the traditional weavers.

In a unique initiative for extending cutting-edge design support to the Maheshwari weavers, the idea of bringing together designers from Finland and India was explored. The initiative was led by Liisa Piitulainen-Numminen and Amita Sahaya through Findia Foundation, New Delhi. The seeds of this project were done in a seminar at the Finnish Embassy in New Delhi where some well-known Design experts from both countries participated and discussed the strategy and level of this international partnership. The project was supported by the Office of the Development Commissioner, Handlooms, India. The idea was to carry out contextual product innovation and create new market linkages for Maheshwari fabrics. This collaborative project between Indian and Finnish designers and the craftspersons involved:
Innovative Product Design
Knowledge-exchange between India & Finland
Assimilation of Indian traditions and the user-centric approach of Finnish Design
Exploring high-end value segments in export markets
Introduction of design innovations for greater penetration into the domestic market
A Sustainable approach to Maheshwari fabrics, with particular focus on women weavers to enhance their opportunities and empowerment

Rahul Mishra’s “Butterfly Effect” collection-
These days Designers also like to experiment with handicraft fabrics in their collection. Rahul Mishra the designer who is known for his combination of economics and designing has used handcrafted fabrics in his collection in Wills Lifestyle Fashion Week Autumn-Winter 2010. Women weaves designed the fabrics for the designer Rahul Mishra. The fabrics which they have designed were organic hand-spun cotton and Chanderi fabrics. The collection was based on the theme of “change one thing, Change everything”. The concept was to present a collection based on the metamorphosis of revival and declination of the concrete jungles and flower fields. The collection was named Butterfly Effect.

The designer has exploited every quality of Chanderi to present in his collection. The sheerness, stiffness, and uniqueness of the fabric were used in his collection. The crisp and transparent effects were given to the garments through the Chanderi fabric. As the theme was based on butterfly, the sheerness was needed. The strapless dresses, spaghetti, etc. an addition was done in form of wraps to cover them to judge with the name of the collection in some or the other way. The Chanderi was also used to provide a delicate effect to the dresses.

Synergy weaves collection-
Synergy collection is a venture of Women weaves. It is made by merging the three major weaving centers of India i.e. Kota, Maheshwar, and Chanderi.

These centers were woven in synergy to produce and create an exclusive collection of dupattas, saris, and stoles etc. The whole concept was developed keeping in mind the changing requirements of modern consumers who are more experimental and want to explore innovations in handicrafts.

The collection was made by combing the colors and designs of the three saris. The fabrics are combined to present a different look or appearance of all the three fabrics of the three regions.

For example, a Maheshwari Sari having a Chanderi or Kota pallu/aanchal attached to it or vice versa. This attachment adds a unique look to the sari.

Bagh print on Maheshwari Saris- In the starting, only plain Maheshwari Saris or the engraved one with motifs from the palace were made. But now moving a step ahead, the Maheshwari saris are coming with prints on them.
A place called “Bagh” in Madhya Pradesh producing beautiful hand block printing on the fabrics is combined with the cotton Maheshwari saris to give them a new appeal. In the printing natural dyes are used to present a joyous charm of the pattern on the sari.

The blocks put a sign of beauty and aesthetics on the sari are highly stylized motifs that evolved over hundreds of years.

The colors that arise from vegetables and natural dyes that do not fade are used for Bagh printing. The colors used are vibrant yellow from turmeric roots, a spirited pink from pomegranate skin, the veritable indigo from the famous indigo plant, etc.

Krishna Mehta’s “Curious Alice” Collection

In 2017, Designer Krishna Mehta showcased her collection “Curious Alice” in Amazon India Fashion Week Spring Summer 2017. The collection showcased exceptional and extravagant silhouettes made of Maheshwari silk fabric. Bold lines, checks, printed patterns and sequences ruled the ramp. The Innovative styling of garments and the experimentations added lots of perfect color combinations to the show.

The collection was comprised of saris with full sleeve blouses, peplum and cape style blouses, fitted skirts, as well as large lapelled jackets, tunics, trousers, narrow dhoti pants tunics, large-lapel jackets, colorful trousers, narrow dhoti pants, asymmetric and Reglan sleeves dresses. Few of the blouses had detailed embroideries, while some others were sewn by using the attributes of Maheshwari fabric that is the bold checkered fabric in bottom wear of skirts and trousers.

Sanjay Garg’s Collection in “Raw Mango” Brand

Sanjay Garg played with chanderi in a a little different way. He combined the cotton yarns with silk yarns and made them into chanderi and dyes it in a way which is more sustainable for mother earth. He has designed Saris, contemporary wear, etc.

Value additions in Chanderi-

As there increased demand for embellishments on every kind of wear hence Chanderi Saris also reached a stage of embellishments in its journey.

The value additions like sequence, beads, machine embroidery is also done on Chanderi Saris to enhance their look. Ethnic fashion will always be a significant part of Indian fashion and culture and with it, chanderi as it shape shifts to suit modern palettes.

Also, organic stoles were produced by Women weaves in which the Chanderi and Maheshwari fabrics were combined with organic hand spun cotton.

Conclusion-
The Maheshwari and Chanderi saris have come a long way in their journey from their evolution. The uniqueness and specialty of Maheshwari and Chanderi saris had not been changed over time. These saris are more in demand than earlier. And due to the new experiments, they are appearing more beautiful and more unique. Various kinds of experiments can still be done with the Maheshwari and Chanderi saris to keep them up with the new pace of upcoming fashion.

References-

5. [http://crafts.indianetzone.com/maheshwari_saree.htm](http://crafts.indianetzone.com/maheshwari_saree.htm)
handeri+Maheshwari](http://www.zimbus.com/Uttar+Pradesh/articles/229/charm+Madhya+Pradesh+saris+C
handeri+Maheshwari)
11. [www.womenweaves.org](http://www.womenweaves.org)
12. [https://www.graameen.in/maheshwari-handloom-saree-mh-s-040.html](https://www.graameen.in/maheshwari-handloom-saree-mh-s-040.html)