
Expedition for Innovation – Chronicle of Dharmavaram Designers

G. Savithri *,
P. Sujathamma **,
T. Tripura Sundari ***

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Abstract

India has a number of silk weaving clusters that are known for unique designs, weaves, colors, patterns, traditional knowledge (TK) and processes that are specific to a geographical region, and are guarded for centuries. The tradition of creating exclusive designs and items is a unique feature of Indian silk handloom weavers. The colors, designs and textures of silk fabric reflect their traditions, tastes and fashions where they belong. Silk is the most elegant textile in the world with unparalleled grandeur, natural sheen and inherent affinity for dyes, high absorbance, light weight, soft touch and high durability and is known as the queen of textile in the world ever. Andhra Pradesh is a treasure of traditional handloom silks known for their distinct and typical style of products. Dharmavaram silk weaves are the most elegant, gorgeous, rich and colorful. The beauty of Dharmavaram saree speaks about the volume of hard work and the artistry done by the craftsmen. Amongst the silk weaves the Dharmavaram silk sarees are famous, has carved out a niche for itself in south India by rolling out sarees catering to all strata of people. Each and every thread of the Dharmavaram saree is hand woven. The hallmark of Dharmavaram sarees are the motifs and designs adapted from the sculptures of temples at Lepakshi and Tadipatri and other motifs of nature like peacock, deer, flowers etc. The culture and tradition of Andhra Pradesh has also woven into the saree. With this back ground the authors narrated about the few talented unique designers of Dharmavaram with global reputation.

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Author Correspondence

G. Savithri ,Department of Sericulture,Sri Padmavathi Mahila Vishvavidyalayam(Women’s University) Tirupati
Andhra Pradesh, India

INTRODUCTION

Dharmavaram is a famous hub for its unique silks and a small town of rich handloom weaving cluster located at a distance of 47 KM from Anantapur District in Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh, has enthralled, endeared and throbbed the hearts of millions of women with its elegant, splendid and classic silk sarees. The traditional, heavy, broad bordered rich with butta sarees of Dharmavaram have world wide popularity. Amongst the silk weaves, the Dharmavaram silk sarees are famous, has carved out a niche for itself in south India by rolling out sarees catering to all strata of people. Each and every thread of the Dharmavaram saree is hand woven. Dharmavaram handloom silk sarees and silk pavadas are exclusively made of mulberry silk woven by hand, with elaborate zari work woven on them in resplendent colours. Dharmavaram silk sarees are known for their excellent weaving quality, rich look and feel. The economy of the town entirely depends on well established silk handloom industry.

Dharmavaram has its own share in the annals of history. Sri Kriyasakthi Odeyar Swamy who was staying in Vudayagiri came to Chilamuttur and after consulting karanam Thummala Mallarasa decided to build a village near Chilamuttur. He built the village during 1153-54 and derived the name Dharmavaram from 'Dharmamba', the mother of 'Sri Kriyasakthi Odeyar' who constructed the local Dharmavaram tank. The historical evidence available on the inscriptions prove that the region was ruled by Vijayanagar Vidya kings for nearly 500 years from 1075 Satavahana Saka. Dharmavaram was also under the governance of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan for some time before it was captured by the British. Evidence of origin of Dharmavaram sarees can also be found in the roof wall paintings of Lepakshi temple. There are a total of 280 designs in the temple, constructed during the year 1522 to 1538 AD. A place called "Latha Mandapam" wherein 36 rock pillars have 144 unique designs of Dharmavaram sarees.

The Dharmavaram sarees of today are innovatively embellished with decorative stones, chamkies, sequins, and kundans which either contain the same color or are multi colored. Besides saris, this artwork can also be witnessed on [salwarkameez](#), kurtis, scarves and stoles. Even handloom items like carpets, bed sheets, curtains, bags, and cushion covers have this artwork imprinted on them. Considering its wedding attributes, pure traditional heavily worked gold jewelry can enhance the elegance of this outfit. Also, Diamond studded jewelry can go well with this sari by giving the entire look more richness. The silk weaving industry has managed to spread their markets all over the world. There will come a time when this fabric will almost become a regular feature in different forms, owing to its grand look.

Author Details

G. Savithri, Department of Sericulture, Sri Padmavathi Mahila Vishvavidyalayam, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, India *

P. Sujamma, Department of Sericulture, Sri Padmavathi Mahila Vishvavidyalayam, (Women's University) Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, India **

T. Tripura Sundari, Department of Journalism, Sri Padmavathi Mahila Vishvavidyalayam (Women's University), Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, India ***

Designing Process of Dharmavaram Handloom Silks

Earlier a Dharmavaram saree that could fit in a match box was designed and weaved for British queen. Weavers and designers of Dharmavaram continuing the legacy of yester year designers and experimenting on silk weaves and producing array of unique designer silk sarees viz., Lighting saree, Musical saree, Sandal perfumed saree, Sampenga or Champak saree, NavaratnaKhachita silk saree' depictingourepics on the sarees etc. and also enriching the silk sarees by using kundans, chamkies, stones etc. Traditionally, a design was drawn using a trace paper or a graph sheet. It was then rubbed and float checked. The same design used to appear on the saree but in a reduced format when compared with the graph sheet. The design was then punched and the punch card prepared. The punch card was made manually and this was the most difficult part of this process. The punch card or the design pattern was then given to the weaves for the saree to be woven. The whole process used to take around 5 hrs and was very complex and tedious. The automated design process has replaced the traditional design process. Nowadays computerized design process made the complex and tedious process into simple and easy with the help of software "Paint shop". The image of the motif is first scanned and then it is traced and filled with bitmaps. Finally the image is transferred to the punch cards. Now the punch cards are attached in the form of a chain and loaded into the jacquard machine to start weaving. The jacquard machine codifies and replicates the design/pattern on the weave. A group of threads (locally known as vallyu) are connected to the jacquard machine is loaded to the loom which helps in forming the design while weaving.

Unique designers of Dharmavaram

The hallmark of Dharmavaram sarees are the motifs and designs adapted from the sculptures of temples at Lepakshi and Tadipatri and other motifs of nature like peacock, deer, flowers etc. The culture and tradition of Andhra Pradesh has also woven into the saree. There are very few reputed designers in Dharmavaram as compared to the magnitude of weaving and dyeing sectors. Yet, these handful designers are dexterous enough to keep pace with the fast changing fashion market of the present time. A designer's role is not cut out. Instead, the designer has to keep abreast of the latest trend and fashion, and experience. The scintillating array of exceptional designs of Dharmavaram has carved a niche in the silk market at home and abroad. The designers have to live up to this expectation as it is evident from the booming demand for Dharmavaram sarees. Dharmavaram sarees, which were identified with their traditional designs till recently, have been able to capture the minds of the people by imparting a deft and judicious blend of tradition and modern designs. The present design market is constantly changing, unlike earlier days; a particular design may not find favour with the consumers even for three months. The designers of Dharmavaram are inclined to absorb the consumer preferences to equip the industry to meet the challenges from other weaving enclaves. Stiff competition prevails in the handloom clusters, only few craftsmen have realized the situation of late, and came out with something novel both in concept and presentation with exceptional skills. The dazzling collection of exceptional designs has engraved forte in the silk market in India and abroad. Creative innovations coupled with ingenious ideas in the sphere of textiles led few craftsmen to present exceptional skills. Let us have a glance of few talented and unique designers of Dharmavaram.

**Designer Mr.Nagaraju
NAGARAJU**

A designer by name Nagaraju is one such talented designer who has woven Lepakshmi archaeological sculpture on a very rich looking silk saree which carried 42 Nandi models, 7 Lord Nagendra images, 30 Jatayu pictures. Each saree measures about 5.5 metres where the end portion or the pallu is designed with the exquisite design and a blouse-piece material. He inscribed the word Lepakshi in 112 times on the blouse material and the pallu carried elephant and swan images. He took one month of time for weaving the saree with a cost of Rs.40000. He exhibited the saree in Lepakshi Festival and won the prize. Mr. Nagaraju has taken training from his father and developed experience in handlooms in all levels such as reeling, dyeing, weaving, Complete Computed Aided Textile design (CATD) system, stitching of jackard hooks, setting of designs, harness building, saree folding and marketing. Presently he is handling 16 handlooms employing many unemployed in design creation. He is taking advises from Central Silk Board (CSB), Dharmavaram for design creativity as a freelance club member. He also obtained training in Central Silk Technological Research Institute (CSTRI), Central Silk Board at Bangalore on designing and released CDs on his designs throughout the Nation in the year 2005. His works have been recognized by the Commissioner, Department of Handlooms and Textiles of Andhra Pradesh and awarded 2nd Prize for him for the year 2005-06. He designed a saree also for a movie “ Samba’ inscribing Sanku, Chakra and Om NamoVenkatesa symbol. He made designs and completed the work delegated by Andhra Pradesh State Organization’s KhadiGramParisramaSangh’s Program of PRODEEP for producing TajMahal and Thailand cultural designs. All world wonders are studded in Dharmavaramsarees and is grabbing market not only at national but also in the international markets. He intended to design a saree depicting epic Ramayana, as a beginning he designed AnjaneyaSwamy (Hanuman) engraving Sri Rama Namam on silk fabric. The inherent talent added with creativity is resulting in obtaining fame and name by the designer like Mr. Nagaraju.

LEPAKSHI SILK SAREE DESIGNED BY



**Designer Mr.Peddaiahgari Mohan
MUSICAL SAREE**

DESIGNER P.MOHAN WITH

Mr. Peddaiahgari Mohan, young designer-weaver created waves throughout the country for his unique ideas. He is like a feather in the cap to the Dharmavaram saree weaving industry. His innovative themes and intricate designs with various materials; woven into different patterns. His idea of using the fragrance of Champa flowers in weaving a silk saree has won him laurels too. Though he woven the saree as part of his work, the Union Minister of Textiles recognized his work and gave him an award. The massive silk saree industry in the south just added a new note to its repertoire - the saree Swaramadhuri, which can 'sing' for four hours at a stretch. 'Swaramadhuri', a 'singing silk saree', embedded with eight micro speakers on its border has caught the fancy of many silk traders down South. Conceptualised by Mohan, the beautiful drape has micro speakers on its border and a small digital music player at the 'Pallu' which can play as many as 200 songs continuously for a stretch of four hours. Mr. Mohan has used a 2-GB memory chip to support the device on the saree. The enterprising designer had earlier created sarees with small LED bulbs which he called 'lighting sarees'. The lighting saree is made of 20 different micro-lights woven into the saree. These lights are run on a 9-volt battery, which is also woven beautifully into the saree. The wiring for the lights is woven into the Zari while the controls (on/off) have been incorporated into the pallu. The micro-bulbs can glow for two and a half hours at a stretch. He also made silk sarees using sandalwood. There is a great demand for the sandalwood saree. The Gandham Saree is designed with small motifs and intricate designs made of sandalwood imported from Mysore. Some of his other works include Mayurisaree, Ashok chakra, Brahma Kamalam, Pushpavallikasaree, musical Saree, Navaratnasaree, UdayaKantisaree, VijayaratnaSaree and DivyaAbharanaCheera. Peddaiahgari Mohan is the recipient of the Union Handlooms and Textile Ministry's National Award from President Pranab Mukherjee for his 'Sampangi' sari in 2012. He also received the 'Hastakalaaward' from State Government in 1993 for his 'lighting' sari. He designed special sari named 'Peethambaram' at a cost of Rs. 1 lakh. The sari has women performing 'pushpabhishekam' to 'poornakumbham' besides figures of 17 Veena instruments all woven in golden fibre. The sari also has 35 navaratnas and 350 pearls stitched on to it, apart from 10 flowers and 17 birds made with ten tolas of silver and Thulasi beads. The "pallu" has a 'kalyanamantapam' woven with gold fibre. The 'Brahmakamalam' saree has 18 white Brahmakamalam flowers that turn into light green when exposed to sunlight while the Gandhamsaree has peacocks with sandalwood paste, peacock feathers and butterflies going into the making of it. He is contemplating to weave an 'antibiotic' sari with Thulasi beads that would ward off harmful bacteria and safeguard the health of those wearing it. He mastered the art of weaving from his father and took up designing for value-addition as he believed in "doing things



differently". The designer opines that without creativity there is no life, therefore he is designing sarees in different concepts and though he faced failures in the beginning gradually he became successful. His only aim is to bring international fame to Dharmavaram sarees.

Designers Mr. Rajesekhar and Mr. Venkatesh

Nowadays keeping the demand in mind; new design patterns have also been introduced. Mr. Rajesekhar and Mr. Venkatesh are inimitable designers in creating mementoes with silk and zari engraving the photographs of politicians such as late Dr. N.T.RamaRao, former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh and Sri Nara Chandrababu Naidu Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh on the Dharmavaram silk cloth and images of God and Goddesses. This new experiment is different from routine where the raised design is woven with zari on the heavy, coloured silk fabric. The warp as well as weft threads are coupled into a complicated pattern and while weaving the



MEMENTOES WITH SILK AND ZARI DESIGNED BY MR.RAJASHEKAR AND MR.VENKATESH

craftsmanship is intersect perfectly to produce the set pattern of Lord Ganesha, Lord Saibaba and Goddess Lakshmi etc. The technique of creating these designs is tedious and beautiful subdued prints are mercerized on the fabric; which were designed by Sri Rajesekhar and Sri Venkatesh of Dharmavaram. These experiments are on hand-weaving and the patterns are taken from temples. These silk studded mementoes fare really well in the market and financially viable for the artisan. In addition the duo has also designed unique silk sarees such as sandalwood saree, a number of small flowers like pieces are carved out of sandalwood and attached onto the motifs drawn and original peacock feather studded silk sarees.

Designer Anwar Basha

Twenty-six year old Anwar Basha, another weaver cum designer, designed unique RakshaBhandhansaree on the eve of Rakhi celebrations. This unique model saree portrayed the importance of Brother and Sister Relationship. This saree stood out versatile in the market. He also had woven a silk saree that emanates fragrance of pure sandalwood. More than 2,000 specially designed sandalwood beads have been stitched along the border and embroidery work all over the saree. Any woman who wears it will spread the fragrance up to a distance of 10 metres, thereby naturally catching the attraction of the people around her. And the fragrance continues to remain for more than a year, even after several washes", Anwar said. It cost Rs.

28,000 for Anwar to make the saree and was sold for Rs35,000. Anwar has earlier designed and sold a saree made with 1200 colours to Priyanka Gandhi, daughter of UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, for Rs. 35,000/-. Another Master piece designed by Anwar Bashais dark green coloured saree was made of pure silk yarn, with intricate embroidery studded with red and white semi-precious stones.

The level of artistry and intricacy achieved in the handloom fabrics is unparalleled and certain weaves/designs are still beyond the scope of modern machines. Recognizing the need of protecting our cultural heritage and traditional skills of handloom weaving and for protecting the sector from competition from the power loom and mill sectors, Government of India decided



ANWAR BASHA WITH HIS DESIGNER SAREE

in 1956 to set up the Design Centres. The activities of the Design Centres were later expanded to cover other aspect of development of Handlooms. These Centres were re-designated as Weavers Service Centres. These Centres have been helping the handloom weavers in various aspects such as: Design Development, Design Adoption, Design Dissemination, Product Development, Skill Development, Technical inputs in the form of research in looms, dyeing techniques and innovations in appliances and accessories used by the weavers. Over a period of time, the Weavers' Service Centres have collected samples of various designs and weaving techniques in order to preserve this heritage for posterity. Designers of Dharmavaram creating miracles in the world of designing and these designers assisting the designers of other Handloom clusters in production of innovative and unique designers handloom fabrics.

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