



# **“Benarasi Saree” The Lost Glory of Benaroshpolli and Its Revival for Cultural & Design for Bangladesh**

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## **Abstract**

The present paper looks into the situational analysis of Benarasi saree of Bangladesh. The past of Benarasi saree was gorgeous & rich full, but present situation is fall into big trouble. Recently it has attracted large number of consumer in our country as result of campaigning of the fashion designers. Traditional based fashion clothing, which proved that the Benarasi still has great appeal people in the local and international market. Among them Benarasi is one which is associated for bridal costume, especially for south Asia Region. Our neighboring country is exporting Benarasi fabric & Product. Bangladesh has also that type of potentiality to export Benarasi product, especially share, by transforming it a new look of fashion product can be made which will be a globalized costume.

**Keywords:** Benarasi Saree, Benaroshpolli, Culture, Bangladesh.

## **Introduction**

Bangladesh has a rich and ancient tradition of fabric-based cottage industry. Benarasi Palli and its famous Benarasi Saree is one of the most ancient traditions of Bangladesh. This industry has been bringing name and fame for our country for a very long time. This tradition has mainly come from Benaras in India. The weavers of Mirpur Benarasi Palli migrated from Benaras, India. There are also some Bangladeshi weavers and most of the traders are Bangladeshi. Benarasi is mainly associated for bridal costume. Presently this industry does not get proper attention but it has a great demand in local and international market. Our neighboring country export Benarasi products and we have the potential to export it too. Though the business of Benarasi Saree is very profitable, life-style of the weavers does not represent it. Bangladesh has a rich and ancient tradition of fabric –based fashion industry. Muslin, Jamdani, Benarasi, khadi these are few of highly acclaimed handloom industry in this country. This industry has been bringing name and fame for our country for a very long time. Evidence in favor of benarasi showing that last few decades this benarasi fabric faced a declination this country. This industry has been bringing name and fame for our country for a very long time. Evidence in favor of



benarasi showing that last few decades this benarasi fabric faced a declination of its significant glory for the change came to the tradition in our fashion culture. We report on a recent study describing the way to revive the lost glory of the benarasi saree- a cultural heritage of Bangladesh. The gorgeous and delicate piece of cloth, which is known as Benarasi is mostly used for bridal costumes. Though the benarasi industry has a great demand in both local and international market but it is not getting proper attention of government as well as other fashion related authority. A series of problems are threatening the existence of the Benarasi. Deterioration in quality, cheap materials use, unwillingness of many craftsmen to take over the job which is inherited from their forefathers.

### **Objective of the study**

The objective of the paper is to know about our rich traditional history of Benarasi saree, Design process of Benarasi saree, new look concepts of Benarasi saree, its present status and upcoming future. The article is basically based on qualitative method. This paper focused the facts and information already available and analyzed these to make an easy evaluation. Information of this study has been collected from reports of fashion industry, history of Benarasi, handloom industry, reports of consumer of Bangladesh.

### **Methodology**

To conduct the research in an effective manner and to uphold the standard of the quality of the research, scientific research methods have been used and the methodology comprises of qualitative and quantitative approaches. At the same time, focused was emphasized on the literature to have crystal view on the previous perceptions of the scholars and most of the data was collected and reviewed from library. Primary and secondary sources both types of data were used while internet helped a lot in the process of data collection and verification. In the process of the research, focus group discussions were conducted. Non-participant observations were made by the academics of the concerned research. To have primary and authentic data on the future of the Benarasi in Bangladesh, survey was conducted, in several segmentation of the target population which comprise of entrepreneurs, designers, weavers, auxiliary works and data was collected on both male and female perception. According to the plan of both qualitative and quantitative data collection and research execution approaches, the process classified in two major types named focused group study and questionnaire development and response collection. Qualitative data collected from focused group discussions and close review upon them. Quantitative data collected by questionnaire design which follow a sequential form of questions. From the findings it is seen that focused group was more respondent and the data was easier to collect. As the findings of focused group reveals about the accommodation facility of the population along with their perception about the industry, inherent passion for their traditional career and miseries of their life and tension of competition with the global globalization and industrialization. Apart from the focused group study, questionnaire were prepared in aim of data collection while notable population respondent to it.



## **Literature Review**

Historical evidence shows that the Banaras weaving industry reached its peak during the Mughal period, due to the patronage of mighty Mughal emperors such as Akbar. Benarasi saree and its history dates back to the Mughal rule in the 16th century. Contemporary paintings that wholesaled personalized motifs were introduced to the public, but were slightly modified for the Indian taste. More emphasis was given to floral designs, and the ancient animal and bird motifs were given up for good. During Emperor Shahjahan's time, Varanasi continued to be famous for the production of cummer bonds, turbans and garments. Women's garments such as odhinis or dupattas (veils or long scarves) were the specialty of Varanasi up to the 18th and 19th centuries. Banarasi saris are saris made in Varanasi, a city which is also called "Benares." These saris are historically considered to be among the finest saris in India and are known for their gold and silver brocade or zari, fine silk and opulent embroidery, and being highly sought after. These saris are made of finely woven silk and are decorated with intricate design, and because of these engravings, these saris are relatively heavy. Their special characteristics are Mughal inspired designs such as intricate intertwining floral and foliate motifs, kalga and bel, a string of upright leaves called jhallar at the outer, edge of border is a characteristic of these sarees. In Bangladesh the migrated Muslim from Banaras, started making Benarasi saree since 1947 in old Dhaka. After independence, a considerable number of non-Bengali citizens in Bangladesh, known as the Biharis wanted to go to Pakistan but could not do so due to complication in the repatriation process, these people are called "Stranded Pakistanis" or the Bihari Community. Although they are residing in "refugee camps," the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) does not recognize them as refugees. Therefore, they are deprived of the benefits and opportunities extended to the refugees by the UNHCR. The ethnic identity Bihari has a derogatory meaning in Bangladesh. Since the Biharis are believed to have opposed the independence of Bangladesh, and have collaborated with the Pakistani government in 1971 in the killing of Bengalis, they had to bear enormous social, economic and political consequences immediately after the independence of Bangladesh. Benarasi saree, whose history dates back to the Mughal rule in the 16th century, has its origin in Banaras, a northern city of India. In Bangladesh the migrated Muslim from Banaras, started making Benarasi saree at Mohammadpur and Mirpur in Dhaka. Benarasi weave in Bangladesh Becharamdeori, Kazialauddin road, Nimtoli, Nilkhaet, Tikatuly, Doagonga, Gendaria, Nobabpur, Tekerhat, Hossen market was the main Place. That time Sultanabad of Mirpur, Amanot, Md. Hafiz in becharamdeori, Golamrasul, Raza Benarasi, Maznumia, Kallumia, Rasidmia, Harunsheth was the famous weavers, as well as designers of Benarasi saree. Benarasi saree always weave n silk yarn. It ornamented by gold and silver thread. Price of oldest Benarasi saree was Tk. 60 to 155. Migrated Muslim from Banaras started making Benarasi saree at Mohammadpur and Mirpur in Dhaka. Benarasi in Bangladesh hold tradition elegance especially for the women. A wardrobe of a woman without a Benarasi could not be thought. Any matrimony without Benarasi saree used to be impossible previously but days are changing now and fabricated and industrialization engulfing the future of the Benarasi. Bride used to look gorgeous with the stunned classic beauty of Benarasi. It all



started with the reign of Mughal when women leaned to the exquisiteness of Benarasi used to be treated as aristocracy in the society. Benarasi of Bangladesh has gone through several difficulties and manual looming process used to seen in the process. With the passage of time, the market of Benarsi has expanded but not up to mark. The textile industry of Bangladesh in this regards show several ups and downs and from Muslin to Benarasi it revolve and revived. In the teeth of the colonial oppression, people didn't leave their passion and profession in the face hardship. With the end of colonial British rule, the industry revived and upon the partition of India Pakistan, many people migrated to Dhaka and placed themselves in Mirpur where they reinvented the industry. Previously in the Mughal period the raw-materials of Benarasi collected from China but at present the demand of raw material which is silk is collected from within the country and Rajshahi Supplies those. The way if designing and motifs of the Benarasi Saree is quite different from other industries as practical learning and practicing hands are lauded more than the academic qualification. It takes around fifteen days to six months to loom a piece while price ranges according to the quality of the product and texture within it. Golden brocade is applied on the surface of the Saree to catch attention. Distribution system of Benarasi in Bangladesh was always unfavorable to customer. Initially people had to collect Saree from the direct manufacturer. Later, in 1995, an exhibition center was opened and that kept expanding which now counted around hundred fifty. The Benarasi saree, whose history dates back to the Mughal rule in the 16th century, has its origin in Benaras, a northern Indian city. In Bangladesh, Muslims who migrated from Benaras, started making Benarasi sarees in Mohammadpur and Mirpur in Dhaka since 1950. The tradition of making these sarees passed on from one generation to the other. This art was revived soon after the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 when about 370 non-Bengali families from Benaras, presently Varanasi, came to Bangladesh. Among them, about 200 families settled in the Mirpur area of Dhaka and started making Benarasi sarees.

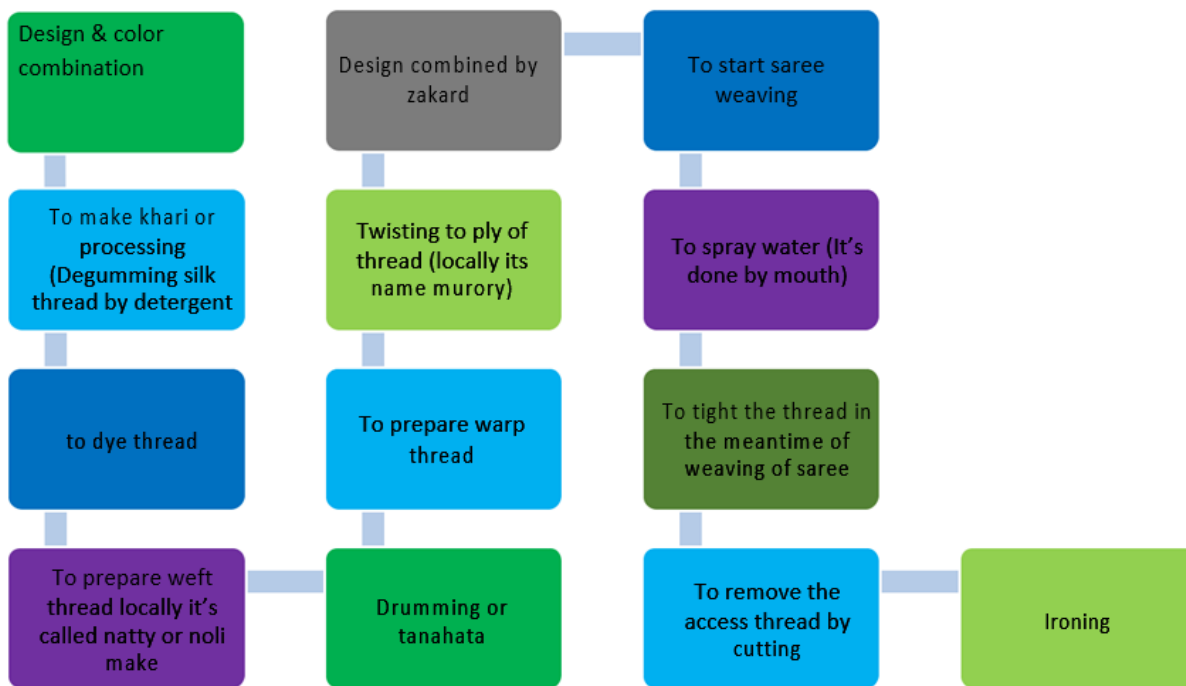
### **Limitation of the Study**

Though Banarasi is one of the oldest and reputed traditional textiles in Bangladesh, the people who are engaged with this industry are not in a comfortable position at all. As a part of series coverage on traditional textiles this article is the second one after „Banarasi, the artisan’s doomsday“. A thorough investigation reveals that the struggle of the most famous traditional textiles in Bangladesh is mostly the result of lacking of backward linkage, not giving proper wages to the artisans, not using new technology, less variation in design, Indian influence in this market etc In the process of execution of the research, it was hindered by some obstacles and those have limited the scope of research in some dimensions. Limitations of this study comprise of the followings. Reluctance of the population to the response of the questions was one of the major limitations. Most of the time, they tried to ignore the facts and mostly thought it is dodgy to deliver data to the research team on the internal condition of the industry. Today there are mainly four varieties of Banarasi saree available. Those are Pure Silk (Katan); Shattir, Organza which is fine kora with zari and silk works and finally the Georgette . If you go to varanasi you would find some 10,000 shops selling Banarai Saree which is more a cottage industry for several



million people around Varanasi which includes Gorakpur and Azamgarh as well. And sometimes they refuse to answer some questions which they treat as sensitive to the industry and even to the professional life. Among the focus group study, it was hard to get their time as most of the time they used to routine job. Another limitation of the study is the refusal of the workers to talk to the researcher, whom they treat as stranger and they find them no fruitful as their previous experience tells. Most of them refused to interview because they thought this research doesn't impact on their life at all. Scarcity of data, mostly statistical, numeric and structured hinders the findings of the research as it impacts a lot in the final assessment and drawing conclusion. Absence of structured regulatory body made it belated to collect data. As a part of limitation, illiteracy became one of the vital one here. Most of the worker apart from some, very few workers, rests are almost illiterate and bringing out data and making them understand the real question, asking the frequent question and technical terms limited the outcome.

### Overview Process of Benarasi



Manufacturing process of Benarasi Saree is done in three stages:

- Preparatory Process
- Weaving process
- Finishing Process

These steps also have some other steps to done the making of the Saree.

Wooden made loom in which Benarasi weave its name pit loom. Locally its name KHADDI.



Different parts of this loom are:

1. Norod or turia( **to wind thread**)
2. Hatta or tirochi (**where set up reed**)
3. Mala.
4. Siri.
5. Jacquard (Combination of hook,patta, dangi, Design panch card)
6. Zala.
7. Pagia
8. Naka (zala,pagia&zala are used for Design in Saree)
9. Khutait is another name is khaddi. Four khaddi in four corner in where set norod
10. Stand of pagia.
11. Gulla or bou(combination of 8sticks)
12. Paosarerdanda.
13. Lappa.
14. Makri
15. Paddle.
16. Matty.
17. Dharky
18. Makku.
19. Tota or bobbin.
20. Nori.
21. Noli
22. Tiri.
23. Phokhnari or palok.
24. Giridanakorfally.
25. Paodani.
26. Chimta.
27. Katia.
28. Dasty
29. Sirky.

**Preparatory Process (Making *Naksha-Patta*): by Banaroshi designer/ design technologist**

At the weaving loom three people work one weaves, one dye and other work at the Revolving to create skeins (lacchis). At this juncture another important process is initiated. This is designing the motifs. There are several traditional artists available who might not be educated but can create wonder designs for Saree. To create ‘Naksha-Patta’ the artist first draws on the graph paper with color concepts. Now those designs are of varying kind .But most universal kinds are Caixg (Kalka), Butane flower and foliage. This became the functional aspect of art which is not far off from the people life cycle. In modern days one can see geometrical designs have come in, but it lacks appreciation. As traditional folk design remains the base appeal for Banarasi Saree.





Once design is selected then small punch cards are created those are guides for particular which color thread has to pass through which card at wastage. For one small design one requires to create hundreds of perforated cards to implement the concept. Once those perforated cards are prepared those are knitted with different threads and colors on the loom and according to design those are paddled in a systematic manner that the main weaving picks up right color and pattern to create the design and weaves well.

### **Finishing Process**

**Karchupi:** Karchupi is a special kind of intricate thread work, which is used to make dress materials more attractive. It is the process of embedding puthi, Zari and other decorative materials by means of a special needle as sharp as fish hooks.

**Cutting:** Cutting is a finishing process which is carried out to make cutwork saree. This type of saree prepared on plain ground texture after removing of the floated thread which are not design (Woven) during the weaving process which provide good transparent look.

### **Design, & Color Trend of Benarasi motif and Pattern & Texture Used in Benarasi**

Motifs of Banaras carry a long history and with the passage of time it changed its motifs. Among the motifs floral, vegetables, animals and bird depictions are notable in form of marigold, jasmine, mango, elephant, parrot, peacock and horses. A very ancient form named „Tasvir“ used to draw several mythological characters. Geometric designs, scroll works can be traced in the motif of Benarasi and leave pattern were introduced in Shahjahan period. Delicate trunk of the plants was replaced by the adoption of exuberant foliage that radiated both the sides and the blossoms continued to be tiny. Later in the 19th century, a number of new patterns were found which added as button-roses, flower baskets, bouquets with boa or ribbons, butterflies and pets were substituted for old motifs to suit the English taste and sensibility. Designing and color of Benarasi depends on the intention of the weaver and designer while several combinations rely largely on the gorgeousness. Major colors of Benarasi counts, golden jori, red, yellow, Mejjenda, purple. Weight of the Saree relatively high compared to Jamdani. Design is painted on the card which is kept in front of the weaver which most of them are monotonous and a number of color combinations are used.

The process of making Banarasi saree with the colorful dying of the Silk. Those silks are then sold by weight. And power loom people take them to weave the basic texture of the saree. In the weaving warp they create the base which runs into 24 to 26 mts. And there are around 56 00 thread wires with 45 inch width. Two person tie a rope in their waist to hold the form and other is grounded. This is designing the motifs. There are several traditional artists available in Varanasi who might not be educated but can create wonder designs for Saree. Patterns of Benarasi compiles complicated floral pattern of „beil“ - a running flora a „buti“ - single - a single flower or figure, a „buta“ (a large buti) and their different possible combinations. These were also known as „phulwar“. Anchal of Benarasi patterned with 'Buta' or a group of 'butia', shrubs or



florets. But later with the influence of west, ‘sprigs’ or ‘flowers’ that featured all over the compartment. Zaal pattern include ‘buti’ in a booth woven by an intricate network of geometrical patterns. Design of forest and wooden texture are used. During the British era, the Victorians often demanded geometric patterns. Today, while Islamic motifs remain popular, one can find a variety of Hindu Gods embossed on to cushion covers, wall-hangings and even sarees.

### **Pattern & Design to focus Trend for Banarasi**

To create ‘Naksha Patta’ the artist first draw on the graph paper with colour concepts. Now those designs are of varying kind. This Mughul inspired designs made of intricate intertwining floral and foliate motifs, *kalga* and *bel*, a string of upright leaves called *jhallar* at the outer, edge of border is a characteristic of these sarees. Other features are gold work, compact weaving, figures with small details, metallic visual effects, *pallus*, *jal* (a net like pattern), and *mina* work. Banarasi products fall under four classes (23–26), namely silk brocades, textile goods, silk saree, dress material and silk embroidery. There are four main varieties of Banarasi saree, which includes pure silk (Katan), Organza (Kora) with zari and silk; georgette, and Shattir, and according to design process, they are divided into categories like, Jangla, Tanchoi, Vaskat, cutwork. Tissue and Betide. Prime Banarasi comprises brocade Katan, Pyramid Katan, Mirpuri Reshimi Katan, prince Katan, Opera Katan, Synthetic Katan and broader category includes Muslin Banarasi, Jute Katan, Dulhan katan, Orgendi Katan, Chunri Katan, Fulkoli katan, Millennium Katan.

These sarees are the face of Banaras and they give our Banarasi culture an identity. Any wedding preparation in India begins by gifting a Banarasi saree which is made from pure silk threads in both warp and weft that are completely hand woven. Upon reviving and recreating the industry, team has to be focused on the strategic planning and demand creation of the product. A minutiae discussion has to be conducted on the long term planning and future of the loom industry. The saree designs are first created on paper: the pattern is literally punched into paper, making it look much like Braille. A separate pattern guides each row and hundreds of such patterns, (*naksha patras*), are created for a single saree. It is essentially these *patras* that give you everything from floral motifs to *jali* work and more. Based on these *patras* the dyed silk and zari threads are wound into the handloom, to create the desired patterns. It will not be a hard part for Bangladesh as Banarasi is a household name and every woman of the country is acquainted with this dress. So, what is necessary is letting them know about the presence of the product in more convenient way and in customized manner. Wedding can be a great source of market of the Banarasi. Diversification of the Banarasi can be used to create demand.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

Banarasi saree are the hallmarks of the today's modern fashion world. It is a must wear attire for women who want to look elegant and yet sober and sophisticated. It is popular not only in Bengali weddings but rather these types of sarees are desired by every woman regardless of social status or religion. Banarasi Saree weaving industry in is deteriorating rapidly and is losing





its feet. To regain the lost glorious position the weaving industry needs transformation in all spheres. Considering the problems, some remedial measures have been suggested which would be beneficial for the Benarasi Saree and the industry in general, which are based on Designers perception of the problems and resultant solutions. According to Bangladesh Handloom Board, In 1995, Tk 24.42 crore was invested in Mirpur Banarasi Palli under a project. The project's revised cost was fixed at Tk 29.47 crore. In June 2002, Tk 18.81 crore was shown as expense for price of housing and others. Finally, the project was not implemented due to a stay order of High Court and the weavers of Banarasi Palli were not rehabilitated. Facing tough times the weavers of Banarasi Palli are being bound to leave the industry

- Banarasi sarees are getting increasingly popular and becoming every woman's first choice. There are various websites on the Internet dealing with the shipping of these Banarasi saree all around the globe.
- There are two reasons to it; one that they get made here and the other is that the authentic traditional designs that mark these sarees are called Banarasi.
- Professional Designers should be come to develop design concept, color concept, and trendy design to the weavers.
- With all the mechanizations and technologies, Varanasi is still relying on hand weaving to make these Banarasi saree which make them all the more special and outstanding.
- Exhibition, fair, should be organized, to promote our traditional heritage of Banarasi saree.
- Different marketing policy like ecommerce, digital marketing, offering to customer may effect the situations
- This generation are interested in the traditional value of Banarasi but the less variety of product is demotivated them to wear it.
- Combination of Antique design & trendy design give fusion to develop design of Banarasi which is new version of Banarasi saree.
- Increase use of silk & related material to revive the tradition
- Incentive & different police should be taken for weavers of Banarasi to back them loom.
- Categorized the Banarasi saree according to Characterized the customer.
- Decreasing demand of Banarasi- Open market policy pursued by the government has opened the country to Indian sarees. Indian sarees for their cheaper prices, varied designs and availability usually lure more local buyers.
- Lack of variation in design- Customers taste is changing day by day. Their preference for foreign products is also a cause of declining the sale of Banarasi saree.
- High cost of raw materials-Most of these raw materials are imported and they have to pay high import tax and duties.



## Conclusions

Nowadays, banarasi sarees are getting increasingly popular and becoming every woman's first choice. There are various websites on the Internet dealing with the shipping of these Banarasi saree all around the globe. Banarasi is the aristocrat part of the Bangladesh's traditional clothing sector which at present passing a hard time but with the new trends of fashion the demand is increasing day by day to fashion conscious people so it can be said that in upcoming days Banarasi industry has a bright future. Now government is also taking some initiatives to raise the industry. Already in Bhashantek there is a registered area for another Banarasi palli and also near the Padma Bridge about 130-150 acres land is proposed for rehabilitating the workers and it may be considered as an important measure to extend this traditional industry. They are highly in demand given their fashionable and exotic weavings by the excellent designers who work with zari, emeralds and motifs. The rapidly declining status of Banarasi silk saree and the degrading various conditions of the weavers is a matter of great concern today. The recent trends in the industry's downfall, marred with stiff competition, unethical outlook towards this age old culture, not only brings in social problems but pushes the pride product of the city on the track of virtual extinction. Due to shrinking opportunities in this Fashion designer of Bangladesh may be save our Traditional saree. Banarasi saree forms an integral part of Bangladesh cultural contours. Through this paper a small attempt has been made to urge to all the readers to revive, preserve and promote this exquisite traditional art form by doing their bit. And this may, hopefully, provide worth, dignity, creative fulfillment and a rightful place in society to weavers of this astonishing attire.

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