

PROJECTS / PROCESSES

**CONSTRUCTING
TRADITIONS: THE
JAMDANI WITHIN
EXHIBITION PRACTICE
OF HANDICRAFTS**

ABEER GUPTA

PROJECTS / PROCESSES VOLUME I

Series Editor: Senjuti Mukherjee

**Constructing Traditions: The Jamdani within
Exhibition Practice of Handicrafts**

Abeer Gupta





Installation view of "Weftscapes: Jamdani Across New Horizons" at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019.
Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.



Weftscapes
Jamdani Across New
Horizons

Curated by Pramod Kumar KG

Venue Adil Shah Palace



Installation view of "Weftscapes: Jamdani Across New Horizons" at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019.
Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.



Curatorial Note

Curatorial By *Pramod Kumar KG*

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Exhibition Design *Vertex Inc.*

Weftscapes examines a fresh approach to the creation and making of *jamdani* fabrics, both in its weaving, choice of raw materials, colour, patterns, designs and the end product – a finished garment. Multiple intertwined yet disparate stories coming together in this contemporary initiative.

The versatility of the *jamdani* weaving technique involves the use of a supplementary weft technique. The idea here is to explore the various possibilities of introducing different yarns, materials, and constructions into the weave. The ingenuity of Indian handlooms and the dexterity of its weavers allows for a unique experiment where diverse materials and objects are strung and woven in by hand through the fabric.

Bengal's history is strewn with references to the Indigo trade and its impact on her people. An important aspect of *jamdani* was the use of the colour indigo which also lent its name to several lengths of fabric with the iconic *Nilambari* sari becoming popular across the subcontinent. This project has exclusively used the Indigo palette with its non-traditional yarns being dyed in organic Indigo vats;

namely in a banana vat, dates vat, and the henna vat. The varied materials used and the ways the colour was imparted has allowed for a kaleidoscope of indigo shades.

Traditionally the hand looms of Bengal wove saris which were a finished textile, alongside other kinds of cloth. This project attempts at creating a finished garment on the loom without the need for cutting and or sewing. Towards the same, two shuttles have been used in the cut shuttle technique to create a selvage along the centre giving shape to the garment. The fringes left loose can be tied to close the sleeves with the finished piece worn like a mantle or a robe.

Constructing Traditions: The Jamdani within Exhibition Practice of Handicrafts

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Handcrafted textiles from the Indian subcontinent have historically been part of global circulation through the Indian Ocean trade routes since the first millennium CE and overland to Rome since the first century BCE. Even so, contemporary imagination often traces them from the international trade shows of the nineteenth century—such as *The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* (1851) held in London—which were displays of Great Britain’s industrial might and colonial produce, contextualising the latter within categories such as decorative arts and oriental crafts. These categories informed not only collections and curatorial practices in colonial museums but continue to define consumer behaviour today. Between the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, these exhibitions in London and Paris fired industrial production and populated industrial design with a range of motifs and patterns that renewed circulation and cemented its consumption in global markets.

Handmade textiles from the subcontinent, however, continued to be represented¹ as refined and complex artefacts of cultural production along with craftsmen or their images, as part of a tableaux display of an exotic place of making, objectified along with the artefacts and often used to authenticate them. Such constructions allow us to question the understanding of an unchanging tradition of a craft practice, such as *jamdani*.

In post-independence India this story grows through a renewed focus on developing the handloom and handicraft sector that ushered in advances in the revival of textile production, introduction of design

interventions and new modes of circulation at home. The National Institute of Design² under the Ministry of Commerce, and Industry and Weavers' Service Centres by the Ministry of Textiles, were set up along with state handloom emporiums under the National Handloom Development Corporation (Ltd.). Several exhibitions such as the *Textiles and Ornamental Arts in India* (1955) curated by Pupul Jayakar at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York³; *Vishwakarma – Master Weavers* (1981-91) in seven editions as part of the Festivals of India in Britain, curated by Martand Singh; and *The Golden Eye: An International Tribute to the Artisans of India* (1985-86), curated by Rajeev Sethi at the Cooper-Hewitt, New York (the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design⁴) worked closely with the revival of artisanal practices to reclaim a national heritage and recontextualise these artefacts as traditional Indian products.

Recent years have seen newer perspectives emerge. Projects such as *The Fabric of India* (2015-16) at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; *Fracture* (2015) at the Devi Art Foundation, Gurugram; and *Imprints of Culture: Block Printed Textiles of India* (2016) at Bonington Gallery of Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham displayed contemporary textiles alongside historical artefacts—looking at ways in which regional skills of production continually adapt to new materials, innovations in design and new markets. They further map the journey of handcrafted Indian textiles into contemporary global fashion and as artefacts of contemporary art. In early 2019, a curtain raiser for the Arvind Indigo Museum at the Kasturbhai Lalbhai Museum in Ahmedabad produced a range of philosophical and artistic reflections on the idea of indigo. It explored indigo through a range of installations using various materials beyond textiles, including cement, brick, steel, paper, canvas, aluminum, sandstone, and wood, created by both handcrafted and industrial processes. These exhibitions explore a transcultural hybridity, locating the artefacts within contemporary reactions to globalisation.⁵ However, colonialist and nationalist narratives continue to inform curatorial frameworks, and contemporary practices around craft are exploring truisms of tradition and innovation. It is in this landscape that *Weftscapes* -

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Jamdani across New Horizons offers an opportunity to interrogate and unpack ideas with respect to the contemporaneity of *jamdani* textiles.

Jamdani textile has appeared in both national and international exhibitions as exceptional individual pieces from the mid-nineteenth century. A significant piece from Dhaka appeared in *The Great Exhibition* in 1851⁶, while the Calcutta International Exhibition, 1883-84⁷ and the Delhi exhibition of 1902-03⁸ showcased the classical form of *jamdani*, defining the traditional notion of brocading on muslin, enlisting it within contemporary notions of luxury textiles. Audiences since have been enchanted by the brocaded white muslin with white, black or red supplementary wefts for patterning and often dyed in indigo. The *Textile and Ornamental Arts exhibition* at MoMA (1955) showcased a cotton tissue sari woven in brown, red, and gold (*zari*⁹) on cream-coloured ground from the early twentieth century Dhaka, (belonging to the collection of the Calico Museum of Textiles in Ahmedabad) and a white figured muslin made in Dhaka in the nineteenth century (from the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London) of the same lineage.

Vishwakarma – Master Weavers curated by Martand Singh part of a revival of traditional Indian textiles between 1981 and 1991 in Britain displayed *jamdani* textiles from across India. A selection of the pieces from these exhibitions which were displayed at the National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum, New Delhi as part of *A Search in Five Directions* (2018), included a *Kodalikaruppur* sari from Weaver's Service Centre, Chennai and Hyderabad, a *Neelambari*¹⁰ (dyed in indigo) and an Awadh *jamdani* sari from the Weaver's Service Centre, Varanasi and a *jamdani* tapestry from the Weaver's Service Centre, Vijayawada¹¹, currently in their collection.

More recently, *Fracture* in 2015 exhibited a *jamdani* sari woven with silicone threads using one of the oldest free-hand techniques of brocading by Rimzim Dadu¹², thereby exploring a radically different material yet achieving the delicate sheer like texture of muslin. *Fabric of India* in 2016 showcased a *jamdani* dress¹³ with machine embroidery over a shirt by Aneeth Arora exploring contemporary global

ensembles. In 2015, the exhibition *My East is Your West*, a collateral event of the 56th Venice Biennale, showed at the Palazzo Benzon. It was curated by Shilpa Gupta from Mumbai and Rashid Rana from Lahore and was “born out of the desire to reposition the complex climate of historical relations between South Asia’s nation-states and presented the region as a shared cultural cartography”.¹⁴ Gupta’s *Untitled* (2014–2015) explored the fluidity of the Indo-Bangladesh border, locating the *Dhakai jamdani* sari as an artefact of economic exchange.¹⁵ In *Patterns of a Tactile Score*, (2017–18) at Exhibit 320, New Delhi, with works such as *Manifesto*, (2017–2018) produced in the medium of *jamdani* (cotton), *silver yarn and hand embroidery*, Yasmin Jahan Nupur blended her personal narrative and cultural memory evoking ideas of identity and gender.¹⁶

In December 2017, the Delhi Craft Council presented an exhibition of vintage and contemporary *jamdani* weaves at Bikaner House in New Delhi.¹⁷ It recalled the romance and mythical splendour associated with the textile and positioned it within contemporary times. In 2018, an exhibition jointly organised by the Bangladesh National Museum and the country’s Small and Cottage Industries Corporation showcased some of the finest contemporary weaves from across the country, followed by the *Jamdani Festival*¹⁸ in 2019 at Bengal Shilpalay, Dhaka. Besides seminars and workshops on current production and circulation trends, these exhibitions led to inquiries and renegotiation of the tradition as part of a larger pantheon of Islamic art and cultural interactions in the region.¹⁹

Weftscapes appears on this horizon and proposes a fresh inquiry around the *jamdani* as a contemporary textile. It does so by challenging the core of its identity as a brocaded muslin fabric.²⁰ The artefacts in the exhibition are created by retaining the essential technique of *jamdani* weaving, but radically transforming the surface and texture of the textile with the introduction of an innovative range of materials as part of the signature supplementary weft of *jamdani* and adding a range of processes to support these materials. *Weftscapes* thus questions the evolution of weaving and its proliferation into yet unexplored dimensions rather than being ossified by a set of weaving structures and patterns.



Installation view of "Weftscapes: Jamdani Across New Horizons" at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019.
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Through the twenty-four artefacts that come straight off the loom, *Weftscapes* challenges the imaginations and aesthetics along with the functions of *jamdani*. The artefacts consciously move beyond the usual reorganisation of patterns seen in standard design interventions into a range of new possibilities. These robe-like garments are entirely woven on the handloom like the sari and dyed in various shades of indigo. The exhibition comes across as an exquisite display of a deep and sustained interaction between the designer and the weavers. Moreover, a perceptive dialogue between the textile designer and art-curator is starkly visible. The exhibition poses further inquiries around identity and agency of labour—for instance, the use of indigo is flagged beyond a formal exploration pointing to the complex history of labour around the production of indigo and a note on Geographic Indication (GI) marks the regional predicament of *jamdani* production divided by a border in Bengal.

Rumi and Bappaditya Biswas, the designers of *Weftscapes*, have worked with the *jamdani* weaving communities of West Bengal for nearly two decades, focusing on making artisans self-sufficient through constant efforts in skill development and employment. Trained in textile design from NIFT Kolkata, they successfully led a design-entrepreneurial revival of textiles—through the brand Byloom. Their first national exhibition at the Delhi Crafts Council, 2005, was immediately sold out and within a short decade, they had developed a unique design language, involving a fresh take on colours corresponding to seasons and introducing sequins and pompoms with the extra weft of the *jamdani*. These sustained explorations have already made an impact on production networks beyond Byloom's repertoire.

Conversations between the designers and the curator predates the exhibition by a couple of years, which allowed for the curatorial themes to develop gradually. Curator and archivist Pramod Kumar KG, has an extensive experience of managing cultural resources and collections. Founder director of the Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing at Amer in Jaipur, he was, till recently, one of the Indian editors of the *Textiles Asia* journal. This curatorial intervention lifts the collections

on display into a space of subtle criticality. Pramod Kumar KG had recently curated a range of luxurious revival textiles by Rahul Jain, for the exhibition *Pra-Kashi: Silk, Gold & Silver from the City of Light* (2019) at the National Museum, New Delhi in collaboration with the Devi Art Foundation. Textiles recreated from the historical workshops of Varanasi were displayed alongside historical textiles, miniature paintings, jewellery, and decorative arts from the collection of the National Museum.

THE EXHIBITION

The introductory gallery includes a brief historical background, technique, and weaving structure of the fabric. A garment with the *Vishnu Pada* brocaded in silk and metallic yarn establishes the historical and traditional use of this technique. In this section, the garments are displayed against a dark blue background with offsets created with loose hanging threads, perhaps drawing attention to the yarn which is at the core of weaving. Another installation, using a nylon mesh, introduces the notion of the extra weft and the manner in which it is incorporated over the base fabric. At the centre of the first space are bobbins of threads dyed in indigo; the focus in the garments is, however, on the range of materials introduced as part of the supplementary weft.

Woven in a simple tabby weave, the *Vishnu Pada* lotus feet motif seen here are made of golden metallic and silk yarns. The extra silk weft is inserted by hand using the traditional extra weft technique of Bengal called *jamdani*. This particular garment is a unique part of the collection on display here as the motif is both traditional and contemporary at the same time. The *Vishnu Pada* motif also denotes the historic connection between weavers in Bengal and *Vaishnavism*.

The second gallery displays elements in a manner that allows viewers to engage with them as raw materials, adding a tactile element to the display. Another installation, in three layers of transparent acrylic, exemplifies the working of the warp, the weft, and the supplementary weft. In the same section, a set of videos provide insights into



Installation view of "Weftscapes: Jamdani Across New Horizons" at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.

the processes undertaken in the workshop and documents the interactions that have taken place between the designer and the artisans. These two sections make viewers ponder—in a mix of wonder and curiosity—over the diverse choice of materials and the possibilities of the form of the final products that these artefacts point towards.

A third gallery has a central installation that illustrates the processes of dyeing by recreating an indigo vat. The vat is surrounded by a metallic grid on three sides and different materials are made available for audiences to pattern over the grid—alluding to the manner in which the supplementary weft is used to pattern over the base fabric—as the indigo dye slowly seeps into a fabric suspended on the central vat. This space is marked by three text panels exploring the history and the chemical transformation followed by a poem on the wall. The panel on history is prefixed with the quote: *not a chest of indigo reached England without being stained in human blood.*²¹ The quotation alludes to the exploitative conditions of labourers in indigo plantations under which it was produced and traded in the colonial period and details of the Champaran Satyagraha led by M. K. Gandhi, 1917.²² The next panel clarifies the unique properties of the dye, its tryst with synthetic dyes during the twentieth century, and its revival and use by designers today; leading us to the final comment on it in the form of a short poem by P. Sainath:

*Blue, but not as in blue blood
Nor in primary colours too
Blue as in unrelieved sorrow
Touching the darkness in you*

Visitors are also introduced to the acquisition of the Geographic Indication²³ of *jamdani* by Bangladesh in 2016. GI, administered by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), ascribes such tags in the hope of empowering and protecting artisanal-produce that is bound by cultural geographies. However, this is seen by many as another complex mechanism to control markets and raises important questions such as: Are the origins and mandate of WIPO



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capable of dealing with complex postcolonial histories which have often fractured cultural practices? Can GI define the core and the multiple peripheries of a practice, especially when they exist across international borders?

The narrative of the *jamdani* has been transformed by the partition of Bengal in the mid-twentieth century. Other crafts of the subcontinent such as the complex practice of *Ajrakh* dyeing in Gujarat, *Phulkari* embroidery in Punjab and shawl weaving and embroidery in Kashmir, have also shared a similar fate. Like *jamdani*, they have battled industrial alternatives, while negotiating ideas of authenticity within their own kind through norms ratified by a foreign agency. This becomes a significant moment to reflect upon how a craft, or products linked to socio-cultural production divided at the birth of new nation states, negotiates a local national narrative and global markets.

Weaving embellished fine muslin is known to have existed in the Indian subcontinent from antiquity, however the term *jamdani*, and the patterns related to it emanate from the Mughal period. The special technique of weaving gained popularity in the erstwhile region of Awadh and along the riverine plains of Bengal into the Manipur valley, where it is known as the *Meitei Inaphi*. While the *Awadh jamdani* slowly faded away and was replaced by *chikankari* embroidery, Tanda and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh continued to weave *jamdani* in cottons and silk. In Andhra Pradesh, while clusters like Venkatagiri, Ponduru weave in fine cotton, Uppada²⁴ adapted *jamdani* embellishments on silk and the rare *Kodalikaruppur* sari in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, united it with local painting and printing traditions. However, the pristine and the most flamboyant forms emerged from the heart of what is Bangladesh today.

Jamdani is essentially tapestry-work on a loom²⁵ with the introduction of a supplementary weft to create a characteristic range of angular figurative and floral patterns. The skill developed in the riverine plains of the subcontinent due to the adequate humidity in the natural environment which is conducive for spinning fine cotton. The produce, delicate sheer textiles, gained popularity in a range of drapes

for both men and women—as it was suitable for the predominant heat and humidity of the region—before it came to be popular as a sari. *Jamdani* was popularised by the affluent urban women of Dhaka and Kolkata in the late nineteenth century, who, along with the *Baluchari* (figurative silk brocades), draped it for ceremonial occasions. The notion of tradition and authenticity of the *jamdani* is often built around this period. However, much has been recorded on the decline of *jamdani* weaving in the late colonial period as industrially produced textiles like chiffons and georgettes, from the turn of the century, supplemented the refined collections of these women. It should be noted that *jamdani* saris are produced today on either side of the border in Bengal in a wide range of refinement, in both the choice of material as well as execution of patterns, to cater to a wide socio-economic range of consumers.

In Kolkata, one grew up very close to textiles, particularly the *Dhakai* sari, recognised by the place of making rather than the technique. The sari is what women wore at important family gatherings, at annual cultural programmes rendering “Tagore Songs”, modernist poetry sessions, home-grown theatre productions and Hindustani classical music concerts. The *Dhakai*, blended ethereal beauty with a strong sense of loss, with the partition of Bengal in 1947. The problem of quick access to Dhaka, made it all the more esteemed. My earliest memory of one such sari is a photograph of my maternal grandparents at their wedding in Dhaka around 1936 and subsequently I have memories of my mother and aunts being moved by photographs of notable Bengali singers and actors draped in the *Dhakai* and waiting for an opportunity for a friend or relative to visit Dhaka. This was the time of annual book, craft and textile fairs at locations such as Kolkata’s *Maidan*, state emporiums set up in the pre-liberalisation mall *Dakshinapan* and famed south Kolkata boutiques *Meera Bose* and *Kundahaar*. It was marked by exhibitions organised by upper middle class, homegrown designers and entrepreneurs, especially around Bengali new year or the Durga Puja—curated and consumed by women who waited eagerly for a bag full of saris from Dhaka.

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TECHNIQUE AND INNOVATION

Weftscapes questions the identity of *jamdani* by showcasing innovations in techniques that also illuminate upon the historical possibilities of a new range of products. The fabled supplementary weft becomes the point of not just decorative patterning on simple, gauze-like, tabby, and mock leno weaves, but introduces elements that modify the use of the textile. The artefacts in the exhibition present materials such as beaten French bullion wire, copper wire, gold and silk yarn, plastic fish-line, along with metallic reflective surfaces to reinterpret the surface.

The extra weft inserted here is an electric copper wire twined around the warp with a long loose end left hanging on the surface of the cloth. The robe has been woven in the mock leno structure. The use of stiff copper wire gives the finished piece a form similar to others but here the garment gains a form even without being worn or draped. Loose ends may be sculpted to different shapes and directions to add a further dimension to the finished piece.

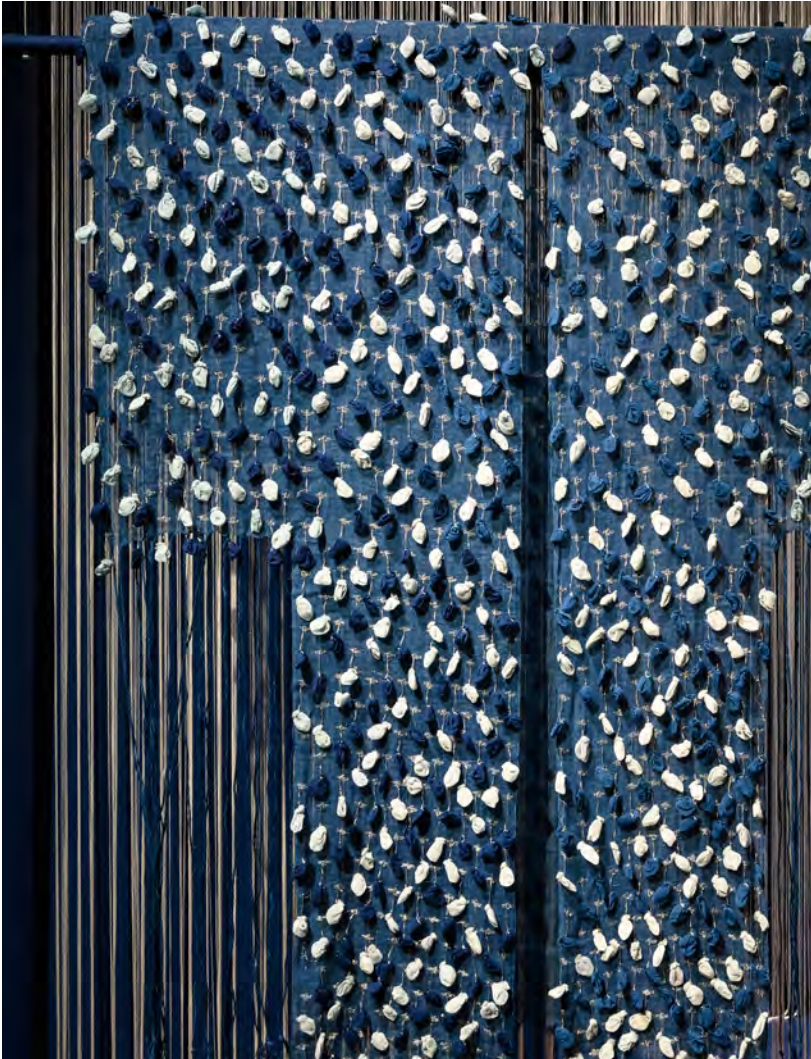
Further exploration on the dimensionality of the textile is visible with viscose yarn pulled into loops—a kind of piling prevalent in carpets or towels; other woven fabric such as silk organza was cut into leaves and pouches made of chiffon along with a range of sequins, including shell, and brass bells were converted into yarns using crochet needles, before being introduced as part of the supplementary weft.

This range of materials is assimilated into collections that are organically dyed in subtle shades of indigo; firstly, enabling the spectator to reflect upon the transformations to the core fabric and then into the multifarious possibilities the routes of innovations may follow. The curatorial interpretation allows us to ponder upon how the essential use of these textiles may transform in their future uses.

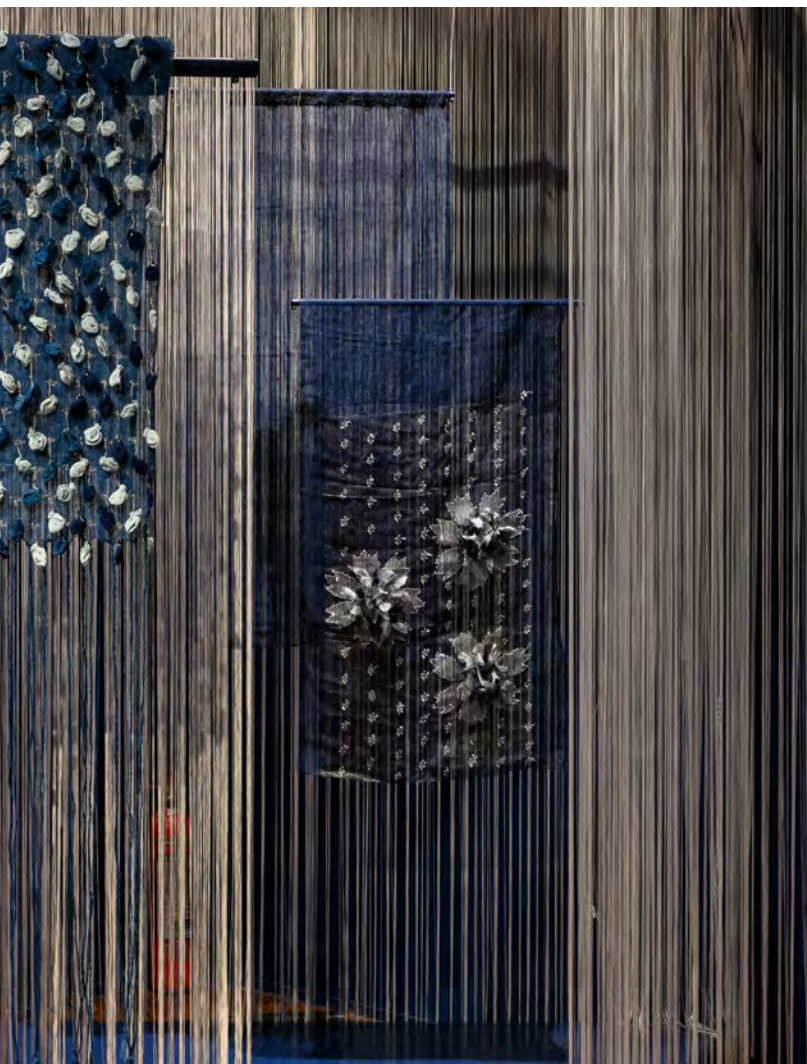
The piled, looped or tufted surface that extends above the foundation or surface of the textile, for instance, holds the capacity to subvert the original imagination of the fabric, transforming it into something that may be used for insulation.



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Weftscapes brings the relationship between the designer-innovator and the weaver squarely back into focus. The weaving communities of West Bengal in the districts of Nadia or Burdwan have been surviving on the narrowing scope of the market for handloom, especially in the context of production of the power loom textile industry and having to match the cheaper costs. In the late 1990s, the economic resources of the middle classes of Kolkata were limited and a host of cheaper alternatives became available. The handloom production had lost steam and needed some fresh ideas to recapture the imagination of a new global market.

Bappaditya and Rumi Biswas entered the stage around the early 2000s and spent nearly the next two decades working with weavers, revitalising their practices, and upgrading their skills. Their commitment to create sustainable livelihoods for artisans working with the hereditary skill of hand weaving garments has been commendable. Although the weavers were initially hesitant and unsure of risking their minimal access and orientation to the existing market, the designers successfully inspired them to be part of a slow and meticulous process of instilling confidence and eventually investing in a new narrative with mutual understanding and trust.

When *Weftscapes* was being discussed, the designers were yet to prototype actual scale drawings which the weavers could work on. The weavers were perhaps unaware of what was about to cross their paths, but they had been prepared over several years for the challenge that awaited them. Bappaditya Biswas conferred that such experimentations for the exhibition cannot be undertaken in vain, they have to, directly or indirectly, have an impact on the skills and imagination, as it would eventually influence the range of products that are produced in these clusters. Design interventions or design development workshops have usually percolated into the repertoire of weaving communities over a period of time. The community learns from each other and invariably, quite intuitively, picks up elements which become assimilated in their design language.



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Biswas described how they made scale drawings of the visualised garments to be placed under the loom for the weavers to work on; however, he recounts a challenge with the pieces which involved tufts of copper wires. During the process of weaving, textile is usually rolled up on the loom after a section has been brocaded. In the pieces involving materials sitting in a non-uniform manner on the surface of the textile, rolling it up became a problem. In common design parlance, a method involving trial and error, a flexible approach to problem-solving using experience of existing resources is often referred to as *jugaad*. This kind of *jugaad* is amply visible within craft communities—a grass root innovation where often a range of unpredictable objects and materials are used to work around a certain absence. The weavers, who created the artworks for *Weftscapes*, did not give up, they faced the challenge of dealing with the unusual surfaces by tweaking their process and delivered the designers' dreams. In any innovation, the journey is often complete when ideas are absorbed and adapted by the artisans to create smaller technical innovations.

Conversations with the curator provided insights into how these innovations may be taken forward. A range of woven jackets off the loom, are being visualised by the designers, which shall be possible because of the extended aptitude of the weavers. A revival of *jamdani* as a contemporary textile is being envisaged by redefining its purpose. The introduction of reflective surfaces with metallic elements, for instance, for fire retardant reflective fabric and with the introduction of wool, the original nature of these sheer fabrics can be transformed for purposes of insulation. The explorations and innovations carried out during the production of the exhibition could open up fresh grounds for end use.



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TOWARDS A NEW CRITICALITY IN EXHIBITING CRAFT PRACTICES

Previously, artefacts produced by craft practices have been showcased within the curatorial paradigms of decorative arts within museum collections and gallery exhibitions. They have located the practice within their geographic contexts, illustrated the method and ingredients of making and ideas of provenance and aesthetics have usually determined a certain value. They are exhibited as unique slices of regional histories, given unique geographical identities.

Attempts are now being made to contextualise them within broader socioeconomic settings and within the complexity of their making, and with growing acknowledgement of the artisan communities. Contemporary scholarship of material culture brings questions of authorship, identity, and genre to the fore, and with them the relationship to various classes of consumption. The scholarship challenges notions of authenticity by exploring histories of production. These ideas facilitate the subversion of the erstwhile showcase within anthropological sections in museums, as a product of a regional cultural practice. It then becomes possible to reconsider the manner in which crafts and the techniques spread and then develop into regional products and styles, allowing explorations away from their prevalent uses as artefacts in opposition to industrialisation. These ideas have facilitated not only novel curatorial paradigms but also reorganising interventions within the craft sector.

Products of craft inhabit a spectrum of production catering to wide socio-economic strata and continue to encapsulate a formidable range and proportion between the decorative and their use. This involves catering to local markets closer to the place of making while adopting degrees of semi-industrial processes and contesting with cheaper industrial alternatives. It, therefore, becomes critical to evaluate raw materials not only for their potential for transformation but also within the political economy of production and harvest of natural resources, within environmental concerns and to look at the

maker beyond the hands and the harvest of indigenous skills in order to engage with ideas of agency.

Curatorially, *Weftscapes* opens up new dimensions of looking at artefacts of craft—displayed within spaces of art practice—in the manner in which it moves beyond the illustrative or decorative to objects of material culture as they imbibe and become inadvertently part of global flows of consumerism. Regional producers of handlooms and handicrafts have been participants in the shift in patronage from regional and feudal economies to national and state-funded development programmes that attempt revival and conservation of these cultures. The exhibition relocates them at the gateway of a new international circulation. This is despite the fact that venturing into the area of innovations with the introduction of diverse materials and infusing fresh creative-entrepreneurial ideas into explorations of contemporary textiles will inadvertently challenge our notions of tradition and authenticity. It draws our attention to the need for deeper investigation in the manner in which craft confronts ideas of tradition and negotiates evolving scenarios of circulation.

New global movements provide increased opportunity and expanded markets for craft-led product development. However, this also poses the need to look at the historical ties craft has with increased industrialised production, and the dichotomy within the system in which craft has been packaged and sold. *Weftscapes* provokes a pertinent set of questions as it positions within these circumstances the roles of the designer/innovator and the uniqueness of the artisans. The focus for the future should be on economically empowering the weaver/craftsman, as the other stakeholders in the arena have had a clear advantage based on privileges such as education or access and affordability of technology. *Weftscapes* thus provokes a shift in our imagination of artisans as part of a production centre to a creative community and addresses issues of their intellectual property and labour.

NOTES

The author wishes to thank Sudeshna Guha, Natasha Jeyasingh, Mayank Mansigh Kaul, Martand Badoni along with Pramod Kumar KG and Bappaditya Biswas for their valuable inputs.

¹ Saloni Mathur, *India by Design – Colonial History and Cultural Display* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2007); and “Living Ethnological Exhibits: The Case of 1886”, *Cultural Anthropology* 15, No. 4 (Nov., 2000): 492-524.

² The interaction that led to the show by at MoMA by Charles and Ray Eames, also resulted in their visit to India and the writing of the India Report which is considered a document which led to the setting up of the National Institute of Design.

³ The Museum of Modern Art, *Textiles and Ornamental Arts in India* (1955), Exhibition Webpage and Archive, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3327>.

⁴ Douglas C. McGill, “A Tribute to India’s Artisans”, *The New York Times*, December 2, 1985, <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/12/02/arts/a-tribute-to-india-s-artisans.html>

⁵ Marwan M. Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalisation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

⁶ The Heritage Lab, “India, on display: The Great Exhibition of 1851”, May 9, 2019, <https://www.theheritagelab.in/india-the-great-exhibition-of-1851/>

⁷ *Official Report of the Calcutta International Exhibition, 1883-84*, Volume 2 (Kolkata: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1885).

⁸ Sir George Watt, *Indian art at Delhi, 1903: Being the official catalogue of the Delhi exhibition, 1902-1903*. (Kolkata: Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1903).

⁹ Metallic yarn refers here to the material, at the time, of a fine gold foil wrapped over cotton thread.

¹¹ *A Search in Five Directions, Textiles from the Vishwakarma Exhibitions*, In honor of Padma Bhushan Late Martand Singh (1947-2017), Curators, Rakesh Thakore, Rta Kapur Chisti, Rahul Jain, Devi Art Foundation, 2018.

¹² Rimzim Dadu, Silicon Jamdani Sari: 2015, <https://www.rimzimdadu.com/pages/devi-art-foundation>

¹³ Victoria and Albert Museum Collections, *Dress by Aneeth Arora* (2010), Artefact Webpage, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1273355/dress-arora-aneeth-ms>

¹⁴ The Gujral Foundation, *My East is Your West: A Collateral Event at the 56th Venice Biennale*, May 2015, <https://gujralfoundation.org/show-item/my-east-is-your-west-programing/>

¹⁵ “Unsettling the National in South Asia”, *My East is Your West*, Venice Biennale; and *After Midnight*, Queens Museum, New York, *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research 3* (2015), Berghahn Books, 142–186.

¹⁶ Kanika Anand, *Curatorial Note on Patterns of a Tactile Score*, an exhibition of works by Yasmin Jahan Nupur, curated by Kanika Anand, <http://kanikaanand.com/patterns-of-a-tactile-score>

¹⁷ Shruthi Issac, “Jamdani: The Legacy of the Woven Winds”, uploaded on Academia.edu, https://www.academia.edu/35639558/Jamdani_The_Legacy_of_the_Woven_Winds

¹⁸ Further information on the Jamdani Festival can be accessed through their website: <https://jamdanifestival.com/>

¹⁹ Labiba Ali, “In Search of Bangladeshi Islamic Art”, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Blog*, November 12, 2015, <https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/ruminations/2015/bangladeshi-islamic-art>.

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²⁰ A delicate hand-woven cotton fabric, the craft of weaving *jamdani* muslin in Bangladesh was included in the list of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2013.

²¹ This quotation is attributed to EWL Tower, Indigo Commission, 1860 – *Weftscapes* uses this source. The same quotation is attributed to E De-Latour, 1848 of the Bengal Civil Service, who was magistrate of Faridpur in 1848 – the Arvind Indigo Museum uses this source.

²² D. G. Tendulkar, *Gandhi in Champaran* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Informations and Broadcasting, 1957).

²³ Mohammad Towhidul Islam, “Protecting Jamdani with Geographical Indications”, *The Daily Star*, March 8, 2015, <https://www.thedailystar.net/protecting-jamdani-with-geographical-indications-48901>; See also, M. S. Siddiqui, “Protecting Jamdani: Is the GI Act Sufficient?”, *The Financial Express*, July 5, 2014, https://www.academia.edu/7765217/Protecting_Jamdani_Is_the_GI_Act_sufficient

²⁴ Uppada *jamdani* sari woven in Uppada in East Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh received GI certification in 2009.

²⁵ *Traditional Jamdani Design* (Bangladesh National Museum and National Crafts Council of Bangladesh, 2018).

Biography

Abeer Gupta is currently the director of the Krishnakriti Foundation in Hyderabad and the Achi Association India, Leh. He has directed several documentary films and curated art, education and community media projects. He has participated in several group shows, such as *Project Cinema Cinema City* (2012), *Fibre Fables* (New Delhi, 2015) and *Witness to Paradise*, (Singapore Biennale 2016) and curated, *Atoot dor: Unbroken Thread: The Banarasi Brocade Sari at Home and in the World* (National Museum, New Delhi 2016), *Old Routes, New Journeys II* (Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, Bhopal 2017) *Graphic Storytelling in India* (KNMA, New Delhi, 2018) and *Urban Frames, Visual Practices and Transitions*, Hyderabad 2019)

His research is based in the western Himalayas, in Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir around oral histories, material cultures, and visual archives. His publications include, *The Visual and Material Culture of Islam in Ladakh* (Tasveer Ghar, 2014), *Discovering the Self and Others in Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh* (Sage, 2014), and *A Sense of Place: Islam in the Western Himalaya* (Marg, 2018). He has taught extensively at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, Ambedkar University Delhi and has been invited to conduct a series of lectures at the School of Art and Aesthetics, JNU. Abeer has a Masters Degree in Visual Anthropology.

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Constructing Traditions: The Jamdani within Exhibition Practice of Handicrafts by Abeer Gupta

Series Editor: Senjuti Mukherjee

Managing Editor: Nandita Jaishankar

Copy editor: Arushi Vats

Cover design: Aman Srivastava

Layout: Aman Srivastava & Mallika Joshi

Projects/Processes as an initiative is conceptualised and supported by Mr. S. K. Munjal, Founder Patron, Serendipity Arts Foundation and Ms. Smriti Rajgarhia, Director, Serendipity Arts Foundation.

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