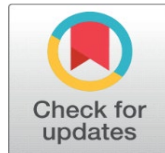


A JOURNEY INTO THE TIMELESS ELEGANCE AND RICH HERITAGE OF GADWAL SAREES

Anjani Rao ¹  , S. Greeshma ²  

¹ Bachelor Student, Department of Fashion Design, School of Arts and Design, Woxsen University, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

² Research Scholar, Department of Fashion Design, School of Arts and Design, Woxsen University, Hyderabad, Telangana, India



Received 29 June 2023

Accepted 22 July 2024

Published 27 July 2024

Corresponding Author

S. Greeshma,
greeshma2551997@gmail.com

DOI
[10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2CDSAD.2023.1082](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2CDSAD.2023.1082)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2023 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

Nestled in the heart of Telangana, India, the Gadwal Weavers Community faces numerous obstacles in upholding its centuries-old handwoven Gadwal saree tradition. These difficulties include the invasion of mass production, a lack of acknowledgment and assistance, and financial hardships. Nevertheless, despite these challenges, there are encouraging paths for conservation via programs that promote sustainability, technical innovation, and partnerships with the fashion industry. This essay explores the rich cultural legacy and historical significance of Gadwal sarees, emphasizing their elaborate weaving processes. It also looks at the current comeback of Gadwal sarees in fashion, which is driven by a fusion of classic style and contemporary appeal. Through an analysis of the projects carried out by the Gadwal Weavers Community and the wider consequences of their difficulties and conservation endeavors, this paper aims to provide insights into the delicate balance between tradition and modernity in the realm of handloom craftsmanship.

Keywords: Gadwal, History, Handloom, SWOT, Traditional

1. INTRODUCTION

Weaving textiles is one of the earliest human inventions, having been around for thousands of years. Weaved cloth was originally used for the utilitarian purpose of protecting the body from extreme temperatures, such as heat and cold. Weaving has developed throughout time from a purely utilitarian craft to a way to express personal style and cultural values via clothes. India in particular has long been a well-known hub for the traditional crafts of textile weaving and dying. This trade is

so significant that it has shaped Indian history in a number of ways, including religious and philosophical ideas.

The Telangana village of Gadwal is a prominent illustration of India's rich textile legacy. Handloom zari sarees from Gadwal are well-known and a tribute to the region's exceptional artistry. These sarees have patterns that are a blend of traditional and modern aesthetics thanks to their meticulous weaving of silk or cotton threads and embellishment with gold or silver zari. The craftsmanship that goes into creating Gadwal sarees is a representation of Telangana's rich cultural heritage as well as a source of pride for the area. Gadwal sarees have maintained its historical relevance while appealing to modern fashion tastes by fusing traditional ethnic designs with contemporary style features. The age-old skill of textile weaving, which honours India's rich cultural legacy and the enduring craft of handloom weaving, is preserved in the current era thanks to this careful balancing act between tradition and modernity [Chain \(2020\)](#).

2. REVIEW LITERATURE

2.1. HISTORY

The history of Gadwal Sarees dates back about 200 years, to a time when Gadwal was the capital of a tiny kingdom called "Samasthanam" in the local language. The queen of this country, Maharani Adhi Lakshmi Devamma, zealously promoted the craft with the help of expert weavers who came to Gadwal from coastal areas. These sarees were first known as "Mathiampeta," which reflects its early status in the weaving culture. These sarees are a treasured tradition in the area because of their exquisite craftsmanship and historical value, which reflect a rich cultural legacy [Priya. \(2022\)](#).

Renowned for its unique combination of silk and cotton, Gadwal sarees have a silk pallu border and a cotton body. The weaving uses silk and cotton threads and is done using ancient techniques such as the Kotakomma technique or the interlocked-weft technique (also known as Tippadam or Kupadam). The elaborate zari work on these sarees displays traditional designs that draw inspiration from religious and natural themes. The exquisite designs that Gadwal sarees create showcase a tasteful blending of materials and processes, giving them a timeless appeal and cultural significance.

The Gadwal Handloom Centre, established in the 1940s by the late Ratan Babu Rao, made a substantial contribution to the spread of knowledge on Gadwal sarees. These sarees are now proudly recognized as a Geographical Indication (GI) product, a distinction that highlights their exquisite craftsmanship and cultural significance. Its elegant design and use of high-quality materials, Gadwal sarees are popular for formal occasions and festive celebrations throughout India. The Gadwal Handloom Center's heritage lives on because these sarees are still cherished for their elegance and are now an essential component of traditional Indian clothing [Dey \(2021\)](#).

Gadwal sarees, which are seeing a comeback in popularity, skillfully combine traditional and modern trends, enthralling wearers with their stunning designs and painstaking craftsmanship. These sarees, which originated in the Telangana town of Gadwal, are well-known for their luxurious fabric, which is a special blend of silk and cotton. Especially striking are their unique "Kuttu" borders and "Jari" pallus, which are finely woven with pure zari threads in gold or silver, giving them a timeless air of luxury. Gadwal sarees have become a fashion industry leader due to their flawless fusion of traditional and modern styles.

Gadwal sarees are currently available in a wide variety of styles and colours to fit every occasion. They have also adapted to current tastes in recent years. Adapting to suit shifting tastes, these sarees have embellishments all over the dress, with zari embroidery and colourful threads derived from traditional and natural themes.

Due to their increased accessibility through e-commerce platforms, Gadwal silk and cotton sarees have become increasingly popular worldwide. Customers throughout the world may easily browse and buy these classic ensembles from the comfort of their homes thanks to websites like Narumugai and IndyVogue, which provide authentic Indian sarees, including Gadwal cotton and silk variations.

Gadwal sarees' reappearance in current fashion is evidence of their classic elegance, cultural relevance, and capacity to meld old-world charm with cutting-edge looks. Sarees are still a popular choice for a variety of situations, from traditional Indian weddings to modern cocktail parties. They are prized for their beauty, craftsmanship, and rich past [DM \(2024\)](#).

2.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the research is to ensure that the priceless history of Gadwal sarees is not lost by recording and examining their rich cultural heritage and traditional weaving processes. The initiative attempts to comprehend and address the existing concerns encountered by the Gadwal Weavers Community, including decreasing artisanal skills and market rivalry. Along with encouraging innovation while honoring traditional practices, it also looks at ways to use programs and technical breakthroughs to preserve and revitalize the Gadwal saree industry. Furthermore, by emphasizing the religious and cultural value of Gadwal sarees, especially in customary rites and celebrations, the project raises awareness of the cultural significance of these garments and increases demand for them. By combining these various initiatives, the project hopes to preserve and revitalize the Gadwal saree custom, guaranteeing its ongoing significance and vitality in the contemporary day and commemorating its long heritage.

2.3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The Gadwal saree is a representation of India's rich textile legacy, combining centuries-old weaving skills and cultural customs. The purpose of this study is to shed light on the financial circumstances of the weavers by emphasizing the effects of modernization on their means of subsistence and the financial difficulties this age-old craft faces. The project aims to secure the Gadwal saree industry's survival and expansion by identifying sustainable practices and creative solutions that integrate technological advancements while maintaining traditional ways. These discoveries also have instructional significance; fashion designers, historians, and fans of traditional Indian textiles can all benefit from them. This all-encompassing strategy promotes Gadwal sarees' awareness and demand in the contemporary market by addressing current issues as well as celebrating the traditional value of these garments. The initiative hopes to preserve and revitalize the Gadwal saree legacy through this interdisciplinary investigation, guaranteeing its ongoing significance and vibrancy for coming generations.

2.4. THE TRADITION OF GADWAL SAREES

Gadwal sarees are a quintessential part of traditional Indian clothing, celebrated for their unique style and exquisite craftsmanship. Known for their

intricate weaving techniques, these sarees beautifully blend silk and cotton threads, resulting in a lightweight and portable garment. The saree's body is typically made of fine cotton, while the pallu and border are crafted from silk, creating a captivating texture contrast. Weaving is performed on traditional pit looms, often utilizing dobby or Jacquard mechanisms depending on the design's complexity. With elaborate zari work on the pallu and border and vibrant colors, Gadwal sarees are perfect for formal events and festivities.

A distinctive feature of Gadwal sarees is their unique weaving method, which includes two main joints: the vertical joint connects the body to the border, and the horizontal joint, made using a special hand-interlocking technique called "kuttu," joins the body with the pallu. This intricate process, done entirely by hand with natural gum, requires immense skill and experience, contributing to the saree's unmatched visual appeal.

Gadwal sarees hold great religious and cultural significance. During the Brahmotsavas at the renowned Tirupati temple in Andhra Pradesh, the goddess's idol is adorned with a beautiful Gadwal saree, enhancing its esteem and importance among devotees. Weavers in Gadwal have the rare honor of crafting the sesha vastram, or "eruvada jodi panchalu," for Lord Venkateswara during the annual Brahmotsavam. This special cloth, woven in yellow, maroon, and red, is made on a unique loom following a strict 41-day regimen of chanting Govinda's name. The completed vastrams are presented to the temple's main priest, who performs a special arathi and informs the deity of their arrival, marking the start of Brahmotsavam. Gadwal sarees, traditionally woven with cotton, silk, and silk-cotton, are distinguished by their pure silk borders, combining tradition with exquisite craftsmanship [Priya \(2022\)](#), [Yadagiri \(2023\)](#), [Sundari Silks. \(2020\)](#).

Figure 1



Figure 1 Gadwal Saree for Lord Venkateswara

Source tirumalatirupatiyatra.in

2.5. WEAVING TECHNIQUES

2.5.1. KUTTU OR KORVAI TECHNIQUE

The exquisite weaving techniques used to create Gadwal Sarees are well-known, demonstrating the extraordinary talent and knowledge of the weavers. Their vivid and sumptuous appearance is largely due to a special interlocking method called “kuttu” or “korvai,” which is at the core of their artistic skill. This completely manual method entails the weaver carefully manipulating threads with their thumb and index finger. Carefully, the weaver weaves together the threads from the pallu and the body of the saree to create the distinctive “kuttu” junction. Because the procedure depends on natural gum for adhesion, perfect outcomes require a high level of competence and knowledge. The technique of weaving used to create Gadwal sarees demonstrates the skill and expertise of the weavers. The use of a Jacquard or dobby mechanism with conventional throw shuttle pit/frame looms depends on how complex the design is. Simpler designs only require a dobby mechanism, whereas more complex ones require Jacquards with as many as 480 hooks. Gadwal sarees are meticulously crafted using fine cotton yarn, typically 120s count for the body, while the silk borders and pallus employ higher denier silk ranging from 100 to 120. The weave density, measured in ends per inch (epi) and picks per inch (ppi), varies to achieve a dense, intricate texture. Available in pure cotton, silk-cotton blends, and pure silk variations, Gadwal sarees feature solid colors, stripes, or small buttas (motifs), complemented by traditional temple borders and contemporary geometric or floral patterns. Bridal options are adorned with elaborate zari work and vibrant hues like red, maroon, and yellow, showcasing their cultural significance. Additionally, adaptations in Kalamkari and Paithani styles further diversify their aesthetic appeal, ensuring Gadwal sarees remain both timeless and versatile in Indian textile tradition [The S Studio Online. \(2023\)](#).

Figure 2



Figure 2 Gadwal Sarees

Source [g3fashion.com](#)

These sarees are remarkably light, making them comfortable to wear and carry about for a variety of events. Their exquisitely woven borders are adorned with geometric zari motifs that are elegantly contrasted with pallus of contrasting colours. Zari motifs like thazhampoo rekku and korvai are examples of superb craftsmanship; they resemble elaborate tapestry designs. Inspired by the temple architecture of South India, the themes feature animals and plants such as parrots, peacocks, and lotus blossoms. Their appeal is further enhanced by check patterns and butta designs, which appeal to contemporary preferences. A touch of royalty is added by certain versions of Paithani-inspired borders made of pure golden zari brocade. The rich cultural background and workmanship of Gadwal Sarees are reflected in these design aspects, which make them a treasured part of traditional Indian dress. Gadwal silk sarees often feature striking color combinations such as blue and orange, red and green, or complementary shades like pink and yellow, or orange and green. The pallu is adorned with intricate floral motifs in zari and silk yarn, adding to their elegance.

2.6. THE TREND OF GADWAL SAREES

2.6.1. THE MODERN APPEAL OF GADWAL SAREES:

Gadwal Sarees' modern charm has contributed to their current rise in popularity. They've moved on from traditional patterns to contemporary geometric motifs that appeal to the current generation. Gadwal Sarees combines traditional charm with modern style to provide a versatile option that can be worn to a variety of events, from weddings to informal get-togethers. Their easy-to-wear design and lightweight build add to their growing popularity.

Traditionalists and fashion-forward people alike are drawn to Gadwal Sarees because of their ability to skillfully blend traditional motifs with contemporary aesthetics. They cleverly combine classic components like paisley and flowers with modern geometric designs, exhibiting a well-balanced blend of history and modernity. To ensure Gadwal Sarees' ongoing relevance and appeal in the ever-changing fashion world, this synthesis maintains the cultural core of the brand while also catering to changing consumer demands.

The popularity of Gadwal Sarees has increased among trend-conscious consumers because of the support and promotion of celebrities and fashion influencers. Their backing has resulted in increased awareness and demand for these sarees, confirming their position as a sought-after fashion statement. This significant support has accelerated the growth and improvement of Gadwal Sarees, solidifying their status as a renowned and sought-after design in the saree industry [Gadwal Sarees: The Perfect Blend of Cotton and Silk Weaving Artistry. Sanskriti Cuttack. \(2023\).](#)

2.7. GADWAL WEAVERS COMMUNITY

The Gadwal Weavers Community creates deep connections and helps the larger community by going beyond business ventures. They carry out humanitarian work by giving food and hygiene packages to impoverished households, among other necessities. They collaborate with organizations like NIFT on projects aimed at conserving Gadwal's unique handloom legacy. Through these programs, the community upholds its trade and shows a dedication to social responsibility, improving the lives of both beneficiaries and craftspeople.

To empower its members and enhance their abilities, the Gadwal Weavers Community places a high priority on skill development. Financial assistance is provided for several actions, such as skill development, product innovation, and infrastructure improvement, through programs such as the Cluster Development Programme. The goal of this coordinated endeavor is to improve Gadwal weavers' craftsmanship and make them more competitive in the market. In addition, the community actively participates in outreach initiatives and scholarly exchanges to preserve Gadwal's handloom legacy. Acknowledging the importance of skill development, especially in maintaining and growing the handloom industry, these initiatives represent a dedication to the community's long-term survival and prosperity as well as its beloved customs [Pujari & Geetanjali \(2023\)](#).

The socioeconomic standing of Gadwal saree industry weavers has drastically deteriorated over the last ten years, and as a result, about eighty percent of them have given up on their ancient trade because of extremely difficult financial conditions. To make ends meet, many now weave part-time while working other jobs. For example, Gubba Aniamailu, who used to weave and earn between Rs. 2,500 and Rs. 3,000 a month, now makes between Rs. 150 and Rs. 200 a day selling peanuts. Weavers have sadly committed suicide as a result of this financial burden, which has been made worse by a lack of government assistance. Only a small portion of weavers benefit from the pension program that the Telangana government has started. Jacquard loom operators make between Rs. 800 and Rs. 1,000 per saree, indicating a shift towards mechanization to boost output.

The industry is run decentralized, primarily in homes with multiple family members contributing. Women and children help with pre-loom processing, weaving, and finishing stages, although men handle the majority of the weaving. Cooperative societies supply looms for weavers to use at home, and they also oversee bigger projects like towels and bed linens. Even with difficulties including debt cycles under master weavers and deductions for faults, some independent weavers own pit looms and oversee their production and sales.

The continuous hardships that Gadwal's weaver experience highlight the critical need for improved government assistance programs and financial support. Together with programs from NGOs like Oxfam India, the Handloom Weavers' Comprehensive Social Scheme offers essential help in the form of basic supplies, social aid, and insurance coverage. These initiatives show how important it is for the public and commercial sectors to work together to alleviate financial challenges and preserve Gadwal's renowned weaving legacy both culturally and long term.

The Cash Credit program offers financial assistance for the purchase of yarn and other materials required for the manufacture of sarees. Microfinance is provided by the Pradhanmanthri Weavers Mudra Yojana to help businesses grow and stabilize their finances. Through infrastructural support and training, the Scheme for Training & Infrastructural Assistance to Handloom Sector increases production capacity. Telangana's Gadwal sarees are also protected by a Registered Geographical Indication, which promotes their cultural history and preserves its distinctive qualities [The Hans India. \(2021\)](#), [Gupta & Kumar \(2024\)](#).

2.8. CHALLENGES AND PRESERVATION EFFORTS

The emergence of mass manufacturing and mechanized production in the textile industry has increased competition and put traditional handloom artistry in grave danger of going extinct. The younger generation's diminishing interest has been made worse by this reduction in recognition and assistance, putting the

transfer of essential skills and information at risk. A variety of projects have been launched in response to this trend to raise awareness, offering financial assistance, and training to weavers to empower communities and protect cultural heritage.

Organizations like X Ltd, which prioritize fair trade and assist women entrepreneurs, are prime examples of the shift towards sustainable and ethical manufacturing processes in Sri Lanka. The increasing importance of sustainable fashion highlights the desire of consumers for distinctive, handcrafted goods that align with principles of fair trade and environmental conservation. Handloom fabrics, with their natural fibres and low carbon footprint, represent the spirit of ethical and sustainable fashion, keeping up with changing customer preferences and market trends.

2.8.1. SWOT ANALYSIS

1) Strengths

Utilizing traditional weaving techniques such as the "Kupadam" process, which is renowned for its intricate interlacing weft.

Adopting natural fibres that are recognized for their low carbon footprint, biodegradability, and renewability.

Permeated by cultural customs, Gadwal sarees have great historical significance and are worn during religious celebrations and weddings.

Creating a legacy of skilled weavers who have been passed down through the centuries after receiving rigorous training.

2) 2.8.1.2 Weaknesses

A decline in trained weavers due to industrialization and the emergence of other employment options, endangering the Gadwal handloom tradition's viability.

Dealing with the competition from automated manufacturing and the need to adapt to changing customer preferences.

The modest income of weavers, with some earning as little as Rs 12,000 to Rs 15,000 per month, underscores the persistent economic challenges they face.

The situation of weavers is made worse by inadequate compensation and welfare support, which leave many of them vulnerable and impoverished.

3) Opportunities

Increased support from the government and consumers could help to ensure that Gadwal handlooms survive for a long time.

Sustainable sourcing, fair trade principles, and environmentally conscious raw materials are promoted via integration into global supply chains.

Advancements in technology such as automation and digital weaving offer the possibility of increased productivity and customized mass production capabilities.

Collaborations with fashion houses and designers bring Gadwal handlooms to the attention of a global audience, reigniting interest in this timeless craft.

Enhanced training programs and workshops enhance weavers' competitiveness by enhancing their weaving skills, design knowledge, and entrepreneurial acumen.

4) Threats

Weavers with advanced skills may become less prevalent in the industry as a result of modernization and other employment opportunities.

The reputation and market for Gadwal handlooms may be weakened by competition from mass-produced synthetic alternatives.

Modifying the weaving techniques and designs used by Gadwal artisans to suit changing consumer preferences would require significant changes.

The Gadwal Weavers Community generally faces obstacles in maintaining their traditional skills as a result of the growth of mass production, a lack of acknowledgment and assistance, and financial hardships. Nonetheless, there are chances for preservation through programs that support morally and environmentally responsible behaviour, technical breakthroughs, and partnerships with designers.

3. CONCLUSION

The road ahead for the Gadwal handloom heritage is paved with potential for sustainability and rejuvenation, but it is also full of obstacles. In the face of the threat of mass manufacturing displacing centuries-old skill, the Gadwal Weavers Community's tenacity serves as a beacon of hope. The community welcomes initiatives that support ethical behaviour, technology breakthroughs, and partnerships with the fashion industry while striking a balance between tradition and flexibility. The lasting cultural relevance and ageless allure of Gadwal sarees is highlighted by their recent comeback in contemporary design. The weavers' concerted attempts to uphold their custom in the face of financial difficulties and demands from modernization are a testament to their unwavering commitment to fine craftsmanship. The Gadwal Weavers Community creates a strong basis for appreciating the craftsmanship of handlooms by incorporating innovation while upholding tradition. This guarantees that Gadwal sarees' legacy will be weaved into India's cultural tapestry for many years to come.

The Gadwal Weavers Community is robust in the face of challenges like mass manufacturing and economic downturns because to government assistance, international alliances, and improved training programmes. Future studies should examine how the productivity and customisation of Gadwal handlooms are affected by contemporary technology like automation and digital weaving. It might also assess how well different public and private programmes work to assist the community's infrastructure, skill development, and financial needs. It is hoped that with cooperative efforts and the steadfast spirit of the Gadwal Weavers Community, this age-old skill would flourish and continue to influence modern fashion with its ethical and environmental values. As a result, Gadwal handlooms' tradition lives on and is intricately intertwined with India's rich cultural legacy.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

Chain, T. V. (2020, May 10). Woven Textiles of India. Textile Value Chain: Textile Magazine, Textile News, Apparel News, Fashion News.

- DM, N. (2024, February 28). Gadwal Sarees: Tradition Meets Modernity in Exquisite Sarees Fashion.
- Dey, M. (2021, August 23). Gadwal Sarees: An Asset to the Telangana State. Bongchong.
- Gadwal Sarees: The Perfect Blend of Cotton and Silk Weaving Artistry. Sanskriti Cuttack. (2023, July 7).
- Gupta, S., & Kumar, P. (2024). Gadwal Saree: Telangana's Priced Handloom.
- Priya. (2022, March 1). Vikaspedia Domains. Vikaspedia.
- Pujari, S., & Geetanjali. (2023). Make in India - A Boon to Indian Handloom Industry- Study on Gadwal and Narayanpet Handloom Weavers of Telangana State. Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research, 10(02), d645-d659. <https://doi.org/http://doi.one/10.1729/Journal.33113>
- Sundari Silks. (2020, March 6). Weaves of Gadwal.
- The Hans India. (2021, October 8). Financial Help Assured to Gadwal Handloom Weavers.
- The S Studio Online. (2023, July 24). The Glorious Gadwal – a Weave Carrying Tradition for Ages. The S Studio Online.
- Yadagiri, M. (2023, March 14). Why Gadwal Sarees are a Women's Favorite. Pochampallysarees.Com.