LESSON 3  CHANDERI

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3. **CHANDERI**

In the previous lesson you had learnt about the famous woven fabric - Banaras Brocade. In this lesson we will cover another important and popular woven fabric, namely Chanderi, which is known for its fineness, softness and transparency.

### 3.0 Objectives

After going through this lesson, you will:

- Gain a broad overview of the history, raw materials used, motifs, patterns and designs of Chanderi.
- Be able to appreciate and identify the fine texture and designs of Chanderi. Brocade by studying its weaving techniques designs and colours.

### 3.1 Introduction

Chanderi is a historic city in Madhya Pradesh, which is famous for Chanderi saris known as Asavali. Chanderi is a weaver’s town, in economic and social terms. Made in pastel shades and white and cream, Chanderi saris have floral woven patterns (Fig. 3.1) and matching borders and pallavs (top end of the saris) with extra warp and weft. The ingenious technique was introduced, which enabled craftsmen to produce a marvellous effect that appears jewel-like on the surface, borders and pallu-ends. Lines, flowers, buds and leaves, dots and geometrical patterns are often seen. At Maheshwar and Burhanpur, saris of similar texture and quality are woven which excel in the beauty of traditional motifs with colour combinations on the main borders, introducing very often scrolls and other geometrical designs. Chanderi produced fine quality nine-yard saris worn in the royal houses extending from Baroda state up to the Hindu states in the Deccan.

### 3.2 Historical Background

Chanderi, an ancient town near Gwalior in the Malwa region of central India, was famous for its exquisite textiles. The cotton ‘ground’ of these fabrics was of unusual fineness and delicacy; it was usually white, though colours were also used and had silk and zari borders of unsurpassed beauty. The importance of Chanderi as a weaving centre was clearly established in the 17th century by the presence of a Mughal karkhana. The Chanderi karkhana supplied the Mughal court with high quality fabrics.
Since the 18th century, there has been production at Chanderi of very fine, plain and gold-bordered cotton muslins comparable to the products of Dhaka in Bangladesh. Cotton safas and saris edged with gold borders and pallus have figured prominently among the 19th century textiles (Figs. 3.2 and 3.3) attributed to Chanderi.

In the 20th century, Chanderi continued to weave the delicate fabrics of mill spun cotton. After independence, ‘greige’ or unde-gummed and undyed silk began to be used in the warp. The unde-gummed and un-dyed warp enabled the weavers to retain the transparency and finish of the traditional Chanderi texture. In the past two decades, silk has replaced the cotton weft in the Chanderi production. Today the Chanderi centre produces a far larger number of saris and fabrics of pure silk than those with the greige warp and cotton weft.

The changes in the nature and quality of fabric led to increasing use of dobby and jacquard patterns in borders and pallus. Despite this continuing transformation, however, the extreme delicacy of Chanderi fabric has remained its most prized characteristic up to the present day.

3.3 Raw Materials

The basic raw materials used are Cotton, Silk, and Zari. None of these materials is locally available in Chanderi. Cotton yarn is mainly brought from Coimbatore and Ahmedabad. Silk is brought from Bangalore, Mumbai, Kolkata, China, Brazil, Korea and Vietnam.

Real zari was replaced by tested zari to reduce the cost. The zari was brought from Surat, Banaras, Ahmedabad and Baroda. The difference between the zari brought from Surat and Banaras is that in Surat the zari is silk-based and the Banaras zari is cotton-based. Most weavers use tested zari, even though it is stiffer as it has a lower percentage of silver.

Artificial silk is used for the extra weft insertion in Chanderi. The art silks as they are called are of two types: Bumper and Chamki. Bumper is not twisted and has more shine, while Chamki is cheap and is used for the local market. Coloured zari in copper, gold and silver is also used.

3.4 Dyeing

Yarn is obtained in hanks (lachhis) and then dyed. Before the arrival of colour in the weft, customers are
known to get plain saris dyed according to their tastes from a rangrez (dyer). The colours used were mainly obtained from fruits and flowers, which were locally available in nearby forests.

After the introduction of chemical dyes in the market, there has been a decline in the use of vegetable dyes. The increase in the popularity of chemical dyes is mainly on account of easy dye application and a greater facility in colour matching. Mainly direct, acid and naphthol dyes are used in Chanderi. Acid is used for dyeing silk, while direct and naphthol dyes are used for dyeing cotton. As sometimes fast colour is difficult to achieve especially for cotton, pre-dyed cotton is brought from Coimbatore.

3.5 Technique

The silk yarn which is in the form of hanks (bundles of yarn), has to be wound on bobbins before it can be used on the looms. Weaving techniques as well as looms are still quite traditional. Most of the weaving is done on Pit Looms, or Dobby & Jacquard looms. A more recent development is the Tara-loom. Today, though modern fly shuttle looms are being used, still the magic of the master weaver is not lost.

Self-check Questions

1. What are the basic raw materials used in Chanderi Saris?

3.6 Pattern

The traditional saris have taken inspiration from stone carvings (Fig. 3.5), as well as from nature like flowers, birds, animals and everyday things (Fig. 3.6).

The nakshas or designs for the kinars and the butis are made by the design masters. The designs are represented on graph paper. These days, computers are also being used to develop the nakshas to save time and give mobility of design for various layouts and colour combinations.
3.7 Colours

Chanderi saris had a natural off-white body, as pre-dyed yarn was not used until the 1940s, when one family began to dye the cotton weft, resulting in the now well-known Chanderi Pastels. Traditionally, the bright colours were used in Chanderi. However, now pastel colours are also being used to bring out the delicacy and the beauty of this fabric.

The fame and the romance of the soft Chanderi colours lies in their constant reference to nature, fruits; flowers and birds (Fig. 3.7). The most popular colour is red, as it is an auspicious colour. Yellow is also considered auspicious. The other popular colours derive their name from nature: kesari (saffron), badami (almond), anguri (pale green), mor gardani (peacock neck), mehendi (green), anandi (turquoise) and rani (Indian pink).

Chanderi colours show a preference for harmony between the borders and the body of the sari. A typical example of this is the use of black against red, which is a typical combination. A lot of contrasting borders are also being woven like the famous Ganga-Jamuna sari, in which one border is red, and the other border is green in colour, while the body of the sari is white (Fig. 3.8).

Self-check Questions

2. Name the most popular colour of Chanderi Sari.

3. What is the source of inspiration for designs in Chanderi Saris?

3.8 The Chanderi Fabric and Saris

Chanderi is a lustrous and fine material made of very fine cotton, silk and all-silk. The beauty of Chanderi lies in its fineness, softness and its transparency. The ends are often worked and fringed with heavy gold thread (Fig. 3.9). Traditionally, Chanderi was used to make safas (Fig. 3.10) which further led to the development of saris as a product which has been in use ever since. The Chanderi material is now being used to make stoles, scarves, cushions, dupattas, draperies, and suit material.
There has not been much change in the designs for the kinars and butis. Many changes have come in the colour combinations for the borders and butis. A lot of pastels as well as contrasting borders are in production. Pastels are being used for the saris which are in great demand. The major product of Chanderi weaving is the Chanderi Sari, which is a continuous length of fabric of dimensions 48-52 inches in width and 5.5 metres in length. On one end of the sari we have the pallu. A 90 cms piece of blouse is sometimes attached along with it.

Three types of Chanderi saris were traditionally woven:

1. The lightest muslins, which were almost completely plain, had a very narrow border of complementary warp zari and the pallu containing a few narrow zari bands or one single wider band (Fig. 3.11).

2. Saris with broader borders, woven in supplementary warp zari with coloured supplementary warp silk had small repeat geometric or floral designs (Fig. 3.12). The pallu consisted of the border elements repeated twice (as two parallel bands), often with narrow woven lines and many butis woven between them. Butis would also appear in the ground. Many of the patterns woven into the borders are influenced by Banaras styles, with creeping vines, jhaalar and Meenakari (coloured inlay against gold) being common.

3. The third type of sari called, Do-Chashmee (two streams) that is no longer made, had wide supplementary warp silk in satin weave.

3.9 Design and Motifs

Chanderi saris have a plain base with dots or motifs of zari, which are placed at regular intervals to make a uniform design. Concentrated effort goes into preparing these exquisite and lovely looking designs on the border. Motifs are generally drawn from earth and sky, hunting scenes, the tree of life, man, woman, birds, fruits, flowers, and heavenly bodies (Fig. 3.13).
Chanderi saris have a kinara, running parallel both sides. Lengthwise the same kinara (Fig. 3.14) is used to ornament the pallu, which forms the distinguishing feature of Chanderi.

![Fig. 3.14 Chanderi Sari with Kinara](image1.png) ![Fig. 3.15 Chanderi Dupatta](image2.png)

The woven Material with butis all over ornaments the Chanderi sari. The same layout is used for the dress material. Unlike the Saris the dupattas (Fig. 3.15), have a cross border on both the sides. The only change in design that comes about in the Chanderi material is on account of the layout of the kinara and butis. The specialty of the soft Chanderi colours lies in their constant reference to nature.

There are three main categories of saris based on the material used. The product ranges from cotton to pure silk, *i.e.*
- Silk by Silk
- Cotton by Silk
- Cotton by Cotton

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF SARI</th>
<th>WARP</th>
<th>WEFT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silk by Silk</td>
<td>Silk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silk by Cotton</td>
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<td>Cotton by Cotton</td>
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<td>Cotton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zari</td>
<td>Silk</td>
<td>Zari</td>
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Mainly three types of Zari; namely, Golden Zari, Silver Zari, and pure Zari are used. In almost all Saris, the border is made up of cotton. Only the inner material changes in different saris.

### 3.10 Cost

The price of the sari is determined by the design of the border and also by the use of zari – *i.e.*, whether it is real or artificial. Real gold zari is pure gold-coated-on-silver, while the other is fabric woven with thin gold and silver wire yarn or artificial gold coating on cotton yarn. The zari work is done by hand only. Price of the saris range from Rs. 150 to Rs. 50,000. The weight of a sari generally varies from about 200 gms. (simple sari) to 1.0 kg. (heavy zari sari with rich designs).
3.11 Assignments

3.11.1 Class assignments

i) Make a replica in a drawing sheet of any one woven textile of India.

ii) Draw sketches of various motifs used on different woven textiles.

3.11.2 Home assignments

i) Collect some photographs and samples of Chanderi fabrics.

ii) Try to design a border and a pattern for Chanderi sari.

3.12 Summing Up

Chanderi saris, also called Asavali, derive their name from a small historic town of Madhya Pradesh which is famous for its exquisite textiles. Traditionally, Chanderi was used to make safas which lead to development of saris. Today, the main product of Chanderi is saris. The ground / base of Chanderi saris is usually delicate, made of fine white cotton usually with silk and zari border. Of late, the cotton weft of Chanderi has been replaced by Silk. Thus, the basic raw materials used to prepare Chanderi are cotton, silk and zari. Whereas the cotton yarn is obtained from Coimbatore and Ahmedabad, cotton based zari is produced from Banaras and silk-based zari from Surat. The traditional patterns on Chanderi saris are derived from stone carvings. The most popular colour is Red.

The beauty of Chanderi lies in its finesse, softness and transparency. Chanderi saris are with a continuous length of 5.5m and width of 48 to 52 inches. They have a plain base with a uniform design made of dots or motifs of zari. A sari weighs anything from 200g to 1.0kg and costs Rs. 150 to Rs. 50,000 per piece.

3.13 Possible Answers to Self-check Questions

1. The Fabric raw materials used are cotton, silk and zari in a Chanderi Sari.

2. Red is the most popular colour of Chanderi.

3. Stone carvings and motifs from nature like those of flowers, birds, animals, etc. are the source of inspiration for design in Chanderi Saris.

3.14 Terminal Questions

1. What are main features of Chanderi saris?

2. What is the difference between Surat and Banaras zari?

3. What are the different types of art silk?

4. What is Bumper art silk?

5. What are the patterns used in Chanderi?
6. What types of colours are used in traditional Chanderi sari?
7. Which are the main categories of sari, on the basis of which material is used?
8. Fill in the blanks:
   i) Chanderi is a historic city in ______________.
   ii) For Chanderi saris, cotton yarn is mainly brought from ____________ and ______________.
   iii) _________________ is used for the extra weft insertion in Chanderi.
   iv) The colours used for Chamki were mainly obtained from ______________ and ________________.
   v) _________________ is the most popular colour in Chanderi saris.
   vi) The traditional Chanderi saris have taken inspiration from ________________.
   vii) The length and width of Chanderi saris are _________ and __________, respectively.
   viii) The weight of a sari generally varies from about ______g to ________g.
9. Indicate whether the statements are true or false.
   i) Chanderi saris do not have a plain base. True / False
   ii) Chanderi saris have a border running in parallel on both sides. True / False
   iii) Chanderi saris border is usually made of cotton. True / False
   iv) The zari work is done by hands only. True / False
   v) Chanderi saris are also known as Asavali. True / False
10. Write a brief history of Chanderi?
11. What colours are used in Chanderi saris?
12. What designs & motifs are used in Chanderi saris?
13. What are the three types of traditionally woven Chanderi saris?
14. What are the raw materials, and patterns used in Chanderi saris?

3.15 References and Suggested Further Reading


3.16 Glossary

1. Tara Loom This is a new generation weaving machine having improved features to improve the efficiency of the weaver and quality of the woven fabrics. The loom consists of fly-wheel, special take-up mechanism, negative let off, backrest and improved frame. All these parts are so carefully designed that it conforms to the traditional workmanship to produce more and better quality fabrics. This is a versatile tool for the village weavers. The salient features of the Tara Loom are – high productivity; superior quality fabrics; simple to operate; operate without any vibration at high speed; can use all type of yarns like cotton, wool, silk, and synthetics, both mill and hand spun; let-off mechanism for automatic tension control; fly wheel and steel frame for higher efficiency.

2. Dobby 16-32 shaft dobby is usually in use in Chanderi. Here the deigns are more geometrical and less intricate when compared to jacquard.

3. Jacquard The single cylinder, single needle jacquard capacity is used. Here the designs that are made are extremely intricate as every end is controlled individually.