

Exhibition Review 'Baluchars: The Woven Narrative Silks of Bengal'

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The National Museum, New Delhi and Weavers Studio Resource Centre, Kolkata have jointly organized an exhibition titled, '**Baluchars: The Woven Narrative Silks of Bengal**' followed by a seminar at the National Museum, New Delhi which was inaugurated on 8th February 2019 by Padma Shri Ms. Ritu Kumar, the leading Fashion designer of India and Dr. Ghada Hijjawi-Qaddumi, President, World Craft Council, Asia Pacific region; in the presence of Dr. B. R. Mani, Director General National Museum, Ms. Darshan Shah, Ms. Jasleen Dhamija, Dr. Anamika Pathak, Ms. Ritu Sethi, and people of academia and textile lovers. The students of IICD (Indian Institute of Craft and Design) were lucky to be invited to Delhi for an exhibition opening and to attend the seminar on Baluchari organized by Craft Revival Trust (CRT), National Museum and Weavers Studio Resource Centre (WSRC) at National Museum, New Delhi.

We visited the Baluchari exhibition at the museum, which had authentic pieces, conserved and displayed. The specialty of Baluchari in terms of motifs and jala weaving was very clear in the pieces on display. The Baluchars are splendid textile traditions found originally in Bengal flourished in the Nawabi capital of Murshidabad around the 18th century. The raw material was mulberry silk, which was cultivated locally and referred to as 'figured fabrics' by academicians. These rich naturally dyed saris woven on traditional *jala* looms are more than a fabric – instead it denotes a work of art. This two-hundred-year-old intricate textile tradition consisted of a repertoire of saris, stoles and shawls (*chaddar*). The themes were derived from the surrounding creative ethos consisting of architecture, painting and other artistic fields.

The symposium on 9th February gave us an opportunity to listen to speakers who have in-depth knowledge in the field of Baluchari weaving. Motif, revival and many other aspects and the paper presentation involved a total of nine speakers who spoke about the past that involved the revival process, the contemporary variations brought to this traditional textile and future is expected to give technological support to the artisans. Apart from the above paper presentations a few dialogue exchanges took place that parted knowledge on a few more aspects of the textile being discussed through conversations between the Master Weaver Naseem Ahmed and Master Weaver Gobordhan Pal with Ms. Darshan Shah and the conversation between Mrs. Jasleen Dhamija and Ms. Monisha Ahmed on 'Witness to History: A Maker of History'. This symposium as a whole enriched each individual to the historical, technical and emotional aspects involved in this craft and its revival.



Figure 2: Display of Sari



Figure 3: Master Artisan from Varanasi working on Jaala Loom



Figure 4: Display of Contemporary garment



Figure 5: Display of antique museum garments



Figure 6: Faculty of Indian Institute of Crafts and Design, Jaipur with Padma Shri Ms Ritu Kumar.