




Sari

celebrating the unstitched garment



The sari represents a culture in which the woven & textured
with pattern garment, unpierced by the stitching needle,

is considered not only more appropriate in terms of aesthetics
and climate, but was also an act of greater purity & simplicity.

The 'Sari' Exhibition

Presented by Rta Kapur Chishti





*Saris that pay tribute
to the traditional classical sensibilities*



As well as contemporary renderings
of traditional skill

The Sari School' workshops

By Rta Kapur Chishti





The new generation has to feel the history and elegance of the Sari as a recreation.

The sari has the adaptability to become a pair of pants, shorts a long or short dress or even a gown!





The Sari need not become just a framed panel on the wall of a museum

PHOTOS: JASJEET PLAHA



POISE PERFECT: Seema Goswami (L) and Kavita Bharti



WRAP CHIC: (L-R) Aashti Bharti, Manisha, Binita Rawley, Poonam Sarin and Maya

THE WHOLE SIX YARDS

Over the weekend, the city's ladies met over quite a 'creative' meal. Ogaan's Kavita and Aashti Bharti hosted a sari soiree at DLF Emporio to re-introduce guests to the innovative art of draping the sari. Rita Kapur Chishti, who can at best be described as the ultimate sari historian, showed the ladies some rare styles of wearing the six-yard wonder, like the off-shoulder tribal style from Kerala, the modified Odissi, and so on.

Even the hosts were

draped in interesting styles by Chishti. As guests trickled in, they were led to a makeshift changing room where they were dressed by Chishti and her Sari School team, as she engaged them in sari trivia. We spotted columnist Seema Goswami, socialite Binita Rawley and designers Shrivani and Narresh sampling the delicious fare and the excellent wines, while the others, especially the men, caught up on the latest gossip in town.



AARON GEORGE TEEN SPIRIT: (L-R) Shrivani, Manisha and Narresh



PREP'S COOL: Rita's sari school had many takers



WRAPPED IN SMILES: Rita Kapur Chishti (left) demonstrates one of the draping styles

The Sari supports the livelihood of a million weavers, printers, dyers and more.

Contemporary aspiration and the forces of globalisation offer an energising challenge.

The Sari School has been set up to promote the usage, understanding, survival and recreation of the unstitched garment.

Reinvention of the sari brings a comeback on catwalks, at cocktail parties

By Emily Wax
Washington Post Foreign Service
Tuesday, October 26, 2010, 11:29 AM

NEW DELHI - It was just past noon when dozens of mothers and daughters at [India's](#) most luxurious mall sauntered right past the glittering showrooms of Jimmy Choo and Louis Vuitton and into a brunch celebrating the sari.

THIS STORY
[Reinvention of the sari brings a comeback on catwalks, at cocktail parties](#)
[Saving the sari](#)

India's supercharged economy has brought a parade of posh international designers to the capital along with more affordable chains like Zara and Forever 21 that offer mini-skirts and skinny jeans to one of the world's largest markets.

But the emblem of Indian glamour is in the throes of a comeback, and these women had come to the [DLF Emporio mall](#) to attend "sari school." They hoped to learn some of the 108 ways to drape a sari from the grand aunty of the garment: Rta Kapur Chishti, a textile historian and sari stalwart.

Some of the teenagers had never worn one, and Chishti's apprentice Pallavi Verma, 27, had to push them to try on youthful styles.

"Once you know the basics, you can play," Verma told the group at the brunch, which was hosted by designer Kavita Bhartia, who owns Ogaan, one of India's top fashion houses.

The rules were simple: Come wearing a sari, bring a tank top if you wish to experiment with other styles.

"Sooo beautiful!" cooed Geetanjali Jain, 16, who removed her earbuds blasting Lady Gaga to examine a rack of rare, hand-spun saris.

She had come reluctantly, and had broken the rules and worn jeans.

But watching other young women try them on seemed to make her happy, and Jain's 47-year-old aunt and 74-year-old grandmother looked on with pride.

In between fittings, relatives shouted out opinions and snapped photographs. The young women sipped fresh lime soda for fortitude.

Noting the demise of the kimono in [Japan](#) and the Chinese obsession with global brands, many Indian designers consider saving the sari a point of cultural pride, said Chishti, who was draping a sensual ivory sari with gold embroidery along its edges.

The weekend classes have been packed with brides, fashion models and a new breed of Indian fashionistas who have enjoyed the fruits of India's economic growth. They are curious about the free-flowing seven yards of fabric that for many young urban middle- and upper-class Indians is worn only at weddings, parties and religious festivals.

"The new generation has to feel the history and elegance of the sari," said Chishti, who rushed with a measuring tape to fit a line of girls. "If I can convince one person in their 20s to wear a sari, I have won!"

She's even suggested that Michelle Obama should wear a sari when the first lady and President Obama visit India next month. The India media have speculated that the fashionable Michelle Obama will don a sari, but the White House has yet to comment.

Chishti spent years pouring her passion into the recently published "[Saris of India - Tradition and Beyond](#)," a majestic encyclopedia of the sari, with meticulously researched styles from the off-shoulder tribal style worn in fishing villages of Kerala to the between-the-legs sari worn during traditional Odissi dance performances.

"We will not allow a sari to become just a framed panel on the wall of the museum," she said. "In India, globalization doesn't mean we are all in bluejeans, which don't even fit our hot climate or our Indian sensibilities."

A movement is underway to bring the sari back to the runway and the office place. There already is the denim sari, the little black sari, the swimsuit sari made from Italian Lycra.

Hyderabad designer Vinita Pittie has made the skirt sari, which can be tied around the waist with the goal of attracting young Indians who might feel that the traditional sari is difficult to drape.

"It can even be worn with a T-shirt and chunky jewelry," Pittie said. "The sari must be saved."

Another popular version is the cocktail sari, easy to slip on and made of lighter, slinkier fabric and worn with a sexy spaghetti strap blouse.

"The young Indian woman today is infatuated with the international global brands. Shows like "Gossip Girl" and global magazines are a huge influence," said Priya Tanna, editor of Vogue India. "But an Indian woman knows what looks sexy. She will wear a fabulous Chanel handbag with an exquisite antique silk brocade sari."

At the sari brunch, Chishti put on her glasses and squinted at the perfect curve of the young woman's waist that peeped through the elegant drape of a sari. "Is it comfortable to walk in?" she asked.

"Oh yes," the young woman answered. "I love it."

"If you really want to look wonderful," Chishti added with a smile and a touch of sternness, "do it in the Indian way, my darling."

BOOKS

It's a Wrap. India's versatile sari is the subject of a definitive new study



FIRST LINE

A Portuguese traveler in the early 1500s: "The women wear white garments of very thin cotton or silk of bright color."

BY JYOTI THOTTAM

LIKE THE GARMENT OF ITS TITLE, *Saris: Tradition and Beyond* is gorgeous to look at, rich with history and a product of painstaking labor. Rta Kapur Chishti started her research in 1984, when she was commissioned by the Indian government to document the nation's handloom textiles, a source of immense pride because of their close association with the independence movement. (Mohandas Gandhi wore only khaddar, Indian hand-spun cloth, to protest the import of British textiles.) Chishti spent the next eight years traveling across India, interviewing and photographing women and weavers. She published several academic volumes but also wanted to produce something for a general audience.

The result is an exhaustive, beautiful book that explains the subtle variations in the sari over time and across different states

of India. It's also an unusually intimate work. Along with the descriptions of each style of textile are diagrams documenting 108 different ways of wearing the sari: an unstitched piece of cloth that is usually about a meter wide and up to several meters long. Every fold, tuck, pleat and drape is explained and identified, from the elaborate styles worn by Brahman women in southern India to the utilitarian approach favored by farming communities in western India, where the sari is often wrapped and tucked around

Chishti spent years traveling and interviewing women and weavers

the legs so women can work in the fields. "In the manner of her carrying the sari," Chishti writes, "the wearer reveals her nature and demeanor."

In the 25 years since Chishti began her research, the sari has undergone revolutionary change. Cheaper machine-made synthetics threaten the livelihoods of weavers, and India's economic boom has pulled more urban women into the workforce, where many have abandoned saris in favor of Western clothes. Chishti spent more than a year updating her research to reflect those developments, but she believes there is still a market for what she calls "low tech, high-skill" textiles, if weavers would only stop trying to imitate mass-produced cloth and instead exploit the enormous variety of hand-woven saris. Chishti imagines a pyramid, with expensive saris made by master craftsmen occupying a small niche at the top and everyday cottons produced by younger weavers at the bottom. "I'm not talking about Gandhian economics," she says. "It's the future."

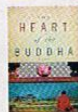


Social fabric Saris are interwoven with history

BOOKS

Doesn't Travel Well. Elsie Sze's second novel could do with less exotica

BY STEPHEN MCCARTY



IN WRITING ABOUT places that captivate, authors risk exoticizing locations to the extent that they contract a serious disease: Lonely Planetitis.

As "an avid traveler, often to remote places," Elsie Sze, raised in Hong Kong and resident in Toronto, would appear susceptible to a bout.

Her enthusiasm for travel infects *The Heart of the Buddha*, a novel of mysticism, love, sisterly devotion and adventure located amid the clichéd "snow-covered peaks" and "lush green... valleys" of the Himalayas. But the setting almost overwhelms the story, which is a pity. Behind the travel-guide speak is a breathless tale of a disappearance, a manhunt and the return of religious treasure.

Idealistic, romantic Marian leaves her job in Toronto and heads to the Bhutanese capital, Thimphu, there to do good works reorganizing a public library. Two twists of a prayer wheel later and she's in thrall to an athletic monk on a mission (cue the appearance of the People's Liberation Army as pantomime villains). He inadvertently endangers their lives as he attempts to smuggle a collection of sacred Buddhist texts out of Tibet.

When Marian vanishes, twin sister Ruth dashes from Canada to find her, and on a trail of treachery finds an unlikely love of her own—her "tour" guide. The plot thickens and quickens, the tension escalates. If only the cheese *momos*, guesthouses and colorful native flora would migrate back to the travel section. ■

SARIS: ANITA DUTTA; HEART OF THE BUDDHA: JYOTI THOTTAM



Participants after The Sari School Workshop





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Rta
Kapur
Chishti

rtakapurchishti@gmail.com

Daksha
Sheth

dsdanceco@gmail.com

Devisarro

devissaro@gmail.com

