

**WEAVING AS PRAXIS :
The Case of the Padma Saliyars**

by

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DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Submitted

in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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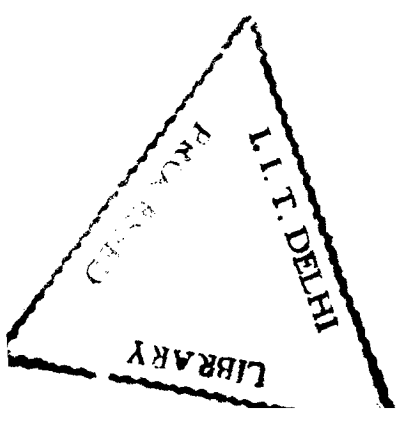
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It is certified that the thesis entitled "**Weaving as Praxis: The Case of the Padma Saliyars**", being submitted by Ms. Aarti A. Kawlra, to the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is a record of bonafide research work carried out by her. Ms. Aarti A. Kawlra has worked under my guidance and supervision for the submission of this thesis which, to my knowledge, has reached the requisite standard.

This thesis, or any part thereof, has not been submitted to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree or diploma.



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July 1997

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible but for my supervisor, Dr. Amrit Srinivasan, to whom I owe the supreme debt - that which a sishya owes to his/her guru. I wish to thank the faculty and staff of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at I.I.T. Delhi for their procedural cooperation.

I am deeply grateful to Thiru K.G. Ramaswamy for his unconditional assistance in the field. I cannot thank each member of his family enough, especially his wife, Satyavathidevi, for making me feel at home during my stay in Kumbakonam. I express my sincere gratitude to freedom fighter and respected member of their family, Thiru C.R. Natarajulu, for sharing his thoughts and time with me in Madras. To his grandson and heir apparent of Radha Silks in Tirucherai, Kalyana Raman, I owe some very insightful comments.

I shall always remember silk sari weaver and *nattaamaikaran* - Nathamuni and his family in Swamimalai, among whom I discovered an exemplary way of life.

My research would not have begun but for the leads into the field given to me by Mr. S.N. Damodaran of the Nallis showroom in Delhi, who was kind enough to help me amidst the interminable flow of customers at all times. I also thank Vishalam and her brother Mr. Swaminathan and his wife, for letting me stay with them initially in Kumbakonam.

My sincere thanks to Thiru Nalli Kuppuswamy of the Nallis group, Thiru R. Kothandaraman and Thiru K. Rajaraman of Radha Silks in Madras; Srinivasa Silks and Lakshmi Silks in Kanchipuram; and Thiru J.S. Ramamurthy and other members of the Silk Cloth Producers Association in Kumbakonam; Thiru S.A. Thilakendran and Thiru A.S. Krishnamurthy and other members of the Tamil Nadu Padma Saliyar Sangam; Thiru P. Kondappa of the Karnataka Padma Saliyar Sangam in Bangalore and my guide, Thiru R. Padmanabhan from Aduthurai - for the information and support they provided me at various stages in my field work.

I am grateful to all those associated with the subject in different ways whom I interviewed in Madras at: The Weaver's Service Centre, Kalakshetra, Handloom Export Promotion Council, Crafts Council, private boutique owners, and prominent families of Madras who are patrons of silk handloom saris, especially Shanta Guhan and Visalaksmi Ramaswamy.

I wish to thank PPST Foundation in Madras and Dastakar, Hyderabad, among whom I found a sense of community with regard to handlooms. I am also grateful to the staff of the Madras Institute of Development Studies, Theosophical Library and the library at the Government College of Arts and Crafts in Madras. In Delhi, I thank the staff at the Teenmurti and Ratan Tata Libraries and the Sangeet Natak Academy (especially Abhijeet Chatterjee) for their assistance during the course of my research.

I appreciate Mr Venkatesan's help in the translation of the *Bhavana Rishi Puranam* and Sujatha and Kannan for theirs in the translation of the poem "*Nulum Nulum*". I am obliged to Prof. P.R. Subramanian of the Morzhi Trust in Madras, for his very valuable lexicographical comments on Tamil terms appearing in this thesis. I thank Arati Chari for enabling me to get a scale drawing of a loom through her architectural assistant, Lakshmi. I owe the production of the Synopsis to my designer friend Deepa, for which I am very thankful. I am grateful to my sister-in-law, Vandana for her support at different times during the writing of the manuscript. I appreciate Shambhu's help in scrutinizing the text, and Pravin's for reproducing some of the figures.

I owe this thesis to Papa who I know, as I complete this work, is already proud of me and to Manish and dear Gayatri - in whose love this research has been nurtured.

I dedicate this work to the memory of my mother who always encouraged me to be myself.


AARTI A. KAWLRA

THESIS ABSTRACT

This thesis is a sociological study of an artisan community - the Padma Saliyars - who specialize in weaving the famed Kanchipuram silk sari in Tamil Nadu. By locating collective and individual identities within the discourse of cultural products and technologies, this investigation highlights the significance of goals of life in human artifice. The first chapter introduces the notion of 'praxis' and draws attention to the need for its application to the study of artisans in existing literature on development, material culture and community studies. The Introduction then goes on to present the research methodology and areas of field-work of the study. A discussion of the reformist and revivalist measures since the colonial period, in chapter 2, points to the neglect in viewing weavers as members of 'work communities'. Chapter 3 establishes 'leadership' as the basis for the organization of 'community' in the context of the production and exchange of silk saris among the Padma Saliyars. The myths and rituals of the Padma Saliyars are then shown to reinforce their distinctive work identity as 'professional' weavers in chapter 4. Chapter 5 examines the complex interrelations between the specific technology (the pit loom) and the weaving process, in order to explicate the 'commensal' nature of household production. Crucially, the body is established as an instrument of production in artisanal work. Through an examination of the actual technique of weaving the wedding sari - *korvai*, chapter 6 highlights the cultural value of 'auspiciousness' as being intrinsic (rather than extrinsic) to the very nature of craft products. In drawing together the various strands of the research, the conclusion reasserts the unity between a community, the product and technology in craft praxis, to underscore the vital necessity of micro-level research in current policy and activism in the artisanal sector.

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