

An Artifact Speaks • Artifact Information Sheet

Artifact Name: Sari

Time Period: 2014

Culture/Religion Group: found throughout India/Multiple groups

Material: Artificial silk

Reproduction? No



Background Information:

A sari or saree is a long, unstitched piece of cloth traditionally worn by women of the Indian subcontinent. There are three distinct decorative sections to the sari: the field, which takes up most of the central length of the cloth, *pallu* or *anchal*, which is the endpiece, and two borders that flank the field. The sari is wrapped around the woman's body over a long petticoat and a short, cropped blouse called a *choli*.

Though the exact origin of the sari is unknown, statues wearing wrapped and draped cloth go back as far as 5000 years. Saris are mentioned in writing in the sacred Sanskrit text the *Rig Veda* (ca. 1200 BCE).

How saris are decorated and worn vary among the many cultures of the Indian subcontinent. For example, sari-makers of the states of Rajasthan and Gujarat are known for their *bandhani* or *bandhni* tie-dyeing technique. Baluchari saris from Bengal are famous for their depiction of mythological figures. Chanderi, a small town in Madhya Pradesh, is famous for a fabric that is sheer and lightweight. Different regions Different styles of wrapping can designate the social class, ethnic background, region of origin, or personal style of the wearer.

One of the most familiar Indian decorative motifs is the *boteh*, known as "paisley" in the west. Shown here are a couple examples of the boteh design from cloth samples in the Spurlock Museum's Teaching Collection. This design can be found on many of the saris used in *An Artifact Speaks* programs.



(continued)

On the following pages you will find a description and photo of each of the saris purchased for *An Artifact Speaks*. Find your specific sari and learn more about it.

Definitions:

- *zari* work - decoration done in zari, a gold-wrapped thread
- *butti* work - butti is a small, floral decoration
- *keri* work - the keri motif is a variation of the boteh. The word keri means “mango.” It is a symbol of fertility.
- *resham* thread - a colored silk thread used for intricate embroidery
- Benarasi saris - saris made in the city of Varanasi in the north of India. Considered some of the finest saris, they are often worn for very special occasions.
- *gamboge* - this is the shade of yellow, or saffron, that is used to dye the robes of Theravada Buddhist monks.

Images and descriptions are from the vendor, sareez.com.



Pumpkin Orange and Mount-
batten Pink embroidered party
and festival saree with zari



thread,
resham
thread, floral
work, leaf
work, and
border work.

Persian Red and Lime Green
embroidered festival saree with
zari thread, floral work,



leaf work,
keri work,
and border
work.

Dodger Blue embroidered
Benarasi party and festival
saree with zari thread,



resham
thread,
floral work,
leaf work,
keri work,
and border
work.

Asparagus Green and Purple
embroidered festival saree with
zari thread, floral work, leaf



work, keri
work, butti
work, and
border work.

Teal Blue embroidered party
and festival saree with zari
thread, floral work, leaf work,



keri work,
butti work,
and border
work.

Gamboge Yellow embroidered
festival and party saree with
zari thread, floral work, leaf



work, keri
work, and
border work.

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Date Notes:

BCE (Before Current Era) = B.C.

CE (Current Era) = A.D.