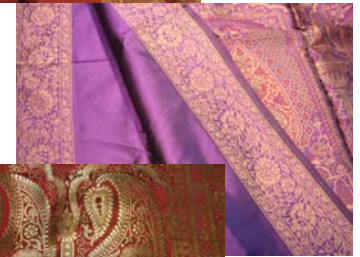


Varanasi Weavers Crisis





A little about Banarasi Sari

- From the Mughal era, Banaras Silk flourished with saris and sherwanis for India, Tibet and even for the royalty Saudi Arabia!
- It takes 3 people to make a sari
- Taking them 15 days to sometimes 6 months depending on the intricacy of the design
- After partition many people tried to copy this art but failed
- Silk used to be imported from China right from the Mughal days

The Crisis



- Varanasi Silk Industry in Turmoil
- India has 10 million weavers. Varanasi has **1.3 million weavers**
- **Half a million** people involved in the Varanasi Silk Industry
- Since 1995 demand for silk has been shrinking
- Many Varanasi weavers struggle for existence in appalling poverty.
- Weavers are suffering with malnutrition
- Art of weaving these saris now faces **extinction**



Varanasi Weavers Crisis is an issue of:

- **Human Rights**

starvation/malnutrition – 48 deaths, suicides

- **Child Labor**

Children are working in agarbatti

- **Dying Arts/Crafts**

60 % of handloom weaving work closed

- **Copyright/Patents/Trade policies**

Indian Varanasi Sari is now “**Made in China**”

reasons: Globalization & Politics

- **1995-1998 Deve Gauda Govt. banned Chinese Silk Imports**

- So Varanasi Weavers could only use “Bangalore Silk”
- Chinese silk was smuggled in because of its superior quality
- Weavers demanded an OGL (open general license) to import Chinese Silk

- **1999 – Govt allows Chinese plain crepe fabrics import**

- The Chinese crepes feel smoother and are of better quality because they are made on powerlooms
- China gives very high subsidies and has a better power infrastructure
- Chinese traders brought silk yarn and used local weavers to replicate the Banarasi Sari
- Lower and middle income groups prefer Surat silk saris which are 1/10th of the price



Chinese silk

\$1-1.25 per meter



Indian Silk

\$2.5 -4 per meter

- Chinese silk fabric exports to India grew by a whopping **6560 per cent** over the past five years from 14.48 lakh metres in 2000-01 to 9.649 crore lakh metres in 2004-05!

When trade protection is liberalized too much or too quickly, imports climb steeply as new products flood in and cheaper, better-marketed goods price out local producers.

reasons: Globalization & Politics

- Recent Govt has in the past year increased import tariffs

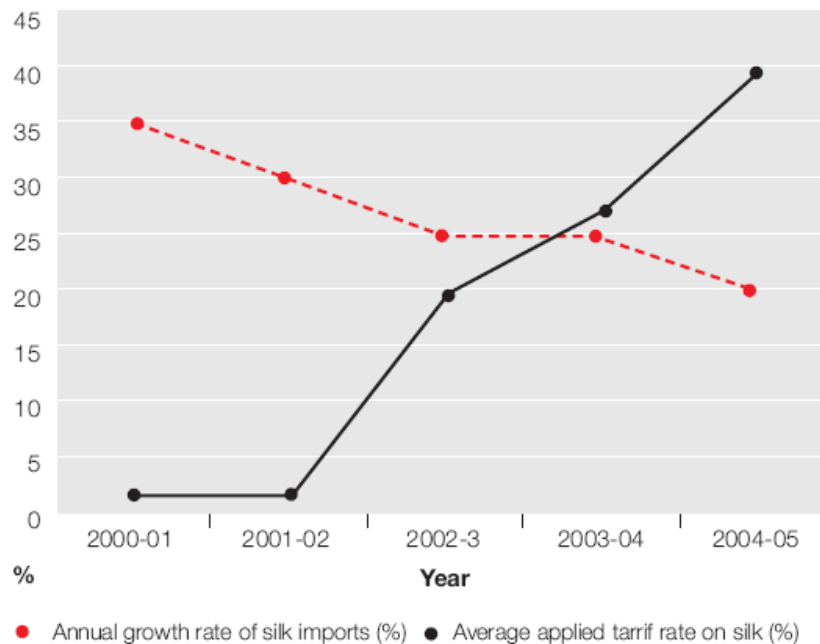
BUT

WTO negotiations called NAMA – ***Negotiations on non-agricultural market access*** * NAMA proposes to liberalize manufacturing and industrial trade

- Developed countries are seeking **elimination of import tariffs** on certain sectors such as **textile**, footwear, and **leather**

NAMA could make it difficult to raise import tariffs

Figure 1: Changes in Indian silk tariffs and silk imports: 2000-01 to 2004-5



Source: Government of India, Department of Commerce.¹⁶

**40 % increase in tariffs
Lead to just 15 % reduction in Silk Import**



reasons: Miscellaneous



- Patents/trademark: does not have Intellectual property rights and GI protection (eg pochampally)
- Chinese silk saris are better, more durable because of powerlooms. Chinese silk is better than Bangalore silk
- Reduced demand for Banarasi saris to Chinese and Surat saris
- “Gaddidar” – the middleman who exploits
- Changing fashion trends – lack of diversification
- Co-operatives: only 1/5th of weavers are under a co-op society. Yet even the co-operatives do not do anything solid – just hold meetings!
- Caste system – Most of the weavers are dalits, obc and Muslims which are minorities and backward

ngos helping hands

- **Aid to Artisans* (US)**
- Actionaid (US)
- America India Foundation (League of Artisans)
- **Craft Revival Trust* (India)**
- **People's Vigilance Committee on Human Rights* (Grassroots)**
- CRY
- Fian International (human rights org in Germany)
- Asian Human Rights Commission

* **Bold** indicates Udai is in touch with these orgs

PVCHR's role

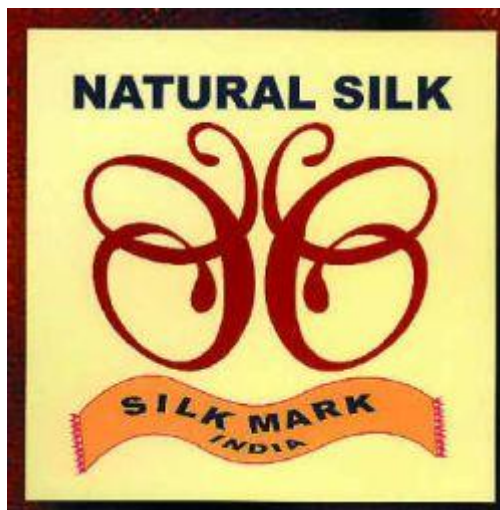
- Grassroots organization in Varanasi
- Massive Campaigns leading to nationwide as well as international attention
- Indian Govt (planning commission has responded)
- Govt. has decided to start a pilot project for the weavers (after meeting with Dr. Lenin of PVCHR on 16th May 2006)
- Published a book “Handloom has become a live grave for weavers”
- WTO Hongkong meeting

PVCHR and other orgs recommendations for pilot project

- Weavers to participate directly
- Govt. officials to be kept away
- Program should be centered towards the weavers
- Weavers hospital should be established
- AAY cards to all handloom weavers of Varanasi
- ***Museum to be established to show craftsmanship***
- ***“Handloom Mark” on production of handloom products***
- ***Varanasi Weavers Trust***

Branding Handloom Silk

- Similar to Woolmark, a mark for pure silk exists in India called Silkmar.
- A trademark for handlooms is needed as well (PVCHR)



Recommendations from CRT consortium (more to be added later!)

- Immediate Assistance (healthcare)
- Marketing
- Patents
- Awareness
- Product design/training