

# Sari: The Magic of the Unstitched Garment

“There’s so much to this unstitched length of cloth. It unfolds histories, cultural sentiments, weaving traditions, and much more...”

Rta kapur Chishti  
Author, Researcher & Design Developer



Sari wearing style, Courtesy, Rta Kapur Chishti, The Sari School

To share your enthusiasm for the unstitched garment, please join renowned historian

**Rta Kapur Chishti**

for a special demonstration and presentation,

***Sari: The Magic of the Unstitched Garment***

**May 6, 10 a.m. to 12 noon**

at the Palo Alto Art Center; Fees: \$25 per person.



A Viewing of textiles and Conversation with the scholar follows at 2-4 p.m. in Los Altos at 13155 La Cresta Drive, Los Altos Hills.

To RSVP for both events, please email [info@sachi.org](mailto:info@sachi.org).

Co-author and editor of the *Saris of India* volumes as well as *Handcrafted Indian Textiles - Tradition and Beyond*, Chishti has been consistently involved with research and development of hand spun handloom textiles. A founder of the ‘Sari School’, she produces saris & runs workshops on the wonders of the country’s iconic garment.

To Rta Kapur Chishti, the six yards of unsewn cloth offers limitless possibilities. An exponent of India’s unstitched tradition, Chishti demonstrates the versatility of the sari in her book *Saris: Tradition and Beyond*. She will discuss its journey through time and the sari’s evolution through varied cultural contexts.

India’s most representative apparel, worn in a variety of ways, the sari is a fabric-length of varying densities in its body, borders and end pieces, often woven by combining a range of cottons and silks in colors and patterns that are constantly evolving.

Despite its iconic status, the sari is fast becoming a special occasion wear. Chishti’s passion for reviving the sari is

---

expressed through her writing, scripting films, founding the Sari School, and in also teaming up with Daksha Sheth Dance Company to create a stage production, *Saris*. The weavers' stories find a place in the production. "One sari is a coming together of hundreds of years of practice and technique" tells Daksha Sheth. The disappearance of each loom signifies a disappearance of heritage.

"As saris lose their everyday vitality, they'll become rare", fears Chishti, impacting ancient skills and destroying the livelihoods of artisans and weavers. Despite the resurgence of designers going back to weavers in an attempt to revive the traditions, production is greatly threatened, says Chishti. "It needs a mathematical genius to weave a beautiful sari" with the precision and talent required to determine "which dye and which pattern at what part of the 6 yards" will yield the desired density and weight to hold the sari in place. She is concerned such skilled hand-spinning and weaving resources are becoming scarce.

In an effort to reach out to weavers, she runs Taanbaan that works with artisans across different states, creating a range of handspun-handwoven textiles and saris that strike a balance between traditional skill and contemporary appeal.

As an unstitched, unstructured garment, the sari has the capability to constantly reinvent itself. What distinguishes it from another piece of fabric is that it is usually woven in different densities for the body, pallu (end piece) and border. Across India, the sari is woven and worn in myriad ways, each style reflective of a particular region, its culture and its textile heritage.

In 108 variations of draping a sari, Rta Kapur Chishti's book cuts across 14-15 Indian states. Interestingly, we learn that the modern urban drape was first adapted by the Parsis and popularized by Rabindranath Tagore's sister-in-law, Gyanonandini Tagore, who found the Parsi style of draping more elegant for outdoor wear.

In its range and variations, "Weaves, patterns, drapes, aesthetics and expressions . . . this one garment succinctly captures India's incredible diversity." Chishti remains even more fascinated by the versatility and the limitless possibilities the garment offers.

### A regional style of draping in Andhra Pradesh, Boggili Posi



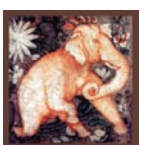
*Saris: Tradition and Beyond* by Rta Kapur Chishti

Worn by: Golla (shepherd community); Gudati Kapulu (agriculturist)  
Area: Narasannapalle, Cuddapah district, Rayalseema region, South Andhra Pradesh  
Length: 9 yd/ 8.26 m

---

#### Acknowledgement:

SACHI extends gracious thanks to Anjali Joshi for hosting the viewing of textiles, and to Meena Vashee and Ritu Panesar for generous program support.



**SACHI**  
Society for Art & Cultural Heritage of India  
[www.sachi.org](http://www.sachi.org)

