

Legacy in Thread: Three Centuries of Maheshwari Woven Anew

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In the heart of Mumbai's Khotachiwadi, the 47-A Gallery stands as a silent witness to history. Within its walls, the 'Ahilyadevi Collection' unfolds—a tribute to the indomitable spirit of Devi Ahilyabai Holkar, the warrior-queen of Malwa, on her 300th birth anniversary. This exhibition, a collaboration between the REHWA Society, WomenWeave, and curator Srila Chatterjee.

The Genesis of Maheshwari Weaving

To understand the essence of the Maheshwari saree, one must journey back to the 18th century. Devi Ahilyabai Holkar, recognizing the potential of her people. This initiative not only provided sustainable livelihoods but also birthed a textile tradition that resonated with dignity and resilience. The rhythmic clack of looms became the heartbeat of Maheshwar, producing sarees that were both a symbol of cultural pride and a testament to craftsmanship.

Reviving Lost Techniques

The 'Ahilyadevi Collection' is not merely a display of sarees; it is a revival of heritage. One of its crowning pieces is the 'Chandravati saree,' a meticulous recreation of a garment once worn by Maharani Chandravati Baisaheb of Indore. Woven with 111 lines of delicate booti in real gold zari, this saree takes over 100 hours to complete.

Equally remarkable are the garva reshmi sarees, feather-light creations woven using the nearly-lost pajni and ochna techniques. These delicate processes of yarn sizing and warp stretching result in fabrics that are impossibly soft and durable. At the heart of this revival is 92-year-old Tulsa Bai, the last living custodian of this knowledge, whose guidance ensures the authenticity of the collection.

A Tribute in Thread

The sarees in this collection are more than just textiles; they are stories woven from memory, portraiture, and archive. Inspired by Holkar family portraits and Raja Ravi Varma's paintings, the textiles draw upon old motifs & temple architecture.

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