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**ROM THE EXPERTS**

# About the **AUTHOR**

**Dr. Sharmila Nagraj Nandula** is a distinguished academician, author, entrepreneur, and lifelong learner with over 30 years of experience. She has worked extensively with design students, design, research, retail, industry, grassroots technologies, weavers, and artisans. Dr. Sharmila is a former Director of Dhruva College of Fashion Technology and Woxsen School of Arts and Design, where she played a pivotal role in shaping the design academic landscape of Telangana. She was also a founding member of **NIFT Hyderabad**, where she served as an Associate Professor for a decade. In addition, Dr. Sharmila has worked with leading U.S. retailers such as Coldwater Creek and Kohl's. She is an alumna of the ILSS: India Leadership for Social Sector.

Dr. Sharmila holds a doctorate in Naturally Dyed Handlooms (Apparel and Textile). Her doctoral research, titled "**Effect of Conscious Connective Processes in the Supply Chain of Handlooms and Apparel in India**", demonstrated that organic cotton handlooms dyed with natural dyes are the best option, as they enhance the physical, physiological, and emotional well-being of the wearer.

Motivated by her research, she founded Kaumudi Studio, a Handloom Design Studio dedicated to empowering weavers and handcrafted sector of Swadeshi Bharat. Dr. Sharmila was honoured by Shri KT Rama Rao, Minist-



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Founder | Kaumudi Studio

-er for Industries & Commerce, and Information Technology, Government of Telangana, with the Eminent Person Award on Handlooms Day for her two-decade-long contribution to the handloom industry. She has also served on the jury of the Santh Kabir Awards and is a passionate advocate for the recognition of handlooms, khadi, indigenous crafts, and design. She is a member with "**Tantavi**", the Office of Development Commissioner (Handlooms), Government of India Initiative for developing, exhibiting and showcasing the handcrafted and handwoven handlooms from the different corners of Swadeshi Bharat.

Her book titled "**From Sketch to Success**". What parents need to know about a career in design. A roadmap to nurturing a design dream is a book every parent must read. It's a book which eases the discomfort of all those parents who seek answers to many questions. Those who want to nurture design dreams for their children will find affirmations in this book. Infact she recommends this book to all as you will find some very profound moments of your life here. A skilled weaver herself, Dr. Sharmila holds exclusive rights related to horoscope weaving in India. She conducts workshops on sustainability, entrepreneurship, innovation, motivation, leadership and book writing, with a focus on imparting valuable insights from India's rich traditions in wisdom, science, and spirituality. Her mission is to inspire and empower young Indians, artisans, and weavers, encouraging them to explore the vast potential this country offers.



# *When Cloth Carries Consciousness*

## **Reclaiming the Soul of Indian Handlooms and its Weavers**

From the moment human beings learned to twist fibre into yarn, cloth has been more than a basic necessity. It has been shelter, identity, ritual, and expression. Across ancient civilizations, textiles carried stories, of land, climate, belief systems, and the people who wove them. Excavations from world heritage sites reveal fabrics of astonishing finesse, reminding us that our ancestors understood fibre, dye, and weave with extraordinary sensitivity and intelligence.

Today, textiles have reached the farthest edges of technological advancement, protecting astronauts in space, firefighters in flames, divers in deep waters, and patients in hospitals. This journey from the humble loom to high-performance materials speaks of human innovation.

Yet, in this rush toward speed and scale, India, once the heart of the world's textile imagination and innovation, has quietly lost something precious.

### **When Weaving Lost Its Place**

For centuries, Indian handlooms thrived under royal patronage, temple economies, and community support. Weaving was not just an occupation; it was a way of life. The weaver understood the rhythm of seasons, the nature of fibres, the mood of colours, and the needs of the wearer. Every region developed its own vocabulary of cloth: Kanchipuram silks, Jamdani muslins, Ikats, Kotas, Maheshwaris, each shaped by geography and culture.

With the decline of princely states, the rise of mills, and later globalization, these living

traditions were pushed to the margins. The weaver slowly disappeared from the centre of the textile story. What followed was fractured supply chains, falling wages, and a growing distance between the maker and the wearer. Cloth that once took months to create was expected to be produced in days.

My work emerges from that silence, from the looms that still beat quietly in villages, waiting to be heard again.

### The Wisdom of Slowness

Handloom has always been slow, not because it lacked efficiency, but because it respected balance. Cotton was grown, harvested, spun, dyed, and woven in harmony with nature. Water was treated with care. Yarn was prepared patiently. Weaving followed time honoured techniques passed down through generations.

In today's language, we might call this "sustainable." But for artisans, it was simply the right way to work.



This doctoral study explored what happens when we return to that pace, when textile making slows down intentionally. Can slowing down create better cloth? Can it reduce harm to the earth? And most importantly, can it restore dignity and meaning to the weaver's work?

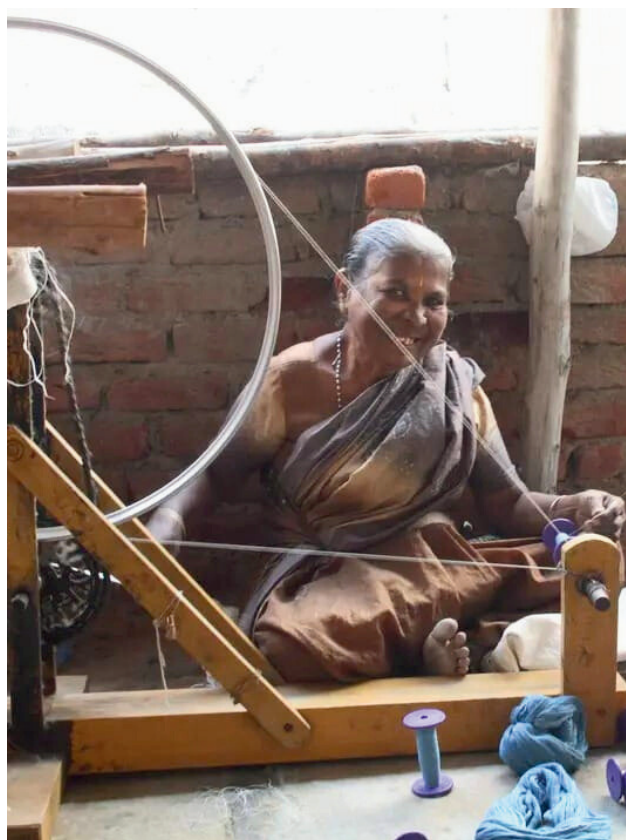
The answer, quietly but clearly, was yes.

### Cloth Made for One, Not Many

One of the most beautiful aspects of this journey was the horoscope weaving, a rare and almost unique practice where fabric is designed specifically for an individual, based on their birth chart.

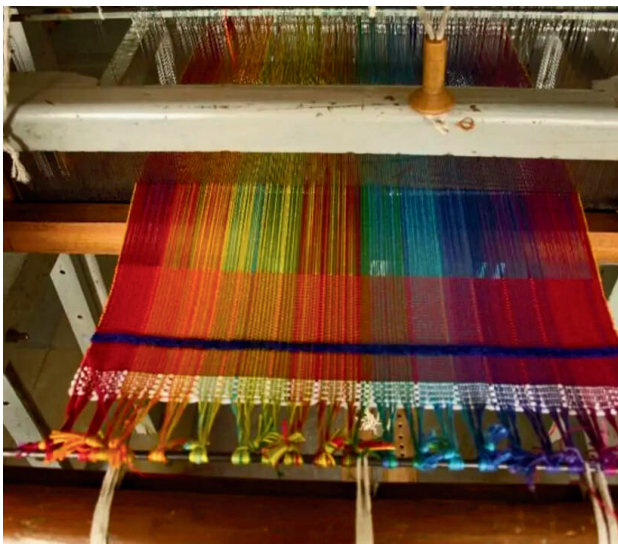
Their birth charts were studied, colours of colour wheel were chosen, and designs were developed according to the chart prepared by Weaver Textile Designer Ms. Bonnie Tarses. The weaver was no longer producing for an anonymous market. She is weaving for a person, a life, a story. The resulting fabrics are deeply personal. They carried intention, care, and a sense of connection. The wearer, in turn, began to see the cloth not as a product, but as something made *with* them, not just *for* them.

In this exchange, the ancient relationship between weaver and wearer was restored through my research called "Effect of Conscious Connective Processes in the Supply Chain of Handlooms and Apparel in India"



## Organic Cotton, Natural Colour, Living Processes

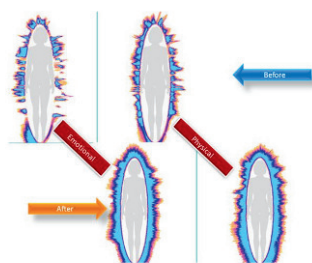
Cotton feels alive, soft, breathable, and gentle on the skin. When such amazing cottons are dyed with natural dyes and woven in handloom it just becomes candy next to the skin. But what truly set this process apart is the return of practices once deeply embedded in artisan communities. Rituals with good intent and respect around the Water, yarn, and fabric make a huge difference in how the fabric turn out.



## When Clothing Touches the Body and Beyond

Clothing is the closest environment we live in, it touches our skin for 24 hours every day. Yet we rarely think about how it might affect us beyond comfort or appearance. Handlooms Wearers spoke of feeling calmer, more grounded, more aware of what they were wearing and why in this research.

It gently reminded us that clothing is not neutral. What we wear can support us or drain us. The research proved that it increased the positive energy field of a person when conscious handlooms are worn.



Before and after readings of female subject wearing 100% organic natural dyed handloom cotton horoscope fabric.

## Earth, Economy, and the Power of Local

A simple carbon footprint assessment of handlooms reveals what artisans have always known: handloom is among the lightest industries on the planet. Naturally dyed, organic cotton handloom fabric has minimal environmental impact, from fibre to disposal.

When we buy handloom, we do more than choose a fabric. We support local economies. We keep families rooted in their villages. We protect water, soil, and air. And we ensure that knowledge passed through generations does not vanish in silence.

***“Buy local” is not a trend, it is a responsibility.***

## Bringing Weaver and Wearer Together Again

What is need today is a meeting, between hands that make and bodies that wear, is where handloom truly comes alive. It changes the way clothes are looked at and perceived. Once the stories are understood handloom doesn't remain just a product it becomes a “Service to Humanity and service to Mother Earth”.

In a world chasing speed and sameness, Indian handlooms offer something rare: depth, individuality, and soul. They remind us that progress does not always mean moving forward. Sometimes, it means remembering, celebrating and cherishing our heritage, culture and our craftsmanship.

Perhaps the future of Indian textiles lies not in forgetting the past, but in listening to it more closely. Because when cloth carries consciousness, it does more than cover us, it connects us.

And in that connection, both the weaver and the wearer find their place again.