

the **Whitworth**

# RAISA KABIR

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## Raisa Kabir

Raisa Kabir is a multi-disciplinary artist, weaver and writer. Kabir is of Bangladeshi origin, brought up in Manchester and now living in London after training at Chelsea College of Arts.

Kabir references the upheavals of the social and political climate of the 20th century subcontinent, including the Bangladesh War of Liberation in 1971 and its aftermath. From 1947–1971 Bangladesh was annexed to Pakistan and formerly known as East Pakistan. The act of weaving and the yarn come together to physically and metaphorically map spaces of time and memory and their associated tensions.

1.

**Lengha (a type of skirt)** c.1890

Brocaded in gold thread and white silk

Varanasi (also known as Benares), India

The lengha is typically worn with a fitted bodice and dupatta (a type of shawl) draped over one or both shoulders and/or the head.

Purchased in 1983

2.

**Shawl** c.1890

Silk and gold brocade

Varanasi (also known as Benares), India

Varanasi (also known as Benares), is a city known for its heritage of rich silk and gold-thread woven brocades, situated on the banks of the River Ganges, in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, India

Purchased in 1983

3.

**Silk and gold brocade cloth** c.1890

Varanasi (also known as Benares), India.

This type of cloth is also known as kinkhab: hand woven in gold and silver jari or metal thread in such a way that the face of the fabric is almost entirely covered in jari.

The combination of both gold and silver threads in kinkhab is sometimes referred to as a Ganga-Yamuna or Ganga-Jamuna pattern, after the two great rivers in India, the Ganges and the Yamuna.

Purchased in 1983



**These textiles at 1, 2 and 3** once belonged to the family of the last Maharaja of the Punjab, Duleep Singh (1838 – 1893) who was deposed by the British in 1849. Favoured by Queen Victoria who later became godmother to his children, including his daughters, Princess Sophia and Princess Catherine, Duleep Singh was granted a pension by the British Government and lived at Elveden Hall, Suffolk. (The two daughters were subsequently involved in the suffragette movement). The Punjab was split between Pakistan and India during the partition.



Photograph of Princess Catherine Duleep Singh. Undated. Presented to the Whitworth in 1983 by Oriel Sutherland.



Duleep Singh. Oil on canvas. Franz Xaver Winterhalter, 1854 Royal Collection Trust © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2017



4.

**Sari** 2011

Khadi cotton (hand spun and hand woven) with gold thread border  
Gujarat, India

Khadi is hand spun and hand woven cotton and was championed by the Indian civil rights leader, Mahatma Gandhi (1869 – 1948) as part of the national movement for swaraj (self-rule) and swadeshi (economic self-sufficiency) so that India could be independent and free from British rule.

Purchased in 2012

5.

**Seal bags** 1800-1880

Silk and Satin brocade

The seals are made of wax and coloured red by the substance, lac, a resin produced by the insect *Laccifer lacca*, commonly found in India.

The Arabic inscription on the seal imprints relate to Kalb Ali Khan, the Nawab of Rampur (1832 – 1887) and his investiture as Knight Grand Commander of the Order of the Star of India in 1875. The date 1875 is not written as such but relates to the Arabic date 1294.

Translation courtesy Jenny Norton-Wright (Early Career Curator, Islamic and South Asian Art and Material Culture, Manchester Museum, the University of Manchester) and Jake Benson (PhD candidate, University of Leiden)

Presented by Sir Thomas Wardle 1904

6.

**Raisa Kabir** 2017

Silk red warp yarns, hand dyed in cochineal

Courtesy of the artist

7.

**New Age muslin sari, 350 thread count** 2015-2016

Cotton muslin jamdani

Hand woven by Al Amin in the village of Rupganj, near Dhaka, Bangladesh

Muslin has been celebrated and revered for centuries as it was considered to be so finely woven and transparent that it was compared to moonlight or morning dew. It was favoured by the Moghul rulers, worn at court by both men and women.

Jamdani is an ancient art of weaving very fine quality muslin fabric that combines intricate floral or geometric designs with the application of a localised extra weft as the fabric is woven (the weft is the yarn which runs horizontally, across the cloth). It is widely known as the rarest and most sophisticated example of handloom weaving and today is mainly produced in the states of Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, India and the city of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Drik (Bengal Muslin) is an organisation working with weavers in Bangladesh to revive the traditional textile, muslin. As part of this work they are currently researching the historical indigenous cotton species, *Gossypium arboreum* Var. *Neglecta*, locally known as *phuti karpas*.

During the past three years, Bengal Muslin has travelled to legendary locations all over Bangladesh encouraging the weaving communities (known as tanti) to accept the challenge of weaving ancient high thread count (250 +) muslin. They searched many weaving villages for the best artisans. Ultimately, they found one master craftsperson, Al Amin from Rupganj, Dhaka.

Over a five month period, the team experimented with different humidity and temperature conditions, using different reed and loom configurations until Al Amin successfully wove the first 200 thread count sari. Subsequently, a 300 thread count sari rolled off the loom followed by a hand woven sari of 350 count, all embellished with the motifs of jamdani. The last and the best of these 'new-age muslin' saris is on display here.

For more information please visit [bengalmuslin.com](http://bengalmuslin.com).

Courtesy Saiful Islam/ Drik (Bengal Muslin)

8.

**Raisa Kabir**

**It must be nice to fall in love...** 2017

Cotton and silk, hand dyed in cochineal

This is a specially commissioned piece designed and woven by Raisa Kabir which reflects and investigates the South Asian Textile collections and their place at the Whitworth, as a direct response to the research of the collections during the artist's 'Work in Progress' (2016) residency.

In this piece, the artist employs extensive intricate use of extra weft figuring techniques, with her own specific 'un-weaving' technique to examine psycho-geographies, referencing maps, memory, trauma and power. (Psycho-geography describes the effect of a geographical location on the emotion and behaviour of individuals). The woven textiles are used to recreate shifting woven borders, outlining a pre-partition map of India distorted by the weaving processes. The piece re-utilises the ways textiles have been crucial in the construction of powerful ideas surrounding nationalism and identity.

'My country. My home. My land. My diaspora. My Motherland is a memory of unwoven dreams'.

Hand woven on a 16 shaft Harris Loom.

Courtesy of the artist

9.

**Patka (sash)** c.1800

Silk and gold metal thread, India

A patka is a sash worn around the waist by a man and was a popular accessory during the Mughal empire (1526 – 1857)

Presented to the Whitworth

10.

**Length of mashru** 1880-1884

Silk and cotton

India

Mashru is a type of fabric with a silk warp (the yarns which run vertically) and cotton weft (the yarns which run horizontally), woven in a satin weave. This gives the fabric a glossy 'outer' finish and smooth, cool 'under' side. Sir Thomas Wardle (1831 – 1909) was a silk dyer and philanthropist from Leek, Staffordshire. He is widely recognised as a key figure in the research and development of Indian natural dyes and collaborated with William Morris in the production of dyed and embroidered textiles.

Presented by Sir Thomas Wardle 1904

11.

**Part of a shawl** mid 19th century

Wool

Kashmir, India

On loan from the Gayer-Anderson collection, Manchester Museum, the University of Manchester

12.

**Length of mashru** 1880-1884

Silk and cotton with ikat (resist dyed woven pattern)

India

Presented to the Whitworth

13.

**Fragment** 1700-1899

Silk damask

On permanent loan from the Manchester College of Art and Design



[manchester.ac.uk/whitworth](http://manchester.ac.uk/whitworth)

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