VARANASI
City of colours, City of light

“Older than history,
older than tradition,
older even than legend,
and looks twice as old
as all of them put together.”

Mark Twain
THE VISION
Continuing the thread of tradition
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VARANASI: A HISTORY
For millennia Varanasi has been a place of sacred pilgrimage in India and is one of the oldest living cities in the world. For over a thousand years it has been home to the largest number of silk handloom weavers in India, who have kept alive this tradition over generations. These artisans have considered their craft sacred, a connection with the soul and a way of life. The rich fabrics they weave were once used to adorn the bodies of royalty and the common man alike. Today these exquisite textiles are considered an essential ceremonial and wedding gift.

CRISIS
The effects of globalization have changed the economic make-up of Varanasi. The weaving sector hit an all time low in the past decade, creating a great imbalance. The decreasing demand for a good product and traditional clothing in India created an unreasonable compromise on quality. User friendly products and increased supply of cheap imitations spoiled the market.
THE CHALLENGES

This led to more than 80% of Varanasi’s looms shutting down and 50,000 weavers at risk of being on the streets. They had become victims of an exploitative trading system. Having no power to negotiate with the market left them with poorly paid wages and this forced them to look for other means of livelihood as construction labourers or rickshaw pullers. In such circumstances Upasana along with Bestseller Denmark took up the challenge to reverse the situation of this weaving community by starting the Varanasi Weavers Foundation project (VWF).

VARANASI WEAVERS: THE PROJECT

The project’s vision was to create the Varanasi Weavers brand as a vehicle to promote the weavers and their textiles and protect the unique craft and heritage of this city. In 2006 Upasana and Bestseller’s aim for starting this Foundation was to create work opportunities for the weavers, so that they could revive and practice their art and make a sustainable living to preserve this ancient craft from slowly disappearing. The project’s focus is on consciously making the product user friendly and choosing to weave designs that are feasible only for handloom.
The project has helped the weavers develop weaving through modern techniques that are user-friendly and machine-washable. The women empowerment programme through reviving the traditional button making craft project has helped many to gain financial independence. The foundation has worked out such that the weavers are able to buy raw material through credit and doing the quality control themselves. Of late the project’s production capacity has grown because five other cooperatives and businesses have joined as partners keeping in mind the vision of the project. Meanwhile the numbers of weavers VWF works with directly has been growing every month gently restoring traditions that have been the pride for the livelihoods of these weavers since ages. In the social development sector VW through community participation held health camps for the villagers in and around Varanasi and worked with self-help groups and other NGOs to help strengthen the identity of Varanasi textile.

**THE DEVELOPMENT**

The project has been actively working towards involving more members from the weavers’ community and gradually becoming sustainable. The weavers have undergone specialised training and are becoming aware of the complex steps involved in the textile industry. The project has been able to channel all finances to the respective villages and the weavers manage their own accounts. The weavers are able to buy raw material through credit and have started doing their own quality control. This has been a big step forward for the project and the weavers. It has created a production fund for loan purposes which over a period of two years are repaid in full. Part of this money is invested in providing the weavers with a working capital.

**THE ACHIEVEMENTS**

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The weaver community is learning to adapt to new ways of thinking to keep up with the fast changing demands of modern life. With the support of Upasana and Bestseller they are learning to organize themselves in small production groups in different villages, having their own bank accounts, being specially trained into the various complex steps involved in this trade and gradually moving towards being independent and capable of running their own businesses.

THE OUTCOME

Varanasi is often associated with the traditional Indian sari. The Varanasi Weavers project has launched new lines of products that extend beyond traditional garments to modern classics. Styles are contemporary to meet the tastes of the present generation and range from saris, stoles, dupattas, running materials as well as hand-embroidered buttons and hair accessories.

THE COLLECTION
THE COLLECTION
Raja Kairi
M 23

Beej Kairi
M 37

Ambari
VW D5/10
Sudarshan
M 19

VW 92 Big

Duchukri
M 18

Choti Imli
VW 56

Judavi
M 44

Stole

Stole
Sinduri  
M 17

Trinetra  
M 20

Badi Imli  
VW 68

Pan Patti  
M 16

Stole
VW 63
VW 55 M
VW 52 Small
Trinetra
M 20
VW 87M
VW 80
Stole
Cross
VW M01

Raja Kairi
M 23
Cross
VW M01

Lahar
MK 07

Iklouti
M 26
Accessories | Hair Clips

Aamia
MD 2

Patia
MD 2

VW CL01

VW CL02
Accessories | Hair Clips

VW CL03

VW CL04

VW CL05

VW CL06
Accessories | Hair Clips
Accessories | buttons
Accessories | buttons
Accessories | buttons

B10 24

B10 38

B02 31

B10 30
Accessories | buttons
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For more information on Varanasi Weavers or the other projects visit:
www.upasana.in
www.varanasiweavers.org

or write to:
Office@upasana.in
“God Almighty is also a weaver ..... he weaves unique designs for everyone!”

Kabir