

Molakalmuru Saree: The Jewel of Karnataka's Looms

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Nestled in the rugged terrain of Chitradurga district in Karnataka lies the humble village Molakalmuru, which is 245 kilometers away from Bengaluru - a place whose name has become synonymous with elegance, tradition and intricate craftsmanship. The Molakalmuru saree, hand-woven with devotion and artistry, stands as one of India's finest examples of weaving excellence, carrying forward a legacy that has adorned women for generations.

A Legacy Woven in Threads

The tradition of weaving in Molakalmuru dates back several decades. Often referred to as "Karnataka Banaras," this small town earned that title for producing sarees that rival the grandeur of the famed Kanchipuram silks. The weavers, primarily from the Sokulasali, Pattasali and Padmasali communities (and now including other groups) use pure mulberry silk threads sourced from Karnataka and zari (gold or metallic thread) from Surat. The result: a saree with luxurious texture, rich color and intricate motifs. It was published in the Mysore State gazetteer in 1967 that the weaving industry of Molakalmuru has provincial reputation and the molakalmuru is famous for pure silk sarees woven on primitive pit looms.

The Art of Weaving Elegance

Creating a single Molakalmuru saree is no small feat. The weaving is done on pit looms with 3 jaquards, using fly-shuttle or throw-shuttle techniques and employs a three-shuttle system: one for the body of the saree, two for the borders. A hallmark of this craft is the contrast of colors: the border and the pallu (the decorated end piece) are often dyed differently from the body to achieve an elegant visual effect. Motifs inspired by nature and temple art - such as peacocks, lotuses, mangoes, swans (hamsa), rudrakshi seeds - frequently adorn these sarees and also received special patronage during the ruling of Nalvadi Krishnarajendrawadeyar, the prince of then Mysore province. The color palette is rich: deep maroons, royal blues, vibrant magentas, radiant golds, mustard, green, snuff, black etc. The techniques involved in production of Pure silk molakalmur Kuttu saree are:-

1. Kuttu Technique – Manual interlacement of border & body weft using 3 throw shuttles.
2. Chalu Technique – Joining of existing warp ends with new warp ends at Pallow body portion.



Fig. 1: Photographs of Molakalmuru Pure silk Handloom sarees

A Living Heritage

Recognizing its cultural and artisanal value, the Molakalmuru saree received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2011. That means only sarees woven in this region and meeting the craft's standards can legally carry the name "Molakalmuru". However, like many traditional crafts, the weavers of Molakalmuru face challenges: economic pressures, competition from machine-made fabrics, and dwindling numbers of skilled artisans. Efforts by government bodies and NGOs are underway to revive and support the cluster.

Modern Appeal with Timeless Charm

Today, Molakalmuru sarees have found admirers far beyond Karnataka. Designers are experimenting with new motifs and slightly lighter weaves to make them suitable for contemporary wear while preserving the traditional essence. They are increasingly seen in bridal trousseaus, festive wardrobes, and among discerning connoisseurs of handloom silks.

Threads of Pride

The Molakalmuru saree is more than just attire - it's a symbol of Karnataka's artistic heritage, a reminder of how tradition and craftsmanship can weave together a story of resilience and beauty. Each saree from this village is not just fabric; it's a labour of love, an heirloom in the making. So, the next time you drape a Molakalmuru saree - remember: you are wearing not just silk and zari, but a piece of Karnataka's soul.