



Image: Textile length, embroidered cotton / beetle wing / metallic gold thread. Photo by Zan Wimberley

## CHARKHA AND KARGHA

Powerhouse's new exhibition presenting highlights from the museum's expansive collection of Indian textiles opened on 13 August. Taking its title from Charkha (spinning wheel) and Kargha (loom), the exhibition features over 100 rare items that date back to the foundational collections of the Powerhouse acquired since the 1880s.

In addition to their beauty, many of the textiles featured in the exhibition incorporate spinning, weaving, dyeing and embroidery techniques. Highlights include block-printed textiles, known as **Fustat** fragments, believed to be made in Gujarat in the 1400s.

A fine pashmina shawl woven in Kashmir between 1840–60 exemplifies the double-interlock twill tapestry weave **Kani**, which has proven impossible for Europeans to replicate, nor match the extreme softness of pashmina shawls. The design reflects the reciprocal influence of French jacquard-woven shawls of the early to mid-1800s.

Another highlight is a textile embellished with iridescent jewel-like beetle wings, likely made in Madras or Hyderabad in the 1800s. It is indicative of India's successful export trade in dress panels, muslin stoles, flounces and table linen.

Traditional men's clothing on display includes a hand sewn silk coat with brocaded floral designs, made between 1900–25, and a silk and velvet vest featuring **Zardozi** (gold work embroidery), including **Salma** (densely set small coils) and sequins made in the Punjab region during the 1800s.

The exhibition features a recently acquired work by artist **Sangeeta Sandrasegar**, *What falls from view*, 2019. The work features Khadi and silk pieces, hand-dyed in Indian indigo and Australian native cherry. [Anu Kumar](#)'s medium format photographs that document the Australian-Indian diaspora are another highlight.

*Charkra and Kargha* coincides with the 75th anniversary of India's independence. The exhibition demonstrates the role that textiles played in India's movement towards independence from colonial rule. To mark Independence Day, Powerhouse announced a major donation by the Indian Government to the Powerhouse collection. The donation from the **Indian Government's Ministry of Textiles** includes 60 exemplary examples of handwoven sarees, turban cloths and other textiles from across India, two handlooms from Hyderabad and Varanasi and two charkha models. 62 documentary films about textile production were also donated by the **Indian Government's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting**.

For the opening week of the exhibition, Powerhouse is hosting from India **Master Weaver Shri Naseem Ahmed**, accompanied by assistant weaver **Shri Tauseef Ahmad Ansari**, providing weaving demonstrations on the traditional wooden Banarasi (Varanasi) loom. **Master Weaver Shri Ramesh Tadaka**, accompanied by assistant weaver **Shri Yadagiri Paladi**, is also providing demonstrations on the Hyderabad loom.

"We are honoured by the opportunity to support the *Charkha and Kargha* exhibition in this landmark year. The Indian Ministry of Textiles has generously provided exquisite handwoven fabrics from different parts of India depicting its rich heritage, including silk and cotton sarees, textile accessories, handlooms, and by sending highly accomplished master weavers from India for live demonstrations to complement the exhibition. I would like to commend the curatorial team at the Powerhouse for their nuanced and exemplary work. Each item on display in the exhibition has its unique aesthetic signature and a glorious history behind it," said **Honourable Consul General of India Sydney Manish Gupta**.

Additional live demonstrations of spinning and weaving will take place in the [Powerhouse Ultimo Textile Centre](#), along with talks on Indian textiles, masterclasses on textile weaving, dyeing and spinning by **Master Vankar Vishram Valji**.

In the lead up to **Diwali**, a late-night program featuring fashion, textile masterclasses and Indian cuisine will celebrate *Charkha and Kargha* on Thursday 20 October as part of the ongoing [Powerhouse Late](#) series. Master weaver **Vankar Shamji Vikram** will deliver a spinning demonstration, the first of a three-part weaving workshop series. Talks on the exhibition will be presented by contemporary artists **Anu Kumar** and **Sangeeta Sandrasegar**, curatorial advisor **Dr. Chaitanya Sambrani** and textile artist **Liz Williamson**.

Additional live demonstrations of spinning and weaving will take place throughout the duration of the exhibition in the [Powerhouse Ultimo Textile Centre](#), along with talks on Indian textiles and daily storytelling of Indian folktales.

“*Charkha and Kargha* pays homage to the skill and creativity of generations of textile artisans and embroiderers from across India. Powerhouse is excited to be sharing this extraordinary collection with many of these objects being on display for the first time,” said **Powerhouse Chief Executive Lisa Havilah**.

“Textile production has always occupied an important place in India and among its craftspeople and weavers. *Charkha and Kargha* highlights a selection of unique Indian textiles collected by Powerhouse, shedding light on the diverse techniques of textile craft, design and production. These include botanical specimens used for dyeing, spinning wheels and loom; woodblock prints; and diverse Indian textiles and garments,” said **Powerhouse Curator Pedram Khosronejad**.

*Charkha and Kargha* is presented by Powerhouse with the support of the Consulate General of India, Sydney. Associate Professor Dr. Chaitanya Sambrani of the School of Art and Design, Australian National University was curatorial advisor with the support of Liz Williamson and Christina Sumner. The exhibition was curated by Dr. Pedram Khosronejad and assistant curator Alysha Buss with exhibition design by Hugh O’Connor. The project was managed by Anna Gardner and realised with the support of a multidisciplinary team of Powerhouse staff and collaborators.

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