KUN.BE

A SERVITISATION FRAMEWORK FOR THE SUSTAINABLE REVIVAL OF GOA'S KUNBI SAREE

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Abstract

The Kunbi saree, once an integral part of tribal Goan identity, is now threatened by colonial erasure and mass production. Despite its historical and cultural richness, attempts at revival have not yet reclaimed its importance. Located at the intersection of cultural protection and sustainable innovation, the study identifies systemic challenges and proposes service-driven strategies to re-establish the Kunbi saree into contemporary fashion economies. Services such as digital engagement, co-creation, and craft-based story-telling present a culturally located and economically viable model for the revival of Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs), by restoring value through the service-led design approach. The project *Kun.Be* positions servitisation as a tool of cultural resistance and economic sustainability, and proposes a replicable model for reviving endangered heritage crafts through service-driven engagement.

Keywords: *Kunbi Saree; Servitisation; Heritage Textile Revival; Cultural Resistance; Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs).*

FROM LOSS TO RESISTANCE

The Kunbi saree, also known as the *Kapod* or *Dhentulli*, is Goa's most ancient saree tradition, which was once part of the everyday attire of the Kunbi-Gawda people (Correia, 2006; Monteiro, 2015; Fernandes & Desouza, 2022). Once woven and worn by the agrarian Kunbi tribe, the saree embodied everyday resilience. It's red-and-white checkered patterns, rudraksha motifs, and life-stage colour coding represent resilience, social hierarchy, and ritual continuity. (Fig. 01)

Although there is no proof of the Kunbi people being the first weavers, from 1930 to 1950, the Shettigars of Candolim, Rasquinhas of Bastora, and Kamats were three large families that dominated this saree industry (Gaatha, 2020–2022). The

Portuguese colonial rule abruptly disrupted this continuity, wherein the local traditions were kept out and traditional attire such as Kunbi saree was relegated with restrictions (Monteiro, 2015; Vas et al., 2021). Today the craft is near extinction, with less than twenty operational weavers today, influenced by globalised fashion, modern silhouettes, and mass-production (Sharma & Sornapudi, 2024).

The saree has survived in spite of cultural opposition, having been preserved in secret chambers and reasserting itself later in ritual contexts like *Shigmo* celebrations and *Dhalo* dances (Rodrigues, 1977; Monteiro, 2015). The saree then embodies what Said (1993) has coined as "survival through subaltern aesthetics" - where material

COMPONENTS & DRAPING OF KUNBI

Body Checks inspired by religious 'Chowk' design

'Chowk'

'6 mukhi Rudraksh'

4.5 inch Border on top and bottom- generally features two lines of motifs representing 'Rudraksh'.

Pallav Design generally features stripes

Pallav/ Pallu usually knotted on right shoulder, In some cases the knot is also place at front

Till 1940's was worn without top/ Blouse, until the law in 1560 that mandated wearing the blouse

Pleats in the front

Knee length saree with Dobby border in silken flat inset is usually a nine yard saree

Fig. 01

culture is a place of hidden resistance. The global fast fashion boom, as well as the post-liberalisation era of the 1990s, have further marginalised the handwoven crafts. The younger generation perceived the Kunbi saree as "backward", and machine-made replicas and man-made fabrics stripped it of its authenticity and financial worth (Sharma & Sornapudi, 2024). Moreover, Goa's tourist economy converted cultural identity into leisure and *Lusophone* culture, and in the process, diluted the tribal narrative in the state's visual culture (Ifeka, 1985; Alvares, 2002). In this framework, the decline of Kunbi sari weaving is not merely due to economic disinterest but as a result of deep-rooted challenges of Cultural invisibility, postcolonial marginalisation, and postcolonial displacement (Barbosa, 2012; Fernandes & Desouza, 2022; Shetye, 2023; Vas et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to revive the saree, through strategies that actively promote cultural empowerment, emotional identification, and socio-economic respectability.

This research responds to the wider challenge of reimagining fashion as a site of pleasure, power, and care, particularly in times of socio-cultural vulnerability. It explores how servitisation strategies can be useful not just for economic purposes, but also contribute to emotional and cultural revival in heritage textile systems.

Initially rooted in industrial management (Vandermerwe & Rada, 1988) and developed through Product-Service Systems (Tukker, 2004; Mont, 2002; Baines et al., 2009; Vargo & Lusch, 2008), servitisation reformulates consumption as experience instead of transaction. Its application has since been expanded in diverse sectors, including Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs) (Sundbo, Rubalcaba & Gallouj, 2021), wherein it focuses on value co-creation, customisation, emotional engagement and lifecycle extension. Moreover, research reveals its potential for the sustainable revival of traditional crafts (Ho, 2024; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; LaSalle & Britton, 2003; Sundbo et al., 2021). Against the backdrop of this context, the research adopts servitisation not only as a business model but as a culturally situated, design-driven strategy for resistance and preservation. Value here is not embedded solely in the product, but it is co-created through ongoing services (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). This shift evolves

the craft from static preservation to dynamic participation (Mont, 2002; Baines et al., 2009). On the contrary, the Kunbi saree revival has so far been on an aesthetic level in which the systemic cultural and economic exclusions have largely been ignored (Gaatha, 2022).

In contrast, servitisation offers a more emotionally resilient and socially embedded model (Chapman, 2005). As Baines et al. (2019), Bigdeli et al. (2017), and Tukker (2004) note, servitisation is a progressive transformation strategy that supports sustainability and unlocks new revenue streams. This study proposes a four-stage model, adapted from Baines et al. (2009), and reimagined for the Kunbi saree's revival, reframing fashion as care, continuity, and cultural resistance (Haraway, 1988; Makhubu & Mbongwa, 2019).

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

This study is excerpted from a broader master's thesis titled *"Revival of the Kunbi saree-A servitisation based approach"*, conducted at Politecnico di Milano in the MSc of Design for the Fashion System (Agarwal, 2025). The article reflects the researcher's situated knowledge as an Indian (Hindu) female researcher, which informed the study with cultural familiarity and sensitivity. Grounded in a feminist and decolonial ethics of care (Serafini, 2021), while the thesis provided a comprehensive exploration of the craft's decline, stakeholder analysis, and systemic barriers, this article focuses specifically on how service design strategies can act as tools of cultural care and resistance within heritage textile systems. This study employs a qualitative, design-driven methodology to explore ways in which servitisation strategies can enable the revival of the Kunbi saree tradition as cultural care, economic empowerment, and resistance against erasure. The author navigated between academic research and embodied field experiences to create a framework embedded in weavers' daily lives and respond to systemic revival gaps.

Servitisation, first introduced in manufacturing industries (Vandermerwe & Rada, 1988; Baines et al., 2009), refers to a shift from merely selling tangible goods to offer product service systems. This concept in Creative and Cultural Industries, refers to a shift from selling artefacts to providing experiential products and services, such as renting, repairing, co-creation, that add cultural, economic or emotional value. This study adapts the servitisa-

tion model to the Kunbi saree weaving industry and positions it as both a business model and a cultural preservation delivery system.

The study progressed in four iterative stages: the initial phase involved understanding the socio-historical background of the Kunbi saree and concepts of servitisation through literature review. More than 50 secondary sources comprising policy reports, electronic repositories, research articles, and textile studies reports were analysed. to determine the gaps in past revival efforts and understand the applicability of servitisation models in CCIs (Tukker, 2004; Sundbo et al., 2021). This phase also comprised comparative studies of best practice in CCIs, such as Gaatha, *"Weaving time"* by Incas (Gagarin, 2020), and *"I was a Sari",* to inform how services like repair, narrative, or digital connectivity could be transposed for heritage crafts.

In the next phase, the primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews of two key stakeholders: Verma D'Mello, Executive Director of the NGO- Goa Sudharop, and Radha, founder of Sincro, a digital platform dedicated to Kunbi sarees. While none of the two interviewees belong to the community directly, they were selected due to their direct involvement with Kunbi weaving revival. They both work closely with weavers and act as a mediator to foster connection between indigenous knowledge and contemporary fashion.

Verma D'Mello has been actively working with weavers through an NGO- Goa Sudharop, aiming to support and uplift the community and Kunbi saree since 2017, Radha's connection to the craft stems from her mother's revival initiative at Goa College of Home Science since 2011. Their prolonged engagement with the members of the community and the craft have provided significant insights on revival challenges and maintaining authenticity of the craft. Nevertheless, the study acknowledges the limitation of not interviewing direct community members. Future research must address this gap for deeper validation of authenticity concerns. The interviews focussed on exploring the challenges in retaining cultural authenticity while modifying designs to attract younger generations and maintaining the emotional significance during the revival process. The study employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis model that consists of: familiarisation with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming the themes and producing

the report. This process ensured that the recurring ideas were strategically identified. For example, the codes referring to "challenges in authenticity" and "youth disinterest", were grouped into the broader themes of "technological barriers" and "socio-cultural challenges", situated within the overarching category of challenges in the Kunbi saree industry. Through this process, the literature analysis and transcription of interviews revealed two overarching themes: (1) Challenges in the Kunbi Saree Industry and (2) Opportunities for servitisation.

The third phase was about developing a model through design synthesis. Building on the insights derived from Phase 1 and 2, a four- stage servitisation model was developed, namely-Awareness, Engagement, Innovation and Scaling. This phase mixed the theory and the empirical results to create a progression model and a service design proposal tailored to Kunbi Saree's socio-economic and cultural environment. In applying the servitisation model to the Kunbi saree industry, the model is also theoretically anchored to Howard-Grenville et al. (2011) understanding of liminality in cultural change. This is to ensure that the progression stays within the boundaries of authenticity (liminal), with meaning and cultural authority intact, without diverging into commoditization or detachment (liminoid). Cultural custodianship is therefore still paramount in each of the four stages, regulating the way services, collaborations, and international outreach are developed and leveraged. Within this framework, the model focuses on digital storytelling, repair services, co-creation, and experiential offers as forces towards long term sustainability (Baines et al.,2009; Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Mont, 2002).

Finally, in the last phase the study translated these insights into the project Kun.Be, that provides a progression model, specific to the Kunbi Saree weaving industry, to ensure practical implementation of servitisation. The study emphasises participatory and culturally aware methodology, understanding design's role not only as an intervention tool, but as a practice that incorporates listening, translating and rebuilding community roots.

CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

The modern dilemmas of the Kunbi saree weaving tradition are not just the result of economic disregard or market obsolescence, but also of more profound cultural stigmas and structural breaks wrought by colonialism, casteism, and global fashion capitalism. Based on the interviews with Verma D'Mello and Radha, two engaged voices in the saree's revival, and supported by secondary literature, this section identifies the socio-cultural, economic, and technological obstacles to revival, and examines why standard interventions have been insufficient and how servitisation can prove to be a better solution.

Amongst young Goans, the saree is found to be largely out of fashion, and a signifier of low caste status (Gaatha, 2020; Fernandes & Desouza, 2022). Such stigma, along with the erosion of intergenerational transfer of knowledge, leads to fewer elders weaving and less youth interest. These reports align with broader trends reported by Majeed (2018), Ghosh (2011) and Ghosh & Ghoshal (2019), which mention rural artisans increasingly moving towards urban employment, considering traditional weaving to be economically unviable.

In spite of its lush pictorial and symbolic lexicon, the present situation of the Kunbi saree in the world of fashion is tenuous. Shows such as Verma's in Cannes provide temporary visibility but do not necessarily result in sustained economic infrastructure (FABUK Magazine, 2017). Radha's experiments in design have been receiving growing attention but remain niche. Without institutional support, such interventions risk becoming sentimental instead of systemic.

Economically, the craft suffers from high raw material costs, low scalability, and non-Geographical Indication recognition that limits its authenticity and traceability (Sharma & Sornapudi, 2024; Verma D'Mello). Policy delays and institutional neglect further hinder advancement. Additionally, the price of cotton yarn increases the production cost, mostly because it's imported from the neighbouring states, due to unsuitable climatic conditions for growing yarn in Goa. This makes the saree uncompetitive with the machine-made alternatives. Weavers lack credit, subsidy and corporate facilities, and therefore, are reliant on NGO support or patronage. This absence of structured financial support discourages new entrants and limits the opportunities for innovation in the craft. Besides, absence of market relationships and formal distribution channels, limits artisans access to scalable and regular markets. The absence of GI tags adds to the

complication of the situation, failing to protect the originality of the weave, and allowing cheap replicas to dodge weaver economies. Moreover, the saree remains highly disconnected from digital markets, which further exacerbates the problem. Kethan et al. (2022) and Mishra et al. (2022) discuss that the problem lies not with demand but with infrastructure. The weavers still have no access to digital tools for design iteration, price transparency, and e-retail platforms. This exclusion distances them from new avenues of sales and commerce.

Both the interviewees highlighted the need to develop digital ecosystems. Verma stressed the value of digital storytelling as a memory project, archiving local dialects, weaving rituals, and personal histories of women who wore the saree. Radha emphasised the need to develop a digital infrastructure to reach and meet the practical needs of young and global consumers. This means that technological renaissance is not just an issue of digitisation but of culturally-sensitive tech design that takes into account the rhythms, literacy levels, and emotional attachments of the community.

SERVITISATION STRATEGIES FOR REVIVAL

As per the challenges identified in Section 3, it is clear that the revival of Kunbi saree cannot be done just by the aesthetic intervention or discrete programmes. These problems jeopardise the sustainability and the cultural meaning of the craft. In combating these issues, servitisation presents an attractive alternative. It repositions the Kunbi saree from being merely a piece of clothing, to an interactive space for cultural continuity. For example, repair and restyling can contribute to the longevity of products (Mont, 2002; Vargo & Lusch, 2008); narrative platforms, such as Gaatha, can form emotional connections. Possibly, craftsmanship can be converted to lived experiences through experiential workshops (Tukker, 2004; Gebauer, 2021; Chai-Arayalert et al., 2021). Global examples, such as Italian Artisan, indicate that partnerships between designers and artisans can promote identity and economic growth. Therefore, the strategies proposed here are a direct response to the social, economic, and technological challenges discussed earlier, not as discrete solutions but elements of networked strategies for resilience through education, engagement, innovation, and collaboration.

EDUCATIONAL REVIVAL AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

As discussed in the previous section, a major challenge in the Kunbi Saree weaving industry is the decline of intergenerational knowledge transfer and youth interest. Many young Goans transition to urban jobs for better earnings and security, as they associate Kunbi weaving with backward labour and caste stigma. This pattern resembles the broader trends across traditional Indian crafts, where young artisans leave the handloom practices for more economically viable employment (Majeed, 2018; Ghosh & Ghoshal, 2019). This has led to the declining number of skilled weavers and thus threatens the survival of the generational knowledge transfer.

Servitisation, converts weaving to an experiential learning process. Partnerships with schools, youth groups and community organizations can restate the history, tradition and symbolism of Kunbi saree weaving industry into an experiential curriculum, building early adoption and emotional bonds. Incorporating digital components like virtual story-telling and game-ified weaving lessons may offer experiential learning while building emotional bonds. Media campaigns among young people, emphasizing the cultural and environmental significance of the saree, can also help reimagine the saree within contemporary values of identity and sustainability.

These initiatives respond not only to the lack of generational transfer but also to the stigma associated with Kunbi saree as outdated. Consequently, these strategies may present weaving as a green and innovative practice, while addressing cultural invisibility and economic downturn, by making the Kunbi saree relevant to modern youth values. This opens up possibilities for the next generation to view weaving as a viable and sustainable career path, and not only become the recipients of knowledge but also the custodians, transmitting craft skills to generations to come.

CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Additionally, the other major challenge in Kunbi saree is regarding its perceptions in contemporary fashion. Younger consumers tend to view tradition-al garments like the Kunbi saree as outdated while cultural purists resist changes in the design. Moreover, for an extensive period the saree has been stigmatized as a garment associated with the lower caste and an attire worn by farmers or a

specific agrarian community (Gaatha,n.d.). Thus, the role for servitisation here is to maintain the balance between originality and modernity.

This can be done through annual cultural festivals. These festivals, featuring Kunbi saree through fashion shows, and traditional dances, will provide artisans a platform to demonstrate their weaving skills. Eventually, highlighting Kunbi saree significance and thereby improving its perception (Ho, 2024). Interactive weaving workshops, where participants can learn about the history and cultural importance of Kunbi saree. Activities may also include co-creating simple woven pieces such as bookmarks or scarves, providing the opportunity for hands-on experience and lasting memories. Moreover, tourism-driven experiences can be integrated into Goa's cultural economy and promoted through platforms such as TripAdvisor. This will help generate revenues for weavers and increase experience for tourists.

Initiatives like these, will acknowledge the saree as a part of Goa's heritage. Importantly, these strategies might also reaffirm the saree's symbolic significance and build long-term respectability, by making the saree visible in both community rituals and global cultural circuits. The local fashion designers, cultural organisations, and tourism industries are the key stakeholders in incorporating the saree into the identity economy of Goa.

DIGITAL INTEGRATION FOR MARKET DEVELOPMENT

The limited digital adaptation, and low visibility adds on to the problem. Since weavers don't have access to digital tools, they remain dependent on occasional exhibitions or NGO for visibility. This allows machine-made replicas to dominate in the market.

Servitisation circumvents this by positioning digital infrastructure as a collaborative and empowering space (Gebauer, 2021; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). The strategies include creating a dedicated platform for digital storytelling archives. This ensures that the legacy of the saree is conveyed, increasing cultural visibility. Specialised e-commerce websites, virtual try-on, and customisation transform the weaver's capacity to engage with consumers directly, eliminating middlemen and ensuring transparency. Training programs for artisans can equip them with the important craft skills as well as skills to use social media, and integration with

craft tourism ensures that technology adoption is culturally sensitive as well as pragmatically feasible. Another strategy can be to create gamified digital interfaces that allow consumers to experiment with motif placements, drapes, and colours, within the liminality of the culture, create deeper emotional bonds with the product, shifting the saree from a transactional commodity to a co-authored experience.

This digital integration addresses the critical disconnect between artisans and markets, making the weavers reach a wider audience. It provides visibility and forms emotional connections. In this way, technology becomes a culturally sensitive tool for empowerment. It thus, positions weaver as active participants in shaping their market presence and narratives. Tech Firms, Artisans, and government textile boards are crucial stakeholders to enable this transition.

FASHION COLLABORATION AND CO-CREATION

Finally, the craft faces a crisis of limited design innovation. As discussed in previous section, there is a tension between cultural purists and
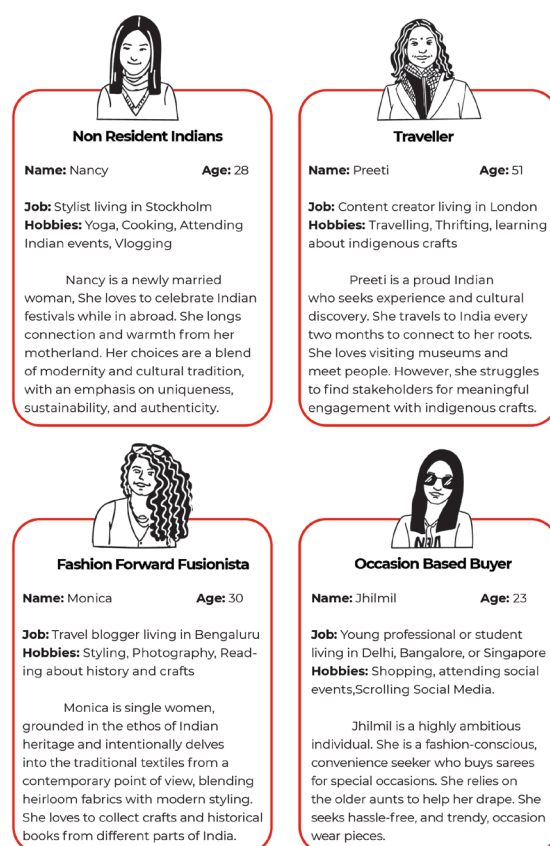
PERSONAS

Non Resident Indians

Name: Nancy **Age:** 28

Job: Stylist living in Stockholm
Hobbies: Yoga, Cooking, Attending Indian events, Vlogging

Nancy is a newly married woman, She loves to celebrate Indian festivals while in abroad. She longs connection and warmth from her motherland. Her choices are a blend of modernity and cultural tradition, with an emphasis on uniqueness, sustainability, and authenticity.

Traveller

Name: Preeti **Age:** 51

Job: Content creator living in London
Hobbies: Travelling, Thrifting, learning about indigenous crafts

Preeti is a proud Indian who seeks experience and cultural discovery. She travels to India every two months to connect to her roots. She loves visiting museums and meet people. However, she struggles to find stakeholders for meaningful engagement with indigenous crafts.

Fashion Forward Fusionista

Name: Monica **Age:** 30

Job: Travel blogger living in Bengaluru
Hobbies: Styling, Photography, Reading about history and crafts

Monica is single women, grounded in the ethos of Indian heritage and intentionally delves into the traditional textiles from a contemporary point of view, blending heirloom fabrics with modern styling. She loves to collect crafts and historical books from different parts of India.

Occasion Based Buyer

Name: Jhilmil **Age:** 23

Job: Young professional or student living in Delhi, Bangalore, or Singapore
Hobbies: Shopping, attending social events,Scrolling Social Media.

Jhilmil is a highly ambitious individual. She is a fashion-conscious, convenience seeker who buys sarees for special occasions. She relies on the older aunts to help her drape. She seeks hassle-free, and trendy, occasion wear pieces.

Fig. 02

The Traveller

NRI

Occasion Based Buyer

Fashion Forward Fusionista

Before | During | After

Cultural Exhibition
Presenting interactive exhibition of Kunbi

Trip advisor
Checking and booking appointment for workshop

APP
Products and Services

Workshop
Cultural tourism- Teach the art of Kunbi weaving

Repair/Rent/ Re-starching Assistance

BillBoard at Airport Lounge

CONSIDERATION

Personal Assistance

MANAGE

Posting experiences on Social Media

Social Media

AWARENESS

Buy the saree

Product guide
History of the product, behind the scene snippets, User guide on maintenece

Loyalty points

Digital Craft Documentation
Presenting digital story telling of craft with videos of process, significance, history and interviews of weavers or other stakeholders

Customisation / Collaboration

CONVERSION

LOYALTY

AI based body measurement & styling

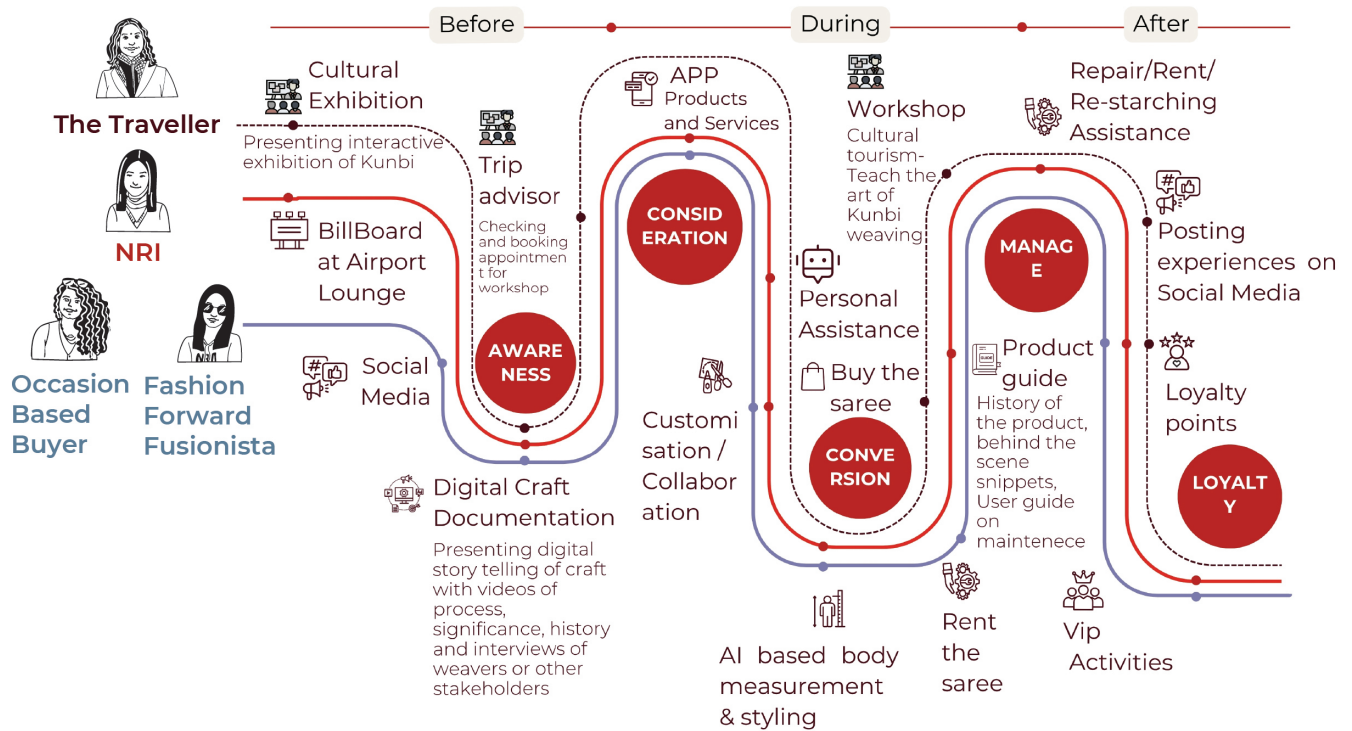Rent the saree

Vip Activities

Fig. 03

contemporary designers. It appears that the scope of design innovation in Kunbi saree is limited. Also, unregulated attempts of modernising Kunbi saree can dilute the craft significance and slip into cultural appropriation. Therefore, it is important that innovation is carefully regulated. Servitisation solves this problem through co-creation and collaborations. Partnerships with contemporary designers may generate hybrid garments that blend traditional motifs with modern aesthetics. This expands the saree's appeal without erasing cultural DNA. Personalisation services, such as pre-stitched pleats, customised embroidery, or tailored draping tutorials, can embed consumer identity while maintaining authenticity of weaving traditions. Virtual co-design platforms further extend this engagement by allowing consumers to experiment with patterns, yarns, and drapes, through a preset menu. Thereby turning the saree into a cultural platform rather than a static product. These strategies expand the meaning of the Kunbi saree by enabling innovation without erasure. Co-design platforms and hybrid garments provide relevance to contemporary consumers while safeguarding traditional motifs and weaving practices. This balance between tradition and change ensures that the collaboration strengthens the authenticity.

Such co-creations imbibe the creators' personal identity into the Saree making it special and

memorable for them. However, the balance lies in creating the sarees within the threshold of liminality, where cultural identity is renewed without losing its symbolism. To ensure this, the collaborations and co-creations must be guided by cultural knowledge holders from the Kunbi community. This will guarantee that the strategies expand possibilities without compromising the originality and meaning of the craft.

However, strategies alone do not ensure effective servitisation. As argued by Baines et. al. (2009), servitisation is most effective when carried out as a non-linear progressive transformation. This study adopts Baines' model for the specific situation of the Kunbi saree weaving industry, suggesting a new four-stage model — (1) Awareness, (2) Engagement, (3) Design Innovation, and (4) Scaling — that aligns with CCIs.

PROPOSAL: A REVITALISATION FRAMEWORK AND THE PROJECT-KUN.BE

Kun.Be envisions a service-based revival of the Kunbi saree as an experiential cultural system rooted in care, co-creation, and sustainability. The project combines product, experience, and digital interventions to reverse economic, generational, and symbolic decoupling in Goa's heritage weaving system. Secondary research and interviews reveal a perception gap, while the consumers respect the

Kun.Be PROGRESSION TIMELINE

Phased progression over 3.5 years

Sep 2025

Awareness

Create recognition of Kunbi saree's cultural & economic value

Nov 2025

Key Activities:
- Digital Documentation
- Billboards and social media campaigns

Feb 2026
- Immersive exhibitions during Carnival festival Goa

Immersive Weaving Exhibition

Mid-feb 2026

Engagement

Develop emotional and cultural connections

Key Activities:

Aug 2026
- Product Launch
- Making videos - Know your artisan
- Basic services like renting, restarching, and pre- stitching

Product Launch on APP **Basic Services**

Sep 2026

Design Innovation

Modernize the Kunbi saree maintaining authenticity & attracting young consumers.

Oct 2026

Key Activities:
- Simple personalisations like embroidery
- AI based styling and fitting

Nov 2026
- Experiential Workshops for tourists & young consumers

Workshop

Personalisation

Oct 2027

Scaling

Expand globally through e-commerce & digital storytelling

Nov 2027

Key Activities:
- Design services for colours, motifs, and layouts for individual & small scale enterprises.
- Designer Collaborations

Jan 2028

- Virtual workshops on dyeing and weaving

Designing **Desiger Collaboration**

Fig. 04

saree as a cultural heritage piece, they don't include it in their contemporary wardrobes.

To bridge this gap, the project recognises four consumer archetypes, whose diverse motivations and constraints drive both the brand and its staggered launch. (Fig. 02 e 03).

- NRI is a diasporic identity who seeks authenticity and pursues hybrid formats that blend western aesthetics, sustainability and heritage. *Kun.Be* helps them to re-establish a connection with Indian textiles through digital narratives, customisation, and virtual styling and hence make their experience of craft accessible and emotionally rooted.
- Travellers experience craft via discovery and engagement. As cultural visitors, they are no longer satisfied with passive consumption but seek active involvement—via weaving workshops, crafts experience. *Kun.Be* situates the saree in experience spaces, where the consumer can co-create or archive their experience, converting consumption into cultural stewardship.
- The Fashion-Forward Fusionista, resides in the space where trend-sensitive modern and deep-rooted tradition coexist. They use heritage as an inspiration for innovation, looking to forms for values and aesthetics to fulfill. They are limited by the lack of modern interpretations for traditional crafts. *Kun.Be* responds with design-driven personalisation, virtual co-design space, and work with visionary fashion designers, making the saree a living entity that can absorb style, identity, and narrative.
- The Occasion-Based Buyer, is a utilitarian use of culture - where heritage clothing is used episodically for functions or weddings. Price, convenience, and styling serve their purposes. *Kun.Be* meets this need by providing rental, pre-stitched, and styled services that lower access barriers whilst promoting longer cultural use.

THE *KUN.BE* PROGRESSION MODEL
Organised in four non-linear stages- Awareness, Engagement, Design Innovation, and Scaling- the project adapts Baines et al. (2009) servitisation progression model to CCIs. Instead of being a rigid business model shift, the *Kun.Be's* 3.5 years' timeline is deliberately flexible, responsive to ground realities, stakeholder support and readiness and institutional collaboration. (Fig. 04)

STAGE 1: EXPLORATION - AWARENESS (SEPT 2025 – FEB 2026)
For Kunbi weaving, the Exploration stage is reinterpreted as *Awareness*, to create recognition of the saree's cultural and economic value among policymakers, weavers, and customers (Pine & Gilmore, 2011 and Ho, 2024). This phase counters the decline in intergenerational knowledge by raising public awareness and involvement. The *Kun. Be* app is an online platform that acts as an archive for Saree's oral history, podcasts with weavers, and in-process videos of the craft. Furthermore, exhibitions will be conducted during *Carnival Festival Goa* and *Dastkar's*. This exhibit will showcase the history of Kunbi saree, and a digital loom for participants to experience the weaving process. These digital designs by participants will lead them to the QR code to the app. This ensures that recognition translates into respect for the craft. Moreover, Social media campaigns will place the saree as a cultural icon and a symbol of resistance. Targeting Fashion Forward Fusionistas and Occasion-based Buyers, this concise but imperative phase uses emotion, nostalgia, and storytelling to place the saree into sight and into desire.

STAGE 2: ENGAGEMENT- ENGAGEMENT (FEB 2026 – AUG 2026)
This stage involves launching simple service offerings like rentals and repairs. Unlike the business-focused "Engagement" of Baines' model, this stage fosters emotional and cultural involvement. Here, the *Kun.Be* app offers behind-the-scenes videos and QR-code-linked sarees, tracking the maker's stories. Other services include, rental, restarching, and repair services, aimed at occasion-led users. Furthermore, digital try-on and styling, will personalise the user's experience. This stage is particularly for NRIs and Occasion-Based Buyers. Within this mid-term phase the saree evolves from an artefact to an emotionally linked object of memory.

STAGE 3: EXPANSION - DESIGN INNOVATION & COLLABORATION (SEPT 2026 – OCT 2027)
The third stage, *Design Innovation & Collaboration*, takes place of expansion in the Baines model. The third stage, *Design Innovation & Collaboration*, takes the place of expansion. During this stage the tools for co-creation and fashion collaborations are

initiated on the app. Here, the consumers as well as designers are provided a space to create hybrid designs. The app allows creators to choose motifs, colours, and check patterns from the preset digital menu of design elements. This serves the desires of Fashion-Forward Fusionistas' for uniqueness and personalisation in fashion. Apart from this, virtual try-ons and styling tools will enable consumers to judge and create their own unique looks. The virtual training workshops on natural dyeing and other aspects related to Kunbi saree weaving can be booked by upcoming artisans as well as consumers in this phase. Designers such as Pero will be able to create the contemporary version of the saree, to be launched as a small batch limited edition product. Evidently the collaboration and co-creation process will be led by artisans or the members of the community, making sure that the craft's DNA is not compromised and the balance between contemporary relevance and traditional authenticity is maintained.

STAGE 4: EXPLOITATION - SCALING (NOV 2028 ONWARDS)

Lastly, the Scaling stage with an aim to expand the saree's presence globally, replaces Baines stage of exploitation. E-commerce website and digital storytelling, facilitates long-term sustainability and placing the saree in the world heritage fashion economy. Designer collections made in collaboration, will feature as a luxury heritage collection. Such expansion in traditional crafts runs the risk of dropping out of liminality, where action continues to hold social and symbolic power within the group, and into the liminoid, where meaning becomes disconnected and commodified (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011). Therefore, the weavers remain the primary cultural knowledge holders of these collaborations. The digital platforms are used as enablers rather than replacements of cultural agencies. Partnerships with UNESCO, museums, and policy organisations make it more culturally significant.

Focussed on Travellers and NRIs, this maintains the significance of the saree and its cultural exchange. Moreover, this enables the saree to be shared beyond borders and yet remain rooted in culture.

DISCUSSION

The revival of the Kunbi saree through servitisation repositions the idea of fashion from a commodity model to an interplay of cultural care, memory, and continuity. As opposed to hierarchical preservationist approaches, servitisation reimagines heritage as a collective process, where activities like repair, renting, customisation, and co-design foster lasting relationships between people and product (Vargo & Lusch, 2008), thereby opening a new approach where the focus shifts from product ownership to experience participation, as suggested by Tukker (2004) and Mont (2002).

To the Kunbi people, weaving is not fashion-driven but identity-determined (Rodrigues, 1977; Monteiro, 2015; Gaatha, 2020–2022). The red-and-white checks. *Rudraksh*-motif, and the colour signification of life stages in the saree, is not just decoration but a symbol of survival, belonging, and social identity (Gaatha, 2020–2022). In order to recover these histories, the service-led approach offers a model for cultural care, where the Product service system prolongs the life of the craft, story-telling retrieves the lost genealogies, and co-creation facilitates mutual ownership of the heritage for new generations. These shared services reflect Haraway's (1988) concept of "Situated Knowledge", where knowledge is always connected with context or experience, which fosters the evolution of Kunbi saree without the loss of its cultural essence.

Further, these services reimagine fashion as resistance, bridging digital divides, re-engaging youth, and placing the saree in local & global markets. The Kunbi saree then emerges as a living archive of textiles that not only contain memories but also a promise of transformation. In decolonial fashion discourse, as Jansen (2020) says, this is an act of reclaiming those genealogies, interconnectivities, and aesthetics that have been violated and erased by fashion discourse, challenging modernist binary logic that perceives indigenous fashion such as Kunbi saree weaving as outdated or backward. The Kunbi saree resists these modernist dichotomies—fast/slow, tradition/innovation, West/rest—and instead presents a pluriversal logic of care, community, and continuity. Thus, servitisation is not just an economic revival plan; it is a cultural tool that enables the saree to not remain as relics of the past, but as evolving, living traditions.

CONCLUSION

The Kunbi saree thus emerges as a strong symbol of resistance and resilience against cultural erasure. In a global fashion conversation where non-Western

aesthetics are largely articulated in terms of Western fashion as producers or consumers (Riello & McNeil, 2010), the saree is reimagined as a site of cultural memory, an economic stimulus, and resistance. Adopting the servitisation framework, this research has demonstrated how heritage craftsmanship can be reconfigured from a product to a value-based system. The servitisation model proposed in this research not only rejuvenates a product but also rejuvenates cultural intimacy and maximises lifecycle value. This model offers a strategic blueprint for other endangered handicrafts in the face of fast fashion, colonial destabilisation, and capitalist homogenisation. Through servitisation, the Kunbi saree evolves as a tactile archive of memory, survival, and pride. Fashion, thus, is not what we wear, but how we remember, resist and care.

ABBREVIATIONS

AI – Artificial Intelligence
CCI – Creative and Cultural Industry
CCIs – Creative and Cultural Industries
GI – Geographical Indication
NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation
NRI/NRIs – Non-Resident Indian(s)
PSS – Product-Service System(s)
QR- Quick Response

CAPTIONS

[Fig. 01] Components and Draping of Kunbi Saree. Courtesy: CottonsDaily https://cottonsdaily.com/products/goa-mangrove-delight-blue-kunbi-saree, Gaatha.org https://gaatha.org/Craft-of-India/kunbi-saree-weaving-goa.

[Fig. 02] Personas for Craft Revival – Kun.Be Project. Source: Authors.

[Fig. 03] Consumer Journey Map across Kun.Be Ecosystem. Source: Authors.

[Fig. 04] Kun.Be Craft Progression Timeline (3.5 Years). Source: Authors, Includes AI-generated and edited visuals by author; select visual references courtesy of @shopSincro https://www.instagram.com/p/DCs-MnSNXMF/, and Niramneela https://www.niramneela.in/products/blue-checkered-kunbi-cotton-saree?srsltid=AfmBOopH2tUYUOwz-V3KQdPC9a5E3CysUfjfwaShmiUvAW43G7LVhVcuU.

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