



“Today’s consumers do not want to carry heritage as a burden,” answers **Tanwy Kabir, founder of Canvas.** “They want to embody it effortlessly.” That single observation captures the tension surrounding Jamdani and Benarasi.

In many cases, though these sarees are still treated as heritage, heirloom, and occasion wear, they are no longer discussed solely in terms of preservation.

#### Two textiles, two different design languages

Jamdani and Benarasi are frequently placed in the same sentence, but they function very differently.

Jamdani is built through lightness, spacing, and intricacy. Its motifs often appear to float, and the skill lies in restraint as much as in ornament. Benarasi is denser, more ceremonial, and more strongly tied to bridal wear, zari, and visual richness.

That difference matters because rethinking them requires different design strategies. Jamdani can be adapted through texture, transparency, and placement. Benarasi often requires a more careful negotiation with weight, shine, and structure.

Neither can simply be cut and repurposed thoughtlessly.

Any attempt to rethink these sarees has to begin with a more immediate problem: much of what is being sold today under these names is not what consumers think it is.

For **Munira Emdad, proprietor of Tangail Saree Kutir**, this issue is especially visible in both Jamdani and Benarasi. She points out that many Benarasi artisans have already left the profession, partly because of long-term policy failures and the gradual shift away from loom-based work.

Instead of strengthening weaving, the market made easier retail alternatives more attractive.

“That was the beginning of the decline of Benarasi weaving,” she says. She argues



that most of what is widely available now is synthetic or power-loom based.

In the case of Jamdani, she is equally direct. Sarees with Jamdani motifs are being produced on power looms and sold as the real thing. The difference, she explains, becomes clear on the reverse side. Authentic Jamdani shows hand-rotated thread work, while machine-made versions often reveal cut threads and mechanical finishing.

That confusion is something Tanwy Kabir, founder of Canvas, a heritage-inspired store, also sees as central.

“The biggest gap is not just a lack of awareness, it’s misunderstanding at a technical level,” she explains. According to her, consumers still struggle to identify whether a saree is handwoven or machine-made.

In Jamdani, thread count is one of the least understood but most important factors, because it determines the delicacy of the fabric and the complexity of the motifs.

In Benarasi, the confusion extends to zari quality and base material. “Whether it is pure silk, half silk, or polyester. These

are not small differences,” Kabir elaborates. “They define the entire value, longevity, and authenticity of the piece.”

The result is a distorted market where handcrafted sarees are often compared with mass-produced alternatives based on visual resemblance or price alone.

#### Making heritage wearable, not burdensome

For many younger consumers, the challenge is not admiration but wearability. Heritage textiles are often respected, but not always integrated into everyday or even repeatable use. That is why adaptation matters.

Kabir’s design response is technical as much as aesthetic. She speaks of weight distribution rather than simply reducing weight, of using finer silk counts to improve drape, and of placing zari strategically so a garment remains breathable rather than overwhelming.

She also mentions modular styling, allowing one piece to be worn in multiple ways. This is perhaps one of the clearest summaries of the current shift. The issue is no longer whether heritage has

value. It is whether that value can be translated into forms that fit contemporary movement, contemporary styling, and even international platforms.

#### Keeping artisans inside the story

None of this adaptation matters if the artisan disappears from the picture.

That is why **Maria Mumu, founder of Mansi**, focuses on direct collaboration with weavers. She says her brand operates without middlemen and aims to ensure fair wages, while also giving artisans a say in final pricing.

More importantly, she resists treating them as anonymous labour. “Tantis have very specific designs that are specific to each of them,” she says. “We are making sure that they are shining in their own design.”

This is a necessary reminder. Rethinking Jamdani and Benarasi for global platforms cannot mean stripping them of the people who make them. If these textiles are to move into blazers, skirts, or contemporary occasion wear, that transformation must still retain authorship, fair compensation, and technical respect.

To sum up, the future of Jamdani and Benarasi does not lie in choosing between purity and innovation. It lies in making more intelligent distinctions.

If these sarees are to remain alive, they may need to move across forms and platforms, from weddings to wardrobes, from sarees to garments, from local use to international presentation.

However, that movement must be informed, not careless.

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**Styling: Tahmina Shaily**  
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