



Rural Craft & Cultural Hubs of West Bengal



Department of MSME&T
Government of West Bengal

**Kenjakura
Textiles**
Vibrant Weaves



A good life is like weaving. Energy is created in the tension. The struggles, the pull and the tug are everything.

Joan Erikson

American author, educator, craftsperson and choreographer

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West Bengal is a treasure trove of natural and cultural heritage. The intangible cultural heritage of Bengal is an exemplary instance of the aesthetic lineage of Bengal. Utilitarian lifestyle items like basketry made with date palm leaves and Sabai grass, hand spun and hand woven jute rugs (Dhokra), mats made with cane slips (Sitalpati) or Madurkathi (Madur), pottery, Kantha-spreads, decorative and ritualistic items made out of Shola and others, reflect a curious fusion of indigenous craftsmanship and utility. Bengal's art and craft reflect cultural history, ethnic roots, and lifestyle in-tune with nature. Variety of masks, Dokra and metal work, range of indigenous weaves and embroideries, dolls, masks and figurines curved out of wood are examples of Bengal's artistry. Culture of Bengal is enriched by the mellifluous tunes of the Baul, Bhawaiya, Bhatiyali singers, rapturous dances of Chau, Raibenshe and Jhumur, storytelling traditions like puppetry and Patachitra, and folk theatres like Gambhira, Banbibir Pala among other folk forms.

The Rural Craft and Cultural Hub (RCCH) Project is an initiative of the Department of Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises and Textiles (MSME&T) and UNESCO aiming to rejuvenate the rich cultural heritage of West Bengal and strengthen rural creative enterprise. The journey started in 2013 and the RCCH project currently covers 50,000 handicraft and folk artists across the state. It has strengthened the ecosystem supporting the transmission of traditional skills in art and craft, fostered direct market linkage, engaged youth in pursuing their traditions, and promoted cultural tourism to the villages of the artists. The project is indeed a testimonial to the contribution of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) to sustainable development, social inclusion and also to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).





KENJAKURA

Kenjakura Textiles

The vibrant weaves of Kenjakura tell a story of a kind. Conceived by the creative imagination of the weavers, the rhythmic shafts breathe a symphony into the natural essence of the yarns that are woven into beautiful patterns of checks, lines, repeats and floats. The weaving tradition is practised by almost 300 families of weavers, all carrying forward the weaving traditions of their ancestors who came and settled in the village 150 years ago. Among many others, the product most commonly associated with the cluster is the ubiquitous Gamchha, which is woven in a number of different styles and sizes. The weaves of Kenjakura have a beautiful character and appearance. The interesting use of float structures in simple products with natural fibres of cotton and silk is what makes them distinctively different from other handloom products.

Process

Raw Material Sourcing

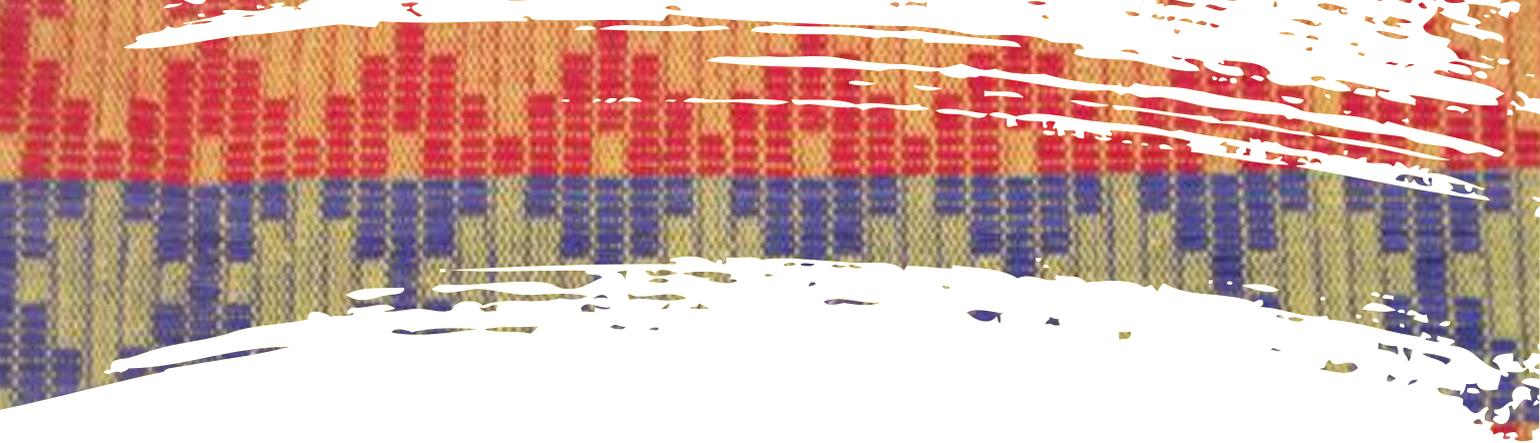
The weaving practices of Kenjakura are strategically organized. The tension and movement of the process requires yarn stability throughout. This is the reason why the cluster mostly operates with industrially spun yarns. Processed yarns arrive at the cluster in bundles specific to the count. While thicker yarn counts of 17 and 40 are used for most home linen and utility products, 60 count yarns are used for finer weaves. The traditional offerings of the cluster use a few specific hues but contemporary products can be developed in a variety of other colours. The dyeing of yarns is completed before they arrive at the weaving cluster, mostly from the source units from which they are purchased where the yarns are purchased from.



Pre-Loom Preparation

The most important part of the weaving process in Kenjakura is the methodical calculations that support the weaving intentions. The yarn is divided as per these calculations and processed accordingly. The warp yarn is first wound as per the design requirements. This yarn is then passed through the metal reed as per the colour sequence of the design. This reed holds the yarn in place until the loom setup is complete. The length of the yarn is then carefully warped on a smooth round wooden beam through a process called rumming, where one end remains free and the rest is wrapped over the beam in multiple layers. To allow for a smooth unrolling of the yarns during weaving, newspapers are added in between the yarn layers on the beam while it is being wrapped. The beam is then carried and fixed onto the loom.





Loom Setup & Weaving

The free end of the yarn is passed through frames on the loom sequentially, as per the design pattern. While the simplest weave requires two frames, complex weaves can use up to 12 - 20 frames. The frames are then tied to a pedal that the weaver operates with his/her feet while weaving. This regulates the movement of the frames up and down to allow for the bobbin shuttle to pass through as the weaving proceeds. The warp setup is completed by passing the yarns through another fixed reed on the loom and finally wound on another which the weaver uses to wind the fully formed fabric on. This reed is used constantly to maintain the density of the weave structures as well as keep the weave end compact.

The weft yarn is used solely through the shuttle by spinning it on bobbins, attaching it to the shuttle and passing it through the weave mesh. Interwoven designs are what develop as different weave structures, which are sequentially controlled by the movement of the shuttle through spaces created by the frames during the weaving process. Kenjakura weavers can operate a greater number of pedals in the weaving process than what is seen in other weaving clusters.



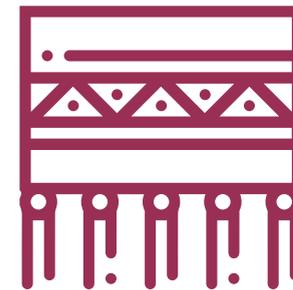
Raw Material Bundles



2 Winding



3 Warping



4 Denting-Drafting



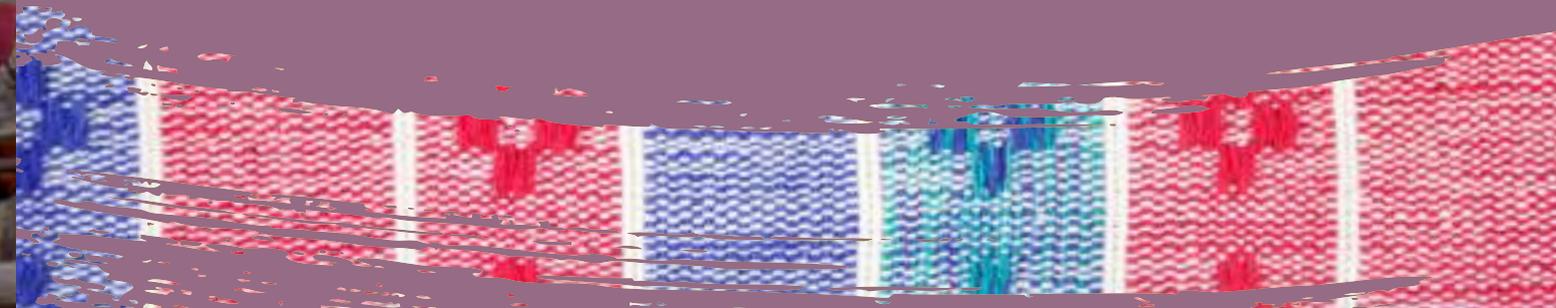
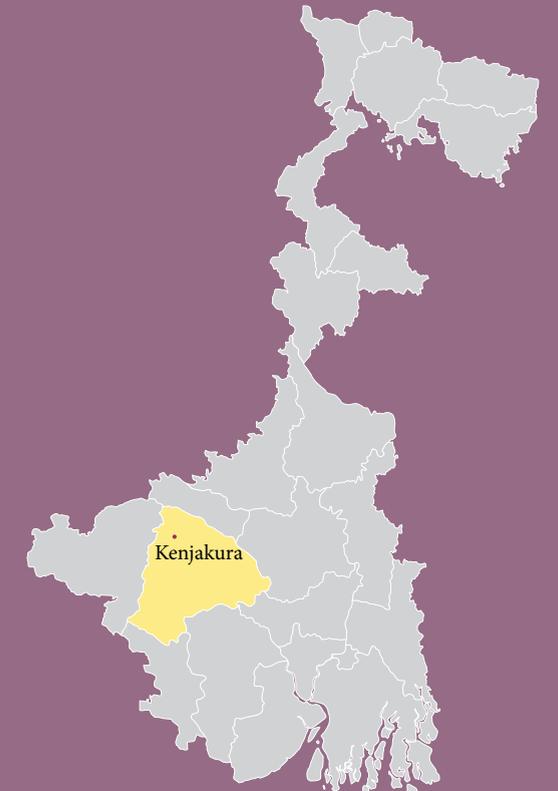
5 Weaving





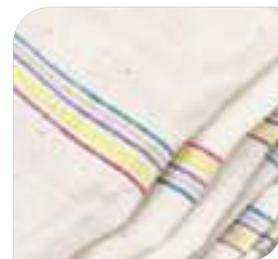
Textile Hub

The beauty of Bengal weaves celebrates the many ways in which soft, natural yarns are woven. The West Bengal Khadi & Village Industries Board started the initiative of reviving the cluster and taking it forward is the RCCH initiative. The Rural Craft and Cultural Hub initiative has strengthened the cluster in Kenjakura, Bankura I block which is a prominent hub of textile weavers. With intensive training directed towards capacity building and business skill development, the artisans have been trained in the art of ideating and creating products that align well with the changing needs of today's market while building on the strengths of the traditional weaving patterns and practices. Kenjakura is located 23 km from Bankura town and 20 km from the scenic Susunia hills in Purulia, which is a popular tourist destination.





Weaves & Patterns



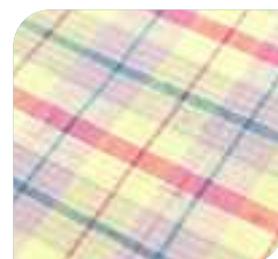
Tana Dor



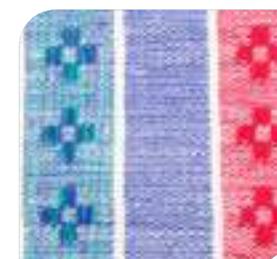
Poran Dor



Check Dor



Joma Dor



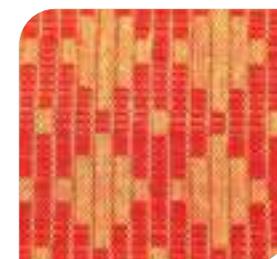
Phool



Jora Phool



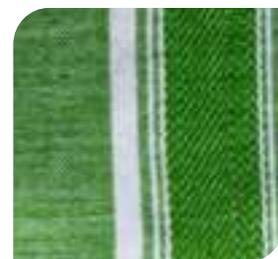
Mukumb



Diamond Phool



Honeycomb



Aanki



Aanki Buki



Alpona

Contacts

Rahul Das: 9609356528
Montu Dey: 9635581831
Mithu Lakshman: 8768850800
Baridbaran Rudra: 9775715108
Goutam Das: 9933461819

Products

The most famous product of Kenjakura is the Gamccha. Other traditional products of the cluster include bed sheets, lungi and rumal. They also make different diversified products today that can cater to the contemporary market. New products include varieties of home, kitchen and bath linen such as cushion covers, towels, hand towels, napkins, table runners, table mats, curtains and others as well as apparel products like sarees, stoles, dupattas and fabric yardage.



Cushion Cover





Towels



Hand Towel





Table Mat Runner

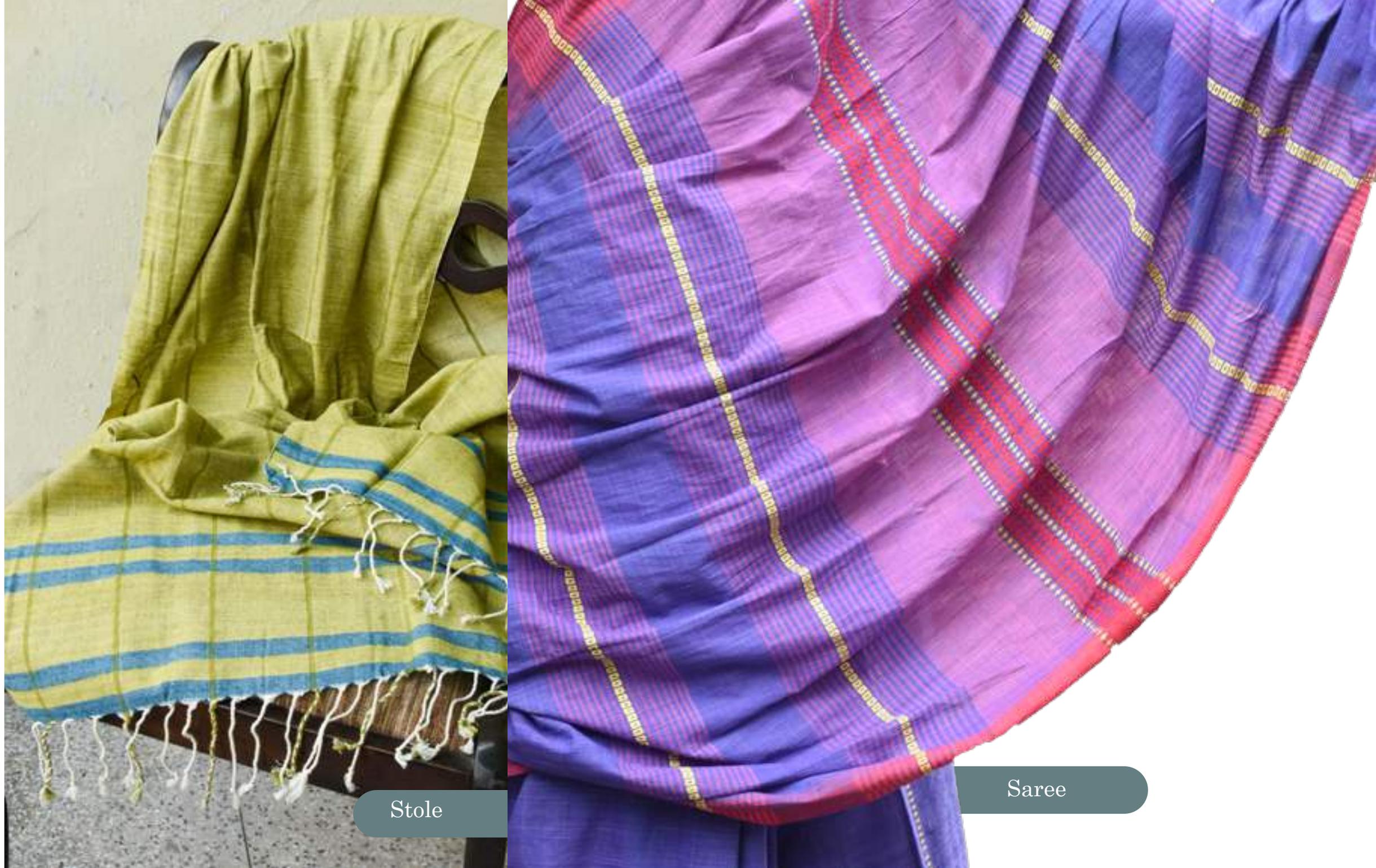


Curtains





Long Dupatta



Stole

Saree



Innovative Transformations

Today textile industry mainly functions on demand and supply at the material stage. Yardages and fabrics are produced by primary suppliers that are then picked up by different contributors for product development. A huge gap for the Kenjakura cluster was it's lack of involvement with different stakeholders in the value chain in presenting itself as a manufacturing cluster for raw material towards end-use products.

With the help of RCCH interventions, textile designs inspired from traditional products were broken down and transformed into interesting colourful patterns and float structure designs as running material and yardages. These textiles are soft, natural and durable and showcase the wonderful skills of the weavers.





 www.kenjakura.com | www.rcchbengal.com | www.naturallybengal.com

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