

Description of a sari blouse embroidered for the goddess Chandi by the god Vishvakarma

Excerpted from the late 16th-century work *Chandimangal*

Meanwhile, Chandi tore off her restraints with a roar, and donned a silk sari. She assumed the form of an attractive sixteen-year-old maiden. Her beautiful arms were adorned with gold bracelets and on her feet she wore gold anklets decorated with pearls. Her body was lustrous and her face had the beauty of millions of moons that dissipate the sun's rays. What in this world could compare to her beauty? The god of love launched his arrows from the corners of her eyes, and the kohl lining her eyelids acted like a poison-tipped arrow. Her hair was black like the cuckoo, the ends decorated with bakul flowers. Her braid was smeared with saffron, and her body decorated with sandalwood paste. Armlets and bracelets of conch shells adorned her arms. She wore ruby rings on her fingers and the luster of her teeth was enchanting. Beads of perspiration gleamed on her face, and the vermilion mark on her forehead was the enemy of darkness. Her lips, possessed as they were of the shine of a bimba fruit, were stained with the juice of betel, and the ruby in her nose captivated the heart. After donning many ornaments, she thought of covering herself with a bodice. 'I'd like to have a bodice made for myself,' she thought. 'I'll call on Vishvakarma.'

Vishai embroidered the bodice with scenes from the most important stories of the Puranas, after consulting the Mahabharata. He worked carefully while meditating on Chandi. Initially he drew the ten incarnations of Vishnu. Afterwards he carefully illustrated the story of Krishna who descended into the clan of Yadu in order to rid the earth of evil. On the right side of the bodice, Vishvakarma depicted sages with red marks on their foreheads. He drew the godly sages Sanatkumar and his brothers in blue and red. He depicted father and son Kardama and Kapila with long white beards. He showed the rest of the rishis with their staffs, water pots, kusha grass, and matted hair. On the left side of the bodice Vishai drew the great hero Garuda, as well as the birds Jatayu, Sampati, and Suparna. He drew roosters standing by the water along with many other species of birds. He depicted kingfishers swooping down to catch fish, and cranes catching and eating snakes. Two wagtails alighted on a lotus while swallows cried for water. After portraying the birds, Vishai drew many species of animals, such as lions, tigers, bears, elephants, the divine black bear named Jambavan, and the monkeys Sugriva, Bali, and the hero Hanuman. He portrayed all the monkey-soldiers of Rama. Vishai sketched forest animals like deer, yak, wild cow, porcupine, monitor lizard, mongoose, jackal, and others. He drew a boar, tortoise, bunches of grass, and mice. He drew that denizen of the water, the makara, in four directions, and the crocodile, shark, riverine porpoises, and all the fishes of the river and the sea, beginning with the carp. He finished the left side of the bodice with a depiction of Brindaban. Finally, Vishai drew different kinds of snakes along with Vasuki, Takshak, and Shesha, the lord of serpents. Vishai gave this wonderful bodice to Chandika and, after receiving her blessings, he left for home. The Mother put it on and sat in the doorway until Phullara arrived home.

Chakravarti, Kavikankan Mukundaram. *Chandimangal*. Translated from the Bengali by Edward M. Yazijian. Penguin Books Ltd. Kindle Edition (pp. 68-69).