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Pochampally – An unique silk handloom cluster

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Abstract

The concept of globalization that floundered the globe in recent years, turned our planet into a small village on one hand, posed several challenges, on the other. Among them, intellectual piracy is a prominent one. One may recall the long, long struggle India had to make in proving the origin of Basmati rice and Turmeric, in the absence of published documentation to prove their historic and geographical belongingness. Since then, there has been increased awareness about the need to protect our products of uniqueness and indigenous knowledge. Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is a valuable and sophisticated knowledge system developed over generations by local communities. The phenomenon of intellectual piracy is cause for great concern and calls for action at both National and International level. Indigenous knowledge is an invaluable resource for the development. Indigenous knowledge, combined with modern know-how, can be used as a basis for sustainable, people-centered development. Therefore, identification and study of traditional handloom silks of Andhra Pradesh is an important component in the present day context. Handloom is one of the important sectors of the Indian economy. Even today, millions of people in India still depend on handloom for their living. Pochampally is a small village in the Nalgonda district of Telengana which is known worldwide for its exquisite hand woven silk saris. In view of the uniqueness of Pochampally ikat weaving, the authors made an attempt to discuss various dimensions of Pochampally weaving after visiting and interacting with the weavers.

Keywords: Handlooms, Pochampally, Tie and die.

1. Introduction

Silk, the queen of textiles dominates the textile industry with its luster, sensuousness and glamour. The silk sarees of India are among the living examples of the excellent craftsmanship of the weavers of the country. The artistic and aesthetic sense of Indian weavers is not content with striking colours they choose for the fabrics, but lies in their mastery over the creation of floral designs, beautiful textures, fine geometry and the durability of such work. The weaver not only weaves with yarn, but with intense feeling and emotion. Indian handloom silk sarees known for their unique features like beautiful colour combinations, intricate designs and wonderful motifs, tops the demand of the domestic market. In India, there are a number of silk weaving centers spread all over the country, known for their distinct and typical style of weaving. South India is the leading silk producing area of the country also known for its famous silk weaving enclaves like Kancheepuram, Dharmavaram, Arni, Pochampalli, Gadwal etc. The beauty of the silk is the key to having wonderful silks.

India's cultural diversity is perhaps best reflected in its handloom textile varieties, from Patola and Mashru in Gujarat, Gulbadan in West Bengal and Saktapar in Orissa, Chettinad and Kancheepuram in Tamil Nadu to Narayanpet and Pochampalli in Andhra Pradesh. Handloom weavers for thousands of years created a tapestry of designs and textures that have been the pride of India. But today, much of this treasure is lost to time and to the advances in technology. Handlooms are losing out badly in several parts of India and the skills are vanishing. The intimidation posed by various developed countries has made even the silk producers in India to respond and protect their silk related products under the Geographical Indication Act.

2. Profile of Pochampally

Pochampally is a mandal situated in the district of Nalgonda in Telengana and is popularly referred to as the 'Silk City of India' for its beautifully crafted silk Ikat sarees and fabric.

Pochampally is most popular for its Ikat style of saris and material and the world knows this quaint town for its spectacular Ikats. Pochampally, a cluster of 80 villages, is the place where threads and colours find their way into the hands of skillful weavers and meander into the market as beautiful sarees and dress material. Spread over an attractive and charming part of the Deccan plateau, the village is around 50 km from Hyderabad, the capital city of both the states i.e., Telengana and Andhra Pradesh. Pochampally is surrounded by lush green fields, beautiful hills and big water ponds which receive water from the river Musi flowing nearby. Having earned a name to reckon with in the map of popular weaving clusters of India. Though there is a change in the lifestyle of the people over a period of time, we still find the rural atmosphere here. Pochampally is a typical weaving village and predominantly a Padmashali village, where the traditional weaving community is strong in number. Pochampally is the single largest handloom tie and dye cluster with about 2000 Pit looms and around 5000 artisans. Usually Pochampally handlooms are made in cotton, silk and Sico - a mix of silk and cotton. It is a treat for the eyes to see the artisans work.

3. History of Pochampally silks

Pochampally popularly known as Bhoodan Pochampally. Acharya Vinobha Bhave started the Bhoodan Movement (Land Donation) from this village. Pochampally silk saree manufacturing history goes back to 1970, when it was decided by some village headmen of Pochampally to weave silk along with cotton (cotton weaving was being done since very long back), to make a better living. They have sent two young weavers to Bangalore to learn the secrets of the art. This was the beginning of a revolutionary era in the Pochampally handloom industry, which led to the eventual dominance of the Indian tie and dye patola Industry. Unlike the Orissa industry, the weaving of pochampally sarees appears to be a modern development without strong indigenous roots. The genesis of the decision to enter into new realms of silk weaving, can be attributed to a new era, in the history of Pochampally ikat. It is believed that the ikat technique was brought to Pochampalli from Chirala, another town in Andhra Pradesh, a couple of generations ago, perhaps as early as 1915. The origin of this technique is not very clear, but it appears to have been learnt and was not indigenous to the region. According to one version, weavers from Chirala who migrated to Nalgonda brought this technique of tie and dye with them. Another view holds that, the Nizams encouraged few weavers of Mashroo (brocaded cloth, with cotton inside and silk outside) here and that the Ikat technique developed out of that. Some say that local weavers went to Chirala to learn the technique, but found it difficult to execute the double Ikat weaving. So the weavers in Pochampalli started only with warp Ikat and only much later worked on double Ikat. The success of such Ikat saris in cottons led to experiments in silk as well. Silk Ikat saris from Pochampalli thus became a generic name for Andhra Ikats. Pochampally products are handcrafted to perfection by skilled artisans who are endowed with critical skills in intricate designs, having decades of experience behind them in their respective fields. In certain cases, these masterpieces can take up to one hundred and twenty days to take final shape, to the satisfaction of our craftsmen.

4. Production Process of Pochampally silks

Weaving a Pochampally sari is an art. Pochampally saree is an interesting collage of tradition, history, heritage, and nowadays widely known for its modernity in design. The weavers of pochampally are popular for their traditional and geometric patterns in Ikat style of dyeing. Ikat weaving involves an 18-step sequence of tying and dyeing sections of bundled yarn to a predetermined intricate colour pattern prior to weaving. The tied yarn is dipped in different coloured dyes to produce hued patterns and thereafter is woven into the fabric. The uniqueness in the Pochampally weave rely on the transfer of design onto the warp and weft first, which are then woven together to get the required design. The fabric designs are visible in the dyed threads. The raw silk is degummed. Degumming is the process of removing the sericin, or silk gum, from silk. Removing the gum improves the sheen, color, hand, and texture of the silk. Then the silk is to be transferred from hanks to bobbins. The skill of the artisans can be seen here while winding the silk from hank to bobbin. After winding it on to the bobbin, the next phase is the preparation of warp and weft on Tie and Die frame. IKAT - is a type of weaving where the warp or weft or both are tie-dyed before weaving to create designs on the finished fabric. Great care must be taken in tying resist areas with water repellent material such as bicycle inner tubes cut into strips. Designs generally are worked out on graph paper. With weft and warp in mind, a design on a graph paper is visualised in this style of weaving. Later, the design is transferred onto the weft and warp. The threads of the warp and weft are measured carefully, and then tied and kept in the dye solution. The weaver is the person who does the mathematical calculations involved in figuring out where the yarn has to be tied and dyed. The precision of the wrapping determines the clarity of the design. After wrapping, the warp threads are dyed. When finished and unwrapped, the areas under the ties have stayed the original colour. Numerous colours can be added after additional wrappings. Yarns are subjected to three ways of preparation for making Ikat designs, warp ikat, weft Ikat and double Ikat. The whole weft yarn dyeing and tying & dyeing of warp yarn, results in warp Ikat. Whole warp yarn dyeing and tying & dyeing of weft yarn, results in weft Ikat.... And Tying & dyeing of both warp and weft yarn separately, results in double Ikat. The weft yarn is spread out horizontally from a reel on to a special frame, going to and fro between a bigger iron peg on one side and around 35 smaller pegs arranged in a semi-circle on the other side at regular intervals. The distance between the big and small pegs corresponds to the width of the finished fabric. This tool for grouping the weft is used typically in the Pochampalli area, and not anywhere else. The weft thread is stretched on it and divided into a number of sets to mark the design and tie and dye to get the ikat design. For dyeing 3-4 colours, the skeins are taken off from the frame, and after drying, replaced on the pegs in accurate order for the next unwrapping and wrapping steps. After dyeing, the yarn is thoroughly wrung and immersed in developing solution. Later it is washed in cold water and hangs out to dry. Then the Tie & Dye yarn should be transferred onto Parivattam, then prin winding.



Tie and dye Warp



Process of Tie and dye



Tie and dye Weft

Great care must be taken in putting the warp on the loom, keeping all the threads in position is necessary for the design to work. The weft is transferred on to Parivattam then converts into pirns so that each pirn goes from one side to the other through the warp threads alternately while the weaver adjusts after its each movement from one side to the other. A lot of coordination is required when weaving intricate designs and a moment of distraction can result in getting the whole design pattern ruined. The natural movement during weaving gives ikat designs a feathered edge which characterize this technique. Not a single loose thread can be left, as every thread plays a role in creating a unique design. Thus, a lot of concentration is needed while weaving these sarees. Each and every thread is adjusted before it is set into the fell of the cloth, producing exquisite effects by a little deviation in setting the threads while weaving, which will be difficult to make on power looms due to high speed and the precision of Powerlooms may snatch the natural effect induced by human hands, thus the popularity of the design. These designs are perfectly reversible with the same appearance of the design on both sides, making them most suitable for sarees, dupattas, scarves and stoles which tend to fold and for getting a similar look from either side. On completion of each saree, the weaver cuts it from the loom, thoroughly checks it and folds it neatly before taking it to the stores. The Ikats of Pochampally are distinguished because designs and patterns appear similarly on both sides of the fabric. Pochampally fabricating an array of silk ikat products like sarees, dress materials, pillow covers, bed sheets, furnishings, ready-made garments, towels as well as other

value added items such as bags, file folders, purses, mobile pouches etc.

5. Pochampally Handloom Park Ltd (PHPL)

The Pochampally Handloom Park Limited (PHPL) established in the Kanumukala village in 2008, about 9 kilometers from Pochampally is spread over a 24 acre land. 35 entrepreneurs from Pochampally have come together to take up the initiative of the Govt of India in setting up the Handloom Park. The Handloom Park is supported by the Ministry of Rural Development and monitored by the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) and the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA). The sprawling premises have the capacity of accommodating around 500 looms. It is an integrated handloom textile facility comprising designing, tying and dyeing, weaving etc, all under a single roof with a focus to sustain the unique Ikat technique on textiles.

A decade back there was a lot of recession in the Pochampally industry. At that time entrepreneurs of Pochampally joined together and discussed about the necessity of joining together and improving the Ikat products. So, at that time 120 people discussed and 35 like-minded people joined together and launched this Park (company). It took two years to construct this company. Two young enthusiastic entrepreneurs from the weaving community struggled for the development of the 'Handloom Park' – their childhood dream to resolve hardships faced by the community in Pochampalli. Damodar and Lava Kumar, just in their 30s, CEOs of the Handloom Park, had firsthand experience of the problems of the weavers in their native

village. As kids, they had a dream to bail out the poor weavers of their village from poverty.

Pochampally Handloom Park Limited (PHPL) is a member of the Silk Mark Organisation of India and authorised user of Silk Mark, the Handloom Park provides support to qualified artisans and weavers. Channelizing this household cottage based traditional artistry into a more organized way, by innovating and modernizing the designs and varieties. The handloom park is carrying out a lot of research and developed a good rapport with many designers who are working internationally in handlooms and textiles. Unlike the pit looms in the traditional weavers' houses, the Handloom Park developed looms on the floor. The handloom park receiving inputs from the Indian and foreign designers, looking at these developments happening in the Park, many foreign buyers are approaching. That is the reason why the Park is able to export 60 percent of the products to the foreign countries. The Handloom Park is having its own showroom in the premises and it attracts prospective buyers in large numbers. With the international orders on the rise, the Handloom Park is gearing up for further expansion. The promoters feel the responsibility to provide training and employment to see the traditional knowledge is preserved, practiced and carried forward to the next generations.

6. Rural Tourism Complex

Our rich heritage and tradition lies preserved in the villages. Some of the villages have gained more recognition in terms of culture, its history, its art, and their festivals or simply because of their scenic beauty, Pochampally one such village recognized well with world famous IKAT weaving. In view of this, the Ministry of Tourism established Rural Tourism complex at Bhoodan Pochampally, Telengana. Pochampally is one of United Nations Development Programs (UNDPs) of 36 rural tourism sites, and is supported by the Ministry of Tourism. The rural tourism complex is situated next to a serene lake called Pochampally Cheruvu, and looks more like a sprawling bungalow, but when you look at the huge gate you see the signboard of the Rural Tourism complex. The tourism complex houses Ikkat weaving museum amphitheater to perform local art forms and guest house. The museum of the rural tourism complex displayed with all the varieties of ikat weaves like dress materials, sarees, variety of ikat designs, portraits of our National leaders like Indira Gandhi, Vinobha Bhave in ikat weave and different devices of ikat weave.

7. Geographical Indications to Pochampally Handlooms

The globalization has brought about enormous challenges to the trade and industry. Geographical Indication (GI) Act, 1999 by the Government of India has created an avenue for the protection of these unique products of the country. The GI Act stipulates protection of the market of the producers and safeguards the interests of the consumers of these unique products through registration and taking infringement action against the infringers. It is believed, that the IPR Protection of unique textile products of the country with a predetermined market linkage strategy would help in brand building of the product, providing market linkages, generating more employment opportunities and enhanced income to the stakeholders.

The famous Pochampally saree has won Intellectual Property Rights protection or Geographical Indication Certification in 2005. It is the first traditional Indian craft to receive this

status of geographical branding. The design won protection in the Geographical Indications (GI) category. Pochampally Ikat be the registered property of Pochampally Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society Ltd and the Pochampally Handloom Tie and Dye Silk Sarees Manufacturers Association. GI registration is seen as a stamp of quality and the registration will confer legal protection to the pochampally Ikat, against its unauthorized use and protect from the unfair competition and counterfeit. It is expected to increase the consumers' confidence in the product and give a brand image to the Pochampally handloom products gaining greater reach in domestic and international markets.

Pochampally products are handcrafted to perfection by skilled artisans who are endowed with critical skills in intricate designs, having decades of experience behind them in their respective fields. In certain cases, these masterpieces can take up to one hundred and twenty days to take final shape, to the satisfaction of our craftsmen. Pochampally is organised as a network of the crafty weavers to provide a clear and synergistic focus to business for customer service, product innovation and profitability

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