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Popular Article

Threads of Tradition: Unravelling of Ikat Weaving

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Abstract

With a particular focus on the historical development, technical procedures, and regional variations of Ikat weaving in India, this review paper, "Threads of Tradition: Unraveling of Ikat Weaving," explores the complex and culturally significant art form. Ikat is a distinctive fabric decoration technique that involves tie and dye techniques. Its origins can be found in many cultures around the world, such as Southeast Asian countries, Japan, Indonesia, India, and others. This study investigates the history of Ikat, following its travels from ancient trade routes to its current renaissance in the world's textile industry. Three major Indian regions—Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh/Telangana, and Odisha—have seen great growth in Ikat weaving, with each establishing its own unique designs and methods. Gujarati Patola are famous for their double Ikat technique, which creates elaborate geometric patterns. Pochampally Ikat, from Andhra Pradesh, is well-known for its vivid designs and combination of warp and weft dyeing. The Bandha Ikat from Odisha is distinguished by its curved designs and Ikat combined with brocade. The importance of Ikat weaving to the culture and society is discussed in the article, with particular attention paid to how it preserves traditional workmanship while incorporating modern fashion trends. This review highlights the versatility and durability of Ikat weaving through historical texts, recent studies, and field investigations, guaranteeing its ongoing relevance and respect in the contemporary textile industry.

Introduction

Fabric ornamentation is the art and science of embellishing each finished textile product according to the quick changes in customer style and fashion preferences. Compared to other nations, India's top handloom clusters make ikat, or tie and dye fabrics, with elaborate and artistic designs that are essential to the country's export industry and draw in worldwide consumers (Behera et al 2019).

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It is a shared textile art, particularly between India and Indonesia, and it universally symbolises riches, power, and status. The word "ikat" itself comes from the Indonesian verb mengikat, which means "to tie" (Sagar, 2019). It is a fabric ornamentation technique that involves the tie and dye process in various patterns and styles (Mohanty, 2010). Many nations, including Persia, Japan, China, Egypt, Nigeria, the Philippines, Germany, France, Italy, Sweden, and Finland, are home to ikat. Different names for it are used throughout the world, such as "patolu" in Bali, "geringing" in Japan, and "ikat" in India (Niessen, 2009). A typical visual feature of an ikat fabric is a feather-like look, resulting from the dye bath's colour penetrating through the resistant material and the threads' minor movement due to weaving tensions (Hann, 2005). Various studies have shown that since India's handloom industry has grown in several states, this textile has once again gained support in India and around the world (Maxwell, 2003).

History

The art of Ikat weaving evolved throughout Indonesia and other Southeast Asian nations, including Thailand, the Philippines, Burma, and Cambodia. They each possess a unique flavour and have a lengthy history of creating the ikat weaving style (Buchanan, 2019). For thousands of years, ikat has been a part of the cultural heritage of the Indonesian archipelago. Throughout Indonesia's 17,000 islands, several regions developed their production techniques and designs over time, which are still widely used today (Poonam, 2019). Ikat is not an indigenous textile of India; rather, it is believed to have arrived in the country ages ago through trade connections with China and Indonesia (Balaram, 2019). India's exquisite ikat gained such a high reputation that it was formerly accepted as payment along the well-known Silk Road (Ghosh, 2000). The double ikat silk patola is one of the most well-known fabrics in the trade textile group (Dhamija, 2014). There are only three areas in the world where double ikat is practiced: Japan, Tenganan Pegeringsingan village in Bali, Indonesia, and India. Double ikat is identical to the patola textile, often called patolu in singular form, because of its elaborate design and sophisticated technique. The earliest extant instance of Ikat was discovered in a pharaoh's tomb and was of Indian Odishan style. It also demonstrates the extensive trade that has existed between Egypt and India (Maxwell, 2003).

Ikat communities of India

Indian Ikat communities: Ikat is a global phenomenon known by various names. Germany, Italy, and Sweden refer to it as flame weaving, whereas in French refer to it as flambe or cbiné. In a similar vein, it is referred to as Pidan in Thailand and Southern Vietnam and Tala-de-lenguas in Spain. In New Zealand, it is widely recognized by a distinct moniker, Grass-Skirts. It is referred to by several



names in India, including Laharia, Patola, Chiticki, and Bandha, depending on the culture and location (Behera et al., 2019).

In India's three main regions of Andhra Pradesh/Telangana, Gujarat, and Odisha, ikat emerged as a well-known handloom textile art. These three areas have developed a unique ikat weaving technique over time, with variations in both pattern and yarn dyeing and application (Ghosh, 2000).

The ikat technique, a resist-dyeing method, entails binding warp and/or weft thread sections together



Fig.1. Patola textile with ceremonial elephants traded to Indonesia, nineteenth century, silk with double ikat.
Fig.2. A set of patola pants which were used by the aristocracy of Yogyakarta in, the 19th century (Guy, 1998).

with dye-resistant material (like palm leaf strips) before the fabric is constructed. The threads absorb the dye when submerged in a dye bath, covering the exposed portions. Before applying additional dye-bath treatment, additional colours can be achieved by rearranging the resist-protected sections. After dyeing, the resist is taken off, and the threads are meticulously placed in preparation for weaving. The weft, the warp, or both sets of threads may be subjected to the resist. According to Weiner (1992), the end products are called warp-ikat, weft-ikat, double-ikat, or compound-ikat, in that order.

Warp Ikat: The most basic method of making ikat fabric, in which the weft yarns are inserted into the warp threads after they have been dyed by the design Waldek (2020).

Weft Ikat: In this type of weaving, the dyed designs are carried by the weft thread, which makes the process of weaving intricate. Retaining the design's clarity requires adjusting the weaving yarn each time the shuttle is passed. That's why it's more complex than warp ikat.

Double Ikat: Of all the three forms of ikat, double ikat has the most elaborate motifs and the most complex weaving structure. Both the warp and weft threads are tied and dyed by the designs before weaving in this process, incorporating the warp and weft ikat method (Singh 2021).

The patola of Gujarat:

Patola, a double Ikat handloom fabric from Gujarat, is well-known for its distinctive designs and manufacturing methods. Since ancient times, Patan, the former capital of Gujarat, has served as the primary hub for the production of Patola saris. The Salvis, who are predominantly Jains but may also be Hindus, are the traditional weavers of Patola in Patan. The history of double ikat patola weaving is extensive, spanning centuries. The tie-dye method used in patola is reminiscent of the



paintings found in the Ajanta caves. Legend indicates that, at some point in the 12th century AD, King Kumarpal of the Solanki dynasty invited 700 families of patola weavers from Jalna, South Maharashtra, to relocate to Patan, North Gujarat. Among those who have carried on and maintained this age-old craft is the Salvi family (Shailaja, 2010). The majority of these double ikat silk fabrics are made into saris, which Hindu and Vohra Muslim women wear at social and religious rituals (Heppenheimer, 2016).

Motifs: Intricate geometric, floral, and figurative elements are frequently blended with grid-based patterns and abstract designs to represent patolas. These fabrics frequently feature images of elephants, parrots, dancing dolls, floral baskets, leaves, and stars. Various cultures have distinct tastes in design, typically based on religious precepts. Red, yellow, green, white, and maroon are the most often utilised colours.

Paan Bhat features motifs of female dancers, blossoming flowers, pan-shaped leaves with parrots, and elephants.

Nari Kunjar Bhat: The literal meaning of "Nari Kunjar" is "a female dancer and an elephant." This style features attractive elephant and flower motifs that are frequently placed in a particular way, usually encased in decorative flowers. Each of these elements comes together to create a visually striking pattern that honours the rich cultural legacy and deft artistry of Indian weavers.

Navratna Bhat: The term "Navratna" means nine gems." Usually, this style has patterns in the shape of squares. The term comes from the fact that the pattern is so precious and detailed that it is frequently compared to the brilliance and cost of nine jewels.

Fulvali Bhat: The word "Fulvali," which translates to "flower," emphasises the design's flowery element. This design features stunning floral patterns and designs.

Rattanchowk Bhat: The word "Rattanchowk" signifies "jewel square," signifying the design's geometric and valuable quality. There are beautiful geometric patterns and designs.

In the past several decades, Rajkot and the other Gujarati villages have begun producing single ikat



saris in addition to the double ikat silk Patola from Patan. Although they are created in single ikat, they use designs that are comparable to those of the Patola, which reduces production time and costs. These are referred known as "Rajkot Patola" locally. Despite having been granted a Geographical Indication Certificate, the Patola of Patan remains a neglected craft. However, in other Gujarati areas, the unique Ikat craft of Patola is flourishing (Bhatia, 2016).

Fig. 3 A modern-day single ikat Rajkot Patola featuring elephants and parrots in radiant contemporary colours. Fig. 4 A rare double ikat Patan Patola design featuring fighting elephants and tigers from Patan, Gujarat, (Kumar, 2016).

Pogudubandhu or Pochampally of Andhra Pradesh:

Andhra Pradesh is the home of the Ikat art form known as pogdubandhu. In Andhra Pradesh, specifically in the area where it is made, it is known as Pogdubandhu, Chitki, and Buddabhashi; however, throughout all of India, it is referred to as Pochampally, named after one of the villages where it is produced. Its pattern is distinct from that of Patola or Bandhni, which are found in Gujarat or Orissa, respectively. However, this Ikat is unrelated to any ceremony or place of worship, in contrast to the other two states. Its uniqueness may stem from the fact that it developed independently with barely any external impact. The weavers of the Debanga, Dera, or Padmashali community produce this craft. Even though this group of skilled weavers is dispersed throughout a vast area, spanning from Ganjam, Orissa, to Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, only a small portion of this population, concentrated in a few villages near Pochampally, produces this craft. Only a few villages, like Pochampally, still use the craft, Galterppala, Chowtuppala, Siripuram, Bhubangiri, Chuigottala, and Koyalgudam, along with a few other villages, are all in the Nalgonda district. The fabric is known by its village name throughout India since Pochampally village, location to over 5,000 looms creating this design, has seen the greatest concentration of production (Ghosh, 2006).

Pochampally is known for its vivid and intriguing ikat saree designs. Contemporary motifs, abstract shapes, and geometric patterns have been embraced by artisans to create vibrant and fashionable Pochampally ikat sarees. During the weaving process, the warp and weft threads are stretched on specific blocks before being coloured and woven. Differentiating Pochampally ikat from other saree winding techniques is the colouring of the yarn before winding. These ikats have become extremely fashionable because of their distinctive designs and use of modern synthetic colours. (Mandakani, 2020).

Pochampally Ikat is distinct because of its double ikat textiles, which are the elaborate patterns and colours woven onto the warp and weft threads. In addition to cotton, silk and cotton, and exquisite combinations of silk and cotton, there is usage of natural colours and mixes. These ikat designs are



unique due to the process of hand-dyeing each thread and weaving it into the cloth in a pattern. both sides display the same final product. (Savithri, Et al., 2020).

Pochampally ikat is well-known among designers, style enthusiasts, and celebrities for its elaborate weaving process and vivid hues. Pochampally ikat is distinguished by its distinctive tie-dyeing method, which showcases its rich cultural legacy and creates captivating patterns. The popularity of the textile is increased by the growing need for materials made ethically and sustainably. The fashion industry has embraced pochampally ikat with gusto, with many designers and brands incorporating it into their collections. Celebrities have also made a substantial contribution to the garment's global expansion by being spotted wearing Pochampally ikat apparel on high-profile occasions (Rao, 2016).

BANDHA- The Unique Ikat of Orissa:

History: Textiles of Odisha have a distinct identity due to their elaborate weaves, which reflect the state's cultural heritage. In Odisha, handlooms are a significant cottage business. Because of their exquisiteness, colour combinations, and highly artistic designs, Odisha's handloom products are recognised both domestically and internationally. Bandhas, made in Orissa using the ikat method, are characterised by their distinctly curved shape. The distinctive feature of these fabrics is the combination of the ikat method with brocade bands on the lengths of the sari borders, at the end pieces, anchal/pallav and sometimes in the field.

Geographical identification of the "Bandha of Odisha" has been in place since 2007. The history of the Bhulia community suggests that they migrated in the early 16th century from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar. The communities of Bhulia (Meher), Costa, Debanga, Rangani, Sarbak, Guin, and Gouda are well-known throughout the state for their Ikat fabric weaving. While there are eighteen major handloom clusters in Odisha, the term "Ikat" (Bandha) and Orissan fabrics originate from Nuapatna, a coastal region, and Bargarh, Sonepur, and Boudh, in western Orissa. These regions are renowned for their single and double Ikat, which have distinctive colour combinations, traditional motifs, and typical designs with fine curves that give them a special place in the art world (Acharya, 2017).

Motif and Design of Ikat in Odisha: Ikat designs in Orissa typically feature horizontal shapes and motifs, such as lotuses, lilies, wheels, rudrakshya and kumbha, among other animals and plants, such lions, elephants, deer, horses, swans, ducks, tigers, fish, tortoises, and snakes. Also, the handloom patterns in use are similar to those seen in tribal art, temple architecture, rock carvings, and the Odisha Chita (dhoti) tradition. Elephants, especially in "khanda," which brides wear during marriage



ceremonies, are among the most often used motifs in Nuapatna Ikat fabrics. Other common motifs seen in Orissa Ikat include large and little stars, deers, parrots, nabagunjar, lotuses, creepers, kumbha, conch, wheels, and danti. Over the century, the complexity of the "Rudraksha" bead compositions has dramatically expanded from relatively modest beginnings in the "Saktapar" saree, with its double Ikat checkboard design and brocaded border (Kulloli, 2017).



Fig 6. Sambalpuri Ikat: compared to the geometrical and more precise patola of Gujarat, the Odishan ikat has a curvilinear and feathery appearance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, India's ikat weaving is an amazing example of the country's skilled artisans and rich cultural heritage. This age-old craft, which stands out for its intricate dying process and exquisite designs, additionally exemplifies the many regional differences that contribute to its uniqueness but also highlights a significant period in India's textile history. Every variant of ikat, from Telangana and Andhra Pradesh's Pochampally ikat to the Gujarati Patola ikat, reflects the distinct historical and cultural context of its area of origin. The ikat weaving sector in India depends on continuing to assist weavers, in inventing innovative new applications, and appreciating the cultural significance of this form of craftsmanship.

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