

PAITHANI WEAVING



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Documented by Pratima Palod (Srishti, Karnataka) for



Introduction

Traditional trousseau of a typical Maharashtrian bride, Paithani is one of the most magnificent and luxurious textiles in the world. Paithani is a brocade saree which is completely hand crafted with traditional tapestry technique. Its special feature is that it looks identical on either side of fabric. This beauty lies in the eyes, hands and mind of its weaver. To own a Paithani is to own a treasure! Its origin lies back in 200 B.C.!

Global Presence

Paithani weaving is a craft limited to India in terms of manufacturing, but its market has reached worldwide since ancient times.

History and Shift in the Centre:

Paithani gets its name from the place to which this craft belongs- 'Paithan'. Paithan is a town in Maharashtra, located in Aurangabad district. Paithan known as 'Pratishthana' was capital of Satavahana Empire in times of Ruler Shalivahana. This was the time when cotton and textiles were greatly exported from his empire to foreign countries and is also said to be the time when Paithani saree developed. Pitambar and Paithani are and were the two highly treasured textiles of this region. It is so exclusive that it has references in Mahabharata describing the love of Krishna for Draupadi. Once when Draupadi accidentally cut her finger Shree Krishna tore his precious Pitambar to tie her bleeding finger!

Major contributors to flourish of Paithani are Peshwas, Aurangzeb, and Nizams. A major incident in history of Paithani is the shift in its manufacturing centre from Paithan to Yeola in Peshwa period. Like other Indian textiles Paithani hit a setback with Industrial revolution and British conquest in India. In late 19th century, a Sardar from Yeola- Raghujji Naik along with a trader Shyamji Walji brought a few weavers from Paithan to Yeola. Since 1980 Paithani weaving took a rebirth in town of Yeola. Before this Yeola Shalu was majorly manufactured in Yeola.

Practitioner Community

Traditionally four communities practiced the craft of weaving Paithani sarees.

1. Kshatriya, 2.Koshti, 3.Shali, 4.Nagpuri

Traditionally men handled the task of weaving on loom, while women, children and elderly help in pre and post processes. The main weaver on an average is between age group of 17 to 45. This intricate and tedious skill was and is majorly passed on from one generation to other in a family. Children start helping in small tasks and as time passes are seen sitting next to their elders to learn and assist in weaving in the age of ten to eleven years.

Though these traditions are still followed there are a number of additions to these traditions for good! Now this craft is being taught in various training centers which are affiliated to certain universities, or in an informal way an experienced weaver trains younger men in surroundings and later hires them as weavers. This has helped people across communities to get involved in this wonderful craft. Also young men from around and villages learn this craft to start their own production later. A trained person then teaches his other family members and thus steps up towards a sustainable life. Another addition is that men now do not hesitate to make their wives and sisters their partners in this work. Women are seen weaving on looms as do the men. The third addition is that due to training facility the area of manufacturing Paithani sarees is increasing widely across villages and towns.



Like the whole apparel market, the major season of rigorous sale for Paithani is summer and late winters as it is the peak time for marriage ceremonies in India. All the families

involved in this craft are totally dependent on Paithani weaving for their livelihood. Except the ones who are newly learning. This is also because the manufacturing of sarees goes on continuously for whole year. Depending upon the level of difficulty of craft, time taken for production varies from 10 days to 1 or 2 years.

Materials

Materials required are-

1. Silk Yarn



2. Zari yarn



3. Dye and dyer

Yarn Availability:

The Silk yarn though imported from Bangalore- Karnataka, is locally made available in various stores across the town. Also a number of vendors/dealers keep in touch with the weavers for providing yarn from time to time.

Also zari which is imported from Surat is made available easily in similar way through vendors and stores.

Dye and Dyer availability:

The town consists of 3 to 4 Dyers who dye the yarns according to the requirement of the weaver. Generally yarn for 10 sarees is dyed in one colour at one time.

1. Silk Yarn:

Filiature silk is used for warp and Cidalgatta silk is used for weft. Filiature silk is soft and fine. For warp, 18/20 denier or 20/22 denier high twist 2 ply yarns are used. For weft 20/22 denier low twist 3 ply yarns are used.

There are 3 options in quality of silk used in Paithani. One is low quality silk which consists of broken lengths of silk yarn spun together to form a yarn. The medium quality silk is the Bangalore Cidalgatta silk, while the highest quality silk is the one imported from China.

2. Zari Yarn:

There are 3 types of Zari thread available.

1. Real Zari- It consists of some amount of silver in it.
2. Tested Zari- It is made in copper base.
3. Half fine Zari- It the lowest quality of zari.

Three to six ply zari is used in Paithani weaving.

Using of different quality yarns create difference in the luster, strength and cost of the saree.

Colour

Originally dark shades were used to weave Paithani. But nowadays lighter shades are in demand. The colour used are-

1. Pophali (yellow)
2. Neelgunji (blue)
3. Firozi (white, red and pale green blend)
4. Pasila (red, pink and green blend)
5. Udaani(faint black)
6. Guijari (black and white blend)
7. Morpankhi (green and blue blend)
8. Aboli (peach pink)
9. Sankirodak (white)
10. Mirani (black and red blend)
11. Motia (pale pink)
12. Samprus (green and red blend)
13. Vangi (purple)

Tools

1. Handloom with dobbie and jacquard attachment
2. Cycle Charkha
3. Yarn winding machine
4. Spindles (dhote)
5. Spools
6. Cotton spools
7. Reed pin
8. Design paper
9. Paper pins
10. Punch cards for brocade designs

All this material is either produced with the help of artisans who are experts in making this material and is available locally or is procured through dealers and vendors who visit and keep in touch with weavers from time to time.

Process

1. Procurement of raw material- silk and zari yarn.
2. Pre processing and dyeing of yarn (done at dyers place)
 - a. The raw silk is first untied.
 - b. A sticky substance is naturally present on the yarn which is removed by scouring it.
 - c. The yarn is then dyed in required colours by hot water dyeing.
3. Making of warp yarn spool (wagi)



4. Winding of small weft yarn spools (kandi) using cycle charkha.

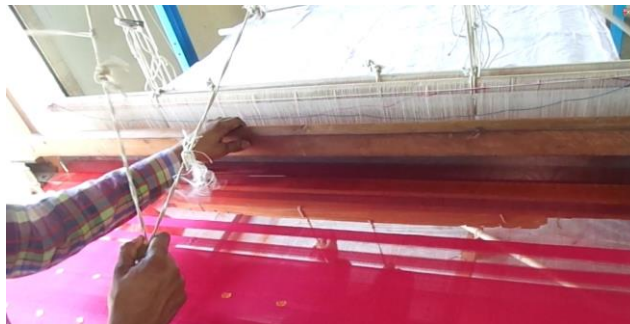


5. Setting the warp on loom-

- a. Tying the warp spool in its place.
- b. Taking the warp on warp beam in sections as separate threads.
- c. Setting up dobbie according to border design.
- d. Setting up jacquard according to motifs in body of saree.
- e. Fixing punch cards in jacquard attachment.
- f. Threading the yarns through the jacquard heddles for motifs, dobbie heddles for border.
- g. Threading the threads through heddles of fly shuttle loom.
- h. Taking the yarns forward from the reed.
- i. Attaching tensions to the yarn packages.
- j. Tying the threads to an iron rod and cloth beam.
- k. Let off and taking up of yarn on loom.

6. Weaving of the saree/ fabric starts.

- a. First the skirt portion of saree is woven. It basically is of plain weave which is done using shuttle (dhota). If border is in different colour two different shuttles are used for it.



- b. In jacquard motifs the threads lift up automatically according to the design. The weaver has to insert yarn from the gap.



- c. After this the pallu portion is woven. The whole of pallu is a region where the weavers make use of small cotton spools wound with different coloured silk yarns. According to the design the number of spools increases. These spools are moved from one side to other in one picking and then in opposite direction in next picking. The threads are lifted according to design patterns which are either fixed on paper below the warps or are fixed in the minds of the weaver in terms of number of threads to be increased and decreased to create the pattern.



7. Once the saree is complete the weaver leaves a space of about 5 inches and begins plain weaving.
8. After 2 inches a gap is left and again a little plain weave patch is woven.
9. Then the threads are let off and fabric is taken up on cloth beam.
10. A rod is inserted through threads in between two woven patches.
11. Finally the ready fabric is cut off from the loom!



Designs/ Motifs

Paithani is characterized by the "*Mor Butti*" (Peacock Motif) on pallu and the "*Narali Kinar*" (Coconut Border). But there is a lot to designs and motifs in Paithani.

Paithani was initially woven in cotton and gold zari threads. No silk thread was used. Also the motifs used were minimal and simple. "*Asawali phool ani wel*" (asawali flower and creeper) motif in pallu, while "*narali kinar*" (coconut motif border) designs and gol butti (round motif) in the body of saree were used. The advancements in design came later in 17th and then again in 19th century.

The motifs in Paithani saree are created by four methods- Paper designs, doobby designs, geometrical designs and jacquard designs.

A. Paper Designs: A paper with motifs drawn on it is placed below the warp threads and fixed with pins. The weft threads are then moved accordingly over the warps.

1. The Bangdi-Mor motif: is one of the oldest motifs in Paithani. It is remembered as the most intricate pattern in Paithani.

The motif consists of a bangle inside which is a lotus flower; four peacocks are seated on the bangle in four directions. It had around 36 elements in it, which with time have reduced to ten. The bangle signifies "*Saubhagya*" (completeness of a woman), while Peacock kindness, compassion and luck as it is a symbol of Goddess Saraswati. The lotus flower resembles to that of Ajanta caves.

While another theory says that the bangle represents the world. There are four symbols one each between the four peacocks which represent the guards of four directions according to Hindu mythology. The four peacocks are the hands of Lord Vishnu. The lotus (*Nabhi Kamal*) in the centre is the flower which came out of Lord Vishnu's belly. Thus this motif can said to be a depiction of the creation of God.

Bangadi-Mor motif dates back to almost 2000 years. Initially this motif was done in pallu only. Later in 1400 A.D. they found place in border as well. Sandwiched between parrots, peacocks, stars and asawalis besides flowering vine and lotuses, some borders are 6" to 18". In last 100 years not a single true Bangadi-Mor was weaved.



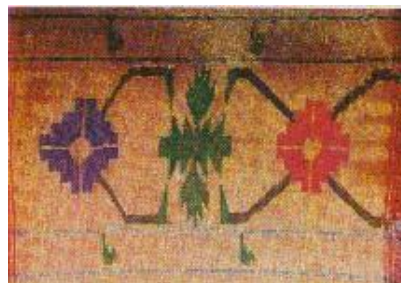
2. The Ajanta Lotus: The Lotus or Kamal Pushpa is a motif that bears a close resemblance to the murals of Ajanta Caves located in Aurangabad, Maharashtra. It is the sign of rebirth. The use of this motif is also done since 2000 years.



3. Koyari: or Mango is integral part of Indian culture and tradition. It was weaved in Paithani for almost 1000 years since Maratha kingdom was dominant in the region. Many additions and variations gave it modern look and intricateness.



4. Akruoti Motif: These motifs are from Satvahana's period. It is almond shaped. Due to its elegance and simplicity these were used in almost all paithani sarees either as main element or elements in pallu.



5. Asawali Motif: It is a motif made of creepers and flowers. Asawali Motifs, Vases and Vines were popular in 18th to 19th Century during rule of Peshwa of Pune. Asawali was adopted from Gujarat as the Peshwa established Yeola as weaving centre and commissioned weavers from Gujarat to weave Paithanies for royals. Since the Mughal influence was predominant, vines and vases remained main stream pattern. Around 600 variants are available from this design from a simple vine to intricate 6 yard filler. Jahangir's great love for nature and flowers brought many symbolic designs to this textile adding another dimension to Paithani in appearance and increasing its repertoire.



6. Tota-Maina Motif: Tota Maina is symbolic of loving couple. Parrot and Maina are arranged in romantic form around creepers. These motifs are woven in parrot green and red colour.



7. Huma Parinda: It is a motif of a heavenly bird. This motif was ordered by Nilofer Begum, the wife of Nizam king of Hyderabad. This design is very antique and is not seen in use since many years.



8. Mor Butti: "*Mor butti*" that is the peacock motif is the most widely used motif in the Paithani saree today. Use of this motif was introduced as a redevelopment program in Paithani weaving. This occurred as late as 1980s. Peacocks are woven in Paithani sari in various styles depending upon the imagination of the weaver. The main theme is "*Mor Kunda*" that is peacocks sitting on big pots.

Colours in this motif are-blue for the feather, green for wings, violet for neck, red for beak.



B. Dobby designs: The borders of Paithani saree are created by doobby attachment. The desired designs are set up in the doobby attachment and yarns are arranged accordingly to achieve the results.

The border is woven with golden zari threads in combination with silk threads which are similar or in contrast shades to the basic shade of the saree.

1. Narali Kinar: The traditional coconut border (Narali) was the most common Paithani border until the end of 19th century. Coconut known as "*Sriphal*" in India is the fruit of gods. It symbolises complete usefulness, selfless service, prosperity and generosity.



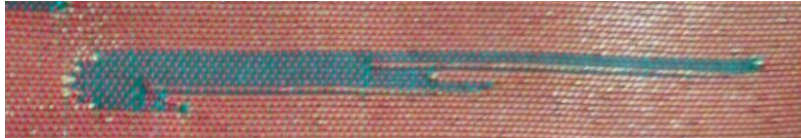
2. Pankha Motif: This motif is fan shaped. It is used in borders of the saree and looks similar to Narali motif.



C. Geometrical Designs: Some designs used in the pallu are geometrical. These are geometrical motifs which are set on a fixed number of threads. The artisans memorize the increments and decrements in threads required to create the design pattern.

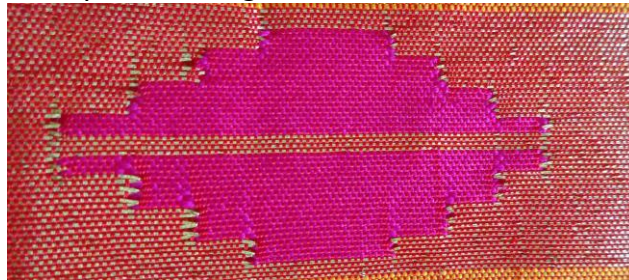
1. The Muniya: Muniya symbolizes the parrot. Parrot is sign of love and passion. Originally Muniya motif was used to fill the weave in and around other motifs. It was introduced in 1970's as independent border form by essence of lower cost woven border.

It is woven in green colour with red beak.



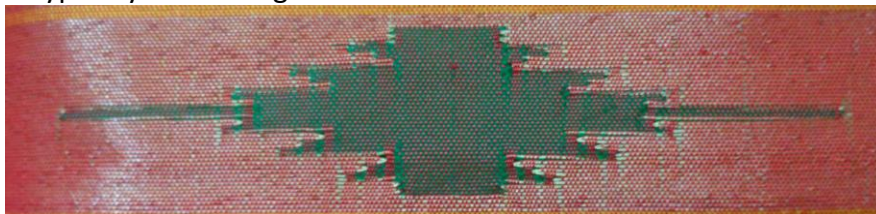
2. Barav Motif: It is a staggered motif in step form.

It is usually woven in red, yellow, orange or firozi blue colour.



3. Panja Motif: This motif is a hazy form of Barav motif.

This motif is typically woven in green colour.



Now the Paithani saree is identified by these peacock motifs. The weavers today have lost track of meanings and significance lying behind the motifs in Paithani. Also they lack a database in range of motifs for this art.

D. Jacquard Designs: There are motifs in the body of the saree which are created by jacquard attachment. Round dots, peacocks, flowers, diamonds, etc, are made with this technique.

These are usually done with golden zari threads.



Products

Traditional Products:

The traditional costume of Maharashtrian women is a nine yard saree. Thus, Paithani was woven into nine yard length sarees; and in "*Pitambar*" that is a dhoti worn by men for ceremonial purposes. Later it was woven in six yard and nine yard lengths. King Aurangzeb and King Nizam Shah ordered shawls woven in Paithani textile in huge amounts. Begum Nilofer, wife of Nizam Shah was also fond of Paithani sarees. During the Peshwa period Paithani sarees were highly popular amongst the Royal families. Also Paithani shawls, "Shela" (Silk Stole) and "Pagote" (type of a head covering) were used by men of Peshwa dynasty.



Products currently sold in the market:

There has been a little addition to range of products in which Paithani textile is used. Along with nine yard and six yard sarees, the artisans also weave dress materials,

lehenga, dupattas, and stoles. Lifestyle products such as purses and in upholstery curtains and cushion covers are made.



Jewellery Box



Hand bag



Lehenga



Stole

Innovations

Paithanis are being woven in cotton yarns. Though this is actually returning to roots the artisans have approached it as an innovation.

Challenges

1. Design innovation: is a major challenge for the artisans of Paithani. The skill of this people is highly advanced, rare and critical. But they are totally dependent on their memories of ancestral work and the customer/ businessmen for the designs. Also, in spite of being dependent on ancestral designs, they do not possess any record of these designs in any form. Thus, a loss in design sensibility, awareness and design range is visible throughout the practice of all artisans. Also there is a need of innovation in design layouts and motifs.

2. Design Complexity: is another big challenge. Paithani weaving requires intervention of woven design experts to teach these artisans some simple designs to reduce their strain. This will help the artisans to achieve quick returns simultaneous to the long term projects they take.

3. Product Design: The technique of Paithani weaving requires support of product innovation to survive in the market. Currently it runs in the niche upper class market. But to survive in the long run it needs to cater to the middle class market to some extent. The manufacturing cost of these products is so high that it makes the selling price unaffordable for middle class market. Thus product should be designed for middle class market which will help increase sales multifold times.

4. Government support: As textile craft practitioners, the artisans hardly get any financial or other support. The artisans quote that bodies have been created multiple times which always end in construction of offices which never function. Promises made in meetings held randomly in a year are never seen to progress towards practice.

5. Costing system: Artisans feel cheated by their dealers and wholesale buyers who buy the product from them in cheap rates and later sell it in prices in multiples of 3 and 4. There is no unified pricing system for the product.

6. Duplicate Paithani Saree made on Power loom: Paithani designs are created on power loom using polyester yarn. These sarees sell in prices 1/10th of original paithani saree. Thus people either out of less budget or out of less awareness end up buying these cheap sarees.

Bibliography

Following websites were used to cross check and add on to the data researched in filed.

1. cultural.maharashtra.gov.in
2. www.forumjar.com
3. www.touchofclass.co.in
4. paithani1.wordpress.com
5. grandeurmaharashtra.com

Major source of research is the engagement in field with the artisans, dealers, master weavers in Yeola town. Specifically, interviews and discussions with following people helped me collect the data.

Mr. Shakeel Habib Ansari- Master Weaver

Mr. Govindsa Narayansa Wadekar- Skilled Artisan

Mr. Manish Kshatriya- Paithani Dealer and Businessman

Mr. Prasad Bhawar- Skilled Artisan

The primary research and documentation is done by Ms. Pratima Pahlod.