

THE BYGONE ART OF KOYYALAGUDEM

Mallika Jobanputra.*
Muppidi Rambabu**

ABSTRACT

In the small town named Koyyalagudem of Andhra Pradesh state, the artisans still weave ikkat handlooms. This study is about the renowned weave, Telia Rumal which was accorded with Geographical indication (GI). Telia which means Tel. Each yarn is treated with castor oil, warp and wefts dyed separately and then weaved together. This time-consuming process makes this handloom expensive. This gem was discovered during the Nizams Era itself, where this piece of fabric was first used just as turbans and lungis, but then was encouraged to be weaved into sarees too. Unfortunately, this masterpiece of south is dying. There are only a handful weavers who continue to practice this intricate weaving art. My article is going to focus on the history, i.e. how Telia Rumal was encouraged, the technique which makes it distinctive from other weaved handloom and the current issues faced by the weavers and artisans.

Keywords: *Telia Rumal, Koyyalagudem, Double-Ikkat, Dyeing, Handloom.*

Introduction

In the small town named Koyyalagudem of Andhra Pradesh state, the artisans still weave ikkat handlooms. Out of which, one of the most renowned weaves is the Telia Rumal. This handloom has been worn since the time of Nizams. Telia Rumal, like its name suggests was first weaved just into small lengths of fabrics, known as 'Rumal', which was used for lungi and shoulder stole. Kamaladevi, a freedom fighter, an entrepreneur and a feminist came forward to motivate the weavers. She encouraged them to weave Telia Rumal sarees and dupattas too. That's how the journey of this expensive handloom began. Currently, it is considered as one of the (G.I) geographical indication of Telangana. Puttapaka Telia Rumal received its G.I tag on 12th of May 2020.

Raw Materials: Pit loom (Maggam), Charkha, cotton yarn, color dyes



Fig. 1: A Telia Rumal Scarf and its Raw Materials

-
- * Student of Footwear Design and Development Institute, Leather Goods and Accessories Department, Hyderabad, Telangana, India.
 - ** Faculty, Department of Leather Goods and Accessories Design, FDDI (Footwear Design and Development Institute, Hyderabad, Telangana, India.

Design Development Process

But why is Telia Rumal considered as an expensive handloom?

In search of answers, I reached the little town named Koyyalagudem nestled in the West Godavari of the state, Andhra Pradesh. This town is well known for its weaving, especially Telia Rumal. On speaking with the weavers, they explained their process of creating this beautiful loomed fabric.

Govardhan, son of one of the weavers in town stated that, they first buy bulk and bundles of raw cotton from cities and private limited companies. Then that cotton wool goes through a stage called 'spinning', which converts the cotton wool into white yarn. He explained that the word Telia means **Til**, i.e., oil. Once the white yarns have been made, they are treated with castor ash and oil. This helps in retaining the colour in the dyeing stage and gives the cloth its cooling properties.

Diagonal to Govardhan's house, B. Sudershan's workers had started the next step after spinning. This is the tie and dye step. Warps and wefts are prepared separately. The warps are tied to two poles. All the weavers then work together to tie notes at pre-determined places. They tie the knots with either rubber bands or by cloth strips. The knots are on the areas where the dyes have to be avoided and the exposed areas are where the dyes need to penetrate the fibres. This method is called resist dyeing, which is used in various other textiles too and this is what gives the intricate designs on the fabric.

On asking one of the workers about the current piece they were working on, they threw light on the detailed calculations and measurements. A total of 40 metres of yarn was stretched out on the two poles outside their home and was marked every 2 metres. The whole length would give them 20 dupattas with each, the of length 2 metres and width of 36 inches. The little white markings were the start/ end of one dupatta, and reference for them to cut the piece out.



Fig. 2: Marking Warps

While some worked on the warps outside, some worked on the wefts of other projects, in the house. Meeting the owner, B. Sudarshan was a bliss. The 75-year-old weaver, reminisced his days of when he was first taught the skill of making Telia Rumal, by his forefathers, B. Narsimha. Since then, this has become their family business and currently all members of his family actively participate in it.

Then comes the process of dyeing, the warps are dyed as per the specific desired colour. There are three types of dyes and each one of them give a different effect.

- Natural dyes are derived from plant and biological sources.
- Reactive dyes react with the fibres forming a permanent attachment. These dyes have excellent colour fastness.
- The last is the wet dye. This tie dye is performed with hot water. Wet dyes make the colours bleed into one another, creating an even flow between colours.

The Key Point of Telia Rumal is that these Dyes Never Fade

The dyed warps are then dried out in the natural light. They are tied under tension for it to dry. Outside almost every house, the dyed warps are tied with poles for it to dry out. The coloured yarn like red, black, yellow, indigo, orange etc. in front of their houses adorns the little village.

The most crucial step after this is the 'counting and marking'. Once the warps are dry, the weavers count and mend broken yarns. They have to ensure that the design remains intact and then only the warps are put on the loom.

The wefts are made after this, but not until the warps are on the loom and woven. This is because precise measurements are taken to ensure the accurate placement of design. These complex calculations, corresponding with tying the yarns as per the dyes, require patience and skills. The wefts are also prepared with the tie and dye method, except its tied to a semi-circle rim with a central peg and many nails. After dyeing, they are coiled onto cylinders and then on bobbins to weave.

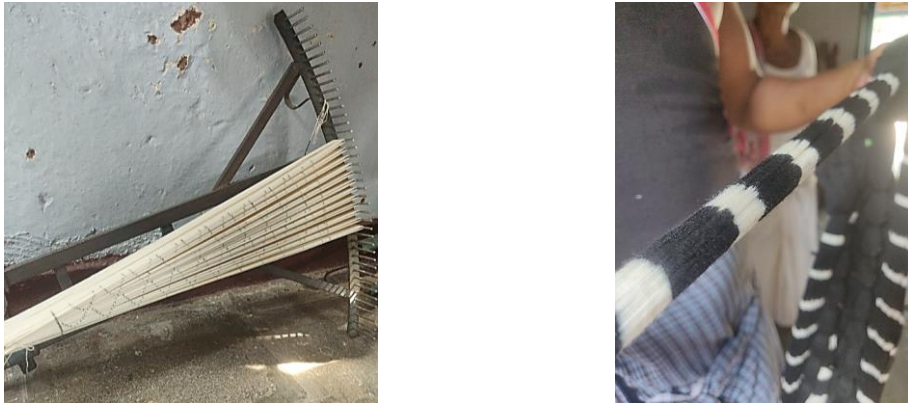


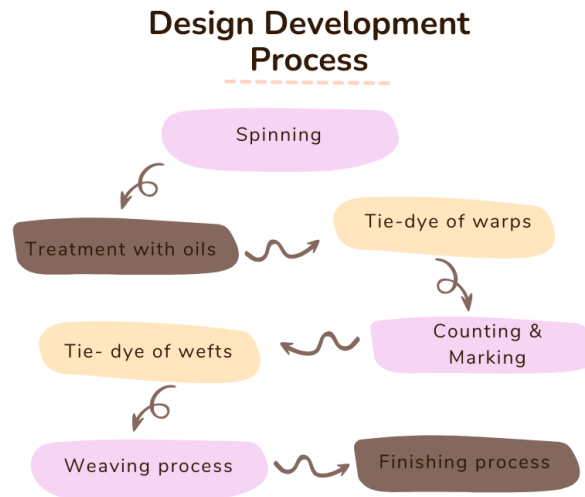
Fig. 3 & Fig. 4: Creating Design on the Wefts using this Equipment



Fig. 5: The Central Area of the Houses had Rods and Pipes to Hang the Ready Wefts

The final step is weaving. As the weaver weaves, the pattern emerges on the loom that has been tie-dyed as per the pre-arranged design. Traditionally only three colours were used- red, black and white in geometrical design. It is woven on pit loom also known as **Maggam**, which is made of teak wood. The more complex designs and colours involved, the more challenging each step of weaving becomes. For a fabric with the width of a saree, the weaving process can take up to four hours.

- Before sending the pieces for sale, they are starched and ironed.
- The complete process, from preparing warps till ironing a 20-metre dupatta itself take about seven days.



Flow Chart 1

Different Types of Telia Rumal Products

Table 1: Different types of Telia Rumal Products

Sl. No	Product Design	Goods	State	Year
1	Saree	Handloom	Andhra Pradesh	2022
2	Dupatta	Handloom	Andhra Pradesh	2022
3	Blouse	Handloom	Andhra Pradesh	2022
4	Wall Hanging	handloom	Andhra Pradesh	2022

Problem of Identification

Along with Chirala and Puttapaka, Koyyalagudem is also considered as one of the towns for Telia Rumal. The town is known for its weaving hands, but now the skills and manufacturing has diminished.

Govardhan stated that his family has five members. His parents, who have been into the weaving business since thirty years, his grandfather, who has been ailing and his sibling. Both, his sibling and himself, are students of a college situated near Pochampally. The weavers in his family now weave other types of handlooms too. Govardhan said "creating Telia Rumal pieces is a hectic and a time-consuming process. Weavers have to invest much time into it, but receive comparatively less remuneration. The demand for Telia Rumal has dropped, because of the other available options in the market. We gain much more income creating other handlooms like ikkat and Pochampally,". Currently their family sells their Telia Rumal products only in the local market, Hyderabad and a Telangana-based private limited company named, Master weavers. He expressed that many juveniles from the town help their families in the business, but have not inherited the weaving skills because they have prioritized education over it. He believes that this art form is going to vanish within the next 10-15 years. On the contrary, B. Sudershan (artisan) gladly voiced that all members of his family are into the family business. They weave other types of handlooms along with Telia Rumal. Usually, their Telia Rumal products are sold in Fabindia. "In this town, some weavers create shirt and dress materials while some create sarees and dupattas.", he added.



Fig. 6: A Package Sticker on a Telia Rumal Product from Fab India

They also face the same issue regarding the low demand of Telia Rupal and due to this they started weaving other products, alongside. He said that there are not many weavers in town who create only Telia Rupal products.

Objective of Study

- To observe and research on the process on Telia Rupal
- To investigate why weavers are opting out of this art form
- To perceive whether the government has taken some steps to protect this craft

Methodology of Study

The paper is mainly based on collective primary and secondary data followed by interviews with artisans and observations of their workings on the utility products and documentation of it.



Fig. 7: Artisans and their Semi- Finished and Finished Products

Review of Literature

Civil services chronicle (July 2020): In the 'arts and culture' section of the magazine, it states that Telia Rupal can be created only using the traditional handloom. They studied on the history of Telia Rupal, stating that officers working in the court of Nizams used to wear the Chituki Telia Rupal as symbolic representation of status. Telia Rupal was also offered to the devotees at Ajmer Sharif in Rajasthan.

Khurana Purva; Suman Pant; Chanchal (Jan 2016): They all researched and wrote about the dying craft, the double- ikat Telia Rupal of Andhra Pradesh. They stated that the world has renewed its interest towards the use of eco- friendly dyes, which is what Telia Rupal uses.

The journal of the Asian arts society of Australia (VOLUME 25 NO. 1 March 2016): Liz Williamson had visited the Musée des Arts Asiatique Guimet in Paris for textile research. He saw the costumes and textiles, mostly dated from the 15th to the early 20th centuries, mainly of Indian and Chinese origin. In the most significant Indian textiles he mentioned, Jain embroideries, Mughal fabrics, Telia Rumpals, Kantha embroideries, Kashmiri shawls, Export Chintzes and Patola.

Colour and Pattern: Tribal and Contemporary Ikats of India and Laos (2010): This article talks about the exhibition of contemporary and traditional Lao tribal apparel, drawn upon centuries-old motifs. The article has pictures of the textiles displayed in the exhibition which includes, Telia Rupal. The author also wrote that the weavers claimed to have migrated from Saurashtra, Gujarat in the early 20th century and settled in Chirala where they produced double ikat cotton Rumpals (square pieces of cloth 36"x 36") in simple geometric patterns. These were called Telia Rumpals of Chirala.

Artisans Interview

B. Sudarshan: "In this town, some weavers create shirt and dress materials while some create sarees and dupattas." He also spoke about his past. "I'm currently 75 years old and this business was previously handled by my fore fathers. They taught me the Telia Rupal process and the different weaving skills, when I was at the age of 10"

Govardhan: He was discussing the problems faced by all weavers and explaining why everyone is shifting to other weaving crafts. He said "Weavers have to invest much time into it, but receive comparatively less profits. The demand for Telia Rupal has dropped, because of the other available options in the market. We gain much more income creating other handlooms like ikkat and pochampally,"

Wholesaler: On speaking with one of the wholesalers of the town, he was complimenting the weavers of Koyyalagudem for their efforts in weaving. “The weavers have to adjust each thread manually to create the perfect, intricate pattern”. He also told us about the prices of Telia Rumal, first mentioning that the prices differ as the raw materials’ cost increase and decrease. “Telia Rumal is made of cotton or silk thread. A 45” by 45” scarf is called Telia Rumal and the design created on the fabric is known as ‘Telia’. This scarf, if made with cotton threads, currently prices around 650 INR. Dupattas and blouses go to almost 6000 INR. A telia saree made of silk thread can cost around 10,000 INR to 40,000 INR, depending upon the details.” He also said that telia products are by solely telia craft, and no other weaving style is mixed with it.

Recommendation

Many traditional handlooms are dying due to the lack of awareness in the urbanized countries. India is known for its variety in rich handlooms, we need to protect them and the weavers. We need to encourage the art and bring it back to life. One of it is the ravishing craft, Telia Rumal. On asking the weavers about how the government is helping in encouraging the form, they said the Telangana government has launched a scheme called ‘Thrift fund’. This is the latest scheme for weavers. Govardhan said that when the weavers pay 400-1200 INR consecutively for 36 months (3 years), they will receive three times the amount. This encourages the weavers to continue their occupation due to the higher income.

The town has too, equally participated in all the weaver’s success. Koyyalagudem has an entire market of manufacturers, weavers, dyers, wholesalers etc. All weavers sell their products to the town council, collectively. The sellers there sell the handlooms in the big market which is in Pochampally.

Conclusion

If this practice continues and people all around start realizing the value of the Indian handlooms and handicrafts, all the dying art and craft would come back to life. Telia Rumal is a very beautiful piece of work, given its time- consuming process. One wearing this handloom, always gives a luxurious vibe. The blacks, reds and whites complement each other so aesthetically. India is known for its variety in rich handlooms, we need to protect them and the weavers. We need to encourage the art and bring it back to life.

Appendix



Fig. 8: Author Interaction with the Weavers

Reference

- APA style

Artisans Interview

- B. Sudarshan
- Govardhan

Tables/ flowcharts

- Fig 1: A Telia Rumal scarf and its raw materials
- Fig 2: marking warps
- Fig 3 & FIG 4: Creating design on the wefts using this equipment
- Fig 5: The central area of the houses had rods and pipes to hang the ready wefts.
- Fig 6: A package sticker on a Telia Rumal product from Fabindia
- Fig 7: Artisans and their semi- finished and finished products
- Fig 8: Author interaction with the weavers
- Flow Chart 1: Design development process
- Table 1: different types of Telia Rumal products

References

Journal / Book

1. **Khurana Purva**, the double- ikat Telia Rumal of Andhra Pradesh, publication- Jan 2016

Artisan Interviews

2. B. Sudarshan, artisan, Koyyalagudem, Andhra Pradesh, Date 31.07.2022
3. Govardhan, artisan's son, Koyyalagudem, Andhra Pradesh, Date 31.07.2022

Tables/ Flowchart

4. Table 1: different types of Telia Rumal products
5. Flow Chart 1: Design development process

Images / Map

6. Fig. 1: A Telia Rumal scarf and its raw materials
7. Fig. 2: marking warps
8. Fig. 3 & FIG 4: Creating design on the wefts using this equipment
9. Fig. 5: The central area of the houses had rods and pipes to hang the ready wefts.
10. Fig. 6: A package sticker on a Telia Rumal product from Fabindia
11. Fig. 7: Artisans and their semi- finished and finished products
12. Fig. 8: Author interaction with the weavers.

