

Handicrafts and Handlooms

PART - I

Basket Maker of Andugula

Polaiah is a basket maker. He is from Andugula village in Kalvakurthi Mandal, Mahabubnagar district. He is about 35 years old. He belongs to Yerukala, a tribal community. Polaiah's family has been weaving baskets for generations. Bagamma, his wife also works as a basket maker. And they have three children. Polaiah's father along with other 25 families came to the city about 30 years ago as the demand for baskets had declined in their native village. He sells baskets on the pavements of Chaderghat.

Polaiah uses the spines of wild date palm (*eatha chettu*) leaves. Using a knife, he shaves off the leaves and keeps them in hot sunshine to dry them. The raw material, wild date palm leaves, are brought in bundles from Andugula, their native village. His relatives in Andugula collect the spines from bushes around their villages and sell to basket makers like Polaiah. Andugula is about 60 km from Hyderabad.

- ◆ What do you understand about raw material in the context of basket making? Who collects them?

- ◆ What are the tools used by the basket makers?

Each bundle of date palm spines costs Rs.120. Polaiah and other basket makers usually bring 10 bundles for two months. Polaiah's family makes 25 baskets from one bundle. Ten bundles of spines would give them about 250 baskets. It takes 30 minutes to make a basket. He weaves baskets from 10 am to 5 pm with some breaks for rest and eating.



Fig 9.1 Basket shop with bamboo products

Polaiah sells each basket for Rs. 20. Sometimes, customers ask for a bigger basket for family rituals. These are sold at a higher price depending on the amount of raw material used. He sells baskets throughout the year. In two months he



Fig 9.2 Basket weaving

would sell Rs.5000 worth of baskets. The cost price is Rs. 1200 excluding the transportation charges of Rs.100 for every visit to his village. So the income of his family is Rs.3700 for 2 months. He does not earn sufficient income to meet his family expenditure. To supplement his income Polaiah buys and sells bamboo products like trays and stands.

Basket making is a craft work that involves the use of wild date palm leaves, cane and bamboo which are found in forests. There has been depletion of forests due to their extensive exploitation for big industries. This affects the livelihoods of people who have traditionally depended on forest. Further, the demand for such products has reduced considerably. This forces them to move out of rural areas and migrate to urban areas for survival. This is true for many involved in traditional

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activities. However, they have to often live in urban areas without basic amenities.

Urban Slum

Polaiah lives in a slum which does not have proper drainage, emits foul smell, and breeds mosquitoes and flies. There is no electric connection or safe drinking water. Polaiah's hut is made of bamboo, mats and recycled plastic bags and tarpaulin. During rainy season their roofs often leak and the huts are flooded. The Municipal Corporation officials sometimes evict Polaiah and other basket maker families huts but they build them again.

Despite struggling hard people like Polaiah have been denied voting rights in the city and in fact they have also been denied ration cards as they don't have any identity or residence proof. Thus they cannot participate in the democratic processes of the city or avail the facilities for the poor.

Basket Makers

People of *Yerukula* tribe are usually involved in basket making and live in different parts of Andhra Pradesh. They are called '*Yerukula*' after their women's



Fig 9.3 Basket weaving

traditional profession of fortune telling 'Eruka chepputa' (Sodhi). People of this tribe speak 'Yerukula basha'. Words from Telugu, Tamil and Kannada languages are used in this language.

Choose the correct option:

- a. Forests are depleted largely because of the usage by (basket weavers / big industries).
 - b. Polaiah buys bamboo items from (trader in Mandi/village in Andugula).
- ◆ Make a table showing expenses for raw material and income from the produce.

- ◆ Do you think people like Polaiah should be given ration card and allowed to vote in Hyderabad?

By now you have learnt that goods such as baskets made of bamboo and *etha chettu* require simple production – using very few materials mostly made of natural resources. There are many other goods which require raw materials to be processed in a more complex way with complex tools. Cloth materials made of cotton and silk are examples of such goods. Cloth can be manufactured today either in hand operated looms or by power looms or in large mills. We will study here how it is produced by handloom weavers.

PART - II

Handloom Weavers in Pochampally

Pochampally is a small town in Nalgonda district in Andhra Pradesh. The weavers here produce unique sarees called *Ikkat* sarees, which are world famous. *Ikkat* is a term used for the particular style in which cloth is dyed, often also referred to Bandhini or Pochampally itself. They are high quality silk sarees containing simple geometrical designs and available mostly in three colours and shades. There are nearly 10,000 weaving families in 100 surrounding villages doing this craft.

Pochampally sarees have a unique design and colour – quite distinct from other silk saris. That is why it is the first handloom cloth patented in India. This means, no

other handloom saree producers in the world can sell sarees in the name of "Pochampally Ikkat Sarees". Only those produced in Pochampally and its surrounding villages can be sold with this brand name. These sarees are sold in India and abroad at high prices.

To make silk sarees you need raw material like – silk yarn, colours, cotton thread. These are not produced by weavers, they buy them from the market. Silk worms from which silk yarn is made, grow on mulberry leaves. Rearing of silkworm is taken up by small farmers. Cotton is produced in farms and is made into thread either in factories or as household craft. Colours are often made in factories. Weavers buy yarn and colours from the market.

Tools: Weavers own the wooden loom, which is the main tool for weaving. Apart from it, they also use small knives. For weavers it is also important to know the design plan to make in the saree. If you look at a saree you will notice that there are very intricate designs on them. These designs are marked on special sheets of paper with specific notations. Weavers follow them without making errors. With years of practice they even develop new designs.

- ◆ Look at a saree and draw any of the common designs on them in the box below.



Stages of Weaving a Saree

There are different stages of making the saree. The first of this is preparing the yarn. Silk yarn is wound on a bobbin. These yarns are then marked with the design. These markings of the designs help them to identify what colours need to be dyed into which part of the yarn. Dyeing the yarn is a long repeated process. Each colour

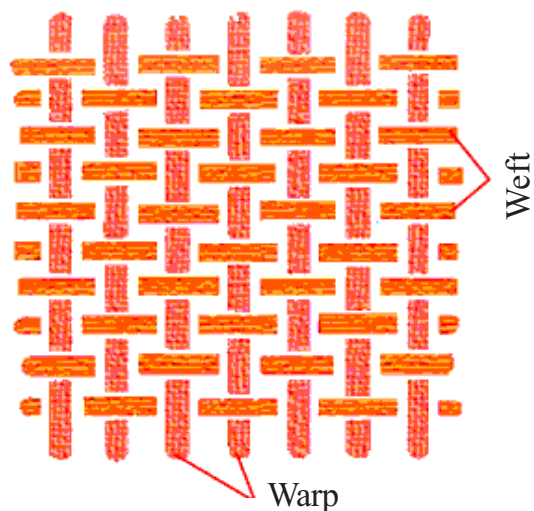
needs to be done separately and dried one after the other. Only when the colouring is completed, the thread can be used for weaving.

Dyeing yarn

For dyeing, the silk yarn is taken off, but when dry, it is again stretched, partly opened and tied again for dyeing, a process repeated several times. For making sarees in different colours and shade, different methods of dyeing are followed. The red and brown shades, between white and black, are achieved using alizarin dyes. For this the yarn is first soaked in a mixture of castor oil and alkaline earth, then dried, again soaked, dipped in alizarin paste and finally boiled till it becomes red. For the brown shades, iron filings are added to the colour. Dissolving iron filings in vinegar produces black colour.

Warp and Weft

You will notice that cloth has threads passing from top to down and sideways something like this #. Warp is the yarn that goes from top to bottom and wefts are the yarns that go from left to right.



Let us look at the account of a visit to a weavers' house in Pochampally to know more about ikkat cloth materials.

Jagathayya is a resident of Pochampally. All of his family members – he, his wife, son and daughter-in-law work as weavers. When we visited his house, we found all members in the family engaged in different tasks. While he was winding yarn, his son Murali was engaged in weaving on the *maggam* (pit loom) set up inside the house. Other tools such as *Chitkasu* (is a curved frame made for weft ikkat with pegs on which the weft threads are grouped and tied for dyeing), *panni* (reed), *Acchu* (head shaft), thread and rubber tubing were used to do different tasks in producing ikkat sarees. Most of the tools are made of wood. Since he has become old, Jagathayya spends most of the time winding yarn and his son weaves on the loom.

Jagathayya's wife and daughter-in-law do bobbin winding. Jagathayya's grand children are studying in schools. There is some work like warping done collectively by group of weavers on streets / outside the house.



Fig 9.4 At pit loom - weaving a saree



Fig 9.5 Winding thread



Fig 9.6 Bobbin winding

His son Murali brings all the raw material – dyed silk yarn, zari and design from master weaver and sometimes from cooperative society of which he is



Fig 9.7 Marking design

a member. At a time Jagathayya gets raw materials to weave eight sarees. The whole family has to work for 12-15 hours a day for nearly 50 days to weave 8 sarees. They get about Rs.1200 per saree for the work.

Weaving saree is a hereditary occupation for Jagathayya's family. The income Jagathayya's family gets from weaving ikkat sarees is insufficient to run the family.

During March-May, Jagathayya's family is able to weave only a few hours a day. If there is high temperature, thread will get cut. The whole family works only till afternoon during these days. Women are distressed a lot – they have to do weaving related works and also take care of the household chores – cooking food, fetching water and preparing children to go to school.

Earlier, Jagathayya's family used to weave only for the cooperative society. The cooperative societies provide financial assistance through insurance in case of unexpected illness or death in the weaver's family. They also help in getting loan for construction of houses. These days cooperative society is not giving sufficient work. They had to look for additional sources of income to run their families. Since a master weaver in Pochampally agreed to give work and the payment for work would supplement his income for the family, Jagathayya's family began weaving

Ikkat sarees for the master weaver. Jagathayya has not given up the membership with the cooperative society and hopes that it will improve its functioning in the coming days.

Weaver's Problems and Cooperative Societies

Andhra Pradesh has the second largest number of handlooms in the country, next only to West Bengal. Handloom weavers are facing a serious problem. They face a stiff competition from power loom and mill made cloth -these are cheaper as they are produced on machines and also because they use synthetic yarn which costs much less than cotton or silk. Even though it is popular due to its high quality and unique beauty, the Pochampally saree seems to be expensive. But the weavers are not getting good rate due to middle men's involvement.

The buyers are spread all over the world and weavers do not have any direct contact with them. Fashions in the cities change fast and it is difficult for the weavers to know what kind of designs are in demand and they have to rely on middle men to know about the designs in vogue and change their designs accordingly. They have to depend on middlemen for getting raw materials like cotton or silk yarn as these are produced in far



Fig 9.8 Weaving in process

away centres. This gives the middlemen an important position in the handloom industry and they try to get the largest share of the price paid by the buyers of the sarees.



Fig 9.9 Warping

In order to overcome these problems the weavers are encouraged to form cooperative societies. The cooperative societies are meant to help the weavers in buying raw materials at low price and to arrange for marketing of their cloth. This reduces their dependence upon middle men and traders. The cooperative societies should help the weavers by training in new designs.

However, now-a-days, a large section of weavers in many other parts of Andhra Pradesh also do not get sufficient work from cooperative societies. In some cooperative societies, weavers are not given any role in decisions regarding procurement of raw materials and sale of cloth materials. They do not provide opportunities for weavers to produce sarees to suit the changing preferences of consumers. This has once again pushed the weavers into the clutches of the middlemen and traders.



Fig 9.10 Folding the Ikkath Saree

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A large amount of handloom cloth materials in Andhra Pradesh are produced and marketed by master weavers and merchants. The master weavers and merchants procure all the raw materials and supply them to weavers and collect the woven cloth. They then sell these materials to wholesale cloth sellers. They pay a stipulated amount as wages for the weaving work. Many master weavers also provide loan to weavers to set up loom, buy other tools and restrict them not to weave sarees for other master weavers. They also decide the wages for the work done by the weavers. Since they are interested in raising their incomes, it is natural for them to look for ways to pay less to the weavers. Distressed weaving families should be provided work from cooperative societies and saved from the master weavers.

- ◆ List the raw materials and tools used to make Ikkat sarees.
- ◆ Why Jagathayya's family has begun to weave for a master weaver?

Key words :

1. Raw materials
2. *Ikkat*
3. Patent
4. Tie & Dye
5. Warp - Weft
6. Eruka Chepputa
7. Co-operative societies

Project work :

Invite a craftsperson to your classroom or visit their work place. Make a wallpaper showing different processes of their production.

Improve your learning

1. Do you think people have enough earnings from work like basket making and weaving?
2. Prepare a list of goods which could have substituted the basket. Discuss with your parents before preparing the list.
3. There are many products that have replaced handicrafts – identify them and try to find out where they are produced. Discuss how this could affect the lives of handicrafts persons.
4. Why did Polaiah’s family come to Hyderabad? Why does Polaiah have no right to vote in Hyderabad?
5. You may find crafts persons like Polaiah producing goods other than baskets. Meet two such persons and collect the following details and discuss them in the class. One sample is given for you.

Sl. No.	Name of the crafts person	Goods produced	One or two important raw materials used	Source of raw materials
1	Polaiah	Baskets	Spokes of date palm leaves	Andugula – native village
2				
3				

6. Why do you think patenting Pochampally Ikkat saree weaving would help weavers in Pochampally?
7. Should weavers procure raw materials and weave Ikkat sarees and try to sell them directly to the people? What are the challenges in it?
8. Prepare the flow diagram depicting the organisation of production in basket making and handloom textile weaving.
9. Compare the similarities and differences between basket making and Ikkat saree weaving and fill in the following table:

Work	Raw materials used	Tools used	How goods are sold
Basket making			
Handloom weaving			

10. List out various handicrafts with location in Andhra Pradesh and prepare a chart.