



**ITMAR-14**  
**Sustaining The Traditional Paithani Saree Weaving Of Maharashtra,  
India**

Reena Bhatia<sup>1\*</sup> and Deepti Desai<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>*Department of Clothing and Textiles, Faculty of Family and Community Sciences, The Maharaja Sayajirao  
University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.*

**Abstract**

Among the hand woven sarees of India, Paithani is famous and has played a significant role in weaving together the socio-cultural fabric of Maharashtra since it is traditionally a part of the trousseau of every Maharashtra bride. The aim of the study was to document the existing weaving traditions of Paithani and explore the possibility of weaving Paithani as a yardage with different product layout. To achieve the formulated objectives a descriptive cum exploratory study was planned. Data collection was done through observation and interview schedule during field visits in Bhandge Lane, Yeola. The weavers were selected through purposive random sampling. Adaptation of Paithani saree layout on handloom was done for selected product range to unearth new opportunities for a local craft and help them expand their market. Data analysis indicated that the younger generation was involved in the traditional weaving of Paithani saree. The weavers were training their children in traditional weaving practices of Paithani; contributing positively to its sustainability. The craft details in terms of raw materials, loom set-up, dyeing, weaving process, types of Paithani, colours and motifs was documented through photographs and supplemented with text. It was reassuring to learn that 80 per cent of weavers would prefer to diversify into other products instead of just weaving saree if done using same technique of Paithani weaving.

© 2014 The Authors. Published by Global Illuminators. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)  
Peer-review under responsibility of the Scientific & Review committee of ITMAR-2014.

*Keywords:* Paithani, Weaving Traditions, Documentation, Adaptation, Sustainability

**Introduction**

India has diverse and prosperous weaving traditions (Figure 1). Each area has its own particular style, using traditional designs and motifs (Handloom Saree Maharashtra India).

Among the hand woven sarees, Paithani is famous and has played a significant role in weaving together the socio-cultural fabric of Maharashtra since it is traditionally a part of the trousseau of every Maharashtrian bride. Pune, Nashik, and Aurangabad in Maharashtra are key centers of this tradition (Figure 2). Yeola, a town, a municipal council and a taluka headquarters in Nashik District in the Indian state of Maharashtra is buzzing with Paithani weaving activity these days (India-Crafts).

The Paithani of Maharashtra is a silk sari of gorgeous colours, intricate design and painstaking labour (Chattopadhyaya, 1975). It is part of a culture given more to thrift than flamboyance, with treasured elegance and beauty. It tells us of people who were willing to

\*All correspondence related to this article should be directed to Reena Bhatia<sup>1</sup> Department of Clothing and Textiles, Faculty of Family and Community Sciences, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.

Email: [reenanrupen@rediffmail.com](mailto:reenanrupen@rediffmail.com)

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Global Illuminators. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

Peer-review under responsibility of the Scientific & Review committee of ITMAR-2014.

spend lavishly to clothe their women folk in nine yards of the traditional silk and spun gold, crafted by indigenous weavers, especially on festive occasion(DHAMJIJA, 1995).

It is known as “Mahavastra of Maharashtra”. Paithani saris with rich tapestry woven gold and silk pallav have the finest weaves. The technique of tapestry weave is one of the most ancient methods of creating patterns with weaving in, of multiple non-continuous weft threads of different colours (Agrawal, 2008).

The Rig Veda mentions a golden woven fabric and the Greek records talk of gorgeous Paithani fabrics from the great ancient trading and industrial center, Pratishan or Paithan in Maharashtra. During the medieval period, the Marathas extended their patronage to textile activities. Some centers became renowned for their textiles and the fabric frequently derived its name from the place of origin. The name Paithani came from Paithan(india-crafts).It was the only centre where this complex technique of weaving was kept alive during the colonial period, when other Deccan centers ceased to weave saris because of lack of patronage. Paithan possibly survived because of the patronage of the household of the Nizam of Hyderabad, who kept the art alive by opening a centre for weaving turbans, saris, shalus, and patkas, sashes, for the use of the court(Agrawal, 2008).

#### *Aim And Objectives*

A documentation of Paithani saree weaving process and its types was undertaken to serve as a record of the traditional craft to provide knowledge for future reference. It would also serve as an empirical reference to design product line for several end users; by keeping intact the character of Paithani saree. The Paithani saris look beautiful, have a sentimental value but sadly enough, it has very few takers. Its declining popularity has been attributed to its traditional look, high price, stiffness of fabric and traditional motifs(Doshi, 2011). The possibilities of designing a range of product by modifying the existing layout of the Paithani sareewas explored to bring about a social change that would contribute to the challenge of sustaining the culture of Paithani weaving traditions of Yeola in Maharashtra. The following objectives were formulated thus -

1. To document the weaving process of Paithani saree and its types.
2. To adapt the Paithani saree layout for creating a range of products.

#### *Purpose Of The Study*

Paithani saree has its unique identity which Maharashtrian women used to wear as a draped garment during ceremonies, festivals and wedding. However, these days’ women are not keen on wearing their traditional saree because it has the traditional look, high price and the stiffness of fabric. Also, with each passing day the cultural differences between the states and countries are minimising due to the change of trend in fashion and its acceptance by the masses. Today consumers are eager to possess a traditionally crafted product which is a healthy sign for its survival(Doshi, 2011). However, the consumers prefer these handcrafted products in their contemporary forms which look trendy as well. Being a young Maharashtrian, the investigator understood the socio-cultural connections of Paithani which is essential to be retained. Hence, the need to preserve the traditional craft and at the same time diversify the basic product, Paithani saree for new end uses which in turn will increase its market size; and contribute in sustaining the craft.

## Methodology

To achieve the formulated objectives a descriptive and exploratory study was planned which was divided into two phases as shown in (Figure 3).

### *Phase I - Documentation of the craft*

The preliminary survey of the Paithani craft was conducted in Yeola town in Nashik district in Maharashtra to gain information about the pockets of Paithani weaving and structure of craft. For the collection of primary data, interview coupled with observation method was used in view of the objectives of the study. The interview schedule consisted of closed and open ended questions. It contained detailed questions such as demographic details of the weavers, details regarding the craft such as weaving process, sourcing of raw materials, motifs, colours, product types, pricing and marketing practices, and scope for diversified products. The final data was collected in the month of November – 2012. Photographic documentation was also done to support the study. The secondary data collected for the study was obtained from museums and libraries. The visited libraries were Hansa Mehta Library, Museum Library of The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Weavers Service Centre Mumbai and Raja Dinkar Kelkar Library of Pune. The authentic sources mainly included photographs and ancient samples which were preserved by the curator in the museums.

The sample selection was done by purposive random sampling method. Selected 50 respondents from Yeola town who belonged to families of hereditary weavers of Paithani were interviewed.

### *Phase II - Market survey, Adaptation of Saree Layout and its weaving*

The researcher conducted a market survey at different places such as handcrafted exhibitions, gifts shop, home décor, local market in Vadodara city, Gujarat and Pune city, Maharashtra. The survey was done to spot innovation in diversified products and its market potential. Based on the results of the market survey the researcher decided to create products that can be used for different cliental segments, under several categories given in (Table 1).

The designing of product layout was done in order to diversify the product range of Paithani (Figure 4). The product designs were kept simple, highlighting the traditional motifs of Paithani on diversified product. The adaptation of the layout was made by modifying the placement of designs according to the designed products. The adapted layout was planned in the specified width of the saree. The placement of motifs was calculated accordingly and adaptation was done as required. Weaving of the fabric was done by the weavers Mr Anil Krushnasa Habib and Mr Sunil Krushnasa Habib who had acquired art of weaving Paithani since generations.

Exhibition was planned for promotion of craft and designed products. Banner was prepared and displayed for awareness about the craft. The banner contained information on the history, technique used, types, motifs, and present status of the Paithani craft to give the consumer insights about the craft. This would help the consumer in making an informed

purchase decision since their familiarity to the craft would be greater which could be extremely helpful while making routine or low-involvement purchases.

## Results And Discussions

### *Weavers' profile*

The findings pertaining to the age of Paithani weavers showed that they were in age group of 21- 70 years. This indicated that the younger generation were involved in the traditional weaving of Paithani saree and probably the craft fetched them good income and hence they were engaged in this craft activity. All 50 respondents were Hindu in religion belonging to Kshatriyas caste and their mother tongue was Marathi. All the weavers were literate and exactly 50 per cent of them were graduates. It was observed by the investigator that though women were not engaged in Paithani weaving, they would help the weavers especially in pre-weaving process. Actual weaving was only carried out by men both young and old. The children were trained in traditional weaving practices and encouraged to follow the traditional craft. It is a surely a positive step towards the sustainability of craft at least through the next generation. In addition data in (Graph 1) revealed that the craft in Yeola is at least being practiced since 100 -200 years and hence it has a strong hereditary character. They were engaged throughout the year in craft activity.

### *Raw materials and equipment*

Procurement of raw material was done by the Master Weaver from the yarn dealers located in Yeola itself. Every month silk yarns of 18 - 20 denier were purchased from Bangalore and Zari from Surat. Silk required per loom was 5 kg and zari required was 1kg per loom. Average quantity of silk and zari consumed per month was 25 kg and 5 kg respectively by a weaver. This was purchased at a cost of Rs. 3500 / kg silk and Rs. 2000 / kg zari.

A fly shuttle frame loom (Figure – 5) was commonly used by households to weave a Paithani saree. The terminologies for weaving tool and equipment used locally is given in (Table – 2). Total time required for weaving process included winding of yarns on bobbin which took three to four hours, dyeing of yarns took three days, winding on warping frame took a day, and setting of loom took two days. If the loom was new it would take a month, because of its longer process. To set a new loom the process will start by changing the punched cards, dyeing the warp yarns and weft yarns in the desired colour shade, setting up the warp beam, threading the warp yarns through headles, winding the bobbin for weft yarn and setting the cloth beam. Weaving a saree took at least five days which was also dependent on the design and the intricacy of work.

As observed by the researcher and description by the weavers suggested that pre-weaving processes of a Paithani saree included the following steps as described below -

### *Sorting of silk*

Sorting of silk was generally done on the basis of length, diameter, lustre and strength of the yarn. The purpose for sorting silk was the efficient for yarn required in weaving. In local language warp is known as Taana and weft is known as Baana and the process of weaving is a combination of Taana and Baana. Warp (Taana) acts as foundation for further processes of weaving and designing. The warp thread is stronger, highly twisted than the weft thread. Now this silk thread of warp and weft is ready for bleaching and dyeing. Then it is sent to dyeing unit.

### *Degumming, dyeing, soaping and washing of silk*

Degumming (Figure – 6) process removed the silk gum and was done through boiling; accomplished by the use of soap and soda. The quality of silk was retained by controlled use of soap and soda ash. The weight loss of silk in the process of degumming was 20 – 25 per cent.

### *Dyeing*

In Paithani weaving acid dyes were mostly used in a wide range of brilliant shades. Bleaching (Figure – 7) was done prior to dyeing. After dyeing the material is taken out and given cold wash. After cold wash silk was kept in shade for drying. It would take three to four days for drying. The dyeing was usually initiated at 40° C and the temperature allowed to rise to about 85° C, while boiling was avoided, (Figure – 8) since it would affect the strength and lustre of silk. Addition of glauber salt was done to work as a levelling agent.

### *Winding*

After the dyeing process is completed, the yarn is normally received by the weavers in the form of bundles. Winding is done on small instrument which in local language is called *Asaari* and is prepared from bamboo splits just like a conical reel.

Charkha machine is prepared for winding of weft. In this machine motor is used in place of wooden rods, stones and *Asaari* and weft is wound on cones. Then this silk thread is again taken, wound on bobbins with help of charka. This work is generally done by women folk of the family.

### *Warping*

This process was carried out in house; three people were required for this operation. Hanks were wrapped on the warp beam. Four thousand five hundred yarns were wrapped at one time and five sarees of six yards were woven when one warp beam was prepared. Warp beam was prepared within three hours.

### *Setting up the loom*

The warp beam was placed on one end of the loom were rolled on the earlier yarns used for the previous saree. If a different design was to be made, only the jacquard cards were replaced. This process took only about a day.

### *Loom*

The fly shuttle loom was simple and consisted of a traditional wooden frame with same parts of a basic loom (Figure 14) such as cloth beam, sley, shuttle box, reed, reed rest beam, warp beam, lease rods, paddles. In looms jacquard and dobby was used for the purpose of butta and border design. Cloth beam in local language known as *Turai* was slowly rewound which enabled the weaver to roll the cloth when the work was in progress. Comb was fitted in between sley and reed. Through this comb silk threads of warp were kept parallel. Shuttle box was fitted to sley at both the sides for fly shuttle weaving. *Zatka* means beatening. The batten is tightened to sley for fly shuttle. With the help of rest beam warp was spread on loom. Harness cords were used for warp threads for designing border and butta. Dobby was used in making border design of *Ekdhoti* Paithani sari. *Tillies* were used for designing pallav and for making buttas on body of the cloth. Punched cards were used for butta design while pegs were used in *Ekdhoti* and three shuttles for weaving of border design in a *Kadiyal* sari. Treadles were the footboards/paddles by which the weaver raised or lowered the threads of the warp which was called as shed. These respective harnesses were lowered or raised according to the holes on the punched cards (Figure 12) fed into the jacquard mechanism. The crossbar was fixed to the ground on two pegs and used for raising the warp. The warp beam was a wooden beam on which the warp was fastened.

### *Types of Paithani*

Paithani was classified under three categories according to the weavers; based on weaving process, motifs and colour. However, Paithani were of two types based on their weaving process i.e. *Traditional Paithani* which had traditional motifs and was woven with Ek dhoti i.e. single shuttle with Narali border (Figure 11) and the other type was *Kadiyal Paithani* with interlock and two to three shuttle are used with Narali border.

The characteristic features and detail of Paithani saree were its bright colours with contrast or matching Narali border and traditional motifs such as Peacock, Tota Maina, Kamal, Asawali, Anarvel, geometrical Munia etc.

### *Motifs (RuupChinha)*

The oldest of the traditional Paithani designs were inspired mainly from flower and leaves. The motifs were and some still popular are Kuyari (mango), GokarnbaleJhaad (tree of life), Asavali (flower motif), Aakruthi (walnut), Mor bagdi (four peacocks in a bangle), Tota maina (parrot nightingale), Asharphi (gold coin motif), Jiparighari (flowers with petals) , Ajanta lotus, Baheshti Parinda (bird motif), HumaParinda(bird motif) and Anarvel ( tree and creeper). These motifs kept changing from Shalivahan period to the Mughal period. History had a great influence on motifs. In Shalivahan period ‘Bagula’ and ‘Hansa’ were the motifs on the Pallav. In Yadava period ‘Suvarna- Kamal’ (lotus) was the main motif.

In Mughal period several types of flowers, birds, trees, Totamaina, HumaParinda, BaheshtiParinda, Dranksha bale (trees and the creeper) Kuyari, Anar bale, Gokaran bale and Phoolpattti were the designs. Asharphi- borejali with muhar motifs were also common.(3)

□ BangadiMor: The word

*bangadi* means bangle and *mor* means peacock. So *bangadimor* means a peacock in a bangle or in a bangle shape. The motif is woven onto the pallu, the design sometimes having a single dancing peacock (Figure 15).

□ Munia brocade:

*Munia* means parrot. Parrots are woven on the pallu as well as in border. Parrots are always in leaf green colour. The parrots in silk are also called *tota-maina* (Figure 16).

□ Lotus brocade: lotus motifs are used in pallu and sometimes on the border. The lotus motif consists of 7-8 colours (Figure 17).

### Weaving Process

□ Kadiyal border sari:

*Kadiyal* means interlocking. The warp and the weft of the border are of the same colour while the body has different colours for warp and weft.

□ Ekdhoti: A single shuttle is used for weaving of weft. The colours of the warp yarn are different from that of the weft yarn. It has a narali border and simple buttis like paisa, watana, etc.

The Paithani saree is identified by its plain field with Narali border (Figure 23). It is woven in tapestry weave which has contrast border. This is one of (19th C. Paithani Saree in the Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, Pune) the Kadiyal Paithani saree which is woven with help of three shuttles. The field of the saree is plain coloured. The pallav has delicately woven mango motif with an exquisite floral border with four different colours and covered with gold brocade which gives the rich look and heavy brocaded appearance to the saree. The saree is 6 yards long and 48 inch in width border is 3 inch in width and size of pallav is 22 inches.

The Paithani saree (Figure 24) has plain field with narali border, which is a traditional border and the identification of Paithani saree. This is woven in tapestry weave which has same colour border. This is one of the Ekdhoti Paithani saree which is woven with help of single shuttle. The field of the saree is plain coloured. The pallav is double pallav which has Kundi mor motif which is the peacock sitting on the vase and it has seven series of motifs and covered with gold brocade which gives the rich look and heavy brocaded appearance to the saree. The saree is 6 yards in length and 48 inches in width. The border is 4 inches in width and pallav is 24 inches in length.

### Colour

Paithani saris are woven in a number of colours (Table 3) and each have a symbolic meaning attached to it. The very delicate colours of the Paithani silk saris give it a unique touch these colours can be pure or be created using a blend of different coloured yarns.

### *Market survey of craft products*

A survey was conducted by the researcher at Vadodara city in Gujarat and Pune city in Maharashtra to check the availability of products made from traditional textile crafts. It was noted that the different styles of handcrafted products were available in the market. (Table 4)

### *Adaptation of product pattern to Paithani saree layout*

The yardage of Paithani was produced on handloom by traditional weavers, following is the layout given by the investigator. (Figure 25)

Five categories were selected for the products which were accessories, apparels, corporate items, home décor and souvenirs. Three products in each category were constructed making a total of 15 products. (Figure 26).

### Conclusion

It can be concluded that the craft being the identity of Indian culture was preserved at least through the documentation of its traditional knowledge. The investigator found out that there was change in weaving method; the designs and motifs too were simpler due to market demand. The designing of product layout in the given saree width was made possible without making any changes in loom setting. The simple design layout offered greater scope to create wide range of products from a given saree width which, the weavers too could easily adapt to on their own. The present study thus, was an earnest attempt towards the sustainability of craft and the craftsmen by giving them an opportunity to diversify Paithani into several products and further increase their market size.

### References

- Agrawal, Y. (2008). *Silk brocades*: Roli Books Private Limited.  
Chattopadhyaya, K. (1975). *Indian handicrafts*: Allied Publishers.  
DHAMIJA, J. (1995). *The Woven Silks of India*, 77-90.  
Doshi, D. (2011). A Study on the Paisley Motif as Depicted on the Woven Textiles of Gujarat and Maharashtra.  
HandloomSareeMaharashtraIndia. Retrieved 11 July, 2012, from <http://www.HandloomSareeMaharashtraIndia.htm>  
india-crafts. Retrieved 22 Nov, 2012, from [http://www.india-crafts.com/textile/indian\\_textile\\_tradition/](http://www.india-crafts.com/textile/indian_textile_tradition/)