

Throw shuttle weaving of *Ambasi panje (lungi)*

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Dhoti or the waistcloth of men is a scanty piece of cloth fastened round the waist, its ends being carried tightly between the two legs to the back and tucked. The *dhoti* or the *lungi* worn casually or as a daily wear gained its popularity when woven with a contrast border using traditional motifs. One among such traditionally produced made-ups is the contrast-bordered *lungi*, locally famous as *Ambasi phadiki dhadi panje* woven at the village, Lakkundi. The off-white *lungi* has contrast borders on either sides with *rudraksha* and chrysanthemum motifs and was woven on the throw shuttle pit loom during 1916 and even before. Weaving process of the same that gave rise to various contrast bordered made-ups is discussed here under.

Key words: Traditional weaving, Pit loom weaving, Throw shuttle weaving, *Lungi*

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Indian culture is older than history. Its beginnings take us back to immemorial antiquity and introduce us to the golden age of civilization, the ruins of which have been unearthed at Harappa and Mohenjo Daro in Sindh. From the excavations in these buried towns, the people who dwelt in the Indus Valley more than four thousand years ago, wore a robe with or without embroidery over the shoulder and under the right arm, extending well below the knees. Another skirt like garment was secured around the waist by a running cord and either in the form of bruches or alternately a close clinging *dhoti*. The *dhoti* or the waistcloth of men is a scanty piece of cloth fastened round the waist, its ends being carried tightly between the two legs to the back and tucked. In the developed form it is much fuller and more dignified attire. Similarly *lungi* is a yardage of cloth with broad checked borders worn by Mohammedans in Bengal and Punjab. Hindus wrapped it round the waist with one end gathered in the front and tucked at the waist. The *dhoti* or the *lungi* worn casually or as a daily wear gained its popularity when woven with a contrast border using traditional motifs. One among such traditionally produced made-ups is the contrast bordered *lungi*, locally famous as *Ambasi phadiki dhadi panje* (Fig.1), woven at the village, Lakkundi¹⁻³.

Lakkundi located at about 12 km to South-East of Gadag, is a place of antiquarian interest with as many as fifty temples and 29 inscriptions, spread over the period of the later Chalukyas Kalachuries, Seunas and the Hoysalas. Lakkundi has the pride of capitalship during the period of Hoysalas. Lakkundi was also called as *Lokkigundi*, derived from two different words of Kannada literature. *Lokki*, denotes plant of a particular species that was abundantly available in *Gundi*, a lowland area / place. Lakkundi was also famous as *Lohakhandpura*. Lakkundi is a place of complex temples with beautiful architecture. History records the existences of 101 temples of Chalukyan art and 101 steep wells artistically built with small-canopied niches inside the walls of the wells enshrining *lingas*. The place is also known by the famous *Danachintamani Attimabbe*. She sanctified every niche and corner of the place and was a patronage for Kannada literature.

The inscriptions of the Kalyana Chalukyan King Irive Bedanga, narrates in two stanzas of *Ajithanatha Purana* the details of the donations and constructions made by *Attimabbe*. An inscription also mentioned about the then existing *Mulasangha Devange* sect of Jain saints, whose descendants formed a dominating portion of the weaving community in Karnataka. With an approximate population of 12,000, Lakkundi at present has seven Jain *Basdis*, ten *Shaiva*, three *Vaishnava*, six *Veerashaiva* temples and a mosque.

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Other than temples, the place is now famous for its jasmine, guava, ber cultivations and of course the contrast bordered *dhadi panje*, which is responsible for the birth of polycotton sarees.

The off-white *lungi* has contrast borders on either sides with *rudraksha* and chrysanthemum motifs and was woven on the throw shuttle pit loom during 1916 and even before. A custom of wearing this *lungi* for rituals and marriages was a common practice prevailing then. The length of each *lungi* was 1.95 m and the width 1.04 m with 0.08 m borders on either side. Red rayon replaced dyed cotton yarns in the border during 1950's. The smooth and glossy properties of rayon enhanced the richness of traditionally famous bordered *lungis* (*dhadi panje*). The oldest loom known to weave sarees was the throw shuttle pit loom called the *kuni magga* in *Kannada*. The loom basically consisted a pit measuring 1.06 m x 1.06 m x 0.91 m. The pit has treadles operated by foot. Two pillars on either sides of the pit supported the upper frame of the loom (Figs. 2 & 3). Warp threads from the cloth beam *Kunti*, passed through the reed (*halagi*) into the harness (*bejada kolu*). Extra warp yarns in the border were passed through the five dobbie slaves (*peti shell*) for creating motifs in the border. The free warp ends were tied in separate sets of 4-6 bundles onto a bamboo stave (*chungi kolu*) that acted as the warp beam. A sturdy cord pulled the *chungi kolu* tightly through the main peg (*mini goota*) to the hand peg (*kai goota*) on the right hand side of the weaver. The rayon yarns used for extra weft figuring were taken up from the dobbie stave over another bamboo stave (*peti kolu*) that was hung to the roof. The free ends of rayon were wound on an indigenous spool (stick), the tension of which was maintained by hanging sand bags of required weights. The tension of the dobbie staves was controlled by weights superimposed through sand filled coconut shells. Similarly harnesses were interconnected on either sides of a single cord, which was passed over a pulley (*chakra gada*) for shed formation. The stave holding the pulleys was tied to the roof.

Weaving technology

Warping

Warping called as *hasuvadu* in *Kannada* is done on the warping frame, called the *reshmi hari* (Fig. 4). Warping frame constituted of wooden frame with six pegs each on either sides and two pegs on the top and a single at the bottom. The frame is hung on the wall

at a convenient height for warping. For warping, 10-20 yarn packages (10 for coarse and 20 for fine fabrics) are taken collectively. The yarns from the packages travel through an indigenously made guide (glass bangle tied onto a wooden stave), onto the warping board. The person engaged in warping will collect all the yarns in the left hand and works on the warping frame with the right (Fig. 6). On the frame, the work first starts from the top two pegs between which a lease cross or Portee-cross (*ani hakuvudu*) is used to maintain the order of yarns for easy threading (Fig. 5). The yarns next move in a zigzag fashion over the peg moving downwards, till the last peg at the bottom from where the yarns after taking a turn start traveling upwards up to the first two pegs on the top. A knot then secures the cross between the top two pegs tightly. The warp is later tied with cords at intervals along its length before taking off the warp from the warping frame.

Gaiting the loom

Gadidara katuvadu, in *Kannada* means preparing the loom for weaving. The harnesses, reed and the dobbie staves are all tied on into the positions. The lease rods are placed alternately and the starting ends of the warp yarns are brought in front of the loom onto the cloth beam (Fig. 8). The surplus warps lengths are conveniently divided into 6-8 sections and are tied to the bamboo stave that act as a warp beam.

Pirn winding

This is a process of winding the weft yarn from the bobbins on to the pirn, called *khandaki* in regional language. Pirn winding wheel known as *khandaki suttuva raathi* consists of a large wooden wheel (similar to the bullock cart wheel) with a handle in the center to rotate. On the left is the spindle connected to the wheel by a cord or some times cycle chain. The person sits in front of the machine, rotates the handle with right hand clockwise. On operating the wheel, the spindle automatically rotates at a greater speed. The person draws the yarn from the bobbin placed over the bobbin stand with left hand and fills the pirn/spool mounted on the spindle (Fig. 9). Sometimes sorghum stalks of 0.06 m -0.07 m long with a hole at the end are used as a pirn (Fig. 7).

Weaving

Neyuvadu in *Kannada* means weaving of the *ambasi phadiki dhadi panje* with contrast borders is accomplished by using three shuttles—one big for the body carrying unbleached cotton yarn and two small

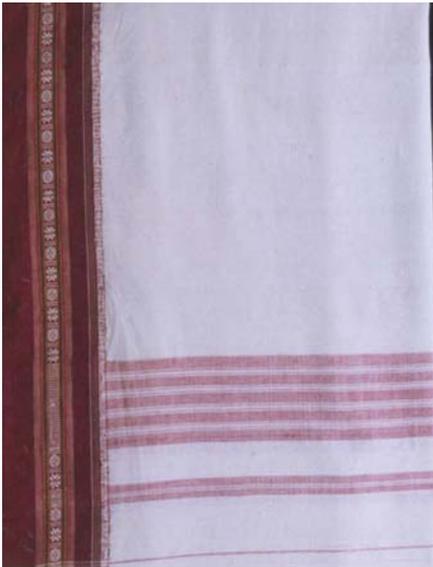


Fig.1 Ambasi Phadiki Dhadi Panje



Fig. 2 Throw shuttle pit loom



Fig. 3 Throw shuttle pit loom



Fig. 4 Warping frame, Reshmi hari



Fig. 6 Warping



Fig. 7 Sorghum straw



Fig. 5 Portee cross (Ani haakuvudu)



Fig. 8 Loom for weaving



Fig. 9 Pirn winding



Fig. 10 Weaving through three shuttles

for the borders carrying either dyed cotton or red rayon weft. Weaver always needed a helper on his right side, most of the times his wife who used to operate one of the small shuttles in the right border. The weaver throws the big shuttle from the left through the body of the *lungi* wherein it is interlocked with the border weft and in turn thrown from the right to the left (Fig. 10). This process continues after every successive beating and lifting. The weaver applies wax to the reed at intervals to avoid warp breakages.

Taking up and letting off

The bamboo stave carrying the surplus warp ends is loosened and simultaneously the cloth woven is wound onto the cloth beam. This is how the bamboo stave slowly comes closer to the weaver. At certain point, the excess lengths of threads are opened and added onto the warp. The new sets of warp are then twisted and joined to the old warp using a weaver's knot. The process is called *kechchuvadu*. This system of drawing-in is easy and less time consuming. The whole set of warp sheet is pulled through the heald eyes and dents at a time, thus completing the warping process in few minutes.

Conclusion

Customs and traditions still occupy the paramount significance in Indian culture. A custom of wearing the off white *lungis* still persists in the traditional Brahmin cult. The sanctity of this *lungi* lies in the fact that it is pure, devoid of any chemical finish, hand spun and hand woven. It is further believed that *Kapatappa Ukkali* of Lakkundi, the only weaver in the State produces the *Ambasi phadiki dhadi panje* on the throw shuttle pitloom. Even though the production is very slow, the *lungis* fetch constant demand not only in Karnataka but also in Maharashtra and neighbouring parts of Andhra Pradesh. It is the determination of such weavers that the tradition still exists and is cherished religiously.

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