

Ikāt



The soul of the Ethnic fabric

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Uncovering the History of Ikat

Ikat is most well-known in India, Indonesia and Japan and even has traditions existing in various countries across Latin America and parts of Europe, owing to Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese colonialism in Southeast Asia from the 16th century. The intricacy of the double ikat technique requires the most skilled and experienced artisans, thus it is only produced in India, Indonesia and Japan, where the craft has existed for millennia.

The discovery of frescoes - a type of mural painting that makes use of lime plaster - in Maharashtra's Ajanta Caves provides evidence that ikat was already present in India by the 7th century CE, having gaining popularity through trade with west China and Indonesia. Throughout the centuries, Indian craftsmen refined the craft of ikat dyeing and weaving, enhancing it and facilitating its diffusion of ikat in the modern era.



The word 'ikat' is derived from the Malay-Indonesian word 'mengikat' which translates to 'to tie'. Despite this association with Indonesia, historians are not able to identify the exact location of origin of the ikat technique and believe it may have evolved independently in several locations across Central and Southeast Asia. Similarities in techniques and patterns of ikat from various countries indicate that the craft spread with the migration of Austronesian peoples, which include aborigines of Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Micronesia, Polynesia and Madagascar. During this period, ikat also evolved within Latin America and China. Over time, ikat from India became known for its use of fine materials and production improvements. It was even considered a form of currency on the famed Silk Road.



Andhra Pradesh and, subsequently, the separated state of Telangana, are celebrated as the place of birth of Indian ikat. The most distinct ikat is the Telia Rumal, which is characterised by the obscure process of oil treating the yarn. The Nalgonda district, which is now part of Telangana state, has been the perpetual hub for ikat production. Weaving continues to occur in the Pochampally, Puttapaka and Choutuppal areas of the district where the skilled weavers continue to reside. This book is a pictorial essay to the weaves around this community.

India textiles

Indian textiles are as diverse as its culture. It is a result of centuries of a complex yet colourful juxtaposition of cultural influences, climate conditions, geographical factors and trade. With their sheer beauty, colour and artistry, they have woven their way to win the hearts of both royalty and the common people across the country. And with the wealth of knowledge and skills passed down from one generation of master craftsmen to the next, it will continue to do so for a long long time to come.



Ikat

Ikat textiles are among the most highly prized fabrics in the world. They are renowned for their brilliant colours and compels patterns and design.

Ikat fabric

The word “ikat” means “to bind.” It is a very ancient way of creating designs in fabric by resist-dyeing the threads before the fabric is woven villagers take the weft (crosswise filling threads) and tie tiny bits of plastic onto the threads. The tightly tied areas of thread, when put into the dye pot, resist the color and create a pattern, once the plastic ties are removed.

Ikat fabric differ from other fabric

Ikat fabrics are woven by hand on narrow looms in a labor-intensive process. Handwovens, free of the chemical additives and stresses of power-loom production, are vastly different in appearance and feel from machine-made fabrics.

Plainweave ikat fabrics, due to the unique resist patterning, look the same on both sides of the fabric; there is no right side and wrong side to the cloth.

Production of ikat textiles in India

It is mainly concentrated in the regional states of Gujarat, Orissa and Telangana. Each region produces a rich variety of traditional and contemporary ikat patterns corresponding to the socio-culture of each community.

Ikat textile's are mainly produced in the form of saree, but due to urban demand now dupattas (veils or long scarfs), lungis (cloth worn by men) and yardage is also being produced.

Pochampally (Nalgonda district, Telangana)

It is a cluster of 80 villages where threads and colours find their way into the hands of skillful weavers. They weave beautiful sarees, dress materials and furnishings.



Pochampally & Around

Pochampally Saree or Pochampalli Ikat is a saree made in Bhoodan Pochampally, Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district, Telangana State, India.

They have traditional geometric patterns in Ikat style of dyeing. The intricate geometric designs find their way into sarees and dress materials.



Map of Pochampally

Each weaver works from home with all the family helping in different processes. Perhaps the grandmother is winding bobbins, while the wife is marking out the design on warp threads and the husband is weaving on a pit loom in the main living area.

In one corner rice is being sieved and tamarind is spread out. A child wanders around and a baby is in a hammock. Life revolves around weaving.



Pic credit : Pravin Drivedi





Koyalagudum (near Pochampally) Telangana is one of the busiest hand weaving villages centred around a co-operative producing thousands of meters of ikat each month. They specialize in warp ikat particularly suitable for furnishing fabrics made from cotton.



A typical weave

Marcus Aurelius, a Roman emperor and philosopher, once said,
“a soul becomes dyed with the colour of its thoughts.”



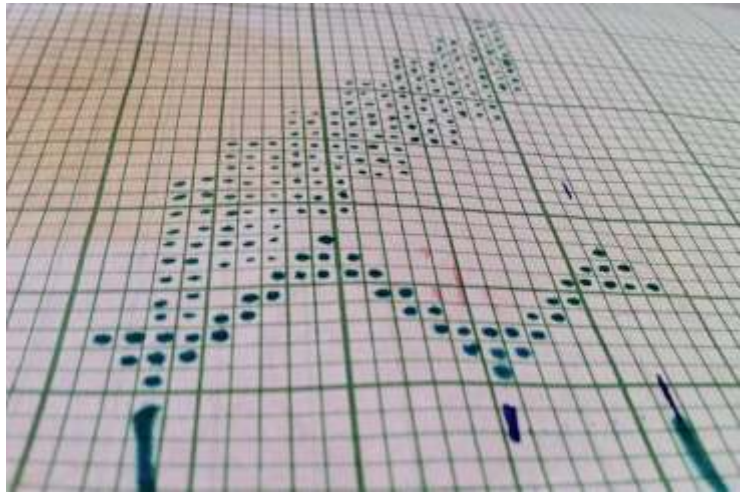
Ikat, or ikkat, is a dyeing technique used to pattern textiles that employs resist dyeing on the yarns prior to dyeing and weaving the fabric. In ikat the resist is formed by binding individual yarns or bundles of yarns with a tight wrapping applied in the desired pattern. The yarns are then dyed.

This process may be repeated multiple times to produce elaborate, multicolored patterns. When the dyeing is finished all the bindings are removed and the yarns are woven into cloth. In other resist-dyeing techniques such as tie-dye and batik the resist is applied to the woven cloth, whereas in ikat the resist is applied to the yarns before they are woven into cloth.

A characteristic of ikat textiles is an apparent "blurriness" to the design. The blurriness is a result of the extreme difficulty the weaver has lining up the dyed yarns so that the pattern comes out perfectly in the finished cloth. 50 meters fabric of weaved ikat takes almost around 1 month. Ikat has 2 styles - single-Ikat and double-Ikat. Single Ikat fabrics are created by interweaving tied and dyed warp with plain weft, Double Ikat involves the process of resisting on both warp and weft and then interlacing them to form intricate yet well composed patterns.



Drawing the intended design



Designs generally are worked out on graph paper.

A master weaver is usually in-charge of the design process as he translates the design from a graph paper to the warp and weft yarns. With a great amount of precision, he marks areas that need dyeing and the others that should resist it. The beauty of these designs is a result of an unbelievable amount of effort, as you shall discover in this essay.



Marking the drawing





Charka

This is used for winding the yarn on the bobbin (warp) and pirn (weft).





Warping Mill / Warping Machine

The warp yarn is prepared on a warping machine (known in telugu as aasu).



The village co-operative owns several of these warping mills; which members use to create warp





Weft Preparation / Chitik Frame

This is used in order to obtain weft designs. Yarn is tied on the frame and then designs are marked



The weft yarn is then transferred on to an asu(a triangular metallic frame roughly the width of the fabric) in radial lines and this process is called chitiki.



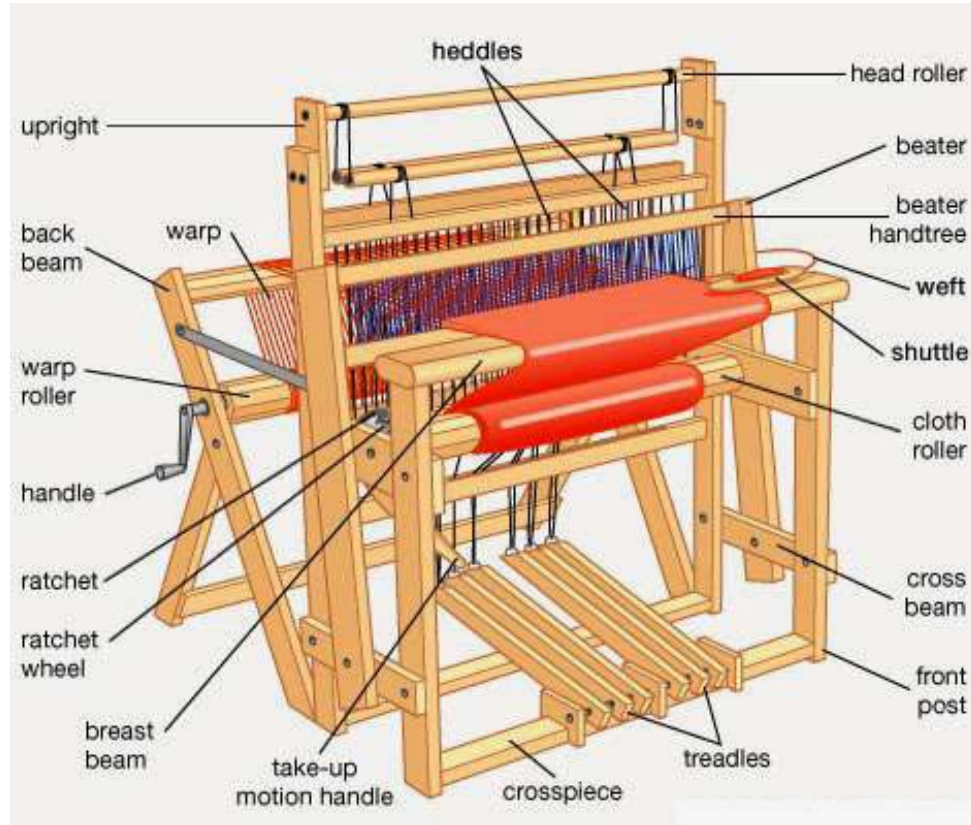


Bobbins

The bobbin is fit in to the shuttle and this shuttle is put on the loom for weaving. This is called interlacement of weft and warp to form a fabric.



Weaving Process - A typical loom



Preparation of Loom for Weaving

The loom is a traditional pit loom with two shafts, modernized with a fly shuttle. While weaving, each weft has to be carefully set in the right position in order to achieve a clear pattern. The time taken to weave a warp is usually four to five days.

Stages of weaving process

1. Yarn is bought from nearby Secunderabad (about 40 kilometers away), Vijayawada and Chirala. Aadoni and Dwarapudi are also accessed for yarn while silk yarn is from Nagari and Dharmavaram.



2. Washing in detergent water for removal of oil
3. Using ratnam or charkha i.e. spinning wheel, the thread is wound on to a box or pipe



4. It is then transferred to the Pose Aasu and the process is termed as Chitiki poyadam
5. Designs are marked on the thread using either charcoal or a pen which is then prepared for dyeing
6. The dyeing process



Pic credit : Pravin Drivedi



7. After the yarn has dried, it is transferred on to another Aasu, also called a Chitki, known as the Tippe Aasu. On this the design is marked.



8. It is then spun on to a Ponte



9. The thread is now transferred on to a Kandal or Uusa



10. This Uusa is fixed on to a Nade. This Nade is put in the loom and weaving begins. It takes a day or two to prepare the loom or Muggam. Weaving a saree on the Muggam takes about 15 days. This often takes upto 2 months.





A typical household



If you step into any weaver's home, chances are you'd find yarns left to dry.





Yarn preparation



Once dry, the yarn is rolled onto a box or a pipe using a spinning wheel .





Warp Mashing and tying



IKAT - is a type of weaving where the warp, weft or both are tie-dyed before weaving to create designs on the finished fabric. Great care must be taken in tying resist areas with water repellent material such as bicycle inner tubes cut into strips. The precision of the wrapping determines the clarity of the design. After wrapping, the warp threads are dyed. When finished and unwrapped, the areas under the ties have stayed the original colour.





Others weavers help in applying the bindings in the form of thick rubber pieces for larger areas and thicker threads for thinner areas. Tying the yarn ensures that this part of the yarn won't get dyed when the whole lot is dipped into a vat of the required colour. The tied parts are tied so tight that the liquid dye cannot percolate through at these places.



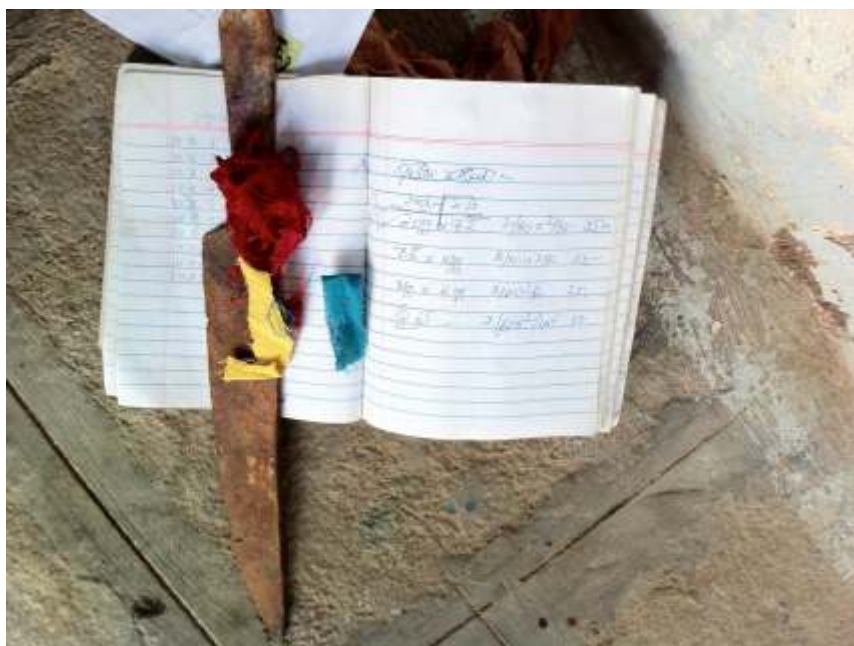




Colour is something that produces different sensations in a person. A skilled dye worker masters the art of creating such impressions via the fabric with which s/he works.

Colouring is a crucial pre-loom activity. Both natural and synthetic colourants are used to dye the yarn. Dyeing units work independently as well as with cooperative societies in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Dyeing was a hand process for thousands of years. Dyers used large containers or vats for coloring relatively short lengths of fabric or small quantities of fiber and yarn. Until the development of synthetic dyes, all dyes were natural compounds. Fastness varied widely among the natural dyes.



A typical recipe book for colour mixing

Each dyeing unit usually has its own record of what measurements of which ingredients make a particular shade. This is the holy book the unit adheres to. New shades, when created, are also added to the records.





Dyeing Process



The complication of the process is the dyeing. The technique involves specific computations that focus on symmetry without undermining aesthetics. Every inch of the fabric is calculated and deliberated upon. It is then tied, dyed, untied, retied and dyed again. Since the threads are dyed before being woven, accuracy is a prerequisite. The weaver has to figure out where on the loose threads the dye should (and shouldn't) go for it to form the proper pattern when it is woven on the



Numerous colours can be added after additional wrappings





It gets more complicated as more colours are added.





Once both the warp and weft yarns have been suitably dyed they are left to dry.



Ratnam - Yarn winding



Once the dyeing is complete and the yarns are dry, they are spun once again and transferred to bobbins. These bobbins are a part of the weft and move horizontally during the weaving process. The sequence of bobbins is very crucial to the resulting design.

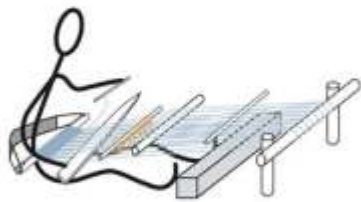


Evolution of the Loom

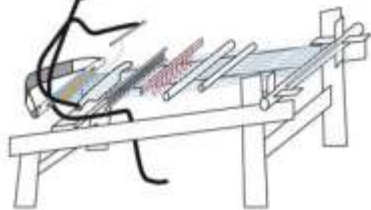
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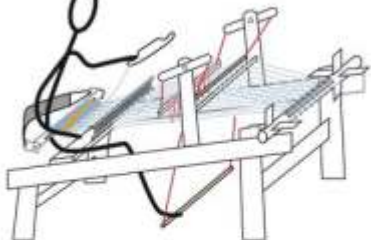
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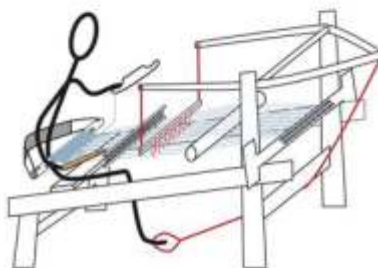
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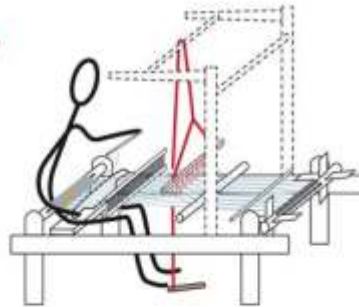
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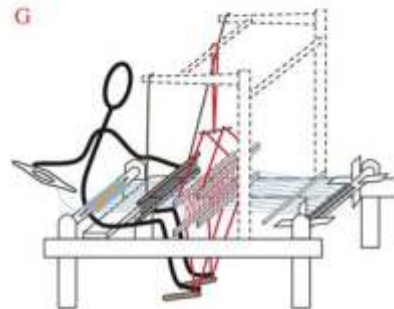
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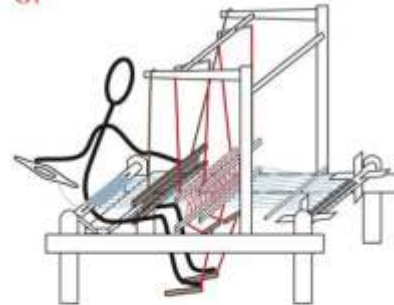
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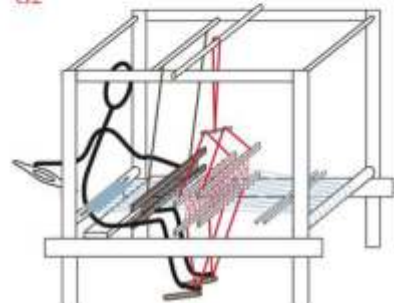
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G1



G2







Weaving



The design comes to life as the yarns are woven into cloth. It is far more complex, as the weaver has to not only dye the threads with precision but also set them correctly on the loom to form the correct design when woven.







Ikat in fashion

Today fashion trends may come and go, but Ikat fabrics have always stood the test of time



Beautiful Ikat featured in light fashion spring summer collection (2016)

Lakme fashion week © The Meraki Project



Amazon fashion week © The Meraki Project





My Introduction

"I has travelled far and wide ;in that quest for the full circle of life, having touched many shores and many worlds.
I believes that time and space are blank frames!
It is up to us on how we fill them ;that make us who we are!"

WHO:

My name is Rajesh Pamnani, M52, a hard core "Hyderabadi".
An amateur travel photographer; Foodie, Rotarian and a entrepreneur .

I love to photograph the transition in Hyderabad from a sleepy, laid back "nawabi" town to a Megapolis as it becoming now.

WHAT:

Handmade fabrics have been a part of the Indian way of living since time immemorial. The desire to create is one of the deepest yearnings of the human soul. And, with handmade textiles, this yearning has been kept alive for centuries. These Indian fabrics reflect the traditional heritage and cultural wealth of India. The artisans creating these Handloom fabrics are like gems hidden in the depths of the country. They possess the traditional knowledge passed on from generations which keeps alive the time map of the Indian civilizations.

WHERE:

I am based in Hyderabad. My work allows me to travel world-wide.
It helps me build my travel portfolio and also to understand the similarities of different cultures ;
east or west.

WHEN:

I always carry my camera - to work, travel and occasions.
It is my constant companion everywhere.
I would love to capture the mundane and the spectacular ;as it unfolds.

WHY:

Dyeing and weaving largely depends on their relationship with threads.
We dye threads and warp the threads. Then before we put the treads on a loom, we wring, bundle, stretch and loop them. Finally we weave the threads. Afterwards, threads get tangled or cut, but if you put them back in order patiently, you will see the light on the other end and you will know which direction to follow.
The process in which threads become textile is somehow similar to the process of human lives.
I would be delighted if this pictorially ikat book; could bring out the joy and struggles of working with threads.

HOW:

I have been visiting Pochampally and areas around it since the 1980's.
Firstly - as a Student , Bird watcher & a budding Photographer.
Secondly - as a rotarian , as we had done a school project here.
Finally , helping my Daughter (Sonali Pamnani Jhabakh, The Meraki Project) to source fabrics for her Design Collections.
I was attracted to see the master transform magically; these threads, to produce such profound mesmerising patterns.
This book is devoted to both my love for Photography and documenting our hidden gems of our culture.

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