

# KORAPUT WEAVING



  
Hand made in india

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## 1. Region and location



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Some major rivers of Orissa pass through the district of Koraput: Machhakunda, Bansadhara and Kolab. This district is also bestowed with waterfalls like Duduma, Bagra and Khandahati. It contains the largest mountain of Orissa, called Deomali along with Chandragiri Mountain. Koraput district is famous for places like Jeypore, Duduma, and Bagra, Sunabeda Mig factory.

**Koraput:** It is located at a distance of 21 kms from Jeypore.

## 2. Introduction

Indian hand woven fabrics have been known since time immemorial. Poets of the Mughal Durbar likened our muslins to *baft hawa* (woven air), *abe rawan* (running water) and *shabnam* (morning dew). There is a tale of Emperor Aurangzeb having a fit of rage one day, on seeing his daughter Princess Zeb-un-Nissa clad in almost nothing. On being severely rebuked, the princess explained that she had not one but seven *jama*hs (dresses) on her body. Such was the fineness of the hand woven fabrics.

Handlooms are an important craft product and comprise the largest cottage industry of the country. Millions of looms across the country are engaged in weaving cotton, silk and other natural fibers. There is hardly a village where weavers do not exist, each weaving out the traditional beauty of India's precious heritage.

Orissa has one of the richest traditions of handloom and handicrafts in the country, which goes back to the time of antiquity. The art of weaving in the state is highly evolved and its fabrics bear testimony to the unique and artistic ability and tradition of the weavers of this state.

The tribal weave of Kotpad village in Koraput District is traditionally woven in heavy cotton ranging from counts of 10s to 20s. The use of natural dye extracted from the roots of the Indian Madder tree (*aal* tree) makes it different from other weaves. The weaver uses a three-shuttle interlock patterning, which allows for innumerable combinations in scale and volume.

### **DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SAMBALPURI AND KORAPUT WEAVE**

In Sambalpuri weave the loom once set can be used to make 20-30 sarees of the same design. In Koraput weave only one saree of a particular type can be woven once the loom is set. Sambalpuri weaving is done using jacquard looms as well as pit looms; Koraput weave is only made on pit looms.

## 3. Producer communities

Panka is the main tribe engaged in the Koraput weave. Earlier weaving was more widespread. Since it is a time consuming activity without commensurate pay, many people are shifting from weaving to other occupations. Some tribes, such as Gadaba, Dongaria khand and Bondo still weave and embellish their own textiles. Other tribes like Bathra, Bhumia and Tanti earn their bread and butter by farming and a few other crafts like terracotta, wrought iron, bamboo, tribal jewelry and paddy craft etc.

#### 4. Craft tradition

The tradition of Koraput weave started with the few tribal people who used to weave their own clothes. Traditionally, they used to weave sarees which were narrower than the existing sarees, made of heavy thick unbleached cotton with a single color pattern woven in red, purple or brown. The yarn was dyed with natural dye made of the roots of *Aal* (Madder tree).

#### 5. Raw material

##### 5.1 Yarn

Yarn is a long continuous length of interlocked fibers, suitable for use in the production of textiles, sewing, knitting, weaving and rope making. Yarn can be made from any number of synthetic or natural fibers. Very thin yarn is referred to as thread. Yarns are made up of any number of plies, each ply being a single thread. These threads are twisted (plied) together to make the final yarn.

Two varieties of yarn are used:

##### 5.1.1 Cotton yarn

Cotton yarn is purchased from Sambalpur District, Orissa. It is available at the rate of Rs. 560 per *peti* (box or carton). (Prices as per October 2004.) The number of *muda* (rolls) of yarn in one *peti* depends on the count:

- 20 rolls of yarn of 20s count
- 40 rolls of 80s count
- 30 rolls of 60s count

##### 5.1.2 Silk yarn

Tussar silk yarn is used. Silk yarn is purchased from Jagdalpur, Rayagada District, Orissa and from Sambalpur District, Orissa. The price of silk yarn ranges from Rs.650-700 per kg. (Prices as per October 2004).

##### 5.2 *Aal ki chaal* / Madder dye

The knowledge and use of vegetable and mineral dyes goes back to pre-historic times in India. According to data collected so far, there are nearly 300 dye-yielding plants available in the country. However, after chemical colors flooded the markets, only a small number of dyers continued with natural dyes such as indigo. Cotton yarn dyed in madder is still used by the weavers of Kotpad in Koraput district.

The characteristic natural dye coloring is derived from the *aal* or madder dye extracted from the root of Indian Madder tree.

The root of the Madder tree is bought from the tribes of the Kalahandi jungles, and costs Rs. 800 to Rs.900 for one *peti* (prices as per October 2004).



[Photograph:aal ki chaal]

### 5.3 Kumahar pathar / Iron

*Kumahar pathar* or *loha pathar* is sulphate of iron. This is locally available as waste with any blacksmith. The blacksmith gives the weavers *kumahar pathar* in exchange for some goods or a little money.



[Photograph:Kumahar pathar]

*Kumahar pathar* is crushed and brought to powder form by using this wooden grinder that is operated by foot.

### 5.4 Castor oil

Castor oil is locally available at any general store at the rate of Rs. 50-60 for one liter (prices as per October 2004).

### 5.5 Wood ash

Wood ash is used during the dyeing process of the cotton yarn.

### 5.6 Cow dung

Cow dung is used while dyeing the cotton yarn. It acts as a bleaching agent. When applied to the yarn, it ensures that the dye is absorbed properly.

### 5.7 Tora oil

It is used in the *kangi*. It acts as a lubricant for the yarn on the loom.

### 5.8 Starch

Starch is applied on the yarn when it is stretched out before setting it on the loom. This is done to provide strength to the yarn and prevent it from breaking and tangling. Starch is made from flour and water.

## **6. PROCESSING OF THE RAW MATERIAL**

### **6.1 Dyeing cotton yarn**

The process of dyeing is very tedious. Dyeing is done mostly in winter. The most suitable time for dyeing is from November to March. The foremost requirement for dyeing is sunlight, without which the process cannot be completed.



First of all two *mudas* are tied as one with rope for convenience of handling the yarn reels. The yarn from the mill is washed thoroughly in cold water.

Castor oil is applied to the washed yarn. A solution of 5 liters castor oil and 5-6 liters of normal water is made. Thereafter, the yarn is either dipped in the solution or the solution is applied by hand to the yarn. Applying oil by hand is more effective, as the oil spreads evenly.

After the application of castor oil, cow dung is rubbed on the yarn. This is done to bleach the yarn, and ensure proper dyeing. The yarn is then kept for drying in the sun. Care should be taken while drying the yarn; the yarns fire up if they are placed on top of each other.

After the yarn has been left to dry for a day, it is rubbed down with a solution of wood ash boiled in water. This process is supposed to be done twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening for around 15 days i.e. 30 times. Then the yarn is kept in the sun for drying.



Thereafter, the yarn treated with ash and water is washed thoroughly in the lake. With this the cow dung washes out properly, and the yarn becomes wheatish in color.

For dyeing the yarn to a deep maroon color, a solution is prepared with 100 grams of castor oil, 1/2 kg powder of *aal* bark and 5 liters of luke-warm water. The yarn is immersed in this solution for a day. The next day, the yarn along with the solution is put to boil.

This is stirred continuously with a wooden stick and boiled till the entire solution dries up.

The powerful and vibrant colours ranging from deep maroon to dark brown depend on the age of the root bark and the proportion of dye used.



To dye the yarn in shades of brown, *kumahar pathar* is used. The stone is crushed and powdered. This powder is then mixed with jaggery and water and put aside for 4-5 days till the solution becomes black. Thereafter, this solution is mixed with the ingredients used earlier for deep maroon color i.e. 100 grams of castor oil, 1/2 kg powder of *aal* bark and 5 liters of luke-warm water. The yarn is boiled in this solution with continuous stirring, till the entire solution dries up.



After the dyeing is completed, yarn is left in the sun to dry. The dyeing process is done by women.

## 7. TOOLS

### 7.1 Pit Loom

The pit loom is a horizontal, ground - staked handloom at which the weaver sits in a pit dug below floor level. This type of loom saves space and lumber, and is typical of most village production in India today.



### 7.2 *Bharni*

The *Bharni* is a wooden frame. The yarn reel is fitted on this and then single threads are rolled on the *Tossar*. This helps individual threads of the yarn to separate from each other.



### 7.3 *Tossar*

This is a long wooden stick with a circular head. The yarn from the *Bharni* is wrapped on the *Tossar* so that it can be put in the shuttle.



#### 7.4 Pawan / Warping Board

This is a wooden frame used to separate cotton yarn and prepare it to be fitted in the warp. This is a device which is used to measure the thread that will be held under tension during weaving.



#### 7.5 Purni

Purni is a hollow cylindrical pipe made out of bamboo. It is used to arrange the yarn on the Pawan from the Bharni for warping.



#### 7.6 Kangi / Comb

This is the comb through which the warp passes.



#### 7.7 Nathi / Spindle

This is a conical wooden frame, which is motioned in circles to wrap the separated threads of the silk yarn.



#### 7.8 Chipana

These are flat wooden sticks, which are parted from the centre like tongs.



They are used to hold the combed yarn together and prevent it from tangling.



### 7.9 Dongi / Shuttle

The shuttle is a boat-shaped device containing a supply of weft thread on a spool. It travels through the shed from one side of the loom to the other, propelled either by the weaver's hand or by a mechanical fly arm. There are two types of shuttles used for this weaving:

- Smaller shuttle for borders.
- Bigger shuttle for weaving the whole body of the saree.

## 8. PROCESS OF WEAVING

### 8.1 Warp making

The master weaver carries out the process of warp making depending upon the requirement of the design and color combination. Since the process requires a lot of space, the warp is made outside in the open. A *taana* (warp) machine is used. The thread rolls are put on a movable vertical frame. The ends of the thread are passed through another small, grid like frame that guides the threads, and are wound on a cylinder in the desired combination.



This process starts from one end of the cylinder and goes on till the entire cylinder is covered with thread. *Tora* oil is applied on the threads, to make them move easily on the loom. Once this is achieved, the log upon which the *taana* is to be wound is fitted into the blocks between the cylinder and the frame. The tightly wound thread on this log is then provided to the weaver who uses it on the loom.

### 8.2 Setting the loom



The first step in weaving is to stretch the lengthwise yarns that run from the back to the front of the loom. These form the basic structure of the fabric and are called the warp or longitudinal yarns, which must be very strong. The weft, woof, or filling crosses the warp, binding the warp threads at either side to form the selvage (the edge of a fabric that is woven so that it will not ravel or fray).

The three essential steps after the warp is stretched are:

1. shedding, or raising every alternate warp yarn or set of yarns to receive the weft;
2. picking, or inserting the weft; and
3. battening, or pressing home the weft to make the fabric compact. In most primitive weaving these operations were performed by the hands alone, as in making rush mats and baskets.

Gradually, frames for holding the warp evenly stretched, and devices for throwing the weft came into use.

On the loom, the warp beam is mounted at the back and the warp yarns are conveyed to a long wooden block or cylinder called the cloth roll, which is at the front of the loom and on which the fabric is rolled as it is constructed.

Supported on the loom frame between these two cylinders (the warp beam and the cloth beam), the warp yarns are ready to be interlaced by the filling yarns that run in the width of the cloth, thus producing the woven fabric.

Men carry out the weaving process.



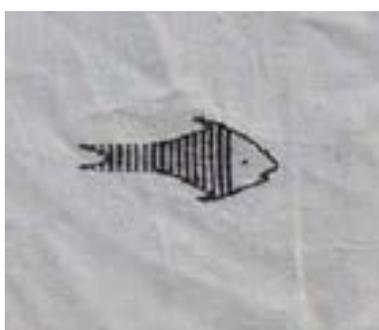
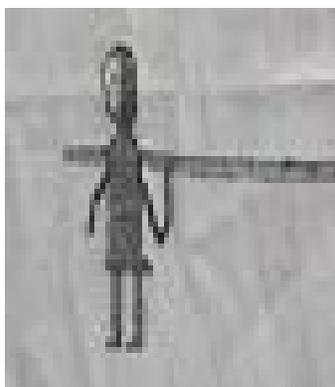


### 8.3 Washing the woven fabric

Once the entire fabric is woven, *Shikakai* and *Reetha* are used for the first wash, which is a soft wash so as to make the color permanent and strong.

### 9. Motifs









The motifs and designs used in Koraput weave have been passed down from generation to generation. These motifs were woven and worn by tribes of this area, and are now used as basic designs of Koraput weave.

While traditional motifs continue to be used, the products woven have changed from only the saree, to include other contemporary products.

## 10. Market

Koraput weaving originated in the clothes the tribes wove for their own use. Gradually they started weaving traditional short sarees for the local market also. These were sold in markets like Mangal bazaar, Jagdalpur etc. From about 1985 Koraput products began to get exposure outside local boundaries. Government exhibitions and fairs helped Koraput weave develop an identity in national markets. Weavers started getting orders from Delhi, Hyderabad, Madras, Bhubaneshwar etc. With the expansion of their markets weavers expanded their product range from short length sarees to full-length sarees, dress material, dupattas and kurtas. Incorporating new designs, the Koraput weave is now being exported to other countries as well.

Natural-dyed Koraput textiles face strong competition from chemically dyed products. Chemical dyeing is less labor intensive, and therefore has a price advantage.

## 11. Changes over the years

### 11.1 Technology

Koraput weaves are still made using age-old techniques of weaving and dyeing. There has been no change in technology; pit looms continue to be used for weaving.

### 11.2 Design

The designs used have an underlying symbolism and are largely inspired by nature. One distinctive motif is a pyramidal pattern called by weavers: the *phool*, *cheeta*, *chauk* which translates as 'flower, leopard, seat'. They also produce many discontinuous supplementary weft motifs placed in rows in the field such as leaves, snakes, axes and even some non-traditional items such as umbrellas and aeroplanes. The significant difference that has come in designing with the change in market conditions is that earlier they made bold tribal motifs but now minute and detailed work is favored. The weavers are now creating textiles with much finer counts and different widths to suit the urban markets.

### 11.3 Market

Earlier craftsmen only made *Faltual*, a traditional dress with tribal motifs and short length traditional sarees. As the demand for Koraput weaving grew in other markets like Delhi, Bangalore, Madras, and Hyderabad, the product range expanded to dress material, full-length sarees, dupattas etc. Now short kurtas of Koraput weave are also available in the market.

## 12. Products and their uses

Koraput weaving uses designs which have an underlying symbolism and are largely inspired by nature or by significant objects of daily use. The end use of the fabrics is mainly apparel. The product names are kept according to the designs applied on them.

They are:

### ***Faltual***

This is based on traditional designs is worn by the tribes of that village.



### **Sarees**

Earlier, sarees woven were narrow: i.e. 42 inches in keeping with the traditional Orissa saree. With the expansion of markets outside Orissa, full-length sarees are also woven. The price range of sarees is from Rs.1000 to Rs.3500 for one saree (October 2004).

### **Patta**

Patta is a traditional scarf with traditional motifs.

### **Dupattas**

Dupattas are made out of cotton as well as tussar silk, woven in various sizes according to the prevailing market demand. The existing sizes are 27 inches, 22 inches and 16 inches in breadth.



### **Dress materials**

Dress materials are available in cotton and tussar silk. Their price ranges from Rs.60 - Rs.150 per meter (October 2004).

### **Short kurtas**

With external design intervention, the weavers are making short kurtas of different styles.

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### **CONTACT PERSON**

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## **Interview with the Master Craftsman**

Jagabhandu Samrat is the master craftsman of Koraput weaves in Kotpad village, Koraput District, Orissa. Around 60 families in the village are engaged in this type of craft. There are thirty-four pit looms in the village. All the weavers in this village are registered with the Weavers' Cooperative Society.

For the handloom sector, the co-operative system of production is expected to be the best and least exploitative. According to the guidelines of the Co-operatives Act, all weavers attached to a co-operative society are its owner-members and they have legitimate rights over the management of the society and a share on the profits or loss made by the society.

The weavers working under the co-operative system of production are supplied with the essential raw materials such as yarn, dyes, chemicals, etc by the primary weavers' co-operative society and get a reasonable wage or conversion charge for the amount of labor put in by them on weaving. Through the society the member weavers are provided with other social security benefits such as medical relief, group insurance facility, old age benefits and assistance for modernization of looms and work sheds etc. They also get a dividend and a share of profits when the society earns net profits on the sale of their goods during a particular production year.

But all this did not happen with weavers here in Kotpad village. The society shut down 3 years back and now weavers have to find work themselves, which is a tough task. There is nobody to provide them with raw materials and buyers. Money meant for the society and weavers never reached the weavers. Electric current is also not available in all houses. The master craftsman's house has only one little window for light.

The condition of the weavers is not good and they are suffering because of poverty.