

STUDY OF TRADITIONAL SRI LANKAN HENAVALA HANDLOOM AND DESIGN INTERVENTION

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Abstract : This article is to introduce the influence of traditional Sri Lankan Henavala handloom material on coats for women's wear to intervene and help in the revival of the traditional weaving industry by giving modern look and targeting young national and international clients who crave for new look in traditional wear.

Historically, men were away at work busy in agriculture or Chena cultivation and Mat weaving was done by rural women at home in Sri Lanka. Henavala is known as the last bastion of Hana weavers in Sri Lanka. Though this beautiful art is a native of Mexico, it is unknown as to how it reached Sri Lanka. Many of the beautiful Hana tapestries also known as Dumbara or rata mats adorning hotels and homes are born in the pit looms of this pleasant corner of the world. The master weavers here could be considered national treasures – many in their seventies and eighties are award winners, addressed as gurunanse (teacher). Like many of Kandy's weaver communities, Henavala claims a lineage going back to Maha Sammata Raja, mythological first king of the world. The early weavers made mats and not tapestries. Mats were in demand back then because furniture was scarce. Over time, the Hana padura has transformed from simple to more decorative. Today, just 15 of the 80 households here actively weave though others are skilled but have taken to other more profitable occupations.

In recent years new products have been introduced like Hana purses, tote bags, table mats, even fly whisks, fans and screens. To this day this highly skilled craft is not practiced in any other part of the country. Hana weaves live, though the struggle is on to keep the dream alive. Other than furnishings this beautiful handloom materials could be blended with fashion clothing to give national/international acceptance. Urge the budding designers to follow this path and put this traditional art form on the global map.

IndexTerms - Handloom textiles, Craft, Culture, motifs, Designs & Clothing, design interventions, making traditions meaningful craft

I. INTRODUCTION

It is believed that the weavers of Dumbara belonged to 'berawayos' cast who were descendants from the indigenous people of Sri Lanka. This traditional weaving is being practised in the small village of Henaval which was also known as Kalasirigama, in the Dumbara Valley of the Kandy district. Traditional craft of Weaving of Dumbara mats and tapestries is practised by small group of families for their day today life. Its age old craft more than 300 years old, Kinnara community people have practiced this craft since the days of the Sri Lankan kings, when they enjoyed royal patronage and the craft flourished. It is said that two brothers who made a beautiful wall hanging and presented to the then king of Sri Lanka's last royal kingdom, Kandy. Looking at the beautiful work, King was so astonished that he bestowed upon them a royal deed settling them in the village of Henavala. Today this beautiful craft is been practised by the descendants of the original settlers with passion, pride, and precision. In Menikhinna only 10-15 families are employed in this traditional art. Though this craft is passed from generation to generations but it is present young generation is looking into other profession which can fetch them better income. Presently Cotton, silk and synthetic yarns are used in Dumbara weaving. In Dumbara weaving basket weave is used. The price of the yarns differs according to the thickness of the yarns. Dumbara handloom **Weaving is a** hereditary skill carrying a rich legacy of culture. Presently the weaving industry is experiencing a revival because of the demand of the market.

II. HISTORY

It is 300 year old traditional weaving technique. This beautiful art has been passed down to the generations in Henavala village, near Kandy. The descendents of Henavala village have perfected this art and these wonderful artifacts are seen in homes and designer hotels. In Sri Lanka Henavala also known as Dumbara is known as the last bastion of hana weavers. At present in Henavala out of 95 to 100 families only 10 families are actively engaged in this traditional weaving. The master weavers are addressed as gurunanse that is teachers, many of them are in their seventies and eighties who are considered as national treasures and are also are award winners. This is only the group which is involved in this traditional craft which is fast disappearing because present generation is looking for alternative profession for better livelihood.

As per the mythological, Maha Sammata Raja first king of the world had an eye for beautiful craft and was patron of weavers communities. Henavala also claim a lineage going back to Maha Sammata Raja like many of Kandy's weaver communities. The ancestors of Henavala artisans who arrived on the Island were here to weave for royalty.

In the beginning weavers weaved only mats and not tapestries. Earlier hardly there was any furniture because of which mats were in quite a bit in demand. There were different types of reed mats were available amongst which dumbara padura (mat) was said to be sophisticated one followed by hana padura. Earlier dumbara paduru were made from niyada (*Sansevieria zeylanica*) and not from fibers of hana (sisal hemp, a long-leaved agave). Later when there was scarcity of niyada supplies then they started using the fibre of Hana as an alternative the weavers chose when began to run out. Though this beautiful art is a native of Mexico, it is unknown how it reached Sri Lanka.

Over a period of time hana padura has moved from simplicity to more decorative. One of the weaver captured the nature in the weaving and it became a trend. This skill has been passed from generations to generations. Earlier motifs were very simple with geometrical shapes along with motifs inspired from nature, presently motifs are more stylized.

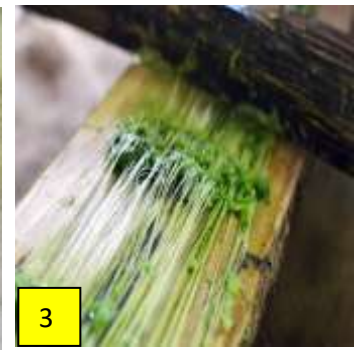
The art of weaving of Dumbara handloom is practiced since the days of the Sri Lankan kings, way back in time of epic Ramayana from 3000 BC. The Sinhala race begins with the arrival of Indian Prince Vijaya on the Island and married Kuveni, Yakshini queen also known as Kuvanna or Sesapathi. As per the records in the Mahavansa the Veddas, the Sinhala people, are descended from Kuveni's children. Prince Vijaya saw Kuveni for the first time when she was spinning yarn. She used to weave beautiful patterns. The Sri Lankan weavers are divided into two groups; 1) Indigenous weaving community and 2) migrants. Often for ceremonial cloths used by royals were made by master weavers from India who knew how to make fine gold woven cloths. Over the period of time, the foreign immigrants have influenced the local handloom weaving. Though the Dumbara weaving is the traditional art but presently motifs and patterns are influenced by the modern art due to market demands. Dumbara handloom weaving is named after the place which is near Kandy. Originally mats were made and woven by musicians at home when they were free. Dumbara handlooms textiles are a community based Industry and were largely woven at home. This skill of weaving was passed from generations to generations. The evidences of this arts existence dates back to hill capital Kandyan era where this weaving Industry flourished with the support of king and many beautiful articles were made for royalty. Earlier the pit looms were used for weaving. Still the weavers of Thalagune Uda Dumbara use the traditional motifs and they are very protective about the craft and make sure it is kept within the family. Earlier the complete village was involved in this process though there was not much demand but presently very few families are involved.

III. METHOD, MATERIAL AND MOTIFS

In ancient time, people did weaving as a way to spend leisure time than as a way to earn money. Traditionally the weaving was done on the pit looms, pit was made and only one loom was placed. Presently the weavers are working on the stand looms at their homes. Though the weaving is done by man and a woman, spinning is done by only women.

The extraction of fibre from hana leaf is done manually. It is very tedious work and done generally by women; worker takes half day to clean just 50 leaves. After removing the thorny point and the edges of the hana leaf, the leaves were placed on the flat log and rubbed hard to remove the fleshy part, leaving behind the fibre. The fibre is washed properly and dried under the sun. These fibre is combed and bundled and then these fibre is dyed with natural dyes. The traditional colors like red, yellow and black are extracted from natural materials. But presently imported dyes are used for dyeing the hana fibre to suit the contemporary requirements.

The looms used for Dumbara weaving is known as Aluva. A room is dedicated to this art for keeping materials. In weaving process both men and women are involved. Basically basket weave is used for Dumbara weave. The thin sticks are inserted to turn and twist the thread to achieve the distinctive patterns in Dumbara weave. This technique of weaving is a time consuming and also makes Dumbara weave distinctive from ordinary handloom weaving. This technique requires skill and lots of patience. The thin stick which is inserted to turn and twist the thread is known as "Pathura". A kind of a hemp known as hana was used by traditional weavers, presently dyed cotton, silk and synthetic yarns are used.



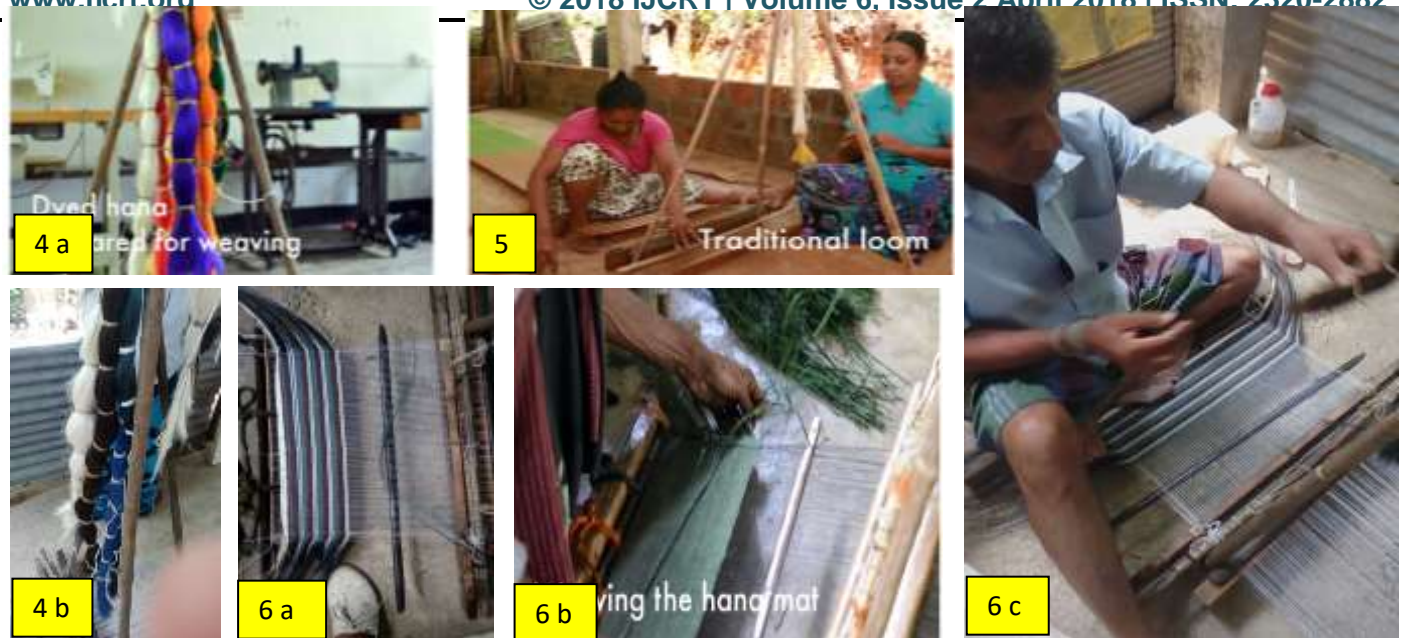


Fig:1 Hana Rosette, Fig:2 leaves were placed on the flat log and rubbed hard to remove the fleshy part, leaving behind the fibre. Fig:3 Hana Natural Fibre, Fig:4 a & b Dyed hana prepared for weaving, Fig:5 Tradition loom used for Dumbara Weaving, Fig:6 a, b & c Weaving the Dumbara mats.

IV. MOTIFS

In the ancient period beautiful decorated dumber textiles depicted the craft skills of the weavers. The motifs incorporated in the Dumbara textiles were basically inspired by nature as the lifestyles were bound with the nature. The motifs were flowers, leaves, animals and geometric shapes found in nature. Some of the motifs used in traditional dumabra WEAVING are rarely used by present weavers in their work.

Traditional dumbara motifs used geometrical motifs like lanu getaya - different types of Plait motif, Haras ratawa - vertical line pattern, Bagyankara- geometrical pattern of Chinese Checkers board game design, Tharaka piyum – is a geometrical pattern of alternate squares in the same colour, Idda mal piyum - concentric design of diamonds, Gal piyum - Diamonds set within two parallel lines in vertical pattern, Kiribath ratawa - Geometrical motif of triangles arranged in vertical pattern symmetrically in two parallel lines set between horizontal lines with a single triangle alternating with a double triangle, Mal petta - flower petal motif placed in a square, Ata pethi mala - eight petal floral motif placed in a square, Sevvandi mala - eight petal floral motif is formed using triangles and a square. Other motifs of animals and birds like Elephant, Hare, Deer, Peacock, Horse, Bull and Cobra, Salalihiniya (Sri Lanka Mynah) bird were also used.

The master craftsmen would always explain the importance and significance of the motifs to pupils after the years of training and this information was passed on through poems in earlier days from father to son and in absence of son it was passed on to close blood relatives. It was hereditary transmission.

V. INTERVENTION OF NEW DESIGNS

The process that involves new designing products is known as design intervention: new processes, new tools, technologies, new materials, function and utility, surface manipulation, redesigning existing products with changes in colour, size & shape etc. For the livelihood the weavers adopted the contemporary designs in their work. As per the requirement of the market they adopted new motifs, techniques of weaving and large range of colours. Earlier they used natural dyes but now they have started using synthetic dyes also. The modern weavers have introduced new product range like letter holders, shopping bags, fans, screens, cushion covers and hand bags etc as per the market requirements.

The Dumbara woven mats & tapestries also could be used in clothing. Below pictures (Pic 1 – 10) shows the “trendy handloom women’s jackets using Sri Lankan natural hana fibre mats which can be used for casual occasions. The objective is to develop the concept of jackets which adds value to casual wear. To invent the new designed for future under the concept of jackets and also for the future market and change the trend in the present for the busy working women’s. This also helps in promoting the ancient art.



FIG 1 & 2 – Jacket is made using pink color handloom fabric in combination with Sri Lankan natural hana fiber mats. Patch work is done on front, Back and on sleeves of the jacket using mat.

FIG 3 & 4 – It is Asymmetric casual wear Jacket made using green color handloom fabric along with Sri Lankan natural hana fiber mats. Patch work is done on the right side of the front., Circle shaped on the back and also at the hem on back.

FIG 5 & 6 – Casual wear Jacket with Peter Pan collar using Orange color handloom fabric ornamented with Sri Lankan natural hana fiber mats. Patch work is done on pockets & at hem on front, circle shaped at the Back and on sleeves of the jacket using mat.

FIG 7 & 8 – Casual wear Jacket made using Red color handloom fabric in combination with Sri Lankan natural hana fiber mats. Patch work is done on hem at the front. Diamond shaped at the Back and on sleeves of the jacket using mat.

FIG 9 & 10 – Blue colored Jacket made using handloom fabric ornamented with Sri Lankan natural hana fiber mats. Patch work is done on front, back and on sleeves of the jacket using mat.

VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Change is inevitable. It is evident that the fashion trend changes with time, consumer behavior and culture. The degree of success of any new product depends upon the versatility of the product. The product can be successful if it is accepted by large number of customers at a given time. In the present study it is observed that consumers appreciated these designs.

Here most of the consumers have been accepted that the trend factor is affecting on them to choose a jacket and also majority of the consumer accepted that these jackets are as per the modern fashion trends. It is also observed that overall color composition, silhouette and fabric used was appreciated. The majority of customers accepted that it is an excellent collection. Here most of the consumers opted for the present collection which means it can create a demand in the target market. At the same time it is found to be according to the modern trends.

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