

Traditional *Kota Doria* saris- An innovative allure

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■ **ABSTRACT** : In a continuous changing world of textiles with ever growing challenges and competitive environment, innovation in traditional weaving crafts has become essential for their long lasting existence. *Kota Doria* weavers are also experimenting with yarns, motifs, and colours to meet the contemporary demands of consumers without changing *Khat* -a recognizing characteristic of this craft that gives a unique squared check pattern to the textile for which it is famous and is not found in any other textile. Innovations in this craft had transformed the textile from plain turban cloth to saris designed in varied range of motifs with additional richness incorporated by use of zari. Cotton yarns in both warp and weft directions are replaced by silk and zari, vibrant rich colours along with naturalistic and stylized motifs has given a new variety to the craft making the fabric more appealing. Amenability of creators according to market needs is enriching this craft heritage.

■ **KEY WORDS** : Traditional hand weaving, Pit-loom, Design, *Khat*

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Hand woven crafts are beautiful representation of Indian cultural heritage, distinctive handlooms are known for their distinctive features. One of the finest Indian hand woven textiles is traditional *Kota Doria*, this almost weightless textile is very popular for its gossamer feel, sheerness, and corded texture. It is woven in few villages of Kota, Bundi and Baran districts of Rajasthan. It is believed that in 17th century Rao Kishore Singh, a general in Mughal army, brought few weavers from Mysore and settled them in Kaithoon, a village nearby Kota. The tradition of weaving gradually died out in Mysore, but subsequently this craft flourished in Kaithoon. Owing to the original parentage, earlier these textiles were called "*Masuriya Malmals*", and as now it is being woven in surrounding villages of Kota, so named "*Kota Doria*". The early weavers of plain *Kota Doria* handed down their art of weaving generation to generation enriching and imparting new dimensions in this craft in an innovative way. The original fabric made by *Kota Doria* weavers was turban cloths for royalties; later odhnis were also weaved which were draped on rituals and occasions by women of Oswal and Marwadi communities of Rajasthan. Further, adapting and modifying the textile –a new product line of

saris were woven which is still continued in this craft. Along with remarkable innovations in designing of the traditional *Kota Doria*, its unique hallmark- *Khat*, are still preserved to lend a square-check pattern in the weave itself, thus making it a distinctively fine textured fabric with intricate craftsmanship. Innovations always involve high risk factors, because consumer may or may not pay for the ideas which are implemented in the product, but in traditional hand woven *Kota Doria* textile, it is evident that, innovations always added more and more splendor to this fabric, and consumers appreciated it. Master weavers of *Kota Doria* handloom sector are now involving innovation by deliberate application of market trends and consumer tastes, they are now using their imagination to enlarge the design repertoire by synchronizing traditional style with modern sense.

Jain and Singh (2011) mentioned that Indian and international designers have shown a numerous designs using the versatile *Kota Doria* in recent collections, which have ranged from apparel for men and women to accessories like handbags and pouches to home furnishings that include diaphanous window coverings and delicate lampshades.

Dewan (2008) wrote that since 1970 with the advent of

power loom in the country, the traditional craft of *Kota Doria* faced serious competition from counterfeit products made on power looms. Although the products that were made on power loom did not match the quality of the original, they were cheap, easy to manufacture and therefore outsold the original. Nath and Wacziarg (1987) wrote that gold thread added a glitter to the gossamer weave of *Kota Doria* saris with a cotton warp and a silk weft. Dhamija and Jain (1989), in their book 'Hand woven fabrics of India', refer to the presence and fame of the *Masuria* being woven in Kaithoon, one of the few fine weaving centres besides Dholka, Khambat and Porbandar in Gujarat.

Objectives :

- To study the innovative trends in yarns used in traditional hand woven *Kota Doria* saris.
- To know about innovative motifs and colours of traditional hand woven *Kota Doria* saris.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted in Kaithoon town of Kota district, as largest population of weavers resides here. A sample of 150 weaver respondents was randomly selected. A structured interview schedule was developed to get complete and authentic information. It consisted of questions related to earlier and present day trends regarding yarns, motifs and colour used in traditional hand woven *Kota Doria* saris. The elicited information was documented with photographic evidences.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study have been discussed in detail as under:

Yarns :

As the weavers of *Kota Doria* saris are wage weavers and are governed by the master weavers, selection of yarns, motifs and colours are also dictated by them. Inspired from other traditional textiles, and combining it with their own indigenous ideas, the master weavers are innovating according to current market trends, keeping *Kota Doria* in original intact form. Yarns are procured from different places; cotton is mainly supplied from Coimbatore, silk from Bangalore and zari from Surat. Earlier hand spun thick cotton yarns were used, but now introduction of mill spun mercerized thin cotton yarns of 80s to 120s (Fig.1) counts with higher twist increased the fineness as well as strength of the fabric. "Cotton x silk" variety of *Kota Doria* has surpassed the "cotton x cotton" variety due to its increased fineness, transparency and more appealing. In cotton x cotton variety, there was 2 *khat*/inch, but now in cotton x silk variety it is 5-7 *khat*s/inch. Silk yarns used in *Kota Doria* are two ply and 20/22 denier to 13/15

denier which gives extra fineness to the weave. Now-a-days degummed silk yarns locally called "buff katan" (Fig.2) are also used to give lustrous appeal to the fabric. Single silk yarn used as warp and weft yarns but for extra weft designing more than 3 silk yarns are used. Cotton x silk variety is very suitable for summers and also in budget of middle class.

A recent innovation in *Kota Doria* sari is the "tissue variety" in which zari yarn is used as wefts and silk yarns are used as warps, this variation is more suitable for winter season and also for festive occasions. Use of more zari adds to the richness of sari, and its price range starts from Rs.20,000..

Approximately 300 to 350 g of cotton and 70 to 100 g of silk is required to weave a single *Kota Doria* sari of standard length of 6.2 meter, weight of zari used is according to design. To lower the expense on zari, the original zari threads are now replaced by specially prepared thread of silk with metallic mounting of gold and silver.

Motifs :

Desired motifs of artistic value are now produced by weavers in wide range as was never before. Earlier, stripes of zari yarns were practiced in monotonous style, distance between two stripes and number of stripes in the layout was the only prevalent variation of *Kota Doria* saris. Some times intersecting stripes were used to make checks commonly called *chattai* motif (Fig.3). Later, designing with Jacquard, Dobby and Jala arrangement were started to meet contemporary tastes along with use of zari and silk yarns for vivid design. Dobby designs went under a set back due to lack of variety and monotonous designs. Jacquard designs impart elaborated look to the woven product, but the fine and intricate designs are life and soul of these fabrics which can only be created by the means of indigenous arrangement called Jala. Stylized designs with more emphasis on naturalistic motifs are now incorporated with new vigour in *Kota Doria* saris. Birds, flowers, leaves, creepers are the main motifs arranged in the textile. Weavers are now experimenting with ethnic motifs of human figures. Earlier repeats of motifs were in half drop pattern, but now an innovative approach is applied by placing these motifs in sequence touching each other to make a line arrangement. Another advancement is, use of large motifs on pallav and borders of sari and exactly similar motifs, but smaller in size, on the ground body of the sari. To mutate the look, gold and silver zari yarns are used simultaneously in the motif. For last few years, motif made by one type/colour of yarns is surrounded by other type/colour of yarn, this pattern of designing is called "Nug" (Fig.4), it increases beauty several times as well as wages of weavers. As the designing wages are calculated by the *khat* covered in that particular design, so to reduce the labour charges and also to add variety, these days borders of different widths are woven in plain weaves.



Fig. 1 : Mercerized cotton 120s

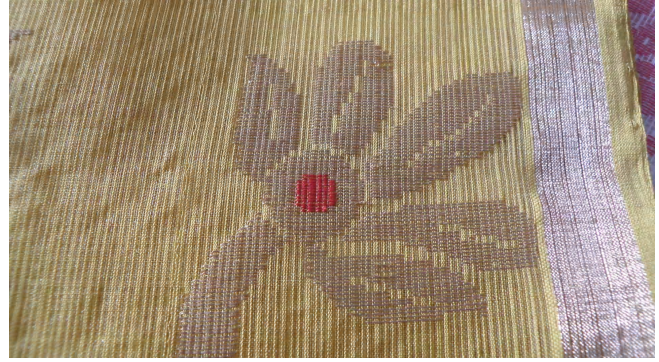


Fig. 4 : Nug motif



Fig. 2 : Buff katan



Fig. 5 : Dhoop chhawn



Fig. 3 : Chattai motif



Fig. 6 : Use of different colours

Plate 1 : Yarns, motifs and colours used in traditional hand-woven *Koto Doria* saris

Colours :

Initially, white and off white tones were used in turban cloths, later bright red and saffron colours were used in odhnis, further the textile was transformed into pastel coloured sari which was very suitable for hot summers of Rajasthan. Currently *Kota Doria* is offering all tones and shades of

colours, rich and vibrant, dull and bright (Fig.5). Cotton and silk yarns dyed in non-conventional colours such as black and weave with combination of golden and silver zari are also in trend. Weft of one colour and warp of another colour created new variety called “Dhoop Chhawn” (Fig.6).

The shifting of colours palette from lighter to dark

colours is probably due to high merchandise of the product in southern India. Reactive and direct dyes are mostly used because of their easier application process, vegetable colours are used on special orders only. Though yarns are dyed prior to weaving, but as a new experiment very few saris are also being dyed after weaving in multi colours called “Rangoli variety”.

Conclusion :

Fusion of traditional weaving art with the contemporary demands has made a revolutionary miracle in the handloom industry. *Kota Doria* weavers are now adopting innovative approach in four major aspects viz., affordability, comfort, durability and style. Considering these aspects, the paper was focused specifically on new changes in the yarns, motifs and colours of traditional *Kota Doria* saris. Once woven in only off-white cotton warp and weft yarns without any element of designing, are now being woven in devious way making it thriving art. Use of degummed silk, mercerized cotton yarns of high counts, incorporation of zari as regular weft and naturalistic motifs has made the textile qualitatively rich. Charm of the fabric has increased manifold by fine motifs created with silk yarns, never made earlier. Vibrant and strong colours are successfully added to the spectrum along with modification in dyeing techniques. Despite of being one of the most demanded hand woven textile, due to profit earning tendency of master weavers and traders, the weavers are socially and economically not in sound position. As traditional *Kota Doria* saris has a growing and demanding market, also powerloom substitute and cheap duplicates are wedging their

way in, continuous effort to maintain its value and merit through innovation and upgradation is the need of hour.

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