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A Case Study

Weaving traditional druggets (*Kambli*)

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ABSTRACT : Since ancient times, the manufacturing of textile goods has been carried out in India using the indigenously produced natural fibres, *i.e.* cotton, wool, silk, ramie, etc., by rural artisans. Although, the techniques employed in manufacturing such goods were labour intensive and time consuming that inturn made products to be expensive. These artifacts are eco-friendly and provided large employment to rural artisans. Mean while the products possess good hand and feels and have much appreciations and acceptance by the users. Among the various textile products produced, manufacturing of drugget using indigenous traditional knowledge of yarn spinning and weaving from locally available wool is one of the amazing products, unique in construction and performance. In this paper, detailed information on availability of wool, its quality, processing technique, conversion of wool fibre into yarn, then yarn in to drugget is focused.

KEY WORDS: *Kuruba*s, Sheep wool, Hand spinning, Drugget

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Wool production and its utilization in South India are traced back to early colonial period. In one of the earliest descriptions, Francis (2003) mentioned about *Kurubas,* the shepherd community all originated from Karnataka origin. The sole occupation of *Kurubas* was feeding their herds by extensive grazing, and weaving their wool into coarse blankets/druggets. Each *Kuruba* possessed about 100 to 200 sheep, which he grazed on the fields all day without paying any rent and at night the community folded them on the aerable lands of the cultivators, in return the shepherd used to about 3-5 kg of grains or Rs. 200 in exchange of dung of 100 sheep, from the farmer.

History of blanket weaving from woollen yarn is age old. In 1920, the employment per hand loom was greater in wool sector than in cotton weaving; since woollen yarn was still largely handspun. Majority of these looms were engaged in the weaving of blankets. It is hard to define 'coarse' blankets in terms of grades of wool, since one of its attributes was precisely lack of standardization. Raja *et al.* (2008) described the coarse blanket in the following terms, "in the villages of Tamil Nadu, many coarse blankets, or *Kambali,* were woven from the sheep wool. To produce soft and attractive blanket they used 300g of wheat flour for sizing 2kg of yarns. There used to be an article of dress universally used by almost all shepherds, living on hills and over the Ghats or planes, were readily distinguished from other communities as the farmers did not wear any cotton or linen. Generally, the poorest quality wool available locally, with a quantity of hair that made it unfit for most other purposes, found its way into a kind of blankets commonly called coarse floor spread (druggets), though the precise nature of the material varied between regions. Everywhere, it was a purely utilitarian product and apparently of high wear and tear, thus, it always found consumers who price mattered more than durability, texture, or softness. The peculiar cost-saving coarse blankets of the plains did enjoy was derived from the fact that they were woven by the shepherds themselves. Blankets of this kind were as ubiquitous as the sheep from which the wool clipped and sold very cheap at weekly markets or post- harvest rural fairs, a number of which took place just before the winter.

From the above, it is clear that shepherds, the *Kurubas* rear sheep from ancient time and are still continuing. These people utilize the produce for manufacturing the blanket using traditional techniques for self use as well as for sale. In this paper, detailed information on availability of wool, its quality,

processing technique, conversion of wool fibre into yarn, then yarn to blanket/dugget and their quality parameters are highlighted.

Observations:

Medleri village is situated 12 km from Ranebennur of Haveri district in Karnataka state. Of 200 families living in the village, about 100 families are sheep farmers whose men and women are engaged in weaving woolen blanket in traditional style. The sheep is bred and maintained by *Kuruba*, a shepherd community, mainly residing in hamlets at Medleri village. These indigenous sheep heards (Fig.1) are migratory in nature and migrate once in every six months to villages of Shimoga, Sagar, Shikaripura and Chitradurga districts and main reason for migration is to graze the sheep.

Traditional method of drugget (Kambli) manufacturing

Fig. 1: Northen Karnataka (Medleri) sheep

Wool quality:

The physical attributes of colour ranges from light white, yellow, black and brown fleece. In general, annual yield of greasy fleece is about 403±12 g. The mean yields after scouring and clean wool are 90 per cent and 80 per cent, respectively. The staple length of wool is 5-6 cm.

Wool processing:

Shearing and sorting:

The shearing of wool from sheep is carried out twice in a year during the month November-December and May-June. The shearing is carried out by simple scissors, before shearing; sheep are cleaned with water to remove dust and dirt from the fleece. Shearing and sorting are normally carried out in the grazing areas (Fig. 2). The total sheep population in Medleri village is about 50,000. Taking into consideration the average wool yield per sheep being 400 g, the total wool stock weighs about 40,000 kg per year, out of which about 30,000 kg is used by the villagers locally for making blankets and the balance is sold in the wool market every Monday between 6 am to 11 am. The shepherds along with raw wool do sell wool yarn and blankets to the public and retail merchants.

Fig. 2 :Sheard and sorted raw wool fibre

Carding and spinning:

A local made machine (Fig. 3) is used for carding the wool (Fig. 4). The machine is fitted with two rollers first one is a hollow cylinder with bent strip of metal to push the wool fibre further, which is transmitted by a conveyor belt, the other one is a carding roller with sharp spike coarse pitch to open the wool. The machine doesn't contain any provision like doffer or coiler trumpet arrangement for making sliver or tops. It is similar to dusting machine for opening the fleece. The final outcome of the carding machine is well opened and carded into loose wool of coarse quality. The wool is carded 2 to 3

Fig. 3 :Carding and combing-raw wool fibre

Fig. 4 :Carded and combed wool fibre

times repeatedly to get good results. The women folk further hand card the opened wool.

Two types of spinning systems are being employed by the woman, *i.e.* hand spindle (*Takli*) (Fig. 5) and hand spinning (*charka*) (Fig.6). These systems are primitive and traditionally used for spinning the yarn from wool. The quality of the yarn spun by the above methods is coarse with high twist and is hairy. The production rate is very low as compared to newly developed spinning machines. A woman can spin 0.5 kg of yarn per day on an average using *Tukli* and 0.75 kg using *Charka*. Spinning is a secondary work attended by the women along with their domestic work. Spinning is exclusive done by women. The yarn conversion cost, though not precisely estimated, seems to be high due to labour wages as compared to other spinning systems but the entire process is environmentally and user friendly because it does not create any sound pollution.

Fig. 5 :Hand spindle (*Takli*)

Fig. 6 :Hand spinning (*Charkha*)

Preparation of starch *(Ambali)* for sizing:

Kuruba community adopted an indigenous method of sizing the wool to impart it stiffness and strength. Good quality tamarind seeds are fried on a high flame and outer black-brown husk is separated and the inner seed is ground into fine paste and kept for overnight for aging. On the next day morning, this paste is boiled on a medium flame by adding water with continuous stirring using a palm leaf tied to a wooden spoon. This starch solution is boiled continuously for 3 hours turning into a thick paste, which is further used as starch for sizing of wool yarn.

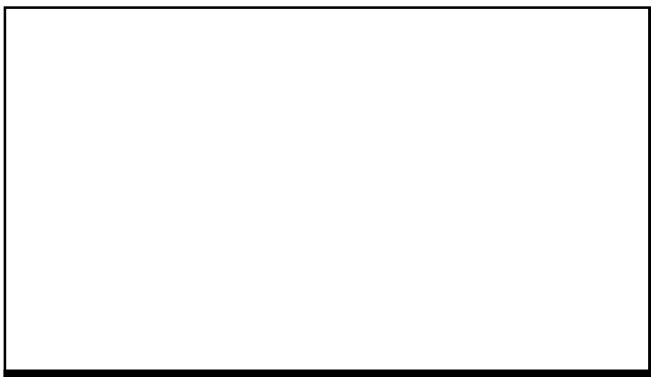

Fig. 7 :Hand spun yarn cones

Warping and sizing:

A spun yarn from the cone is transferred on to a small wooden board (Fig. 8) in a cress cross method to prepare a hank. Manually the continuous hank yarn is transferred onto the two metal rods placed at the distance of 6 feet (72") and 7 feet (84") on 4 vertical stones fitted on ground, by passing hank back and forth to prepare a warp beam of 400 to 450 and 500 to 550 ends, respectively based on the required length and width of blanket. Sometime 4-6 white or coloured ends are arranged along with the woollen ends to add beauty to the drugget, at random positions. Once the yarns are arranged on the rods, then the sizing procedure is carried out.

Fig. 8 :Wooden board-to prepare hank

Priorly prepared starch is mixed with water making into a semi-solid paste and is applied (2-3 times) to the horizontally held warp yarns on metal rods manually. A brush made out of inner cortex of coconut root is used for separating and evenly spreading of starch and sun dried for 4-6 hours (Fig. 10). The purpose of warp sizing is to produce, weavability in the warp *i.e.*, imparting the yarn a totally of physical and mechanical

Fig. 9 : Black and gray hank

properties necessary for its processing in weaving. The size applied to the yarn forms a film on drying.

Fig. 10 : Brushing of warp yarn on sizing

Winding the pirn:

A hollow plastic tube closed on one side is used as a shuttle. The spun yarn from the cone is directly taken on the wooden stick and a superficially starch is applied manually and kept for sun drying. Once the weft yarn is dried it is filled into the plastic tube and used as a shuttle. The advantage of using plastic tube is its smooth surface and can be easily passed through the warp yarns (Fig. 13, 14, 15 and 16).

Weaving:

After the process of warping and sizing the sun dried metal rods along with the ends are directly yarn taken on to the pit loom to weave blankets (Fig.11). Pit loom works on the principle of shedding, picking and beating for blanket production. Once the blanket is woven, it is taken out the two marginal ends of the blanket is either knotted tightly nor are left free or finished attractively by coloured acrylic yarn. After taking out from the loom, around 2-3 times water is sprinkled on the blanket and sun dried 5-6 hours (Fig. 12).

Two types of blankets are produced in this village by varying the length and breadth and keeping the quality same. A blanket with 72”x 48” and 84”x 54” length and breadth requires about 4 kg and 6 kg of wool fibre, respectively.

Fig. 11 : Weaving (Pit loom)

Fig. 12 : Druegget-sun drying

Fig. 13 : Cone to wooden stick

Fig. 14 : Weft warn- wooden stick

Fig. 15 : Wooden stick to plastic tuber

Fig. 16 : Weft yarn in plastic tube

Later the blanket is neatly folded and packed for selling in local Monday market. On an average, a person can weave 6-8 blankets a week. Based on the quality, size and weave the blanket price ranges from Rs. 1000 to Rs. 1500. The production cost of blanket (72"x 48") woven is given in the Table 1. *Kurubas* of Medleri do produce many other articles like druggets (Fig 17), *Kori Kambli Angi* (shirt) (Fig. 18) and knitted caps (Fig. 19). Monday market of Medleri is famous for different varieties of blankets produced in Karnataka. Now-a-days blanket weaving on pit loom is being replaced by power looms but, *Kurubas* of Medleri are still following their indigenous traditional weaving method using pit looms.

Table 1: Production cost of woolen blanket

Particulars	Price / kg	Cost (Rs.)
Wool fibre (4kg)	30.00	120.00
Carding	10.00	40.00
Spinning	35.00	140.00
Warping and sizing	25.00	100.00
Weaving	50.00	200.00
Total		600.00

Woollen products

Fig. 17 : Druggets

Fig. 18 : Kori kambli angi (shirt)

Fig. 19 : Woollen cap

Quality of blanket:

Although, the cost of the blanket seems to be high because of intensive labour cost of spinning and weaving, however, the product has unique character in durability and warmth. Blanket look rough and harsh to handle initially but on after use, it becomes soft in texture and attractive in appearance due to original yellow colour. Since the blankets are eco-friendly they are not treated with chemical at any stage of processing.

Conclusion:

The traditional occupation of (shepherd) *Kurubas* in Karnataka is age old. The profession is associated with various problems related to wool quality (coarseness of wool), outdated carding and spinning as well as weaving techniques, which make the product expensive and rough to handle. In order to overcome these problems, it is suggested to blend fine quality wool with local coarses variety. The carding of wool could be done on modified cotton card to produce uniform sliver. The existing *Charkha* needs to be modified suitably to get higher production and uniform quality. The existing pit looms need be replaced with handlooms so that the production rate may be increased as well innovative products can be manufactured. Training can be given to women about different wet processing like dyeing and finishing, so that the product quality could be improved. Hands on can be planned to diversity the product like light blanket, carpet, shawls by blending coarse local wool with other fibres like cotton, polyester, acrylic etc. There is no organized market established by the shepherd families so far. Hence, the weavers do face difficulty in marketing their products. The younger generation has found better avenues in learning skill and technical knowledge. Thus, most of them have moved out of village. Only few less-skilled youngsters are pursuing this profession engaging other labourers. This is a way to protect and preserve the traditionality of blanket weaving at Medleri village. If the Indian culture and heritage is to be seen, its only in villages cut off from the main routes of the city.

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