

STATEMENT OF CASE

Madurai Sungudi Saree

Description of Goods

The Madurai Sungudi Sarees woven are generally in great demand among the women folk of South India. These are cotton sarees that are suited to a tropical climate and can be used for both casual and formal wear. The saree is manufactured in the traditional tie or knot dying process. The knots made on the saree are generally evenly spaced with a continuous string running amidst all the knots. Thereafter the saree is dyed with the appropriate colour. Subsequently when the knots are untied the knotted portions remain uncoloured as rings, thus giving a unique kaleidoscopic effect to each saree. The colours used are mainly vegetable dyes. And the water of the sacred River Vaigai, used in the dying process, is believed to possess the unique quality of impacting the brightness of the attractive colours used on the saree.. The art of tie or knot dying process is now part of a tradition in usage for a couple of centuries and capable of being classified under classes 24 and 25 - textile and textile goods and such others.

Origin & Geographical Indication

It is believed that the art of making the Madurai Sungudi Saree (the said Saree) came into Madurai during the Nayak dynasty that ruled Madurai around the 16th century onwards. The art of making the Sungudi Sarees is time immemorial and came from the weavers' viz. the Saurashtras community, who brought it along with them as they migrated into southern India, perfected the art and gave it the unique blend and style that got it to be distinguished as the Madurai Sungudi Saree. Thus the art per se is much older and was known to be practiced since time immemorial.

In fact the said community undertook the weaving of the said Saree as a profession, hence the said community came to be also known as the 'Patnulkarans' i.e. silk weavers. And the word 'Sungudi', a Saurashtras word is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Sunnam' meaning 'round'. Thus Sungudi literally meant ringed dots, which are spread throughout the fabric of the Saree and forms a distinct and special feature. Another interpretation being that the word Sungudi or Chungadi came from the word 'Junnadi'.

In the later years given the demand for these Sarees many other communities of weavers were also involved in manufacturing and were also instrumental in popularizing the said Sarees. So popular were these Sarees that every other community involved complemented the other, with the increasing market demand

for the said product (read Saree).

And so popular was the tie - dyeing or knot - dyeing work in the 19th and 20th centuries that it won a Bronze medal for a cotton work, according to the Official Catalogue, Class vii, P.252 at the Colonial and Indian Art Exhibition conducted over a century ago. Understandably the fine texture and finish contributed to it being chosen for the said award. It is noteworthy to mention here that apart from the awards bestowed the said Saree has been so deeply entrenched in the psyche of South India for it is a must in many communities during marriages in the South to adorn themselves only in a Madurai Sungudi Saree and nothing else.

Madurai District Profile

Geographical Position:

North Latitude : Between 9° 6' to 10° 49' N
East Longitude : Between 77° 11' to 79° 19' E

The River Vaigai:

No mention of Madurai is complete without the River Vaigai. This is the principal stream of the district and originates from the Varushanad Hills. This river is the very life source of Madurai and hence its waters are considered sacred. The city of Madurai is located on the banks of the river, and near the village of Sholavandan the river bends to the south-east, and thence flows right across the centre of the district and empties itself into the sea viz. the Gulf of Mannar, at Attankarai, east of Ramnad.

Languages spoken:

Tamil, Telegu, Patnuli or Khatri (a dialect of Gujarati spoken by Saurashtras), English, Hindi.

Area & Population	
Area in Square K.m.	3741.73
Population (2001 Census)	25,62,279
(a) Males	12,95,124
(b) Females	12,76,155
(c) Rural	11,29,028
(d) Urban	14,33,251
Density/S.q.K.m.	733
Literates	17,95,751

Production - Method & Stages

The manufacturing process of the Madurai Sungudi Saree is generally classifiable as a cottage industry.

Raw material:

Here the work commences from the already woven cotton saree that is unbleached. Hence it would be appropriate to say that this is the perfect raw material to which a value-add is made by means of the tie - dyeing and this being the most important value add to the saree. The sarees used are woven using 80's or 100's - combed / carded yarn for warp and 80's - 100's combed/ carded yarn for weft.

Dyeing:

In the earlier days vegetable dyes especially the dark red colour that were pleasing to the eyes, sober and permanent were used. The red came from safflower, stick lac, chay root and red sanders. The orange came from saffron wood chips, parasam flower or seed of the Jabra plant for yellow and orange turmeric and kasa leaves for yellow and indigo, pale for blue and indigo, turmeric for green and annabedi (sulphate of iron) for black were all used for dyeing. The process to extract the required colour of dye was tedious and this entailed soaking the extracts of the aforesaid plants in rigid ratios in earthen pots/ tanks and covered with a wooden plank for days together. Thereafter the plant particles were crushed into a mixture and the colour dyes would be obtained.

However today with the advent of artificial dyes the usage of vegetable dyes has remarkably come down. The dyes are usually obtained from Bombay and Ahmedabad. Today the Dyeing is carried out by using chemical dyes (aniline) such as vat alizarine red, naphthol and indigo are used to get the red, blue and other combinations. The process of dyeing the saree after tying the knots is also labour intensive and thus time consuming.

Design:

The sarees may have motifs and various other designs strung on them. These are incorporated by the intricate tying or knotting process. The Madurai Sungudi Sarees are produced using the following method: The plain saree produced using the warp of 100s and weft of 80s are bleached and impressed with multi squared markings. Thereafter the impressed saree is sent for "Tying" the knot i.e. "putta" or "bandhani" work. Any such plain saree, which is usually longer than six yards contains more than 20,000 puttas i.e. knots approx., which generally are uniformly placed, using a single thread. The perfection of the sungudi depends on the firmness of the knot. The pallu portion of the saree is given a contrasting colour. This is done by clamping the portion of the pallu appropriately. Consequent to the dyeing process when the puttas are untied they give the "Sungudi" effect i.e. the revealed un-dyed places where the puttas were made.

Process Adopted:

The procedure although laborious is rather simple. This entails pieces of handloom or mills being first dipped in an emulsion of groundnut oil and alkaline earth and trodden under foot for a number of times and allowed to remain wet for two - three days. They are then washed in the waters of the sacred River Vaigai and sun dried. This process is repeated for about a week after which they are again washed in the river and put in the dyeing vat containing a solution of Vat alizarine red and kasa leaves. They are finally steamed and dried. For sungudi sarees knots are tied along the lines marked in the cloths with red pigment, so that when the clothes are put in the vat containing the dye the knots prevent the colours from going into the knotted portions. The knotted portions thus remain white and appear as white specks on a coloured background. In order to give different colour to the pallu i.e. the border of the saree, the dipping in the dye solution is done in such way that the borders do not get stained. For this the pallu portion of the saree is first clamped secure. This is done so that the dye when applied to the other parts of the saree by no chance touches the clamped or secured portion. Consequent to the dyeing of the other portion the clamped pallu portion is dyed separately. Once the dyeing process is complete and the knots undone meticulously, the single thread is reused.

Eminent Body

The sales and marketing of the finished products are generally dealt by the various cooperative societies operating under the guidance of the state government. In 1943 the "Madurai Junnadi Javuli Vyaparigal Sangam" set up. Today renamed as the "Madurai Sungudi Javuli Urpathiyalaragal & Vyaparigal Sangam" it is one of the leading bodies assisting in the process of marketing the Madurai Sungudi Sarees. Additionally the private sector also caters to the interests of the weavers in marketing the finished products. As understood today the market for the Madurai Sungudi Sarees has spread far and wide well beyond South India and is also exported world over. Additionally in order to aid and sustain the cottage industry the state government has also exempted the Madurai Sungudi Sarees from Sales Tax, since 1959.

Uniqueness & Characteristics

The Madurai Sungudi Saree in addition to being a handloom cottage industry is dominated by women folk who play the major part in the making of a saree despite being labour intensive. The dyeing however is done by the men folk.

The Saree:

- The Sungudi Sarees are only sarees of its kind in the world wherein any laborious work is performed on the saree before it is dyed. Dyeing of the saree and removing the knots is logically the final step here

whereas in all other kinds of sarees of the world, the yarn is first bleached /dyed and then saree is woven or prints affixed on the woven saree. This is a unique feature of the Madurai Sungudi Saree.

As regards the colour:

- The elegance of colours that used to be vegetable dye based is an outstanding feature. The chemical dyes used today in comparison to the vegetable dyes also uniquely distinguish the Madurai Sungudi Saree from others.

Concerning the weave:

- The cotton saree is woven using 80's or 100's - Combed / Carded yarn is used for warp and 80's - 100's Combed /Carded yarn is used for weft. On account of this the Saree is generally light usually around half a kilogram or so.

Texture:

- The feel of the Saree is fine and speaks of the texture and fine variety of yarn used in its manufacture. Attribute for this may also be given to the vegetable dyes used and the qualities of water that is inherent to the said region, especially the waters of the sacred River Vaigai. The water of the sacred River Vaigai is believed to impact the brightness and steadfastness of the colours on the saree despite a long period of usage. Here it is essential to suggest that such sarees have the capacity to absorb heat easily which is why it keeps the wearer fresh and comfortable all day long.

The Design, Knotting and Dyeing Process:

- The Saree is handcrafted to perfection by skilled artisans who are endowed with critical skills in intricate designs, with decades of experience behind them in their respective fields to make meticulous knots sometimes more than 20,000 in a saree, all of which are unique and yet of the same nature and quality, strung using a single thread; and thereafter dipping the saree so knotted in the dye the saree meticulously with great precision, for there is no second chance in this process. ✓
- It is entirely hand crafted hence the design is unique to each saree produced. Thus the design and pattern varies from saree to saree and never is an instance where a saree has matched another in semblance.
- The knotting process undertaken by the womenfolk only entails fine and intricate knots put in place using finger nails and using a single thread for the entire saree. The perfection of the "Sungudi" depends on the firmness

of the knot. Once the dying process is complete and the knots are undone meticulously, such that the single thread can be reused.

- In 'chunri' the dying is done after the tying of the knot and pursuant to the dying process when the puttas are removed a unique kaleidoscope image is seen where each putta had existed.
- The method of dyeing is such that the saree is dipped into the dye solution in such a way that the folded border is clamped appropriately and does not get the colour of the dye. The border thereafter is dyed accordingly. Extra warp designs are created in the border using gold zari / half fine zari for extra warp design in the border.

Inspection

In order to keep a constant tab on quality of the said Sarees manufactured each cooperative society has its quality Inspectors. The task of the Appraiser is crosschecking the details provided viz. not only the texture but also the tie - dyeing done and the patterns thereof. The process of verification is done through physical examination and comparison. No doubt it is the years of experience and the rule book that every Appraiser would rely upon in arriving at while certifying the genuine Madurai Sungudi Saree. Having said that the Appraiser relies on physical examination one must also not forget that the said industry is a simple cottage industry and not does not entail investment of huge monies for technical inspection.

Others

There are approximately more than 1100 people alone directly involved in the making of the said Saree in Madurai alone. And there are about 5,000 people involved in the ancillary (or related to the weaving) such as the dyeing, marketing etc. work involved in the Madurai Sungudi Saree. The annual sales turnover of the Madurai Sungudi Sarees approximates to around more than Rs.7 crore per annum.

Usage

An aesthetic cotton fabric that this saree no doubt is, the Madurai Sungudi Saree is an ideal summer wear in South India. In many communities it still forms an essential part of the marriage ceremonies attended. It also forms a part of the collection of gifts that the bride and the bridegrooms are vested with. To this day it still forms part of some of those great traditional styles of the south where the orthodox prefer to adorn themselves in a 9 yard saree. And today not just the traditional but also the young ones alike wish to display their intricately designed

sober or bright coloured sungudi saree cottons. Sungudi sarees which was formerly satisfying only the older generations now keeps pace with the growing younger generation. It gives elegance to the weather which is why it is easily preferred among the working majority and the exotic range of cotton sarees is also widely preferred by the college going students as it enhances their grace. Since maintenance is easier the ratio of preference towards these sarees is always on the high. Its ranges though astonishing is genuine. Further it is a well known fact that such sarees have the capacity to absorb heat easily which is why it keeps the wearer fresh and comfortable all day long.

Marketing & Future

The cooperative societies and the various sales agents generally market the finished products. In order to aid and sustain the cottage industry the state government has granted major subsidies and one them being the exemption of the Madurai Sungudi Sarees from Sales Tax, since 1959. The government also offers low interest loans through the cooperative to aid and assist the manufacture of the said Sarees. Thus the said Saree is easily procurable and within the reach of the common man. Further given the major government subsidies today people from almost all communities are involved in the making of the Madurai Sungudi Saree. Today the Madurai Sungudi Saree is exported world over and famous world over for its unique qualities.