

Traditional threads: Kovai Kora cotton saree

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Tamil Nadu boasts a rich cultural heritage that has developed over the years. Tamil Nadu's handicrafts and handcrafted clothing are arguably the most abundant expression of Tamil culture. Saree is considered to be an asset in Indian women's life and it speaks about the art and culture. In Tamil Nadu, sarees show intricate design with unique characteristics. Tamil Nadu sarees are distinctive in their cultural significance, designs, and weaving techniques. The cultural identity has been preserved through the generations-long transmission of weaving techniques and patterns. These sarees play a major role in weddings, Festivals like Pongal and Temple rituals, symbolizing purity and prosperity. Sarees like Kanjeevaram sarees are a staple for weddings and auspicious occasions, Chettinad cotton sarees represent traditional south Indian Aesthetics, Madurai Sungudi sarees for casual and festive occasions, Kodambakkam silk Sarees bridge the tradition with modern fashion Trend, Kovai Kora cotton valued for their comfort touch of tradition. This review articles deals with the historical origin, geographical indication, product specification, production process and uniqueness of Kovai Kora cotton saree.

Keywords: Cotton sarees, Handloom sarees, Kovai Kora cotton sarees, South Indian culture, Origin

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The traditional Kovai Kora cotton saree is produced in Coimbatore, Tirupur and Erode districts. Besides, individual weavers are also manufacturing this kind of sari in this region. It has got a wide market in south India. A Kovai Kora cotton saree is made of a cotton and silk yarn blend, with Jari used to make the pallu and putta and 2/100 gas mercerized extra-long staple used for the weft.

Historical origin

The 'Devanagar community', who are considered to be the original weavers of Kovai Kora cotton, are thought to have migrated from Mysore to the Kongu region and settled in Sirumugai, Mettupalayam, and Sathyamangalam. The majority of the silk cocoons produced during the reign of the Vijaya Nagar

kingdom came from the Kollegal region, which was formerly a part of the Madras Presidency's Coimbatore province¹. A handloom weaver in T.G. Pudur, a part of Coimbatore District and close to Karnataka, was given the task of creating clothing for the royal family using super-fine cotton yarn made from cotton grown in Coimbatore District for the weft and silk taken from silk cocoons as the warp. The type that was created in this way is known as Kovai Kora Cotton¹. When making Pavu and oodu (warp & weft) to weave yarn saris, Kora silk was initially utilized. Later, when making the hybrid Kora silk saris, cotton thread was used for the weft and exclusively Kora thread for the warp, taking into account the local weather²⁻⁴.

The people of Devanagar Community are the pioneers of weaving in the district⁵. They are thought to have come from Ahmed Nagar in Gujarat and

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moved to South India as a result of the Talaikotta War's obliteration of the Vijaya Nagar Empire in 1565 AD, which resulted in the destruction of the Kayatri Peetam of the Devangars at Hemakooda Parvatham. They settled at many villages in Mysore state and thereafter to the kongu region. Devangar, according to historians, means "the weavers of the dresses used to clothe the celestial bodies." - (Deva - God, Anga - flesh).

According to Madras District Gazatteers – Coimbatore by Dr. B.S. Baliga (1966), the district's traditional coarse-colored saris were the most popular type of clothing manufactured there. They are made of yarn in the 20s to 30s and have 18 to 20 punjams. They are weaved into cloth that is 14 to 18 cubits long and 42 to 45 inches broad. Negamam, Mantripalaym, Periyapalaym, Ammapalayam, Sennimalai, and Sivagiri are the primary production centers for these colored saris. The majority of the yarn used is obtained from local mills, although colored yarn, particularly red, is imported already dyed from Madurai. At Tiruppur, Kangayam, Sennimalai, Bhavanai, and Mantripalayam, dyeing with additional colors is being carried out. Here, Haverro Trading Company representatives provide the additional colors and give the dyers instructions on how to carry out the dyeing process. In addition to these coarse saris, Sathyamangalam also produces grey saris of the finer counts of Pullampetta pattern for export to the Northern Circars⁷. It is also said that all of the weaving expertise comes from kollegal in Mysore, which was then a district of Coimbatore in the Madras Presidency.

Almost all the looms in the district are fitted either with fly shuttle or fly shuttle slay⁶. Warping is done by means of small rotary mills made of split bamboos and sizing is done generally in streets with the usual rice gruel.

The women of the Kongu region have worn coarse-colored saris since ancient times. During this time, the weaving groups in the district produced a variety of coarse colored saris utilizing cotton yarns with counts in the 20s and 30s from the 1940s, 1960s, and 1980s were used to create colored saris.

Geographical location

Coimbatore is situated in the extreme west of Tamil Nadu near the state of Kerala. The city lies between 10° 10' and 11° 30' of the northern latitude and 76° 40' and 77° 30' of eastern longitude in the

extreme west of Tamil Nadu near Kerala state at an elevation of 432 metres from sea level.

In summer and winter, the average high and low temperatures range from 35°C to 18°C. On the north side are the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve and reserve woods, while on the west are mountains. The district's eastern portion, which includes the city, is primarily dry. The district's whole western and northern region shares borders with the Anaimalai and Munnar ranges, the Nilgiri biosphere, and the Western Ghats. It is bounded by what is known as the Palghat Gap, a western gateway to Kerala. The district has a diverse range of wildlife due to its closeness to the Western Ghats. Coimbatore is called the Manchester of South India due to its extensive textile industry, fed by the surrounding cotton fields⁸.

Product profile

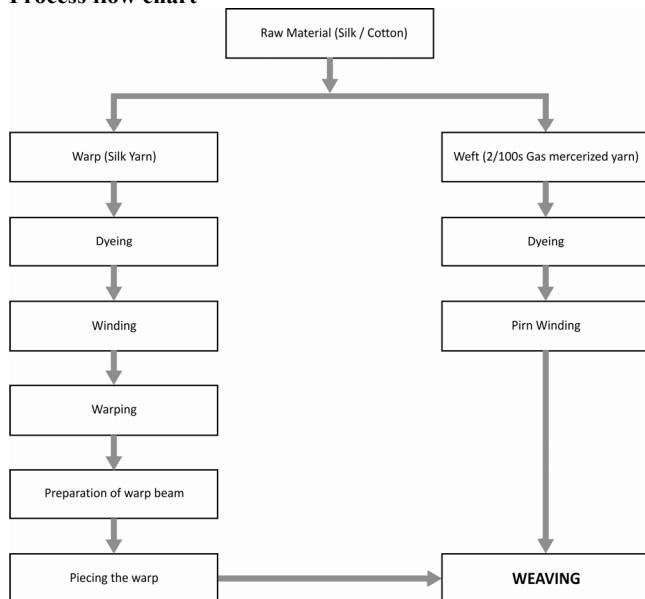
The Kovai Kora Cotton sari is made from a mixture of cotton and kora silk yarn that is produced in pit looms using 2/100 gas mercerized extra-long staple for the weft and Jari for the pallu and putta (Fig. 1). The sari has got a wide market in Kongu region⁹.

Product	Specification	
	Warp Yarn	20/22 Denier
		Kora silk Weft
	Yarn	2/100s gas mercerised cotton Yarn
	Border	Half fine Zari
	Pallu	2/100s gas mercerised yarn + half fine Zari
	Putta	Half fine Zari Extra
	warp	Half fine Zari Extra weft
	fine Zari	Half fine Zari
	Reed	96
	Count Ends/inch	96
	Picks/inch	75 to 80
	Reed width	50 inches
	Cloth	47 inches width
	Warp length	52 Mtrs
	Cloth length	50.4 Mtrs (8 saris)
Sari Length	6.30 Mtrs	
	(5.50 +0.80Mtrs Blouse)	
Price range	Rs.600 to 2000	

Fig. 1 — Specification of Kovai Kora cotton saree

Methodology

Process flow chart



Raw material

The basic raw material for producing the Kovai Kora cotton sari is 20/22 denier Kora silk (Undegummed silk yarn is called kora silk) and 2/100s gas mercerized cotton yarn procured in the form of hank by the co-operative societies from TANSILK and National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC) respectively. The Private weavers are procuring the same from Yarn dealers/brokers/traders

or directly from the Spinning Mills at Coimbatore as per their choice and requirements². The Cotton yarns received from NHDC are given to the dyeing units for dyeing the yarns. It is mandatory for the Handloom Co-operative Societies to get the yarn dyed from the Govt. approved dyeing units (Fig. 2).

Dyeing

The first stage in the dyeing process is to prepare the formula or dye bath and wash the Kora silk in plain, clear water. The most crucial stage in the dyeing process is preparing the dye solution. The Dyeing Master, who is well aware of the dyestuffs which are available for matching combination shades, and their chemical, physical and functional properties, decides the quantity of dyes/combination of dyes required for a particular colour. The process of dyeing kora silk is comparable to that used in dyeing of silk yarn⁴. The kora silk is let to soak in warm, dye-mixed water. After some time, a wooden stick with a yarn spindle is wound up to make sure that all of the kora silk's sections are correctly and consistently colored by using both hands alternately. Once this process is over, the yarn is squeezed and then washed in ordinary water. This dyed yarn is then dried in shade for proper oxidation and thereby provide more strength and original colour to the dyed yarn. The same process is used to dye the 2/100s gas mercerized cotton yarn used for the weft as it is for the fine cotton yarns (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2 — Raw material of Kovai Kora cotton sari



Fig. 3 — Dyeing of Kora silk

Winding (for warp)

The process of winding involves changing the packaging of yarn, such as from hank form to bobbin. The Kora silk yarn for the warp and cotton yarn for the weft are separately taken up for winding⁶. The dyed yarn for warp in the hank form is converted into bobbins through manual process called bobbin winding. However due to manpower shortage the above process is being carried out through winding machine at present in many weaving centers. Once the winding is over, the yarn in the bobbin form is taken up for warping process (Fig. 4).

Pirn winding (for Weft)

The twisted cotton yarn which is used in the weft is wound on to the small cops called pirns with the help of a small hand-driven ratta (Charkha). This process is called pirn winding. These pirns are pushed into the shuttle which acts as a carrier during the process of weaving for the weft threads⁷.

Warping

Warping is the process of creating warp sheets in the desired length and width from windup bobbins. There are various types of warping by which yarns from a large number of warper's bobbins are collected

together and made into a suitable form of package⁸. The type of warping used in Coimbatore district is horizontal/drum type warping (Fig. 5).

Preparation of warp beam

Beaming is the technique of transferring a warp sheet into a weaver's beam for mounting on a loom. These tasks are all completed manually without the use of electricity.

A street or public area that is longer than a warp must be available for the beaming work. The warp is fastened at the street with an iron rod, and two people are holding the other end. They would check the entire warp and, if necessary, mend any damaged yarns after stretching the warp to its full length. At this moment, each sari's measurement that needs to be woven will be indicated. The warp will then be rolled into a wooden beam or cylinder, delivered to the weaver's home, and correctly placed in the proper spot for further processing⁹.

Piecing the warp

Warp piecing is the term for the local practice of twisting by hands to attach the new warp to the old warp threads that are present in the reed (Achu) in the cylinder. In most cases, a weaver or a member of his family performs this labor.



Fig. 4 — Warping of Kora silk



Fig. 5 — Horizontal/drum type warping



Fig. 6 — Pit loom



Fig. 7 — Pallu design

Weaving

Pit looms are the most widely used looms in this region for producing the traditional Kovai Kora Cotton handloom Saris at present (Fig. 6). The pit looms are fitted with fly Shuttle. The healds for these fly shuttle pit looms are prepared locally by Nylon wire. The pirn meant for the weft insertion is normally kept in water on a small pot while the weaving is in progress and inserted into the weft one by one. The process of picking is done by beating the shuttle across the shed by hand and beaten by suspended slay. The warp beam and cloth beam are used to roll the woven fabric, with the warp beam serving largely as the tension beam during weaving. The reeds used by weavers at Coimbatore are made of iron rods⁵.

Design weaving

Generally pallu design is woven for about 25-40" (Fig. 7). The luxurious pallu design would measure around 40" and the common pallu design would be about 25". The beginning 6" and last 6" of each pallu design, which is separated into three sections, will

seem similar. The pallu design that is created in between will have an ornamental motif, a bird motif, or any other beautiful design. Every sari has putta motifs that are woven in a count range of 5 to 7. Putta is woven in two different sizes, known as small putta and huge putta. The minor putta would measure $\frac{1}{2}$ " to 1" and major putta 2" to $2\frac{1}{2}$ ". The putta design is typically chosen from a decorative theme, a flower in a figurative design, or a figure in the pallu. Gas mercerised yarn and half fine zari is used for making pallu where as zari alone is used for putta design. Jacquard/Dobby accessories are widely used for making designs. Only the zari with correct contents will be used in making the Kovai Kora Cotton Sari³.

Quality checking & packing

The Co-operative Society's assessors carefully examine the length, width, warp ends, weft picks, design framework, border ends, putta numbers, and proper folding of the woven products to determine their quality (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8 — Quality checking

Uniqueness

1. Blend of Kora silk and cotton Yarns
2. Utilizing the water from the Western Ghats-originating Siruvani/Bhavani rivers ensures high-quality dyeing.
3. Tie and dye method used for border and body of the sari.
4. Specialty of Pallu and Putta design

Conclusion

Kovai Kora cotton sarees are a renowned traditional art of Tamil Nadu, recognized for their lightweight texture, durability, and complex motifs. Originating from Coimbatore, these sarees blend delicate cotton and silk threads, making them comfortable for everyday use yet exquisite enough for special events. Kovai Kora sarees are distinguished by their vivid color schemes, distinctive patterns, and finely woven borders, which are frequently influenced by Tamil and natural themes. Government programs and contemporary adaptations are among the measures used to preserve and promote Kovai Kora sarees, guaranteeing their continued relevance in the modern world while preserving their traditional qualities. As a symbol of Tamil Nadu's cultural identity, these sarees continue to enchant saree enthusiasts and uphold the region's rich textile legacy.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors have no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

JK and CP were the ones who first conceived and developed the concept. MJ, JH, and VK supported

and helped MR with field operations and data collecting during the experiment. JK, TV, and CP expertly edited and processed the document, contributing their knowledge to improve the content. JK and CP took charge of the manuscript writing process, incorporating insightful comments and critical criticism from all study participants.

Informed Consent

Informed Consent was obtained from all weaver's who participated in this survey based study.

Data Availability

The Pictures and tables supporting the results of this study are included within the article, and the original database are available from the first author or the corresponding author upon request.

Glossary

1. Ratta – Charkha
2. Achu – Reed
3. Paavu – Warp
4. Oodu – Weft
5. Kongu region – Kongu Nadu is a region comprising the north-western part of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.
6. Devangar – Deva – God; Anga – Body
7. Irulas – Forest Dwellers
8. Kosars – Name of the tribe
9. Putta – Small motifs in the body and pallu

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