

Study & Documentation of
Balaramapuram Sarees & Fine
Cotton fabrics:
The Pride of God's Own Country



**Textiles Committee
Ministry of Textiles
Government of India
Mumbai**

Chapter I

History of Handlooms

1.1 Handloom weaving in South India

The Handloom weaving has been an industry of prime importance for centuries in India. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were a period of unquestioned prosperity, whereas the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have seen certain significant changes in the structure and organization of this industry. A number of historians have documented the production and trading systems pertaining to handloom cloth in earlier centuries. The Coromandel Coast as a whole and Masulipatnam fabrics in particular had achieved world-renowned name in the history of handlooms. It is well established that production was not only for an insular rural market, but also catered to a sizeable export demand. For example, the chintz or checked rumalls of Masulipatnam were in great demand not only in India, but also in Persia and Europe. Muslins and calicos too were important items of production and formed a significant component of trade.

It was this textile trade that the British sought to control in South India. It has been observed that while local merchants used to link weavers with the export market earlier, “as deliberate colonial policy the English sought to use their power to alter the conditions of production of handloom textiles and to transform existing relations between producers and middlemen” (Arasaratnam, 1990:190). This gave rise to major alterations in the organization of production itself. Rather than deal directly with weavers themselves or use the existing marketing intermediaries, the East India Company appointed ‘Gumasthas’ as mediators in the process of accessing cloth. The system worked through advances and contracts, where money was advanced to the intermediary rather than to weavers directly. A well-established trading system thus took shape in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, formalizing the dealings between the Company and the intermediaries. Records and studies of maritime trade reveal the importance of the handloom industry in that period. As the export demand increased, it is said that traditional weavers scaled up export-oriented production, and cut down on weaving coarser fabric for the domestic market. This lacuna was

filled by the entry of individuals from non-weaving castes, especially those from the lower-castes. What is incontestable, however, is the great degree of mobility and flux that characterized workers in this industry, into the twentieth century as well.

1.2 Handloom History of Kerala

It was during the 15th century, the British, French and Portuguese people visited Kerala. The things like spices, ivory and the beauty of handloom fabrics attracted them. They began to purchase large quantities of these products and exported to their countries. The German people based at the northern part of the present state have established a mission called 'Basal mission' in 1829. This mission paved the way for changing the home production of handloom fabrics to factory system.

After the British captured India, they took up and nourished the handloom industry for their purpose. At the end of the 18th century, the monopoly came to an end and since 19th century, with the advent of industrial revolution, the English people gave up patronising the handloom industry. They started mechanical production of fabrics in their land. During the dawn of 20th century, the Sree Narayana movement influenced Kerala society by and large prompting the caste based culture to change towards secular and modern industrious culture so that many people from traditional Thiyya/Ezhava community had taken up their employment in Handloom Industry to do away with the toddy tapping to respond with the advice of Sree Narayana Guru. These changes also have its own mark in making the present shape of Kerala Handloom Industry and resulted in the production of various types of artistic handloom goods in Kerala.

The 'Kerala kasavu sarees' have special reputation all over India for its fineness of count and natural colours, texture and gold borders. Kerala is also known for its unbleached cotton handloom crepe popularly known as 'kora' cloth, which captured the foreign market and occupied a proud place.

1.3 Profile of the State

Among the Traditional Industries of Kerala, Handloom sector stands second to the coir industry in providing employment to the tune of 1.75 lakh persons. The Industry in the State is highly concentrated in Thiruvananthapuram and Kannur districts. Palakkad, Kozhikode, Thrissur, Ernakulam, Kollam and Kasargod districts also have some concentration of the Industry. Out of the total number of looms, the co-operative sector, consists of both factory type and cottage type societies, occupies 94 per cent and the rest by entrepreneurs. Lungi, Grey sari, Furnishing material and Dhoti are the major handloom items produced in the state and which accounts 67 per cent of the total production in the Industry. The Southern region of the state consisting the districts of Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam produces 54 per cent of the major handloom items followed by the North region (Kannur, Kozhikode & Kasaragod districts) with 32 per cent and Central region (consisting of Ernakulam, Palakkad & Thrissur districts) with 14 per cent. The overall production of cloth in Kerala shows a marginal increase of 0.10 million meters from 62.38 million meters in 2005-06 to 62.48 million meters in 2006-07. Out of the total handloom production in the state, 96.11 per cent is from the co-operative sector and the rest, 3.89 per cent is from the units in the entrepreneurial sector. The state government has recently launched several schemes to promote the handloom industry in the state. One such scheme “Uniform made of Handloom Clothes to School Children” stipulates that the school children should wear clothes made of Handloom fabric at least one working day in a week. The scheme is expected to generate employment to at least 20000 weavers and to some extent to keep the traditional heritage of the state. Another project called “Kerala Thanimaykku Kaithari”, under which Government officials would be required to wear handloom clothes at least one working day in a week.

Kerala is one among the smaller states in terms of the area, which is only 1.3 per cent of the total area of India. The state is a 600 km. long strip of land along the south-west coast of India, between the Arabian Sea to its west, Western Ghats in the east, the state of Karnataka in the north and north-east, Tamil Nadu in the south-east and south. With a coastline of about 550 km. long, Kerala is a narrow stretch of green land, with an average width of only 70 km. The state is divided into three natural geographic regions called the highlands, the midlands and the lowlands. The

state situated at the southern part of India between 8° 18' and 12° 48' north latitude and 74° 52' and 77° 24' east longitude, extends over an area of 38,863 sq. km.

The state of Kerala was formed on 1st November 1956. Prior to the formation of the state, in the year 1949, the two major princely states of Travancore and Kochi were merged into a single state known as “Thiru-Kochi”. Under the States Reorganisation Act, where the states of India were organised on the basis of the language, the present Kerala state was formed. The four Tamil speaking southern



taluks of Travancore were separated from Kerala and the Malabar region of the then Madras state and the Kasargod taluk of South Canara district of Karnataka were added to the Thiru-Kochi while constituting the state of Kerala. The present Kerala State consists of three main regions along the south-north direction called Travancore, Kochi and Malabar. Travancore region consists of the southern districts; Kochi consists of the districts of the central region, and the northern districts constitute the Malabar

region.

Census 2001 indicates the state population at 31.84 million consisting of 15.47 million males and 16.37 million females with a decadal growth of 9.42 per cent. Kerala has the lowest population growth rate in comparison with other states in India (India’s decadal growth rate: 21.34 %). The density of population for Kerala is 819 people per sq. km. whereas the same for the country is 324 persons per sq. km. There are about 6.73 million households in the state with an average family size of 4.73. More than 74 per cent of the people are living in the rural areas and about 26 per

cent inhibit in the urban parts of the state. Kerala has a unique position with regard to sex ratio. The sex ratio has increased from 1028 females per 1000 males in 1951 to 1058 in 2001. This is the only state where sex ratio is above the equality ratio, which is contrary to all India pattern. With regard to literacy, the state's position is at the top among all states with 90.92 per cent. The literacy rate of the male and female are 94.20 per cent and 87.86 per cent respectively as compared to the all India figures of 75.85 per cent for male and 54.16 per cent for female. The male-female differential in literacy rate is 6.34 in Kerala as against the all India figure of 21.69 per cent.

1.4 Status of the Industry

The handloom sector in Kerala employs about 1.75 lakh people and this industry stands second to the coir industry in providing employment amongst the traditional industries of the state. The total number of weavers of the state is estimated at 1,35,750 and the employment generated is 485 man-days in lakhs. The handloom industry is mainly concentrated in Thiruvananthapuram and Kannur districts and in some parts of Kozhikode, Palakkad, Thrissur, Ernakulam, Kollam and Kasargod districts. About 94 percent of the total looms in Kerala are working under the co-operative fold and entrepreneurs own the remaining six percent of the looms. The co-operative sector consists of factory type and cottage type societies. As per the latest available statistics (March 2007), there are about 758 Primary Handloom Weaving Co-operative Societies (PHWCS), of which 155 are factory type societies and the rest are cottage societies.

Of the total number of 50315 handlooms in the state, the share of Thiruvananthapuram and Kannur districts are 44 percent and 22 percent respectively. There are 73 registered co-operative weavers' societies and 79 private handloom units in Kannur whereas in Thiruvananthapuram, there are 363 handloom weaver co-operative societies. The major varieties produced in the handloom sector of the state are Dhoti, Sari, Grey Sari and Furnishing material. It is estimated that these items constitute around 67 percent of the total handloom production. The total production of cloth in the handloom sector is estimated at 62.48 million linear metres worth Rs. 281.16 crores in 2006-07, an increase of 0.10 million linear metres in 2005-06. Of the total production, 96 percent is contributed by the co-operative sector and the remaining 4 percent is produced by the entrepreneurial sector.

1.5 Major Handloom Clusters of Kerala

At present, Kerala has 14 districts stretched from Thiruvananthapuram in the southern end to Kasargod in the northern end. Even though the handloom industry is spread in all the districts of the state, it is concentrated in certain important clusters. The southern Kerala or the *Travancore* region is famous for its superfine cotton products, like Sarees, Dhothies and 'Set mundu' etc., the middle part of Kerala, the *Cochin* region also engaged with such products. But while going to the northern belt of Kerala, also called *Malabar* region, the main production is of coarser varieties like furnishing materials, bed-spreads, towels etc. The common products in all the clusters are 'Thorthu' (Bathing towel) and Lungies. The major handloom clusters of Kerala are Balaramapuram/Thiruvananthapuram of the Travancore region, Koothampalli and Chendamangalam of the Cochin region and Kannur, Kasargod and Kozhikode of the Malabar region.

1.6 Thiruvananthapuram / Balaramapuram

Balaramapuram, in Thiruvananthapuram district is one of the most historically important places for fine cotton handloom fabrics in Kerala. The weavers belong to the Saliya community were migrated from Nagarcoil and Thirunelveli of the present Tamil Nadu. They produced super fine 'Mundum Neriyaathum' for the need of the Travancore royal family. (*Mundu*: A loin cloth or say *Dhoti* used to cover the lower part of the body. *Neriyathu*: A fine textured cloth used to cover the upper part of the body.) The technique of producing the superfine fabric spread from them to the local weavers in Balaramapuram and the surrounding places of the Thiruvananthapuram district. Initially they were producing 'Mundu' for men with 0.4cm of width of 'kara' (cross border) with black garn. Even before 100 years the Zari from Surat were brought to Balaramapuram and 'Kasavu Sarees' production was started.

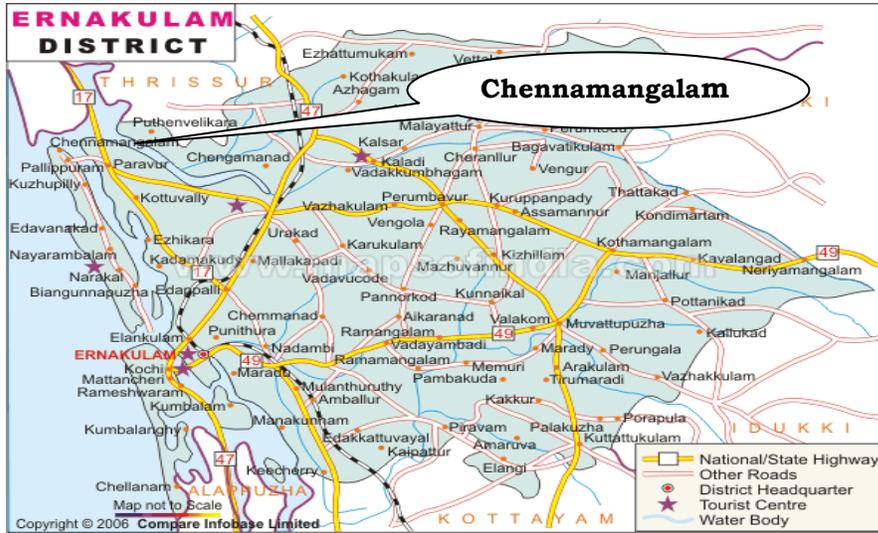
1.7 Koothampalli (Thrissur District)

Koothampalli in Thrissur district is also well known for handloom weaving. The Devangas immigrated from Karnataka state are engaged in the weaving activities here. The 'Kasavu Sarees', which are being produced here, is mostly with half-fine zari. The middle class people are normally the consumers of these types of the sarees

because of its cheapness. The price of a saree can be reduced by about 80 per cent by using half fine zari instead of the pure zari.

1.8 Chennamangalam (Ernakulam District)

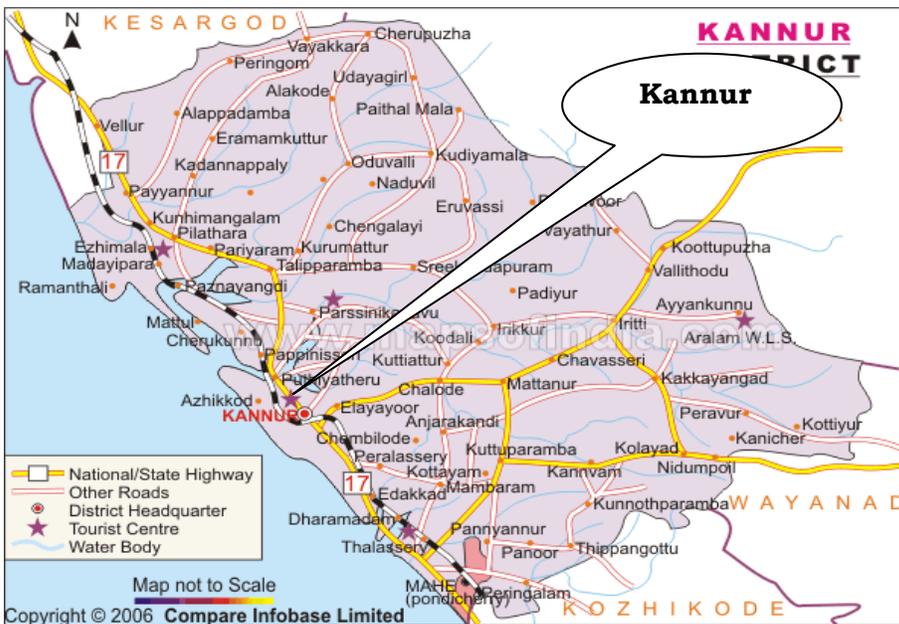
Chennamangalam, in the Ernakulam district is also an important handloom centre in Kerala. This cluster mainly concentrate on the production of traditional



items such as set-mundu, thorthu, kavani, set sarees, dhotis, and so on. The distinction of these fabrics is in its structure in the plain direction, they have producing a special effect in weft direction.

1.9 Kannur (Kannur District)

Kannur – the land of looms and lores- is situated towards the northern part of



Kerala, popularly known as the Malabar region. The evolution of the industry in Kannur and surrounding areas can be traced from the records of the Basel Mission Activities. Legend also exists that the Chirakkal Rajas of Kannur brought

weaver families from the traditional weaving communities of Saliya from other regions

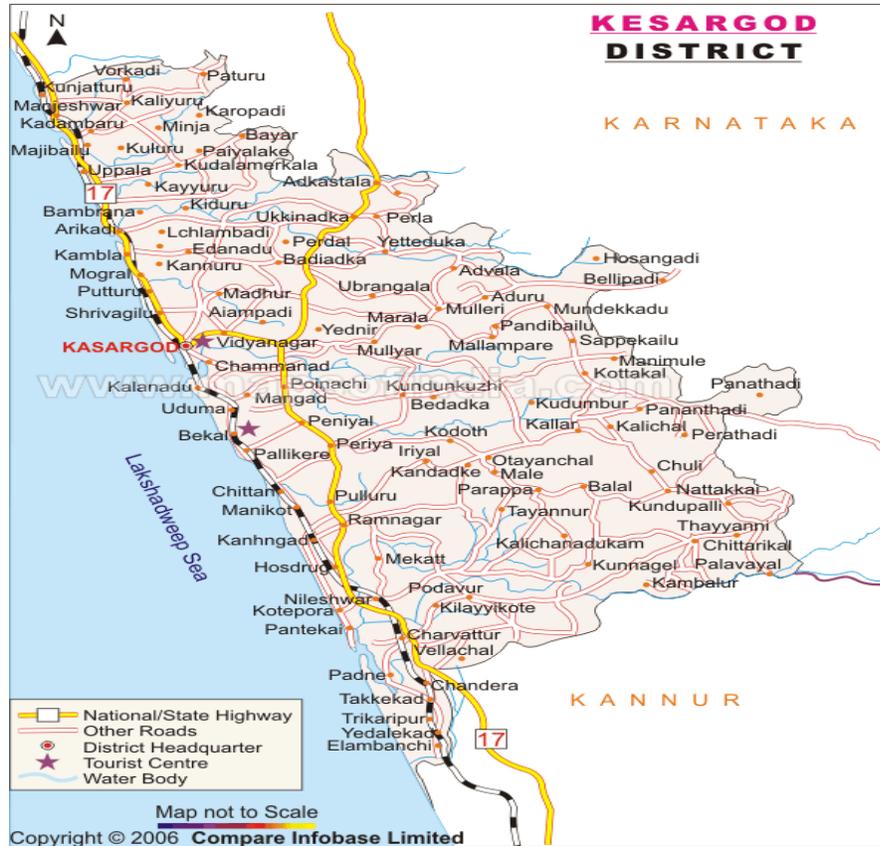
and settled them in colonies. Though Basel Mission commenced its activities in India in 1834 at Mangalore, weaving was taken up only in 1844. Weaving establishments in early days were attached to the Mission house itself.

Later establishments were started at Kannur (1852) and Calicut (1859). By 1913, both these establishments had huge complexes with over 600 workers each. In 1911, for better management, these were merged under the name Basel Mission United Weaving Establishment. It was Basel Missionaries who introduced frame looms in Kannur. Also the introduction of fly shuttle looms, jacquard looms (1872) by the missionaries helped the weavers of Kannur widen the range of their products. They were mainly tablecloths, napkins, handkerchiefs, cotton check shirts, superior damask linen and so on. Later, furnishing and upholstery fabrics for which the industry is now well-known came into being. It became more and more specialized in export-oriented production. The Basel Missionaries also pioneered the introduction of the concept of integrated handloom factories, which is still predominantly in vogue in this region.

The uniqueness and speciality of the furnishing fabrics from Malabar region is the excellent structure and texture of the cloth, unique colour combinations, wider width (98"-120") and craftsmanship. Handloom cloths of excellent qualities were exported to Asian and European countries through Vascoda Gama, the Portuguese navigator who visited Calicut in Malabar in 1498, much before the arrival of the British in India.

1.10 Kasargod (Kasargod District)

Kasargod is the north most district of Kerala is a traditional handloom cluster famous for *Kasargod Sarees*. Kasargod and Mancheswaram are the main handloom weaving centres of this cluster. Kasargod sarees, the masterpieces made with high quality yarn using traditional hand-made methods, are very famous in Kerala and has very good demand for the silk sarees woven with different colour patterns, designs and ornamented with zari or borders. The weaving is done in a unique style by giving care to the thread and hence they are very strong and prevent fading of the colour. These kind of handwork and style cannot be seen anywhere in India apart from Kasargod sarees.



1.11 State Domestic Product and Per capita Income

The estimate of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) at factor cost at constant prices (1999-2000) is Rs. 1,06,832.73 crore during 2006-07 as against the provisional estimate of Rs. 98,817.08 crore during 2005-06, registering a growth rate of 8.1 per cent in 2006-07. At current prices the Gross State Domestic Product is estimated at Rs. 1,32,738.53 crore (quick estimate) during 2006-07 as against the provisional estimate of Rs. 118998.19 crore during 2005-06. The growth rate at current prices is 11.6 per cent in 2006-07 compared to 11.2 per cent in 2005-06.

The quick estimate of Net State Domestic Product (State Income) at factor cost at constant (1999-2000) prices is Rs. 92119.77 crore during 2006-07 compared to the provisional estimate of Rs. 85759.29 crore during 2005-06 recording a growth rate of 7.4 per cent in 2006-07. At current prices the State Income is estimated at Rs. 113475.14 crore (quick estimate) in 2006-07 compared to the provisional estimate of Rs.102508.19 crore during 2005-06. The growth rate of State Income at current prices is 10.7 per cent in 2006-07 compared to 11.2 per cent in 2005-06.

The per capita Gross State Domestic Product at constant (1999-2000) prices during 2006-07 is Rs.31642 compared to Rs.31438 during 2005-06. The growth rate in per capita GSDP is estimated at 0.65 per cent during 2006-07. At current prices the per capita GSDP during 2006-07 is Rs.39315 as against Rs.35602 during 2005-06 registering a growth rate of 10.4 per cent.

The per capita state income at constant (1999-2000) prices increased from Rs. 25657 in 2005-06 to Rs. 27284 in 2006-07, registering a growth rate of 6.3 percent. At current prices the per capita state income during 2006-07 is Rs. 33609 as against Rs.30668 during 2005-06, recording a growth rate of 9.6 percent in 2006-07. The per capita state income is higher than the per capita national income of Rs. 22483.

Chapter II

Balaramapuram Handloom Industry

2.1 History of the cluster

A major handloom cluster, Balaramapuram is a small village in Thiruvananthapuram district of south Kerala, which is famous for fine cotton sarees and dress materials. The Balaramapuram sarees are well known for its simplicity and worn as a traditional costume by the women folk of Kerala. It is woven from un-dyed natural cotton, that compliments the tropical climate of Kerala. It is usually a cream stretch of cloth with "Kasavu" (exquisite embroidery work created from silver wires coated with gold) borders.

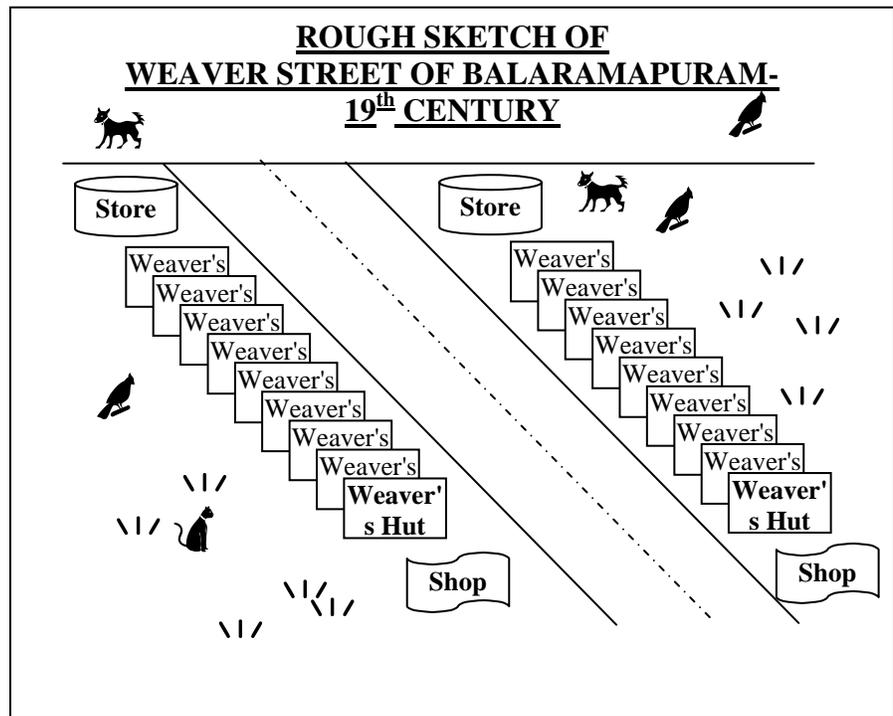
The history of handloom weaving in Balaramapuram dates back to about 200 years ago and is associated with the royal family of *Travancore* (or *Thiruvithamkur* in Malayalam). The then princely state of *Travancore* with its capital at Thiruvananthapuram (also known as Trivandrum) comprised of most of the southern parts of the present Kerala and the modern Nagarcoil and Kanyakumari districts of Tamil Nadu. The Dewan (the Chief Minister) of the then Maharaja, His Highness Maharaja Balarama Varma (from 1798 to 1810), Shri. Ummini Thampi during his reign, brought weaving families from Valliyoor, in Tirunalveli District of the present Tamilnadu state. They belonged to the *Shalia* or *Chalia* community and were brought to weave and supply cloths to the members of the royal family. The King allotted separate streets to them and gave financial assistance initially to start the business.(T.K. Velu Pillai, 1940; Nagam Aiya, 1906; Sreedhara Menon, 1962; Pattom G. Ramachandran, 1996)

Subsequently, Maharaja Balarama Varma, on the advice of his Dewan, Shri. Ummini Thampi, converted Balaramapuram and its surrounding places into an agro-based industrial belt with various traditional industries such as handicrafts, handloom weaving, oil extraction, etc. Separate streets were formed at identified places with better infrastructure for development. The length and width of these streets are well designed and constructed to facilitate warping and sizing in the street itself. Market places were also opened at

convenient locations to market the products conveniently. It is due to the earnest and sincere efforts made by His Highness Maharaja Balarama Varma by whose name the place Balaramapuram is presently known; the handloom weaving has become popular and developed into an important industry.

The uniqueness was that the width and length of the well-laid path of this street was so constructed to facilitate warping and sizing in the street itself. Today all communities live in these streets though now occupied mainly by Vaaniya, Mukkuva, Chetty, Muslim and Saliyas. Ezhava community has also now become an important part of weaving and other pre-loom activities though Muslims exclusively do sizing. In any case, handloom weaving has been initiated in Balaramapuram and surrounding areas in the 19th century itself.

The weaving activity and the economic benefit derived out from the production and sale of cotton handloom clothes in Balaramapuram based on the traditional reputation was no longer confined to the members of the traditional *Shalia* community. The handloom industry in Balaramapuram today provide jobs to thousands of families belonging



to different castes and communities like Ezhava, Nadar, Nair, Mukkuva, and others, mostly belonging to the weaker sections of the society. Today all communities live in these streets though now occupied mainly by Vaaniya, Mukkuva, Chetty, Muslim and

Saliyas. Ezhava community has also now become an important part of weaving and other pre-loom activities though Muslims exclusively do the sizing.

Thus the reputation of the name of Balaramapuram handloom products acquired by the *Shalia* community has now been enjoyed by a large number of people especially those belonging to economically and educationally backward sections. Balaramapuram handlooms have gained good markets not only in Kerala and nearby States but are exported in limited quantities to the Middle East countries also where large numbers of Keralites are working.

Presently there are 363 registered co-operative handloom societies, 21687 looms and 45598 registered weavers in Thiruvananthapuram District. Balaramapuram is the main hub of the handloom weaving and related activities in the district.

2.2 Location of the cluster



Balaramapuram, in Thiruvananthapuram district is the most historically important place for handloom fabrics in Kerala. Due to the patronage of the Maharajas of the erstwhile Travancore state and the subsequent support of the Kerala government after independence, the industry has spread to the neighbouring areas and more and more people have opted handloom weaving as their main livelihood. By this time, the technique of producing the superfine fabric spread from the weaving Saliya community to

Thiruvananthapuram District

Area - 2192 (Sq.km)
 Population - 32,34,356 (Census 2001)
 Males - 15,69,917 ”
 Females - 16,64,439 ”
 Sex Ratio - 1058(*Females per 1000 Males*) ”
 Density of population - 1476 ”
 No. of Households - 7,59,382
 Per capita Income - 20,484 ”
 Literacy Rate - 89.36% ”
 Males - 92.68% ”
 Females - 86.26% ”
 Costal line - 78 km
 District Panchayat - 01
 Block Panchayats - 12
 Grama Panchayats - 78
 Villages - 120
 Corporation - 01
 Municipalities - 04
 Taluks - 04

the local weavers in Balaramapuram and the surrounding places. The handloom industry at those days was largely household-based, carried out with labour contributed by the entire family. Later it dispersed, spread across the villages of the southern part of the district.

| Sr. No. | Blocks of HL Weaving |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Nemom |
| 2 | Athiyannoor |
| 3 | Parassala |
| 4 | Perinkadavila |
| 5 | Kazhakkoottom |
| 6 | Vamanapuram |
| 7 | Chirayinkil |

Balaramapuram is located along National Highway-47 at a distance of 15 km south-east of Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum), the capital city of Kerala and 25 km north of Kaliyikkavila, the southern boundary of the state. Balaramapuram lies 77 degree 2 minutes east longitude and 8 degree 25 minutes north latitude. The district lies between 8° 17' and 8° 54' north latitudes and between 76° 41' and 77° 17' east longitudes.

The important areas of handloom weaving in the district are given in the table.

2.3 The Products

The products of Balaramapuram/Thiruvananthapuram Cluster are Sarees (Grey & Dyed), *Set Mundu*, Dhotis and Dress materials. The installed capacity of production per day is about 1,10,000 mts. (total looms 22,000 and the average production calculated per day per loom is about 5 mts.)

Chapter III

Production Process

3.1 Introduction

A number of preparatory processes and accessories have to be adopted to convert the yarn in the hank form into a warp beam suitable for weaving in the loom. The processes adopted in different clusters are similar but for some minor alternations. The various pre-loom activities involved in the production of handloom products are discussed below.

3.1.1 Raw Material

The basic raw material of the cluster is cotton yarn, procured in the form of hank by the co-operative societies/weavers / master weavers from the local yarn dealers or through the yarn bank or from state level agencies like *The Kerala State Handloom Weavers Co-operative Society Ltd.* (HANTEX) and *Kerala State Handloom Development Corporation* (HANVEEV). Nowadays cotton yarn is procured in the form of sized beam also. Besides cotton yarn, the cluster also uses golden or half-fine zari for designing and for border and cross-border. In some cases, coloured yarn (dyed yarn) is also used for border and cross-border. The cotton combed yarn procured are of 100^s, 80^s etc. Cotton yarn of count 120^s is also used in the cluster.

3.1.2 Curing & Washing

The first activity in the production process is to cure the yarn meant for the warp in water to remove the impurities and cleaning. This will help to carry out the subsequent processes smoothly. The same is again get washed in normal water and dried before taking up for further processes. In most of the cases, the weft yarn does not undergo the process of boiling.

3.1.3 Winding

Winding is a process of transferring yarn from one type of package to another



hank to bobbin. The yarns for the warp and for the weft are separately taken up for winding. The yarn is normally received by the weavers in the hank form. The

yarn in the hank form is converted into bobbins by the winding process. In case of



warp yarns, recently the manual process has been replaced by a motorized machine. Once the winding is over, the yarn in the bobbin form is taken up for further processes. On the other hand, the yarn which is

used in the weft does not require any further processing and hence it is wound into a

pirn with the help of a small, hand-driven charkha and is called pirn winding. Pirn winding is the process of transferring the yarns from the hanks into bobbin/pirn in the shuttle used in the weft while weaving. The yarn in the form of pirn or the zari, wherever is required, is used in the weft while weaving.

3.1.4 Warping



The warping is a process of making desired length and width of warp sheet by combining many small packages called bobbins/spools. 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 package. The process of warping used in Balaramapuram is known as vertical sectional warping. The vertical sectional warping process is carried on a wooden drum from a wooden peg creel. A suitable frame called bobbin creel to hold the required number of bobbins in such a way that the yarns from them can be drawn separately without touching each other. The bobbins are put on the creel and the required number of yarn is then drawn through a comb to the wooden drum. The warped yarn is then taken to the next process called sizing.

3.1.5 Sizing

Sizing is a process where starch (sago or boiled Rice or Khoi or Kanji) is coated on the warp yarns for imparting strength; enhance abrasion resistance to withstand



the stress and strains exerted during weaving process. In Balaramapuram, the traditional method of ‘street warping’ and ‘brush sizing’ is practised.

Natural materials such as rice starch, coconut oil and

rice gruel form the important ingredients for sizing. Sizing is required for cotton



yarn by using the residue after rice preparation called “Kanji” in local language by the help of a sizing brush. The sizing is normally done in the streets earmarked for it. The process of

sizing reduces the yarn breakage and improves quality and efficiency of weaving.



Although the yarn is sized and dried in the sheet form, in which the individual threads are lying in a parallel condition, the threads are not free from

sticking to one another. To rectify this defect, dividing rods, i.e. lease rods are used to effect separation of the threads. A brush is used to brush the yarn during the process of sizing.

3.1.6 Beaming & Preparation of Loom



The process of transferring warp sheet to a weavers beam to mount on loom is called beaming. All these processes are carried out by manually without using power. The process of beaming is followed by looming, which finally prepares the loom beam for

weaving. Preparation of loom is broadly classified in to two categories of work, known

as Drafting and Denting. Drafting is the process of passing the warp yarn through the heald of the loom as per the design. This helps to keep the warp yarn in parallel form over the width of the loom and in locating a broken yarn during the process of weaving. In the case of denting the warp yarns are passed through the reeds and the healds. The warp threads are then joined with the old warp threads with a local method of twisting by hands.

3.2 Weaving

Pit looms are the most widely used handlooms in Balaramapuram/Thiruvananthapuram cluster for producing the traditional varieties. These are of two



types; throw shuttle pit looms and fly shuttle pit looms. The Balaramapuram pit loom is of simple construction and there is no wooden super structure to support its parts. The sley is of light construction with provision to hold bamboo reeds. The

shuttle used is peculiar and is made of bamboo instead of horn or wood. The finest varieties of fabrics, known for their beautiful designs and textures with pure zari are produced on throw shuttle pit looms. As the name implies, the loom stands over a pit and the process of picking is done by throwing the shuttle across the shed by hand and beaten by suspended sley. Since there is no beatings involved in the weaving in throw shuttle looms, it is the most suitable looms for products with pure zari. Besides, these types of looms are also suitable for using lace-weaving technique, a technique for creating designs in the fabric with extra warp or weft. The fly shuttle pit looms are also popular in this cluster. But this looms are not used for finer counts of yarn and also products with pure zari. Though the productivity of the fly shuttle looms are 3 to 4 times more than that of an ordinary throw shuttle loom, but is unable to produce intricate extra weft figured patterns without the help of dobbies

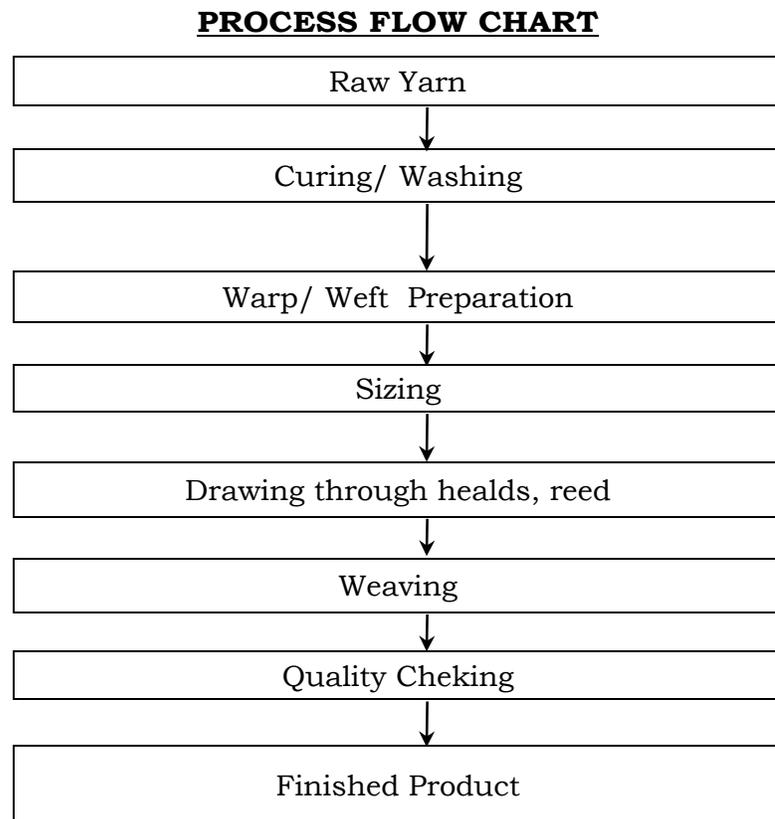
and jacquards. For products other than the traditional varieties in fine cotton fabrics, the weavers are using frame looms in this cluster.

3.3 Quality Checking & Packing

The quality of the woven products are checked thoroughly and taken up for packing. First it is folded properly and then packed according to the specification. Women are mostly employed for these activities.



The flow chart of the production process is given below:



Chapter IV

Product Profile

4.1 Introduction

There are 363 handloom primary societies and factory type societies with the total coverage of 22000 looms and about 26000 weaver members in the district. The production programme in these societies is not scientific or systematic and they do not follow a demand-oriented production and supply system.

The quality of the cotton and the comfort one enjoys by wearing these hand-woven products are the major attractions of “Balaramapuram Handlooms”. Since the equipments they use for weaving is different from others, the weaving community could identify the duplicates of their products at a mere glance. The large number of people involved in the weaving and the reputation of the product is a clear indication that the name “Balaramapuram Handloom” significantly contributes to the socio-economic conditions of these weavers. It is a fact that there are several duplicate handloom products and even power-loom cloths that are being sold using the name “Balaramapuram Handloom”.

4.2 Traditional Products

The major items manufactured from Balaramapuram are Grey Saree, Dhoti (also known as *Veshti* or *Mundu*), *Set Mundu* (*Pudava* & *Kavani* or *Mumdum Neriyathum*) and Ladies Dress Material (Punjabi Dress). These traditional products are woven with kora white cotton yarn (grey or unbleached or non-dyed yarn) of finer counts. The combination of Dhoti and shirt is the traditional outerwear of the adult male in Kerala. The traditional outerwear of the women folk is called *Set mundu*, a combination of *Dhoti* for covering the lower part of the body and Blouse and *Kavani* (or *Neriyathu*) to wrap around the upper portion of the body like dupatta. *Pudava* and *Kavani* is the traditional wedding dress of the brides in the southern part of the state. The *Set Mundu* has been replaced with Grey Saree and Ladies Dress Material.

The materials used for their weaving are cotton and *Kasavu* (or *Zari*). *Kasavu* is the Malayalam name of “Zari”; a silk thread twisted with a thin silver wire and dipped in pure gold. The cotton required for the manufacture of these items is procured from local markets and Tamilnadu and the *Kasavu* from Surat, a textile cluster reputed for making *Kasvu* in the Gujarat state. The quality of the products is not only connected with the processing of yarns and weaving but also for the equipments used for weaving. The “Reeds” in the weaving loom are made out of bamboo pieces. This, according to the traditional weavers, helps them to adjust the gap between yarns, which is very narrow when compared to the clothes manufactured using metal reeds. It is through the techniques of hand weaving and the particular nature of the looms used by the traditional weavers that make the product look very fine and comfortable for use and is connected with the geographical elements of Balaramapuram. It is these features that make the products from this place unique and reputed in the market.

The traditional Products of Balaramapuram / Thiruvananthapuram cluster are described below:

| Sr. No | Product | Specification |
|--------|---|---|
| 1 | Grey Saree OR Balaramapuram Saree  | Yarn: Cotton Grey Warp x Weft: 80s x 80s 100s x 100s 80s x 100s 100s x 80s Length: 5.5 mts.+ 90 cm for blouse Width: 48 / 46 inches Reed: 88s /96s /100s Picks/inch: 82-86s/ 96-100s 100-110s Border: pure zari/ half- fine zari / dyed yarn Cross Border: pure zari/ half- fine zari / dyed yarn Designs: Hand laced designs with pure zari / half-fine zari / dyed yarn |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| |  | |
| 2 | <p>Set Mundu OR Pudava & Kavani OR Mundum Neriyaathum</p>  | <p>Pudava</p> <p>Yarn: Cotton Grey</p> <p>Warp x Weft: 80s x 80s 100s x 100s 80s x 100s 100s x 80s</p> <p>Length: 2.5 mts.</p> <p>Width: 50 inches</p> <p>Reed: 88s /96s /100s</p> <p>Picks/inch: 82-86s/ 96-100s 100-110s</p> <p>Border: pure zari/ half- fine zari / dyed yarn</p> <p>Cross Border: pure zari/ half- fine zari / dyed yarn</p> <p>Kavani</p> <p>Yarn: Cotton Grey</p> <p>Warp x Weft: 80s x 80s 100s x 100s 80s x 100s 100s x 80s</p> <p>Length: 2.5 mts.</p> <p>Width: 42 inches</p> <p>Reed: 88s /96s /100s</p> <p>Picks/inch: 82-86s/ 96-100s 100-110s</p> <p>Border: pure zari/ half- fine zari / dyed yarn</p> |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | Cross Border: pure zari/ half-fine zari / dyed yarn |
| 3 | <p>Double Dhoti OR Mundu</p>  | <p>Yarn: Cotton Grey</p> <p>Warp x Weft: 80s x 80s 100s x 100s 80s x 100s 100s x 80s</p> <p>Length: 3.65/ 3.85/4 mts.</p> <p>Width: 52 inches</p> <p>Reed: 88s /96s /100s</p> <p>Picks/inch: 82-86s/ 96-100s 100-110s</p> <p>Border: pure zari/ half-fine zari / dyed yarn</p> <p>Cross Border: pure zari/ half-fine zari / dyed yarn</p> |
| 4 | <p>Kavani OR Neriyathu</p>  | <p>Yarn: Cotton Grey</p> <p>Warp x Weft: 80s x 80s 100s x 100s 80s x 100s 100s x 80s</p> <p>Length: 2.5 mts.</p> <p>Width: 42 inches</p> <p>Reed: 88s /96s /100s</p> <p>Picks/inch: 82-86s/ 96-100s 100-110s</p> <p>Border: pure zari/ half-fine zari / dyed yarn</p> <p>Cross Border: pure zari/ half-fine zari / dyed yarn</p> |
| 5 | Ladies Dress Material | <p>Yarn: Cotton Grey</p> <p>Warp x Weft: 2/80s x 2/80s 2/60s x 2/60s</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
|  | Length: 2.5 mts. Width: 48 inches Reed: 80s /88s Picks/inch: 82-86s Border: pure zari/ half-fine zari / dyed yarn Cross Border: pure zari/ half-fine zari / dyed yarn Shawl Yarn: Cotton Grey Warp x Weft: 80s x 80s 100s x 100s 80s x 100s Length: 2.5 mts. Width: 40 inches Reed: 80s / 88s Picks/inch: 82-86s Border: pure zari/ half-fine zari / dyed yarn Cross Border: pure zari/ half-fine zari / dyed yarn |
| | |

4.3 Production pattern of Balaramapuram/Thiruvananthapuram cluster

The production pattern of the handloom sector in the Balaramapuram cluster according to the varieties is as follows:

| Variety | Production in % |
|--|-----------------|
| Grey saree (Zari saree, Border saree) | 20 |
| Double Dhoti | 65 |
| <i>Pudava & Kavani / Matching set/ Set Mundu</i> | 15 |
| Cotton Shirting | 15 |
| Bed sheet, pillow cover | 20 |
| Plain Cloth for printing | 15 |
| Lungi, Single Dhoti | 15 |
| Towels, Thorthu | 15 |
| Furnishing material | 5 |
| Dress materials | 15 |

4.4 Diversified Products

Also there are looms in the district that are engaged in the production of generic products, which can be very easily produced or copied by power looms.



Dyed Dhoti & Shirt



Other Dyed Sarees

Chapter V

Uniqueness

5.1 Introduction

Handloom creations are products of the artistic traditions of the area of production. The excellence of the fruit of the labour lies in the skill of the weaver and his ability to achieve a rapport with his equipment. Different geographical areas are renowned for its characteristic fabrics, which are the fruit of a long association between the weaver and the equipment and technique that he employs. The structure of the loom and the processes adopted to produce specific types of fabric are, therefore, subject to geographical variations.

- Throw/ Fly shuttle Pit looms
- Super combed cotton yarn of 80s, 100s
- Natural Grey Colour Yarn (no bleaching/ dyeing)
- Usage of Pure Zari / Half Fine Zari / Dyed yarn in the border & Cross border
- Designs with zari / dyed yarn through lace weaving
- horizontal ribs (cross bar effect) in the cross border of the product

The major items manufactured from Balaramapuram are Kasavu Sarees, Set Mundu (Pudava and Kavani), Dhoti (Mundu), Neriyaathu (Kavani) and Ladies Dress Material (Salwar Kurta). The materials used for the

weaving are cotton and Zari (*Kasavu*) or dyed yarn. The cotton required for the manufacture of these items is procured from the local market as well as from the neighbouring Tamilnadu and the *Kasavu* from Surat, a place reputed for making *Kasvu* in the State of Gujarat. The quality of the cotton and the comfort one enjoys by wearing these products are the major attractions of “Balaramapurm Handloom” products. Since the equipment they use for weaving is different from others the weavers could identify the duplicates of their products at a mere glance. The large number of people involved in the weaving and the reputation of the product is a clear indication that the name “Balaramapuram Handloom” significantly contributes to the socio-economic conditions of the weavers.

5.2 Raw material

The traditional handloom products of Balaramapuram are well known for its simplicity, use of natural materials and exquisite designs with unrivalled craftsmanship. These traditional handloom products are made out of the finest cotton yarn of counts 80^s and 100^s (super combed cotton yarn) with intricate designs. The yarn used is of natural grey colour and no dyes are used in the warp. Pure Gold zari, locally known as *kasavu*, is used for extra warp, extra weft and for making motifs in these products. However due to the exorbitant price of pure gold zari, the weavers are forced to seek other substitutes such as *half-fine zari* and *powerquilt* etc. in place of pure gold zari. Nowadays, dyed yarn is also used as a substitute to the pure gold zari.

5.3 Technology

The quality of the traditional products is connected with the equipments used



for weaving and also with the pre-loom activities.

Balaramapuram Handloom sector has the unique reputation of having the weaving facility for manufacturing finer count cotton combed yarn of count 80^s to 120^s. The types of looms, installed here are (i) Pit looms (two types) - (a) Throw shuttle pit looms, (b) Fly Shuttle pit looms; and (ii) Frame looms. Even though all these looms are in use for the production of traditional

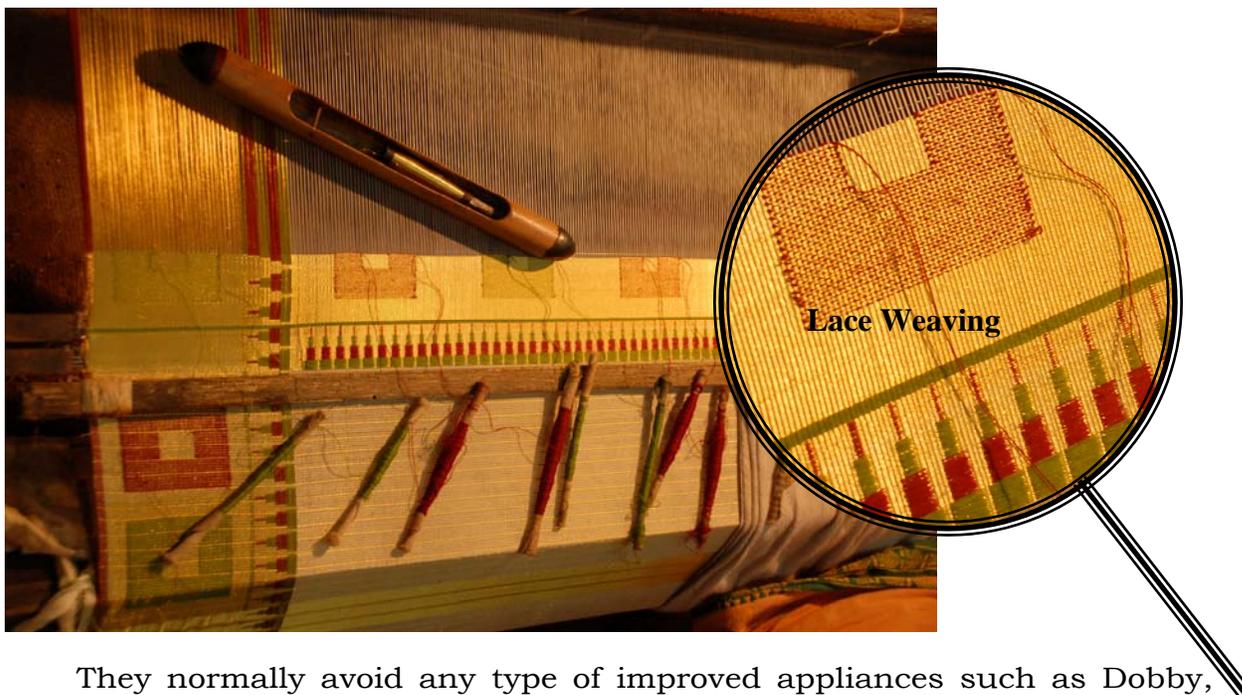
handloom products of the cluster/district, the weavers use primitive type throw-shuttle pit-looms for the production of exclusive cotton fabrics with pure zari. Another speciality is that the “Reeds” in the weaving loom are made out of bamboo pieces. This, according to the traditional weavers, helps them to adjust the gap between yarns, which is very narrow when compared to the clothes manufactured using metal reeds. Another reason for the use of bamboo reeds is that the pure gold zari, which is coated with pure gold, would get damaged due to the contact while weaving if metal reeds are used in the looms. The sley is of light construction with provision to hold bamboo reeds. The shuttle used is peculiar and is made of bamboo instead of horn or wood. It is through the techniques of hand weaving and the particular nature of the looms used by the traditional weavers that makes the product look very fine and comfortable for use. It is these features that make the products from this place unique and reputed in the market. No change has so far been taken place in the type of loom or technology of weaving in producing the traditional handloom varieties.

5.4 Production Methods

Sizing is a process by which a solution is applied to warps to protect the yarn from abrasion in the healds and reeds of the loom and to strengthen the yarn. In Balaramapuram, the traditional method of ‘street warping’ and ‘brush sizing’ is practised. Natural materials such as rice starch, coconut oil and rice gruel form the important ingredients for sizing. The street warping and sizing is carried out in separate streets designated for this purpose.

5.5 Weavers’ Skill

The skill of weavers in Thiruvananthapuram district varies from place to place and depends upon the variety they have been producing continuously and the type of looms used for weaving. As this district produces all varieties from Thorthu (bath towel) costing Rs. 10 to 20 per metre and costly fabrics with pure zari valued from Rs. 100 to 1500 per metre, the income of weavers will vary accordingly.

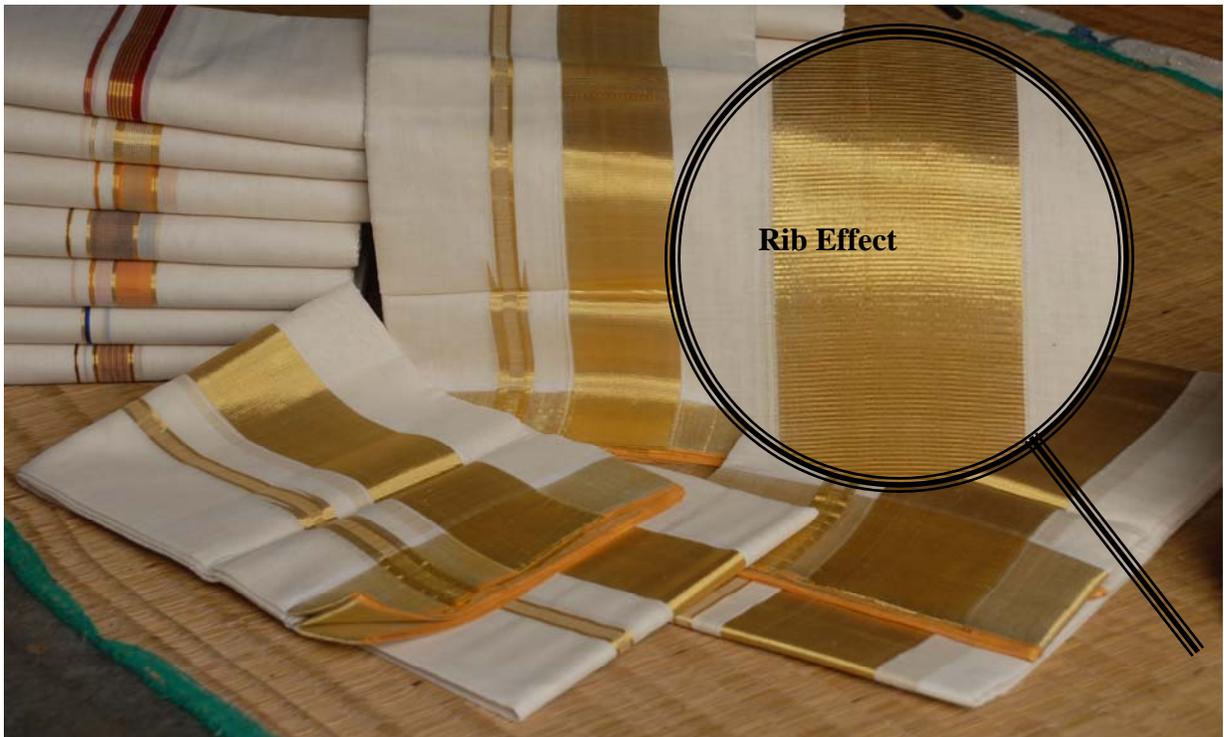


They normally avoid any type of improved appliances such as Dobby, Jacquard, Jala, etc. for making designs in the cloth. The weavers use a unique technique by which each end is separately controlled by hand to interlace with the weft wound in small pirns known as *lace weaving*. But the Butta and larger type extra weft designs are woven on the motif/pattern printed with wooden blocks using easily washable vegetable colours. The design is first etched on wooden blocks and then colour is introduced into it. While the cloth is being woven prints are made on it with the wooden blocks on it. Then, each motif has to be threaded individually by lace weaving by skilled weavers. This kind of work is easily distinguished from Jacquard/ jala designs as both sides of the fabric will have the same design and not merely an outline on the wrong side in case of lace weaving.

This type of unique weaving of finer count cotton fabrics with 100 percent pure zari is rampant in the cluster and also extensively used in the district also. The speciality of the lace weaving is that identical appearance of designs, including warp and weft stripes on the face and backside of the fabric is obtained by this technique of weaving. The designs with zari or coloured yarn, using the age-old technique still has an unparalleled appeal which can attract even the most sophisticated customers. The identical

appearance of the design on the face and backside of the fabric makes it unique and exclusive. This technique of laced weaving is practiced only at Balaramapuram and its surrounding places. For zari in the cross border of the fabric, rib weave is used with the help of treadle connected with extra cords. Due to this weave, there is a series of horizontal ribs (cross bar effect) in the cross border of the product. 'Balaramapuram' became the synonym for the above type of handloom fabrics.

Another speciality of the weaving in this cluster is the 'temple border' or 'puliylakkara' with *kuri* designs weaved into the fabric especially to the Dhoti, Saree and Set Mundu.





Chapter VI

Key Actors of the Cluster

6.1 Directorate of Handlooms & Textiles

The Directorate of Handlooms & Textiles is the state Government department under the Department of Industries dealing with administration and policy related issues of the textile industry including the handloom sector and implements various schemes of the central and state governments. A Director heads the directorate with its headquarters at Thiruvananthapuram. There are three regional offices headed by Regional Directors and the District Industries Centre (DIC) of each district is equipped with a separate cell for implementation of the programmes in the handloom sector.

6.2 District Industries Centre (DIC), Thiruvananthapuram

The District Industries Centre is the District Office located in each of the districts of the state, under the Directorate of Industries and Commerce, Government of Kerala. This office is acting as the main link between the Directorate of handlooms & textiles and the handloom societies at the grass root level. The mission of the District Industries Centres is industrial promotion with special emphasis on small Scale industrial sector, artisans involved in traditional Industrial sector such as hand loom, handicrafts etc. The District Industries Centre also plays the role of facilitator and act as a promotional agency with simplified systems.

6.3 Marketing agencies (HANTEX & HANVEEV)

Hantex and Hanveev are the two State level agencies dealing with the procurement and marketing of handloom fabrics. Hantex is an apex body of handloom co-operatives established for the supply of raw materials for the primary weaver's societies and for the marketing of their products. With its headquarters at Thiruvananthapuram, it has 152 sales depots, two weaving factories; two garment units and one cloth-processing unit under its fold. There are four regional offices working under this apex organization. The value of yarn purchased is Rs.5.39 crore

and value of cloth procured is Rs.6.39 crore during 2006-07 as against Rs.6.56 crore and Rs.7.11 crore respectively during the previous year. Out of the total produce of the societies, 80 per cent is marketed through Hantex and the rest is through own retail shops.

Kerala State Handloom Development Corporation (Hanveev) is another state controlled agency, which assists the handloom industry outside the purview of the co-operative fold. The Hanveev is acting as a link between the weavers and consumers and to eliminate the middlemen. The Corporation supplies raw materials to the weavers at a reasonable price and helps to market their products also. Presently, there are 33 production centres/ clusters and three regional offices at Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam and Kannur under the Corporation. The corporation has a strength of 6500 registered weavers under its fold. The sales turnover of the Corporation has been increased from Rs.1486.65 lakh in 2005-06 to Rs.1500.98 lakh in 2006-07. The accumulated loss of the Corporation has increased from Rs.2753.42 lakh in 2005-06 to Rs.3132.49 lakh in 2006-07.

6.4 Weavers Service Centre (WSC)

It is a central government organization under the Development Commissioner of Handlooms, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, situated at Kannur, Kerala. The basic role of this office is R&D support to the handloom industry and implementation of central schemes and organising training programmes in co-ordination with the state government. Presently the flagship programme is IHTP for imparting training in the field of Weaving, Designing, Dyeing & Market cum Managerial issues. New designs are developed and supplied on nominal rates to the industry.

6.5 National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC)

It is a public sector organization under the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. NHDC supplies the basic raw materials like Yarn & Dye stuffs at the Mill Gate prices to the organised sector of the Handloom Industry. The Primary Weaver Co-operative Societies (PWCS) are the major users of the Mill Gate Price Scheme. Besides, the supply of the raw material, training cum workshops on technical and managerial

issues related to the Handloom industry is also organised by them for effective linkages.

6.6 Textiles Committee

Textiles Committee is a statutory body under Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, with its regional office at Kannur, Kerala. It is a quality-promoting organisation in the Textiles Industry, providing following services under its umbrella:

- Export Promotion & Quality Appraisal in the textile sector
- Testing of Textiles
- Total Quality Management
- Cluster Development activities
- Market Research studies/ surveys

6.7 Institute of Handloom & Textile Technology (IHTT)

The Institute of Handloom and Textile Technology is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Industries, Government of Kerala and the nodal agency in the State for providing input of Science and Technology to the traditional Handloom Textile Industry. The Institute was established and registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 at Kannur in the year 1987.

This institute has been conducting short term courses in weaving and designing, dyeing, silk weaving, special training in jacquard weaving technology, fabric printing etc. The training activities are conducted on a need-based programme aimed at fulfilling the skilled human resources to the industry.

6.8 Government Polytechnic, Thiruvananthapuram

The Government polytechnic in Thiruvananthapuram is conducting diploma courses in weaving, dyeing and other pre and post weaving processes. This is the first institution in Thiruvananthapuram to offer technical training to equip the students to take up activities in the textile weaving and related activities.

6.9 Kerala Handloom weavers Welfare Fund Board, Thiruvananthapuram

This board is established with the objective of implementing the welfare measures of handloom weavers and workers and entrusted with the job of making policy initiatives for the welfare of the weaving community.

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Pre- weaving activities -Warping



Pre- weaving activities -Warping



Pre- weaving activities -Sizing



Pre- weaving activities -sizing



Pre- weaving activities – sizing



Pre- weaving activities - sizing



Pre- weaving activities sizing



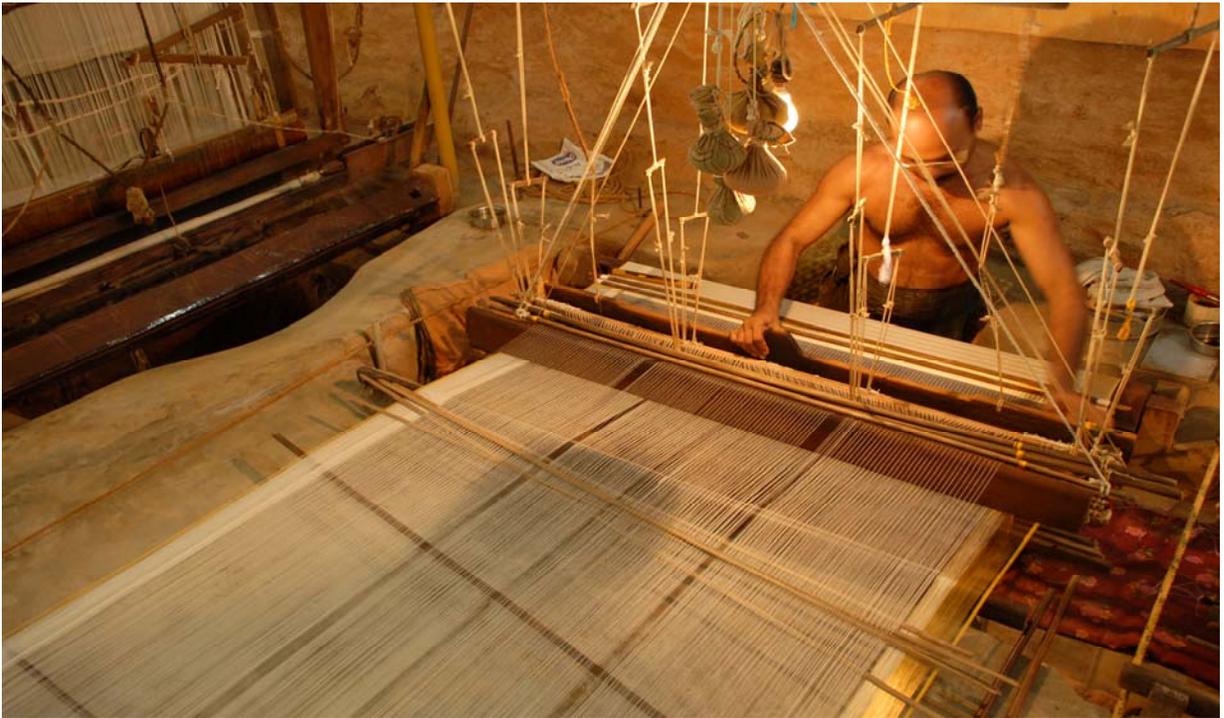
Pre- weaving activities – beam preparation



Weaving



Weaving



Quality checking & packing



Final products

