

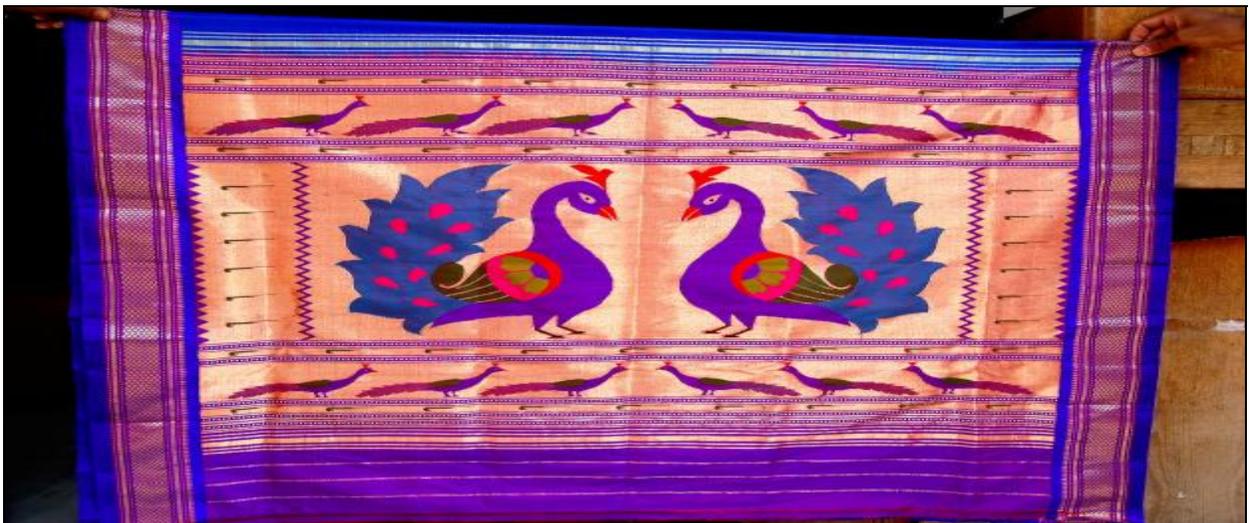
PAITHANI



Paithani – Maharashtrian Saree

The story of the classic Paithani Sari goes back 2000 years & despite the pressures of change, still survives, embodying the values of traditional pride, artistic dedication, indigenous culture & the eternal values of perfection.

Hold the fabric of this sari in your hands and feel it with your heart and you will realize its magic – woven with resplendent colours which glisten & dance like the feathers of a peacock. The flowers & patterns on its pallav seem to float on a river of molten gold, transporting you through the flues of time to long ago times as far back as 200 BC when it was considered precious in the then splendid city of Pratishthan ruled by the legendary Shalivahana (now Paithan by the Godavari in Marathawada, about 50 Km. from Aurangabad). At that time, the city was actually a trade center for silk & zari [gold yarn] & even exported cottons & silks to the Roman Empire. This fabric known as Paithani drew its name from the city.



Traditional Peacock Motifs on the border of a Paithani

At that time and after, the Paithani was exported to many countries and was traded in exchange for gold & precious stones. This tells us that the fabric was considered to be very precious. In fact, it was so special that it even found mention in some holy texts. There is a story in the 'Mahabharat' that when Draupadi, the Wife of the Five Pandavas, cut her finger accidentally, Lord Krishna, did not think before tearing a piece of his expensive 'Pitambara' just to tie her bleeding finger, a proof of how much he loved Draupadi.

Because of its preciousness, the fabric & the tradition survived, supported along the way. During the time of the Mughals the art of weaving this sari was encouraged & patronized by Aurangzeb, around the 17TH Century. In fact the 'Aurangzebi' designs that were specially developed for him are used even today.



Craftsmen Finishing the edge of a Sari

After the Mughals, it was the Great Peshwas who encourage this fascinating art. It is said that Madhavrao Peshwe, had special motifs & colour combinations designed exclusively for himself. He wore the fabric as a stole across his shoulders. Other Peshwa royalty also ensured that Paithani weaving flourished. Under their patronage, even Yeola, a small town near Nashik, became as important as Paithan. It was the Peshwas who encourages a feeling of pride in Paithani among Maharashtrians.

Gradually, the magic of the Paithani slowly spread to neighbouring regions & even the Nizam of Hyderabad came under its spell. Special motifs were created to suit the tastes of the Paithani's new found admirers.



A Few Saree Collections



Beauty & Elegance Personified

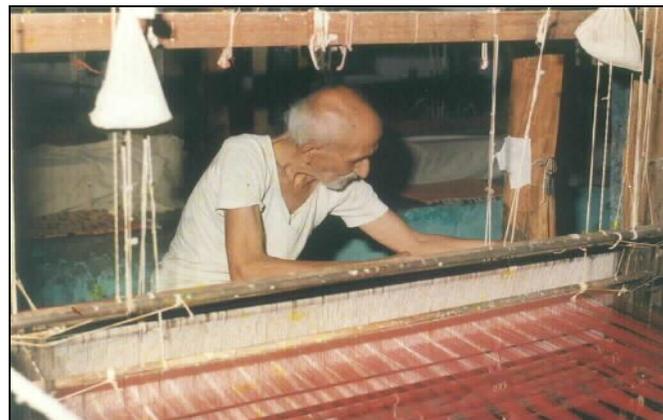
With the coming of the British Raj the art of the Paithani suffered a setback perhaps in the same way that numerous other traditional arts & crafts in the country. But the tradition persisted in its own way. The weavers from Yeola kept this art alive by developing their own weaving techniques, similar to the Paithani weave. The 'Yeola Shaloo' or the bridal sari was created by these weavers. This was the slightly cheaper version of the Paithani. The craftsmen from Paithan too slowly migrated to Yeola & set up looms there.



The Process is Slow & Tedious

It is because of the dedication and faith of weavers that this tradition has been kept alive for more than 2000 years. Today, Yeola has become the main center for Paithani weaving, although the sari has still retained the name that it derived from its birthplace. A garment for ladies & the Pitambara, the yellow cloth are the two types in which the Paithani is made today.

Originally woven with cotton yarn, the Paithani was produced as required. Because of this, each piece was embellished with motifs that were chosen by the individual for a specific occasion. Then, as the demand & admiration for this sari increased, silk yarn was introduced for the borders & pallavs. In the earlier times the Zari was drawn from pure gold. This gave it a classic dignity & saved it from garishness. However, nowadays, silver has become the affordable substitute. The Zari comes from Surat, the Resham (silk) from Bangalore.



Personal touch of the Artisan

Even today, the typical Paithani Sari is made only with the finest quality silk yarn with pure Zari interwoven in its borders & pallav (end piece). The two tone three dimensional effect in the main body of the sari is achieved by using two different colours in the lengthwise & width wise weaving.



Rough Sketch becomes a Masterpiece with the Weavers Touch

What really sets the Paithani apart is its unique weaving technique. The entire process, from dyeing of the yarn to weaving, is done by hand. Dyes are mostly vegetable based & are extracted from sources like flowers, tree bark & leaves. Hand looms are used to weave the main body of the sari. The weaving process of the Pallav & borders is similar to the tapestry weaving technique, which is one of the most ancient weaving techniques in the world. And of course because of the special-ness of the sari, the silk that is used is extremely fine & delicate.

The process of creating designs & motifs is also unusual. The motifs are created by interlocking & tying the coloured threads to the warp (lengthwise threads) on the loom. In fact, the reverse side of the design is almost identical to the right side. These patterns literally seem as if they have been inlaid into the main fabric.

The designs are first drawn by the master craftsman on graph paper in exactly the same way that it had been done for centuries. This is why the patterns seem geometrical in nature. Each weaver refers to this paper & expresses this design on the sari. Every craftsman has own style of weaving that is as unique as his own thumbprint, thus adding to the character of this beautiful sari.

Each motif & every colour requires the weaver to use a separate 'Kakda' (Spool). This process is tedious & time consuming. So, sometimes a single sari can sometimes take up to 2 years to weave.

The motifs that are used to embellish the borders & the pallavs are inspired by traditional forms. Due to Paithan's proximity to the Ajanta Caves, some motif's like the lotus, the triple bird & the seated Buddha seem to have been inspired by their paintings. The Buddha motif is perhaps the only human motif used in the pallav & that is surprising as Paithani Saris were first used for the decoration of Hindu Gods & then taken by the Hindu women.

Many of these designs are found on the border & pallav in different shapes & sizes. Nowadays the most popular ones are the Mor (Peacock), Bangadi Mor (Peacock in a Bangle), Kairi (Paisley), Asavali (Flowering Creeper), Kamal (Lotus), Panja & Tota Maina (Parrot). The names



of certain Paithanis are also based on their colours. A Black Paithani with a Red Border is called 'Kalichandrakala', the 'Raghu' is a Parrot Green sari & the gorgeous Pure White Paithani is the 'Shirodak'.



Till date Cane Spools are used for storing the Yarns

The harmony between the design of the borders & the overall colour is important, so this influences the combination to be used even before the creation starts. The main traditional colours used are Neelgunji (blue), Pasila (red & green), Gujri (black & white), Mirani (black & red), Motiya (pink), Kusumbi (purplish red) & Pophali (yellow). Interestingly these combinations have remained the same over the last 200 years.

The main body of the sari is decorated with 'buttis' (small motifs) like circles, stars, paisley, Chandrakor (Half Moon) 'Mor' (Peacocks), Tara (Star), Popat (Parrot), Kuyri (Mango), Rui Phool (Flower), Paisa (Coin), Pankha (Fan), Kalas Pakli (Petal), Kamal (Lotus), Chandrakor (Moon), Narli (Coconut). The denser these motifs, the longer the weaver takes to complete the sari. Sometimes nearly as many as 900 such buttis are woven along the entire length of the sari.

The charm of the Paithani sari lies in its pallav or end piece. The unique fact about the pallav is it is 'reversible' with the same design seen on both sides unlike in other saris where the pallav has only one side. It is woven entirely in gold & silk threads that are packed so close together that when worn; it seems as if sheet of beaten gold is draped on the shoulder.

The price of Paithanis range from 5,000 to 5, 00,000 rupees. The more expensive saris are woven only on demand. So in order to produce affordable saris, weavers use cheaper silks & artificial Zari. Designs are made by 'jacquard' & 'dobby' weaving techniques which are both cheaper & faster. Unfortunately, in the process, the original Paithani has been overtaken by poor imitations & so the layperson no longer knows what the authentic Paithani looks like. The market is flooded with spurious fabric, as cheap as 2000 rupees, which lacks quality, texture & durability and most of all the classic spirit.



Weaving

In order to revive this craft, the Paithani Training & Production Centre was established at Paithan in 1968 by the MSSIDC [Maharashtra State Small Scale Industry Development Corporation] with an intention to promote the weaving of the Paithani. Designers now help weavers to diversify their art in order to attract new admirers for the Paithani. Wall Hangings, Dress Fabric, Shawls, Stoles, Sari Borders are also being made using basic Paithani techniques. These products are sold at various Government run retail stores in areas which attract tourists. One hope that these coupled with the enduring grace of the Paithani will surely help to keep the tradition alive.

The story of this fabric is alive with traditional pride, artistic dedication, indigenous culture & the eternal values of perfection. It speaks in the language of aesthetics which has been nurtured by centuries of artistic experience alive with a magical glow of inspiration.