



Double Cloth of Napasar: A Lost Identity

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Introduction

Indian textile industry is the second largest employment provider to the residents of India in urban as well as in the rural areas. Every state in India produce their own indigenous craft which has its own identity and popularity in retail and global market. This paper is about a village, Napasar situated in Bikaner district of Rajasthan state in India, at a road distance of about 20 kms from the Bikaner city and is also on the railway line of Delhi to Bikaner Junction. The village is a hub of handloom weaving and hand-spinning since 18th century. The tale of the handloom craft of Napasar is on the verge of languishing in today's globalizing economy. This paper maps the traditional double cloth weaving craft of Napasar handloom and hand-spinning industry and marks the changes occurred in the craft due to numerous factors.

Demography of Napasar

This place is a semi-arid zone with scanty rainfall; hence agriculture is not the main occupation for the villagers. The residents are dependent on handloom or hand spinning crafts since the 18th century along-with other job works like mason, carpenter, labourer on daily wages etc.; which can provide them suitable livelihood for their families in the current scenario. The majority of the craftsmen of handloom industry reside in *Uttaradabas*, *Goyallonka baas* and *Deshnok* road of Napasar. In 2014, the total population of Napasar was 19500; out of which 10101 were males and the rest were females². The handloom weaving is the craft practised by males of Napasar while the hand spinning profession is performed by females of the village.

History of handloom weaving in Napasar

The history of handloom weaving of Napasar can be traced back to the 18th century from *Upnishads* available in the archives and museums of Bikaner, wherein weaving as a profession was introduced in Bikaner jail by the royal families of Bikaner for the prisoners who were trained by the Persian weavers for weaving carpets. The prisoners in Bikaner jail adapted the weaving craft using locally available sheep wool which is now known as Bikaneri wool and started fashioning double width carpets on small looms with geometrical patterns and their versions of Persian carpets. The famous weaving centers in Rajasthan were

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Ajmer, Alwar, Banner, Bikaner, Jalor, Jodhpur, Kaithon, Kota, Malpura, Nagour and Napasar³. The primary data about double cloth weaving was collected from the following museums in Bikaner: 1. Ganga Singh Museum 2. Prachina Museum 3. Lalgarh Palace Museum 4. Rajasthan State Archives.

To support the secondary and primary data, Sh. Lekharam, a master-weaver from NapasarHathkarghaVikasSamiti, a Self Help Group from Napasar also confirmed about the existence of around 500 weavers in the village in olden days involved in weaving carpets and cotton fabrics.

Double cloth weaving and its history

The craft of double cloth weaving is an ancient art documented in various textiles from 850–300 B.C. Paracas Cavernas period⁴ to Persian craft of 14th century. The craft is illustrated from Pre-Inca period to Peruvian textiles moving to 13th century Scandinavian and in 14th and 15th century to Italy / Spain and in the last moving to America in 18th and 19th century. In India the double cloth weaving could be traced back to 16th century from Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Gujarat and Panipat states famous for creating various products using double cloth weaving technique.

Double cloth from Napasar

This technique of fabric creation aids to develop two or more than two layers of fabric from a single warp for any product. It also facilitates wider width products to be developed on small width looms. Based on the same technology the research shows that the weavers of Bikaner created carpets of bigger width on small width looms using this technique. The traditional weaving details can be described under following categories:

- **Target Market:** The weavers of Bikaner and its neighbourhood created products for royal patronage and their crafts flourished with the support of the royal families, hence usage of all handwork, be it spinning or weaving all thrived during the 18th and 19th century in Rajasthan.
- **Products developed:** Double cloth weaving technique in Napasar was practised by weavers to create *charabori* (sack to keep fodder for cattle) made up of camel hair and for making floor coverings with two layers; first layer of camel hair and back layer of cotton yarns as informed by the respondents as daily used products. Similarly, the samples of woven carpets using double cloth weaving technique are conserved in Ganga Singh Museum of Bikaner along-with the apparel fabrics in garment section of the museum, having double cloth weaving designs to prove its existence in 18th and 19th century. The catalogue of Bikaner museum also declares the existence of double cloth weaving technique in the products.
- **Fibers and Yarns:** Earlier conventionally the weavers were using handspun yarns developed on charkhas by the women in the village, who were spinning camel, sheep and cotton fibers for various end products. Similarly, Ganga Singh Museum, Bikaner also referred to use of camel hair in the 18th century carpets, alongwith 18th and 19th century sheep wool carpets.
- **Colours:** As informed by the weavers of Napasar, the colors used in traditional carpets were Ajmeri jogia, Kanibal, Jogiasapur, Orange, White, Red and Golden along with the original color camel hair.



Figure 1: Location of Napasar near Bikaner ,Source: Turnkey Software Projects Pvt. Ltd. 2005-06

- **Weaving details:** The master weaver of a Self Help Group- Napasar Hathkargha Vikas Samiti (NHVS) informed about the folded rugs of 100 inch width, which were created in Bikaner inspired by Santoori carpets made up of cotton yarns using plain weave and hand knotting techniques. The technique was also implied for creating fabric throws known as *Khes*. "Badmedhi pattu used to be the inspirations for designs in carpets, having size of 260 cm X 150 cm with a motif repeat of 32 inches by 16 inches." As informed by Sh. Lekharam and Sh. Om Prakash Meghwal, master craftsmen of NHVS. The secondary research about the double cloth weaving and its product was supported by the responses from the from the weavers of Napasar that the technique existed about 25 to 30 years according to their knowledge and around 10 to 20 weavers were involved in using double cloth weaving techniques. Out of the 50 respondents however only 3 weavers were aware about this technique currently as they have used the technique in creating end products at various places where they worked earlier in their careers.

Current Scenario of Napasar Cluster

Napasar cluster is now running with only 100 weavers and few spinners. There are various reasons for the downfall of the industry. The paper focuses on the current scenario of the Napasar handloom cluster to demarcate it from the traditional craft of weaving and also aids in figuring out the reasons for the same. (Figure 2)

- **Target market:** The handloom cluster is now looking for target market to cater to. With the decline in royal patronage the weavers have lost the market for exclusive hand-knotted carpets / *galichas* in retail market. The consumers have also shifted from patronizing power loom products in comparison to handloom products due to their low price range.
- **Product details:** The product from double cloth carpets and *khes* have now shifted to single layered cotton fabrics for apparel and home fashion products. The fabrics are further stitched and converted into apparels for menswear, women's wear and accessories like bags.
- **Fiber and Yarns:** The fibers used nowadays are cotton and polyester or their blends, sourced from Bikaner as mill spun and mill or local dyed yarns.
- **Colours:** The colours now vary according to the need of the consumers who are followers of brands like Fab-India and buy products from an NGO Rang sutra existing in Bikaner. All the colours are synthetic dyes and either achieved through mill dye or through local dyeing units in Bikaner.



Figure 2: Fabrics produced currently in Napasar, Photo Courtesy: Author

- **Weaving details:** Weaving is majorly done on Tara looms which are sometimes automated for producing more meterage of fabrics in a day. Mostly plain weaves are used for apparel and twill weaves for home products along with yarn dyed stripes, checks and solid colors. 90 percent of the weavers today in the cluster are not aware about the technique of double cloth weaving. All of them have been weaving single layered fabrics for stitched as well as unstitched products from past 15 years.



Figure 3: Tara loom used in Napasar, Photo Courtesy: Author

Factors for change in indigenous craft in Napasar

- *Change in target market:* The consumer to which the cluster of Napasar was serving since 18th century has now changed completely from royal patronage to middle to upper middle class metro city resident, inclined towards craft and handmade products. Now they are struggling to maintain their identity as a weaver in such globalizing economy.
- *Fast fashion:* The choice of today's consumers is changing at a rapid speed, hence the need of new products is leading to fast fashion and small production cycle is making it difficult for the handloom weavers to cope with it.
- *New product line:* Traditionally from carpets and khes, the product line for weavers is now fabrics for apparel, home and accessories. The weavers are not aware about the technicalities and design of these as end products, hence it becomes difficult for them to understand and develop the fabric with best weaving properties for the same.
- *Preference of raw material:* The change in preference of raw materials are many, however one of them is available colors and high demand and low supply of yarns. The camel hair is available only in raw colors and to give more colors to the end products weavers prefer synthetic dyed easily available mill spun cotton yarns from Bikaner city.
- The yarns are required in more quantity for meeting fast changing demands of the consumer, hence they cannot rely on handspun yarns which is produced in less quantity as well as is more expensive than the mill spun yarns.
- *Abridged use of camel hair:* Camels are no more reared in villages of Bikaner including Napasar, hence the availability of camel hair as fiber is a massive problem nowadays, and however the weavers also don't feel pride in possessing the camel hair products like *charabori* and floor rugs as they were not well finished in terms of aesthetic and performance properties too.
- *Employers:* Earlier the weavers were either working independently or together in a Self Help Group for the royal families, but now with the globalizing economy wherein the consumer's requirements are changing at a greater speed, they are unable to map the trends and requirements and hence to earn a suitable income with less risk and more support they started serving NGOs and fashion brands existing in Bikaner, where their involvement is more as a skilled artisan rather than a designer, marketing or a merchandising person.

Conclusion

The conclusion of the above research and data is that the weavers of today are using their craft just as a skill, they are neither bothered about their traditional practices, USP (unique selling proposition) and nor their identity. If this continues at a point they will evade their identity among so many artisans who are now just tagged as skilled labour. There is an emergent need of today's consumer to understand that handloom craft is a slow process and is unique in itself, it has its own identity and to support such craftsmen the craft has to be respected and identified for its uniqueness. Also the weavers have to keep their indigenous craft alive by passing it on to their generations and documenting it for further sustainable practices.

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