

Design Resource

The Land of Looms and Lore - Kannur

A Tale of Renowned Handloom Tradition

by

Sunny Kolekar

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/land-looms-and-lore-kannur>



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Introduction

Kannur is the land of looms and lore, a small town in the southern part of India and a district in the northern part of Kerala. Kannur is formerly known as Cannanore during the British raj and is the one and only place in the whole of India which was targeted by Portuguese, Dutch, French, British and Germans and used for trading by Arabs, Hebrews, Persians, etc.

Etymologically the name Kannur may have been derived from Kanathur, an ancient village. Another opinion holds that Kannur was originally a portmanteau derived from two Malayalam words 'Kannan' Lord Krishna, a Hindu deity and 'Ur' means the place which combines and gives a meaning 'The place of Lord Krishna'.

Historical evidence shows that Kannur was a very prominent place in south India and owned by the ancient Mushika dynasty which is referred to in a Sanskrit literary work 'mushikavamsam' by poet Atula and also mentioned in the Indian epic Mahabharata as one of the prevailing dynasties from southern India. Later on, the Mushika dynasty was known as Kolathiris therefore the place was called 'kolathunadu'. In later times it was known as Chirakkals Rajya. Kannur was an important trading center in the 12th century with active business connections with Persia and Arabia. The 14th century narrative of Ibn Battuta had mentioned about Kannur in his travelogue and in the 16th century AD, a Portuguese official Duarte Barbosa also mentions about Kannur in his records. Since then even Kannur handloom fabric was one of the hot selling commodities overseas. Due to its unending relation with handloom industry, it is known as 'Town of export excellence'. The industry is spread in 37 Panchayat and 5 Municipalities. There is ample scope for fabrics in world market, which is exclusively reserved for handloom industry. Because of quality and fame of Kannur handlooms, Kannur is commonly known as the 'Manchester of Kerala'.

History:

There are three streams of historical incidence pointing towards the tradition, origin and development of Kannur handlooms. First stream of historical stories is that the weaving tradition started between 16th and 17th centuries when the Kolathiri Raja, the ruler of Chirakkal in Kannur, brought some weaver families from Cheranadu in Tamil Nadu. These people settled at Kadalayi Theru, in Kannur and this resulted in the establishment of first Saliya Theru in Kannur. The weavers had mainly produced woven fabrics for the temples and the royal people. The weaver families developed their social life in the district and became a major workforce and the main products were thorthu (towel), panimundu (lower cloth), and mundu (dhoti).

Second stream of the story dates back to 1844, when frame looms were introduced by Basel mission which was brought from Germany. In 1852, development in this loom started with the use of fly shuttles and from this time onwards the Malabar frame looms came to be used in their present form. The product produced by them was mission mundu. The third stream of incidence originated from the social reform movements. The activities of Vagbhatananda guru and Sree Narayana Guru, a movement led to the reformation of the 'Thiyya' community

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with evidence in their social life and as well as in involvement in the industrial activities. Among these, handloom weaving was a prominent one with hundreds of people engaged in it. The social reform movements at the time of independence gave an organized structure to handloom weavers by bringing them into the fold of cooperative societies. During those days the rulers brought weavers for satisfying their clothing needs. Trained weavers took up the work due to social compulsion of employment. They integrated into and got organized as an industrial segment through the cooperative movement for satisfying their needs. Years later the weavers from Kannur had developed 'Kannur crape' which blew their fame into the skyscrapers in the country as well as overseas. In the 1960s, 70s and 80s Kannur crape was the hottest selling fabric in UK and USA.



Lady weaver engaged in weaving.

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A lady weaver engaged in rectifying some mistakes.



Heddles which plays an impeccable role in the making of fabric.



Organic features of a wooden shuttle.

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Process

Manufacturing of cloth involves several processes. These processes can be broadly categorized as pre-loom process, loom process and post-loom process.

The production process starts with scouring process. Scouring is the treatment of cotton with alkalis to remove wax, oil and other impurities, this makes the fiber more absorbent. During the scouring process fats are broken down to soap and glycerin, proteins are converted into water-soluble, wax & oil are emulsified and mineral matter & impurities are removed. Once the scouring process is over the yarns are taken for washing in a pool of acetic water to make the alkalis inactive which is used during the scouring process. Then the yarns are taken for bleaching. Bleaching is the process of removing the natural coloring agent present in the fiber to improve luster and absorbance. In Kannur handlooms, most of the co-operative societies use hydrogen peroxide as a bleaching agent. Hydrogen peroxide is the universal bleaching agent and it is used extensively for bleaching cotton. Once the bleaching is done it is washed in acetic water and taken to a squeezing machine for squeezing and after squeezing the yarns are laid on bamboo rods and kept under the sun for drying. After drying the yarns are taken for beating on a wooden frame to make them fine and to remove curls, tangles and knots.

In pre loom process dyeing solution preparation is the most tedious process. The dyeing master should be a skilful, patient and vigilant person. Most weaving societies are using vat dyes. The name vat was derived from the large wooden vessel from which vat dyes were first applied. Vat dyes provide textile materials with the best color fastness of all the dyes in common use. The fibers most radiantly colored with vat dyes are natural and manmade cellulosic fibers. Once the dyeing solution is ready, the yarns are slowly dipped into the tub for dyeing bath. Dyeing may take 15minute to 1hour 30minute depending upon the color density required. After the completion of the dyeing process the dyed sample is collected for color matching test and if the dyed sample is matching to the required color then the yarns are undergone through several washing and dried under shadow to avoid color fading. The most appreciable fact about Kannur handloom industry is that, most of the societies follow a sustainable production process. The most spectacular and appreciable sustainable model adopted by societies are waste management. After dyeing the waste water is filtered with the help of effluent treatment plant and later on the clean water is used for growing vegetable within the campus. These vegetable are used in the weaver's canteen.

The weaving starts with bobbin winding, bobbin winding the process of winding required amount of yarn used for weaving on a big spool called bobbin. Later on the winded bobbin are taken to warp winding room where the craftsmen will arrange the bobbin according to the pattern and design on creel and thread each yarn through an equipment called comb. Once the treading is done it is winded on warping mill on a particular manner. These winded yarns are formed into a ball shape and taken for spreading on a warp beam with the help of raddle. The appreciable fact is each any every steps of production has equivalent involvement of men women. Once the winded beam is set on the back of loom and craftsmen head towards the most tedious work of the whole weaving process: threading the warp through the heddles on the shafts. Each warp thread must go through the eye

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of a heddle attached to the appropriate shaft, according to the pattern design. If a mistake happen here, there will be an unsightly break in the pattern. Afterwards the yarns are drawn through the reed with reed hook and simultaneously artisans would do the pirn winding for weft. A pirn or quill is a weft bobbin that is placed inside a shuttle in shuttle weaving. As the shuttle travels back and forth across the width of the shuttle loom, the weft yarn is unwound from the pirn through the eye of the shuttle and lay in the shed. The yarn on the quill is tapered at one end such that the yarn with drawl takes place continuously without entanglement. Then the master craftsmen show their extensive talent of weaving fine fabrics which takes the name and fame of Kannur handlooms into the skyscrapers and glorifies it.

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Bobbin Winding



Drying



Dyeing



Loom Process



Pirn Winding



Shuttle Fixing



Warping



Weaving

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Bobbin Winding



The weaving tradition of Kannur handlooms have the involvement of both men and women since their origin and still it continues.



Bobbin winding, involvement of women can be speckled in the whole chain of production.

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Close up view of bobbin winding.



Initial view of bobbin winding.

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Wooden bobbins.



Colorful bobbins.



Bobbin.



Pink thread bobbin.

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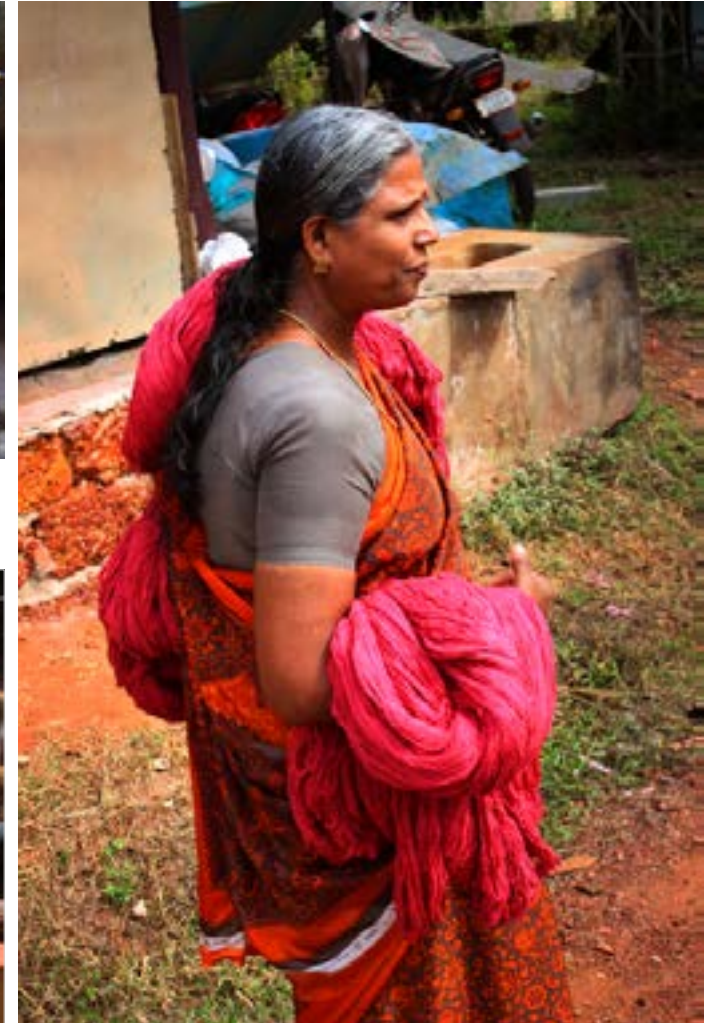
Drying



Drying machine which is used for drying yarns after sourcing and bleaching.



Beautifully dyed yarns are kept for sun bath.



Woman artisan taking yarns for drying after dyeing.

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Visual shows the textural view of yarn.



Yarns are laid for drying under sun.



Closeup view of yarn.

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Yarns are hung inside a room after drying.



Close up view of dried yarn's texture.



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Dyeing



Dye Recipe Preparation



Yarn Preparation

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Dye Recipe Preparation



Raw pigments are kept in the rack.



Dyeing recipe book which is used by the dyeing master for references.

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Measuring and weighing equipment.



Dyeing assistant is measuring the dye stuff for preparing new recipe.

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Labeling of chemical used for dyeing.



Caustic soda flakes.



Weighing caustic soda flakes for dyeing.



Mixing caustic soda in dye solution.

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Weighing sodium chloride.



Adding sodium chloride to the dye solution.



Mixing two dyeing solutions to get another shade.



Blending the recipe well to attain a fine solution.

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Measuring the temperature of dye solution.



Mixing dyeing agent in dye bath tub.



Adding dye solution into the dye bath tub.



Adding dye solution into the dye bath tub.

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Adding more water to the dye bath.



Mixing the dye bath thoroughly.



Removing the soap froth.



Mixing the dye bath.

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Adding more water to the solution.



Mixing the solution.



Removing the soap froth.

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Yarn Preparation



Raw form of yarn kept in storage area.



Yarn after scouring.



Bleached yarns are kept for draining water.



Drying machine.

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Yarns are beaten on a wooden frame to remove curls and tangles.



Beating process of yarns on wooden frame.



Beaten yarns are kept for dyeing.



Initiation of dye bathing.

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Dyeing process.



Yarns are dipped continuously in the dye bath to get even coloring.



Dyeing process.



Dyeing process.

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Yarn dyeing.



Dyed yarns are kept for drying.



Washing process of yarns after dyeing.



Yarns are kept inside the room for drying.

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Dyeing bath tub.



Yarns are hung for drying after scouring.



Kier boiler.

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Interior view of dyeing house.



Sample of natural dyed yarns.



Dyeing quality checking machine.

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Dyed yarn, a close up view.



Dyed yarns are stored in polythene.



Happy faces are the common factor which can be speckled in the nook and corners of workshops.

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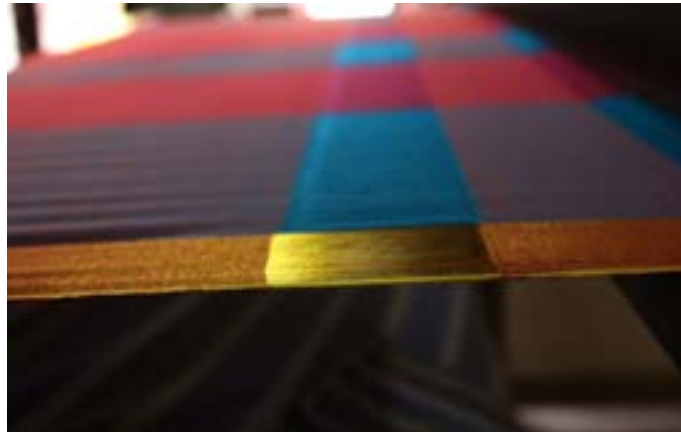
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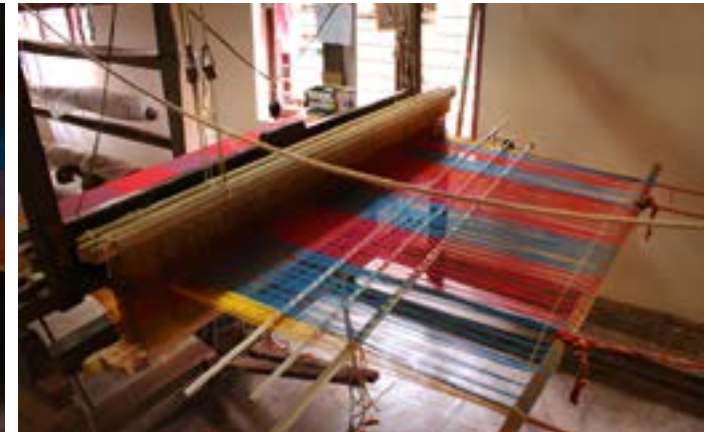
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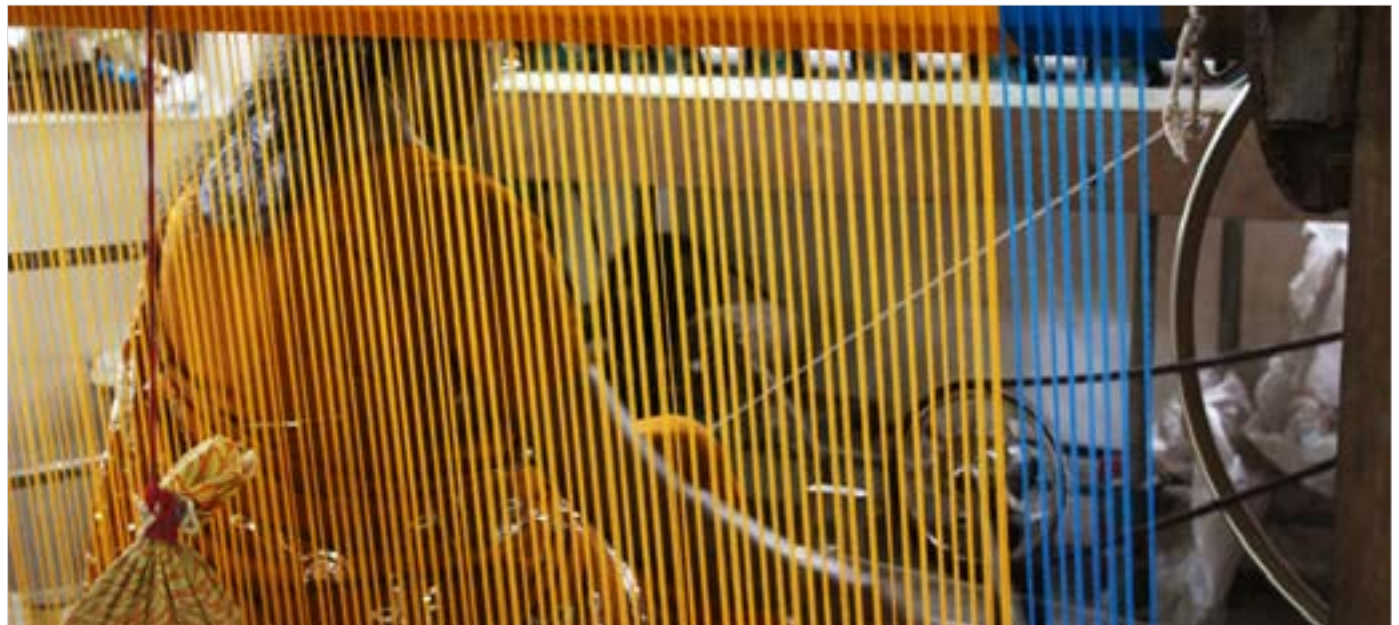
Loom Process



Warp winded yarns, a close up view.



Warp yarns on shuttle loom.



Warp yarns on pit loom beam; a close up view.

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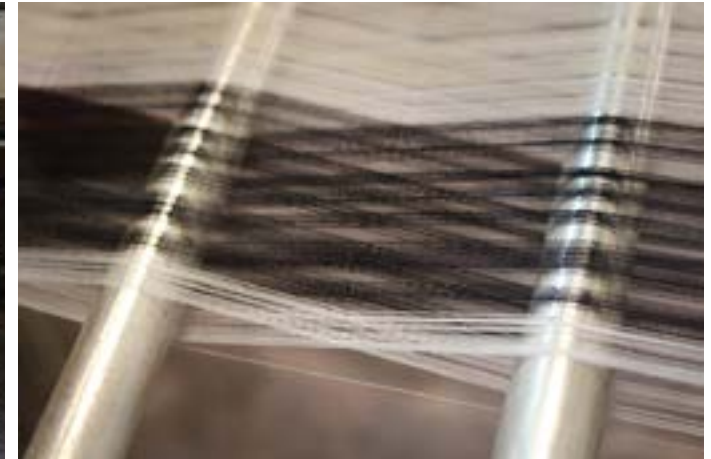
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Warp beam of pit loom.



Yarns and pattern; a close up view.



Warp yarns; a close up view.

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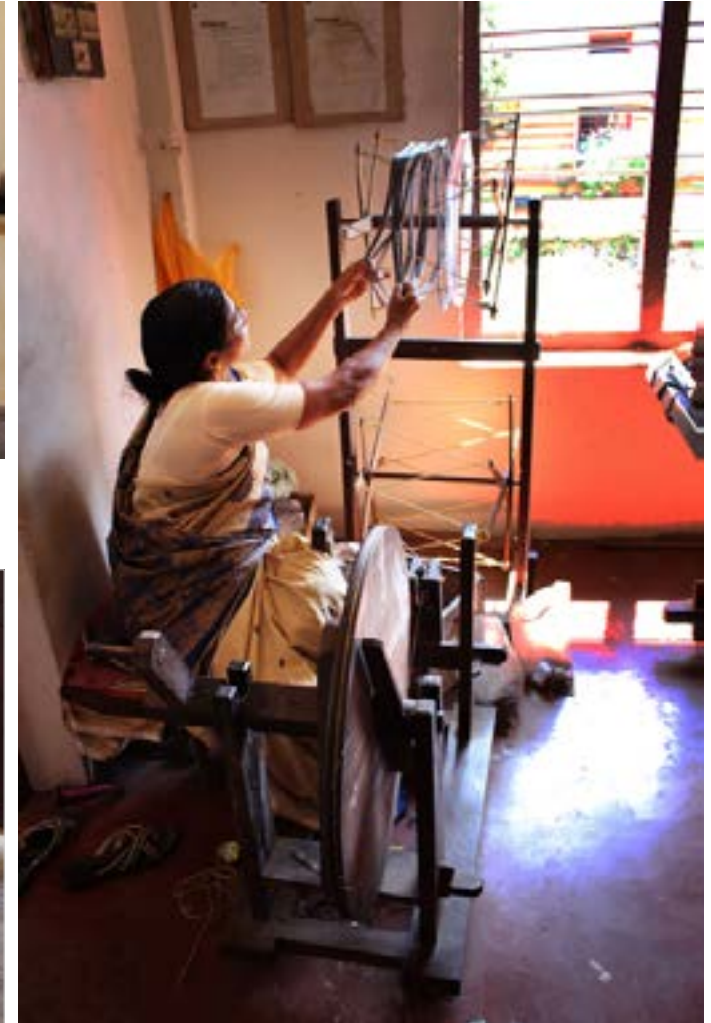
Pirn Winding



A lady worker engaged in pirn winding.



A lady worker engaged in pirn winding.



A lady worker engaged in pirn winding.

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IDC, IIT Bombay

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Pirn winding close up view.



Pirn winding.



Bunch of pirns.

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Shuttle Fixing



A shuttle is the carrier of weft yarn.



Wooden shuttles.

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Wooden shuttles.



Upside down view of a wooden shuttle.



A lady weaver threading the shuttle.

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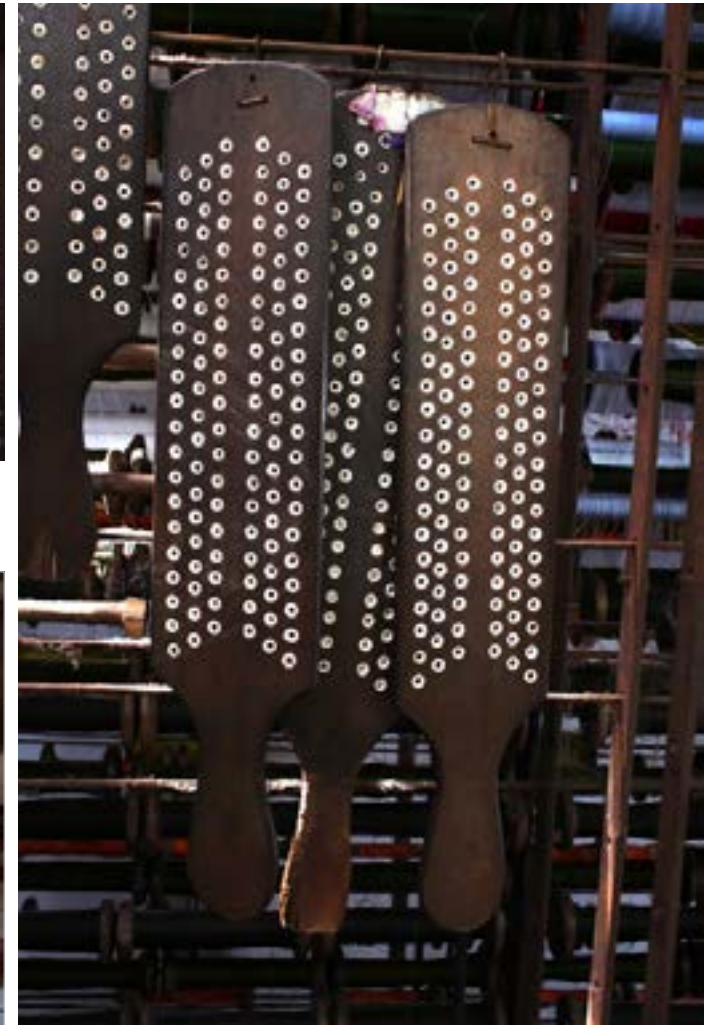
Warping



Comb, a specially designed equipment which is used for warping the yarns on warping mill.



Artisan arranging bobbins on the creel.



Comb, a specially designed equipment which is used for warping the yarns on warping mill.

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Bobbins on creel.



Warping mill.



Warping mill.

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Warping process; a close up view.



Tantu or the yarns; a close up view.



Artisan warping the yarns on warping mill.



A view of tremendous traditional mechanism.

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A view of warp yarns through the comb.



Artisan warping the yarns on warping mill.



Close up view of yarns.

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A view of warp yarns through the comb.



Close up view of warping.



Creels and bobbins.

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Creels and bobbins.



Creels and bobbins.



Creels and bobbins.

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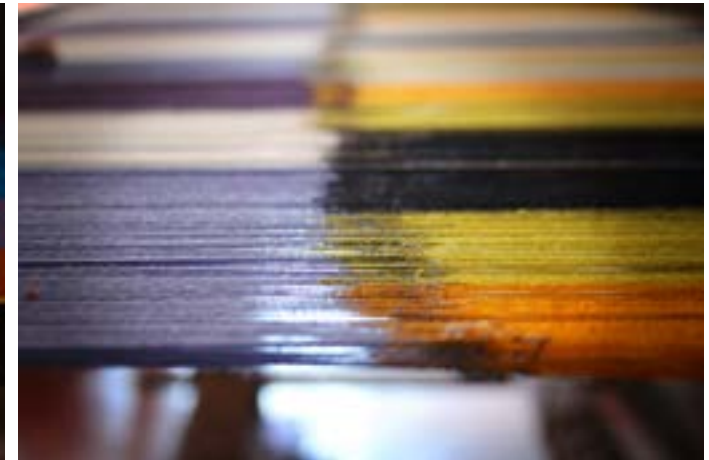
Source:

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Weaving



Warped yarns on loom.



New warp yarn hand joined to the previous warp.



Beautifully hand joined warp yarns.



Hands are used to join each yarn to join with the previous yarn during loom setting.

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Close up view of joined warps.



Winded warp beam on the loom.



Winded warp beam on the loom.



A lady weaver engaged in her work.

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Dobby loom or bathing towel weaving loom.



Stripes and checks are the forte of Kannur handloom.



Saffron cotton dhoti.



Lady weaver working on pit loom.

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View of pit loom.



A lady weaver; a very usual visual in Kannur handlooms.



Age doesn't stop them from saving the tradition.



An elderly woman working on loom and explaining the weaving techniques to a visitor.

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Weaving unit.



Lady weaver.



The tiny yarns pass through heddles which gives a definition to the character of fabric.



Wooden framed of heddles.

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An elderly weaver joining two warps.



Resist dyed yarns.



Warp yarns and warp beam.



Heddles.

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Heddles, the passing way of yarn to fabric.



Wax brush.



Brushing wax on yarns to avoid yarn breakage.

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Products

Kannur handlooms are known for its home furnishing materials like curtains, pillow and cushion covers, bolsters, bed sheets, quilts, bathing towels, kitchen linen, cotton mats. They even cater cotton dhotis, shirting and suiting which includes, cotton, linen, blend of both and sometimes even silk also.



Linen suiting material.



Finely woven bathing towel.



Signature of authentic Kannur handloom materials.



Finely woven cotton dhotis.

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Cotton dhotis.



Earthen color combinations are the forte of Kannur handlooms.

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Showroom display.



Furnishing section.

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No rules of modern visual merchandising, they still follow the old school rack display.



Fineness and comfort of cotton generates the customers.

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Name board of one of the leading weaving society.



A single sign or name board; Nobody will be able to speckle any other modern marketing strategies in handlooms to generate customers.

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One of the weaving society.



Weaving workshop building.



Weaving society office building.

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