CHAPTER III

VARIETIES OF HANDLOOM CLOTHS
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Leafy garments are the precursor of the cloths made of cotton and silk. As the ancient Tamils identified themselves with Nature, it is no wonder that they wore leaf garments. They decorated the leaf garments with Ampal flowers. Each lover was usually expected to present his beloved with garments of leaves and flowers. Such leafy garments were considered worthy gifts as symbols of intimacy and hospitality.

It is also thought that the leafy garments were worn by ladies over their clothes for artistic beauty and pleasure. There is also reference to the garments made up of bark of tree worn by saints in the Tamil country. In Tirumurukarruppadai the saints are described with their garments of bark of the tree as cirai tayiya utukkiyar (சொரை தையிய உடுக்கியர்). Garments made of fibre cords of the tree were worn by 'Kuravas', the people of mountainous tract.

1. Kurunthogai, 293-5.
2. Narrinai, 123.
Purananuru speaks of the number of cloths required, generally for a man-two. But, it is the only minimum requirement for there are many kinds and names of cloths mentioned in the Sangam literature. In Perumpanarru-P-padai, a shepherd satisfied himself with a single cloth. When one sees the names of cloths it can be understood that most of them are derivative nouns.

The usage of aruvai ( அருவை ) for cloth signifies a piece which is cut off from the loom. The word "Mati" ( மடி ) is used for cloth because of its nature of being folded. Even the leafy garments are referred to by this name mativai ( மதிவை ) in Akananuru.

Cloth is named as 'Kalingam' since it is believed that it was originally brought from the Kalinkanad, that is the country comprising modern Orissa and Ganjam.4

Utukkai and UtaI came from the root utu to dress. Atai may be from atai or atu which is closely worn to the body or from "atai" a leaf. Therefore it may originally mean a leafy garment.

Though 'tukil' refers to cloth in general, it is used to signify white silk in chintamani or later days.

Nulakkalingam (ṣr̥vāśāśāśāśā)\(^5\) signifies the silk cloths since the silk threads are not Hand spun.

Kaccū\(^6\) (कच्चु) refers to the waistsash worn by males, whereas, 'Kaccō'\(^7\) (कच्चो) was the breast sash worn by females.

In Paripatal, 'Puttakam' a kind of dress is mentioned which was a bathing dress.

In ancient days, people wearing the long hanging dress vainly thought themselves superior to others.

According to the old commentary on Patirru-p-pattu,\(^8\) the gallant enemies of the Cera king Kalankai-k-kanni Narmuti-c-cerel appeared before their defeat proudly wearing a long dress touching the ground since they had won many victories in whose memory they wore the hero's

5. Patirru-P-Pattu, 12:21
6. Sirupanarru-P-Padai: 239
7. Mullai-P-Pattu, 46-47.
8. Patirru-P-Pattu: 34:3
anklets. In Netunlavatai, according to the commentator, the big sturdy drunken people walked wherever they desired along the broad streets with both ends of the cloths almost touching the ground.

Silappadikaram informs us that even woollen cloths were also made in ancient Tamil Country. It further mentions about thirty two varieties of cotton cloths which were used by the people.

**COLOUR OF CLOTHS:**

It is a known psychology that colour patterns create an aesthetic effect.

In the Sankam literature there are references to the various colours of dresses and cloths according to the heads and social customs of the people.

**WHITE CLOTHS:**

Generally the artists presented themselves with white dresses with an idea that they can feel fresh and unsullied in the white dress.

9. Netunlavatai. 35
10. Silappadikaram - V. 16-17
11. Ibid. XIV. 106-112
12. Puram. 385
White cloths washed by dhoby are compared to the feathers of white crane in Narrinai.\textsuperscript{13} Purananuru portrays a brave mother who sends her only male child to the war front, dressing him with white cloths.\textsuperscript{14} The white colour of the dress is sometimes suggested by the poets with white coloured 'Pakanrat' (Gulanche) flower.\textsuperscript{15} In Purananuru\textsuperscript{16}, there is a reference to the white coloured cloth used to cover the corps.

Royal victorious umbrella, one of the most important paraphernalia of a king covered with white cloth and called 'Venkotai'\textsuperscript{17} identified with 'Venkorrakkutai' (the victorious white umbrella) of later times was also in vogue.

\textbf{BLUE CLOTHS:}

Generally blue cloths will not expose dirtiness as white cloths.

\begin{itemize}
\item 13. Narrinai. 70: 2-3
\item 14. Puram. 279-8
\item 15. Patirru-P-Fattu. 76. 12-13
\item 16. Puram. 286. 4-5
\item 17. Puram. 392-1
\end{itemize}
In Purananuru, a patron is showed, who removed the blue coloured ragged cloths\textsuperscript{18} of an artist and gave the white dress.

In Kali-t-tokai, a young girl of the forest tract with blue petticoat with flower border is seen.\textsuperscript{19}

Kalakam mentioned in the Sangam literature refers to the blue cloth according to the commentator Naccinarkkiniyar though it is generally meant 'black cloth'.\textsuperscript{20}

A soldier is described in Purananuru with his blue waist sash\textsuperscript{21} ( சூசெசம் ) and floral designed dress.

**RED CLOTH:**

Generally the red colour signifies bravery on the battle-field, terror, danger etc.

Ainkurunuru\textsuperscript{22} speaks of the murderous hunters in the desert tract appearing with their red coloured dress as the embodiments of terror and danger to others.

\textsuperscript{18} Puram. 365: 6-7
\textsuperscript{19} Kalithokai. 115: 14-15
\textsuperscript{20} Kalittokai. 73:17
\textsuperscript{21} Puram 274. 1-2
\textsuperscript{22} Aingurunuru 363, 1-2
In Narrinai, the high way robbers are described with their red coloured dress of awe inspiring nature.

In the Sangam literature there are references to the red dress like 'Kunri' (red seed of crab's eye) worn by Lord Murugan. As Lord Murugan is noted for his gallantry on the battle field, he has been described with red coloured dress.

SAFFRONY CLOTHS:

People who led saintly or austere life wore saffron cloths.

In Mullai-p-pattu, there is a mention of Brahmin saints with saffron coloured garments hung on their triple staff.

The above facts indicate that the different types of cloths made of cotton, silk and woollen were worn by the ancient Tamils.

23. Narrinai. 33-6
24. Kuruntokai. Prayer Song 2-4
25. Mullai-P-Pattu. 37-38
Thus it seems that from the ancient period itself in Tamil Nadu different varieties of cloths and different colours have been manufactured by the people. This sort of cloths were produced by the weaving community people till the first half of the 19th century. It does not mean that it is not continuing to-day. The same varieties of cloths are produced with synthetic chemicals instead of vegetable dyestuff.

The handloom industry in Tamil Nadu has a long a tradition of excellence and a living legacy of unrivalled craftsmanship. The marvellously woven fabrics of ancient Tamil Nadu and ancient India were favourites in the courts of Roman Emperors. These marvels were produced on the handlooms. It was an age in which processes of spinning, dyeing and weaving were carried out with indigenous product with indigenous tools in the country side. This sort of indigenous method of producing handloom fabrics continued upto the second half of the 19th Century in Tamil Nadu. The fabrics produced in Tamil Nadu were familiarly called in European markets as Madras handlooms.

The merit of the Madras handloom fabrics lay in its difference from the monotony and uniformity of a machine-
made textiles of England. There were handloom products to suit every mood, every occasion, every season and every purse. There was a number of varieties of handloom fabrics produced in different weaving centres in Tamil Nadu and the following items such as Arni muslins, Palempores, Bhavani Bedsheets and chintzes were popular for exports to London and other European countries. It is said that there were well developed channels for marketing the Madras handloom fabrics among the European countries. Now we shall see the various centres in which weaving was carried on and kinds of cloths produced in Tamil Nadu.

**VARIETIES OF CLOTHS:**

During the period of our review, different kinds of cloths were produced in all the weaving centres of Tamil Nadu. The handloom fabrics were classified into three divisions. Those were Finer, medium and coarse varieties. In all the three varieties, the materials used were cotton, silk and wool. Further, all fabrics could be classified into two such as men's wear and women's wear.
A large proportion of the clothing of the people of Tamil Nadu, whether Hindu or Mohammedan, consisted of articles which were untouched by needle or scissors. These articles leave the loom in a state ready to be worn. The principal of these were the Turbans, Lungees and Dhotees worn by men and sarees worn by women.

Dhoti: (Vesht or Shoman)

The Dhoti is the men's wear. The word dhoti was derived from the dhona, to wash and so named from being washed daily at the time of bathing. Every dhoti, however, has not its daily washing for in its more elaborate form it is embellished with ornamental borders, and by the rich as well as the poor, on festive occasions is doffed after the ablutions.

Dhoti is nothing but a scay folded round the loins and legs, and thus constitutes the whole clothing of a

26. Lungi was a larger scarf are plaid wore over the shoulders and upper part was of the body on those days. But now a days Lungi is worn by muslims, and as the same function as the Dhoti of the Hindu.

large number of the lower and poorer classes. Dhoti or Shoman pieces usually measured from 33" to 36" long from 3½' to 4½' broad and was sold at the weekly markets at varying prices from 8 to 40 Vir-Raya-Panams. In Ambathurai and also in the neighbouring villages in Madurai district, Sedans, the Canarese speaking people made this kind of Dhoties. The white dhoties were manufactured by the local weavers. In weaving dhoties, two methods were followed. Firstly, a plain white dhoti with a narrower border of coloured cotton and secondly, a superior cloth of fine texture in which borders were made of silk. The latter was called silk dhoti which the poor people could not afford to buy.

Silk and wool loin cloth, or combinations of both, are called Pitambur.28 These were worn by Brahmins and other high class Hindus exclusively at meal times, where cotton garments of any kind were considered impure. At meal times the Brahmins or other strict Hindus ought to wear no other garments than a Pitambur, the head and body to the waist being uncovered.

28. Ibid., p.22.
E.B. Havell in his industrial tours found that a large number of Patnulkarans engaged in the production of fine silk dhoties in and around Madurai and Salem. Buchanan also noticed that Shoman, men's wear, was produced by the weavers in Coimbatore and its suburban villages. The dhoti produced here, according to Buchanan, were cotton with silk borders. The pieces were from 22 to 24 cubits long, from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 cubits broad, and they were sold from 8 to 40 Vir-Raya-Panam or from 3 s 11½ d to 19 s. 10½ d.  

Further Buchanan stated that Shalay was a thick cotton variety of cloth with red cotton borders. The pieces were 19 cubits long from 2½ to 2½ broad, and sold for from 6 to 20 Vir-Raya-Panam, or from 2 s. 11½ d. to 9 s. 11 d.  

There were three varieties of dhoti manufactured in Tamil Nadu. They were cotton dhoti, cotton and silk mixture and silk pure dhoti.


31. Ibid.
Cotton plain dhoti, in which both the warp and weft were cotton yarns was the coarser variety of fabrics made for poorer classes. This kind of dhoti was commonly manufactured at Salem, Madurai, Arni, Conjeevaram and Chintatripet.

The other kind is the cotton plain and silk in the borders. This dhoti was made of cotton with silk borders 2½ inches wide. At the ends two coloured stripes of cotton and silk, one 2 inches and the other ½ inch wide were there. The borders were of different colours. The variation adds to the attractiveness of the piece. Normally this kind of dhoties were 1 yard and 34 inches in length, 0.27 yards in width. These dhoties were produced by the Kaikola, Senian weavers of Conjeevaram and Pillayarpalayam, Ayyampet, Muthialpet, the Suburban villages of Conjeevaram. The price of the dhoti in 1860s was Rs.1 and Annas 4.

The third kind is the silk dhotis. Both the warp and weft yarns were silk. This sort of silk dhotis

were woven for the rich people. As it was costly one, it was produced only to order.

The most important variety of dhoti was the cotton and silk mixed dhoti with gold thread. The plain dhoti with narrow coloured borders at each end and a half inch cross stripe of crimson and gold thread was manufactured at Arni in North Arcot District. The length and breadth of the dhoti was 3 yards and 1 yard 9 inches respectively. The price of the dhoti was 10 s. 6d.\textsuperscript{34} According to Edgar Thurston, at Arnee there were 346 looms engaged in weaving in the 80s of the period of our review.\textsuperscript{35}

Another variety of fine dhoti was produced in Madurai, i.e., cotton dhoti with flowered borders of black silk and gold 1½ inches wide. Gold stripe (2½ inches wide) was used at each end. It was an excellent example both of texture and style.

Besides the dhotis, the poorer classes used to wear Longottas,\textsuperscript{36} at home and at work. It was simply

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p.25.


\textsuperscript{36} Longottti is the name used when the Dhoti is very small, Buchanan, in Martin's "Eastern India", Vol.III, p.103.
a piece of cloth called dhoti wrapped round the loins. The end of this, after a couple of turns round the waist, was passed by the male between the legs, and thrust under the folds which cross behind. Occasionally, however, the end was passed from behind and fastened in front.

SARIS:

The chief article of female attire in Tamil Nadu consisted of a long scarf, called a Sari, which could cover the body. It was the common dress of the women of all ranks. The mode of wearing a sari was very much the same all over Tamil Nadu, although the amplitude of its folds, and the quality of the material used, varied with social position of the woman.

DRESSING THE SARI:

The method of dressing the sari by all women was as follows. One end of the sari was passed twice round the waist, the upper border tied in a strong knot, and allowed to fall in graceful folds to the ankle. The other end was passed in front across the left arm and shoulder. It was then allowed to fall behind and under the right shoulder and arm.
MATERIALS:

With respect to the materials of which the sari was made, and the character of its texture, and a few general remarks may be made.

As to the material, cotton occupied the first place then mixtures of cotton and silk, and lastly silk itself. There is no reference that wool was used in the sari.

TYPES OF SARIS:

1. **COTTON-COTTON BORDERS AND ENDS:**

   This sort of saris were almost the coarsest kind of fabrics made in several places. For example in cotton and cotton border saris, both the warp and weft yarns were the cotton. The cotton thread was a coarse one and unbleached. A faint red line (1/5 inch wide) of thread near the edge of the sari was inducted. The principal end was ornamented with a 2 inch crimson cross stripe and two narrower stripes of same colour and the nearer end with a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch cross stripe blue. The opposite end also was marked by two cross stripes of crimson, and of blue. The usual size of sari was 3 yards in length and 1-0 yard in width and these cotton saris were
manufactured at Coimbatore. As the Coimbatore soil was suitable for the cultivation of Karunganni variety of cotton, cotton saris were made here abundantly. The number of looms which produced both cotton and silk goods in Coimbatore district in 1882-83 was 10,879 and the estimated turnover was valued at Rs.17,50,511 or Rs.161 per loom. The Devangas were mainly engaged in weaving cotton and silk saris here.

Cotton saris of 6 yards length and 1 yard breadth of unbleached material with 1/6 inch chocolate coloured stripe border and one 2½ inch and one ½ inch red and yellow stripe across the principal end were manufactured by the Kaikolans and Senian chetti of Conjevaram, Pillayapalayam and Salem. Some three hundred looms were engaged in producing women's cloth at Madurai.

In Chinnasalem, Srimushnam and Torappadi of South Arcot District rough saris of 8 yards length of 20 to 30 counts were done. At Tiruvappoor in Pudukkottai state,


saris of 11 to 12 cubits long and 40 to 50 inches wide were made and these were largely in demand among the Nattukkottai chetti.40

2. COTTON AND SILK MIXED SARIS:

The texture of the cotton and silk mixed saris were fine. The silk was either mixed with the body or in the border. Both 6 yards and 8 yards silk saris were manufactured. This kind of cotton and silk saris were made at Aduthurai, Ammapet and Valankaiman of Tanjore District. The Patnulkaran of Trichinopoly produced cotton and silk tartans (Kailies) for muslims which was very profitable. About 900 of this caste were employed in this industry in the Trichy fort in the 70s of the 19th Century. Some 250 or 300 were employed in the suburb of Uraiyur and about 100 or so at Pudukkottai.41

The following are some of the examples of the cotton and silk mixed saris.


1. Reddish warp checked with white thread and striped borders (2 inches wide) were produced in two different colours. At principal end, several narrow stripes and one 3½ inch cross stripe, all of yellow silk, was there. The opposite end was marked by a simple white cross line close to the edge. This sort of saris was 7 yards 9 inches in length and 1 yard 2 inches in width and manufactured at Mylapore in Madras.

2. Crimson coloured cotton warp, with 5/12 inch stripes in white thread, running from principal end for about 4½ yards was produced. The border of the sari was with 3 inch blue, striped with white and yellow warp threads. About 10 inches in principal end was ornamented, one side with a number of narrow cross stripes of yellow silk. This type of sari usually was 7 yards 9 inches in length and 1 yard 7 inch in width and were manufactured at Cuddalore in South Arcot District. Different coloured silk yarns were also used both for borders as well as for weft of the sari.

3. Dark crimson warp of silk with blue cotton weft, figured with small white flower was also produced. The borders were in imitation of silver lace. At
principal end a stripe of gold thread with yellow and red silk stripes at intervals and the secondary end with two stripes of yellow silk, were produced. Length of sari was 7½ yards, width 1 yard 5 inches and the weight 1 lb 7½ oz. This sort of saris were manufactured at Trichinopoly. 42

3. COTTON PRINTED SARIS:

For the making of printed saris, first unbleached cotton cloth was woven. On this unbleached cotton cloth, the desired designs such as flowers and animals were printed with the help of wooden blocks and vegetable dyes. The method of preparation of various colours by using vegetable dyestuff is described in the dyeing and printing section of this work in the fourth chapter. The wooden blocks which were used for printing and dyeing on cotton saris are shown in the Annexure.

The cotton printed saris were produced at Arcot, Wallajanagar, Kumbakonam, Nagore, Uraiyr (a suburb of Trichinopoly), Manamadurai, Paramagudi, Pamban, Kalahasti, Salem and Madurai. In all these places not only saris

and personal wear were printed and painted but also the hand-painted representations of mythological subjects for adorning the Hindu cars, temple cars and wall-hangings on festive occasions were produced. These sort of saris were painted by hand in Mannargudi in Tanjore District. Block printing was also common here. Red, Blue and some times yellow were the colours used.

Edwin Balfour one of the Art lovers of India, described that the cloths dyed in Madras with vegetable dye-stuffs were a cynosure of neighbouring eyes. He further attributes that the power of colouring beautifully, of achieving a happy combinations of tincts to the traditional instincts of Orientalists could never be attained by Europeans by any scientific method. Thus the saris and other cotton cloths wonderfully printed and dyed were pleasing to the eye.


44. G.O.No.2221, Public, 13th October, 1884.

4. **SILK SARI'S**:

In silk saris, both the warp thread and weft thread were silk threads and the cotton thread was not used. Different coloured silk yarns were used for body and border of the sari. Usually the silk saris were manufactured in the range of 6 yards, 8 yards and 9 yards length. Since the cost of the silk sari was high, the women used it for festivals and marriage occasions. The silk saris were woven in simple pattern, chequered pattern and gold and silver thread patterns.

The important places of silk cloth weaving were Conjeevaram, Kumbakonam, Ammapet in Tanjore, Salem, Arni, Madurai and Madras City. In 1872, there were 2600 families of weavers in Salem and they had 7000 looms. They produced cloths known as Pattu madi and silk saris. In Kumbakonam town alone there were forty streets and lanes containing the houses of Soroushtras. They had engaged in weaving silk saris. There were a thousand
looms in Tanjore town. The weavers got their silk from Kollegal and Mysore. 46

The silk sarees and other silk cloths were woven by Patnulkarans, Kaikola Mudalis and Seniyars in Mylapore, Puddanaickenpet and Purasaiwalkam. In all these three towns of Madras there were 1100 weavers and 720 looms.

Conjeevaram, the proud capital of Pallava rulers, who played a significant role in the political and cultural history of South India for over six centuries, was an important silk weaving centre. This Conjeevaram town is still a very reputed place for silk sari production. Thurston had found when he was writing a monograph on silk fabric industry that there were 15,000 weavers in Conjeevaram town alone. They had 5,000 looms. Ayyampet, Muthialpet and Ayyankulam, the suburban villages of Conjeevaram town had some 1,500 weavers and 270 looms engaged in silk weaving. Further Thurston said that these number of weavers turned as

weaving communities such as Patnulkarans, Kaikolans, Seniyars, Saliyars, with a few Vellalas, Chettis and Pallis.  

About the Conjeevaram Weavers Mr. J.D. Rees wrote as follows. "The town has for ages been the headquarters of a large community of weavers. Coarse country cloths and silk cloths are manufactured. Weaving operations are, for the most part, carried on in the open air, either in the broad street, or preferably under the shady groves of tamarind trees, which abound in and about the town. The threads are made into warp and was ready to be made into cloth, and the actual weaving was carried on by means of primitive hand-loom inside the houses. In this manner are manufactured men and women's clothing as well as the red handkerchiefs dear to the Tamil man, which he takes with him to Singapore, or any other distant place, to which he may migrate." This account, according to Thurston, of weaving operation went on in all weaving centres of Southern India.

48. J.D. Rees, Twelfth Tour of Lord Connemara, 1890.
James Wathem, a traveller, stated the hospitality of the Conjeevaram weavers in the following words:

"I almost expected the appearance of some of those supernatural beings, when we perceived at a small distance, many persons busily employed under the shade. They were of both sexes, the women and children spinning and reeling the cotton, the men were weaving, their looms were of a singular construction, and fixed by stakes to the ground. The women performed their work, sitting on the grass, and used their feet, and toes as well as their hands, at their labour. They received us with artless civility and kindness." 50

Next to Conjeevaram, Tanjore district was famous for silk sari weaving. Ayyampet and Manambuchavadi were the two centres in Tanjore range, had 1800 weavers and 1200 looms. Nagapatanam, Kumbakonam and Mayavaram taluks of Tanjore district consisted of 11,680 silk weavers and 9325 looms in the 70s of the 19th Century. In all these places, cloths manufactured were mainly

female cloth, bodices, petticoats etc., of pure silk or silk and cotton. Raw silk was said to be obtained from Madras, Madura, Calcutta, Bombay, China and Italy. Dyeing of silk yarn was carried on in Mayavaram and Kuttalam.

The silk weavers in Coimbatore district belonged to Devanga Caste. Silk fabric weaving was carried on in Kollegal taluk on a large scale. There were about 1000 looms and the same number of weavers. The value of silk saris differed according to quality, fineness and ornamentation. 51

RAVIIKAI (CHOLI - HINDI):

Besides, cotton and silk saris, the females were wearing a top garment called Ravikkai or bodice to cover their bosoms. The yarns of thinner variety were used to manufacture the bodice cloth. In many places this kind of cloth was produced. But the satin manufactured at Ariyalur (Trichinopoly District) was distinct in style, and of remarkable beauty in colour, as well as

tasteful in the simple patterns woven generally in stripes across it. The ravikkai worn by the native ladies was made out of it. A kind similar in style, but inferior in colour and execution, was produced in Trichinopoly, embroidered with patterns in silver lace. 52

MUSLINS:

Another kind of cloth for which Tamil Nadu was equally celebrated was the manufacture of muslins. 53 The best known and celebrated muslins, were produced at Arni, Kalahesti, Coimbatore, Salem, Tanjore and Madura. 54 It is said that the Arni muslins were the fine quality in Tamil Nadu and that even so late in 1851, they won the admiration of all at the Great Exhibition held in London. 55 The muslins were made with country cotton and these were the best and strongest. Most of the

52. Ibid., p.14.

53. A large proportion of the muslins were manufactured at Dacca and thus it happens that we are in the habit of speaking of all the very fine muslins of India as Dacca muslins.


weavers, as Thurston noted, were engaged in the manufacture of coarse muslin, but the fine qualities were made only to order.\textsuperscript{56}

Mr. Forbes Watson, wrote in his report in 1866, that many varieties of muslins were manufactured at Arni. They were as follows:

1. SULLAH: It was a superfine quality of 15 yards 18 inch in Length, 1 yard 16 inch in width which cost about Rs.12 and 5 Annas.

2. Chunderkana, second quality for handkerchiefs.

3. Striped muslins which derived its name from each thread in the stripes being composed of two threads twisted together.

4. Chequered muslins, similar to that of striped muslins.

5. Muslins were also woven with coloured thread, striped, checked and figured.\textsuperscript{57} Besides, all these

\textsuperscript{56} Thurston, Monograph on Cotton Fabric Industry in the Madras Presidency, 1897, p.11.

kinds of muslins, printed muslins were also manufactured at Trichinopoly.

Dr. F. Buchanan mentioned about the muslins manufactured in Coimbatore: Shilles, or white muslins of 22 cubits long, and 2½ or 2¾ cubits broad were manufactured by the weavers of Jadar Community of Coimbatore. These muslins were very coarse and were sometimes stripped and they were called Duppattas. These muslins were sold for from 7 to 20 Vir-Raya-Panams, or from 3 s 5¾ d. to 9 s 11 d. a piece.⁵⁸

R.C. Dutt wrote that the Company's Commercial Resident at Salem had visited Coimbatore some months before Dr. Buchanan's arrival, and had made advances to weavers for the Company's investment. The cloth ordered was Shalambru, resembling the Bafts of Bengal, and was made in 36 cubits long and 2¼ cubits broad.⁵⁹ From this account we can realise that Shalambru is also a kind of cloth manufactured at Coimbatore for the Company.


PALEMPORES:

This is another variety of cloth manufactured in Tamil Nadu. The term palempore was derived originally from the Hindustani 'Palangposh' (a bed-cover). It was then generally applied indiscriminately to all varieties of Indian printed or hand painted cottons, including canopies, prayer cloths, or mats, handkerchiefs and cloths for male and female wear. Indian cotton manufactures and probably also printed cottons, have been known since time immemorial though the original home of the Palempore industry seems to have been in Persia.

Mr. Havell wrote, "the industry may be divided into two branches, the first including handkerchiefs and turbans, cloths for male and females (dhoti and sari), bed-covers; canopies and prayer-cloths, all with the exception of the last, being for strictly domestic use. The second embraces cloths of special manufacture, nearly always hand painted, used as canopies over the images of Hindu gods, and at marriages or other ceremonies. They are also used to

60. Journal of Indian Art.
drape the car of the God during sacred processions. The
different varieties in the first class of manufacture
are used nearly exclusively by Mohamadans though in
the South India the Mohamadans have assimilated many
of the customs and habits of the Hindus, and the second
kind, of course, is made for Hindus only". Thus
Mr. Havell himself was an eye-witness of the palempore
industry existed in Tamil Nadu during his industrial tour.

In Tamil Nadu, Nagore and Kumbakonam in Tanjore
District, Uraiyr, a small suburb of Trichinopoly,
Paramagudi and Famban in Madura district were the chief
centres where the former kinds of palempores were made,
while for the other variety of palempores, Kalahasti in
North Arcoton District and Salem were noted.61 In and
about Cuddalore itself was an extensive manufacture of
Palempores, combays and gingham.62 The colours used in
the printing were, in all cases the same, though the
whole of them were not always in use in one place.

61. Selection from the Record of the Madras Presidency,

CHINTZ:

The term Chintz was generally employed to describe any dyed or printed cotton, thereby including in its category all palempores. 63

A distinct variety of palempores belonging to the first branch which we have seen above, were made at Paramagudi and Pamban. They were chiefly handkerchiefs and men's cloths for export to Burma, the Straits settlement and Arabian ports, and were noteworthy as being entirely handpainted. The weavers used some primitive apparatus to paint on cloths. Similar cloths, but bolder and somewhat coarser in design, were made at Nagore and Kumbakonam and at Karuppur in the Trichinopoly district. 64

Black-printed palempores (Chintz) were also made at some places. The fine variety of chintzes were made at Arcot and Wallajanagar in the North Arcot District. At Saidapet, a suburb of Madras, produced some block printed chintzes like that of Masulipatnam.


In addition to that printed chintzes, dyed chintzes were also made. Sarada Raju remarked that a noteworthy feature of the dyed chintzes of Masulipatnam and Madura was that the colours became even brighter and more beautiful after washing.\(^{65}\)

**KALAMKARI:**

The word Kalamkari has its origin in the technique of painting vegetable colours on well-prepared cotton fabric using a brush-like instrument called Kalam. This type of fabric painting was found in Kalahastì and Masulipatnam and Sikkanaikenpatti near Kumbakonam. In the sphere of Kalamkari paintings in the Madras Presidency the Telugu speaking weaving community predominated. During the Vijayanagar period, which saw the flourishing of Telugu culture, many Sanskrit works were translated into Telugu. Puranic stories provided the inspiration for mural paintings executed in running series on temple walls and the tradition was repeated in Kalamkari paintings on fabric also. The Mahratta kings of Tanjore also encouraged the Kalamkari artists and many of the richly

decorated dress and uniforms of members of the royal family were done by such craftsmen. After the decline of the Mahratta reign there was not much patronage. Nevertheless, the East India Company exported Kalamkari fabric to their home country.

**MAKING OF KALAMKARI FABRIC:**

The success of the Kalamkari painting near Kumbakonam was to a great extent due to the meticulous care taken to prepare the medium, the cloth, to receive the fast vegetable colour. The cloth selected for painting was unbleached white cambric. The cloth was shrunk in buffalo milk mixed with powdered myrobolans (gallnuts) and dried on grass in the shade. It was then beaten with a smooth piece of wood. The process was repeated if necessary and then the cloth was ready to be used as a medium. With the help of a bamboo stick suitably sharpened (Kalam) the outline was traced on the cloth. The borders and the curved patterns were then traced. The vegetable dyes were prepared from herbs, different varieties of grass, fruits mixed with iron and palm filings, alum surali chakkai, alizarine, Manjush chawal kodi and myrobolam flowers. Generally lustrous red,
black, indigo, dusty pink, maroon and pulpish brown were the colours used. Other hues were created by the appropriate mixtures of the above mentioned colours. After painting, the colour was allowed to dry, then the cloth was washed repeatedly until the dyes get fixed steadfastly on the cloth. The next colour was taken up and the process continues till the whole colour scheme on the fabric was finished. The decorations and the flowers of gods were done at the end. The washing of the cloth in the Coleroon river helps the colour to get fixed fast on the colour, since the calcium content of the Coleroon water was high. 66

Traditional themes were chosen from the epics and were depicted in the form of a series of horizontal panels, and at times a single familiar episode was also depicted in the entire piece of cloth. The characteristic feature of the Tanjore region temple Kalamkari works were the pleasing balance struck between the areas of figurative work and those embellished with decorative designs. This can be noted even today in the temple canopy preserved in many temples and still retain their original colour.

A magnificent collection of Kalamkari fabrics, hand-painted and block-printed palempores were exhibited in the Madras section of the Indo-colonial Exhibition in 1886. At the close of the exhibition, some important specimens were returned to Madras and they are kept in the art gallery of Madras Museum. Those specimens are:

1. A palempore of Persian carpet pattern, exported largely to Persia. The size of the palempore is 18'x18' and it was manufactured at Masulipatnam and the price was Rs.60.

2. Canopy cloth with scenes from the Mahabharata - the size of the canopy is 6'x6'. It was manufactured at Kalahasti in North Arcot District and the price, then was Rs.12.

3. Canopy cloth with scenes from Ramayana - size 13'x11' manufactured at Kalahasti in North Arcot District, price was Rs.35.67

4. During the course of one of his industrial tours in the North Arcot District, Mr. Havell found at Wallajanagar and Arcot, in nearly every house where block-printing was

carried on, (Vide Appendix No.III ) old blocks by very elaborate and beautiful designs, many of them are of Persian origin. Thus, we can understand here that the Kalamkari fabric was a kind of cloth manufactured in Tamil Nadu which mostly attracted the Europeans.

SATIN (KINCOBS):

The next important kind of cloth which was very useful for the Muslims was Satin. Satin was manufactured at Ayyampet, Arcot and Wallajanagar. The weavers of satin seem to be of northern region both from type of features and language, the latter a dialect of strongly mixed with Gujarathi. The satins were used by the Muslims for trousers under the familiar name of "Kincobs". The Ariyalur satin according to Havell, was distinct in style and of remarkable beauty in colour as well as tasteful in the simple patterns woven generally in stripes across it.

68. G.C.No.2221, Public, 13th October, 1884.
69. G.C.No.1, Public Department, dated 7th January 1850.
A kind similar in style but inferior in colour and execution was produced in the town of Trichinopoly embroidered with patterns in silver lace. 71

CALICOES:

This is another variety of cotton fabrics, which at one time occupied an important place in the list of export from India to Britain and other countries.

Dodwell noticed that calicos were manufactured at Cuddalore, Udayarpalayam, Chinnamanaickanpalayam and Shiyali. He stated that these calicos were dyed blue, principally in the neighbourhood of Porto-Novo. 72

CALICOS BLEACHED AND UNBLEACHED:

The bleached cloths, where during the 18th Century and first half of the 19th Century occupied a primary place in the exports from Madras. The usual length of such cloths were 36 cubits or 18 yards, and they varied

71. Ibid.

in width from 36 to 44 inches and 14 lbs. was being the common weight.

SALEMPORES:

The pieces of half the above mentioned length were exported under the name of salempores. 73

The unbleached calicos, under names varying in different localities, constituted a large proportion of the clothing of the poor. They were also used for packing goods, and as a covering for the dead, for which last purpose a large quantity was employed both by the Hindus and Muslims. These fabrics in Bengal called under the names of Carrha and Qusee. In Southern and Western India they were known under the more general term of Khadi. 74 There was a great demand for Madras calicoes and beteellas in Europe. Therefore, Floyer who was in charge of East India Company in Madras was asked to secure as much calicoes as possible from the Madras merchants. Further he was instructed to collect the new merchant’s balance at Madras amounted to 16000 pagodas

74. Ibid.
worth of calicoes and to send the same immediately to London.\textsuperscript{75} Thus, the calicoes from Madras were exported to Great Britain and they were re-exported to European countries by which the Britisher got a huge profit.

**TURBANS:**

These were the other kind of cloth manufactured in Salem and some other districts of Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{76} As its chief function is the protection of the head from the heat of the Sun, it was usually of fine muslin-like texture, when folded, it will be light, bulky and porous—thus admirably fulfilling its main purpose.

Of materials employed in the manufacture of turbans, cotton occupied the first place. Silk, however, was used to some extent for the higher class people. Sometimes, the gold and other decorative medium, in addition to running across the end was made to extend longitudinally, a little way up from the end, so as to be seen on the side of one or two of the last folds of the turban.

\textsuperscript{75} Henry Dodwell, \textit{Madras Despatches}, 1920, p.55.

On the basis of the materials, we can classify the turban cloths into three categories. 1. Turban pieces made of cotton thread, bleached and unbleached. 2. Turban pieces made of dyed or printed cotton yarn with coloured ends. These sorts of turbans were manufactured at Saidapet and stated to be worn by Labbays, an industrial class of Muslim fishermen and merchants on the Madras coast. 77 The same turban pieces were manufactured at Bomady in Salem district also.

The other category of the turban was the turban pieces with silk and cotton threads dyed or printed with gold thread in the ends. These were manufactured at Madura, a place celebrated for dyes and fine plain muslins with a gold stripe in the borders were manufactured at Arani in North Arcot District. 78 These high quality of turban pieces were used by the Nattukottai chettis, a big merchant community in Tamil Nadu.

COARSER VARIETIES:

The cotton lungi or sarang was a coarser variety which was worn by the poorer classes. It was a coloured

78. Ibid.
garment generally with a pronounced check and was worn in all the districts of Tamil Nadu with the two ends stitched together. The length was 2 to 2½ yards. The word sarang was the Malay equivalent of the lungi and like the latter, which is a Burmese word, which means 'Nether garment'.

**Khadar:**

Khadar was a coarser cloth, woven from the lowest count of yarn. They were sold in competition with handloom cloth from hand spun yarn.

**Canvas Cotton:**

The other coarse variety of cloth was canvas-cotton. This kind of fabrics were used in the construction of tents. The quantity of cotton annually consumed for the production of tent cloth and sail cloth was very large in Salem and Madura. A tent cloth by name Dungaree was manufactured at Salem and the sail cloth by name Dungaree unbleached was also produced at Salem.

**Towels:**

Towels of cotton and silk were manufactured at Cuddalore, Chingleput and Salem.\(^{79}\) Printed and dyed yarns were also used.

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The Britishers had given so many names to the cotton and silk piece-goods produced in the Madras Presidency. They were Allejars, Betellas, Callawapores, Dimities from St. David, gingham, (it includes small white, blue striped, red striped, coloured, chequered and super-fine coloured) Izarees, Lampasses, Longcloth, Moorees, Romals, Sastracundia, Bright, Sarrasses, Sicsshes-fine and Succatums-fine. We have already mentioned all the varieties of cloths produced in Tamil Nadu. But the British merchants had given their own names to different cloths which are already dealt in the above paragraphs.

**CARPETs:**

The sacred writings of the Hindus contain frequent references to carpets, which were woven with cotton, silk and wool.

In South India, the carpets were entirely produced for the interest of Sovereigns, Princes, nobles and rich. There is little doubt that "Akbar the Great" brought the art of carpet-weaving into North India from Persia and

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established in Lahore a factory for the making of carpets for himself and his great comrades and feudatories. And, although carpet weaving evidently came to South India with the poor immigrants from Persia, it is reasonable to suppose that Princes and nobles were the best patrons of the weavers of the South.

In the sixteenth century itself the South Indian carpets gained popularity in the European countries. The credit of introducing South Indian carpets into European countries goes to the Portuguese. Here is an interesting narrative on how the portugueses even went to the extent of pirating ships carrying the South Indian carpets from the coasts of India. Doubtless some of the old South Indian carpets may still be found in the cathedrals, churches and old houses of the rich and noble in Southern Europe, which were got through the exertions of these estimable gentlemen. Thus it seems that the South Indian Carpets were very familiar in the sixteenth and seventeenth Century itself and upto the second half of the nineteenth century the carpets were very eagerly imported by the

Europeans into their countries. Now we will see the varieties of carpets such as cotton, silk and woollen carpets and the places famous for its production in Tamil Nadu.

COTTON CARPETS

Cotton carpets were made at Arcot, Wallajanagar (North Arcot District), Ayyampet (Tanjore District) and Ranjangudi (Trichy District) and Bhavani (Coimbatore District). Until the arrival of aniline dyes into India in the 80s of 19th Century, the vegetable dyes were used for dyeing carpets. Havell reported that the carpet weavers worked together in large "Kharkhanas" and were not assisted by the females of their families. The weavers received from 2 to 8 annas as wages according to their skill. 82

The carpets were chiefly made by a few families of Kaikolans in Palni and Rautans in Ayyakudi. The native christians (originally Ambuttans) of Vedasandur in Dindigul region and a number of villages in Periyakulam

and Kannivadi Zamindari produced the cotton carpets. In Timmarasanayakkanur, Seliyan wove similar cotton carpets which were used for making native tents and purdahs. 83 Havell further estimates that the Ayyampet carpets were good and those of Ranjangudi were the best, both in design and colour. He was of the opinion that country cotton was always used in the manufacture. 84 Ranjangudi in Trichy district had a reputation for cotton carpets. The colours and designs were described as very excellent. 85

But later, that is in the 80s of the 19th Century the Jails in Tamil Nadu began to produce carpets and these Jail carpets became the competitor for the country carpets. Now, we shall see the carpets produced in various Jails.

VELLORE JAIL:

Cotton Carpets were manufactured since 1881 in Vellore Jail. They consisted of three varieties -

ordinary, superior and tent carpets. These carpets varied in size, but were usually made from 6 to 7' long and 3' to 4' broad. Tent carpets were plainer than the ordinary ones, usually consisted of stripes of two colours running at right angles to the warp. The ordinary carpets were priced at Rs.1-8-0 and the superior ones at Rs.2-4-0 per square yard and the tent carpets were sold at Rs.1-4-0 per square yard. The number of looms at Vellore jail was 10. The looms employed were the ordinary pit-loom.

SALEM JAIL:

The manufacture of cotton carpets or Jamakalams was first introduced in 1892. Mr. J.E. Young was the then Superintendent of the jail. Samples were sent to England, where orders for large numbers were received from English firms. The cotton carpets were in the sizes of 6'x3' and 8'x5', and 4'x2' and these were bought by the Military Department. About 20 looms were employed in the Salem jail.

TANJORE JAIL:

From 1890 a small beginning was made with cotton carpet weaving of dyed twist. The carpets were woven on
ordinary country looms. The manufacture of carpets from Tanjore jail readily met the demands of the local hospitals. The convicts of the jail wove these carpets. Later, the natives of Tamil Nadu began to feel the competition from the carpets manufactured in jails. 86

SILK CARPETS:

From the district Gazetteer published in 1906 it is known that Ayyampet in Tanjore district was famous for silk carpets. The cheaper jail-made woollen rugs had destroyed the industry there, and the woollen carpets were rarely made, and silk ones were made only to order. Both were excellent in quality, especially the latter, but the colour combinations were not always planned. The warp was of thick cotton thread, and the woof usually of aloe fibre for woollen, and cotton for silk carpet. The price of a woollen carpet, 6 feet by 3 feet was Rs. 7, and a silk one of the same dimensions, which took three times as long (viz. one month) to make, was Rs. 44. 87

Revered Edward Terry's glorious attributes on the carpet weaver of South India, gives a clear picture on their talent. He says that the weavers made richer carpets all of silk, or of silk and wool so artificially mixed that they lively represented flowers and figures made in them. The grounds of some other, of their very rich carpets were in silver and gold, which were most excellently and orderly disposed throughout the whole world. 88

WOOLLEN CARPETS:

As in the past, in the nineteenth century also, there were only four centres of woollen carpet weaving industry in the Madras Presidency. They were Ellore in the Godavari district, Masulipatnam in the Kistna district, Wallajanagar in the North Arcot District and Ayyampet in the Tanjore District. Since our area of review is Tamil Nadu alone, we ought to see Woollen carpets made in Tanjore and Wallajanagar alone. The collector of Tanjore in 1895 replied to an enquiry made by Edgar Thurston, acting as a Secretary, for the

88. A Voyage to East India by the Revered Edward Terry (Chaplain to Sir Thomas Roe, Ambassador to the Great Mughals), 1615-17, (London, 1655).
committee, constituted to study the working of the Madras School of Arts, that the sizes of the woollen carpets made in his district were 6'x3', 8'x4' and 10'x5' and they cost from ten annas to a rupee per square foot, according to the quality. Only vegetable dyes were used. He continues to say that the white wool of superior quality was obtained from Vriddhachalam and of an inferior quality from Tanjore and the black wool was obtained from villages on the north side of the Coleroon river.

Regarding the manufacture of woollen carpets in Tamil Nadu, Havell said that Ayyampet in Tanjore district was an important centre for the manufacture of woollen carpets for which the district was famous. The looms and methods of weaving were the same as that of cotton and silk. In 1880, he said further, that there were 107 families engaged in this industry in Ayyampet. Wallajanagar of North Arcot District was also a famous centre for woollen manufactures. The patterns and colours manufactured here were very bold and striking.89

89. E.B. Havell, Journal of Indian Art, 1890; Letter from the Director of Land Revenue and Agriculture to the Government, dated 13th March 1885; G.O.No.791, Public Department, dated 30 March 1885.
Moreover, the woollen carpets were manufactured from 1874 at Central jail, Vellore, where the convicts were taught the industry by a professional Muslim carpet weaver from Ellore.

In Trichinopoly jail an extensive woollen weaving industry, other than carpets was carried on. There were four kinds of woollen articles made in this jail, viz., blankets for the native troops, blankets for convicts, jhools for the Remount Depot at Hosur, and mops for British troops. But as Mr. Havell wrote in a pamphlet entitled "Madras Carpets" (1896) that though Madras carpets were very famous, it fell into disrepute because it was manufactured largely in jails by the convicts who did not have the practice to weave the carpets as that of the native weaver.

BLANKETS:

This is the another kind of cloth manufactured by the weavers in Tamil Nadu. The yarn used for the manufacture of blankets were prepared from cotton, silk and wool. The blankets could be classified into two kinds. One is coarse blankets and the other is rough blankets.
Coarse blankets were made in 49 villages in Tiruvannamalai taluk, 16 villages of Vriddhachalam taluk. In Tanjore taluk, the woollen blanket industry was carried on only in a single village in Manojiappachavadi. Wool was purchased from Wallajapet, the seat of the carpet industry in the North Arcot District, which was readily dyed red or yellow colour.

Rough blankets were manufactured in 59 villages in Coimbatore taluk. The sheep were shorn twice a year, in March and September and the wool was sorted into white and black, cleaned with a bow, and spun into thread, which was treated cruel made of tamarind seeds and sun dried.

The coarse blankets were manufactured mainly by the people of Kuruba class who mostly lived in Salem and Trichinopoly districts. 90

Bhevani, in Coimbatore district, was the famous centre for cotton blanket weaving. For the warp and weft the Bhevani weavers purchased the yarn in the

local markets and dyed locally. The blankets were sent to Madras and Trichinopoly as well as to various places in the Coimbatore district. Some were sold to pilgrims, who came to carry out the bathing ceremonial at the confluence of the Bhavani and Cauvery rivers. The price of the ordinary blankets with red and black stripes was varied from Rs. 5 to Rs. 7.  

The manufacture of woollen blankets was widely prevalent in Madurai district also. The Canarese speaking kuruba community which migrated to Madurai from Mysore and Deccan countries in the remote past were skillful weavers in this. They wove the woollen blankets from the wool of the black and white sheep.  

In all districts, in general, the woollen blanket weavers belonged to Kuruba community. Both Kuruba men and women engaged in the industry. It is said that the blankets made by them found a ready sale locally. But, the cotton and silk blankets were manufactured by kaikolans and patnulkarans. Thus almost every district was famous for the production of one or more varieties of cloth.