

## Audio 1 : Transcript

Vaishnavi: “I learnt how to knot before I learnt how to weave” ( a quote by Meenaben Sindhav, Rajkoti patola weaver)

We found Meenaben’s video on youtube in which she explains that she was very young when she learnt how to weave khadi and then eventually learnt patola on a neighbourhood loom. She would just watch the patola weavers work. Like her and many other weavers whose video interviews we watched, we learnt how to observe and we saw weaves everywhere, in bazaars, in our wardrobes and on the streets (pochampalli or iLkal saris around us in Bangalore).

Arnika: Apart from all the research and cataloguing data that went into this exhibition, we also wanted to talk a little bit about why and how we worked on tie and dye textiles and what really fascinates, but also bewilders us. In this audiopiece we will take you through the making of tie and dye textiles, and explain terms like resisting and imitation more.

Let’s start with the making. How are ikats or other textiles in this exhibition woven?

Vaishnavi: If you look closely at a plain fabric in your house like a dishcloth (usually reused cotton fabrics in India) or a basket, we can see horizontal weft and vertical warp lines.....these lines go over and under each other to create cloth. The textiles you see in the exhibition are woven on hand looms. Sometimes a handloom can be as simple as two wooden poles, holding a field of threads that a weaver works on. A backstrap loom in which you literally strap your back to the wooden poles is interesting for ikat because we can control the tension of the threads with our body.

Arnika: The tension of the warp and weft can be felt when we hold it in our hand and try to stretch it. Some weaves like the weft ikat are tightly woven. They are so tight that even the weave is barely visible. We would need a magnifying glass to see it. The ikats here vary not just because of the patterns but also the tension of the yarns.

And in that case, ikat is also a weave?

Vaishnavi: Yes, but it’s more than that. It’s also a tie-dye-resist process at the same time.

Arnika: Is it like batik - a process in which wax resists the dye?

Vaishnavi: Yes, exactly that but the warp and weft are tie-dyed first. Imagine the same resist process is applied to threads before it goes to the loom. Most fabrics are created with a resist process after weaving. A very simple example of that is block printing in which a wooden block stamps a colour on the cloth.

Arnika: Like we noticed how a block printed cloth was imitating a patola? The basket weave pattern that we see in Gujarati patola resembles the eight-pointed stars on silk patola woven for the Indonesian market. How did that come about? I noticed that the colours, the triangular ends, everything is quite similar and yet different to touch.

Vaishnavi: The ones exported to Indonesia are coarser to touch than the ones made for India, the patola patterns are woven with specific sacred symbolism. For instance, a floral pattern might be auspicious and indicate a jain spiritual experience. However, the same pattern when imitated or made for the Indonesian market changes it's meaning.

Arnika: Yes, In the patola below our audio, we see that the dimensions of the cloth have become smaller than that of a saree, which changes the number of pattern repeats. The imitation of a technique which might have spiritual meaning makes it non-transferable. And yet, we see the patola in a new context imbued with ceremonial value by the keepers of the textile.

Arnika: Another question that always puzzled me is: Are all patola wedding sarees?

Vaishnavi: Only the ones with a red background and an auspicious pattern can be worn by the bride as a wedding sari but it's difficult to tell. Folk songs in Gujarati explain how even if a patola tears, it's patterns will never come apart. This always makes us ask questions about how the weavers might have imagined the life of a sari even before it was made.

Arnika: Yes, we always thought about who and how many people worked on it? Who purchased it and who wore it? What did wearing a heavy garment like the Uzbek ikat robe feel like? What if we saw this ikat, unstitched, before it was made into a robe, would we view it differently?

Vaishnavi: Let's just take the example of the robe you spoke about. I had read that shohi ikats were all silk robes which made a "rustling sound" when worn, men would be interested in the sound that announced their presence. So there are always stories that tell us more about the robe but it always has multiple histories working together.

Arnika: You know, we were also talking about how all the ikats are connected.

Vaishnavi: It's fascinating that some dyers of bandhani have lineage dating back to the 13th century Timur period which indicates that most ikat and bandhani textiles were connected to each other either with trade or migration.

You'll hear us talk about bandhanis in our next audio below.