

DESIGNS OF PATOLA AND GERINGSING A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract: *Ikat is a very special traditional textile that is woven on the loom by tie-dyeing yarns in designated areas before weaving, to produce exquisite patterned fabrics. Today, there are only three kinds of traditional double ikat fabrics made in the world – Geringsing in Bali, Patola in Gujarat and Kasuri in Japan. Among the three, Indian Patola is world renowned due to its crucial role in the “Spice trade” as a prized item of exchange with the spices and aromatics from South East Asia during the centuries long spice trade. It has been widely observed and noted that the Indian Patola influenced the fabrics in South East Asia, especially Indonesia in terms of the technique and look. This paper aims to compare the designs and motifs of the double-ikat fabrics of Gujarat and Bali by studying figurative type double ikat fabrics of the two regions. With the help of distinct examples, patterns, forms, layouts and motifs are compared with reference to their religious and symbolic significance to highlight the similarities and dissimilarities of these wonderful fabrics.*

Keywords: *Ikat, Bali, Patan, Patola, Geringsing*

1. Introduction

Ikat is defined as a technique of making textiles in which the yarns have been tie-dyed before weaving [1]. It is has been derived from Malayan word “Mengikat”, which means binding (adjective), to bind, to tie, to bond (verb). It is the process of tying and dyeing weft or warp or both set of threads in particular designs before weaving. In the manual process of making ikat, the areas of the yarn that are to remain un-dyed are tied or bound by a material that does not allow the dyes to penetrate. The dyed yarns are subsequently unwound and hand-woven to produce vivid designs and patterns. The characteristic look of an ikat fabric comes from its blurry or hazy effect that develops on the fabric due to slight bleeding of the colors into the bound areas during dyeing and shows up on the fabric surface on weaving.

Ikat weaving has a long history in the world and there are many different theories as to the origin and antiquity of this technique. The technique has been practiced in several parts of the world at one time or another [2]. Therefore it is believed that the technique may have evolved independently in several areas of the world. An accidental staining of the warp or weft might have led to the creation of the first ikat-like fabrics.

Ikat textiles are produced in South and South east Asia, Central Asia, the Near East, West Africa and central and South America [3]. The different types of *ikat* practiced in the world include -Single *Ikat*, Double *Ikat* and Compound or Combination *Ikat*

In single *ikat*, only one set of yarns is tied before weaving. Therefore either warp or weft is tie-dyed while the other set of one single color is woven with the pattern dyed set.

Compound or combination *ikat* refers to the use of both warp and weft *ikat* but unlike double *ikat*, the two sets of yarns are not matched together to form the design. Both warp tie-dyed yarn patterns and weft tie-dyed yarn patterns may appear in distinct parts of the fabric and sometimes appear as random motifs formed by the overlap of the two patterns. Consequently, some areas show presence of warp *ikat*, others show a weft *ikat* patterning and some others show the double *ikat* patterning. This kind of *ikat* is found most often in the “*PagduBandhu*”, *ikat* of Orissa and Japanese *ikat*.

For most *ikat* fabrics, the threads to be given same motifs are bunched and tied together¹ on the frame with a resisting material. The tied yarns are dyed and subsequently untied. The yarns may then be retied to further

¹ The Japanese are known to have applied the *itajime* technique of clamping warp yarns between boards to resist the dye. Even blocks have been used to create resist dyed surfaces on the warp yarns for ikat.

dye in a second color that can give as many as 4 color variations in the resultant yarn². The dyed yarns are finally woven to produce a single, double or compound *ikat*.

In double *ikat*, both the sets of warp and weft are tied and dyed before weaving. The patterns are designed in such a way that the warp and weft combine to form unified motifs. The resultant pattern is achieved on the loom by carefully adjusting the warp and the weft while weaving so that they match and align with each other.

There are only three areas in the world today that practice double *ikat* – Patan in Gujarat, India where the magnificent *Patola* fabrics are made; Tenganan, in Bali, Indonesia which is home to the magical *Geringsing*; and parts of Japan where it is called *Kasuri*

Double *ikat* is remarkable in its creation as the complexity involved in tying and dyeing of the yarns can take up months to prepare the yarns before weaving. Even the weaving becomes very slow as after every few inches, the designs are carefully matched to form the combined patterns [4].

2. *Ikat* in Bali and Patan

2.1. *Ikat* in Bali

Bali is an island and a province in the Lesser Sunda Islands, situated 1.6 km east of the island of Java in Indonesia [5].

Textiles in Bali are more than mere cloths – they are treated as a medium to recognize and express the divine nature of the world – as they are an integral part of the ceremonies, festivals and offerings that honor the divine [6]. Bali is the home to special *ikat* fabrics that are unique to this island. While single *ikat* (weft *ikat*) fabrics called *endek* and *ceput* are woven in several places in Bali, the double *ikat* fabric called *Geringsing* is woven only in the small village of TengananPegeringsingan in east Bali. These textiles constitute a very important part of the rituals and ceremonies observed in this mountain-village [7].

The term *Geringsing* is composed of two words – “gring” that means sickness and “sing” that means no. The very nomenclature of this word implies the mystical qualities associated with this textile. The word is said to be of Sanskrit origin which points towards the connection between this fabric and India [8].

The inhabitants of Tengananvillage believe in God “Indra” who according to the traditional folklore, created the first humans and conceived the design of *Geringsing* and taught the making of this textile to the inhabitants.

Geringsing can be described as the fabric of ritualistic life at Tenganan where it is woven by the women in cotton and used for strict formal dress that is worn during complex rituals. These fabrics were first brought into the notice of the world by the Dutch explorer, W.O.J. Nieuwenkamp who encountered them in the early 20th century. But the antiquity of these fabrics may be better understood by certain literary references. In an ode composed in 1365 by a Buddhist sage, there is a description of a royal caravan that mentions the *Geringsing* curtains of the king’s carriage. Ancient East Javanese texts about the first king of Majapahit, allude to the giving of *Geringsing* clothing by the king to his warriors before battle [9].

2.2. *Ikat* in Patan

Patan, located at about 130kms away from Ahmedabad was the capital of Gujarat for more than 500 years under various regimes of the Chavda, Solanki and Vaghela dynasties between 746 and 1411 AD. The city was founded by king VanrajChavda, the first ruler of Chavda dynasty, who named the city AnhilwadPatan or AnahilpurPatan(after his Prime Minister and friend Anhil) [10]. This ancient city has been world renowned for its double *ikat* silk fabrics called *Patola*.

Even though the technique did not develop in this region on its own, it reached its pinnacle of popularity, under the craftsmanship of “Salvis”, the traditional weavers of double *ikat*. According to folklore, the Salvi

² Another method of producing multi colored *ikat*, specially weft *ikat* is being used in South and South-east Asia in which after the dyeing of the background color, specific areas are untied and daubed with different colors to create multi colored cloth.

weavers were specially re-settled from Jalna in Maharashtra to Patan in Gujarat by King Kumarpal, to enable the production of double *ikat* fabrics in his kingdom [11].

The word *Patola* can be related to Sanskrit words like *Pata* or *Patta* that may have meant silk. The origin of this double *ikat* technique in India is still very unclear. Even though a lot of literary documents mention the word *Patola*, it is not certain whether the word referred to the same double *ikat* fabrics as produced in Patan.

Archeologically, the earliest depiction of *Patola* type fabrics are found in the temple frescoes of Padmanabham palace and Mattencheri in Kerala that were made in the 17th century [12].

3. Structure and size of *Patola* and *Geringsing*

The *Patolu* is generally rectangular in shape and is divided into a central part and two end panels that are edged by vertical borders.

The main or the central field occupies the largest area that is invariably (almost) decorated in double *ikat* patterns. This field is surrounded by a frame of *ikat* motifs or demarcated by one or more stripes in *ikat* patterning. The end panels have identical patterns but may differ in size.

The sizes of *Patola* fabrics vary greatly according to the end use. The width varies from 70-150cms and the length varies from 340-750cms. Apart from the *Patola* made for exports to South-East Asia, most of the domestic usage was for a woman's attire – *sari*, *odhani* and *dupatta* – as an uncut and unstitched garment. The exported *Patola* were used in Indonesia as unstitched fabrics as well as to make trousers and other stitched garments.

The *Geringsing* is mostly rectangular in shape with a long and large central panel with bands at either end. This arrangement is almost universal in all these fabrics. The central panel is further divided by various arrangements of motifs in vertical, horizontal and transverse directions. Its size varies from 40-56cms in width and 162-258cms in length. The widths are relatively narrow as these are made on narrow back-tension looms. In fact, the fabric is woven in a tubular structure, which is cut open to form a rectangle. Broader fabrics are achieved by joining two fabrics along their length.

Geringsing cloth is used by both men and women as - belts, body wrappers, and breast cloths. There are a lot of specific rituals where the locals of the Tenganan village dress in traditional *Geringsing* to participate.

4. Motifs and Patterns of *Patola* and *Geringsing*

Patola designs are composed of plant, zoomorphic, anthropomorphic and abstract geometrical motifs. Bühler and Fischer in their exhaustive study of *Patola* of Gujarat, have meticulously studied and classified the *Patola* patterns in sub-groups based on the main field patterning. The traditional *Patola* have been divided into four main groups.

- a. Single leaf motifs in transverse rows in main field (leaf forms and leaf combinations)
- b. Floral designs in main field
- c. Main field patterned with figurative motifs -human and animal figures
- d. Abstract geometrical motifs (sometimes complimented by plat motifs) in the main field.

The main motifs of *Patola* include crosses, triangles, *tumpal*, triangles, lozenges, star shapes, octagonal forms, heart shaped leaves, five and seven petalled blossoms, stylized parrots, peacocks, elephants, dancing girls.

Patola are easily recognized by the name of the design in the main field in Gujarat. Thus one finds names for *Patola* like the following

“*panbhat*” (group a type) – a design composed of the leaves of betel (pan);

“*tranphoolbhat*” (group b type) – a design composed of floral sprigs with three blossoms each of which is 5 petalled ;

“*nari, kunjara, popatbhat*” (group c type) – a design composed of a girl, elephant and parrot

“*dadambhat*” (group d type) – a geometrical design that resembles pomegranatae (*dadam*)

Most of these words have a Gujarati connotation that refers to the specific motif in the main field of *Patola*. “*kunjara*” that refers to an elephant is a Sanskrit word.

Patola fabrics range from 130-150cms in width to 340-400cms in length for *odhani* (wraps); 90-100cms wide by 400 -500cms long for short *saris*.

The *Geringsing* designs motifs include stylized flowers, lozenges, stars, small crosses and human figures. These textiles can be broadly classified under two categories of

- a. Floral and abstract geometrical motifs
- b. Figurative motifs (based on the *wayang*)

The terminology used with reference to the *Geringsing* is also based on the visual motif depicted in the main field. Generally they are named after a fruit or flower as well as other pictorial names whose meanings are not very clear [13]. In some names, another word is added, which refers to the width of the cloth.

Some common names for *geringsing* are

Geringsingcicempaka (group 1 type) – a design depicting flower

Geringsingwayang (group 2 type) – a design depicting human figures in *wayang* theatre style

5. Comparison of the two examples of figurative *ikats*

The comparison is done between the figurative type designs of these two fabrics.

Patola fabrics with figurative representations were made both for domestic usage and export fabrics. The latter usually comprised of a “*singh*” or tiger along with “*haathi*” (elephant).

In the comparison below, a figurative type of *Patola* (meant for domestic use) is compared with the figurative *Geringsing wayang*.

The *wayang Geringsing* fabric is based on the *wayang* theatre. *Wayang* means shadow in Javanese. It refers to the classical Javanese puppet drama in which shadows created by puppets (manipulated by rods) on a translucent screen lit from behind are used. This form was developed before the 10th century, and has origins in the *thalubomalata*, the leather puppets of southern India. This art probably spread to Java with the spread of Hinduism after 7th century AD.

5.1 Comparison: Colors

The *Geringsing wayang* (figure 1) has limited number of colors that are in contrast to each other. These colors are muted that include – reddish brown, black and tan color (natural color of the yarns completely reserved from dye). The tan color also forms the heavy outlines of the motifs depicted.

The *Patolu* (figure 2) has a wider color palette with hues of red, orange, orange-red, violet, white and yellow. The fully reserved sections of the yarns form the outlines as well as filling of the motifs.

5.2 Comparison: Layout & Patterns

This *Geringsing* (figure 1) characterized by a long main field bordered by narrow bands on opposite sides. Four pointed stars divide the rectangular field into semicircles, which are filled with motifs that are mirrored along both the axis.

The *Patolu* (figure 2) is rectangular in shape with the main field and end panels that are clearly demarcated by grids and lines. The motifs are repeated alternately and are unidirectional.

5.3 Comparison: Motifs

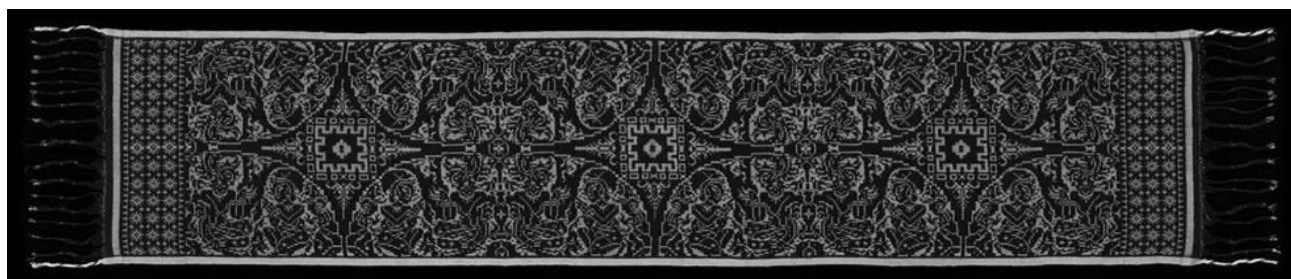


Figure 1: *Geringsing Wayang Kebo* cloth from Tenganan, Bali, early 20th Century, 234x51 cm. Courtesy Thomas Murray

The star motifs of the *geringsing wayang*(figure 3) have a stepped rectangle in the center referred to as “kotamesir”outside Tenganan. The semi circular areas depict pairs of two or three human figures placed opposite to one another, one or two kneeling and the other squatting. The bodies of these human figures are shown in three quarter frontal position and heads in profile that is typical of the *wayangkullit*(shadow play puppets).

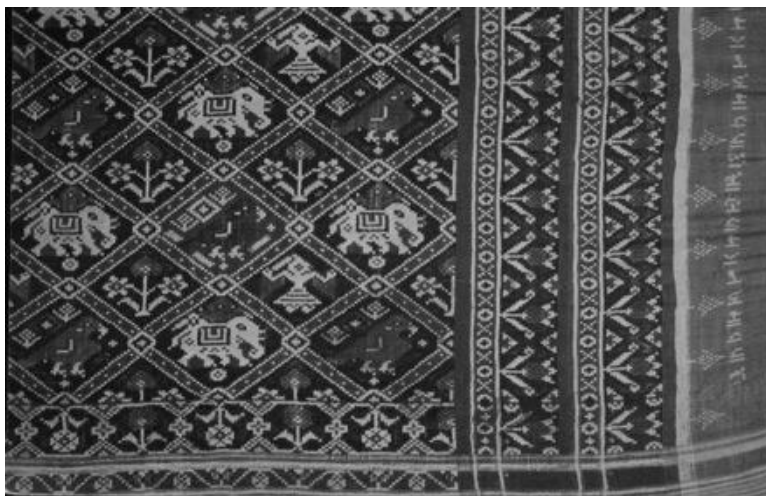


Figure 2: Narikunjarpopatbhat,Patola Sari, Patan

In the example compared the raised figure (figure 3) is thought to be that of a priest with a huge headdress and the other seated somewhat lower is a woman, with falling tresses. She seems to be kneeling (probably) in reverence of the priest.

This depiction is in agreement with the aesthetics of Bali due to its heavy detailing and space occupation. In words of Stephen Davies, “The Balinese dislike blank spaces. They fill their artworks with complex, fine and exquisite details”[14].

The textile is dark reddish purple with designs outlined heavily and detailed by the tan color of the reserved yarns

This depiction is also reminiscent of the bas-relief sculpture of Hindu-Buddhist temples and shrines of fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Java and Bali.

The figurative *Patolu* (with human and animal figures are quite vivid in their appearance. These *Patola* are characterized by anthropomorphic and zoomorphic depictions along with plants. The repertoire of motifs includes elephants, dancing girl or doll, tigers, parrot, and floral sprigs alternating in the main field. These figures are depicted with quite a few details and are generally placed within niches created in an overall grid. The grid is either formed by lozenges, diagonal lines or vertical and horizontal bands that run in the main field.



Figure 3: Detail of figure1 (left) and figure2 (right).

The female figure depicted in a dance pose is shown wearing a skirt with horizontal stripes. A shawl like drape is hanging down her arms that are raised in a "v" shape. The head of the girl is shaped in a lozenge with a hint of a mouse and cross-shaped eye. An *odhani* or plait of the girl point towards the hands of the girl. The parrots in these fabrics are depicted in red, yellow or orange with a curved beak in white. There is hint of an eye and plumage on the parrot's body too. The parrot is surrounded by small flowering plant depicted by a lozenge shaped bud and two leaf-like projections. The figures have a special meaning too. For example the elephant signifies knowledge and wisdom. The woman figure is a very typical depiction of women in Gujarati miniature paintings.

Patola are not traditionally used by the makers i.e. the Salvi community. Rather, other communities in India use *Patola*. The textile shown here in particular was used by the Hindu Brahmin community (Nagars and Anavil) and considered very auspicious with having sacred power.

The *Geringsing wayang* interestingly is also not used so often by the Tenganan inhabitants. This is intriguing since all the other *Geringsing* fabrics are an indispensable part of the ceremonies of the "Bali Aga".

6. Conclusion

On comparing the two kind of double *ikat* fabrics, it can be concluded that both possess a very distinct visual identity and neither seems to have influenced the other directly. Both the *ikats* have been inspired from the cultural milieu in which they were meant to be used.

The *Geringsing wayang* fabric have been inspired by the *wayang kulit* theatre and *Patola* by the Hindu iconography of elephants, tigers and elements from the daily life.

An interesting aspect to consider here is that the *wayang* theatre itself narrates stories and myths from the Hindu scriptures of Ramayana and Mahabharata. So there is a thread of connection.

Other than the technique of double *ikat*, all the other aspects of color, form, layout and details differ in the two fabrics.

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