

Design Resource

Silk Weaving and Sericulture - Chintamani, Karnataka

Silk Farming and Manufacturing

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Ms. Parvathi Pooja

NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/silk-weaving-and-sericulture-chintamani-karnataka>



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Introduction

Silk is a natural animal protein fiber, which spells the class of excellence in the fiber domain. Raw silk is broadly classified into two types: plant silk and animal silk, based on its origin. The plant silk is obtained from the plant family Bombacaceae, while the silk from the animal is from mulberry and non-mulberry sources. Mulberry silk is derived from domesticated moths and Non-mulberry from a wild type. With its commendable aesthetic appeal, this fiber is believed to be originated in the 4th Millenium BCE when sericulture started in china. For more than 2000 years, the Chinese kept this silk extraction method a secret, playing a monopoly in the market and becoming the most zealously guarded secret in history. Then at around 300 CE, it spread gradually through the Chinese culture to the countries of Asia. Japan and Rome were the first to untie the secret, and soon they could obtain silkworm eggs. Simultaneously Arabs also began to process silk, and as a result of some religious crusades happened then, this slowly paved its way into Italy and other parts of Western Europe. Later during the medieval age, the business saw an upended change with the spinning wheel's invention. As a result, silk rapidly became a popular luxury fabric globally for its texture and sheen.

Silk Road, an ancient network of trade routes, played an important role in global trade and the introduction of silk. The Silk Road connects China with the West. Followed through the Great Wall of China to ending with the Mediterranean Sea, this route allows all the trading merchandise to be shipped to various countries. Asia is the main producer of silk, with 95% of the total global output. Even though there are 40 different countries on the world map of silk, China and India are the major producers to date. India contributes to around 18% of the total raw silk production while being the largest consumer too. About 97% of India's mulberry silk produce comes from the Indian states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Jammu and Kashmir. According to archaeological records, India is found to be the pioneer of silk production, with its traces dating back to our Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro civilizations. The Indus Civilization is believed of mastering the art in 2000 BC, while silk production in China commenced in 2570 BC. It is said that people of the Civilization either harvested silkworm cocoons or traded with people who did.

The Varanasi brocades, the luxurious fabrics of Karnataka, the dye craft of Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, the Kashmiri weightless silk, the sheen crepes of Bandhej, the golden Assamese Muga and the temple silk of Kanchipuram are the few varieties of silk products woven exclusively in India, whose fame has went cross borders. In Karnataka, Chintamani is the one unique town with the largest silk market and centuries of expertise in sericulture. Here as silk production is the main occupation, people are well-versed in the harvesting of cocoons and silk saree weaving. The climate of the place exquisitely supports the growth of mulberry plants, thus harvesting silk.

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The view of Hunasenahalli junction.



The owner of the cocoon producing firm.



The cocoons from which silk yarns are produced.



The yarns are rolled to the rod and dipped in the solution during the dyeing.

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Reeling threads from the winding creels to the spindles.

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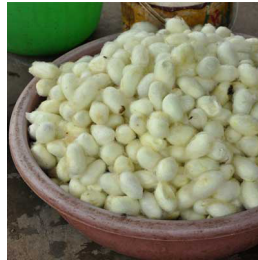
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Tools and Raw Materials



Sericulture



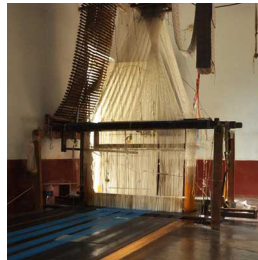
Raw Silk Reeling



Dyeing



Spinning



Weaving

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Sericulture

Tools and raw materials that are used for sericulture are:

- **Mulberry Leaf:** The leaf of the mulberry plant is fed to the caterpillars.
- **Humidifier:** Humidifier helps to warm the room to a certain temperature. This temperature control is essential for the eggs to hatch and for the healthy growth of caterpillars.
- **Plastic Tray:** It is used for placing the caterpillars.
- **Cold Storage:** It is used to store the eggs to prevent them from hatching for hibernation.
- **Leaf Chopper:** A leaf chopper is used for chopping mulberry leaves.
- **Air Cooler:** Air cooler is necessary to cool the room to a preferred temperature.
- **Refrigerator:** After the mating of the moth, the male moth is kept in the fridge to cool it down for the next intercourse.
- **Paper Sheets:** Paper sheets are placed for the moths to lay eggs, where the eggs stick on to the paper.
- **Bamboo Tray:** The bamboo tray is used to keep the cocoons.



Cocoons made from a single filament of material secreted by the pupae.

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Mulberry leaves on which silkworm feed on.



A leaf-cutting machine is used to cut the mulberry leaves.

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Raw Silk Reeling

Tools and raw materials that are used for raw silk reeling are:

- **Silk Reeling Machine:** The silk reeling machine is used to reel the Cocoon baves together to produce a single thread.
- **Weighing Scale:** It is used to check the weight of the silk yarn.
- **Boiler:** The harvested cocoons are boiled in a boiler; this helps the cocoon degum the silk is produced, thus making it easy to extract.
- **Steamer:** Steamer is used to steam the cocoons, which kills the caterpillar and loosens up the silk from the cocoon.
- **Shaved Wood:** As shaved wood is light, it is used to control the temperature of the water in the steamer as required.
- **Bamboo Stick:** It is used to remove the gum, which floats on the water during the degumming process.



Yarns being measured in a weighing machine.

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Dyeing

Tools and raw materials that are used for dyeing are:

- **Boiler:** It is used to boil the water.
- **Dye Colour:** Chemical dyes and acid dyes are used.
- **Metal Rods:** These are used to hang the dyed silk yarn dipping in colour solution.
- **Salt:** Salt is one of the components in dyeing.
- **Soap:** It is also one of the components in dyeing.
- **Dryer:** It helps drain out excess water from the fabric, helping it dry faster.



Dry colours are used to dye the silk yarn.



Dryer machine used for removing the excess water.

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Spinning

Tools and raw materials that are used for spinning are:

- **Charkha:** Charkha is the primary tool used for spinning silk.
- **Spindal:** It is used to spin silk fibers into thread.
- **Silk Yarn:** It is the primary and essential product for spinning.
- **Plastic Pirns:** A Pirn is a small rod onto which the silk thread is wound for use in weaving.
- **Winding Machine:** It is a machine used for wrapping silk yarns.
- **Warping Machine:** Warping machine stretches the yarn and placed it onto the loom to make fabric.



Yarn bundles being removed from the warping machine.

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Weaving

Tools and raw materials that are used for spinning are:

- **Handloom:** Handloom is essential for weaving.
- **Loaded Pirns:** Fully loaded pirns are attached to the fly shuttle.
- **Loaded Spindle:** Fully loaded spindles are used for weaving.
- **Fly Shuttle:** It is used to insert the weft yarns for weaving.
- **Colored Silk Yarn:** For weaving, colored silk yarns are mostly preferred, as it makes beautiful sarees.
- **Gondhu Pasai (Local Gum):** It is mixed with water to form a paste that is applied to the sarees to give it appropriate stiffness.
- **Jacquard Punch Card:** It simplifies the process of weaving complex patterns like brocade, damask, and matelassé fabrics.



Raw silk, the basic raw material for saree weaving.

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Pit loom is used for saree weaving.



Jacquard to create motifs.



Flying shuttle used for the weft insertion while weaving.

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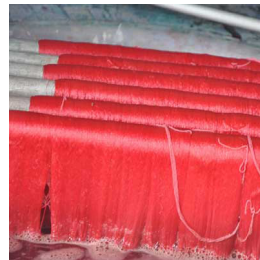
Making Process



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Sericulture

• Mulberry Cultivation – Silkworm Food

Mulberry cultivation plays an important part in sericulture, as it forms the basic diet for the silk caterpillars. Almost 60% of the silk production cost goes to Mulberry planting. The metamorphic stages of silk moth eggs to ultimately cocoon demand a ton of mulberry leaves. The silkworm's diet is satisfied through various stages like cultivation, harvesting, cutting, and finally chopping the leaves. These leaves are then fed to the caterpillars. Though there are advanced mechanization and appliances, the occupation is still highly labor-intensive.

• Silkworm from Egg to Larva

A seed is a name given for the step where the silkworms lay eggs. Once these eggs turn pupae, they are separated according to their gender. Then the mature female moths are combined with male counterparts for mating purpose, which lasts for about 3 hrs. Later, they are separated, and the females are left free to lay eggs on a sheet of paper. She possesses the ability to lay around 300-400 eggs within 48 hours. Here the male moths are kept in a refrigerator for cooling to prepare for the next two rounds of mating. In Chintamani, farmers are buying pupae directly from Hassan, Kunigal, Kuduru, Hebbaru, and Chitradurga. The harvested eggs are then dipped in a mixture of formalin solution (methanol) and water for 10mins to prevent any kind of infection. These wet sheets are then hung in an incubation room until it dries. After seven days, the eggs turn grey, these are then shifted to a black box to ensure no passage of light. On the 9th day, the eggs hatch, and a small larva come out of it. These larvae are fed with tender and chopped mulberry leaves. Once it enters the second stage of growth, initiatives are taken to harvest the cocoon formed around the insect.



The eggs hatch into silkworms.



The filament on which silk is produced at room temperature.

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Neem powder sprinkled on mulberry leaves.



Cocoon feed on mulberry leaves, reach maturation.



The cocoon ready to be transported for silk reeling and twisting.

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Raw Silk Reeling

• Degumming of silk cocoon

Degumming is an essential process of removing Sericin, a sticky liquid secreted by caterpillars in a pupating phase. As this protein forms almost 25% of raw silk's total weight, its removal becomes mandatory. For this purpose, the cocoons are first steamed. Steaming helps loosen up the silk from the cocoon while the caterpillar dies inside the cocoon. Later these cocoons are again soaked in warm water, to degum the cocoon, making it easy to extract the silk.

• Reeling

An artisan with a collection of multiple silk baves starts the reeling process. Here the baves are set through a mechanical machine to produce a single thread. Approximately 200gms of pure silk can be reeled from 1kg of cocoon. Merchants from Chintamani, often weigh and sell these reeled yarns to dealers in Bengaluru.



Cocoon cleaned by removing floss.



This machine automatically picks the filament from the cocoon and reels it.

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Yarns being measured in a weighing machine.

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Dyeing

Both natural and synthetic dyes can be used on silk, as they are very dye-friendly. The dye preference depends on the end-use in view. In synthetic dyeing, the dye colour is added to boiling water along with soap and salt. The silk yarns are then dipped several times in it for a couple of hours until the fabric grasps the colour. Once the preferred colour is achieved, the artisan removes the yarn from the boiler and washes it in clean water. Squeezing out the excess water, the yarn is then hung in columns after drying it in a dryer.



A solution made by adding chemicals to the water.

Dry colour, baking soda, and chemicals being added to the boiling water.

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Yarn soaked in cold water before dyeing.

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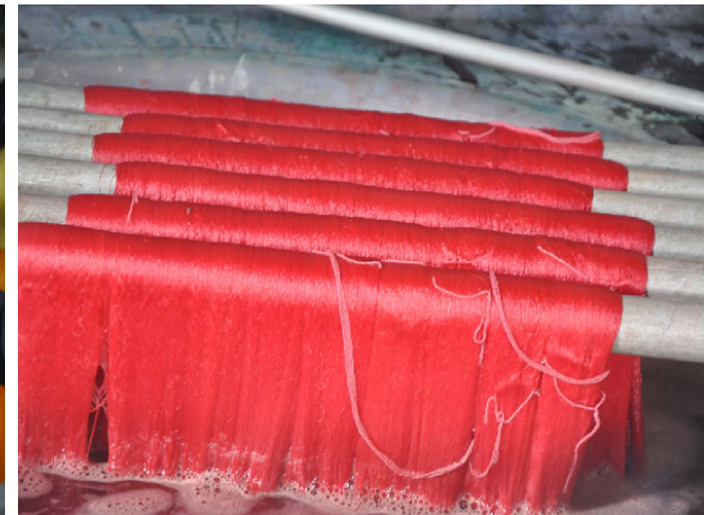
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Dyeing process, by tying the portion of yarns by rubber tubes and plastic.

The yarn dipped into the coloured solution at a very high temperature.

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After dyeing the yarns being dipped in water and squeezed.



Drying machine is used for drying the yarns.



The yarn allowed to cool at room temperature.

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Spinning

• Spinning or Throwing Silk

The conversion of raw silk into substantial yarn using a loom is called Throwing. Throwing is an industrial process, where the silk is reeled into skeins, by twisting and wound onto bobbins. Later, the Doubling process starts where the filaments from three or more bobbins are wound together. These collections of filaments are then set through twisters for converting a single thread into an organized warp. Spinning silk provides the yarn the count, form, and texture required for weaving

• Warping

Warping is the process of joining a collection of spun yarns together to form a sheet. This helps preserve the yarn stretch and maintain a uniform level. It is done under great stress using a warping machine after being tied between two poles to stretch. Usually carried out in the morning to avoid fading under strong sun rays. Here the length of the warp goes upto 18 meters that can make three sarees of 6 meters each. This step is labor-intensive hence requires at least five artisans to complete the process.



Yarn bundles being removed from the warping machine.

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Weaving

• Handloom

The traditional handloom is known to give the best and sophisticated silks when woven. The handloom is classified into four groups: throw-shuttle loom, fly-shuttle loom, frame looms and semi-automatic looms. After warping, the warps are set into the looms, where the fly shuttle starts the process of weaving. This process continues until the design of the saree ends. The artisan then applies Gondhu Pasai, a local gum to give stiffness to the saree. Once the glue dries, the sarees are folded and handed to the distributors.

• Power Loom

A power loom is a mechanized loom with a high rate of performance. With its continuous rotational motion, it gives exception speed and production results. Here unlike handloom, the frames are made up of iron than wood, and the sleys are set to swing to and fro with the help of a lever. While using power loom, the weaver has to fill threads to the shuttle, making it labor-friendly.



Joining thread from the machine to the spindle by twisting.

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Collection of spindles.



The warp yarns were wound across the weaver's beam.

The thread of fly-shuttle is connected to the warp threads, and the shuttle passes through the opening of the warp shed.

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Products

Artisans from Chintamani generally buy silk yarn from dealers in Chintamani for 4000 rupees/per kg, warp; a basic component in weaving from Sidlaghatta for 4500 rupees per kg and Zari thread of 400 rupees each reel from Surat. The artisans of the town possess a minimum of 45 years in Silk Saree Weaving; hence the place is well known for its finished works. The sarees are mostly traded to the retail market in Bengaluru for 4000-4500 rupees, with a profit of about 1000-1500 rupees.



The beautiful Silk saree with floral motifs.



Silk sarees are made in bright colours with Zari borders.

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Design Resource

Silk Weaving and Sericulture - Chintamani, Karnataka

Silk Farming and Manufacturing

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Ms. Parvathi Pooja

NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/silk-weaving-and-sericulture-chintamani-karnataka/video>

Video



Silkworm Sericulture



Silk Reeling



Dyeing Process



Winding and Warping Process

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Weaving Process

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Contact Details

This documentation was done by Professor Bibhudutta Baral and Parvathi Pooja at [NID, Bengaluru](#).

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