

Design Resource

Traditional Saree Weaving - Agartala

Tripura Handicraft

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://www.dsource.in/resource/traditional-saree-weaving-agartala>



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2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
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Introduction

Handicrafts and handlooms of Tripura are unique and attractive. Tripuri has a skillful boon to create incomparable handicrafts and handlooms. Their products are famous in and outside of Tripura. Due to modern practices, such traditional skill is being forgotten. Handlooms in Tripura are in every house since ancient times. In the olden days' clothes required for the family members were almost woven by the women of the family. Thus buying any clothes from the market was not so regular practice at that time. Though the family members have discarded their traditional dress, the womenfolk continue to wear their traditional attire.

Tripuri women's traditional wear consists of three parts. They are 'risa', 'rikutu' and 'rignai'.

- **Risa** – It is a fabric used to cover the upper part of women. It covers the upper/chest part in two layers. It is around 1.5m long and 0.3-0.5m in width. Risa covers from the top and halfway to the navel. It is embellished with numerous brilliant designs. Some such designs are kwchak pali, takhumtwi, khamjang, etc. Tripuri people celebrate the adolescent ceremony of a girl child known as 'Risa Sormani'. On this particular occasion, 12-14 years old girls are given Risa to wear for the first time, and all the relatives gather to worship Lampra god.

Both men and women use it as per the occasion. Men use it as their turban in festivals, marriages, etc. During the winter season, it is used as a muffler by wrapping it around the neck. It is also tied to the waist over the dhoti that gives strength and enables the status of the person. Young girls and boys of Tripura use it as a headscarf. Risa is offered as a mark of honor to the guests, hung down over both the shoulders in front.

- **Rikutu** – This fabric is used for covering the whole body of Tripuri women. This garment is worn in several ways. It can be draped around the whole body during the winter season. The other way to use it is to wear it like 'Chunri' covering the chest part and hanging down from the shoulders towards the backside. The other way is to wear it like the pallu of Indian saree, and it is wrapped around from waist through back to the front passing below the armpit anti-clockwise by covering the chest region and is hung down over the left shoulder. Newly married women especially wear it on their heads. In the olden days, Rikutu was available in only a few colours. But in the present-day Rikutu is woven to match Rignai, so the apparel looks like the continuation of Rignai.

- **Rignai** – It is the garment used by women of Tripura. It is worn to cover the lower half part of the body. It is said that the Indian saree has evolved through this Rignai. But Tripuri women wear it as their traditional saree. These Rignais have varieties in designs. During the reign of Trilochana, nearly 240 designs were invented in Rignai. The designs that are used today have a long history that dates back to 4000 years ago. Some of the designs are chamthwibar, takhumtwi, mikhunchok, kuwaifang, khaklubar, etc. As women of the family wove these in their houses in the olden days, looking at the designs of Rignai, women's IQ was judged, and it also showcased her intelligence.

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The standard size of Rignai is 1.6m in length and 1.2m in breadth. It is usually woven for about 3.2m long that is further cut in two equal sizes, then the sides of the clothing are stitched to make it 1.2m in width. It is used as Chandua on different occasions like weddings, betrothal, etc. Chandua is clothing that is spread in front of the footstep of the main gate that is hanged down from the four poles above the head level. It is also used as a bed-sheet, carpet, and mat. These Rignais are also offered to the Tripuri people's god.

Artisan Mr. Jharna Debarna of Tripura is well versed in weaving the traditional Tripura saree. His family is completely involved in the production of weaving products. These artisans use backstrap loom for weaving the sarees. It is the traditional method followed by the artisan's family to weave. It is an age-old loom that is simple to assemble and very easy to operate. This loom is portable as it is not a permanent fixture and does not have a heavy frame. Such loom is also called a 'loin loom'. The artisans at this place spend 600rs-700rs for the materials to weave an ordinary saree.



Traditional saree weavers, Mr. Jharna Debarna and his family.

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Artisan showing traditional handmade saree.



Artisan wears the red colour floral designed saree.

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Artisan spinning the gold colour thread in the fly-shuttle.



Manually aligned threads are in the weaving process.

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Tools and Raw Materials

The tools and raw materials used for weaving traditional Agartala sarees are as follows:

- **Backstrap Loom:** This loom is a collection of various equipments like loom bar, tie, shed rod, heddle stick, backstrap, sword/beater, roll-up stick, and shuttle. This is used for weaving the sarees of Tripura in a traditional method.
- **Cotton Yarn:** It is the basic material that is used for weaving the saree.
- **Spindle:** It is inserted in the fly shuttle to weave weft. The yarns are spun on it.
- **Spinning Wheel:** Using this, the yarns are spun to the spindles/pirns.
- **Shuttles:** These are used while weaving weft yarns.
- **Warp Drum:** Warp yarns are wound on the drum from the reel that eases the process of warping while weaving.
- **Dye:** It is used for coloring the fabric that is being woven.
- **Hot Water:** It is used for dyeing the yarns.

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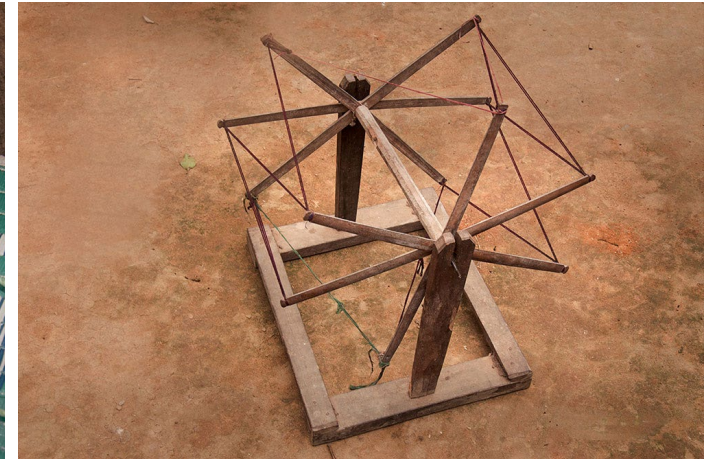
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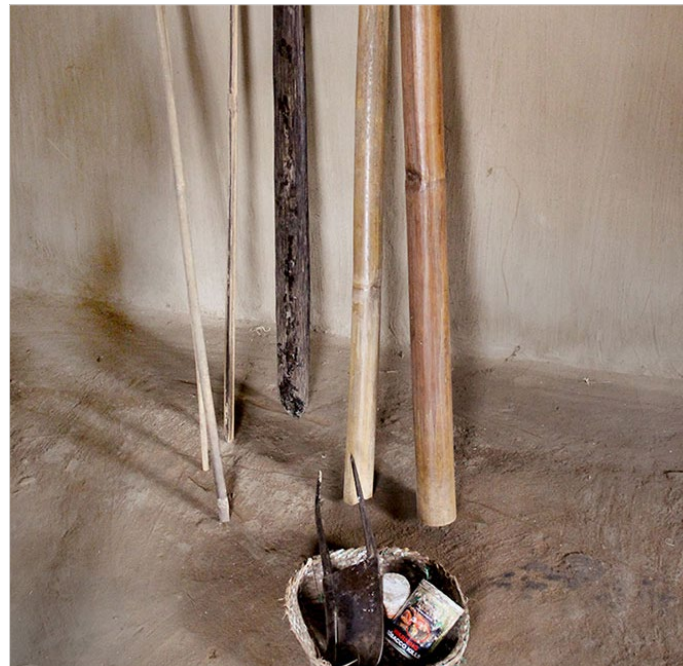
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Backstraps is used in traditional saree weaving.



Wooden spin wheel.



Weaving tools - Most of these tools are either made of Bamboo or Wood.



Fly-shuttle loaded with thread.

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The red and green coloured threads are put to dry.



Artisan is showing the traditional saree design's graph book.



Wooden bobbin loaded with thread.

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Making Process

The art of weaving Tripura traditional saree gets initiated by the dyeing process. Water is boiled at a high temperature, and the required colour is added to it. The water is stirred thoroughly to mix the colour well in water. Cotton yarns are soaked in cold water first and arranged on the rods. These yarns are held tight together and dipped thoroughly in coloured boiling water. Multiple times of dipping the yarns are done to spread the colour uniformly. Once the yarns are dyed, they are taken out from the coloured boiling water and hung inside the room. It is allowed to dry completely at room temperature.

Further, these yarns are used for weaving the traditional Tripura saree. The backstrap loom is used in Tripura for weaving the saree. All the operations are done manually here. Warp yarns are cut as per the length of fabric and fixed in appropriate tension. Two loops present in the ends of the back strap are attached to the notches of the front bar. In this sort of loom, all types of weaves can be woven. There are numerous possibilities to weave a variety of patterns. The backstrap is fixed to the weaver's back, keeping their legs against the footrest. This footrest is adjustable for maintaining the tension in the loom. Weaving in the backstrap loom consists of shedding motion, picking motion, and beating motion.

The heddle stick is simultaneously lifted in the left hand; a circular bamboo bar is pressed down with the right hand. Vertically the sword is placed in the shed, and the weft yarns passed from the right side using the right hand through shuttle and picked up by the left hand. Through this sword, the weft is beaten, and the sword is taken out. Thus the center shed is made, and the shuttle is passed from the left side to the right side. Again the sword is placed to beat the weft yarn. This process is carried on repeatedly. When the weaving gets to begin, two bamboo splits work. This process continues until the pattern is woven. Patterns like colourful stripes run in the direction of the warp, and the geometric motifs are woven in the direction of the weft. These patterns, designs, and colouring all vary from tribe to tribe.

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Flow Chart:



1. Cotton yarns are dyed and cooled in room temperature.
2. Backstrap loom is used for weaving the traditional Tripura sarees.
3. Initially warp yarns are cut and fixed to the tension.
4. Backstrap is fixed to weaver's back keeping their legs against the footrest.
5. Footrest is adjustable for maintaining the tension in the loom.
6. Heddle stick is lifted up simultaneously circular bamboo bar is pressed down.
7. Vertically the sword is placed in shed and the weft yarns are passed.
8. Through this sword the weft is beaten and the sword is taken out.
9. Thus the centre shed is made and the shuttle is passed from the other side.
10. Again the sword is placed to beat the weft yarn.
11. This process is carried out repeatedly and the saree is weaved.

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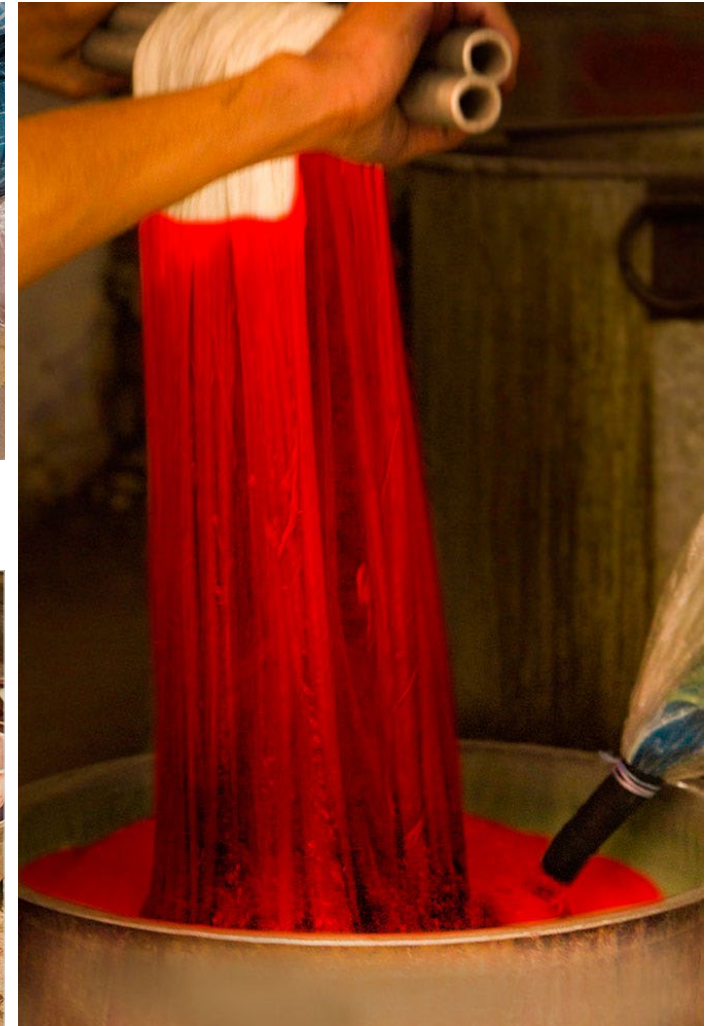
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Artisan cut the measured threads.



Dipping the thread reel in red colour.



Artisan mix the red colour for the dyeing process.

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The coloured threads are hanged to dry.



The artisan attaches the dyed thread reel to the wooden spinning wheel.



Woman artisan spin the wheel and make the thread roll with hand.



Artisan aligned the bamboo sticks and started knotting the different colour threads for weaving.

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The different colour threads are knotted in the loom.



Traditional saree ready for weaving in the handloom.

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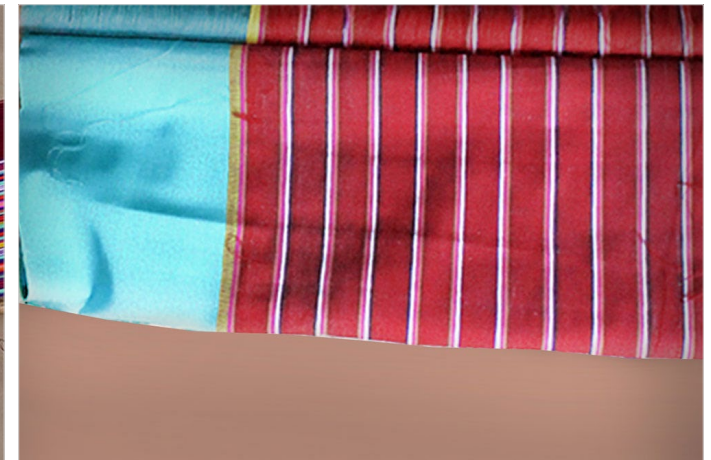
Woman artisans engaged in the traditional design spinning process.



Artisan passing the bamboo fly-shuttle through the middle of the wrapped threads.



Once the fly-shuttle is passed, the artisan starts to beater to join the threads.



The final product of traditional saree.

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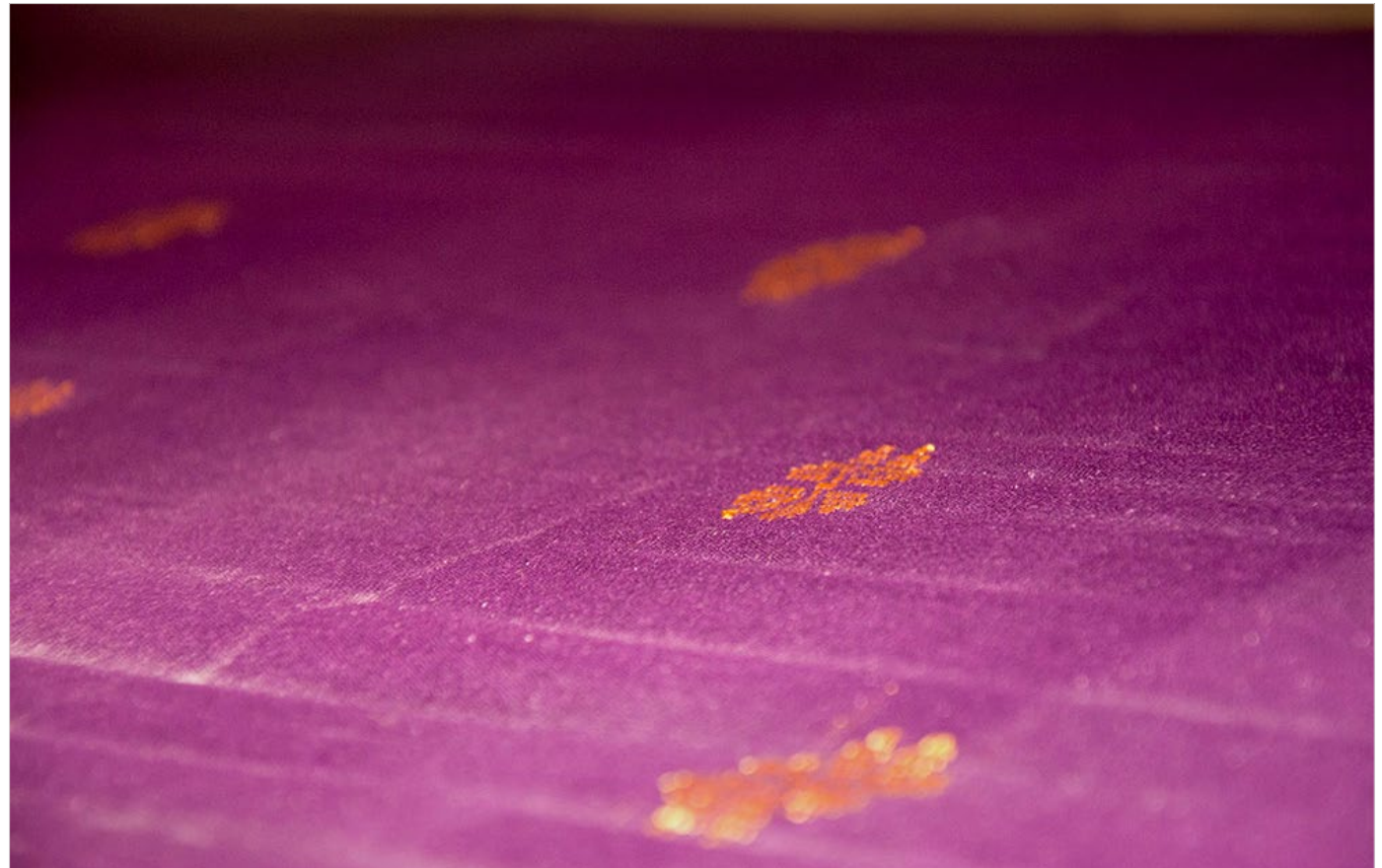
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Products

The traditional sarees of Tripura are unique in their designs. They stand unique in its size and the way it is draped among the Tripuri women compared to any other traditional Indian sarees. There are various designer sarees available. They are made of completely cotton yarns, and also sometimes, the zari is included in-between the cotton yarns. An ordinary saree costs around INR.800 - INR.1000, and a designer saree costs around INR.2000 – INR.5000 in the market. A saree with the design named “phoolbodi” that spreads throughout the saree is the costliest and also requires rigorous artistry to weave it. It takes nearly 17-20 days to weave this beautiful designer saree.



Purple colour saree with the golden flower motif.

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Half stripe and half plain designed traditional saree.



Blue colour saree with red and white colour stripes.



Phoolbodi designed saree.

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