



CRAFT CLUSTER INITIATIVE

MANGALAGIRI TEXTILES





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PREFACE

In liue of the modernisation traditional handloom fabrics have seen a major downfall in demand as compared to their glory days but now after the pandemic in the new normal as the global market gravitates towards a more sustainable alternative to fast fashion ,more and more designers on a global scale look to handlooms. Mangalagiri textiles are one such handloom that can provide a very good ethical and comparatively green alternative to machine made or synthetic fabrics and be a part of the slow fashion movement.

It is also incredibly vital to us as Designers and as Indian to understand our traditional crafts- which are a giant part of our clutural and artistic identity.

In our craft cluster research we have endeavoured to research the same to our best capacity. We will try to explore the textiles current status, production and history.



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1. Introduction

Mangalagiri Sarees and Fabrics are produced by performing Handicraft weaving in Mangalagiri, a town in Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh. It is one of many traditional Indian Handlooms. The Mangalagiri fabric is produced by weaving with the help of pitlooms from combed yarn by warp and woof interlacing. The fabric then undergoes the process of dying. Some of the most commonly found patterns and motifs include the nizam pattern and floral motifs, the modern day weavers also entertain special orders with custom designs.



image courtesy : Design cart

Objectives of the project

- To learn about the production process of Mangalagiri textiles.
- To learn of how the craft fares in the modern world.
- To understand the problems faced by the weavers and their solutions to them , if any.
- To understand how the current pandemic has affected the weavers' business.



Methodology

1. An intensive interview / discussion is to be held with a Mangalagiri Masterweaver -Shri. Ravindranath Garu where in the following questions will be asked (questions will be added or redacted according to the flow of conversation.)

before the tour:

- Could you please introduce yourself and speak a little about your family size.
- Could you describe a day's work.
- What kind of problems and frustrations do you face while doing your everyday job?
- Do you face any problems raising your family because of your job ?
- What distant places do you have to travel to in order to make work related purchases ?
- Why mangalagiri cotton sarees are generally found in single colour?
- What are the popular motifs that are used in these sarees?

while touring (we can observe and add on some extra qs)

- can you talk us through how exactly the machinery/looms work?
- How the dyes are made?
- where do you source your fibres ? Would you know of any farming conditions necessary?

After touring

- What measures have been taken to make it more appealing for younger generations?
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic has affected your people?
- What is their current production value in this pandemic?
- How to distinguish genuine Mangalagiri saree?
- Mangalagiri is a pilgrim center, why was it expected that the devotees to buy a saree from a local weaver before leaving the place?(Is there any story of how it all started)
- What do you think about power looms over traditional looms ?
- How much time does each saree takes to complete.
- Why warp and weft are dyed separately.
- Why zari border itself is not woven alone as the border like many other handlooms?

1. Secondary research using resources available to us like the internet , youtube, social media etc.



2. Aesthetic of Mangalagiri saree

Every handloom makes for an heirloom piece that speaks volume about our country's culture and traditions. The uniqueness of a Mangalagiri weave is its minimalistic motifs, tribal embellishments, temple designs, a plain body with an intricate border and detailed zari work. Another discrete feature is that the fabric is woven only pit looms, as it helps in exerting maximum force and results in a tightly knit weave.

Mangalagiri saree are a piece of glory , woven from cotton having the most characteristic features. As the town is also the house of Lord Narasimha swamy, the saris are also used by the devotees for devotional purposes.

Specialty of Mangalagiri Sarees

- Counts or thread density per square inch range from 40 (coarse) to 120 (superfine), sometimes more. The fine count weaves in fact have a diaphanous or gossamer appearance and considered as export quality.
- The use of zari was once limited to borders. Today silver and golden coloured zari is a major attraction covering borders, the pallu (end piece) and popular motifs like leaf, mango, parrot, and gold coin.
- The experimentation with colours is phenomenal with basic designs given a new meaning with thrilling combinations of light pink with magenta border, maroon with mustard stripes, an olive green field with navy blue borders fuelling the imagination of the market.
- The Nizam border, unique to the Mangalagiri variety of handlooms, has tiny gopurams across the borders and showcases the religious fervor of the people in the backdrop of the three Narayan Swamy temples of the place



- The sensational range in shot cottons sport the double shades or shimmering effect sarees due to different coloured threads used in the warp and weft during the weave. Pleasing kaleidoscopic effects like greenish yellow, sunset orange, deep yellow result in the creations.
- Ikat woven motifs and tie & dye colouring techniques are skillfully employed for sensational offerings in design and pattern in a panorama of fast organic and other colours.
- The use of bootis (small woven motifs), stripes, checks pattern in different counts is done with finesse and accentuates the appeal of these handloom cottons very much. In fact in many cases the use of the jacquard loom has been done brilliantly.
- The speciality of these cotton saris are known for featuring micro checks or stripes on the field with a dense zari border giving the sari a beautiful drape. The pallu is mono-striped ornamented with solid lines of lustrous zari in typical tribal style
- The speciality of the extra warp design is a combination of twill, rib and diamond weaves and these weaves are arranged side by side continuously without any gap and that too design starts from the edge of the selvedge without leaving a single thread.



Characteristics

- No weave designs on body of the fabric
- Nizam border, which is peculiar only to Mangalagiri region
- Material woven only on pit-loom
- Only produced in Mangalagiri region
- No gaps on the weave in the edge of the material which is again peculiar to this kind of fabric.

How to distinguish a genuine Mangalagiri Saree

- Basic texture is more compact than that of similar cotton sarees.
- Extra warp design are spread continuously without any gap upto the selvedge of the saree.
- The texture of the saree is relatively soft since there is no starch finish.
- Mangalagiri saree do not have any extra weft designs on the body.



Artisan's Profile



Name: Mr. Ganji Ravindranath

Position: Master Weaver

Age: 60 years old

Education Qualification: 10th Grade

Monthly Income: ₹.24,000/- (provided by the Government)

Born in February, 1961, Mr Ganji Ravindranath was brought up in Mangalagiri, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh. His house is located in the weaver's colony. This proud father of one is an owner of a handloom store along with his siblings (three brothers and two sisters), which sells the beautiful Mangalagiri sarees and textiles, he has been in the business for over 45 years or more. Being born into a family of expert weavers who have contributed over 100 years into this craft, it came as no surprise when Mr Ganji Ravindranath developed a keen interest in the craft from a very young age.

He has attended school and has finished his secondary education (tenth grade). He apprenticed under his father learning the techniques. With time he became increasingly proficient in the techniques. Mr Ganji Ravindranth believes in the strong principle of making pure handloom sarees and providing employment to the weavers. He is recognized as a Master Weaver in Mangalagiri town, he has provided employment to almost 1200 people both male and female. He even owns a loom where he has employed almost 10 weavers who are above the age of 35, with the reduced amount of assistance from the government in the handloom sector, with no help or benefits, he addresses his concern that the craft is likely to die a slow death in less than 10 years, due to the constant reluctance shown by the young weavers to take up weaving as a career option.

Mangalagiri sarees and textiles have helped him to secure an income while tending to his family. The government pays him 24,000 rupees every month and he addresses the problem that, nothing is provided by the government to the workers who are working under him.

Mr Ganji Ravindranath was a part of an exhibition organised in Delhi in 1994. He has also taken part in exhibitions at Ahmedabad, Bombay, etc. He supplies fabric and sarees to FabIndia, Reliance and Tata. He has done business in Delhi for a few years since 1994. He rented out a house in Sardarjung Enclave there and sold sarees. Presently, he is a supplier of sarees, dupatta and running fabric to Fab India, nationwide. He has over 300 to 400 wholesale and retail clients now. He has started out online because of the Pandemic now. He was also sent to Malaysia by the central government to participate in an exhibition there for 10 days.

Mr Ganji Ravindranath is an industrious man with a beaming smile. He is keen to see the development of the Mangalagiri sarees and textiles and see the new generation to take up this craft. He hopes that the younger generation will recognise their efforts and popularise the craft with the global community.



History

Origins

The Mangalagiri sarees have a history of more than five centuries. long before the sarees got popularised, Mangalagiri was famous for its pilgrimage .The temple of Lord Panakala Narasimha Swamy is located in the centre of the town and is believed to have been there since the Satya Yuga. It is said that under the present temple lies the former Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple, the one in which the main idol was installed by Yudhistira.

In around 1593, during the rule of Qutub Shahi, heavy taxes were imposed on the handloom sarees of this region. As a result of this, the weavers started to move out of this town and started settling in other handloom centres of the state. This affected the weaving activities of this town. Later, the succeeding rulers of this region opted for more sympathetic practices and reduced the taxes.

Patronage

The Lord Panakala Narasimha Swamy temple that we see today, was built by Raja Vasireddi Venkatadri Naidu between the years 1807-1809. As per the tradition in ancient times, the pilgrims needed to buy a saree from the local weavers after offering respect to the lord. It was a way of giving the weavers a livelihood and thus increasing the popularity of these sarees. There are three Narasimha Swamy temples in Mangalagiri – the Panakala Narasimha Swamy on the hill, the Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy at the foot of the temple and the Gandala Narasimha Swamy at the top of the hill. A few 100 years back it all started with ‘muthaka sarees’, 50 years later ‘silver jeri sarees’ and for the past 30 to 40 years ‘Mangalgiri Nizam border sarees’ have become a popular choice worldwide.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Lakshmi Narasimha Temple -P.C Adityamadhav , Lord Narasimha -P.C Myoksha Travels
 , Raja Vasireddy Venkatadri Naidu -P.C KAMMA HISTORY KAMMA RULERS



Present Status

Handloom weaving is the prime occupation of Mangalagiri town. More than half of the population is dependent on the cottage industry for their living. As the global demand is increasing, this weave can now be found on kurtas, dupattas and stoles. Nizam-Zari borders are pretty popular for sarees. They also make customize designs and motifs with multiple colors for sarees and dresses with the help of chhota dhabhi and bada dhabhi (motif making machine). Similarly, they use natural dyes now instead of chemical dyes because of the increasing demand of natural dyes. Most varieties of Mangalagiri sarees are aged back to 200-300 years other than some recently developed sarees like 'muthaka', 'silver-jeri' and nizam border sarees.

Even after being popular in global market the craft is facing a threat of extinction. As till the late 90's there were some 12,000 functional handlooms alone in the town but in 2018 it has shrunk to some 1500. The reason behind this depletion

- Is the mass production of power looms which made handlooms take a back seat in industry.
- Weavers are not ready to accept any advanced machinery to increase their production scale as making purely handloom sarees is their motto.
- Less paid for the skilled work as an average daily wage worker is paid more than these weavers.
- The upcoming generation is not pursuing weaving as their career because of its market un-

- The upcoming generation is not pursuing weaving as their career because of its market uncertainty.
- Majority of the current weavers are in their fifties, who are likely to set back from weaving in near future.
- The central government helping out these cooperative societies with schemes 20% of weavers under cooperative and 80% under private making weavers suffer the most.
- Most of the funds and subsidies that government provides doesn't reach the weavers. So, they are mostly dependent on the private buyers.
- Though the demand has been stable or high throughout the decade, the craft is likely to be extinct because the younger generation is reluctant to continue their lives as weavers.

The pandemic has also contributed to the deterioration of this craft. As this industry is trying to revive high-cost production and inequality in wages is adding the burden. The local demand went down because of the rising price and now the saree is no longer affordable for working class people. Mangalagiri sarees are meant to be comfortable for work but now it is being compared to the crafts like 'Kondapalli toys'.

Handloom Artisans

Mangalagiri weavers have a good ratio of male and female workforce. Men in the family are always accompanied by his wife during this process. Men dye the yarn and women do the warping, sizing and threading. Weaving is done by both men and women. Children also sometimes contribute to the work. This is the reason; the weavers always live in a joint family as each saree takes the continuous involvement of 7-8 members.

Weavers here have cooperative societies and almost 1200 artisans are appointed under each of these societies. The youngest of them are over 35 years. their children are going to school and choosing different career paths. As a result, the recent number of employees has fallen down to 200-300 since no new workers are joining.

Modern Demands and Changes

Getting raw materials for the production is also becoming difficult. Government provides an amount only to the owners / heads of these societies and not to the workers who do most of the work. 80% of the workers don't even own a home.

The brand that sells them cotton as raw material isn't loyal to them. They keep hiking prices and ignore the artisan's demand for specific 'yank yarn'. The brand focus more on exporting the materials as there is an overseas demand for it. There is a constant hike in the yarn rates for 4-5 months now. Recently, yarn was sold in Rs. 200 for 4.5kgs. no price limits setting on yarns by either central or state government. This leads to indirect increase in the price of saree by Rs (100-150).

There used to be a profit of Rs 150-Rs 200 for each saree but now as the demands went low artisans are ready to sell them even for a profit of Rs. 50. The artisans used to trade in 13 different states but it has totally stopped due to lockdown.

The artisans took part in multiple exhibitions in Delhi, Bombay and Ahmedabad. They also supply fabrics and sarees to FabIndia, Reliance and Tata. In this way production happened in Mangalagiri town and exported to different stores as per the order. They also have a store in Sardarjung Enclave, Delhi where they sold sarees. They went to Malaysia for a 10 days exhibition with help from the government to sell their products which helped in making new contacts.

During the pandemic they started online business that helped them earn money during these difficult times.

Demonetization and GST made their trading even worse which was only further worsened by the pandemic . The artisan was used to travelling to different states to sell his goods but he hasn't been able to do that since the first lockdown.



Production

Tools and Raw Materials

- The yarn is purchased from Hindupur, Andhra Pradesh and also from 2 or 3 districts of Tamil Nadu, Guntur district and Tanuku.
- Chemical dyes from Bombay, Ahmedabad and Surat through a dealer.

Equipment:

- Weaving loom : Traditional weaving loom is used for weaving process.
- Warping wheel : It is used to prepare lengthy warp threads.
- Reeling machine : Is used to make Spools.
- Fly shuttle : Is used to load the spindle while weaving.
- Chakra
- Dhabis: Help in designing the fabric

Materials:

- Cotton Thread : Pure cotton threads are used in weaving process.
 - Dye colors : Used to dye the cotton threads as per requirement.
 - Boiling : While boiling the raw cotton, costic acid and soap powder are used.
 - Washing : Sodium, Alum, Costic acid and Dhravakam are used in washing process.
- Dyeing : Hydro sulphite, color and costic acid are used for dyeing.

Pre Production

Boiling and Dyeing Yarn

The artisans first boil the yarn for 12 hours and then dye it with chemicals. They are boiled in a mixture of Hydrosulphite, color, water and costic acid, which is mixed in a boiler. The most important aspect in this process is the mixing of colors, which will give unique and durable color to the fabric. The yarns are dipped in the required color and the worker goes on turning the yarn so that the color is evenly mixed in the yarn. The dyed yarn is dried in the sun and then after drying, its warped by stretching it on boxes. Dyeing is done by men only.



PC. Shri Ravindranath Garu



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Washing

After coloring, the yarn is sent for washing. They are first washed in water with chemical (sodium, alam, costic acid and dharvakam) in it. These chemicals helps in sustaining the color and make the yarn look in rich color and shiny. They are again rinsed in plain water and kept for drying in the sun. Dhamyanti and Chilka Pacha color are dyed twice to get the luster's rich colour.

Spinning

The cotton yarn after dyeing and starching is brought for spinning process. Bundle of yarn is placed on the spinning wheel machine. The cotton strand is reeled to spools and the wheel is operated. The workers simultaneously keep joining the broken strands for continuous reeling of the threads. These spools are then sent for warping process.



PC. Shri Ravindranath Garu



PC. Shri Ravindranath Garu

Warping

Warping is the special and important process of Mangalgiri sarees. The warping is carried out in streets preferably in the early morning, so that the color of the silk yarn does not fade. First the multi-ply spools are fixed to the warping machine (warping wheel), and the yarn is reeled on the warping machine. This Process is locally known as Assu. After Assu process, the length of the yarn is removed from the warping wheel and tied between two poles and it is stretched. Entangles in the yarn are checked and the breaks are knotted. Bamboo sticks are inserted between the threads into the warp, as it is easy to trace the entangled cotton threads. Starch is sprayed on the threads. Starching is done so that the color in the yarn will get more permanent in nature and gives the yarn a polished look. Starching process is repeated 10 to 12 times, which makes the thread thick and strong. Starching also acts as gum while weaving, which helps the threads to interlock intensely. After starching the yarn is stretched and the strands of yarn is passed through the reeds and then rolled on an iron rod, which is fixed in loom to weave. Women do the warping, sizing and threading.



PC. Shri Ravindranath Garu



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Production

Weaving

The prepared yarn iron rod is fixed to the weaving loom and weaving process is started. The weaver interlaces the cotton threads of warp. The shuttle passes through the opens formed when the pedal is operated to interlock the threads of warp. Artisan use different colors of contrasting threads while weaving to create designs. The portion of woven cloth is wound to the wooden beam, which is located in front of the weaver. After weaving of 6 yards of fabric, the portion of unwoven warp is intentionally left before and after the sari weaving, which is later knotted for fringe. It takes nearly 2 to 3 days to complete one sari. The length of 3 saris warp is loaded into the loom at a time. Weaving is done by both men and women



PC. Shri Ravindranath Garu



PC. Shri Ravindranath Garu



PC. Shri Ravindranath Garu

Post Production

Folding and Packaging

After completing the saree, the saree is folded according to a predetermined area. Garments are folded according to the buyers direction, requirements in a standard area usually a rectangle.

The end products of the craft are saree, dress material, dupattas, and colourful running fabric, the packaging is done according to the place where the craft is being sold, as in if the sarees are sold in a local store it is folded and given in box or a bag.

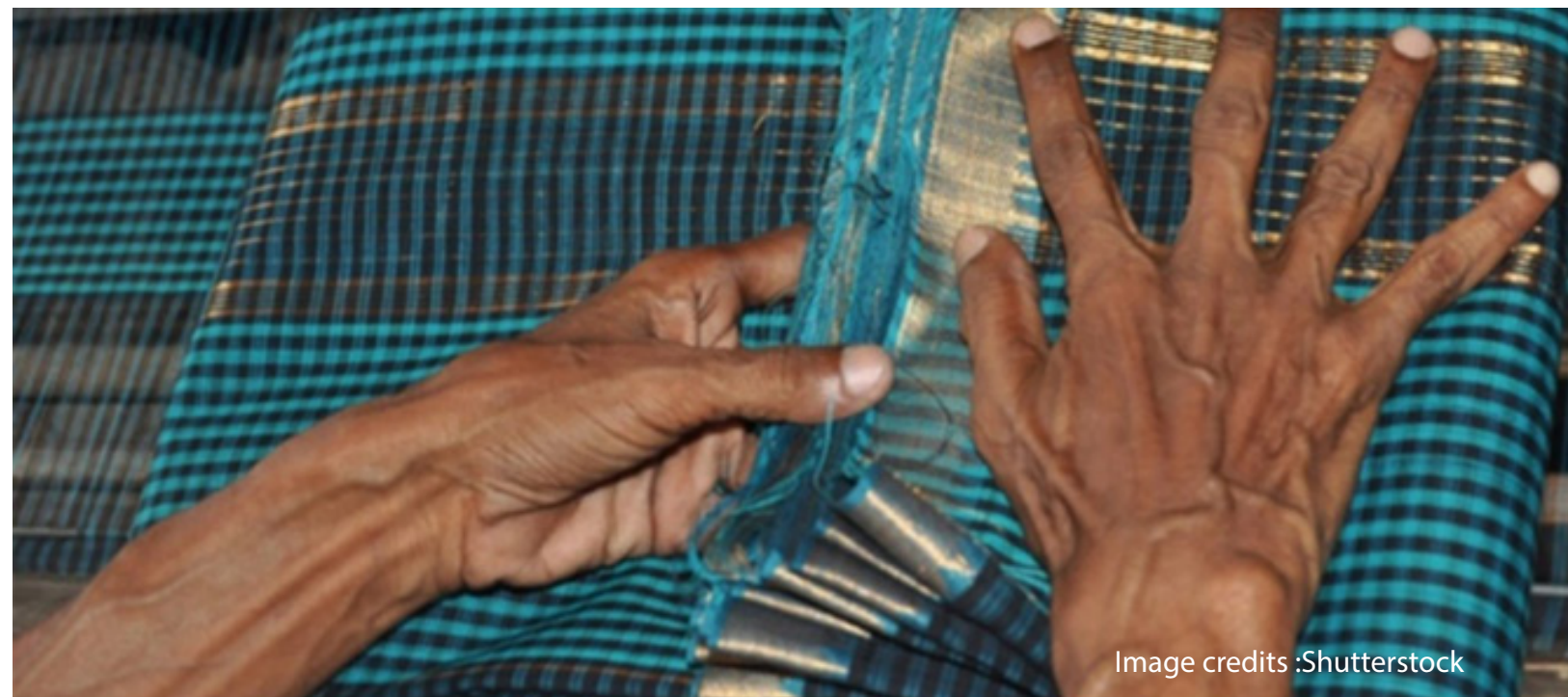


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Marketing

Costing

- The prices of yarn fluctuates , if cotton costs 100 rupees one month , it will cost 120 rupees the next and 140 rupees the month after that. The price of the yarn increased 200 Rupees in the last month and has been at a steady increase for the last few months.
- The weavers are paid for the number of pieces they make per day. They stand to earn 4000- 12000 Rupees monthly.
- The price of chemical dyes also fluctuates.

Profits

There is a profit of 150 to 200 for every saree sold. Post pandemic the demand has decreased to the extent that they even sell for a 50 rupee profit.

Promotions

There are no specific channels of advertising they use. Most of how people are informed

Selling

the artisan adopted simpler and more local methods of marketing before the lockdowns. He put up exhibitions all over the country, first exhibition was in 1994 at Delhi and since then he has put up stalls in Ahmedabad, Mumbai etc. Due to these he was able to rent a shop in Delhi and cater to the northern market as well. He Manufactured his goods in Mangalgiri and sold them in Delhi. Throughout his working years he has gained about 300-400 wholesale and retail clients. He now supplies fabric and sarees to FabIndia, Reliance and Tata. During pandemic things weren't very great for the artisans, sales dropped so low that he agreed to sell on a very basic profit margin. He then explored the world of online selling and marketing through which he was able to participate in an exhibition in Malaysia for 10 days. This opportunity was given by the central government enabling him to get international customers and relations. Though the pandemic was very hard on him in the initial months but by the governments marketing methods and help he now earns 3 times of what he earned in the beginning of the pandemic. He says the online Market has helped him deliver on goods and make money through these difficult times.



Conclusions

Key findings

1. Handloom weaving is the prime occupation of the Mangalagiri town.
2. The master weavers in Mangalagiri play the dominant role and the handloom cooperatives are more or less non-existent.
3. The 400 years old craft is on the verge of extinction, despite its increasing demand. It is likely to die a slow death in less than 10 years, due to the constant reluctance shown by the younger weavers to take up weaving as a career option.
4. Inequality in wages, no proper funding and subsidies from the government has contributed to the detriment of this craft.
5. Lack of awareness about the craft among the people and the negligence by the successive governments has led to weavers bearing the brunt as powerlooms are displacing the handloom sector.
6. Online marketplace and virtual exhibitions has helped the weavers to liquidate their stock in this pandemic

Key Learning

1. The Mangalagiri sarees hold a strong history of more than five centuries .This handloom includes all the traditional skills of dyeing, Spinning ,warping, designing and weaving, which has never been realized formally. These skills must be revived by making them more feasible, rewardable and assessable.
2. Adaption of the technology, promotion of the handloom production and marketing of the high value quality handloom are the key objectives to enhance the earning of the handloom weavers.
3. Education and exposure is the key to the revival of the Handloom.



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Group- 4

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Sai Pooja: Weaver's profile and conclusion.

Samiksha : History,aesthetics of mangalagiri sarees,speciality of mangalagiri sarees.

Sayantane: Empathy and present status.

Richa: Production,packaging and folding .

Rahul: Marketing, characteristics of mangalagiri sarees and difference