

Himroo : Earliest Industry of Aurangabad

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ABSTRACT

India is famous for the art of cloth weaving since olden times. It produced not only the essential cloth for daily wear but the fancy cloth depicting the skill of the craftsmen. Colourful fabrics of cotton and silk were woven in India for generations by skilled workers who were trained in their early childhood at the pit looms. One of such traditional weaving crafts belonging to the state of Aurangabad is known as *Himroo*. This paper talks about the origin, motifs, patterns and present status of the craft of *Himroo*. The handloom industry has declined over the years and *Himroo* is being duplicated on power looms.

Key Words : *Himroo*, *Kimkhab*, Handloom weaving, Cotton and silk weaving

INTRODUCTION

Weaving of *Himroo* was one of the earliest industries of Aurangabad in Maharashtra. '*Himroo*' is a fabric of intricate weave. In the past, these fabrics had a superior brightness and elegance since they were woven in the background of silk. This famous cloth is being produced in the town of Aurangabad where it had reached the pinnacle of prosperity and has tried to survive till this day inspite of depression and keen competition from power looms. It has flourished, evolved and declined with time.

History of *Himroo* :

The antiquity of traditional *Himroo* weaving can be drawn out from two legends that contribute in tracing the origin of *Himroo*. Firstly, it is known that *Himroo* weaving is said to have been brought to Devagiri (present day Aurangabad) during Mohommad Bin Tughlaq's reign. He renamed Devagiri as Daulatabad and shifted the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad in 1326. He insisted that all industries should also be shifted to the new capital. A number of craftsmen shifted to Daulatabad and established the first industry in the city. Mohommad Bin Tughlaq's experiment gradually failed and the capital was shifted back to Delhi in 1335. However, by then the *Himroo* weavers got well settled in Daulatabad and continued their tradition in the same place (Moin, 2014).

Yet another record states that Malik Ambar, the Prime Minister of Murtaza Nizam

Shah of Ahmadnagar in 1610, found a site and named it Fatehnagar. It is said that in 1653 when Prince Aurangzeb was appointed the viceroy of the Deccan for the second time, he made Fatehnagar his capital and called it Aurangabad. Since the medieval times it was a city known for its beautiful, well planned gardens, fountains, ponds, palaces, mosques and monuments including the Ajanta Caves and Ellora Caves. Aurangabad is also titled as “The City of Gates” (Chand, 1981).

There are references to *Kimkhab* or the fabric of dreams in the accounts of Aurangzeb’s rule during the 17th century. The fabric was very popular with the kings, ministers and the *Nizams*. It was made with rich gold and silk threads. *Kimkhab* was interweaving of silk and rich gold threads in a rich variety of colours and floral designs which made the brocades appear most gorgeous and one of the highly prized silk fabrics of India’s legendary heritage. The Indian craftsmen made silver and gold wires of such extreme fineness that the entire fabric could be woven from them, producing literally a cloth of gold (Gillow and Barnard, 1993).

Further with the decline of Mughal and Maratha power the demand for *Kimkhab* was drastically reduced. Fortunately, several craftsmen received patronage from the *Nizam* of Hyderabad and his ministers. Literary evidence have been established that *Kimkhab* however in later days after the gradual disappearance of the princely classes languished due to lack of demand. The new consumers who mostly belonged to the middle classes could not afford the expensive and gorgeous cloth while tastes of consumers also underwent a change (Singh, 2001).

Hence, weavers altered from their traditional material to silk and cotton and a look alike started to be made. It was called ‘*Hum-Roop*’ or similar. This new cloth was an imitation of the old rich *Kimkhab* as designs continued to be the same. *Hum-roop* was later connoted to *Himroo* and the fabric which was once known as *Kimkha bunder* went a change and assumed the name *Himroo*. *Himroo* is a fabric of intricate weave, woven in cotton warp and silk or artificial silk or rayon weft.

Himroo in those days was patronized by the royals and princely class who demanded the rich handloom textiles. To meet the royal demands, the entire *Nawabpura* area of Aurangabad echoed and reverberated to the sounds of shuttles moving up and down, nearly 500-600 looms were working in town (Bhandari, 2000).

Traditional *Himroo* :

Persian motifs were adapted by Indian craftsmen to suit regional demands and made its subservient to the earthier and vibrant qualities of Indian art as a whole. Motifs and texture were excelled and eclipsed by glamorous Indian motifs. The texture on the fabric was so fine that it was compared to a spider’s web.

It usually has an all-over motif placement. Some patterns have specific names. The ‘*SiaJangla*’ consisting of hanging creeper with flowers and foliage mixed up with miniature cones, *Ajanta* pattern inspired from Ajanta Caves and *Ambi* pattern where paisley motif is the main component of design (Fig.1).

Besides the above mentioned patterns, there are many designs that can be woven on the *Himroo* cloth. These include simple designs composed of lines, geometrical designs

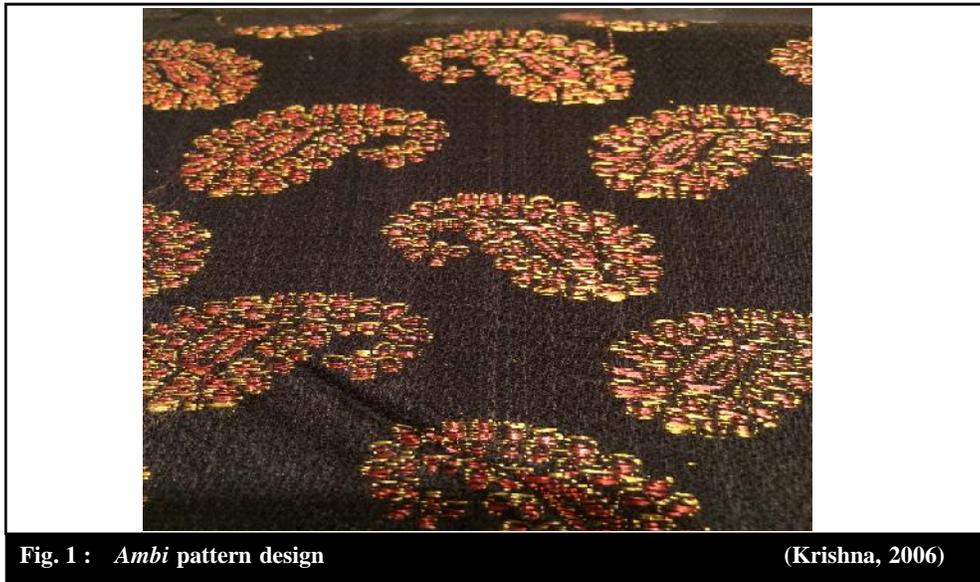


Fig. 1 : *Ambi* pattern design

(Krishna, 2006)

consisting of circles, diamonds, hexagons etc., designs of fruits like mango, pomegranates, almonds, flowers like rose, jasmine, lotus, *chameli*, creepers with leaves and stems connecting one another to form a running creeper and also birds and animals like elephant, peacocks (Sharma, 1998).

With an ethereal synthesis of cotton and silk, this hand woven fabric has superb blends of green, blue, black, gold and other romantic colour combination, that were once upon a time made-to-order by the royal household, noble and courtiers.

The ground of *Himroo* is of uniform colour, usually black, pale slate or mustard and the patterns are picked out in pink, red, yellow and white, according to the ground colour.

Himroo has a quality which was much appreciated by the royalty. *Nizams* of Hyderabad used the *Himroo* fabric for *shervanis*, coats, jackets, gowns, shirts and blouses. In fact, it became a part of their tradition and culture and no royal marriage was considered complete without the lavish use of *Kimkhab* cloth, but this patronage stopped when the government took away the privileges of the royal households.

Yet another version establishes the popularity of *Himroo* fabric in 1673 when a Persian ambassador was returning to Iran from the court of Qutub Shahi king, he was presented with a precious piece of *Himroo* which took five years to be completed by the master craftsmen. Many glowing tributes were paid by various foreign travellers and diplomats who visited India. Marco Polo referred to *Himroo* as the finest cloth in Deccan. He also said that kings and queens of any country in the world will take pride in wearing it.

The design and motifs retained were used as a material for tapestry and ordered on large scale by the government for furnishing. The traditional articles of *Himroo* included Shawls, stoles, bedspreads and yardage. On the right surface, the execution is very neat and the rich and warm tones of colours lend these textiles an unusual degree of elegance and grace.

Present status of the craft :

Around 1940's demand of *Himroo* suddenly nose-dived. Many weavers who were engaged in this profession since generations had to switch over to other occupations. In the year 1949 there were about 150 artisan families but according to the Rural Economic Enquiries in Hyderabad state 1949-51 only 30 families were engaged in the craft.

And among all these families, the Qureshi family was the foremost in making a genuine effort for the elevation of the declining craft. Mr. Abdul Hameed Qureshi, the master craftsman was not only responsible for reviving the craft but through his creative efforts popularizing *Himroo* amongst a new community of buyers the new opulent class of government officials, ministers, governors and the tourists. The *Nawabpura* locality where Mr. Hameed Qureshi has his handloom factory, used to resound with the noise of about 500 looms, now there are only five of them left (Art and Glamour magazine, Nov., 1999)

For curtailing expense, increasing efficiency and economizing the entire production Mr. Qureshi introduced the Jacquard system, which requires only one man to operate this loom and is less time consuming than the traditional method which required a minimum of two weavers at one loom.

Conclusion :

With its archaeological sites and ancient monuments, the city of Aurangabad provides the tourists a deep revelation of the wonders of its glorious past. The lesser known is an exquisite local handicraft of *Himroo* fabric with its refined delicate appeal. *Himroo* still holds a place of its own amid and variegated designs and rare textures that adds to our Indian heritage. Today these can be seen only in museums. The production of handloom *Himroo* has declined immensely especially due to the wide market made available for power looms. The revival of Authentic hand loom *Himroo* is the need of the hour. Beautiful patterns are created by Master craftsmen of Aurangabad with blends of cotton and silk.

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