

Diversification of the Traditional Sungudi Sarees for the Modern Market

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ABSTRACT: Clothing both protects the wearer from the elements and provides comfort. It performs the range of roles from protecting the modesty, to signifying religious and social status in addition to conveying the gender of the wearer. Clothing may also function as a form of adornment and an expression of personal taste or style. Style and fashion go hand in hand. It is assumed that something attractive and unusual will make clothes interesting. In search of constantly changing fashions, the designer needs to be inspired by different traditions and cultures. In the change driven market of today, traditional fabrics can be used in new ways to make fusion or western wear. Therefore for the present project, the focus was on providing a much needed fillip to the Sungudi saree of Madurai by using it as a fabric for reversible jackets for the modern young woman. She could use it if she is a working professional. She could use the plain fabric side with Sashiko embroidery for formal wear and the Sungudi fabric side for casual or party wear. The project was designed after a preliminary survey was conducted. The fabrics were sourced and designed. After the garments were designed and constructed an acceptance study was conducted to see if the jackets have an impact on the market. The products were designed according to the needs of the consumers, taking into account the price points. The study includes both pre-production survey and acceptance study. Pre-production survey was conducted to understand the likes and dislikes of the customers. Acceptance study was conducted to obtain feedback from the end users. The study showed that the acceptance level of designed garments was excellent and Sashiko embroidery designs were equally popular among the respondents.

INTRODUCTION

Women professionals favour western-wear or Indo-Western fusion to sarees as office wear. Fashionable Indian women might wear the traditional *kameez* (of *salwar kameez*) with jeans, or formal trousers with a jacket. The 21st century has seen Western styles becoming popular in the Indian fashion scheme. Especially among the youth, there appears to be an enthusiastic approach to combining traditional clothes with a western touch. With increasing exposure of the Indian subcontinent to the western world, the

merging of women's clothing styles is inevitable. Indian women have gradually relegated Indian ethnic wear to special occasions or festivals in preference to comfortable Western wear for office and casual occasions.

The *Sungudi* saree was introduced in the Madurai region during the reign of the *Nayak* Dynasty around the 16th century by the *Saurashtran* community, who had by then migrated to Southern India. They perfected the art and gave it the style and design features that identify it as the Madurai *Sungudi* saree of today. '*Sungudi*' - a Saurashtran word is derived from the Sanskrit word

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'*Sumnam*' meaning 'round.' These sarees were in great demand among the women folk of the region. These cotton sarees are appropriate for the tropical heat and were mostly used as casual wear.

The saree was manufactured using the traditional tie and dye process. The colours used were mainly vegetable dyes. Today however, the *Sungudi* saree is made with modern designs using block printing, wax printing and screen printing.

Sashiko embroidery from Japan (similar to *kantha* embroidery) was traditionally used by farmers and fishermen to mend and reinforce their clothing. It was chiefly used to strengthen home-spun clothes of the period. Geometric patterns were used. The white cotton thread on the traditional indigo blue cloth gives *Sashiko* its distinctive appearance, though decorative items are sometimes embroidered with red thread. Modern day *Sashiko* stitching is not however not restricted to the traditional indigo coloured fabric but uses a variety of colour combinations.

The present project is aimed at converting the *Sungudi* saree into ready-to-wear reversible lightweight jackets with value addition which would be appropriate for young working women. Value addition on one side of the jacket would be done in the form of *Sashiko* embroidery.

METHODS/EXERIMENTAL

The study was conducted in three phases.

First phase – Pilot study to learn the consumer preference in jackets

An online survey was conducted among college students and working women to gather information regarding their preference in jacket designs and materials.

Second phase – Designing of reversible jackets using Sungudi sarees

Five different reversible jackets were developed using two *Sungudi* sarees. The jackets were embellished on one side using *Sashiko* embroidery.

Third phase – Acceptance study of the product

An Acceptance study was conducted to find out the consumers acceptance of the products.

REVERSIBLE JACKETS USING SUNGUDI SAREE

The pilot study revealed that the *Sungudi* saree had not been used to design apparel earlier. 65% of the respondents liked the idea of using the lightweight fabric to make reversible jackets. Though 66% of the respondents were not aware of *Sashiko* embroidery, around 45% liked the idea of implementing the embroidery on jackets. After sourcing the sarees and contrasting cotton fabric, the patterns were prepared and five jackets were constructed and embroidered.

The designs were named in both Tamil and Japanese after the motifs used in the embroidery.



Figure 1_Ashwini – Purkal/Nowaki reversible jacket in green and maroon.

For example Design 1 is Purkal/Nowaki means grass which is seen in the green colour of the *Sungudi* saree and the Nowaki motif on the reversed side.



Figure 2_Ashwini – Vaira/Hishika reversible jacket in Red and Black
Design 2 is Vaira/Hishika which refers to the Diamond motif



Figure 3_Ashwini – Mandala/Asanoha reversible jacket in Red and Maroon
Design 3 Mandala/Asanoha refers to the leaf motif



Figure 4_Ashwini – Malar/Furawaza reversible jacket in Green and Black
Malar/Furawaza means flower pattern



Figure 5_Ashwini – Mahara/Zashi reversible jacket in Green-Red and Red-Black
Mahara/Zashi refers to the geometric stabbing criss-crossed pattern with contrasting yoke and front panels.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The main objective of this project was the revival of the traditional *Sungudi* saree and to produce new designs for the ready to wear market. Therefore it was decided to design and develop reversible jackets using Madurai *Sungudi* sarees. It is a new way of providing value addition to the Indo-western jackets by increasing the aesthetic appeal. The value addition technique (Sashiko embroidery) in reversible jackets using Madurai *Sungudi* sarees will add to the appeal.

The acceptance study saw the following results: The concept of using the *Sungudi* saree to make the jackets was greatly appreciated. The intricacy of the Sashiko technique was accepted by almost all respondents.

The results were as follows:-

Design IV- Malar/Furawaza was most popular followed by Design III – Mandala/Asanoha, Design I – Purkal/Nowáki, Design II – Vaira/Hishika and Design V – Mahara/Zashi. Almost all respondents liked the colour combinations used. Thus the new concept of introducing reversible jacket using Madurai *Sungudi* sarees was highly appreciated and well accepted.

CONCLUSION

The lightweight Madurai *Sungudi* saree is an ideal summer wear in South India. It is a well known fact that such sarees have the capacity to absorb heat easily which is why it keeps the wearer fresh and comfortable all day long. The Reversible jackets were designed according to the needs of the end consumers. The study showed that the acceptance level of embroidery was excellent although designs were equally accepted.

It may thus be concluded that there is good response for reversible jackets using *Sungudi* saree in the market. There is also good scope for using the *Sungudi* saree for creating women's wear as well.

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