

The warp of technology and the weft of tradition weaves magic in Pochampally.

In this small town called Pochampally in Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh, the tide is turning.

Home to the fabulously intricate Pochampally Ikkat weaves, Pochampally saw a decline in its fortunes when power looms and fabric printing started to replace handloom weaves.

Pochampally handlooms are woven by a community of weavers who moved to Pochampally from Chirala. The weavers use natural dyes, to wrap and dye geometric patterns. Their resist dyeing technique involves wrapping and dyeing sections of bundled yarn to a specific color scheme, at measured distances before it is woven.

The dye seeps into the untied or unwrapped section while the tied section remains un-dyed. When the yarn is woven, the warp and weft create intricate patterns on the cloth. The process is complex and time consuming, often taking weeks to weave a single saree. As a result, these exclusive sarees command a good price in the market.

However, when power looms made Pochampally look-alike fabric available in the market, at a lower cost, the simple village folk had no clue as to how they could continue their trade. They had no means to fight this Goliath – no marketing expertise, no great fortune to speak of, no direct access to customers... They had to depend on a dealer or a wholesaler or a shopkeeper to help them sell the saree.

That was, until they chanced upon the e-commerce opportunity in 2016. A simple Amazon Seller App helped them answer the challenge that would change their fortune.

Nagalu Balayya, had no idea how his life would change when he downloaded the Amazon Seller App on his smartphone. At first it wasn't easy to understand how it worked, but he had heard that he could reach out to a wide buyer base through Amazon, so he decided to give it a shot. Bit by bit, he got the hang of it – it was less complex than the designs he created, day in and day out! Once the sales began and the money started trickling in, there was no looking back! The Amazon Seller team spent time with him and the other weavers and taught them how to use the app and sell products to customers sitting in different parts of the country. Today, Nagalu Balayya is weaving sarees, showcasing the designs online, doing the inventory, scheduling pickups, handling customers, selling his creations and smiling when he sees the money accumulating in his account.

Younger weavers like Srikant and Ganesh have joined the e-commerce bandwagon to make the most of the opportunity. More amenable to adapting to new technologies, some members of the youth brigade at Pochampally have given up lucrative city jobs to come back to the village and pick up the threads of their traditional art and craft. Taking feedback from customers and studying market trends, they have widened their and now weave dress materials and bedspreads in addition to sarees.

From the Amazon Seller Team, they understood the importance of an aesthetic picture and learn how to click and post these on the website using digital product catalogues. They follow a simple processes for taking orders and fulfill them using resources that are faster, cheaper and more reliable.

Master weavers from Pochampally who have registered on Amazon fulfill up to 11 orders every week. The direct access to customers provides them with returns that are almost 20 per cent higher than what they used to get in the past. "We now dream of selling our products across the world," beams Srikanth.

Pochampally Ikkat designs and traditions are handed down from generation to generation. Often, three to four generations from a weaver's family are occupied in different aspects of creating the same saree. While one member dyes the threads, another one winds it up, a third member marks out the design on the warp threads and another person weaves the fabric. And, where this process ends, the Amazon Seller App takes over and opens the door to a new and transformed destiny.