

PHOTO STORY | A COFFEE TABLE BOOK

# MUSIRI People, Culture & The Craft



By Digital Empowerment Foundation

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## Digital Empowerment Foundation

New Delhi-based DEF was founded by Osama Manzar and Shaifali Chikermame in 2002 out of the deep understanding that marginalised communities living in socio-economic backwardness and information poverty can be empowered to improve their lives on their own, simply by providing them access to information and knowledge on using digital tools. DEF aims to connect unreached and underserved communities of India in an effort to bring them out of digital darkness and equip them with access to information. With the belief 'Inform, Communicate and Empower,' DEF finds sustainable digital interventions to overcome information poverty in rural and remote locations of India, and empower communities with digital literacy, digital tools and last mile connectivity.

Today, DEF is one of the world's leading practitioners in the field of Information & Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D). Its Founder-Director Osama Manzar is globally recognised as an expert in this field and he, or DEF as an organisation, is a member of several national and international government and non-government bodies, expert panels and task forces engaged in promoting a digitally-empowered and information-rich society. Through all its diverse programmes, projects and activities, DEF seeks to help people living in information darkness overcome the information barrier, learn how to use digital tools and the Internet to achieve greater socio-economic equality by uplifting themselves almost on their own using the power of digital devices to access information and knowledge.





## Foreword

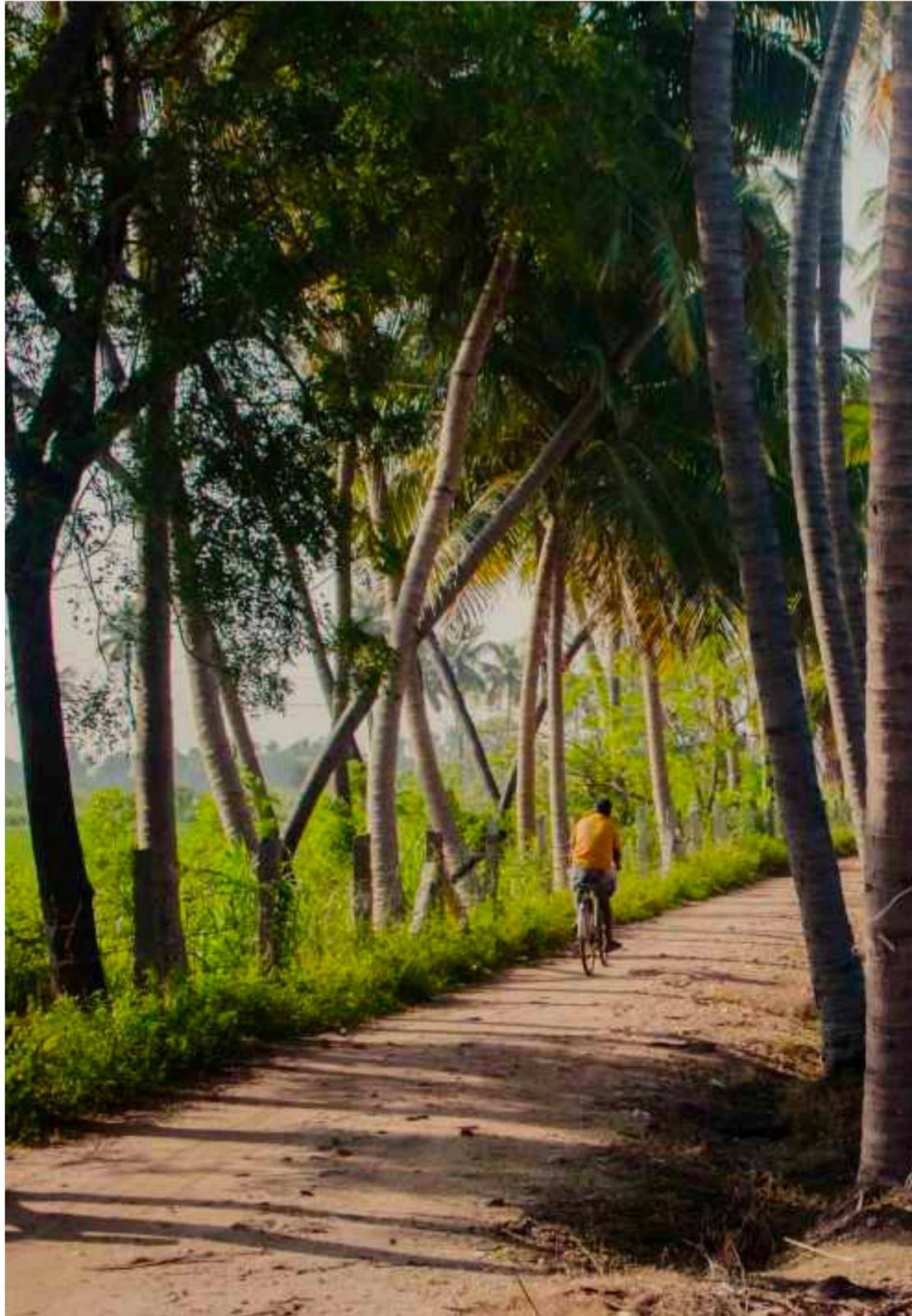
It has been more than 15 years since DEF took an oath to work with the poorest of the poor in rural India to fight information poverty. A lot of its beliefs and efforts have turned into national movements. DEF is glad that what it envisioned a decade and a half ago is replicated in the government's vision — a vindication of the ethos that the organisation holds. "Digital empowerment" is a phrase that is extensively used in the national agenda because the Internet is an empowering tool. It has the power to bring in equality, equity, transparency and accountability. It can create a world where the powerless and the powerful enjoy equal opportunities to be online and equal chances to access information.

As an organisation, we are almost 10,000+ -strong team; we have marked our presence in more than 500 locations across 126+ districts of 23 Indian states and union territories. What keeps going is the growing belief that people have put in us — be it our beneficiaries or those who fund us. However, there is no denying that we are also a victim of growing too fast in the last couple of years but it's the spirit of the DEF family that supports us. DEF is not driven by the passion of just one or a handful but the passion, values and ethos that each one of us holds.



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# MUSIRI

Local town, Streets & Houses

Musiri is a small town in Trichy district of Tamil Nadu with a population of 28,727 (Census 2001) and a literacy rate of 86.28 %. The district has a rich and varied cultural heritage. It is also known for its exquisite handicrafts, castings, and South Indian musical instruments. Handloom is an ancient industry in India and has come to be associated with excellence in India's artistry in fabrics. The features of this sector vary across the country. The economy of this district is mainly agrarian but the role of the textile industry cannot be overlooked. Handloom weaving is one of the largest economic activities in Tamil Nadu.



View of Musiri town in the morning and evening. The town is located on the banks of river Cauvery.



There are both “kutchha houses” and “pucca houses” in Musiri constructions .



Narrow concrete road leads to the village.



The town is also connected via highway .



The area surrounded by temples has many old houses with vernacular architecture.

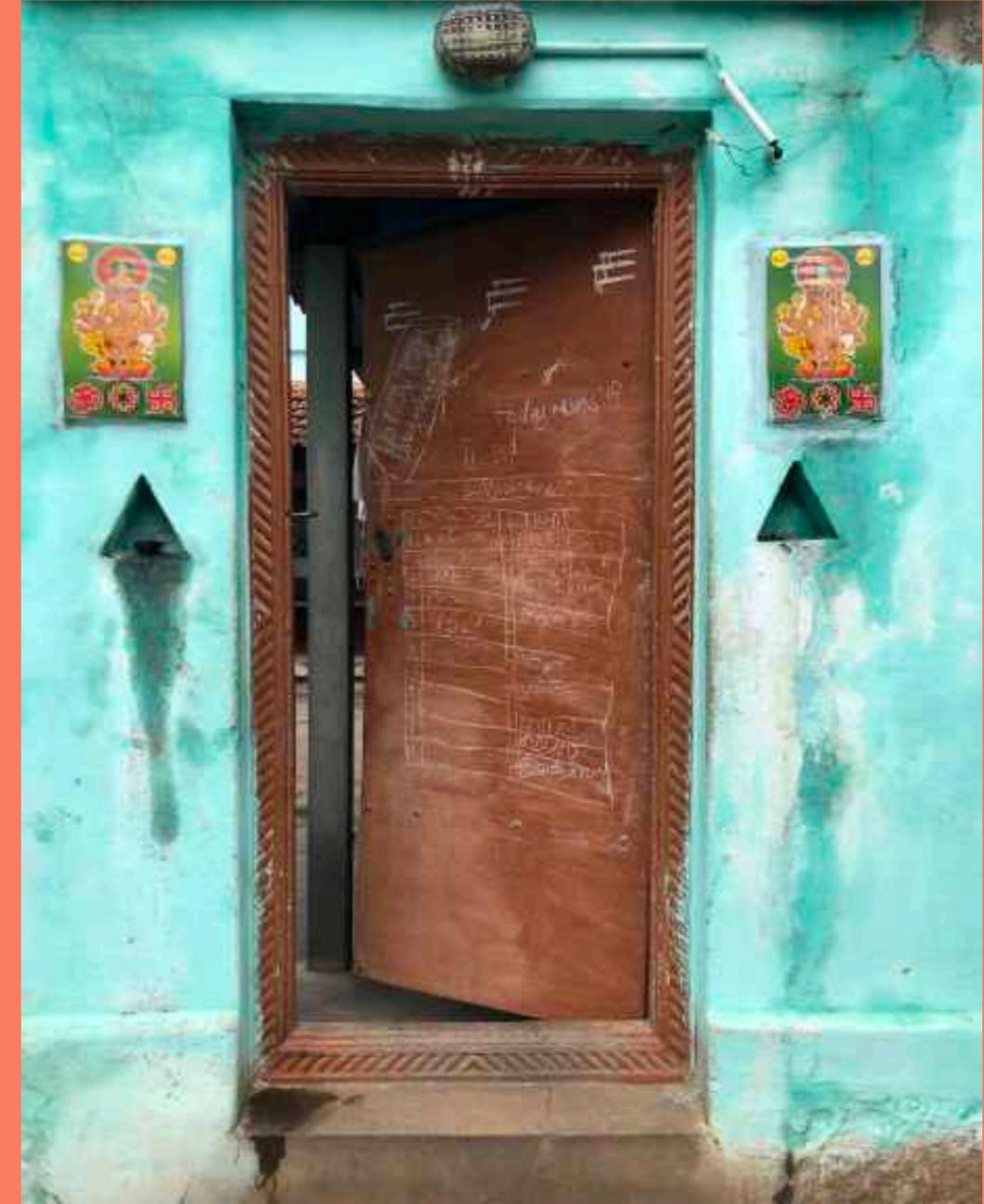




Most houses open with a veranda, which serves as an entry to the central courtyard inside the houses. These houses have a thinnai (raised platform) which is a public and private intersecting space.



Interesting doors can be easily seen in the village houses.



Door with chalk writings on it. The Children of the house often use it as a white board.



# Banana Market

Major produce from Musiri district

Musiri town is located on the delta region of River Cauvery, the town has rich and fertile soil.



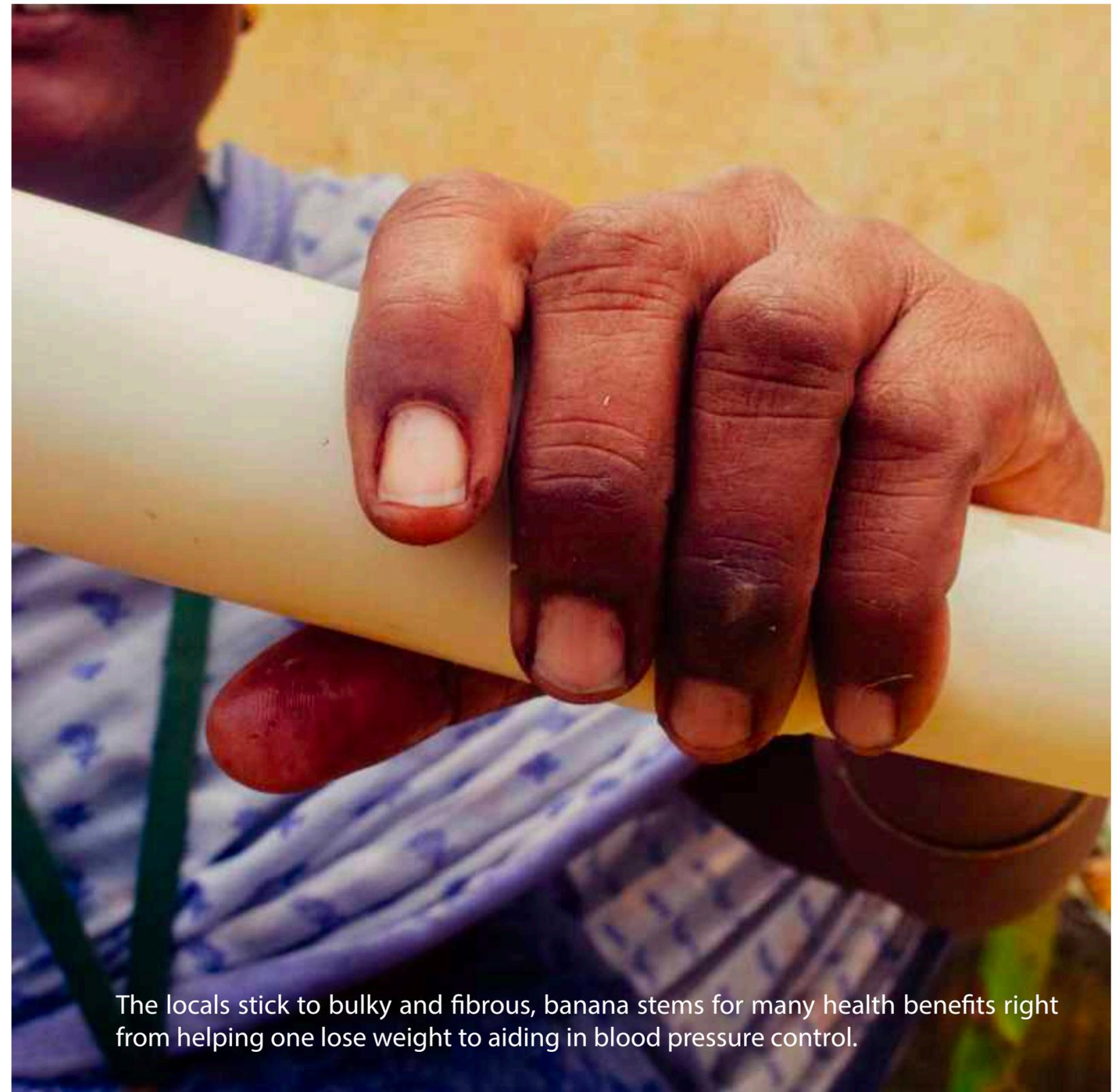
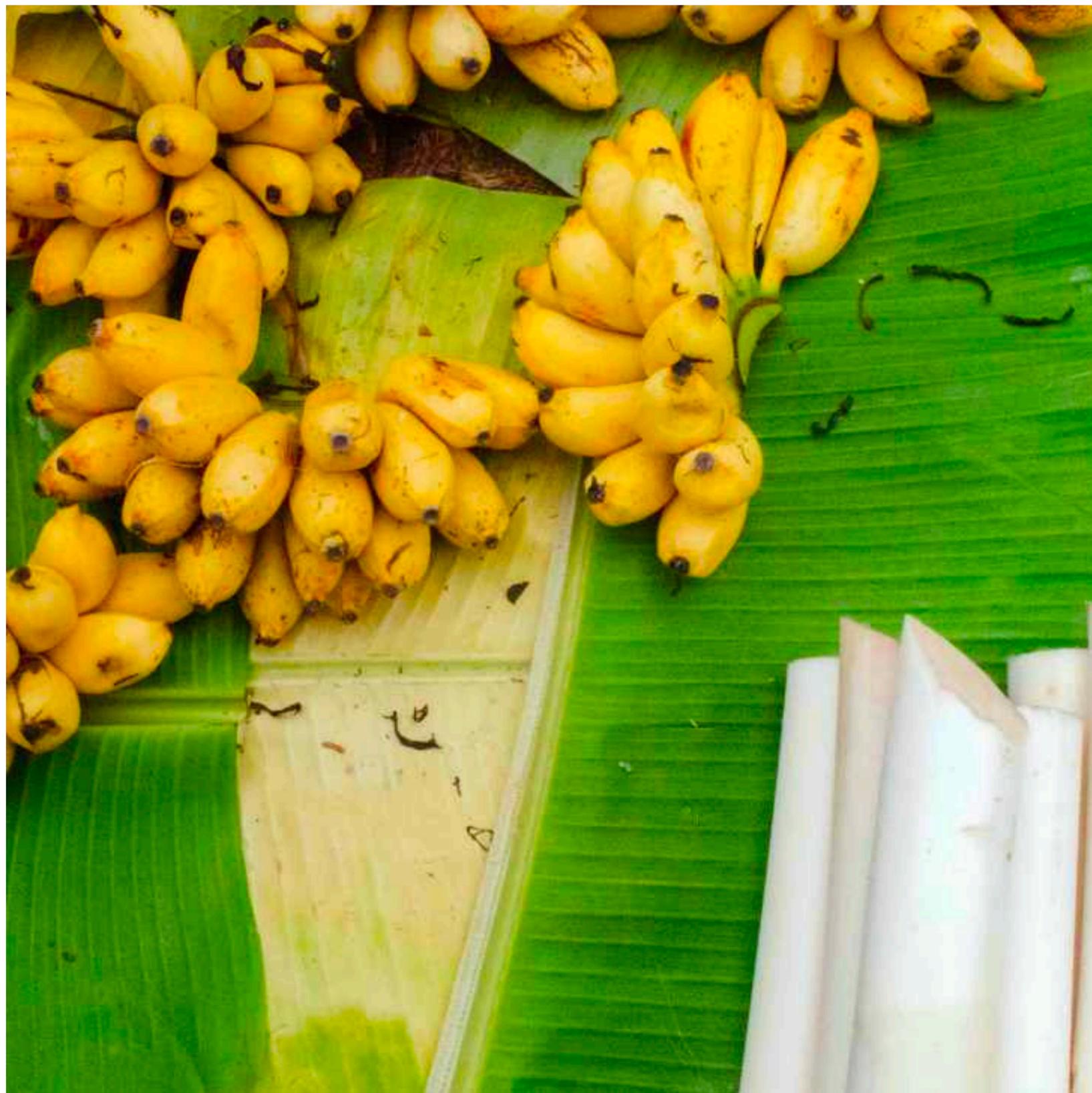
Local vegetable market entrance.



This weekly market is the main source of vegetable, fruits, items of daily consumption and household needs, by the locals around.



The town is surrounded by large number of agricultural villages where Banana is cultivated to a greater extent, which is very popular across the country



The locals stick to bulky and fibrous, banana stems for many health benefits right from helping one lose weight to aiding in blood pressure control.



The town is famous for bananas, banana leaves(green and dry both) and banana stem.



Folded banana leaves plates are sold in bulk here.



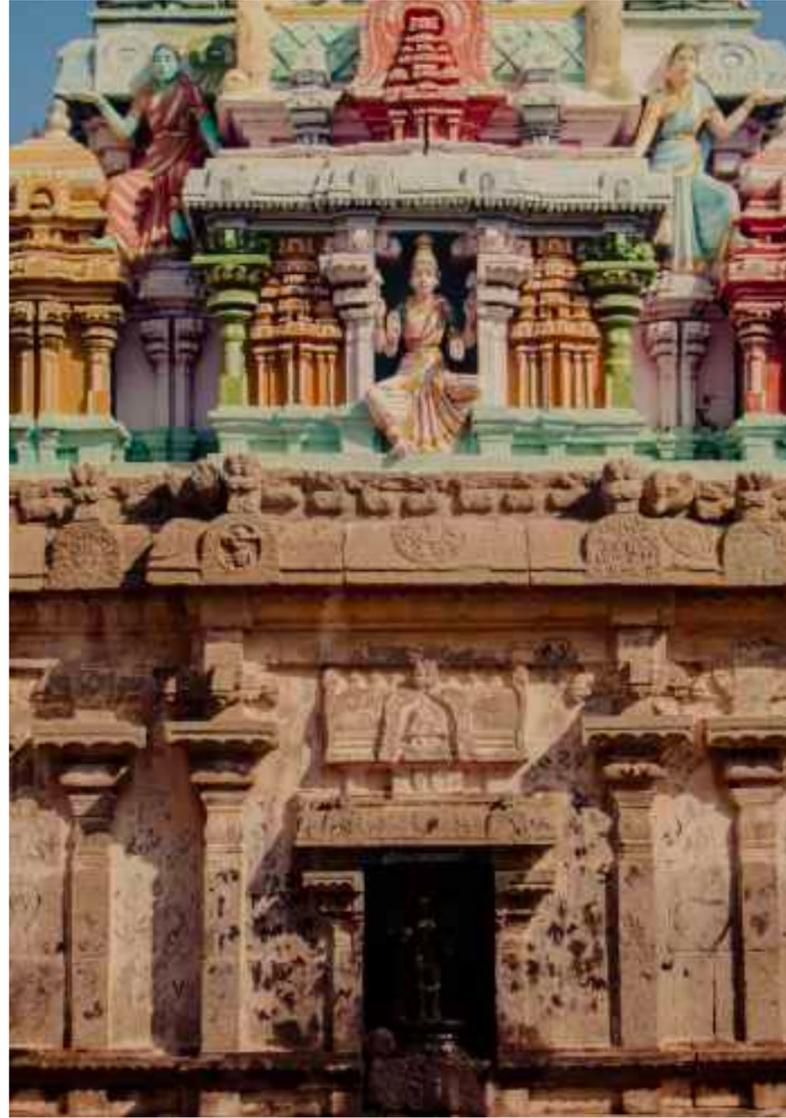
Some of the shops are set up under the dedicated shed, while others are spread across the open area and on the sides of the entrance.

# Cultural practices

## Temples & Rituals

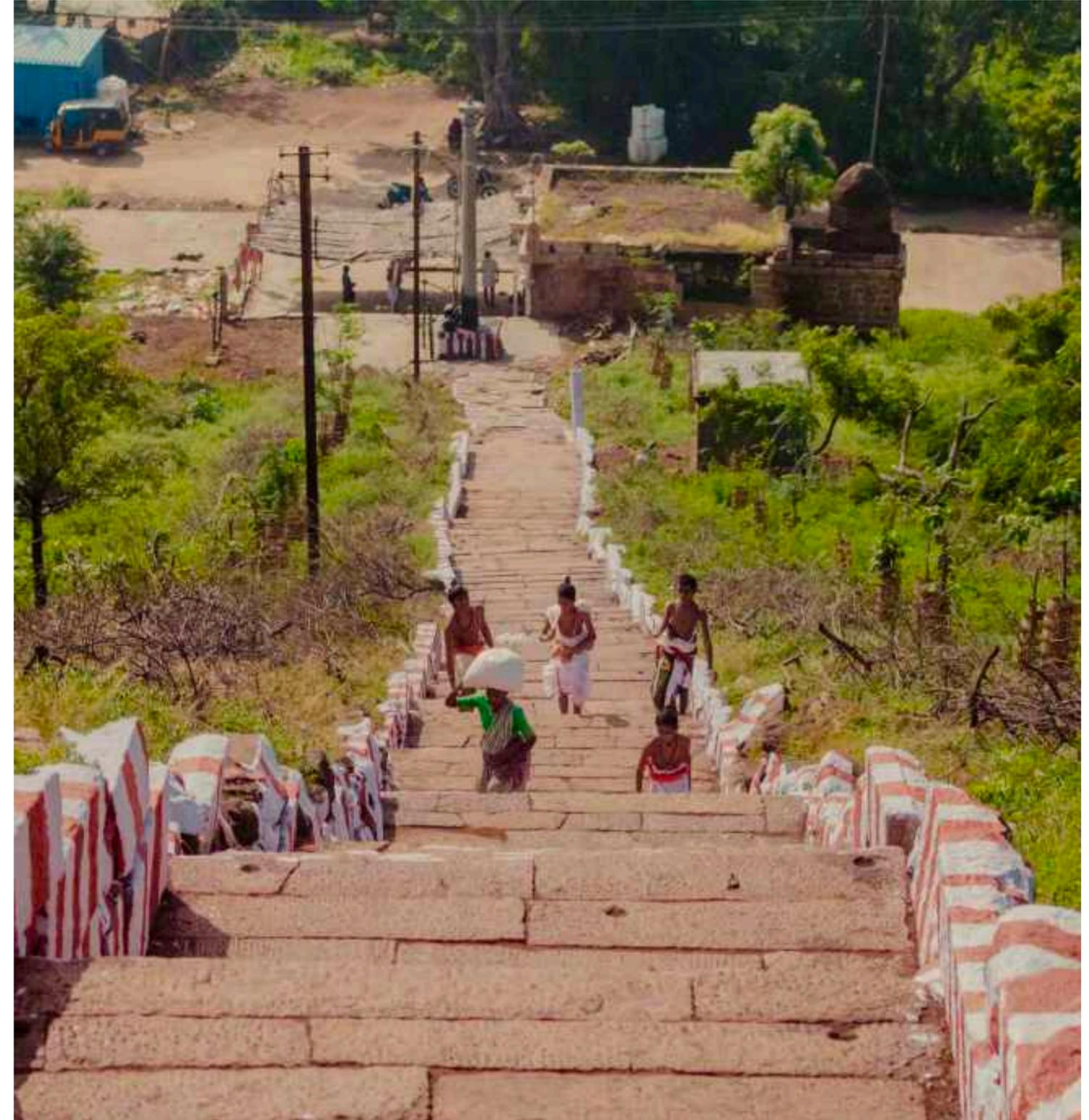
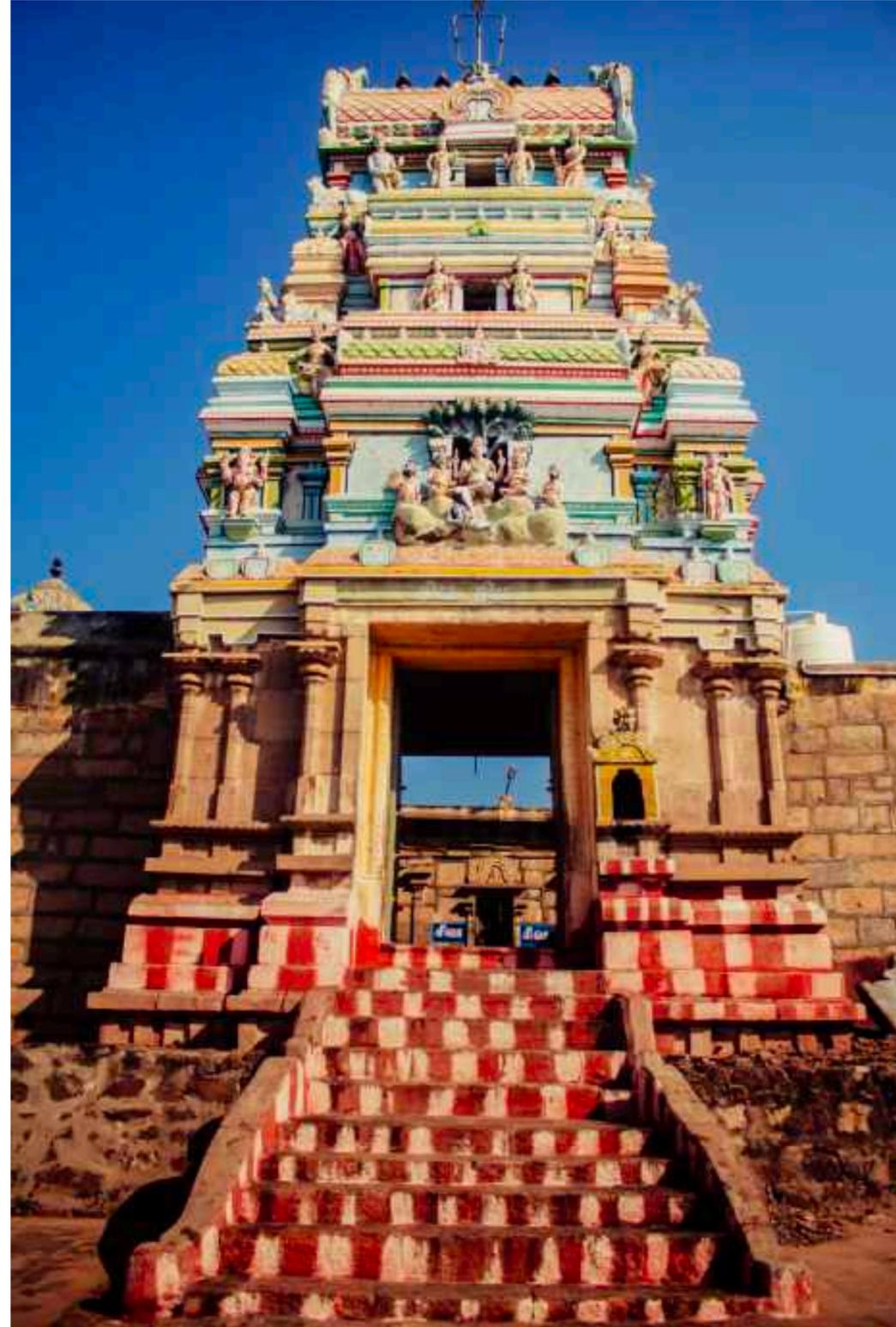
In Musiri Region, there are a number of temples situated in and around. These temples are of historical importance.





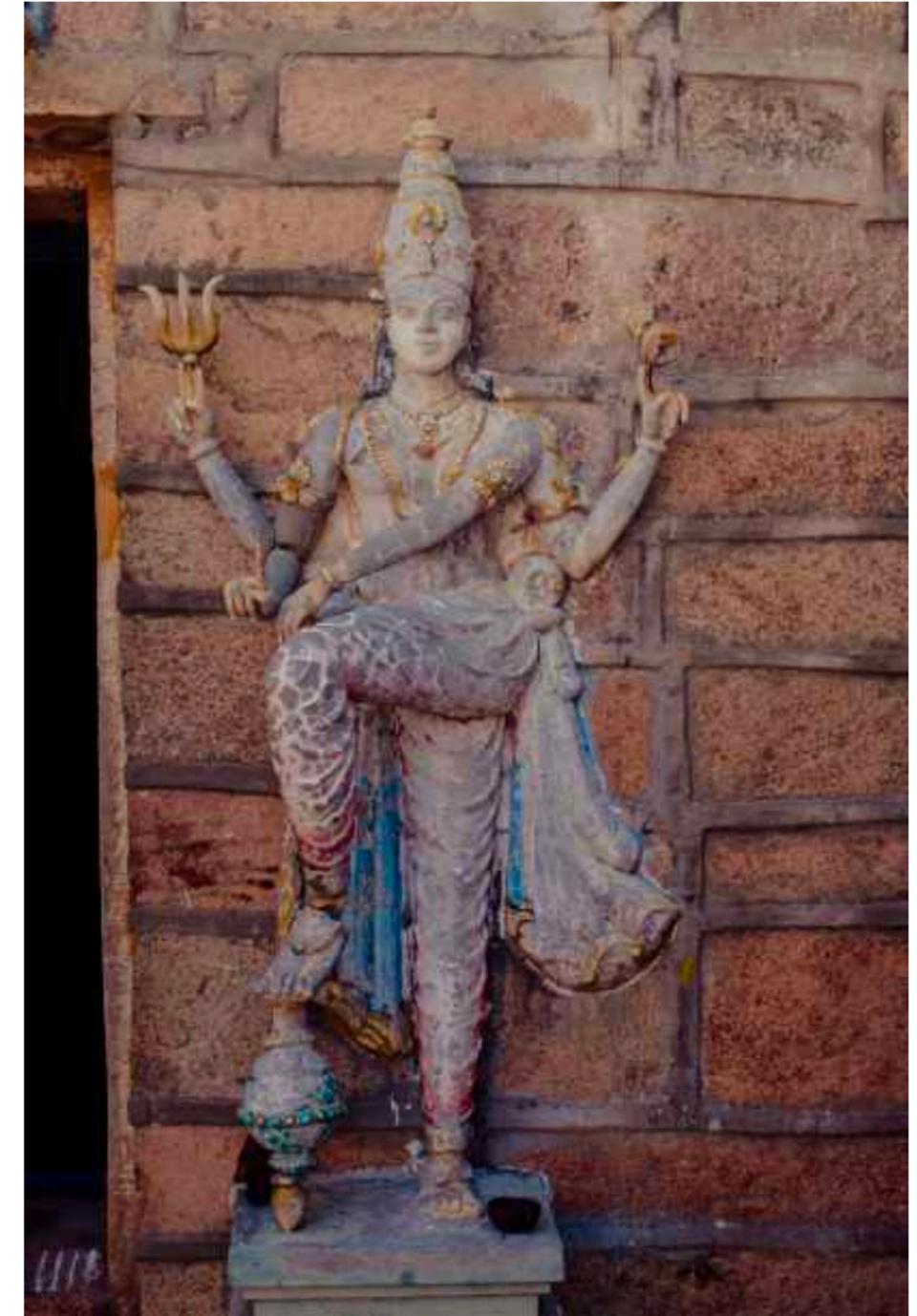
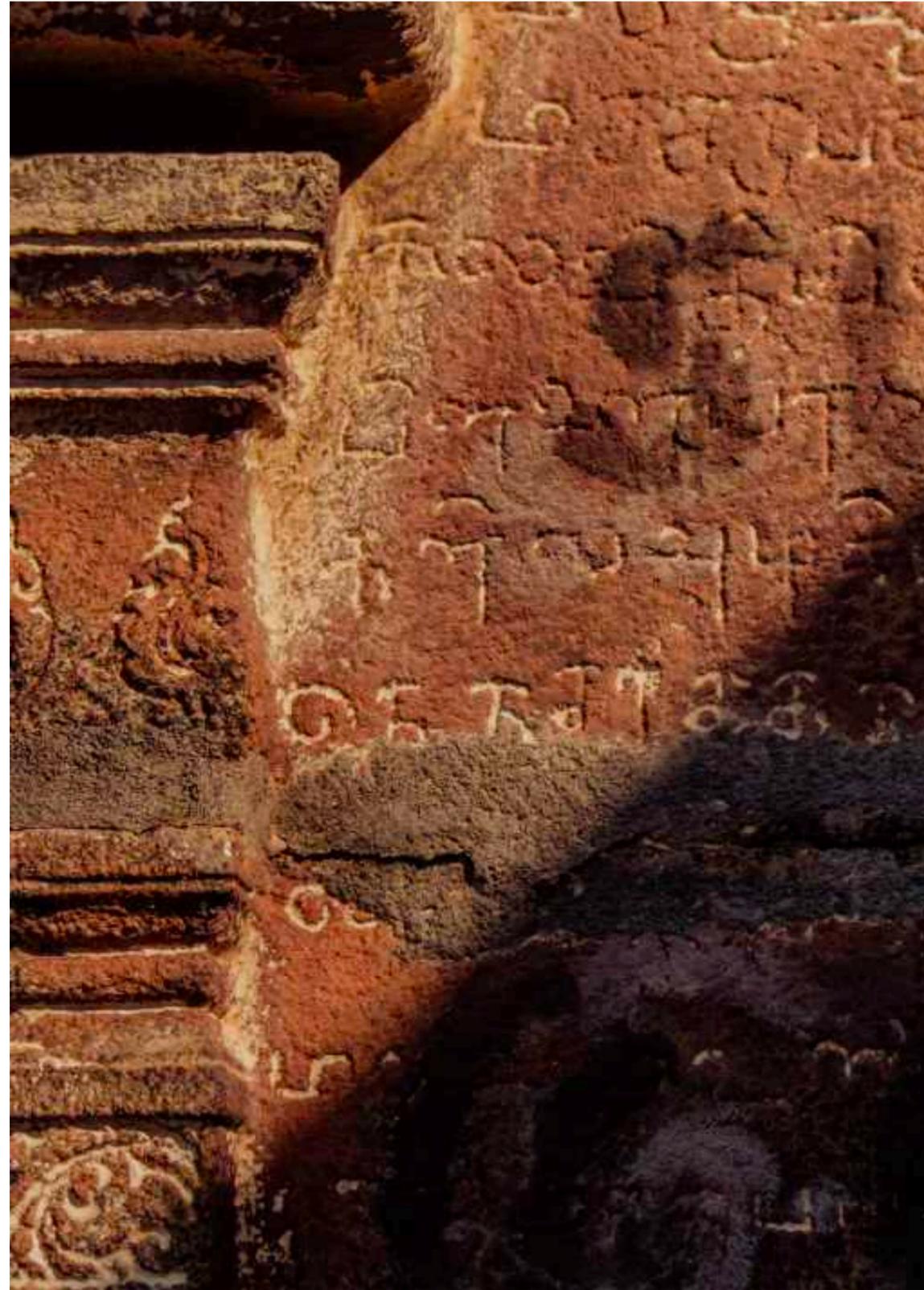
Thirungoimalai Temple

The Siva temple is situated on the top of the hill at a height of 900 feet.



Priest inside the temple, tying coloured threads on the vessels that are used for the special occasions.





Early writings engraved on the walls of the temple.



A marriage procession in the village after returning from the temple.



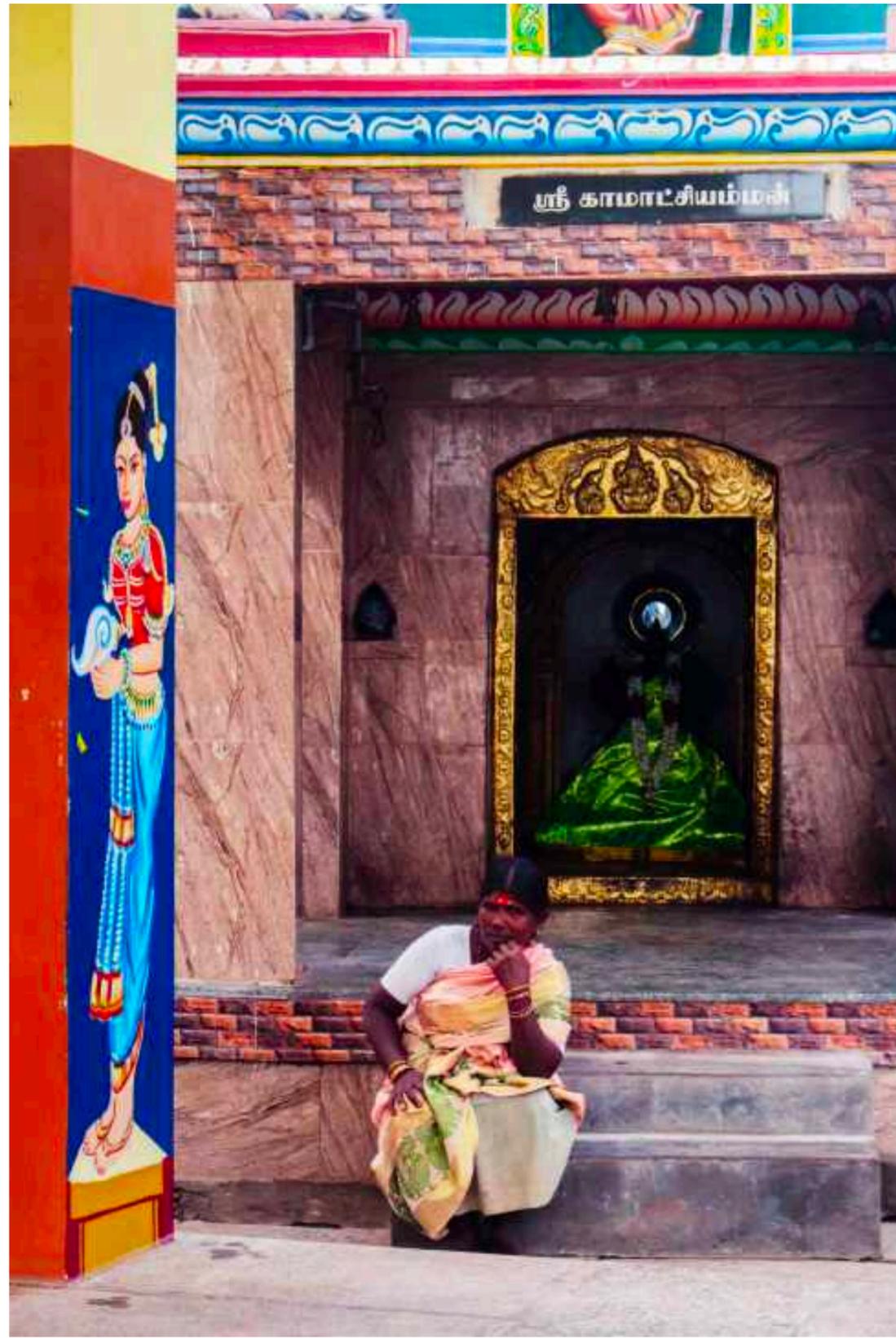
As a cultural practice, all the male members wear traditional dhotis that are woven locally, in all occasions including marriage.



Banks of Cauvery river

Shri Angalamman Temple







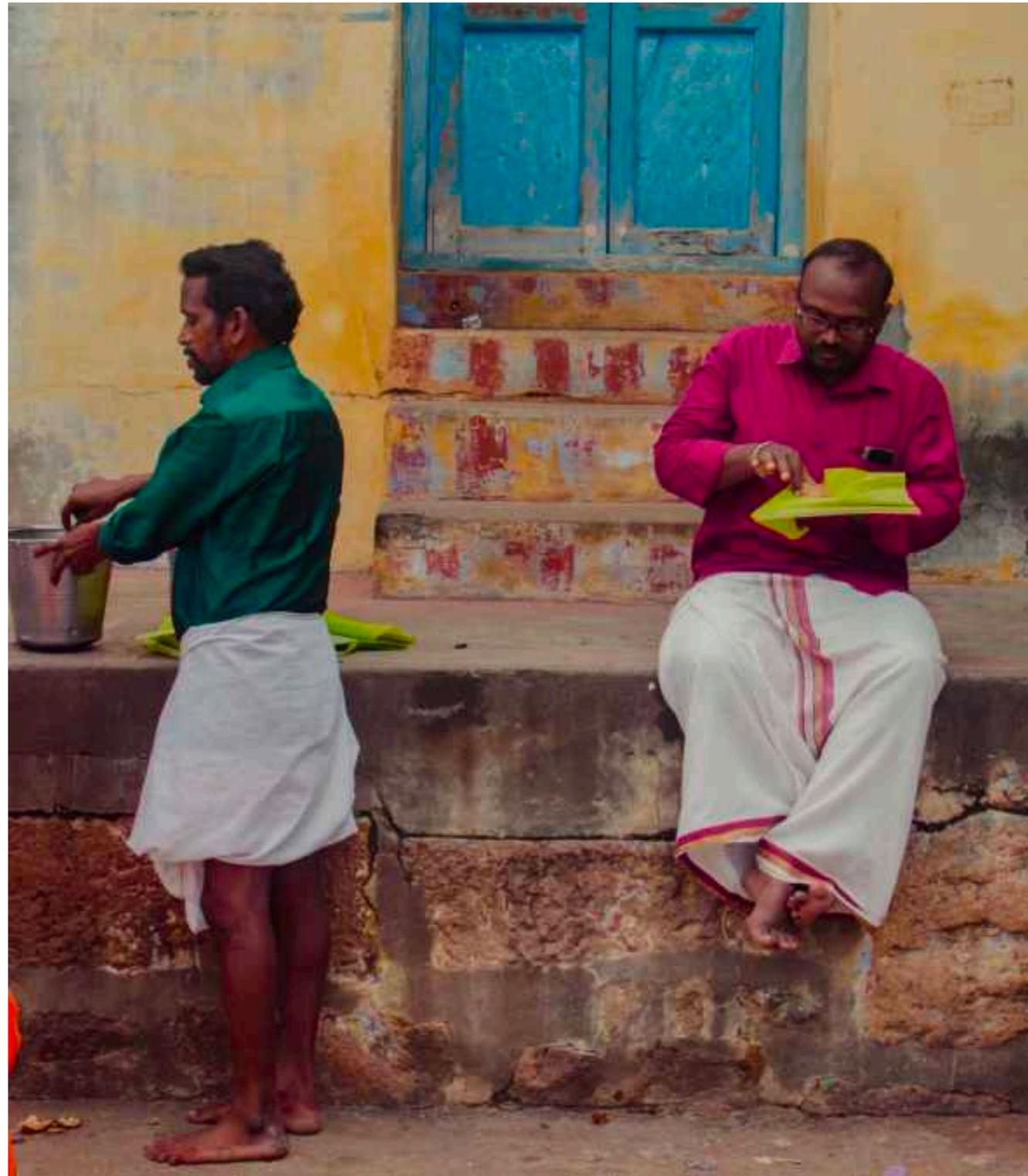
Apart from being a place of worship, this temple in Musiri is also used as a community place where local issues are heard by the temple priests. In the picture above, the settlement of a land dispute between two local families is taking place.



Chandramouleeswarar Temple



The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva and the presiding deity is called Chandramouleswarar. As per the local belief, praying to Shiva here cures mentally ill people.



Devotees eating "Prasad" or temple offering on banana leaf.





Deity inside the temple.

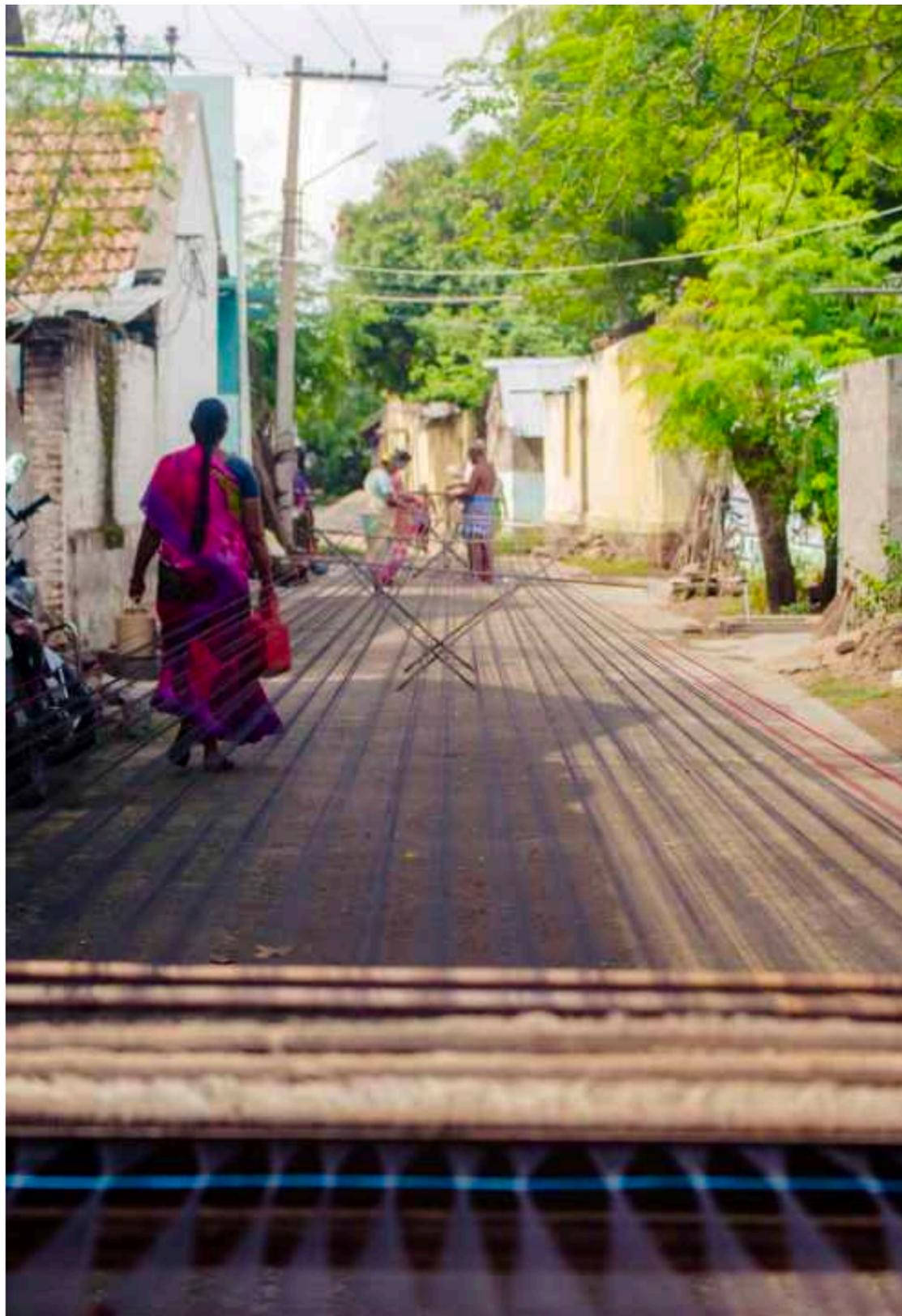


# Weavers village

Manamedu & surroundings

Weaving is the primary occupation of the people here. Most of the loom related activities happens on the street, as the space inside the houses is limited.





Pre - weaving process on the street

Mostly Kutcha houses are there on both the sides of the streets.



Most of the weavers have similar house constructions.



Smaller cut pieces of dhoties are reused as towel for infants.



The front part is the common gathering zone. This is where all the house activities takes place.

Women grinding spices using traditional method



Grinder made up of stone



A member of a weaver's family drying groundnut on the street.



Most of the kitchen activities like drying of certain grains and vegetables happen on the streets outside the homes.



The dwelling has three partitions, the front raised verandah, the living hall and the Kitchen. The front part is the common gathering zone and this is where all the activities take place from spinning to other household chores including weaving.

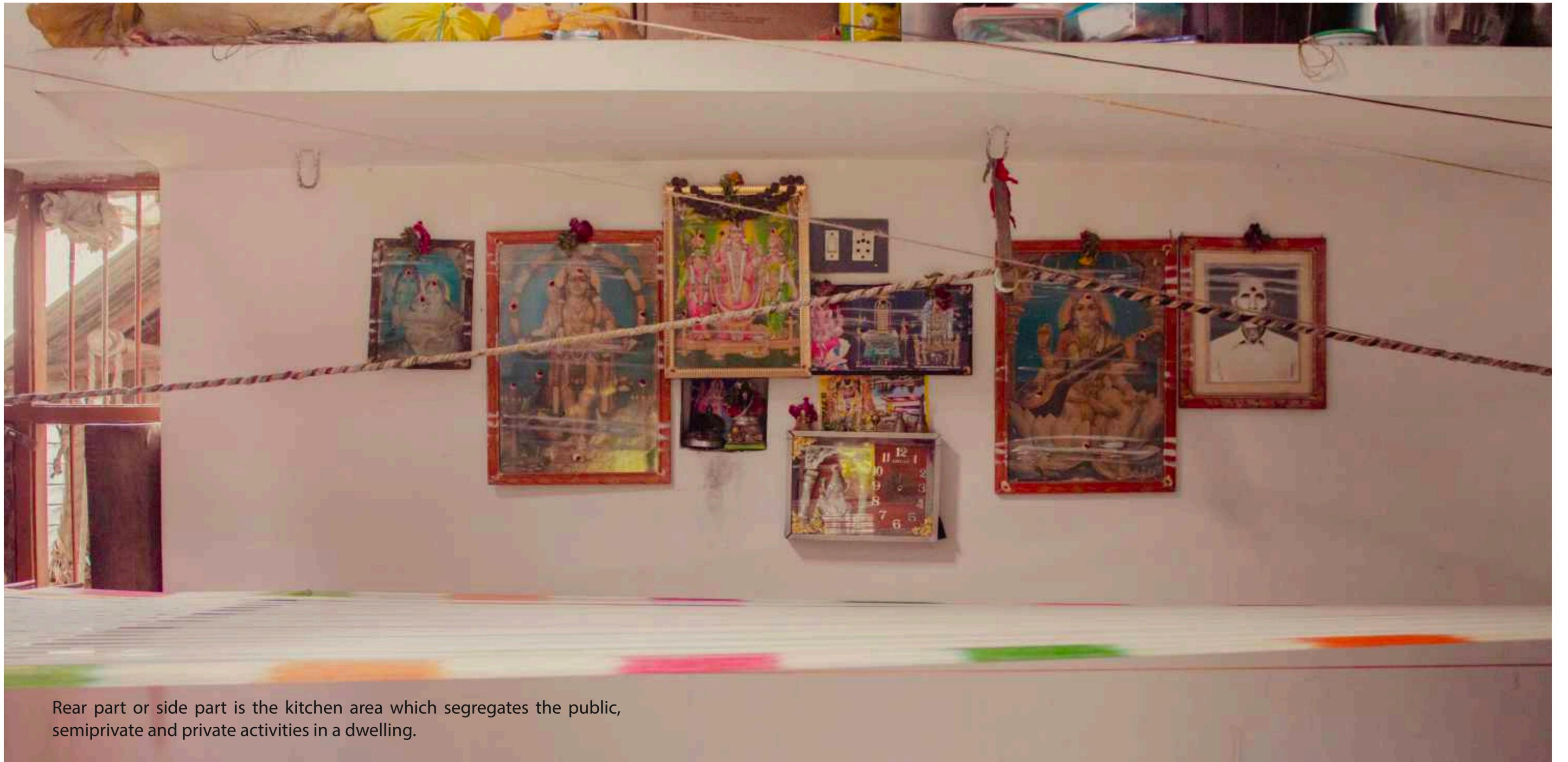




Nearly all the weavers have looms fixed inside their houses.







Rear part or side part is the kitchen area which segregates the public, semiprivate and private activities in a dwelling.



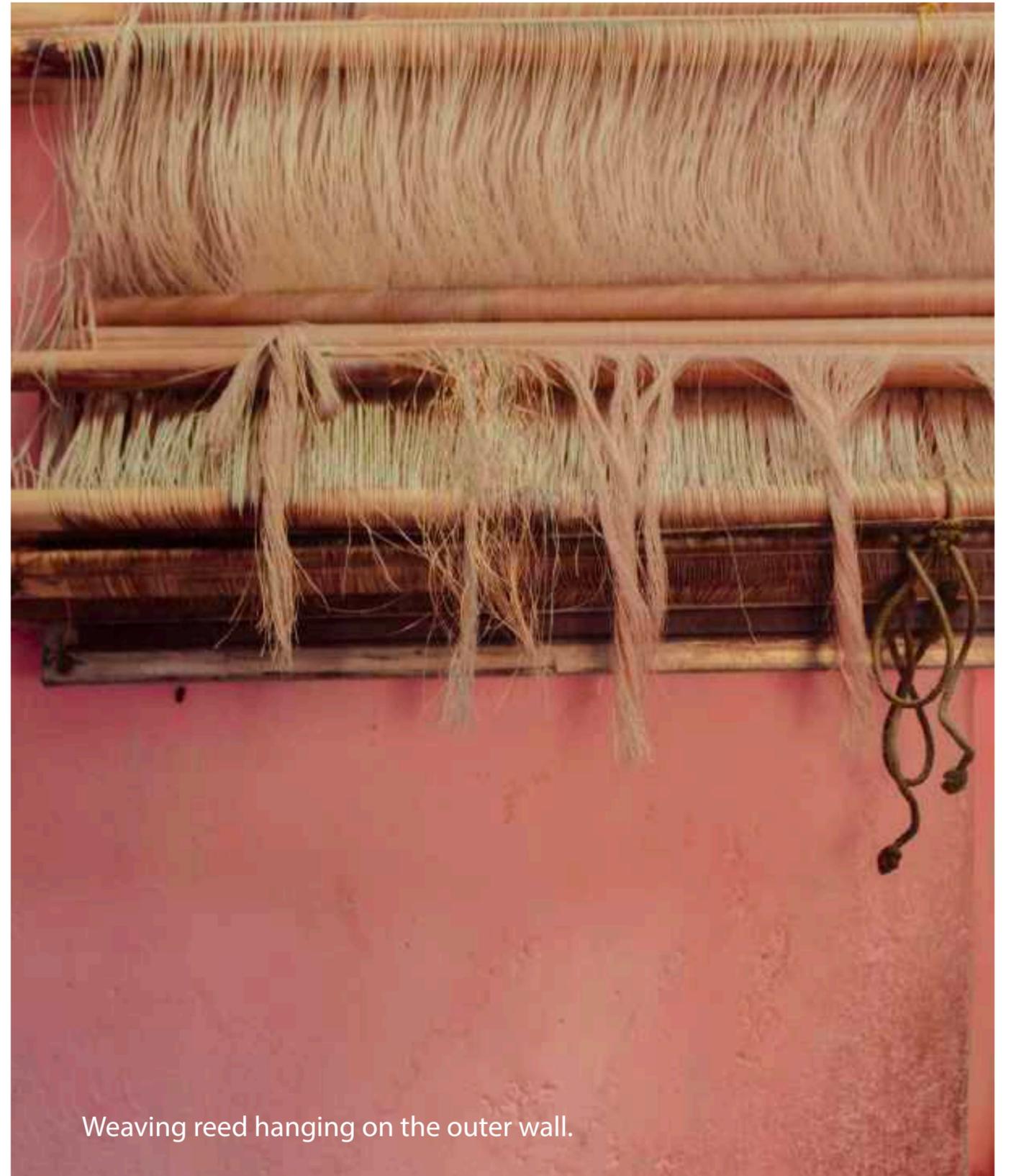
Loom is almost next to the side wall, leaving no place for anything extra.



Most of the weavers ensure that there is a proper passage for light to enter, as the process of weaving takes place inside.



The outer area of all the houses is used for the storage of daily use objects, yarn spinning etc.



Weaving reed hanging on the outer wall.



A regular size spinning wheel outside the house.

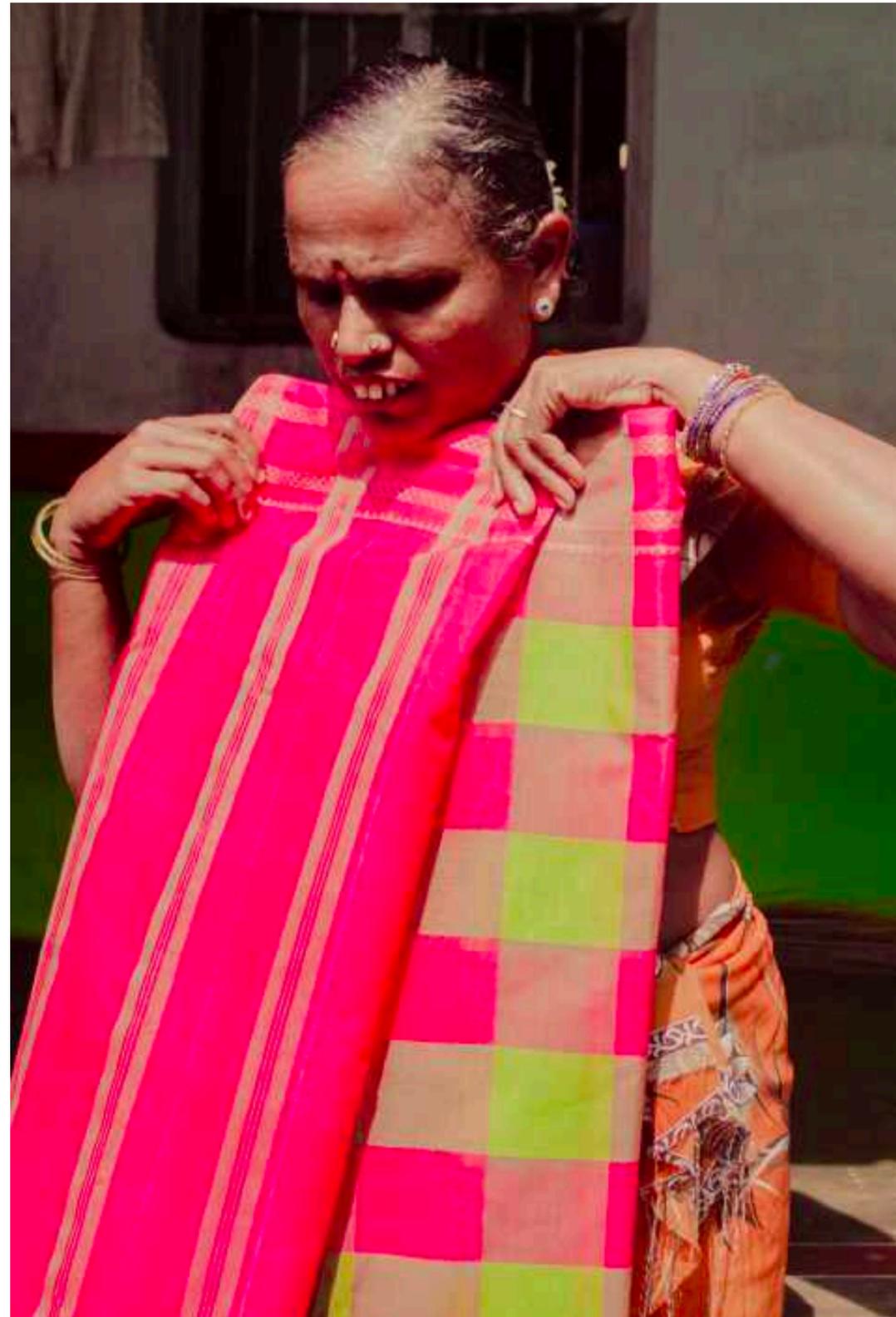


Warping is done on a big drum which is set in a few houses. It is installed outside the homes as it requires more space for rotation.



The houses are constructed using the locally available permanent materials, such as laterite stone, mud mortar, country wood and bamboo. The roof is pitched with a two sided slope and covered with locally made country tiles.





**Weavers and their family**









# Weaving process

Village livelihood



Yarn comes in the form of hanks and is locally known as "Paavu".

Since weaving is like a household process in Manamedu, every senior member of the family is involved in it at various stages from pre to final weaving.



The above mechanism is used to spin large quantity of hanks into smaller spools.



The pre-weaving tasks include the starching of the yarn and winding it into smaller sections for the shuttles.



Preparing the reed for the next lot of weaving.  
This process is usually done by the womenfolk.

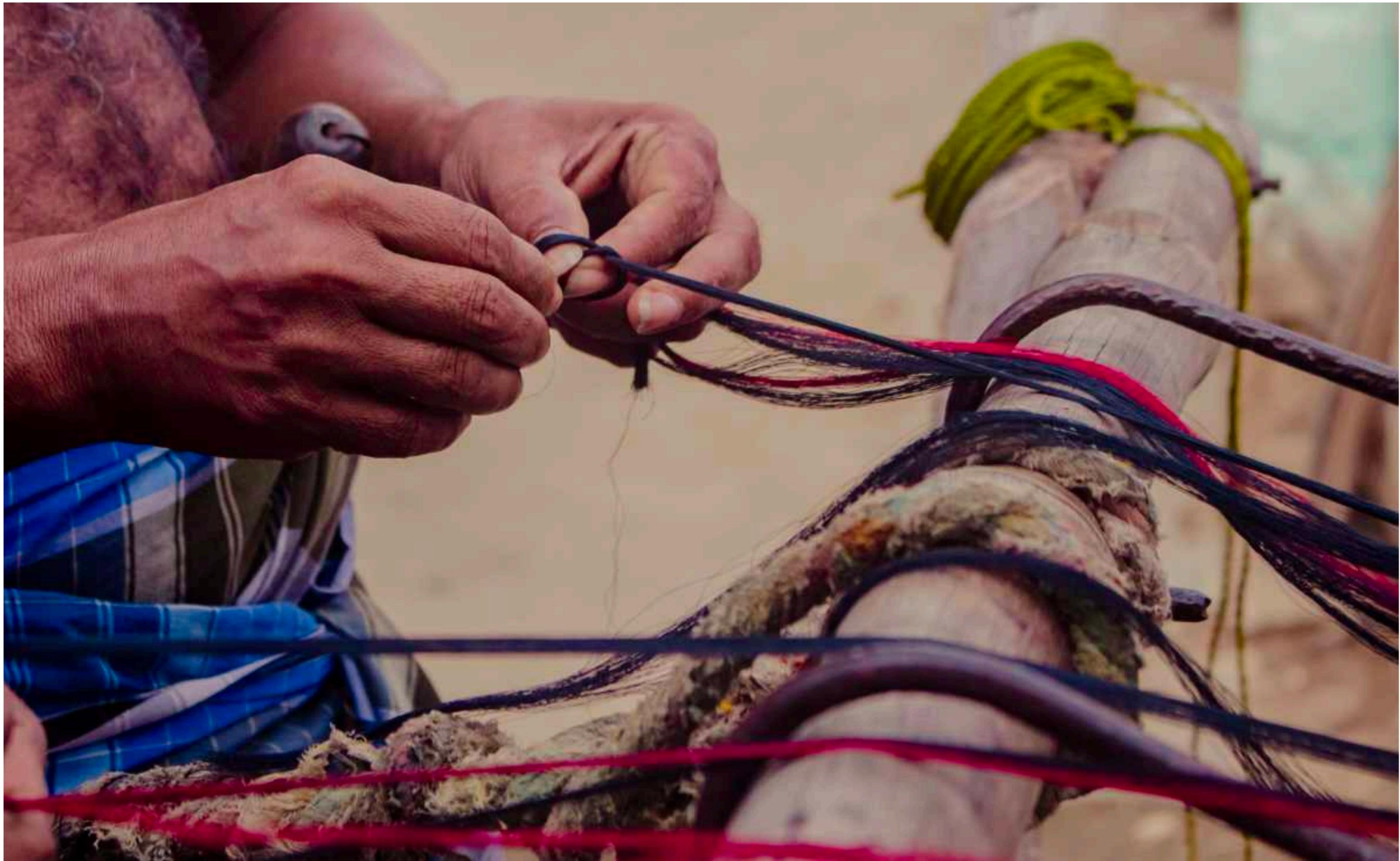


The process of warping and yarn dressing, which converts the hank yarn into a linear form to give the length on the loom.

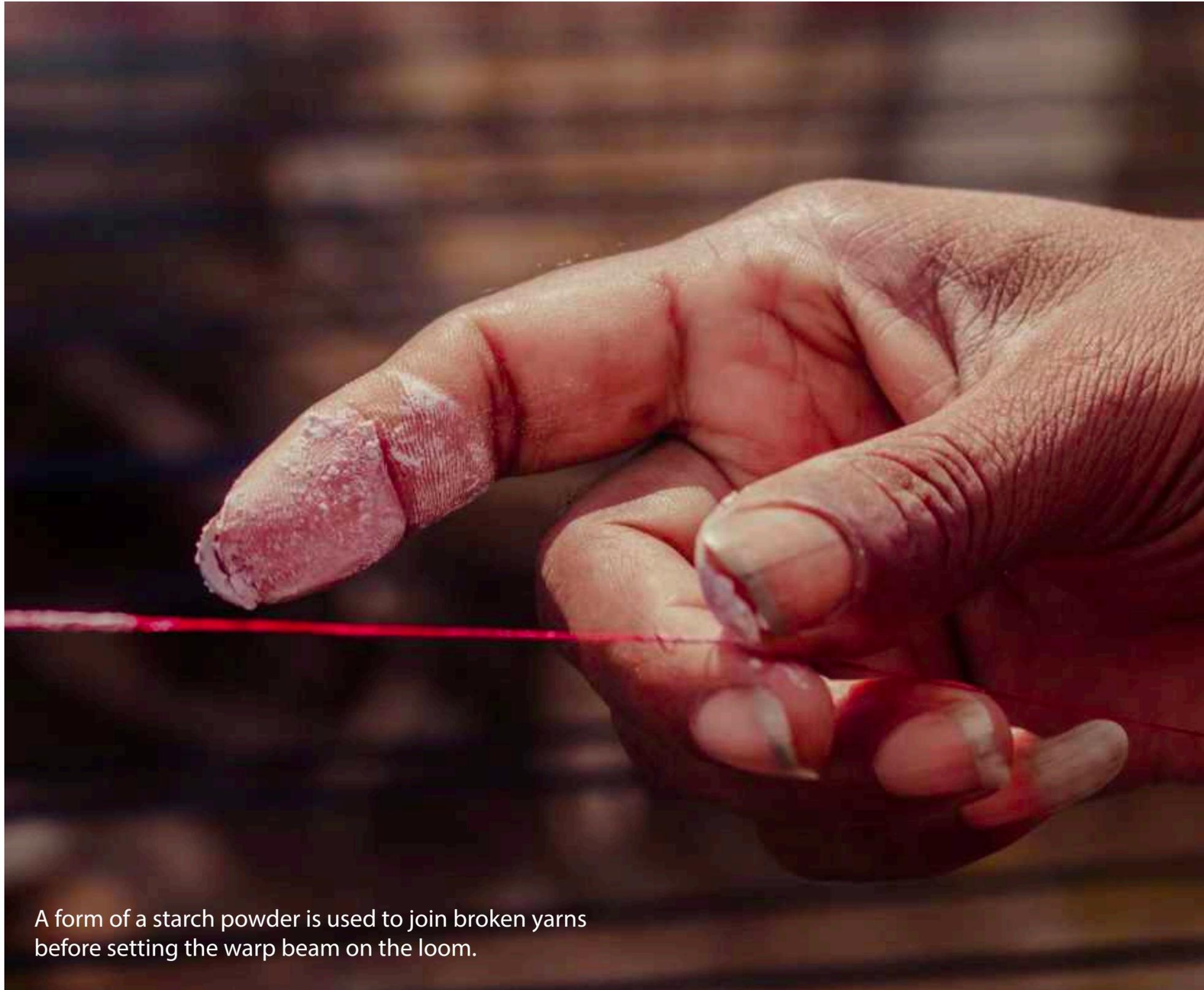


This activity is carried on the streets as the process requires long area to spread out the entire warp. Men and women from the community are involved in the complete process.

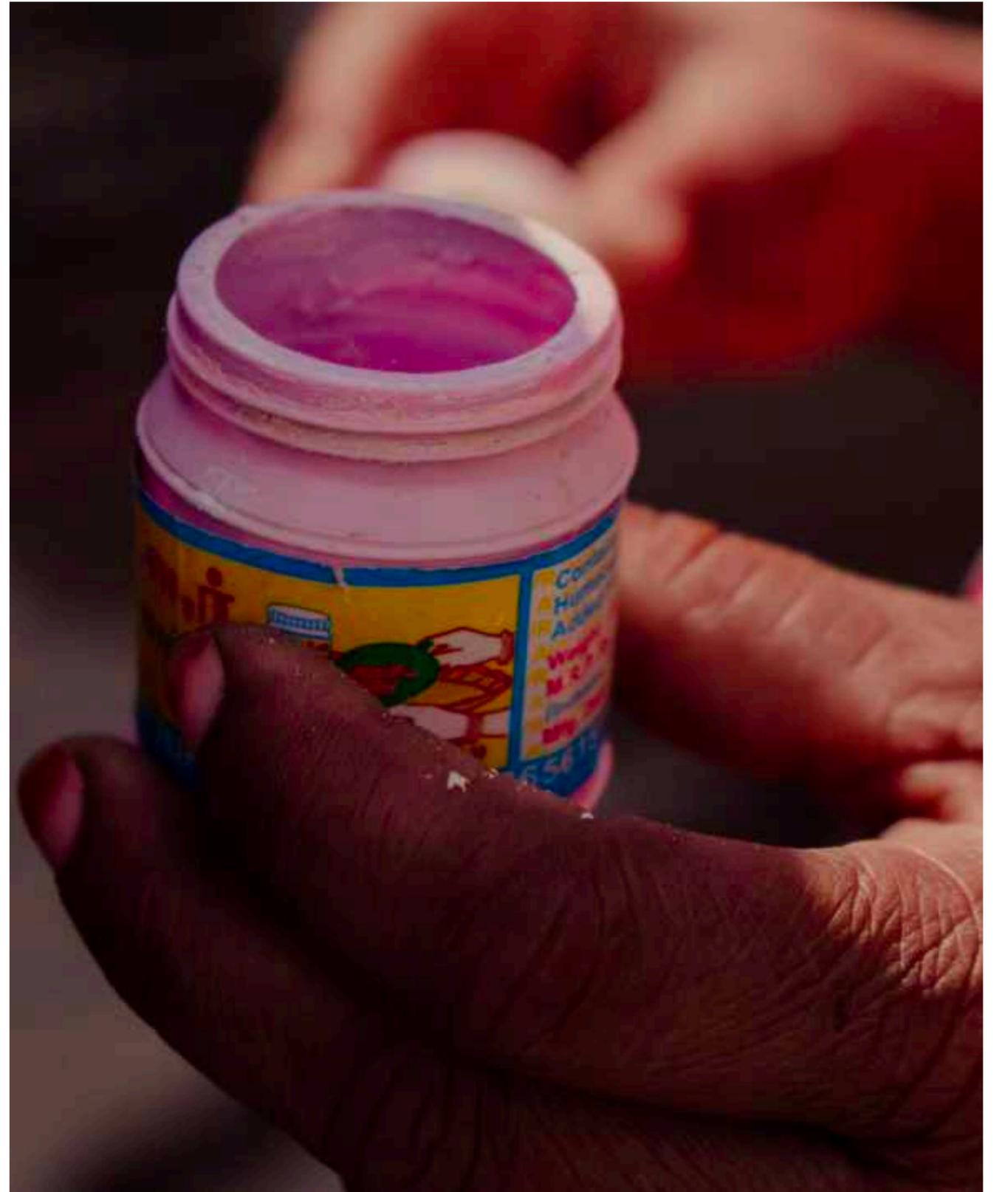


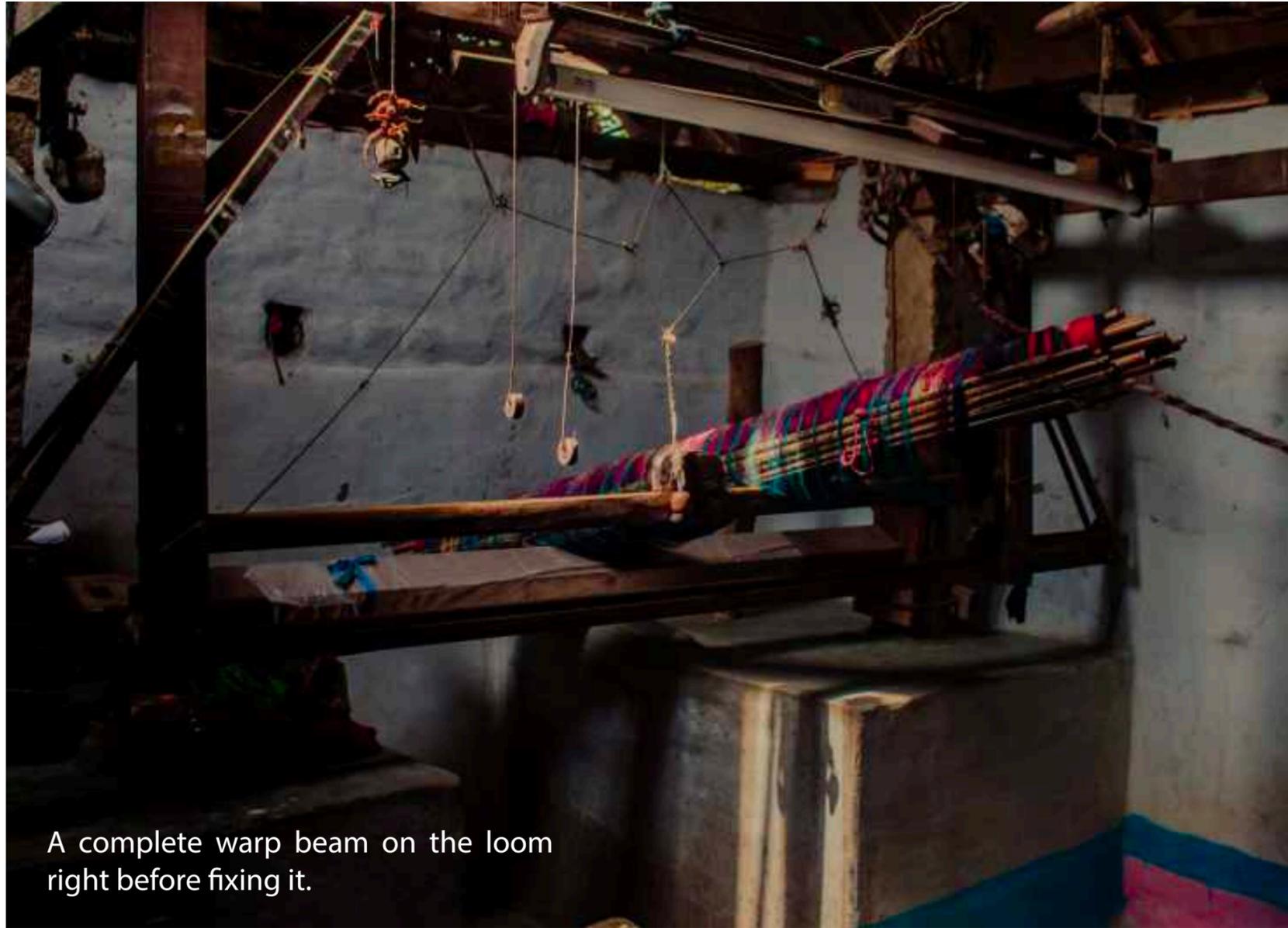


Neighbouring families come together to do the warp dressing for each other's loom. This helps to align and separate all the yarns in the length to facilitate smooth weaving.



A form of a starch powder is used to join broken yarns before setting the warp beam on the loom.







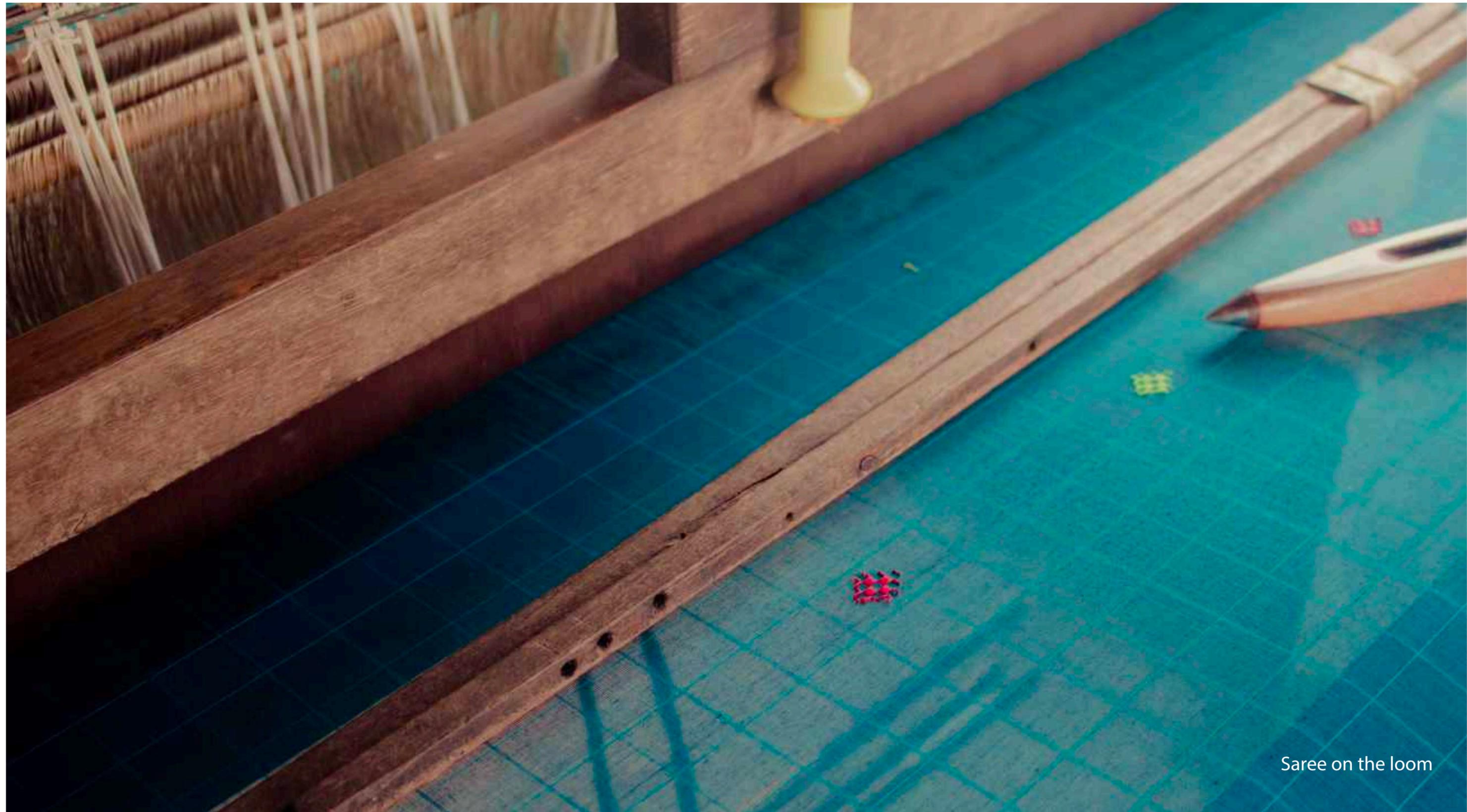
After warping is completed and the loom is fixed, the weaving process which takes place inside the house begins.



Jaquard mechanism which is fixed on all the looms in Musiri town, facilitates the weaving process with the help of punching cards.



A wooden shuttle is used to transfer the warp across the sarees.



Saree on the loom

# Products

DEF Training Centre under DCDP

The Musiri Digital Cluster Resource Programme provides weavers access to digital know-how, content and services. Also, it creates a supportive ecosystem by offering training in product diversification and allied livelihood skills, and tuitions for children. Running between January 2016 and September 2020, the programme's beneficiaries are weavers from five villages of the Musiri block in Tamil Nadu's Trichy district.

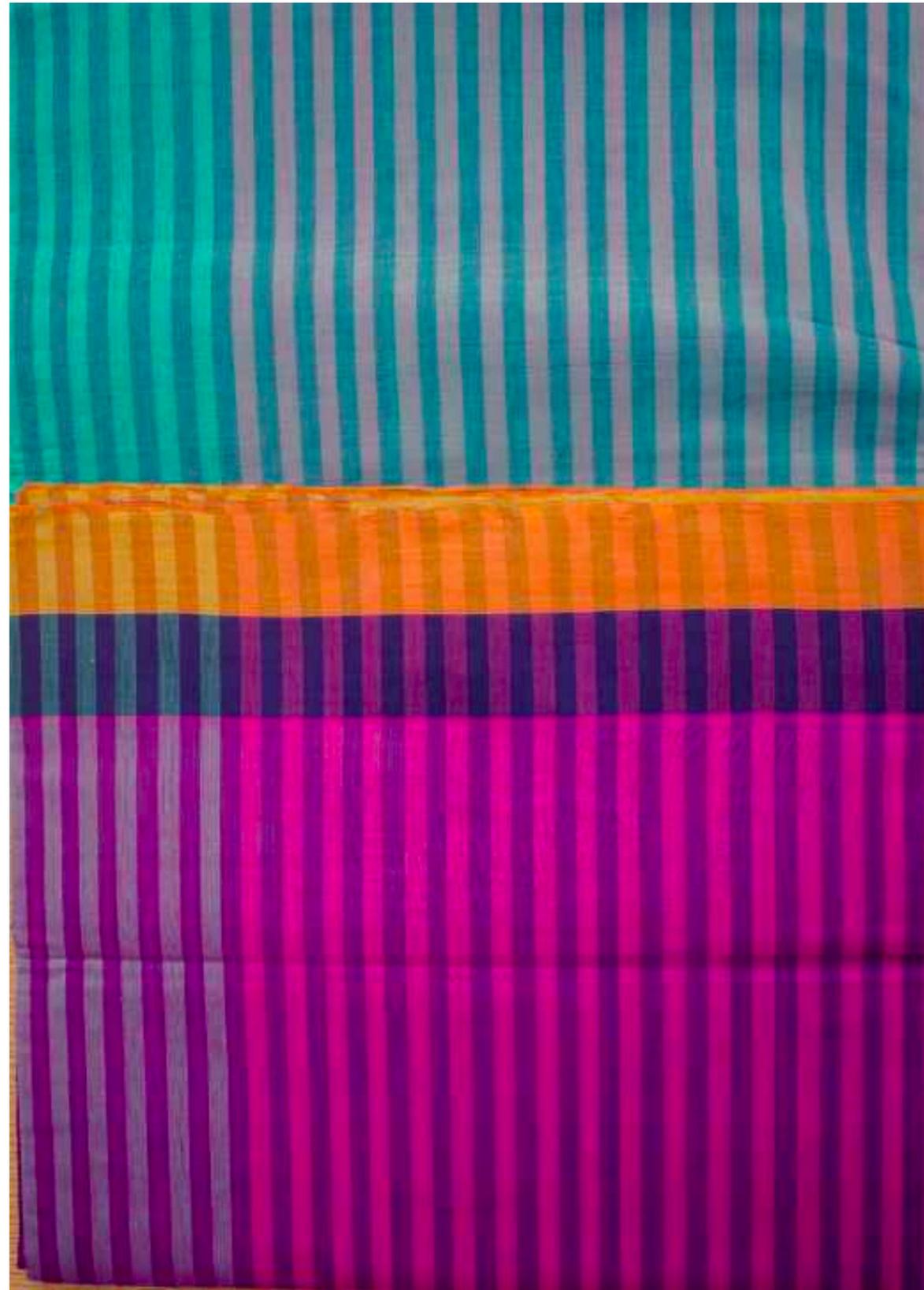
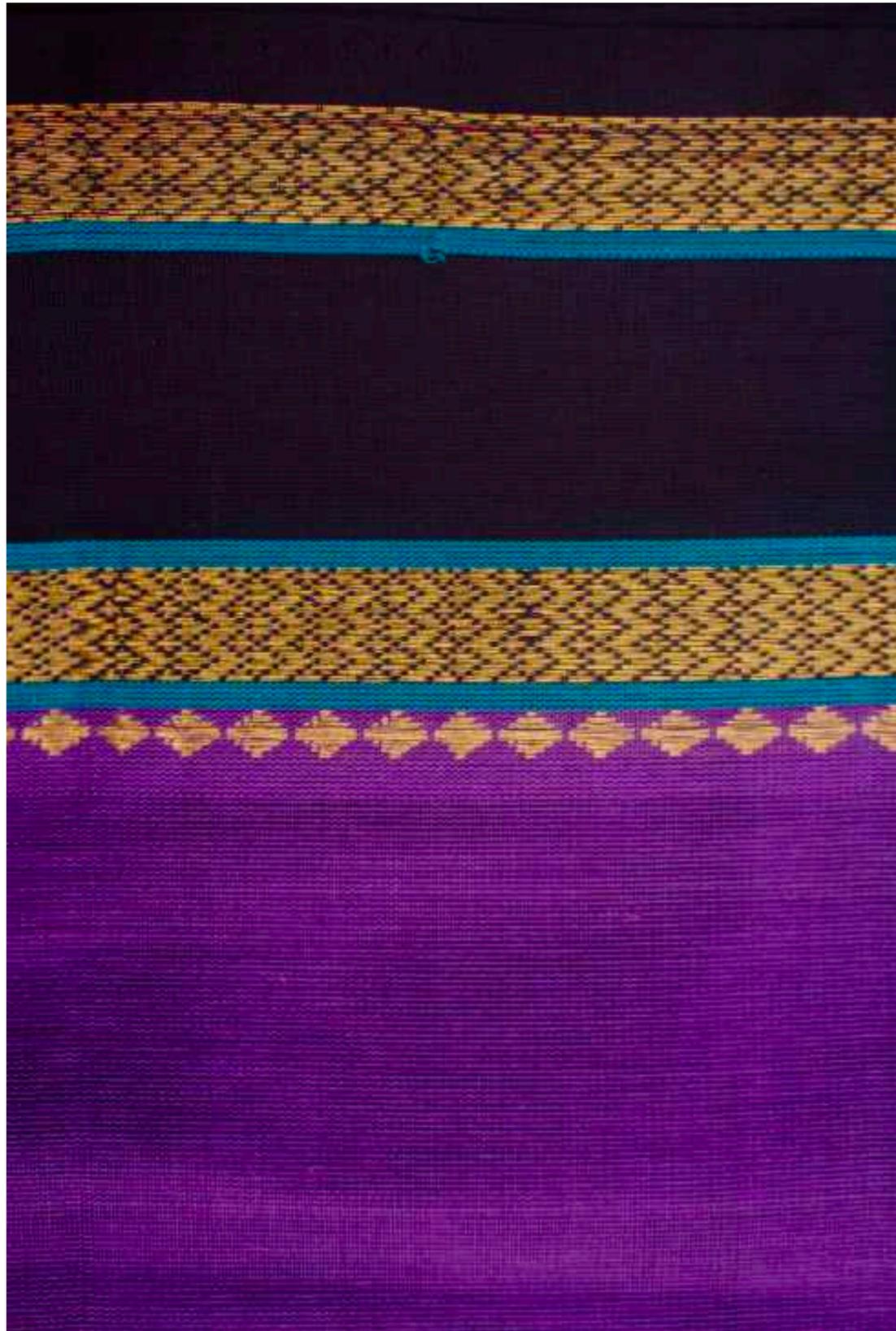




Plain cotton "veshtis" or dhotis with strip selveges in various colours are woven in Musiri.



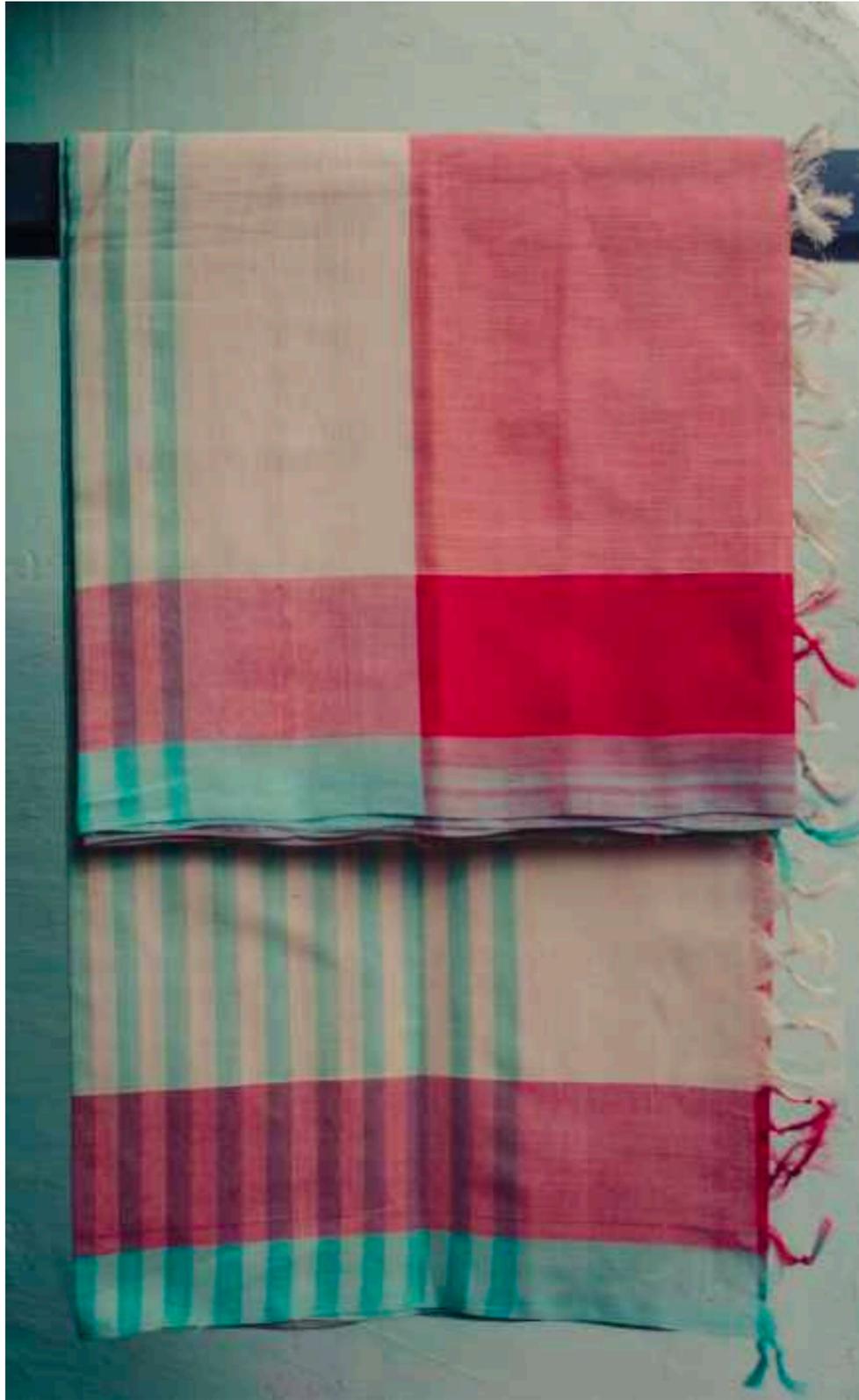


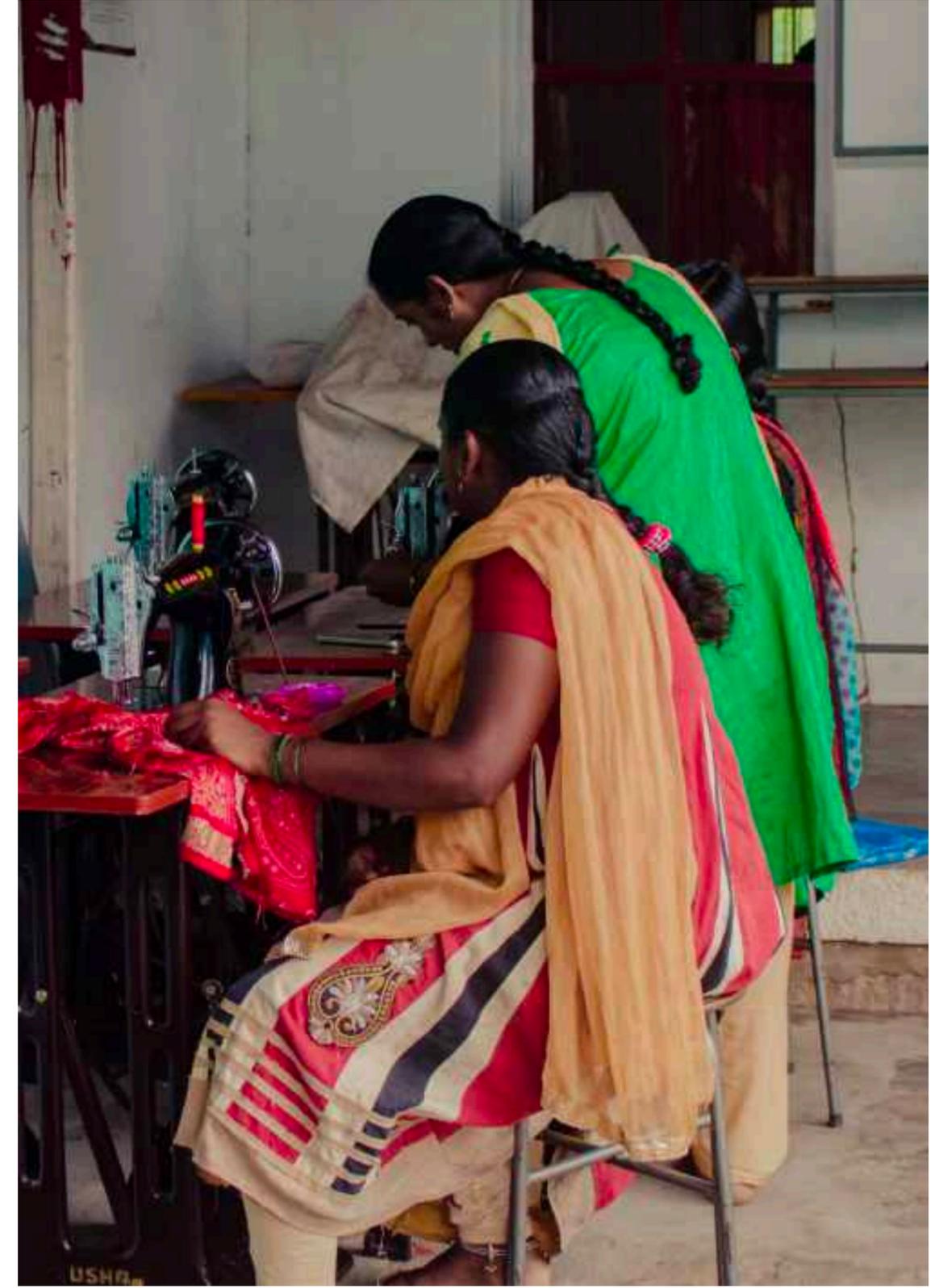


Plain cotton sarees with simple stripes and geometric borders are mostly woven.













Some embroidery and pattern making explorations being done by the community women, who were getting trained under the DCDP program.







DEF team alongwith the DCDP women group in the training centre.

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