

Handloom Weaving – State of Art of Tribes of Kullu Valley, Himachal Pradesh, India

Anjali Sharma and Promila Sharma

*Department of Clothing & Textiles, Institute of Home Science, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University,
Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India*

KEYWORDS Craft. Woven. Shawls. Fabrication. Trade. Multinational

ABSTRACT There are a myriad of craft traditions in India, which depend on social, economic and regional factors. The present status of craft in India owes much to the rich craft traditions of the past. The tribals of Himachal Pradesh are well known within and outside the country for the fabrication of woollen clothes of several kinds like shawls, *pattus*, *patties*, *lahang* etc. Kullu shawls like Manipuri and Naga shawls are very popular all over the country (Chauhan et al. 1989). Owing to rough terrain and remoteness of many areas, most of the age-old traditions and costumes have been preserved to date without succumbing to outside influence. Kullu; the valley of Gods is tranquil heaven known for its international Dussehra celebrations, its warm, woollen hand woven shawls and its innumerable temples. The earlier historic reference to Kullu dates back to 5th century BC. According to legend, Kullu once the land of Gandharvas and celestial musicians and has derived its name from 'Kuluta'- people who participated in the Mahabharata. In the olden times, it used to be an important centre on the great trade route to central Asia – to Tibet and China. Though Tibet is no longer a free country and travel to China is restricted, Kullu today has lost its multinational character to certain extent.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the crafts from the past continue to flourish due to their utilitarian nature, their availability to the common people and popularity in domestic and foreign markets. There is a great demand for rich brocades and zari work. The repertoire of saris ranges from Banarsi Amru, Tanchoi from Surat, Paithani, Patola, and Kancheevaram to the cotton saris from the tribal regions of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh etc, to enchant the modern Indian woman. There is a profusion of materials available to the consumers these days. One can get a variety of garments made of different silks. Richly embroidered garments, woven shawls and household items are in vogue these days. Mainly craftsmen from Kashmir, Punjab, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, North Eastern states etc. create these products. There is a flourishing market for pherans and tablecloths from Kashmir. Woolen shawls from Himachal and North Eastern states are also popular. Products like bed-sheets, table mats, napkins, household furnishings etc. made out using the various styles of textile printing ranging from tie and dye, block printing, hand-printing etc. are in great demand now a days. Art and craft not only contribute a lot to the sustained development of the country's rural economy but also contribute a prominent element to the cultural

unity of the people. Himachal Pradesh the "Dev Bhoomi" finds an important place in woollen industry of India. Due to unfavourable climatic conditions and geographically difficult terrains it becomes inevitable for the people of remote areas to remain indoor for about six months so they utilise their time for processing and weaving wool. A large number of woollen handloom products like *Dohru*, *Pattu*, *Patties*, *Doras*, *Gudmas*, *Namdas*, Caps, Mufflers, Carpets and Shawls are made in Himachal Pradesh. Some of the articles are made only for household consumption while others are marketed of which Shawls are most common interest.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

People Involved

People from different castes engage themselves in weaving occupation which has become a cottage industry. Every household owns a pit loom and men as well as women have acquired this skill. Weaving is generally restored to during chilly winter months; when *pharis* are compelled to stay indoors. (Aryan et al. 1993)

A survey was conducted in the year 2005 on Kullu shawl industry. For this purpose fifty commercial weaving units were randomly selected and data were collected through well-structured

interview schedule (Table 1). The results were interpreted and discussed here. Data given in table 2 revealed that in private units 60 percent of the respondents were engaged with weaving profession from 5- 15 years. Only 20 percent were engaged from less than five years followed by 12 percent from 15–25 years and 8 percent of the respondents were attached with weaving profession from 25 years. In Government units 40 percent of respondents were engaged from 5–15 years followed by 32 percent respondents engaged from 15–25 years and sixteen percent from 25 years and above. Weaving of Kullu shawls gives income to a good proportion of state population, so many big and small weavers at household, cottage or industry level dependent upon handloom weaving for their living.

Table 2 is showing the information regarding craft learning centre and it was found that maximum of the respondents (42%) were trained in 'cooperative societies' followed by 28 percent of respondents trained by their 'family members' and 20 percent in private units. Only ten percent of respondents had learnt this craft from their friends. During discussion it was found that only 32% of the weavers attended one or another training programme.

The Distinctive Handloom Woolen Products Made in Kullu Valley are:

Pattu: A woolen fabric draped by women like a sarong, used for everyday wear are plain or

chequered with simple borders. The ones worn during festive occasion are ornately patterned with designs motifs along with the weft as well as warp. Many times pattus may have a red border called '*Khusti*' running along the vertical edge. Since the last few years however there is a trend towards stitching a separate *khusti* or a patterned border at selvedge of the pattu with the intension of reducing the labour involved and making it lesser cost effective, without reducing the visual appearance.

The pattu is draped around the body and secured at the shoulders with a pin, locally referred to as the 'bumni'. A muffler or sash is tied around the waist to hold it in place.

Men wear shirt, coat, woolen pyjamas and white turban which is now replaced by Kullu cap. In these hilly areas, the garment except the shirt is made of *patti*. This is a locally manufactured coarse woolen sheet. Cotton trousers are also used.

Patti: Local tweed made for coats, jackets or trousers called *patti*. It is heavy twill fabric generally woven from two fold hand spun natural white or brown/ black local wool of coarse count. Sometimes mill spun yarn may also be used. It is generally in plain, stripes and check patterns. It is heavily milled into a well felted cloth, making it impervious to snow, rain and wind.

Dohru or Dohar: It is a woolen blanket woven in coarser wool spun into a thick yardage. Dohru/ blanket generally made from local wool in checks and stripes. Some blankets are woven on frame loom whereas for local market it is woven on pit

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to their profession period (n=50)

S. No.	Period (years)	Commercial units	
		Private units 25*	Government undertaking 25*
1.	Less than 5	5 (20)	3 (12)
2.	5 - 15	15 (60)	10 (40)
3.	15 - 25	3 (12)	8 (32)
4.	More than 25	2 (8)	4 (16)

Figures in parenthesis depict percentage

* No. of respondents in one units

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to their craft learning centres (n=50)

S. No.	Particulars [@]	Percentage
1.	Family members	28
2.	Institution	
	a) Government	12
	b) Private	20
3.	Cooperative societies	42
4.	Friends	10

[@]Multiple responses

Table 3: Reasons for using a particular type of design (n=50)

S. No.	Reasons [@]	Weight mean score (Xw)	
		Private units 25*	Government undertaking 25*
1.	Most commonly used	3.92	3.60
2.	Family tradition	2.40	2.60
3.	Learnt during training	3.98	4.30
4.	Beautiful and different look	4.31	4.48
5.	Easy to make	3.19	3.28
6.	In demand	4.71	4.83
7.	Can be used for multipurpose uses	2.97	2.15
8.	Attract consumers	3.91	3.73
9.	Good appearance	4.03	4.13

[@] Multiple responses

*No. of respondents in one units

loom in two pieces of half width and later joined from the centre with fine elaborate stitching.

Shawls of Himachal Pradesh: The shawl is believed to be a relatively recent introduction to the tradition of Himachal Pradesh. Shawl weaving today has become one of the most flourishing industries providing a means of livelihood to about more than 35 thousand weavers of the state. For many people, it is a secondary occupation to augment and supplement their income from farming. It is a employment generation device for household women of hills.

The Himachali shawl is a light woolen fabric (mill spun or hand spun) measuring 1mtrs x 2mtrs. It is draped around and over the shoulders and chest. The fibre is merino wool, local sheep wool, pashmina, angora and mixture of these. Yak hairs are also used to add variety. The yarn used are mill dyed and also of natural wool colour. Saraf wrote in his book 'Indian Crafts' shawls have been the Himachal's specialty. The most noble is these were the soft pashmina wool shawls. Nowadays, most shawls are made of woolen yarn called *raffal*. These shawls are either plain or patterned. The skilled Himachali weavers found inspiration in their beautiful environment and mythology.

1) Kinnauri Shawl: Widely renowned for their intricacy and fineness in weaving, they are truly unique. Their elaborate geometric designs bear a strong central asian influence. Many of the motifs woven have a very special symbolic and religious significance. For patterning on white, black, grey and brown backgrounds red, orange, pink, blue, green, yellow, black and white colours are used. Out of which five colours represents five elements. The white stands for water, yellow for earth, red for fire, green for air and blue for aether. Many times, they have patterned border running along the four edges thereby increasing the labour involved and making them more expensive than Kullu shawls.

2) Kullu Shawls: Kullu shawls enjoy a unique position among different famous shawls of India. Hand-woven Kullu shawls are known for the unique process and techniques that give them significant value addition. Traditionally Kullu shawls have three borders at the end (Bansal et al. 1997). Kullu shawls own its origin to the Kinnauri shawls. The Kulvi designs and motifs woven today have originally been derived from intricate kinnauri designs that have been enlarged enormously and simplified with the passage of time. This has been resulted into a reduction of

the labour and the time involved – thereby reducing and making them more commercially viable. Mill spun yarn dyed in various colours is used for the ground, while a vast range of acrylic colours are used for patterning the borders. These shawls are available in wool, angora, pashmina and handspun materials. The yarn used may be chemically dyed or naturally dyed and of size 2mtrs x 1mtr.

Kulvi Motifs and Designs: A distinctive feature of Kullu shawls is the stripes or bands running horizontally widthwise at lateral ends. These bands, a few centimeter wide and vary from two to seven centimeters on each side, are decorated with the variety of patterns woven in brilliant colours like yellow, green, white or red on contrasting backgrounds. (Aryan et al. 1993)

Reasons for using particular type of designs are given in table 3. The data depicted in table 3 revealed that in private weaving units 'In demand' scored highest ($X_w = 4.71$) followed by 'beautiful and different look' ($X_w = 4.31$). In Government units same trend was followed In demand' scored highest ($X_w = 4.83$) followed by 'beautiful and different look' ($X_w = 4.48$), 'family Tradition' scored lowest ($X_w = 2.40$) in private units and can be 'used for multipurpose uses' was ($X_w = 2.15$) in government units.

Traditional designs were common throughout the region though names might vary from one place to another. All motifs and designs were named corresponding to their shapes. Most of the motifs were inspired from surroundings i.e. beautiful nature and their household. The weavers themselves had no idea about the ancient origin of the designs they weave, yet these remained relevant and personal to each weaver who named them after something of current interest. Designs included everyday objects like *Ghanti Bel* (bell motif), *Gandu Bel* (onion motif), *Patta Bel* (leaf motif), *Jala* (overall design), *Aloo matter* (potato and peas), *Doop chayuon* (sun and shadow) *Bubul chasm* (Nightingale's eye), *Ganesh* (Swastik), *Kanchi Tara* (crossed stars), *Titli* (Butterfly), *Kanghi* (comb), *mergenda* (Lotus) and many more. In a continuous changing market and consumer choices, new designs are being incorporated.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

A visit to any weaving centres is a rewarding experience. One can hear the rhythmic sound of

the looms from a distance. Seated on one side of the crowded weaving room and pahari women spinning yarn on the charkhas, while the men and women who are weaving, sit before their large loom, pausing to pass the bobbin wrapped with woollen thread through the skeins of warp or working in the precise detail of the geometrical motif. Their skill lies in applying even pressure to the loom, to ensure that the weave is uniform. Based on an almost intuitive perception and an inherited ability the craft skill is nurtured and developed through years of practice. The state government apart, the great demand for shawls, caps and mufflers is the impetus that has transformed a domestic, need-oriented industry into a craft of high standards. Professional weavers from Kullu town have set up their workshops at Kullu – Manali highway. The Kullu dussehera, the Minjor fair held in Chamba town in August and September and numerous rural fair provide the weavers and traders with occasion to sell their woollen fabrics, shawls, blankets, lois, pattus and patties etc.

The wool weaving industry has grown manifold in the past two decades, but at the same time, commercialization has caused an overall decline in quality.

The shawl weaving districts in Himachal Pradesh, are one of those nooks and corners of India, the traditional and ancient handicrafts of which contain certain valuable feature which are fast getting crushed out by the steam roller of the modern society. Kullu and Kinnaur districts have the peculiarities of being ground for

synthesis of the Tibetan and the Indian Culture. The uniqueness of these designs and importance of religious symbols will make it possible for the designs of Himachali shawls to find a market.

For any craft, there are three essentials, the equipment, the raw materials and the ability and skill to use the raw material and equipment for creative purposes. With very little training one can develop the skill necessary to combine them creatively. Weaving brings manual skill, creative ability, confidence, knowledge of colour and texture and last but not the least, lovely products to use or sell. The scope of designing increases as one acquires knowledge through experience.

REFERENCES

- Chauhan SK, Oberoi RC 1989. Production and disposal of woollen products on tribal farms of himachal pradesh. *Wool and Woollens of India*, 10(1): 55-56.
- Aryan S, Dutta RK 1993. *Crafts of Himachal Pradesh*. Ahemdabad: Mapin Publish Pvt. Ltd.
- Bansal A, Phadke SM 1997. Hand woven Kullu shawls. *Indian Tex J*, 7(2): 56-60.
- Himachal Pradesh: State and People 2002. *Himachal Pradesh State Handloom and Handicraft Weavers Apex Co-operative Society Ltd. Kullu*. Ministry of Commerce, Govt. of India.
- Dhamija J 2002. *Handicrafts of India.- Our Living Cultural Tradition*. New Delhi: National Book Trust.
- Chattopadhyay K 1985. *Handicrafts of India*. New Delhi: Inderprastha Press.
- Official Home Page of crafts of India 2006. From <<http://www.hamsashawls.com>> (Retrieved June 20, 2006)
- Official Home Page of shawls of Himachal Pradesh 2006. From <<http://www.beaskund.helloyou>> (Retrieved December 18, 2006)