

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLEDGE

Traditional Methods of Cloth Making by the Zou Tribe in Manipur

H. Esther Gangte

Department of Botany, Churachandpur College, Churachandpur, Manipur, India

Abstract:

Majority of the Zou Community living in the Indo-Burma border of Manipur still practice back strap loom weaving to produce their finest cloth. However, like any of their kindred tribes, they have combined modern life style and a decade year old tradition. Due to advances in manufacturing and invention of synthetic fabrics, this traditional knowledge is now threatened. Hence efforts should be made to preserve this ecofriendly traditional knowledge. This paper tries to elicit the traditional knowledge of making clothes/weaving by the Zou tribe. Information was collected using the participatory and conventional tools. 17 plant products were used in the processes.

Keywords: Zou, tribe, back strap loom, cotton, traditional

1. Introduction

People have worn clothes either as protection from the weather or for modesty. Yet through history, people have also chosen clothes to impress or attract others, or to reflect their jobs, social status, or religious belief. Clothes send out signals about the weaver's life style and the type of society they live in.

In northeastern state of India, Manipur enjoy a place for its heritage of artistic handloom products. There is an immensely rich tribal culture in this region. The beautiful hand woven products of this region reflect on the skills of the individual weaver artisans. The richness in material culture is also reflected in their colorful and attractive dress and costume. (Reshma Khaton *et al*, 2014)

The Zou's are one of the recognized scheduled tribes of Manipur in 1956 having their own culture, customs, and traditions. They are the indigenous communities of Mongoloid race inhabiting the border areas of India and Burma (Esther Gangte *et al*, 2013). In India, they are concentrated in Chandel and Churachandpur District of Manipur with a population of 24,294 (Census, 2011). Traditionally, the Zou wear a loin cloth worn somewhat like a dhoti and have one or more clothes to wrap around themselves over one shoulder or both. They also wrap a piece of cloth around the head with one end sticking out during important occasions. The women wear a loin cloth wrapped around their waists and reaches just above their knees and a string of *nuang tang* (conch shell) around the waist (Khawlnu 2009). In addition they wear a breast cloth which is wrapped tight round the torso, the outer corners being tucked in between the left breast and the armpit. Sometimes additional wrapper is thrown over the shoulders. These clothes are made by themselves within their own home. The knowledge of producing home spun cloth from cotton which has been passed down from generation to generation is now almost vanishing and confined only to elderly women. Therefore, the need is strongly felt to document this traditional knowledge and the plant used in cloth making. Traditional weaving methods of Adi and Kom tribe of North East India have been studied by some researcher but this is the first of its kind amongst the Zou tribe in Manipur, India.

2. Materials and Methods

Ethnobotanical knowledge on traditional methods of weaving was collected during July - October, 2014, through direct interview and personal observation. Thirty knowledgeable elderly men and women between the age group of 60 – 80 were personally contacted to get information regarding the type of plant used for making the weaving set and the processes of producing home spun cloth. For participatory observation, four different Zou Villages viz. Zoumunnuom, Kamdou Veng, Vazang Veng and Hiangzou situated in and around Churachandpur town were visited where majority of Zou women between 25-45 years of age are involved in back strap weaving. Ten weavers from each villages totaling to a sample of forty weavers were selected following the standard methodology with slight modifications (Rao & Hajra 1987). Prior consent was obtained from informants before collecting information. Invaluable and valuable information were collected from literature written in local dialects. Photographs were taken wherever necessary and identification and nomenclature of plant used was done using authentic sources.

3. Result and Discussions

Home spun cloth is made from cotton grown in the jhums called *pat lei* or cotton field. They mix the seeds with the help of hoe known as *patpoi* or mixing the seeds with soil. Sowing is done during *vaupa* i.e. April/May. *Vaupa* is an indicator for sowing cotton seeds. Cotton flowers bloom just after paddy is harvested in November/December. After harvesting, the cotton is spread out in the sun for 2 to 3 days before ginning. Well dried cotton is cleaned in a wooden Gin having two rollers closely fitted. The frames of the cotton gins are made from *Vong Sing* and the roller from *Se Sing* or *Thenngou Sing*. Sometime the base and the frame of the Gin are cut out of a solid piece of wood. After separating the seed, to clean the cotton and make it soft and fluffy it is teased with a string bow-patsai/patkap. The bow is made of *gova* and a string made of cane or *chiing*. With the help of a bow the

cotton is flicked with a piece of bamboo (Kaikhohau 2003). The cotton is rolled as an elongated wads on a stem of *phaipi kung* or *munphie*. Depending on the cloth to be weave, it may be rolled thick or thin. The cotton rolls is spin in a wheel called *mui*. The spinning wheel or *mui* is made from wood and cane and the spindle or *thaltang* being made from iron. The base and stand is made of *vong sing*. The handle to turn the wheel is attached to the axle. The axle is made of *tuum*. At the end of the dovetailed stem is placed a three pronged support made from *nahkia*, which holds the spindle in position. A split cane loop is fix as a tyre. The spokes of the wheel are made of *vong sing*. The loop made of cane encircles both the wheel and the spindle. To keep the spinning wheel firmly, a stone is generally placed on the stand. As the spinning wheel is turned the cotton wool is gradually spun into a thread. The thread is removed and wound on to a thread holder called *vaudit/patdit* made of bamboo. The thread is then boiled with rice water, *buhtui nang*. The thread is then taken out and hung up to dry in a cloth line made of bamboo called *chiing baan*. Heavy wooden bar is placed to stretch the thread and brush with the fruit of *pat kui sing* to remove the ragged starch. When the thread is dry they are place on a thread winder called *sut lam* made of bamboo and wood. The thread is wound into balls called *pat lum* or *vautuo* which is ready for weave. For back strap loom weaving, first a strong bamboo beam is tied between two posts, a loop of rope called *khaupi* is suspended at both ends. A thinner bamboo rod is hanged through these two loops to form a warp beam or *siem lehna*. The weaver or *siemgan nu* sits on the floor below at a distance, according to the desire length of the cloth. She then passes her belt made of animal hide, called *kawng duop*. This belt is attached by cane rope tied into the groves at each end of the round waist rod, or *kolka* made of *vong sing* or *maubul tah*. Another woman *siem bang* assists the weaver to set up the loom. While the assistant places the warp on the loom she inserted the lease rod or *longpi* made of *gawkha*. Another small bamboo stick called *chiengtang* is inserted between the warp threads. The third round stick is the heddle or *tah nah*. When the entire warp has been placed on the loom, an evenly notched stick called *tuhlet/tangha* is placed. The beating sword or *chiem* may pass between the warp thread for the shuttle or *khawhlong/khawthei* to pass through. The shuttle is shot by hand. The *chiem* is a flat piece made from *tuum* stem. Every now and then, the warp is wet with water using a bundle of pig's hair so that the weft enters properly making the cloth thick and tight known as *siemtui pia*. If part of the weft is uneven, it is loosened with porcupine quill or *sakuh liing*. To keep the line of weft straight and maintain the original width, flat bamboo sticks with two pointed end are pierce on to the woven cloth to control the width. This flat stick called *siemkam* is retained till the weaving is completed. The weaver sits on the floor in front of the loom with her feet pressing on a firm support to keep the necessary tension on the warp. The warp is tightened or adjusted with the help of a warp bamboo or wood beam. The weaver continues to ply the shuttle till the warp is woven.

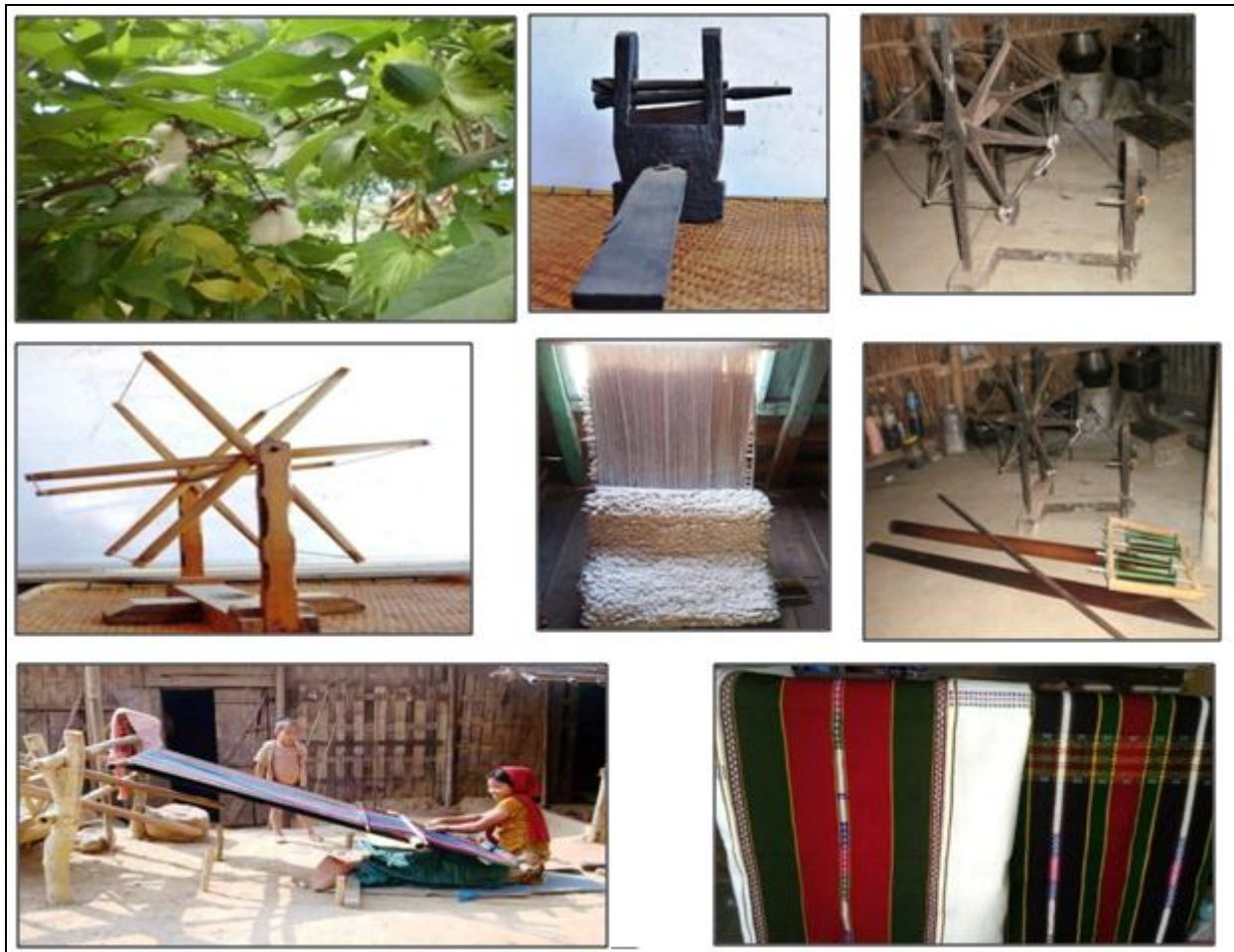


Figure 1-8 : Indigenous weaving methods and tools of cloth making by the Zou Tribe.

Sl/No.	Name of species	Local Name	Used in/as
1.	Gossypium arboreum Linn Malvaceae	Pat	Raw material
2.	Bauhinia variegata Linn Caesalpiniaceae	Vau	Indicator of season
3.	Gmelina arborea Roxb Verbabaceae	Vong sing	Cotton gin frame, base of spinning
4.	Castanopsis tribuloides A.Dc Fagaceae	Sesing	Gin roller (<i>pat heh</i>)
5.	Bambusa tulda Roxb Poaceae	Gova	Bamboo beam, bow (<i>patkapna</i>), thread winder (<i>sut lam</i>), notch stick (<i>tuh leh/tangha</i>), thread holder, thread winder (<i>Sut lam</i>), notch stick (<i>tuh leh/tangha</i>)
6.	Calamus erectus Arecaceae	Chiing	Rope (<i>khau</i>)
7.	Themeda arundinariae Poaceae	Phai pi kung	Cotton rolling stick (<i>pat ziel na</i>)
8.	Caryota urens Linn Arecaceae	Tuum	Axle (<i>Mui phe</i>), beating sword (<i>Chiem</i>)
9.	Mesua ferrea Linn Clusiaceae	Helse sing	Beating sword (<i>Chiem</i>), waist rod (<i>kolka</i>)
10.	Callicarpa arborea Roxb Verbanaceae	Nah kia	Three prong stalk of spinning wheel
11.	Bambusa arundinaceae Wild Poaceae	Mau tah	Shuttle (<i>khoh thei</i>), waist rod (<i>kawl ka</i>), warp beam (<i>siem leh na</i>), small bamboo stick (<i>chieng tang</i>),
12.	Bambusa arundinaceae Wild Poaceae	Go kha	Lease rod (<i>lawng pi</i>), shuttle (<i>khoh thei</i>)
13.	Pandanus foetidus Roxb Pandanaceae	Pat kui sing	Brush (<i>pat kui</i>)
14.	Erythropsis colorata Steculiaceae	Khaupi	Rope (<i>khau</i>)
15.	Oryza sativa Linn Poaceae	Buh	Starch (<i>buh tui nang</i>)
16.	Garcinia pedunculata Roxb Clusiaceae	Vom va pi	Notch stick (<i>tuh leh/tangha</i>)
17.	Cyathocalyx martabanicus Hook.f. Thoms Anonaceae	Sing Zathu	Notch stick (<i>tuh leh/tangha</i>)

Table 1: Plant species used in weaving

4. Conclusion

Since the dawn of civilization cotton has been the only raw material for clothing used by the Zou's. They have deep rooted tradition in weaving cloths. Cotton was cultivated, plucked, ginned, reeled, and woven to cloths by women. The traditional process is rather primitive and a few simple tools were used. Although introduction of mill cloths reduced the importance of hand woven craft to some extent, but they still desire to retain their original back strap weaved cloth as it is considered special, strong, and ethnic. Different designs and pattern can be obtained by necessary combination of different colored threads in the warp and weft and also with the help of the heddle. The Zou's make practically their own cloths. Every household in the villages has their own weaving sets. Every woman is supposed to weave for her family besides their other domestic chores (Mannuamching 1999). It is expected that every marriageable girl should know how to spin and weave. The responsibility of producing cloth, right from harvesting cotton to weaving, lies on woman alone whereas the man folk are involve only in making weaving tools. The Zous embraced Christianity in the early 1950's which benefited them in many ways. At the same time, it also left an impact on social, cultural, and traditional life of the Zou's. The modern youth does not give much interest in the culture and tradition of his tribe (Lhungdim Holkholum 1980). Therefore, the traditional knowledge is depleting at an alarming rate. The traditional knowledge of producing home spun cloths using natural dyes are now confine only to elderly people above 60 years of age and the youths are totally ignorant about it. Therefore effort should be made to preserve this traditional knowledge before it withers away due to modernization.

5. Suggestion

- Introduction of cotton ginning machine in the district will revive the cotton plantation in and around Churachandpur district, Manipur.
- Such introduction will lead to utilization of the barren waste land, the product of unplanned shifting cultivation.

- This will lead to specialization in cotton cultivation and solve unemployment problems to a great extent.

6. Acknowledgement

The author is extremely thankful to Pi Ngaizanem, Pi Luanching, Pi Ningbawi, Pu Ngulzatong, Pu Khamkai and Pu Kamzakhai for their in-depth information and Zoumunnuom, Kamdo Veng, Vajang Veng and Hiangzou weavers who wholeheartedly shared their knowledge and experiences. I am also indebted to University Grants Commission for the financial assistance in the form of minor research project to carry out this work vide order no (No.F.5-05/2013-2014/(MRP/NERO) dated 15 July 2014

7. References

1. Reshma K. et al, 2014. Study of traditional handloom weaving by the Kom tribe of Manipur, Indian J Trad. Knowledge, 13(3): 596-599.
2. Gangte H Esther, Thoudam N S & Zomi G T, 2013. Wild Edible Plants used by the Zou Tribe in Manipur, India, International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, 3 (5) : 1 - 8.
3. Khawlnu P, 2009. Zou Tawndan leh Akipatna, Printed at Thawnsaau Offset Printer, Churachandpur, Manipur, 11.
4. Rao RR & Hajra PK, 1987. Methods and Research in Ethnobotany, In : A manual of Ethnobotany, edited by SK Jain, Veer Printing Press, Lucknow. 33-41
5. Kaikhohau, 2003. Zou Customary Laws, Printed and Published by the Author at Co-Operative Printing Press, Zoveng, Churachandpur, Manipur, 67.
6. Mannuamching, Miss. 1999: Zou Culture (Past & Present), Printed and Published by the Author at Co-Operative Printing Press, Zoveng, Churachandpur, Manipur, 64.
7. Lhungdim Holkholun, 1980. An Introduction to the Zou Tribe (M.A. History Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Centre of Post-Graduate Studies, Imphal).