



The Bhutanese Art of Weaving

DRUK THAGZO

འབྲུག་ཐགས་བཅོ།



Agency for Promotion of Indigenous Crafts (APIC)
Ministry of Economic Affairs





CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4
INTRODUCTION	6
HISTORY	8
TEXTILE MAPPING	10
LOOMS	12
RAW MATERIALS	16
PROCESS	21
PATTERNS	24
MALE ATTIRE	36
CEREMONIAL SCARVES	38
GHO FABRICS	41
BELTS	51
FEMALE ATTIRE	53
CEREMONIAL SCARVES	54
KIRA FABRICS	56
BELTS	76
OTHERS	79
CONCLUSION	104
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	105

FOREWORD

Although the art of textile weaving (Thagzo) in Bhutan has been in vogue since the days of antiquity, it was further intensified with the introduction of elaborate and intricate designs by Khandro Sonam Paldon of Babesa village in lower Thimphu. She is the visionary consort of Phajo Drugom Zhigpo, the founder of Drukpa Kargyudpa sect in Bhutan in the 13th century. Khandro herself was a great weaver which is evident from the preserved master pieces which are still maintained in Tashi Chhoedzong and Tango Monastery until today.

Following such enduring path of legacy, all Bhutanese mothers had embarked on gray cotton weaving mainly to clad their family members and even to barter with other goods domestically or across the borders for the sustenance of their livelihood. The progressive move had been further intensified during the era of successive Zhabdrungs, Desis, Ponlops, Dzongpons and local chieftains with cotton cultivations and harvests at the grass root levels.

The emergence of the Wangchuck dynasty has been and is the cause of peace, stability and prosperity that are still being enjoyed by the people of Bhutan. Royal initiatives and interventions spearheaded by the queens, princesses and prominent artisans including Wangdue Chhoeling Aum Yeshe Choden, Lamey Gonpa Azhi Paldon, Bumtang Chumey Azhi, Ugyen Chholing Azhi, HRHs royal grandmothers Azhi Phuntsho Choden, Azhi Pema Dechen and Bumthang Zangling Ahzi Rinzin were the role model and driving forces in furthering textile development in Bhutan.

For instance all medieval palaces in Bhutan such as Wangdue Chhoeling,

Lamey Gonpa, Urgen Chhoeling, Domkhar Tashi Chhoeling, Khema Nagtsang in Lhuntse, Dramitse Nagtshang in Mongar, and Eundu Chhoeling in Trongsa had attached weaving centres that trained the local women. Some of the aristocratic and well to do ladies were also professional weavers.

The history of Bhutanese textile becomes more evident in the last century as the textile productions moved beyond the confines of clothing to artistic expression of individuals and communities with the patronage of the royal family and especially that of HRH Azhi Sonam Choden Wangchuck, His Majesty's Representative in the Ministry of Finance and Agriculture who has been instrumental in the art of Thagzo and had supported it by distributing yarns on subsidised rates or through products sale proceeds to recover the costs of yarn in 1980s to the entire women/weavers in Bhutan.

Today Bhutanese textiles have reached new heights of dynamism and respect; they are valued not only for their economic viability, but also as a symbol of Bhutan's artistic heritage that commands world attention and appreciation.

Under the patronage of Her Majesty the royal mother Azhi Sangay Choden Wangchuck, the Royal Textile Academy and the Textile Museum at Norzin Lam in Thimphu has been set up and is already doing very well in terms of demonstrations, collections, and dissemination of information on textiles.

The Agency for Promotion of Indigenous Crafts (APIC) was set up in 2011 coinciding with the celebrations of our His Majesty's Royal Wedding. APIC is mandated to intervene in all forms of crafts practised in the country including textiles to enhance

rural income and to generate employment opportunities in the country.

APIC also attempts to compile products catalogue so that its intervention could be properly recorded. This textile catalogue is our 4th publication and our first in house attempt at documenting our crafts. We would like to solicit the readers' comments and suggestions for the betterment of the document which we wish to revise after two years with the incorporation of new designs and innovations that emerge during the period.

Tashi Delek!
Lam Kezang Chhoephel

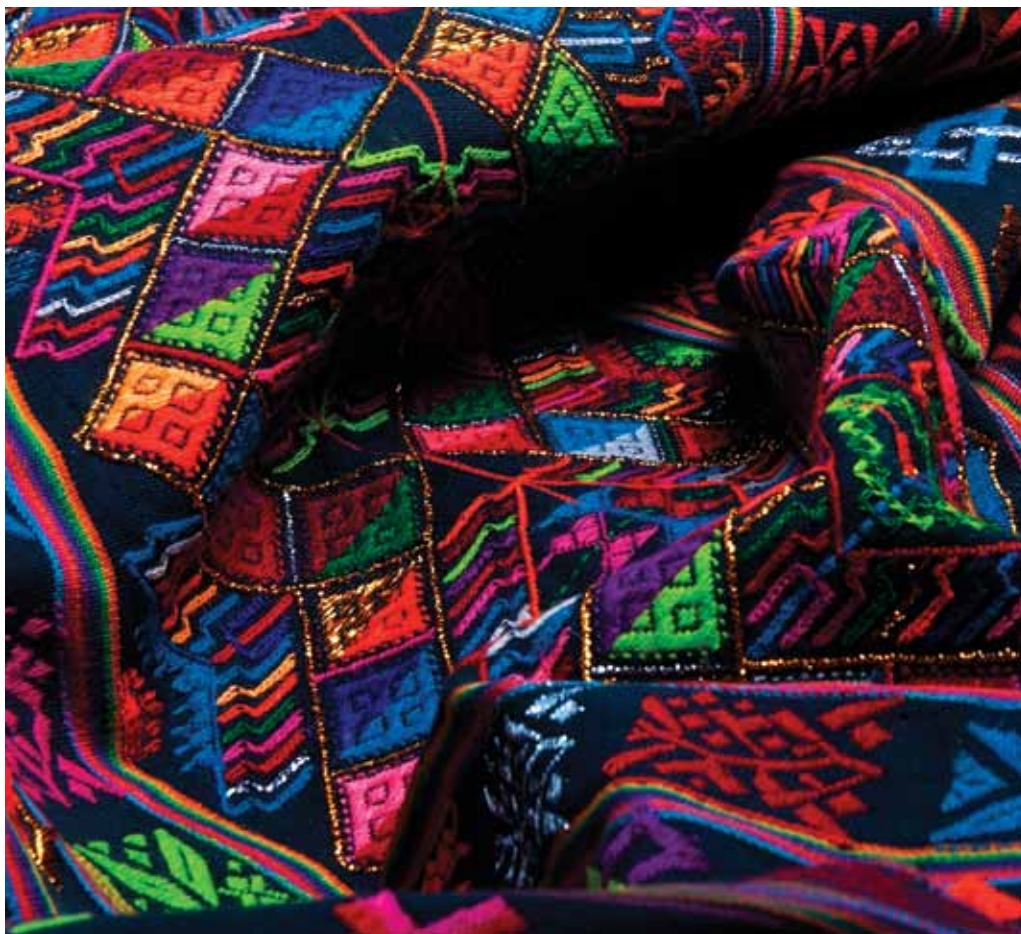
INTRODUCTION

Bhutan has been increasingly gaining recognition in the world for its beautiful weaves. We have always maintained a high regard for the art of weaving. It is also a component of Zorig Chusum or the thirteen arts and crafts of Bhutan. In this catalogue we are only concentrating on hand woven textiles.

Until recently the trend has been that only experts and collectors from outside Bhutan have been writing about our textiles; there are museums and a few private collectors who have endeavored to write about it. Much has been accomplished in our attempts

at preserving our weaves, especially the ones of the past. And this would not have been possible without the efforts of the Textile Museum, the Royal Textile Academy both under the Royal patronage and guidance of Her Majesty the Queen Mother Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck.

We have always regarded our weaves and weavers as precious. In the past when Bhutan was yet to become part of a global world we were basically self reliant. But now that Bhutan has made its venture into the arena of globalization, we find ourselves unable to be self reliant



as we used to. Back then, we were more or less self-sufficient; our weavers wove not just for their own families but also for the noble families as well. The elite had the luxury of securing the services of highly skilled weavers.

Besides the weavers being very resourceful, we also had our own raw materials that were either home grown or harvested from the wild. These included wild cotton, silk cotton, nettle, raw silk, yak hair, and sheep wool. They were skilled in natural and herbal dye and processing both animal and plant based natural fibers.

With the onset of modernization and the trickling in of products from the outside so called developed world, chemical and synthetic dyes, different kinds of yarn, metallic Indian yarns and many more have found its way into our weaves .

The weavers of Bhutan have always been consistently innovative in adapting to new materials and time and again proved to be geniuses at what they do as they go about creating the most beautiful and intricate hand woven textiles.

Our pride in our rich culture and heritage is amply manifest in our tendency to wear our weaves, irrespective of whether we are going for work or to attend festivals. If it fits our budget we always opt to wear a woven fabric which we consider more precious and prestigious than the machine made ones. This puts into perspective just how much our weaves mean to all Bhutanese.

Making the national dress a standard to be worn during all official setups has

indeed been a great gift from one of the greatest visionaries. This has been and still remains highly instrumental in keeping even the simplest of our weaves alive and as vibrant as ever. Besides giving us our unique identity, it has also been a great support to the local economic functioning as well. It is an established fact that in almost every home we find some connection to a weaver or weaving.

In modern Bhutan our appreciation and usage of our textiles has ensured not just the survival but the thriving of the age old and time honored art of weaving and the various skills that come along with this art form.

It must be noted that words fall short in encompassing the entire worth of the skills of our master weavers and their master pieces. For what it is worth, this catalogue is but a feeble attempt at preserving and recording whatever information that we could within this short span of time. Although attempts at recording knowledge and information pertaining to textiles have been made by passing them down through generations as an oral tradition, there is the very real risk of losing them out to modernization and development. Hence the need for conscious efforts to record them.

This particular catalogue focuses only on weaves and therefore does not cover other textiles like embroidery and appliqué, patch works and religious dance costumes. They will be covered in another catalogue.

HISTORY



We are internationally renowned for our unique development philosophy of Gross National Happiness and one of its four pillars is protection and promotion of tradition and culture. What we wear defines who we are and where we belong. Our national dress is an integral aspect of our culture and this is one of the driving forces contributing to creating conditions conducive to the preservation of our rich heritage of weaving and *Thagzo*.

Irrefutable evidences of textiles, looms and beautiful motifs being an essential part of our historic past can be found in numerous *Namthars* (biographies) and records of textiles paid as taxes. Furthermore, these textiles were also used as items of exchange during our barter trades with Tibet and India. The Gho was introduced as the national dress by the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in the seventeen century. Sources reveal

that prior to the Gho coming into vogue, men in south western Bhutan wore a Phaki made of cotton or nettle. It is evident from artifacts as well as religious history that women in the eastern regions wore a *Kushung and Leushinkha* (tunic). Unfortunately, these went out of fashion sometime between the seventeen and the nineteen century and was replaced by the full Kira. The existence of the *Thinkhab* (ornamental hooked pin) and dating it backwards will probably help ascertain if this is true.

Although credible information as to when the culture of weaving was started in Bhutan is not available, it is an established fact that our people wove for themselves for centuries. In Central Bhutan, cotton was cultivated in Trongsa and sheep wool was harvested in Bumthang. While the highlanders were known for their yak hair, people from other parts were skilled in making nettle into fibers for weaving. Some narratives relate accounts of how raw silk was used by the family members amongst themselves. Weaving skills, along with the knowledge of using natural produce, both cultivated and collected from the wild for dye has been passed down from mother to daughter for generations. Though the vibrancy has ebbed to a certain degree with only a select few establishments continuing the practice, back in the past, the knowledge and skills were shared in a community. The young were groomed in the art and taught by the elders. But even at that point of time, the gap between the haves and the have-nots held sway. It was only the rich, noble and affluent families who could afford the luxury of having a group of weavers weave for them.

Weaving has been associated with religion and therefore skilled weavers are held in high regard. Although most motifs are associated with religion and some with what a weaver has observed and been inspired by in day to day life. Weavers today consist of mostly women albeit it is not uncommon to come across a few men who are master weavers as well. There is a prevalent belief that if one wears a textile woven by a man, it functions as a *Sungma/Sungkay* or an amulet – basically an object to ward off negative energy and keep demonic forces at bay. Though in principle, this belief should serve as an encouragement for men to take up weaving as a vocation, the trend is on the decline. Terton Pema Lingpa, the renowned Terton or Treasure Discoverer is also known to have mastered many crafts which including weaving.

Interestingly enough, although knowledge regarding our traditional patterns have been passed down through generations just as an oral tradition without any written records whatsoever, nearly all the motifs from the days of antiquity are still woven and in vogue. Nevertheless, time has taken its toll; some of them are not in use anymore and can be found only in museums. It takes a great degree of effort and time just to even to locate some of them such as the *Lungta* or the horse and other animal figures and those of the likes of the *Torma*. These days these motifs are rarely found on textiles that people make regular use of but nevertheless they still do exist. The *Lungta* can be found on the jackets from Merak and Sakteng and recreations of old artifacts and motifs. A notable example of the

recreation of traditional artifacts and motifs is the *Kira* that won the National Design Competition organized by the Royal Textile Academy back in 2009.

History bears testimony to the fact that weaving and weavers were an integral aspect of our past. We find bags like *Bhundis* (refer pg no. 83 & 84) and *Tsamkhus* (refer pg no. 85), ceremonial cloths like *Chha sil Pangkhep* (refer pg no. 82), offering cloths like the *Ten Khep* and various other things amongst others, indicating that hand woven textiles were definitely a part of everyday life. There are also records of cloth being used to pay taxes. Angay Kuri, an eighty year old a weaver who passed away a few years ago, used to tell stories of how taxes were paid in kind. She used to recount anecdotes of how cotton textiles with white backgrounds bearing small, herbal dyed motifs were paid to the tax collators. The narratives have been further corroborated by historical records and whatever information historians and researchers have managed to obtain.

Textiles and the artists who created them were an essential part of our culture and heritage, contributing in no small measure to their preservation. To this day, textiles and weavers still remain just as important. It is safe to assume that there are no households in Bhutan that is not associated with the fine art of Bhutanese weaving in some way or the other.

TEXTILE MAPPING

The map below shown here depicts the association of a particular textile with a district or Dzongkhag. This map takes into account the fact that some regions, especially those in central and eastern Bhutan can be identified with many kinds of hand woven textiles and patterns. It also identifies what each

region specialized in historically. For example Trongsa was known for cotton and nettle and Bumthang for *Yathra*, Marthras and *Hothras*. However for the



west and south we tried to assign woven material in accordance to modern trends. These are some examples to help illustrate the point - Paro has an elaborate *Pesar* (new design) indicating usage, Wangdue has an *Adha Marthra*

and *Adha Rachu* as it originated there. In Pemagatshel we see a stack of *Jadrima Kiras* that are woven there. The *Pangtsi* and *Serthras* in the southern part of the country have been influenced by neighbouring Assam and are therefore identified with the South. Likewise, the *Rari* or sheep wool rug is identified with Tsirang.



LOOMS

Back strap loom / Pang Tha

This loom is one of the oldest of its kind. It is designed for convenience as it is portable and doesn't occupy too much space. It can easily be set up in a small space with light on a porch or in a corner in one's home. This loom is a blessing for a weaver who wants to work at home while looking after the children and getting household chores done at the same time. It is made of wooden frames combined with bamboo parts.

Though it can be used to weave a variety of textiles, the length of the cloth is limited on this loom. Because of the convenience of its usage, it is the most popularly used loom in Bhutan.



Horizontal frame loom / Thru Tha

Thru Tha or the horizontal frame loom was introduced in Bhutan in the twentieth century. It is said that a lady from the Royal Family sent a weaver who happened to be a male to Tibet. His venture ended up being a success and consequently this particular loom along with the knowledge pertaining to its usage was introduced in Bhutan for the first time. The frame loom is used to produce *Marthras*, *Yathras*, *Serthras*, *Hothras* and Woolens.

Card loom

It is difficult to exactly put a time frame on the card loom. It has been in existence for a very long time. It was used to weave a belt worn by males called *Pho Ching*. In the past the square cards were made of *Desho* (Bhutanese paper made of Daphne



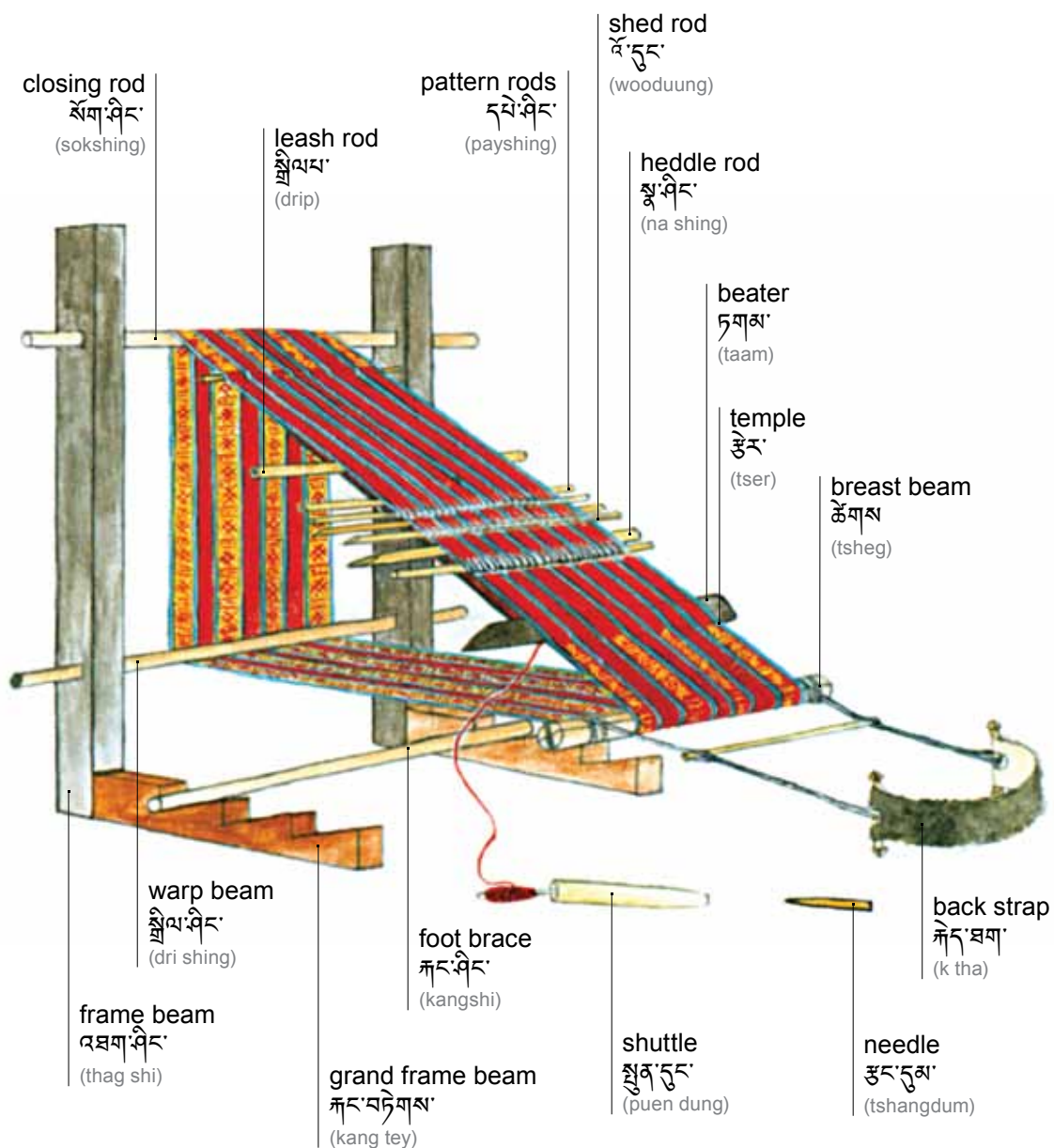
) and goat's hide. This loom is similar to the back strap loom because of the frame. Though the frames are similar, in this case, cards are made use of. This loom is used to weave belts for both men and women and *Lham Chings* or small belts that are used to hold up the *Tsho Lhams* or traditional boots. It is also used to weave stiff bag handles as well. This loom also is back strap.

Other looms

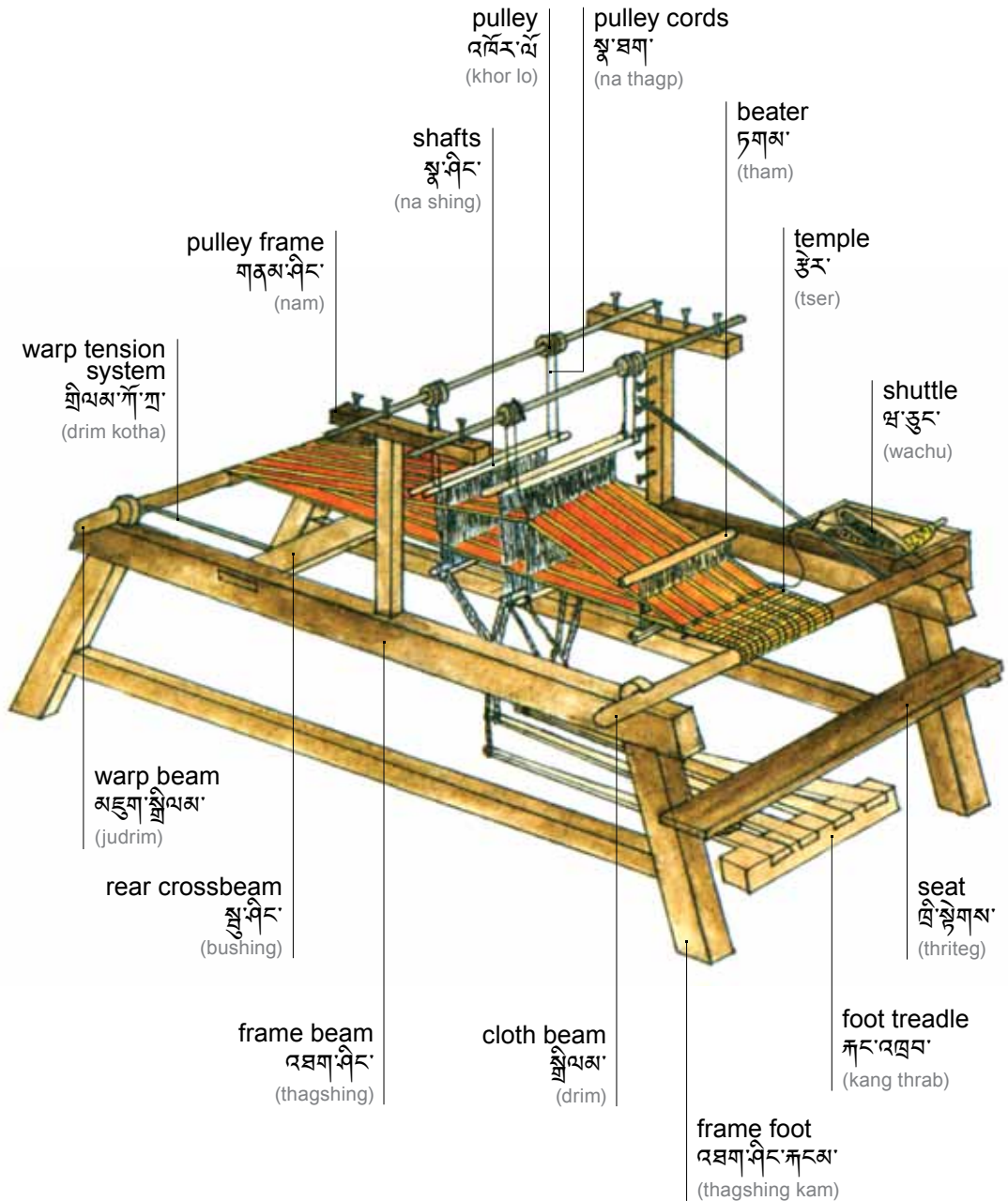
There are other looms like the make shift one used in the picture shown here. These kind of looms are used to weave woolens like yak hair blankets in the north and in sheep wool rugs in the south. These days, we also find other looms that are structurally experimented with, like the slightly modified one in the picture below.



Back strap loom



Horizontal frame loom



Courtesy Garab Dorji My picture Dictionary

RAW MATERIALS

Bhutan is absolutely land locked in every sense. Because of its geographical oddity, there was hardly any interaction between people from different regions as their mobility was constantly restricted by the difficult mountainous terrain. People in different regions had their own distinct languages and variations in their lifestyles and the kind of materials they produced according to the climate and region they lived in.

In the highlands, one comes across waterproof tents that the yak herders made out of yak hair. For other materials they used the softer felt out of the underbelly wool. Moving on towards warmer climates and more fixed settlements, one begins to realize that sheep wool was the primary raw material for textiles of the likes of *Yathras*, *Marthras* and some *Hothras*. Towards central Bhutan we come across nettle fiber made into *Bundis* (type of a bag). Nettle fibers were made use of because of their strength and resistance to wear and tear. Those in eastern Bhutan grew cotton and other materials for items like the *Chhasil Pangkhep* (multi-purpose ceremonial cloth) and *Thagras*. In the east and the

south, one finds more evidences of wild silk, raw silk and silk cotton having been gathered from the trees.

Those days, people made use of natural materials and plants, which they subjected to natural processes in order to dye them into yarns of different colors. They used ingredient like Madder (*Tsoe*), Turmeric (*Yonka*), *Symplocos Paniculata* (*Zim*), Indigo (*Sanja*), Lac (*Jatsho*), Alum (*Do-chur*) as ingredients for dyes. They also made use of wild fruits as binders and locally grown plants and fruits as color enhancers.

The animal based wool or plant based fiber (depending upon which one is used) is then treated, processed and spun into yarn for weaving.

In the past weavers who wove at home either collected the raw materials directly from the forests or chose to grow them depending upon their convenience .

Modern Bhutan is seeing a change in the weaver's life. Mechanically processed raw materials are conveniently available at their disposal. As can be obviously inferred, given the natural human propensity for convenience and seeking the easy way out, they opt for the ready made yarn which is already dyed,



mostly with chemical and synthetic dyes imported from India. We have Silk, Terri Cotton, Pure wool, Synthetic wool, Acrylic and Metallic yarns currently available in the market.

Even the whole process of fruits and natural binders being used for treating the yarn is being rendered obsolete due to the availability of synthetic vinegar.

Natural dyes and herbs are added as color and durability enhancers onto the pre-dyed yarn in order to make the colors last longer.

Few highly skilled weavers have taken

to opt for a fusion of sorts. They took to learning and practicing new methods whilst still retaining and practicing their traditional ones. Along with herbal and vegetable dyes, they also make use of natural binders to dye various kinds of yarn to produce high quality natural dyed textiles.

Modernity came with its benefits; people no longer face problems related to accessibility or availability. Weavers of today have the luxury of choosing from the many products, colors, dyes and yarns readily available in the market.



Silk yarn / Seshu



Wool / Them



Terri cotton



Acrylic wool / Jachen



Vinegar used to treat yarn

Family Rosaceae
 Scientific name :
 Choemeles lagenaria / *Khomang* :
 dried wild fruit for treating yarn



Indigo / *Sanja* (plant and dried)



Walnut / *Tago* :
 peel/bark of walnut fruit is used as dye



Lac / Jatsho



Madder / Tsoe



Ash / Gothey :
used *during* herbal dye



Alum / Do Chur



Dried fruit peel



Raw Silk / *Burai* : herbal colour



Silk / *Seshu* : natural dye yarn



Wool natural dye

PROCESS

In the past the process was more complicated. It started with the collecting of dyes and fiber (both animal and plant based), spinning (Kheyney, Zheyney) and finally the dyeing of the (*Tsho*) the yarn. Of late, weavers have opted for easier methods and taken to making use of pre-colored yarn which is usually pre-spun as well. The next step is arrangement – laying out the thread in its preliminary format. In Dzongkha the word for it is *Gongni* (rolling). This is followed by the laying out of the warp (*Jemni*).

The back strap loom or the card loom does not require more than one person to conveniently arrange and lay out the warp. For the horizontal frame loom, two people are required. It is then set on the loom (*Thagshing*) (depending upon what type of loom the weaver is using). The weaver then arranges the positioning of the weft, the process of which is referred to as *Mam Sham Ni*. The process of weaving then commences and the weft starts coming into place. For designing patterns the weaver uses a needle like, sharp, pointy object called the *Tsang Dum* to embroider and weave in the patterns.

For very complex and detailed designs which do require a whole lot of *Tsang Dum* usage, the process of weaving in the patterns is referred to as *Metho Thuni*. For the plain ones, the process is much simpler with the weaver being required to just continue putting the weft in place and use the *Tam* or beater to arrange the thread. If it is a frame loom the beating of the *Tam* and the foot paddle needs to be coordinated while putting in the weft. On the horizontal loom, the weave has to be arranged once the desired length of the weave has been achieved. People refer to it as *Thag Di Ni*.

Depending upon the type and design of the material the weaver might take days, months or even years to complete the weaving process.

As the second last stage of the weaving process, finishing touches are added onto both ends so as to prevent them from splitting apart. The final step is *Tha Toh Ni* or cutting the weave off from the loom. For *Kiras*, there is yet another step – *Rep Kheyni* or arranging and trimming the two ends. If the *Kira* is patterned the reverse sides of the weave are trimmed.

1. Collecting raw material

2. Spinning
(Kheyney)



3. Dyeing (Tshog)



4. Rolling into balls (Gongni)



5. Arranging Weft (Zemni)



6. Fixing the starting of weft
(Mam Shamni)

7. Weaving (*Thagni*)



8. Incorporating Pattern (*Metho Thuni*)



9. Ending the edges of weave (*Thag juduni*)

**11. Finishing the ends by hand spinning
(*Rep Kheyney*)**



**10. Cutting the weave off the loom
(*Thag tog Ni*)**

**12. Trimming the ends of the motifs on
the reverse side**

PATTERNS (motifs found on textiles)



The Bhutanese weaver of today has good reasons to be proud as they are fortunate enough to be part of a culture that has successfully retained most of the motifs and patterns of the past in all its uncensored glory. It comes as no surprise that few people are unaware of what a *Marthra* or a *Pangtsi* is. It is this very deep-rooted reverence and appreciation of our intricate culture of weaving that is the driving force behind not just the survival but the thriving of these unique patterns.

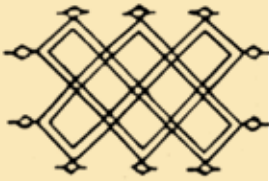
We have patterns that are simple as well as elaborate ones, some are combinations; the weavers these days combine ancient motifs and patterns to create awe-inspiringly beautiful textiles. Back then, weavers got inspiration for their designs from their natural surroundings and most importantly from religion.

In this section we have attempted to record and describe our unique patterns. One will notice that these days certain patterns are used more frequently than the others that were in vogue during ancient times. The *Lungta*, the *Torma* patterns and the amulet box featured in some books written in the past are no longer so much of a fashion statement as they used to be in the past.

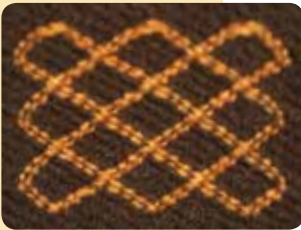
Of the whole lot, it is the *Kishuthara* that has been given a lot of attention by writers and researchers. We have a reason to take pride in, the *Timar*, a weave method distinctly unique to Bhutan. It makes the weave appear to be 3 dimensional and it is raised above the rest or the *Sapma* - the ordinary, same level weave.

There is a trend of fabric fashion; there was a time when the *Kishutharas* was very fashionable. This was followed by a style which was started in Bumthang whereby motifs on *Marthras* were the most desired. Over time, sometime during the seventies, metallic yarn became popular. After this, the refinement of *Kishutharas* came about. Meanwhile, two toned Kiras also became the in thing. The latest development is the one in which old, multicolored patterns, especially *Kishutharas* with the *Jabgang* - an elaborate different wave on the back, has come back into fashion. Of late, following the Royal Wedding, old eastern patterns are the most sought after in the market.

ETERNAL KNOT / Dramey

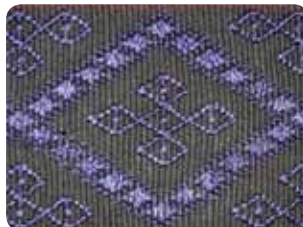


They are also known as Endless knots. This symbol is associated with Buddhism and the belief that the universe and one's actions are interlinked. It is also used as a symbol to refer to the heart of the Buddha whose compassion is entwined with the universe and infinite. The weavers express this through their patterns which can be found on fabrics that are over 80 years old to materials that are woven today. This particular design is very much in fashion and remains an all-time favourite. The interesting aspect of this design is its message that one's karmic actions and the universe are interlinked.



DOUBLE THUNDERBOLT / Dorji Jadram

The *Dorji Jadram* is the double thunderbolt or the *Vajara*. It is also a symbol of stability, of one's being and the four elements. As suggested by the name, it is a powerful symbol. Weavers have found different ways to convey their message through the Gho material in the old days for religious purposes. This symbol and pattern, which is also a representation of the nature of wisdom, is woven and expressed by modern-day weavers in many different forms.





SWASTIKA / YURUNG

The Swastika is associated with both Hinduism and Bhuddism; it is a symbol of absolute stability. It is also a cross that radiates and moves outward. This is a design appreciated by both the weavers of the past and present alike. We find them on the borders of Kiras and bags used in the past. Its knowledge has been passed down through generations as a precious inheritance. It is indeed unfortunate that this is the very symbol used by Adolf Hitler and is therefore associated with the heinous atrocities that it stood for. However, the simple weavers in Bhutan remain blissfully oblivious to these facts.



TREE OF LIFE / SHINGLO

This is a pattern resembling a tree. This particular design is known to be very difficult to execute. It symbolizes long life, like the legend of the tree of life. It is only found on the most expensive textiles woven today.





BIRDS EYES / JAGI MIKTO or JAMIG

This pattern is also referred to as *Phutu Mik* or Pigeons eyes. This motif resembles the image of numerous pigeon eyes put together and is a design that remains in fashion to this day. We find this pattern on old nettle. The many combinations of how it is being used are shown in the sample pictures.



EDGES LIKE A FLYS WINGS / JAM GI SHOGDRO

Ripples with edges like a fly's wings. This pattern is found on old *Kishutharas* and *Ngoshom*. Lately the ripple pattern is not seen as much as it used to in the past and is rarely seen on Kiras today. However, the edges are still found on many popular fabrics.





EDGES LIKE A MONKEYS NAILS / CHA SE

There are many variations of the outer border which is supposed to resemble a monkeys nails. The internal patterns are different. Antique textiles as well as the new ones have these featured on them.



STAR / KARMA

The star is found on many fabrics and especially on the belts used in the past. These days we also find them on woolen fabric *Yathras* and on *Kiras*. This pattern, which at times resembles a butterfly, is a very common one. It is also known as the butterfly pattern to some weavers. There are many variations of this motif.





WIND HORSE / LUNGTA

The *Lungta* or the wind horse is mostly found on prayer flags. Back then this pattern was usually found on tunics and *Chha sil pangkheps* (multipurpose ceremonial cloth). In the weaves of today it has almost disappeared and is rarely found on *Gho* and *Kiras*. We find examples of these on the jackets used by the women of Merak and Sakteng like the motif shown in this picture.



COILED ROPE / THAKPA

The coiled rope pattern is still very much in fashion and has not changed. It is used in various kinds of textiles ranging from old nettle and cotton *Bundis* (traditional bag) to the woolen *Yathras* and the ever-famous *Kishutharas* woven today.





HORSE EYE / TA MIG

Ta Mig or the Horses eyes were found on very old nettle herbal dyed fabric and on old cotton. These days it can also be found on silk, *Kishutharas* and other simple *Kiras*.



LIKE A ROOSTERS COMB/ JAPOE DZEW

The external side patterns remain the same, but there are many different variations in the internal pattern. The outer pattern is bold and resembles the rooster's comb which is why the weavers call this pattern - edges like a roosters comb.





THUNDERBOLT INTERNAL / DORJI INTERNAL

The larger diamond patterns put together with *Dorjis* are mostly seen on old nettle bags and sometimes on belts with slight variations. It is executed with fewer motifs put together. This particular pattern was probably used more in the past than it is today and therefore is not seen as much on new textiles.



COIN / THALA or TIG CHANG

This pattern is the coin and it is also called the *Khorlo* or the wheel by some weavers. The pattern is associated with long life and is found on many fabrics, ancient and modern alike.





VASE / BUMPA OR TSHEBUM

The design is that of triangles put together to resemble a vase. It is also called the vase of long life. It is associated with Buddhism and is one of the eight lucky signs. There are many variations to this pattern and can be found on several kinds of textiles.



CHINESE CHARACTER FOR LONG LIFE / TRANKA

The *Tranka* or the Chinese character for long life is featured on many textiles especially the old as well as new *Aikapurs*, *Lungsems* and *Mentsi Marthras*.





WEB WITH EDGES LIKE A FLYS WINGS

These patterns are found on *Kishutharas*. It consists of many threads which intersect and form a connecting web. The outer patterns are all edges like a fly's wing. In some ways it is also another kind of eternal knot.



PATCH WORK TRIANGLES / *TENKHEP METHO* or *THRA*

This is inspired by the patchwork ritual offering cloth. It is also associated to long life. People believe that if it is woven on the textile, the lives of the weaver and the person who wears it will be longer. There are many variations in multicolor.





AMULET BOX / GAU

The *Gau* or the pattern of the amulet box is very special and rare. These days they can be seen only in museums and old Lhakhangs (temples). It is found on ancient tunics known as *Kushung* which can be seen displayed at the Royal Textile Academy Museum. (Picture courtesy RTA)



RITUAL OFFERING / TORMA

The *Torma* or ritual offering is another very rare pattern found only on few textiles. It can be seen on one of the ancient tunics displayed at the RTA Museum.

(Picture courtesy RTA)



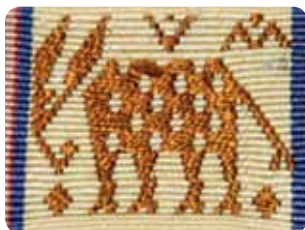
Areacnut tree and cooking pot lid

The last two motifs are very old ones seen in the booklet produced by the Textile Museum in October 2003. The first one is the areca nut trees and the second one the cooking pot lid. These patterns are also very rare and not found on common textiles of today. It is very exceptional to see the cooking pot lid on Kiras.



OTHER OLD PATTERNS

This section shows various ancient patterns which are still replicated to this day. Under this category, there are patterns of Stupas, *Chortens*, various birds and animals, Scissors and *Timar Vajra* or *Dorji* which are mostly found on old belts. This is a classic example of the many old and ancient patterns that have been passed down from generation to generation. There are many more in the list but all of them could not be shown because of time limitations.



PESAR PATTERNS

The *Pesar* or the modern patterns are all derived from the old ones with variations in color and slight differences in execution. There are examples of these *Pesars* on this page. Just like the weavers of the past, modern day weavers are very creative with color and tend to constantly explore new ideas by combining patterns. These are a few examples of the many new patterns that are created by combining old motifs.



MALE ATTIRE

Historical evidence in the form of sketches made by the British points out that in those days *Phaki* was what the men wore, prior to the advent of the *Gho*. Even to this day, in some other regions, people wear outfits similar to the traditional costumes of Merak and Sakteng. The *Gho* is the male robe. It overlaps in the front and is folded at the edges at the back and finally secured at the waist with a belt called a *Kera*.



The *Gho* when adjusted is supposed to be worn in accordance to one's social status. Lay men are to wear it with the rim of the *Gho* above their knees and the other civil servants and commoners till their knees. Only the high ranking officials and those above them could lay claim to the prerogative of wearing it below their knees. However, as of today, this remains true only in theory with just a handful of the elderly lot abiding by the norm.

The *Gho* was designed as a multipurpose garment. It has a huge pocket in the front section about which a young journalist pointed out in an article that the *Gho* could very well break an international record for the national attire with the largest pocket in the world. This pouch like pocket was used to carry a dagger (for obvious reasons, given the Bhutanese man's inclination to settle any argument with the dagger, as pointed out by the British in their Memoirs), and a plethora of other items essentially consisting of a *Tora* (a piece of white cloth which served as a plate during meals), *Phob* and *Chakar Timi* (metal container for areca nuts and beetle leaves). Regarding the dagger and the cup, there is this old saying which goes '*Chang dang phob klo lu zha; Chang dang tham ga pchey med*,' the commoners had but one *Gho* which they used for the whole year.

If one worked for the government or a high official he was gifted a *Lo Gho*, meaning a *Gho* for a year. However, times have changed and today men,

irrespective of their social status possess any number of *Ghos*, depending upon their individual preferences and financial status.

By Law, men are supposed to be in the national attire during visits to offices and *Dzongs*. Protocol also demands that the *Gho* be accompanied by a ceremonial scarf (the color of which is determined by his position in the social hierarchy) especially in areas where the National Flag is hoisted.

Traditionally, men went about bare feet wearing nothing else except for their *Ghos*. It was only high ranking officials who had the luxury of foot wear. Today, men use traditional boots that are embroidered but this happens only during special, mostly official occasions. Commonly, they use formal shoes or sneakers with knee length socks. However, one is not allowed to wear sneakers during visits to the *Dzongs*. Formal leather shoes are mandatory without which one has no option but to either borrow shoes from someone nearby or go barefoot.

The hand-woven fabric requirement for putting together a normal sized *Gho* consists of three loom-lengths of fabric for a Back Strap Loom. The material needs to be approximately 58 centimetres wide and 280 centimetres long. On the Horizontal Loom, the width is comparatively limited, about 27 centimetres in width and 109 centimetres (for one roll). For a *Gho*, two such rolls are required).

The pages that follow cover the woven textiles used for the men's traditional wear.



CEREMONIAL SCARVES / KABNEY

The *Kabney* was introduced in Bhutan by Zhabdrung Nawang Namgyel in the seventeenth century. Ceremonial scarves are known as *Zen* in *Choekey* (Tibetan script) and they existed since the time of Lord Buddha. It is said that monks wore red, black, light orange and orange colors whilst the saffron yellow was worn by the Supreme Abbot. The colors represented the stage of attainment achieved.

The *Kabney* is a major component of our culture. While there are many other colors indicative of the individual ranks, saffron yellow is worn by the *Je Khenpo* - the Supreme Abbot and the Kings.

The ceremonial scarves signify the wearers rank and status in the civil service and Bhutanese society.

A commoner wears a white *Kabney* with fringes. The village headmen or the elected representative of a village

wears a *Kabney* with maroon stripes on the sides and white in the centre with fringes. An official that has received a certain degree of status and recognition has a white scarf with no fringes.

A *Dzongda* (Administrator of a district) has a red *Kabney* with a white line running along the centre while the *Dzongrab* (Deputy Administrator of a district) has a white *Kabney* with three red stripes.

A red scarf is indicative of an individual who has served the country to the best of his/her abilities and immensely contributed to the society. This is an honor bestowed by the King to an individual with remarkable achievements to his/her credit.

The orange scarf represents a Minister elected by a democratic process. A blue scarf represents a Member of Parliament; the green scarf is for the Judiciary and is used by Judges.





Saffron yellow used by the kings and religious Abbot the Jekhempo



Orange Scarf used by ministers



Red Scarf used by Dasha/Nyikem



Blue Scarf used by member of parliment



Green Scarf for Judiciary



White with no fringes for Dasho



Scarf of Dzongda district governor



Scarf of Dungpa and Dzongrabs deputy district governor



Scarf of Gup Elected viillage headman



White Scarf with fringes for commoners

GHO FABRICS

Gho fabrics are woven both on the back strap loom and the horizontal loom. Today there are a variety of hand woven *Gho* materials ranging from silk, raw silk, cotton blends, sheep wool and pure wool to the rarely available yak wool. Prices for a simple hand woven *Gho* material ranges from around Nu. 3000/- to the more expensive ones which might cost about Nu. 1, 80,000/-.

JADRIMA

Literally translated, it means rainbow. '*Ja*' means 'rainbow' and '*Drima*' implies 'adorned with.' Hence, '*Jadrima*' or 'adorned with the rainbow.' One cannot help but get the feeling that the weaver must have been inspired by the rainbow while in the process of picking the stripes onto the fabric.



MARTHRAS

Marthras were originally woven in Bumthang on the horizontal frame loom. There are quite a few references to the '*Bumthang Marthra*' in popular traditional songs. Traditionally, *Marthra* weaves were made of wool. Of late, they are also woven out of *Bura* or raw silk and cotton blends. Interestingly enough, there are various kinds of *Marthras* available and are classified in accordance to not just the kind of yarn used but also the size of the checks. Depending on the size of the checks they are termed *Thra Bom* (big checks) or *Thra Charuru* (small checks). Within these divisions we get the following three variations.

Thra Chigpa - The checks are in equal size and the colors usage in this weave is either red, green and blue with traces

of yellow or white for lines or traces of blue for lines which are modulated and the base colors - red, green and blue are used in equal proportions

Kempa - The checks are divided and there are two lines of blue or green and only a single line of red checks that run through. A little less red is used but it is evident that the two parallel lines of blue or green run along the material with a division of red.

Dorshongpa - is another kind of *Marthra* check where there is usage of red lines between two lines of either blue or green which is then repeated. It is similar to *Thra Chigpa* but there is usually a red line running horizontally between the green and the red and once again the red between the blue, the process of which is repeated.



PANGTSI / PANGTSHEG

It is usually has a white, off-white or cream background with lines forming checks in darker shades of either black, maroon or grey. 'Pang' means 'a portion of weave' and 'Tsheg' means 'stacked up or repeated.' Therefore 'Pangtsi/Pangtsheg' loosely translates into 'a particular portion of weave that is repeated at regular intervals.' Historians maintain that the *Pangtsi/Pangtsheg* was inspired by assumed patterns.

Nowadays, variations of the same are available in a wide assortment of shades and materials.



ADHA MARTHRA

The origin of this particular style of stripes can be traced back to a place called Adha in *Wangduephodrang*. Weavers from Adha were particularly renowned for their proficiency in weaving. *Adha Marthras* are horizontal stripes on material. These stripes, consisting of dark shades of yellow, red, orange, blue and green are amongst the popular textile designs.



SERTHRA

'*Serthra*' literally means 'golden pattern,' or 'yellow checks.' There are variations of yellow shades combined with checks of lighter yellow, sometimes with a thin black line for the outline. There are only two types of *Serthra* – the common *Serthra* and the *Dalipa Serthra*. The common *Serthra* has yellow squares on an orange background while the *Dalipa Serthra* is double lined and has small checks.



KAM SUM / BE SAMPA

'*Be*' means 'legs' and '*Sam*' means 'three,' and therefore '*Kam Sum / Be Sampa*' or literally 'three legs.' The patterns shown here and the ones that follow are associated with eastern Bhutan and commonly known as '*Hor*' (with supplementary weft patterns). These and the *Gho*



materials that follow are said to have '*be*' or '*legs*' which are used to count the patterns and are all essentially Buddhism related odd numbers.

'*Be Sampa*' is the simplest pattern in many different shades that are available today. These kind of *Gho* fabrics are usually woven on a back strap loom.

KAM NGAM / BE NGAPA

(Five legs) the *Gho* material at the top is a traditional *Lungsem* and the other two fabrics shown below are *Pesar* or new color combinations.



KAM DHUEM / BE ZUMPA

(Seven legs) the *Gho* fabrics shown here are all identified with count of seven legs pattern. From top to bottom we see a *Lungsem* followed by an *Aikapur*, *Mentsi Marthra*, a *Dromchu Chem* and finally *Bura Lungsem*.



KAM GHUM / BE GUPA

(Nine legs) these are commonly referred to as cotton *Khaling Gho* fabrics. The three cotton fabrics shown here are herbal dyed and made in *Khaling*. They are all *Pesar*, which means that the color combinations are relatively new.



KAM CHUGCHIM / BE SONGTHURPA

(Eleven legs) the one shown here is a *Lungsem* with eleven legs (meaning the count of the patterns amounts to eleven but only the people who possess the knowledge to count know how to differentiate between the different types). Patterns go up to thirteen leg pattern. The legs are used to keep count of the breadth of the pattern and to incorporate the design with the weave.



AIKAPUR

Aikapur is a weave with patterns which are also *Hor* (with supplementary weft patterns) but with either white and orange, white and yellow or white and red.



LUNGSEM

These are generally of the *Hor* (supplementary weft patterns) pattern but consisting of two colors which are usually green with orange or red.



DROMCHUCHEM

This fabric is usually woven with '*Hor*' (supplementary weft patterns) and has four colors – red, orange, green and white.



MENTSİ MARTHRA

'Mentsi' means 'yellow' and *'Marthra,'* means 'red pattern,' it has a red background with yellow *Hor* (supplementary wefts) patterns.



AIKAPUR WITH JADRIMA

This *Gho* is silk and it is *'Aikapur'* white and yellow *Hor* (supplementary wefts) pattern divided by a *'Jadrîma'* or the 'rainbow pattern.'



SHINGLO

These two Gho fabrics shown in this picture both have '*Shinglo*.' The one on top is a *Pesar* and the one on the bottom is a *Mentsi Marthra* with *Shinglo* patterns. The *Gho* fabrics are woven out of pure silk.



LUNGSEM SHINGLO

This *Gho* is *Hor* (supplementary weft patterns) with orange and green as *Shinglo* and the *Tranka* and coin pattern woven into it. It is woven from silk.



PESAR / NEW DESIGN

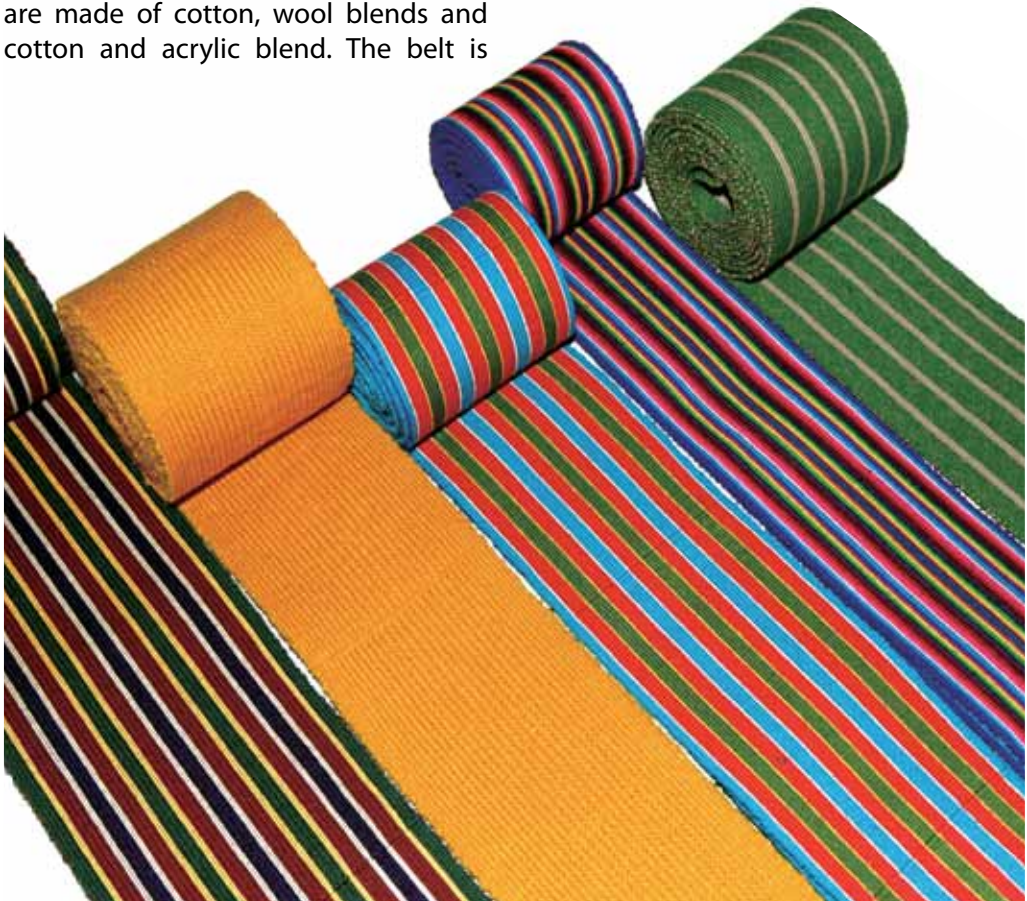
The *Gho* fabric is a combination of old motifs with new colors and pattern arrangement.

BELTS



used to fasten the *Gho* in place around the waist. Compared to a woman's, the men's belt is much simpler as it does not have many motifs and patterns. The dimensions of the men's *Kera* are: the width is approximately 7 centimetres and the length 198 centimetres without the fringes. The fringes are about 29 centimetres on either side.

Men's belts called '*Kera*' are woven with fringes on both sides. They are usually designed with stripes of both dark and bright shades. Men's belts are relatively very simple and are generally woven on a card loom even to this day. They are made of cotton, wool blends and cotton and acrylic blend. The belt is



How to wear the Gho

step 1



step 2



step 3



step 4



step 5



finish



Illustration : Pema Tshering

FEMALE ATTIRE

The *Kira* is the women's National Dress. It is a rectangular piece of garment constructed out of three pieces of cloth produced from a back strap loom. This is for a full *Kira*. The full *Kira* is fastened at the ends with broaches. Back in the past *Thingkhabs* (ornamental hooked pin) were made use of to hold the *Kira* in place. The change in fashion took its toll; they were later replaced by *Komas*. The *Kira* is worn with a big fold or pleat on the front and overlaps at the back. It is fastened by a belt or *Kera* at the waist. The front portion has a pocket as a result of the fold and the belt being fastened, which serves as a reservoir for utility items such as money, mobile phones or keys. But these days, full *Kiras* are opted for only during the winter months as they offer better protection from the cold than the half *Kiras* do. Today most women wear half *Kiras* and they have hooks and Velcro at the waist. A *Koma* has been fashioned into a broach worn on a *Tego* which is a short jacket with broad sleeves worn by women with a *Kira*. Women wear the *Kira* over a *Wonju*, a thinner slim sleeved inner wear folded with the jacket and tucked out at the neck or collar area.

Today, women wear *Kiras* of all kinds of materials, hand woven as well as imported fabric. Nevertheless, it is every girls dream to own the intricate ones woven by our master weavers.

It is a little difficult to put a date to the *Kira* and ascertain what was worn before it came into being. However, many writers maintain that the predecessor to the *Kira* was a tunic called the *Kishung*. According to Babra S Adams, Writer and Textile Collector,

the *Kira* was in vogue since 1905. She was making references to Druk Gyalpo Ugyen Wangchuck's daughter. For a normal sized half-*kira*, on the *Pangtha* or the Back Strap Loom, one requires two loom lengths of fabric which measures approximately 61 centimeters of width and 235 centimeters length. For the full *Kira*, (on the *Pangtha*) three loom lengths are required; the width of the fabric is slightly smaller but the length remains the same. On the *Thru Tha* or the Horizontal Frame Loom, the required width is 29 centimeters and length 800 centimeters on average. This is measured in rolls and for a *Kira* you need two rolls of material.



CEREMONIAL SCARVES / RACHU

The ceremonial scarf worn by women is called a *Rachu*. It is worn during official and formal sessions such as visits to the *Dzongs*, offices and similar establishments. Although the children need not wear it, it is mandatory for the adults to use it during festivals. The *Rachu* is draped over the right shoulder. They are generally red or maroon in color; other colors are used very rarely. There are various kinds of *Rachus* with simple as well as elaborate motifs and stripes. The elaborate weaves usually have more patterns towards the two ends, above the *Rep* or the fringes.





KIRA FABRICS

The weavers of the past and present continue to keep our culture alive. They are highly skilled in combining colors and motifs to create fabrics ranging from the simplest to the most exquisite and elaborate products from the loom. This section is a little of what is created as *Kira* fabrics, some from the past and some of what is woven today.

The fundamental difference between the *Kira* and *Gho* fabric is that most fabrics designed as *Kiras* are woven to be worn horizontally and have a *Kha Cha* (special design for the bottom and top end) whereas men's fabrics are worn vertically.

MARTHRA

Marthra Kiras are checked and like the one in the picture in the men's section are of three types - *Kempa*, *Tha Chigpa* and *Dorshongpa*. Sometimes the weaver combines two kinds of checks on a single fabric. The *Kira* materials are made of three lengths of fabric put together from a back strap loom. If the *Marthra* is woven on a horizontal loom, it has to be stitched after being arranged with many sections put together. *Marthras* are found in all materials such as raw silk and fine silk but the most common are the mixed cotton and wool.



SERTHRA

Serthras are golden patterns, yellow checks on an orange or a darker or lighter variation of yellow or orange.



SERTHRA METO CHEM

This *Kira* is woven on a horizontal loom. It is a *Serthra* that has yellow checks and *Metho* or flowers in the checks of yellow.



THAGRA

Its design consists of horizontal stripes dominated by white ones which are slightly wider than the rest. It was very popular in the past. The one shown here is made of cotton.



BORDERS

The *Thagra* shown below is one with elaborate edges. It is made of cotton with old and faded wild silk.



MOENTHRA ALSO CALLED MOENTHA

This is a pattern which was in existence well before the advent of Buddhism, when Bhutan was known to the rest of the world as *Mon Yul* or the Land of Darkness (because there was no religion). Hence the name *Moenthra* or the *Monpa's* design. Over time, it came to be known as *Moentha*. This material has *Hor* (supplementary weft patterns) on it and also has a dominant white stripe.



MOENTHRA or MOENTHA WITH JADRIMA

The *Moentha* in the picture below is over 80 years old. It is made of cotton with *Hor* (supplementary weft patterns) woven out of wild silk. It is partitioned with the *Jadrima* or rainbow stripes that divide the patterns.



JADRIMA

The Kira fabrics here all are *Jadrimas* and have *Kha Chas* (very dominant border pattern or stripes that are used in women's *Kira* fabrics).

MOENTHA YURUNG CHEM

The Kiras shown here are *Menthas* with *Yurungs* or Swastika. In a departure from popular international opinion, Swastikas are a Buddhist symbol which is held in high regard and therefore it is considered good to have one on your item of clothing. *Moenthas* bearing *Yurung* fetches a higher price compared to the ones without.



THAGRA YURUNG CHEM

This particular Kira has a *Thagra* base with *Yurungs* - Swastika motifs and colorful flower patterns.



MENTSİ MARTHRA

Similar to the other *Mentsi Mrathras* in the earlier sections this is yellow Hor (supplementary wefts) pattern on a madder red background. This page also shows a *Mentsi Marthra* with *Methos* called a *Mentsi Marthra Metochem*.



STACK OF KIRAS

The stack of Kiras in the picture below show two *Pesars* on the top followed by a *Lungsem*, *Lungsem* with a *Jadrima*, a *Domchuchem*, *Aikapur* and a *Mentsi Marthra*.



AIKAPUR

This *Kira* is white and yellow with rainbow partitions and has a clear smaller border patterns or the *Kha Cha*. *Aia* means a woman and *Kapur* means cotton and so it may be safe to surmise that it is a term for a cotton fabric woven by a woman.

AIKAPUR SHINGLO CHEM

The other Kira shown on this page is an *Aikapur Shinglochem* which is an *Aikapur* bearing *Shinglo* patterns.



LUNGSEM

This is a *Kira* fabric with green and orange. Usually *Lungsem* has green combined with red or orange.



NAGSHAM (NAG MEANING BLACK)

It is a *Kishuthara* with a black background. The ones in this picture are old styles and have motifs woven out of what we call *Jachen* - a kind of imported wool.



DROMCHUCHEM

This Kira is famous in the east and has four colors - white, green, yellow and orange.



NGO SHAM

It is a kind of *Kishuthara* pattern on a blue or purplish blue background. There are three *Kiras* in this section; the first one is a full *Kira* spread out showing the bottom design and the design on the *Jabgang* or back end. It has a cotton background with wool, silk and traces of metallic yarn. This *Kira* is from the 1970s.



These two pictures show portions of a *Kira* with a plain striped border. It is cotton based with wild silk patterns. This one is from the 1960s.



The third one is a recently woven *Pesar Ngosham* - pure silk half Kira.



MARSHAM

Kishuthara with a red background is called *Mar Sham*. In this section, we have two pictures. The first one is herbal dyed madder background with pre-dyed wool *Jachen* and Indian metallic yarn motifs. It is from the 1970s.





The second *Kishuthara* with the red background is modeled on an old one with the back panels or *Jab Gang*. It is pure silk imported from India.

JANGSERM

This is a *Kishuthara* with a green background. The one in the picture here is an old one with traces of metallic yarn.



KISHUTHARA

Kishuthara is a very prominent design and anyone who knows anything about Bhutanese textile will vouch for that. It is an elaborately decorated *Kira* with numerous motifs on a white background. This section has three *Kiras*. The first one is an example of a *Kishuthara* of today. The second one has cotton background with cotton motifs. The third one is designed to resemble the ones of the past. It has two colors, dark blue and maroon on a white background.



The word *Kishu* which means noble or elite and Thara refers to the patterns. Therefore a *Kishuthara* is a *Thara* fit for the *Kishu* or the elite. *Kishutharas* originated from *Lhuntsi* and therefore are usually associated with that place.



PESAR

Pesars are new designs. Weavers are constantly experimenting and coming up with new ones. We have here a silk *Pesar* on a blue background, the second one has very unique patterns on a maroon background and the third has bold butterfly or flower pattern on a cotton background.



The *Pesars* on this page are four *Kiras* with old motifs rearranged in light shades that are produced to cater to the demand for such *Kiras*.



KHALING PESAR

The five *Kiras* shown on this page were woven in *Khaling*. They are herbal dyed and therefore the colors do not run while washing.



DORJI METO

The *Kira* shown here bear the *Sapma Dorji* motif. These *Kiras* are popular with the working professionals of today.



TRIMA DORJI

This particular *Kira* shows *Timar Dorjis*. It has a *Dorji* on the border and above it, a *Dorji Jadram* or cross thunderbolts.





HOTHRA METHO CHEM

This *Kira* was woven in *Bumthang*. It is made of wool and was inspired by a Tibetan pattern that was popular in this region back then. The difference between *Hothra Meto Chem* and the *Tibetan Thiktha* is that instead of the tie dyed crosses, it has a woven flower motif.

CHHARU TARICHEM

This was also woven in *Bumthang*. It is woven on a horizontal loom out of local sheep wool colored with herbal and natural dye. It has big stripes or panels of Madder red (the red color derived from Madder), black and indigo blue.



BELTS / KERA

Women's belts in the past were woven much broader. They were plain on one side and patterned intricately on the other. It had fringes only on one side which was used to tuck and fasten the belt when worn folded.



Belts or *Keras* in modern Bhutan have evolved. In the sixties, *Keras* (belts) became slimmer and more stiff with fringes on both ends. Some are plain while others are striped. These days, a wide assortment of *Keras* are available. The dimensions of the *Kera* are: for the traditional belts, the width is about 38 centimetres and the length approximately 202 centimetres without the fringes. The fringes are usually about 40 centimetres. For the modern belts the width comes to about 9 centimetres and the length without fringes around 191 centimetres. The fringes are roughly 20 centimetres.



How to wear the Kira

step 1



step 2



step 3



step 4



step 5



finish



OTHERS



A Bhutanese woman carrying her baby with woven material (kabney)

This chapter is an attempt to cover all the things that are woven besides the *Gho* and *Kira* fabrics. In the past we had no option but to weave or create whatever day to day items that we needed as access to mass produced goods were either limited or non-existent. A good example is the *Bundi* which functioned as a bag pack and we have many more such items such as the makeshift bags we used to offer gifts of rice.

KUSHUNG TUNIC

Those days women used tunics which were known in the east as *Kushung*. They are still worn during certain sacred ceremonies. The most elaborate ones were on white backgrounds with sacred motifs like the Amulet Boxes, Thunderbolts, Swastikas and *Torma* offerings, almost all of which have religious significance. These were what inspired the *Kishutharas* of today. We also had other tunics made of wool like

the one below. The dark fabric is hand woven. The other tunics are referred to in accordance to the color like *Leushingkha*, *Ngaushinkha*. The *Kishung* that can also be made out of old Thara with fancy borders. As of today one finds these pieces only in museums, monasteries in the east and in rare cases, private collectors within Bhutan.





CHHA SIL PANG KHEP

Chha Sil Pang Khep literally translated means hand wipe lap cover. It was used as a napkin or a towel, serving cloth and lap cloth for the elite. It was basically a multi-purpose ceremonial cloth. At times it is also used to carry babies on the back. Weavers paid their taxes in the form of *Chha Sil Pang Kheps* and other weaves. In the absence of modern trade systems, barter system was taken resort to and consequently, taxes were levied in kind. People wove both dyed and non-dyed cotton fabrics with simple motifs which were paid as taxes.



BAGS

Over the course of time various kinds of bags have been produced and made use of. Hand woven carry bags and bags fashioned out of hand woven textiles (usually modern ones) are very popular among the masses. They serve both practical purposes and as a fashion statement as well.

Nettle Bundi with wild silk herbal dye madder and indigo



*Simple cotton Bundi with a
centre Swostika motif*



Yellow turmeric dyed Bundi



Cotton Bundi with herbal dyed wild silk patterns

Phechung



Tsamkhu



Yak hair bag



Yahtra back pack



Bag made out of Kira fabric



Bag woven in Trashiyangtse

Modern bag with bamboo handle



Bag made out of old textile



RUGS

Though Bhutan imported most rugs and carpets from Tibet in the past, we did have our own rugs which were made out of *Yathra* and other hand woven fabrics. *Denkheps* made out of *Yathra* were used either for covering the furniture or as bed covers or the floor mats.



Yathra Rug



Yathra Rug



RARI

Rari is a rug woven out of natural sheep wool which is spun and woven on makeshift looms. It is woven in Southern Bhutan by the *Lhotshampa* or the Bhutanese who live in the south.



BLANKETS

Blankets were originally made of sheep and yak wool or *Yathras* - a fabric popularly produced in Bumthang. There are several examples of woolen *Marthra* blankets sewn together from pieces of fabric.



Yathra Blanket



Black and white Blanket



Black sheep wool blanket

CHHARKAPS / RAINCOATS



DIANA K. MYERS (1986)
Book - *From the Land of the Thunder Dragon*
Published in 1994

Though rendered obsolete with the advent of modernization, there was a time when people had to make use of *Chharkaps* to protect themselves from the rain or extreme cold. They were made out of yak or sheep wool. Three stretches of *Yathra* were stitched together to resemble a blanket which was then used as a raincoat. Today, they can still be seen in use in rural villages. In urban towns they are seen only in the museums, having been replaced by modern umbrellas and raincoats.

Red Yak wool



Yathra orange based



Yathra with indigo blue

JACKETS

Jackets worn by the highlanders made out of coarse felt of yak and sheep hair which is either black or red is common in areas of Laya, Lingshi, Merak and Sakteng . Women in Merak and Sakteng in particular, wear elaborate wild silk (and other materials) jackets with many motifs made on red backgrounds.

The trend of fashioning *Yathras* into jackets gained momentum sometime in the 70s and early 80s. From the jackets of the past to those of today's emerging fashion market we find a wide variety of hand woven jackets.

Merak Women's Jacket



Men's Jackets



Hand woven textile used for modern design jackets



SCARVES

There are a variety of scarves, these are designed as souvenirs for tourists and sell very well. There are a variety of scarves and mufflers available in the market. They are made of silk, raw silk (*Bura*), cotton and wool.



Raw silk scarves

Silk scarves





*Herbal dyed
scarves & mufflers*

HATS

In the past the highlanders wore flat hats made of fine yak hair which are still in use today. Besides these, you also find new styles and versions of hats that are non-traditional but use our textiles and motifs.



Herbal dyed Tego material (Dorji bee, Bumthang)

Yathra slippers



INTERIOR



Cushion covers



Yathra Fabrics





Nettle fiber place mat

Place mats



Table runners



TENTS

Yak hair tents are made out of coarse yak hair and are water proof. They are woven by the semi-nomadic highlanders. It serves as their home when migrating to and from their pastures. In Dzongkha it is called as *Bra-Goor*.





CONCLUSION

The future of Bhutanese textiles is as bright and as vast as all the colors in the spectrum of the Bhutanese weaves. It is an art form that is currently thriving because of favorable policies and the foresight of our leaders. The art of weaving contributes not only to the preservation of our culture; if we delve deeper we find that it helps support the livelihood of so many people and touches their lives in so many ways.

Through the efforts made by the Royal Textile Academy and the Textile Museum, it is hoped that the weaves that come from weavers heart through this elaborate and unique art form of ours will be radiated onto the world and flourish. Therefore it is very essential for women to learn the secrets of our dyes and how to weave in order to take this art form forward.

The weavers of the past and the creators of our backs trap looms were not only innovative and creative but also looked into practicality. So, it comes as no surprise that the looms are almost the same as they were before and almost all our motifs that existed back then are still woven to this day. We take pride in and love our textiles; it stands for who we are and where are from. Therefore conscious and concerted efforts must be made to preserve and promote our textile.



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The other references' are Traditional Bhutanese Textiles by Barbara S Adams 1984, Grace of the Kira Bhutan's textile heritage by David K Barker, From the Land of the Thunder Dragon Textile Arts of Bhutan 1994, by Diana K Myers & Susans Bean.

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