

TRADITIONAL WEAVING AMONG THE ADI WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF BOMDO VILLAGE IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Kombong Darang¹ & Tame Ramya²

The women in the Adi community are very hardworking. Apart from involving themselves in household activities such as cooking and looking after the children, they are actively involved in agricultural activities. Interestingly, while managing all these activities, they also take time for weaving. They weave various clothes, including wrap skirts, coats for men, *badu* or *gadu* (traditional blankets made of cotton), etc. Various plant-based materials derived from natural resources available in their surroundings are used for weaving. Though produced by employing simple indigenous techniques, their products are durable and long-lasting. The art of cloth weaving among the Adi women is learned and transmitted orally and/or through observing their elders, i.e., mothers and grandmothers. The present study explores the weaving practices among the Adi women in the Upper Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. It also deals with exploring various forest products used in weaving and the varieties of clothes produced through weaving. It also aims to identify the possible threats that arise due to globalization that might affect traditional weaving. Our findings show that despite the influence of modernization, the women of Bomdo village continue to practice traditional weaving.

Keywords: Weaving, Adi, Upper Siang, Bomdo village, Arunachal Pradesh

¹ *Kombong Darang* is currently working in a major research project at the RIWATCH Centre for Mother Languages (RCML), Khinjili, Arunachal Pradesh, India. Correspondence regarding this article may be directed to him at: kombongdarang@gmail.com

² *Tame Ramya* is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Tribal Studies, Arunachal Pradesh University, Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh, India

Introduction

For ages, weaving traditions among tribal women have been an integral part of their culture and heritage. These traditions have been passed down from generation to generation, retaining the particular skills and techniques that make their textiles distinctive. Weaving is more than simply a technique for tribal women to create garments and textiles; it is also a form of artistic expression and a way for them to connect with their cultural heritage. The patterns and designs woven into their clothes typically convey stories and reflect the natural environment and spiritual beliefs of their communities.

One of the most fascinating aspects of weaving traditions among tribal women is the use of natural materials. Many tribes rely on locally obtained fibres such as cotton, silk, and wool, as well as plant fibres such as bamboo, hemp, and nettle. These textiles are frequently hand-spun and dyed with natural dyes derived from plants, roots, or insects, yielding rich and earthy hues. The weaving process itself is a time-consuming and labour-intensive task that requires significant expertise and patience. Traditional looms, which vary in size and design depending on the tribe, are frequently used by tribal women. The looms are primarily made of wood or bamboo and are worked by hand, with the weaver passing the weft thread through the warp threads using a shuttle or their fingers.

Weaving is generally a community practice among tribal women, with older generations passing methods and patterns to new generations. This knowledge transmission preserves the preservation of their weaving traditions and helps to create community bonds. Tribal women's textiles are not only useful but also highly prized as cultural objects and symbols of identity. They are frequently utilised in traditional ceremonies, festivals, and rituals and are occasionally exchanged as gifts during significant life events such as weddings or births.

In recent years, there has been a rising acknowledgement and respect for the skill and artistry of tribal women's weaving techniques. Many organisations and efforts have been developed to assist and promote these traditions, including training, resources, and market access for tribal women to demonstrate and sell handmade textiles.

Statement of the Problem

Arunachal Pradesh, located in the far east of India, is well-known for its unique ethnicities, cultures, and traditions. It is a land of linguistic diversity,

with roughly 26 major tribes and more than 100 sub-tribes. Furthermore, the inhabitants of the state are lauded for using indigenous technologies in their daily lives. The weaving technique is one of the technologies they have mastered and are well-known for. Almost all of the state's tribes have their own technique of weaving garments, bags, blankets, and other items. The weaving technology of the Adi women of Arunachal Pradesh, in general, and Bomdo village, in particular, is investigated in this study.

The Adi community is one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Their name (Adi) is derived from the term 'Adi', which means "hill" or "mountain top" (Chowdhury, 2016). In terms of population, the Adis comprise the second-largest community after the Nyishis (the most populated tribe in the state). The Adis mostly inhabit the Siang, East Siang, Upper Siang, West Siang, Lower Dibang Valley, Lohit, Shi Yomi, and Namsai districts of Arunachal Pradesh.

Tribal life, in its inherent simplicity, is based on fundamental truths reinforced by eternal values (Pandey et al., 2021). Their strength is their ability to successfully hold to primal talents and natural simplicity. Their creations show progress over time, and their arts and crafts are ageless. When we come across the most primitive tribal handicrafts, our primal instincts are stirred in all of us. As a result, the Adi women have extensive knowledge of handloom and handicrafts, particularly weaving. They weave a variety of things, such as wrap skirts, coats, bags, blankets, and shawls.

Objectives

The key objectives of the present study are:

- i. To observe the traditional weaving practices of the Adi women
- ii. To explore the various forest products used in weaving and the varieties of cloth produced through weaving
- iii. To identify the possible threats to the traditional weaving practices of Adi women in the Bomdo village

Study Area

The research was carried out among the Adis of Bomdo village in the Upper Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. Bomdo is a medium-sized Adi village in Jengging Circle, 36 kilometres from the district headquarters, Yingkiang. According to the 2011 Census of India, the total population of

Bomdo village is 444 people, with 233 men and 211 women. The village has 83 households. Yingkiong is the town with the closest significant economic activity to Bomdo.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Bomdo village, Upper Siang district, Arunachal Pradesh, during February and March 2021, using the purposive sampling method. Respondents from various age groups and resources were selected for collecting primary data. An observation technique and a general survey method were used to collect data. The investigators ensured that a comprehensive interview was limited only to expert weavers (women). Detailed information about 'weaving tools' and 'handloom items' was gathered and tabulated. The photographs of the studied items were taken and offered as additional information in this study. The table item number corresponds to the image number.

Results and Discussion

The Adi women are very diligent, whether in agriculture or in-home activities. They are also proficient in cloth weaving using indigenous resources found in their surroundings. The traditional handloom they used to make clothes is called *gekong-gelong*. The traditional profession of cloth weaving is one of the major occupations among Adi women (Singh & Singh, 2007) and serves as the major source of income and livelihood, especially for women. This practice has been followed by the Adi womenfolk for generations. This weaving technique is passed down by oral traditions and is learned by women weavers from their elders, namely their mothers and grandmothers. Women with many years of skill weave a wide range of cultural and traditional garments. Wraps, skirts, coats, loincloths, and traditional blankets are common traditional garments among the Adis.

One of the most significant parts of weaving among the Adis is the patterns of calligraphy and embroidery embedded in their clothes. These traditional patterns, locally known as *pore*, are unique and beautiful. Elwin (1957) observes that the intricate motifs and designs, the combination of colours, all reflect the social status and ethnic origins of the people. The weaving designs are geometrical types varying from a formal arrangement of lines and bands to elaborate patterns of diamonds and lozenges (Singh *et al.*, 2007).

In making the complete set of *gekong-gelong*, experiential wisdom is required to select every component of handloom made of a different plant. A complex process of weaving is observed in various steps and processes in which women are very competent (Singh & Singh, 2007). To make tools for weaving, the community uses natural resources found in their forests. All the materials used for weaving are derived from their local sources. The equipment used for weaving is made from wood and bamboo that is locally available in their forests.

The threads used for weaving are derived from silkworms and indigenous cotton varieties available locally. The colours of the threads are made of natural dyes extracted from trees, flowers, bark and seeds; they are also obtained from plant sources such as *éngot* or *ongot*, which produces various colours like red, black and maroon (Singh & Singh, 2007). However, most of the threads used in weaving are bought from the market, and traditional dyeing is no longer used.

It is important to note that the terminology used for certain tools varies from village to village. Table 1 shows the list of tools used in weaving, and Table 2 shows the list of products made out of weaving.

Table 1: Weaving tools among the Adis

<i>Item No.</i>	<i>Local Name</i>	<i>Item Description</i>
1.	<i>Gékong</i>	It is a square-shaped device that is the base for both ends of weaving. It is made of wood.
2.	<i>Horbung/Írbung</i>	It is a device to separate threads into two different parts. It is made of bamboo.
3.	<i>Chumpí</i>	It is a flat device to put or tighten the threads together. It is made out of a kind of sago palm tree known as <i>tamak</i> .
4.	<i>Tapín</i>	A wrap-around thread on a bamboo stick is known as <i>tapín</i> . It is made of bamboo.
5.	<i>Ngikong</i>	It is a device used to wrap <i>tangi</i> which is a nylon thread. It is also made of bamboo which is used to separate each thread.

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| 6. | <i>Dashot/
Dashét</i> | It is a device to hold both ends of the cloth while putting on patterns. It is also made of bamboo. |
| 7. | <i>Gépanjang/
Gétak</i> | It is a waist belt used during weaving. It is made of either animal skin or rope developed from plastic threads. |
| 8. | <i>Ugari</i> | It is a device to make thread balls. The thread is called <i>aching</i> in Bomdo Village. However, this item is believed to be borrowed from the Assamese community as the name itself is an Assamese term. |

Source: *Fieldwork* (2021)

Table 2: Products of traditional weaving

<i>Item No.</i>	<i>Local Name</i>	<i>Item Description</i>
1.	<i>Gyalut/ Geluk</i>	A blouse worn by womenfolk. In the early days, they used to weave it themselves but now they buy it from the market. It is usually white. However, the black blouse is also worn by women during festive occasions.
2.	<i>Gyalél/ Dordang</i>	It is a wrap skirt that is woven traditionally by the womenfolk. It is worn by womenfolk by wrapping it on their waist. It is commonly known as <i>gechéng</i> . The red colour is said to be the original traditional <i>gyalé</i> .
3.	<i>Gyeyíng/ Geyíng</i>	It is worn on the head and covers the body from the backside. It is black.
4.	<i>Badu or Gadu</i>	Traditional blanket made of cotton piles.
5.	<i>Lukyíng</i>	It is the traditional coat of menfolk. In the olden times, it was woven by womenfolk from cotton and the <i>Ongot</i> plant was used to give it a black colour.
6.	<i>Ugon</i>	It is a loincloth worn by the menfolk of the Adi community. <i>Ugon</i> is woven by the womenfolk using cotton. Earlier, all the men used to wear this but in recent times it has been replaced by modern pants. Nowadays it is only worn by old people and during festivals.

Source: *Fieldwork* (2021)

Possible Threats to Traditional Weaving Practices

There are several potential threats to the traditional weaving practices of the Adi community that need to be considered.

a. Modernization and Westernization: As the Adi tribal community become more exposed to modern lifestyles and global markets, younger generations are less interested in traditional weaving practices. They are attracted to more lucrative or convenient alternatives, causing a decline in the transmission of weaving skills and knowledge.

b. Lack of Economic Viability: In many cases, traditional weaving practices among the people are not economically sustainable as standalone occupations. Low demand, competition from cheaper machine-made alternatives, and inadequate market access discourage weavers from continuing their craft.

c. Limited Resources: Traditional weaving among the Adis relies on natural resources such as specific plants, animal fibres, and traditional dyeing techniques. Environmental changes, deforestation, and overuse of these resources deprive the weavers of the materials essential for their craft.

d. Changing Social Dynamics: Migration to urban areas, younger generations adopting different livelihood strategies, and changes in cultural practices disrupt the intergenerational transmission of weaving skills. This can result in a loss of knowledge and a decline in the number of active weavers within the community.

e. Lack of Infrastructure and Support: Insufficient infrastructure, such as weaving centres, training facilities, and access to markets, limits opportunities for tribal weavers to showcase and sell their products. Additionally, inadequate financial resources, limited government support, and the absence of comprehensive policies hinder the revival and preservation of traditional weaving practices among the people.

To address these threats, it is crucial to raise awareness about the cultural significance and uniqueness of traditional weaving practices. Supporting initiatives that provide market access, infrastructure development, training, and financial assistance can help safeguard these traditions and provide economic opportunities for tribal communities.

Conclusion

The Adis adore their traditional attire and are happy to wear them at every opportunity. However, most younger generations are uninterested in learning and carrying on this age-old essential heritage. With the advancement of modern technologies in clothing manufacturing, modern clothing displaces traditional dress. Currently, traditional Adi dress is worn on occasion during festivals and occasions.

Although weaving is a part of people's economic activity, it is only practised by middle-aged and older women. Young ladies rarely engage in this weaving tradition. This is because young people prefer modern clothing to traditional woven clothing. The use of traditionally woven clothing is restricted to festivals and specific rites. If this trend continues, considerable traditional knowledge of weaving could be lost.

The glaring example of vanishing traditional weaving among the Adis can be seen in the use of *badu*. *Badu* is a traditional cotton blanket that is only seen as a farewell gift to the deceased because the Adis believe it is one of the most essential parting gifts to the departed. Apart from being used in funeral rites, it is rare in Adi society. The researchers feel there is a need to promote and educate the Adi community about the traditional use and significance of *badu*. The modern blanket can be customized partly by adding colour and altering it. Overall, weaving must be offered as an extracurricular activity in schools so that younger generations can keep practising this tradition and save it from extinction.

Suggestions

Preserving and saving the weaving tradition from extinction among Adis requires a concerted effort from various stakeholders. Here are some suggestions to consider:

a. Documentation and Research: Encourage researchers and organizations to document and study traditional weaving techniques, patterns, and historical significance. This serves as a resource for future generations and helps raise awareness about the importance of preserving these traditions.

b. Education and Training: Develop programmes to educate young weavers about traditional techniques and the cultural significance. This can be done through workshops, apprenticeships, or collaborations with skilled weavers.

c. Support Local Weavers: Promote and support local artisans by creating market opportunities, such as craft fairs, exhibitions, or online platforms. Encouraging the purchase of handmade textiles helps sustain the livelihoods of traditional weavers.

d. Cultural Exchange Programmes: Facilitate cultural exchange programmes where weavers from different regions can share their techniques, stories, and experiences. This promotes cross-cultural understanding and fosters collaboration and preservation efforts.

e. Government Support and Policies: Advocate for policies that recognize the value of traditional weaving and provide financial aid or incentives for weavers to continue their craft. This can include grants, subsidies, or tax benefits.

f. Community Engagement: Encourage communities to actively participate in preserving and promoting their weaving traditions. This can be done through festivals, community projects, or the establishment of weaving cooperatives.

g. Digital Archiving: Create online platforms or digital repositories where weavers can showcase their work, share their knowledge, and connect with others globally. This helps create a broader audience and preserves weaving traditions in a digital format.

h. Collaboration with the Fashion and Design Industry: Promote collaborations between traditional weavers and contemporary designers or fashion brands. This allows for the integration of traditional techniques into modern products, widening their reach and appeal.

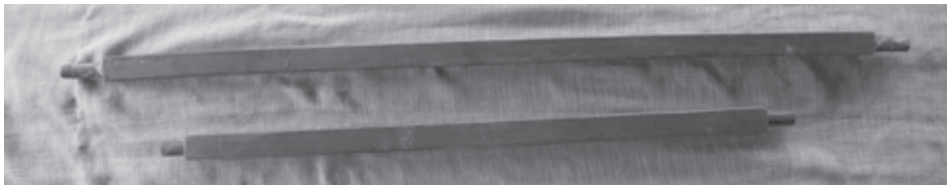
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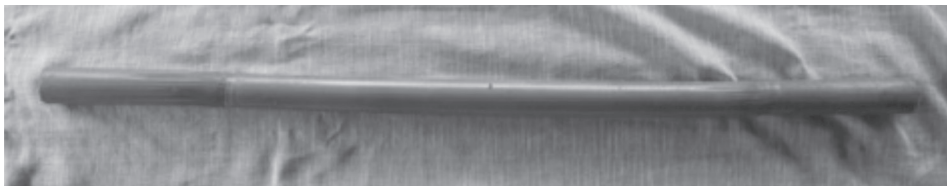
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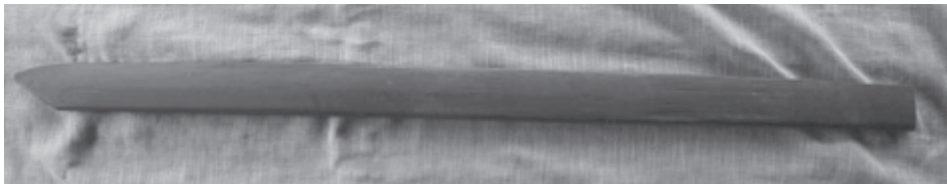
Photographs of weaving tools (Mentioned in Table 1)



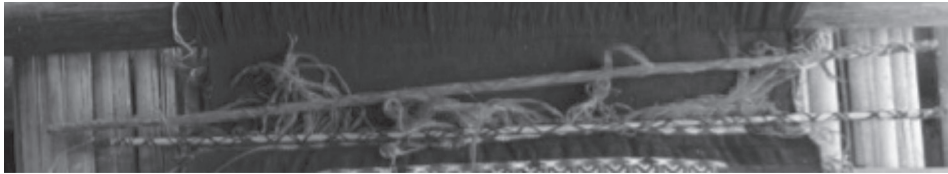
1. *Gékong*



2. *Írbung*



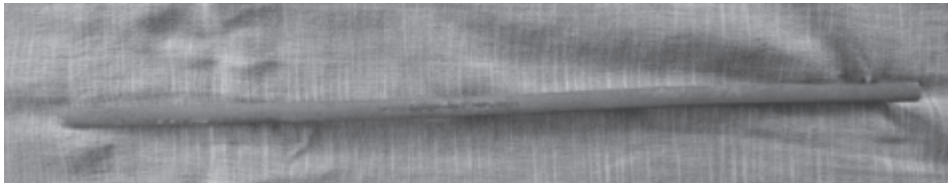
3. *Chumpi*



4. *Tapin*



5. *Ngikong*



6. *Dashot/Dashét*



7. *Gé pang or Gétak*



8. *Ugari*

Photographs of traditional attires made of weaving (Mentioned in Table 2)



1. *Gyalut/Geluk*



2. *Gyalé/Dordang*



3. *Geyíng*



4. *Badu*



5. *Lukyíng*



6. *Ugon*



Initial stages of weaving



Weaving Set



A Lady weaving a Dordang/Gyalé