Case study

Traditional Handloom of Kargil district, Ladakh

Abstract:-

Handloom weaving is one of the main activity of nomadic people of Kargil district of Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir. Weaving becomes their chief occupational priority especially during harsh winter season when they have no agricultural related work to do. The weavers, especially women folk, follow their ancestral traditional methods for converting raw wool into various woollen handloom products. These handloom products full fill their local needs, help them to improve their financial savings and thus empower themselves. In the present study handloom of district Kargil have been presented. The various handloom items of the Kargil district include; *Snamboo, bali topi, thouth, rouchak, bali dorma, bali guncha, Jainamaz, Thulpa, Salchkpa, phengma, Pherba, Kartapa, kanchy, lakshups* etc. which have been described in detail in the paper. Traditional handloom making business, need based trainings should be provided to local women for improvement in their product quality and product diversification so that they may easily compete in international as well as national market.

Key Words:- Kargil Handloom weaving, Ancestral traditional methods

Introduction:-

Ladakh ("land of high passes") is a region in Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir that currently extends from the Kunlun mountain range[3] to the main Great Himalayas to the south, inhabited by people of Indo-Aryan and Tibetan descent.[4][5] It is one of the most sparsely populated regions in Jammu and Kashmir and its culture and history are closely related to that of Tibet.

Historically, the region included the Baltistan (Baltiyul) valleys (now mostly in Pakistan), the entire upper Indus Valley, the remote Zanskar, Lahaul and Spiti to the south, much of Ngari including the Rudok region and Guge in the east, Aksai Chin in the northeast (extending to the Kun Lun Mountains), and the Nubra Valley to the north over Khardong La in the Ladakh Range. Contemporary Ladakh borders Tibet to the east, the Lahaul and Spiti regions to the south, the Vale of Kashmir, Jammu and Baltiyul regions to the west, and the southwest corner of Xinjiang across the Karakoram Pass in the far north. Ladakh is renowned for its remote

mountain beauty and culture. Aksai Chin is one of the disputed border areas between China and India.[6] It is administered by China as part of Hotan County but is also claimed by India as a part of the Ladakh region of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. In 1962, China and India fought a brief war over Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh, but in 1993 and 1996 the two countries signed agreements to respect the Line of Actual Control.[7]

This Study was carried out at KVK Kargil Shere Kashmir University of Agricultural science and technology , Kashmir. Kargil region of Jammu and Kashmir is located at an altitude of 3000 to 5000 m above mean sea level. The soil of this region is sandy in nature coupled with brown rocks. It is a plateau region, characterized by undulations with rugged terrains. The annual rainfall in this area is quite low i.e. up to 8-9 cm, while the temperature varies from 35°C in summer to -40°C in winter. Drass area of Kargil is one of the coldest places in the world with temperatures during the winter season reaching as low as -50°C. Snowfall is a very common phenomenon in winter. The high wind velocity with a low precipitation rate, low humidity, low oxygen tension and fluctuating temperature makes the climate most inhospitable to crop based livelihood activities. Under such harsh environmental conditions, livestock is the major source of livelihood to the inhabitants, including the nomadic and semi nomadic tribes of various regions of Kargil. The nomadic people of Ladakh rear a variety of livestock such as sheep, goat, horses and yaks, which provide them with various goods and services. Nevertheless, the needs and aspirations are changing. Sheep plays an important role in the hilly and other inaccessible areas, where it is difficult for other livestock to thrive and contribute to the income of poor communities.

Objectives of the study was

- To showcase the traditional handloom of Kargil district and
- To find out challenges faced by Kargil district people

The lack of market facility and popularization of these traditional handlooms things needs to be addressed for the development of the region in general and for traditional handloom in particular.

Handloom:

Handloom weaving is one of the main activity of Kargil district of Ladakh region. Handloom of this district, projects the unique art and cultural heritage of the region. The people use their leisure time (winter months / while grazing their animals) for weaving of woollen

products. Sheep and goat rearing ful-fills the demand of raw wool for the said purpose. Majority of the sheep breeds of Kargil are indigenous. Almost every household is having 5-10 sheep and few goats. The wool used for weaving of the woolen products is procured from different sheep breeds like karakul, purgi, angora and bakarwal. Each family is having sufficient raw wool and they do not need to procure it from any other source. But they have no market for raw wool, so they convert it into various woolen products by traditional methods. Most of the handloom in kargil serve the need of the local people. For many it is the main source of earning livelihood.

Methodology:

Three blocks of district kargil, viz. Taisuru, TSG and Drass were selected. In each block three villages, where traditional handloom making is more prevalent viz: (Khawos,Youljuk and Prantee),(Chaskore, GM Pore and Trespone) and (Olberud, Bihmbat and Kaksar) respectively, were selected for the study. Information and data was generated during 2014 and 15 , from local people, especially elderly people and women, in the selected villages, who were involved in this practice. Data was collected largely through combination of semi structured interviews of people, questionnaire and on spot direct observations.

Results:

Sheep husbandry is the mainstay of the people of Ladakh. They procure wool from sheep and then process raw wool in different traditional ways and convert it into traditional woollen products which are unique to Kargil. These woollen products protect them from cold in harsh winter. Sheep breeds reared in the region includes, purgi, karakul, angora, changthangi and bakarwal.

Following are the various traditional woolen products of the kargil and their methods of preparation

Snamboo:

The sheared wool (*Baal*) is combed and made smooth with a special comber called *Balchat* (Fig.1). The combed wool is stored in a small Salix basket (*Krangi*) in the form of a small pack. These small woollen packs (*Dahang)* are used for spinning a thread with special spindle shaped device called *Phangchay* (Fig. 2) and wooden round cup shaped device known as (phangkochay) (Fig.2). These woollen thread balls *sukatpa* (Fig.3) are used for making woollen fabrics (*Snamboo*) (Fig.4). It is about 1.5 feet (unwashed) and 1feet after washing, in width. The

length depends upon the end product. The roughness of the fabric (*snamboo*) is removed by soaking it in water in wooden tub. A labourer presses it with his feet continuously for at least 6 to 10 hours. This fabric is then used for making almost all kind of woollen products like *Bali Topi, Thouth, Salchkpa, Frook, Rouchack, Bali dharma, Basket, and choga* which are generally wooven by Karglis on indigenous handlooms.

Kargli Caps

Locally it is called as *bali topi.* The fabric (snamboo) is cut into four small triangular pieces which are then stitched from inner sides to make it dome shaped. Round base is stitched separately to this portion. Laces and some button of different colour are used to decorate it. It is an important part of local men garments. It is used during winters. Elderly people of the area use it through out the year. It is usually found in different colours i.e black, black and white brown and grey. Locally it cost around Rs 300 to 500. (Fig. 5)

Frook

A traditional women garment called as *frook* is very famous in the region. It is found in different colours but gray and black is common colour. Two pieces of Snamboo are stitched together and the arms are attached and stitched separately. Size of frook depens up on height of individual. It is mostly use during winters months. It costs about Rs 500 to 1000. (Fig.6).

Turban:

Locally it is called as *thouth.* It is made up of fine fiber (*greve*). It is about 3 to 5 meters in length and 10 cm in width. It generally comes in three colours i.e white, brown and gray. However, the demand of white turban is more than other colours. Strips of different coloured threads like red, black and blue are used at both ends to decorate it. Wearing this turban is considered as pride by old age people of the region. They use it on different occasions especially on eid and marriages ceremonies by bride grooms . It costs about 500 to 800. (Fig. 7)

Choga:

The LADAKHI MEN usually wear a typical long gown called as *bali guncha*, having a belt (skaraks) to fasten at the waist. This dress suits the physical and climatic requirements of their lifestyle. They used it during harsh winters to protect themselves against the severe climate. It is also used as uniform, during local archery competitions. The approximate weight of

the *choga* is 3-4 kgs. The wool obtained from the first shearing of a lam is used. It is a very costly woollen traditional garment, costing about 3000 to 5000 in local market. The *choga* is of different colours, maroon being most popular and attractive. Ladakhi woman also wear choga, with the difference that there choga has folded and a round bottom. (Fig. 8)

Jainamaz:

Jainamaz is made up of course wool of sheep and come in 2 x 3 feet size. Square design is the prominent in it. It is used for offering the prayers. it costs about 300 to500 per piece. (Fig. 9)

Pherba:

It is a type of blanket which is spun from goat hair. It is wooven into two portions of half width and later joined from the centre with very complicated stitches. Old age people are usually engaged in its processing. It is rough in texture but provides warmth. *Pherba* is usually plain or available in cheques or bands of black and white. The size of the *Pherba* varies but mostly it comes in 3 x6 feets and weighs about 3 to 5 kgs. It is also used in mosques as matting. The approximate cost of *Pherba* is 4000. (Fig.10)

Fig. 1 *Balchat.*

Fig. 2 *Phangkochay and Phangchay*

Fig. 3 *Sukatpa,*

Fig. 4 *Snamboo*

Fig. 5 *Bali Topi*

Fig. 6 *Frook*

Fig.7 *Thouth*

Fig.8 *Bali Guncha (Choga)*

Fig.9 *Jainamaz*

Fig.10 *Pherba*

Thulpa:

After the slaughter of sheep, whole of its skin is removed. Skin is then processed by rubbing salt and then drying under sun. 4 such processed skin are then stitched to make a big size structure of 4 x 6 and 4x8 size. Woollen side of the skin is kept as such and other side is covered with cotton or woollen fabric. It is then used as quilt during winters. The cost of this product is approximately 1500 to 2000 in village. (Fig. 11)

Salchkpa:

It is made up of goat skin. After the slaughter of goat, whole of its skin is removed. Skin is then processed to prevent it from putrefaction from bacterial growth by rubbing common salt on skin side and then it is subjected to sun drying. After drying it is as such used by local women to hang over their shoulders on their back. They keep the woolen parts downwards and skin parts upwards. The under side woollen part act as an insulator. The upside skin part act as a sheath to protect from heat, cold and other calamities. (Fig.12)

Jooti:

It comes in both women and man wear, Traditionally it is called as *Kartapa.* Its sole is made up of sheep and goat skin and remaining portion is made up of sheep wool. Mainly course

wool is used for its making. Several coloured threads are used for its decoration. Mixed colour especially white and black is more desirable among the local people. Brown, black and other colour is also available. It requires 150 grms of yarn to make it. It costs about 300-500. (Fig.13).

Namda:

It is a type of matting which is made by felting of wool rather than weaving. It is prepared by mixing course low quality wool with small quantity of cotton. Locally it is called as *phengma.* These *Namda* are usually plain and come in different sizes. 3 x 6 feet or 6 x 6 feets size are most common. The price of the *namda* depend up on the size and quality of wool used.

Woman Shalwar/ Pyjami

Locally it is called as *rouchak.* It is the traditional dress of local woman folk of the Kargil district. It is thicker, heavier and longer, available in about 10 feet length and weighing about 2 kg. It has wrinkled appearance. It is used by ladies during winters and is also used by bride. It takes 15 days to make this Shalwar. It costs about 500 to 1000.

Men Shalwar:

Locally called as *bali dorma.* It is also made from course fabrics (*spun*). The length of Shalwar is almost 2-3 feet and weighing about 1.5-2 kg. It is straight and thick in appearance. It is used by gents during winter months. This shalwar is mostly found in gray and black colours. It takes about one week to make this Shalwar.

Waist coat :

It is called as basket in local language. It is made up of wool. It requires about 2.5 kg of yarn. It is used particularly by men on different occasions. It is also considered as pride to use this waist coat.

Hand knit woolens:

Woman of the region are expert in hand knitted woolen articles and get handsome amount by making these woolen products. They spending most of the time during winter and while grazing their animals during summer, for making these products which includes gloves, socks, caps, sweaters and mufflers.

Oukurdu:

It is a long elongated rope like woollen product, used for controlling animals while grazing and also used to protect field crops from birds by using stone. It is a special product having two arms with equal length and one triangular part at centre. The end of one arm is having ring which is fixed in index finger. After keeping the stone in middle triangular area, other arm is kept in between thumb and index finger. Then it is rotated clock wise against index finger 4 to 5 times. When it comes in motion than it is thrown towards target point (Fig.14).

Woollen Sweater:

It is also available in both woman and men garments. Usually made up of fine sheep wool with cash melon thread for different strips, which make it colourful and more attractive resulting in more price. It requires 500-700 gms of yarn. The final cost of this product is about 1000-1500 Rs. Price also depends upon the quality of wool and pattern. It is found in different colours like grey, white, black, cheque etc. It is very warm and used during winter months. Aged people use it round the year. Locally called as *banyan.* (Fig.15)

Woollen Socks:

Its local name is *kanchy*. It is knitted from local fine sheep wool and different bright colours of cash melon. It is available in multi colours. Most of the local people are using it irrespective of sex and age. 200-300 gms of yarn is required for making of this product. Young woman are usually engaged in its preparation. (Fig.16)

Woollen Gloves and caps:

Locally they are called as *lakshups* (gloves) and (caps) *bali topi.* The gloves and caps are knitted from indigenous wool with geometrical designs over them, displaying brilliant colours. Its price depend on the quality of wool used. Approximate cost of these products are 250-350 and 300 to 500 Rs. Approximate wool requirement is about 100-150 gms. and 150-250 gms. respectively. (Fig.17)

Fig. 11 *Thulpa*

Fig. 12 *Salchkpa*

Fig.13 *Kartapa*

Fig.14. *Oukurdo*

Fig.15 *Woollen Sweater*

Fig16. *Kanchy*.

17 Fig. *Knitted bali topi*

Conclusion:

It is concluded from the study that woollen products in Kargil are prepared by traditional methods, by local people for fulfilling their personal needs. Kargil does not boost an artistic craftsmanship on a huge scale. There is no popularization of these products , resulting in lack of interest among new generation. So there is need of popularization and marketing of these products other than their local markets, so that they may get good price. This may create interest in new generation who may then show interest and get engaged in this traditional handloom making business. Need based trainings should be provided to local women for improvement in their product quality and product diversification so that they may easily compete with the outside world.

References :

1. *"MHA.nic.in". MHA.nic.in. Archived from U on 8 December 2008. Retrieved 21 June 2012.*
2. *Wiley, AS (2001). "The ecology of low natural fertility in Ladakh". J Biosoc Sci.* ***30****: 457–80. PMID 9818554.*
3. The Gazetteer of Kashmir and Ladák published in 1890 Compiled under the direction of the Quarter Master General in India in the Intelligence Branch in fact unequivocally states inter alia in pages 520 and 364 that Khotán is "a province in the Chinese Empire lying to the north of the Eastern Kuenlun (Kun Lun) range, which here forms the boundary of Ladák" and "The eastern range forms the southern boundary of Khotán, and is crossed by two passes, the Yangi or Elchi Díwan, crossed in 1865 by Johnson and the Hindútak Díwan, crossed by Robert Schlagentweit in 1857".
4. *Jina, Prem Singh (1996). Ladakh: The Land and the People. Indus Publishing. ISBN 81-7387-057-8.*
5. *"In Depth-the future of Kashmir". BBC News. Retrieved 16 April 2013.*
6. *"Fantasy frontiers". The Economist. 8 February 2012. Retrieved 24 September 2014.*
7. *"India-China Border Dispute". GlobalSecurity.org.*
8. Ishrat Yaqoob, Asif H Sofi, Sarfaraz A Wani, F D Sheikh & Nazir A Bumla. *Pashmina shawl* - A traditional way of making in Kashmir. Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge. Vol. 11 (2), April 2012, Pp. 329-333.
9. Neetu Sharma, Promila Kanwar and Anju Rekha. Traditional handicrafts and handloom of kullu district, hamachal Pradesh. Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge. Vol. 7, January 2008, Pp. 56-61.
10. Anju Kapoor, Promila Kanwar and Neetu Sharma. Handicraft heritage of gaddi tribe of hamachal Pradesh. Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge. Vol. 7, January 2008, Pp. 62-66.