

A Study on Woollen Handicraft Cluster of Chamoli Garhwal



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Chamoli the abode of Gods, reputed for its shrines and temples, is one of the hill districts of Uttarakhand, India. The Indo-Tibetan people who have made their homes in the High Himalayas for centuries (Mana and Niti valleys of Upper Chamoli) were called "**Bhotiyas**". The *Bhotiya* tribes, from ancient times when they had trade with Tibet, accepted the woollen industry as an essential part of their lifestyle. For centuries their women have been moving their small "*pithachan*" (Loin-loom). *Ptdu, thulma*, carpets, *chutka, lava, shawl, asans, pankhi, gudma* etc. were prepared very artistically. The entire mountain belt, from the Western Himalayas to the Northeast frontier region, produces wide range of woollen articles, each distinctive in its own way. Difficult geographical conditions and lack of transport resulting in difficult access to the region had helped in maintaining their monopoly over this trade for decades.

The returns are not at all comparable to the amount of input by these people in the form of labour and time, therefore special stress should be laid to encourage their craftsmanship and capabilities which would not only provide them with a valuable alternative source of income and personal development but will also preserve the extinction of the craft. The present study is the macro effort in this area. The **specific objectives** are as follows:

- To document the present scenario of woollen textile industry of Chamoli Garhwal.
- To flag the problems faced by the industry.

For this field survey was conducted in the month of June 2000 in the summer habitation of these people and during the month of January 2001 in the winter habitation. Five tribal villages and towns where the tribal community was practising woollen craft were selected as the locale of the study.

Government and non-government organisations were also surveyed for the study. These organisations were selected by purposive sampling method.

For obtaining data regarding to socio-economic status, industrial setup and design documentation of the Chamoli Garhwal following tools were used.

Socio economic status scale (SESS) by- R.L.Bharadwaj: The present scale of socio-economic status has been developed for literate people but it can be administered on illiterate people but by personal interview.

Questionnaire: It was developed to know details of the craft and industrial setup.

In addition to above mentioned tools participatory type of observation were also done for understanding the existing status of the people and the craft of the locale also to get

an actual idea and difference between cottage industries and small scale industries and to understand the techniques involved in the craft.

Geographical Location:

Uttarakhand has an importance because of different geographical, social, and cultural position. It is situated on the international boundaries of India. Uttarakhand, an important geographical region of the central Himalayan axis, has been entailed as the most venerated part in the *puranic* literature so far as *Tirth Yatra* (religious pilgrimage) is concerned. The entire area seemed to become sacrosanct on account of the growth of the religious belief about the two famous shrines of Badri and Kedar which made them the ultimate abode of the two principal deities of Hindu Pantheon – *The Narayan Vishnu* and *Lord Shiva*. Together with this the famous Gangavatran episode of our religious tradition and his progeny made this Himalayan region a source of the descent of life-sustaining Ganga River along with Yamuna. Lacking in infrastructural facilities like adequate communication and road network, electricity supply, public health services, educational opportunities, the area has remained more than backward.

The People:

Life has never been easy here. Still waves of humanity came here and made their embalming land their home. People amalgamated cultures galvanised and societies homogenised here. The mountain environment enveloped them. For the most part the migrants settled in relatively hospitable and more accessible places, along with river valleys and moderate slopes. The tribes who for the most part are natives took to more inaccessible and rugged higher reaches of Dehradun, Chamoli and Uttarkashi district. Although tribal settlement occur in all six districts yet mentionable concentration of this community are restricted to the border areas of district Chamoli, higher reaches of the district Uttarkashi and the Himalayan interior of Dehradun. The tribal population of Garhwal Himalayas is divisible into two as depicted below.

Both of these communities differ from each other in not only their lifestyle but also their culture, tradition and social structure. The Bhotiya in whose folds are included the Marchas and Tolchas has the border areas of district Chamoli extending from Niti in the East to Mana in the West. The Jads & Bagori near Harsil Uttarkashi are semi nomadic people. The Juansaris, who possess a peculiar ethnic identity of their own, are the permanent residents of the Chakrota sub division of District Dehradun.

The term “Bhotiya” is supposed to be originated from the word “Bhot” means Tibet. Thus, the term Bhotiya shows relation with Tibet, so their language reveals influence of long contact with the Tibetan community. It is said that the ancestors of Bhotiya used to live in the south of Himani Anchal; due to some unknown circumstances they started living in Tibet after crossing the Himalaya. After living there for long they came back and started living in Uttarakhand. Except Darma Bhotiya all other show their relation with some other villages of Tibet. Looking at their physical built up and cultural characteristic one can easily say that they are very much near to Tibet (Nautiyal 1990).

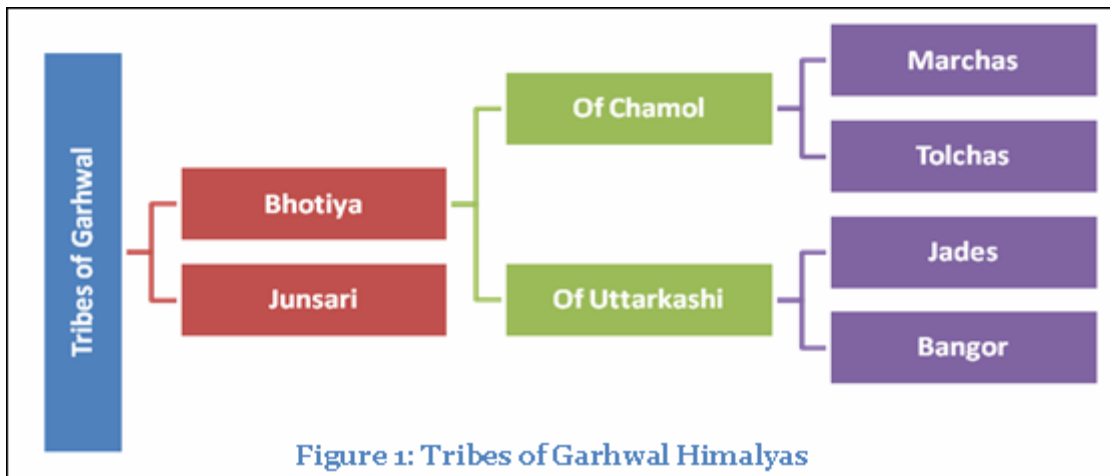


Figure 1: Tribes of Garhwal Himalyas

Religion:

Bhotiya community differs characteristically from most of the tribes in India on adoption of the caste system, a feature not normally found among the ranks of the tribals. Two reasons can be cited for this, firstly, these people have remained in an exceptionally close contact with the Hindu living in their surroundings, a fact which could well account for acquisition of alien social values, secondly, these people have been declared tribal rather recently after the term tribal has been made sufficiently liberal for the constitutional purpose. (Semwal Sood, 1991). It is believed that Buddhism existed in the hills of Uttarakhand as far back as during 7th century.

However Shankaracharya who established the holy shrine of Badrinath during the eighth century converted the population to Vedic faith. Hinduism is deep rooted in the hills of Uttarakhand, a place where Hinduism was practiced and preserved in both Pre Brahminical and brahminical form. Bhotiya of Uttarakhand follows a blended culture/ religion of Buddhism and Hinduism although they call themselves Hindus. They are Mongoloid in appearance with occasional Aryan and aboriginal traits. Bhotiya still follows their traditionally folk religion based on belief & worship of spirits. They offer sacrifice to ward off the evil influence of spirits. The present trend among the Western Bhotiya who are partly Hinduised is to become Hindu to achieve better social status. The traditional links with Tibet have given the Bhotiya a culture peculiarity of their own. Their language, religious practices, social beliefs, food habits and documents all bear strong marks of Indo-Tibetan cultural interaction. They worship both Buddha and Hindu deity. They perform religious rites and social customs belonging to both India and Tibet.

Language:

According to Sir George Griyarsan of the West, The language of the Central hill region was closer to Vedic than Sanskrit. As far as Bhotiya are concerned they speak Garhwali, Tibet, Hindi and a dialect native to them.

Habitation:

Between Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Tibet completes the triangle Bhot Pradesh, contains seven river valleys, which have been the homeland of the Bhotias from time immemorial.

The seven river valleys are:

- ✓ Bhagirathi- Jahanavi Ganga in Uttarkashi
- ✓ Alaknanda-chamoli district
- ✓ Dhaulis Ganga in Chamoli
- ✓ Gauri Ganga-Pithoragarh
- ✓ Dhauti-Pithrogarh
- ✓ Kali in Pithoragarh
- ✓ Cutie Yankti-Pitoragarh

The Bhotiyas are the residents of the Alaknanda-Pinder triangle and upper Bhagirati Valley. As pointed out by Dabral (1964), they are the residents of the narrow belt lying between the greater Himalayan and the Tibetan plateau extending from Laddhak in the West to Kamproop in the East. According to Vishambhar Sahay Premi (1955), these people are known by different names in different parts of the Himalayas. Small summer settlements of the community dot the entire northern border from Niti Pass in the East to Nilang Pass in the West. The winter settlement of the community lies around Joshimath, Gopeshwar, and Uttarkashi. There are some Bhotia settlements whose members do not migrate, but such instances are very less. Nomads in the Himalayas show some common characteristic feature. Life among nomads has revolved through regular and successive change of place. It alternates between permanent to temporary habitations according to the cycle of the season. (Edward Blue).

Various causes of nomads in this community are scarcity of the fodder for the flocks during winters, unsuitability of snowfall to the sheep and goat, scarcity of food stuff as the yield of the crop is not up to the mark, non-availability of the seasonal employment in the region, health hazards of severe winter, an urge to migrate because of a long standing habit and association of migration with the mythical migration of lord Shiva from Kailash to Chamba during winters.

Social Life:

As per government notification of 1967 Bhotiya community has got a status of schedule tribes to improve their overall living condition and to make them developed. Bhotiya live in a family termed as “khu” means smoke. It means family is an institution where members of the family take food prepared in one kitchen.

This family system consists of two more nuclear families. Today also Bhotia people are practicing this type of family system. This community is paternal type of community in which eldest male of the family is main of the family. Now day’s nuclear families could also be seen in this community, reason being literacy, government jobs urbanization, mobility, modernisation and development of self-values.

Influence of Hindu society is very much significant on Bhotia. Their culture at present is no different than a Hindu culture. They have started practicing same mythology, beliefs and values of as Hindus.

In this community females have very high rank and they are also in favour of female equity.

Traditional Costume:



Figure 2: Traditional costume of Bhotiyas

Costume of Bhotiya community shows influence of both Bhotiya and Tibetan culture. Bhotia people weave their personal apparels at their home itself. Female costume mainly includes lava (woollen wrap around costume), ghagra (coloured geathered skirt), ghunghati (white head gear with brocade patch), blouse, chug (long sleeved woollen coat up to ankle)

Males usually wear long coat. Pyjama and “ pahari topi”. Two types of caps are in use. Generally the cap they wear is known as “chubadha” and another is dense piled cap known as “Chukla”. The ornaments of women are a good blend and harmony of Tibetan and Garhwali culture. (Plate)

Economic Status of Bhotiya:

Main occupation of Bhotiya people is woollen industry. Some of the Bhotia community (settled in Mana valley) are also dependent on agriculture (potato cultivation) but agriculture only serves a supplementary family income. Apart from these two occupations they also make alcohol and rare livestock mainly goats, sheep cow buffalo and pony. These people are very laborious and pay hard efforts on their businesses. The profit attainment from woollen industries is greater to other means of income. Sheep rearing is a very important

occupation of Uttarakhand form ancient times. About 65% of forestland and 15 % of grazing fields constitutes the best pastures – reason being sheep and goat rearing has been the major means of livelihood.

Table 1 Socio-economic status:

S No	Status	Upper class	Upper middle class	Middle class	Lower class
1.	Social status	-	6.15%	93.85%	-
2.	Economic status	-	-	98.46%	1.50%
3.	Socio-economic status	4.62%	6.15%	89.23%	-

The limitation of the scale was that it was unable to mention the social aspect and caste separately as a result of which inspite of the lower caste of the people, their social status became highs. People filled wrong information in order to hide their actual social and financial status, as a result socio-economic score as a whole gave a high score.

Education level: literacy and education level is shown in table no 2. Results showed that majority of people in this community have now acquired at least middle education. Percentage of illiterates is very low.

Table 2 Education level

<i>Education</i>	<i>Sample size</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Illiterate	10	20 %
Primary	7	15 %
Middle	20	40 %
Secondary	5	10 %
Higher	8	15 %
Total sample size=50		

Industry Set Up

Historical background of the industries: The history of wool is legendary in the region. Wool is considered sacred and their life revolves around it. Every winter, on the day earmarked for closing the “Badrinath shrine kapat” young maidens of Mana village weave a woollen shawl called “Beena” and “Kamla” in one day. The shawl is immersed in ghee and is wrapped around the idol of Sri Badrinath. After six months when Kapat has to be re-open two maidens of the same village weave a carpet which is offered to Sri Badrinath. Bhotia tribes practice woollen craft in the entire district. Bhotia community is traditionally a trading community. They are skilled and hardworking traders of Uttarakhand. Difficult geographical conditions and lack of transport has helped in maintaining their monopoly over their trade for decades.

Hilly areas have distinct topographical and cold climatic environment hence people of this region as per climatic necessity are very much dependent on woollen clothing. The Bhotiya tribes from ancient times of their trade with Tibet accepted the woollen industry as an essential part of their tribe in their winter villages. For centuries their women have been moving their small “pithachan” (loom). Ptdu, thulma, carpets, chutka, lava, blanket, shawl, asan, pankhi, gudma etc. are prepared very artistically. There was a very close bond between the Bhotia and Tibetans across the mountains for centuries. Every Bhotia went through some ceremony with his Tibetan counterpart enjoining permanent and exclusive trade on both end and a pledge that they would be mittars (eternal friends). (Chatopadhya-1953) Trade agreement between two was referred to as “gamyā” and was formalized at the ceremony “sarchu-mulchhu” (literally gold and silver). This Ceremony was conducted by taking a glass of water from the lake Mansarower along with a little powdered gold and silver. Both the parties drank this water and took an oath to remain faithful to each other. (Chawala, J. 1996). During



their trade with Tibet the Bhotias had to travel through inaccessible hills and valleys. After many long months of walking on these paths they would reach in wholesale markets of Tibet. Probably, this long and tortuous journey has made them courageous hardworking merchant and mountaineer. Difficult geographical condition and absence of means of transport helped them maintain their monopoly over this trade, as there was no competition. They brought borax, salt, gold, animal skin, wool, and mules, goats and sheep from Tibet and from India. They carried with them food grain, cloth, rice, oil, jaggery, saffron, tobacco, iron, coarse shawls, pankhis (large woollen shawl), gudma, ponies, and various jari-buties (medicinal plants) etc. Their trade traditionally involved bartering system of goods between buyers and sellers. Their goods were sold through agents and this trade relation continued from generation to generation. After 1962's attack by China the best quality wool stopped coming in which was a great setback to wool industry? Yet wool industry has been the only means of their living which resulted in poor economic condition of Bhotia.

Present status of woollen industries: Weaving is essentially the domain of the Bhotia women folk even today woollen industries in Chamoli are totally dependent on Bhotia womenfolk as the entire process of business such as weaving, finishing and partially merchandising is practiced by the female members of the household. They consider weaving as women's job.

Woollen industries of Chamoli can be grouped into two classes;

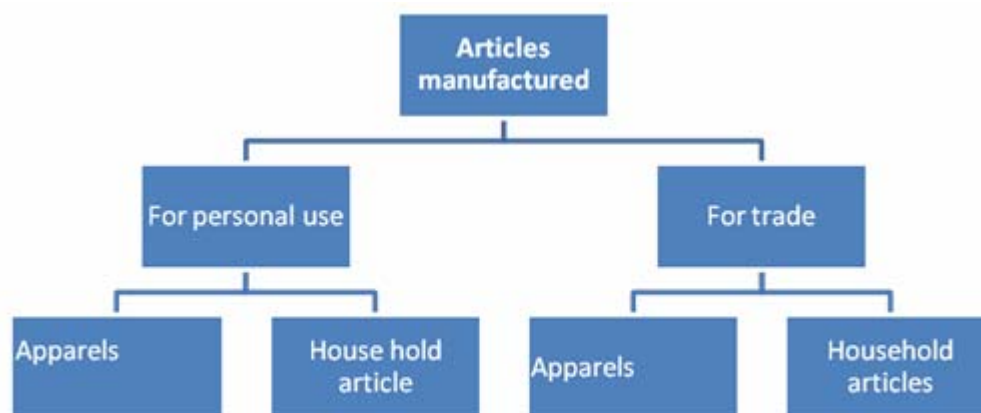


Figure 4: Product category

Table-3 Woollen Articles Produced by the *Bhotiya* Community of Garhwal

S. No.	Articles	Description	Colour Range	Price/Piece (RS)
1	<i>Dokha</i> *	Male upper costume	Cream, Grey, Black	-
2	<i>Lava</i> *	Female woollen wrapping costume	Black, Brown	250-300
3	<i>Pankhi</i> *	Fine woollen shawl	White, Cream, Brown, Black	300-700
4	<i>Shawl</i> *	Female upper garment	White, Black, Coloured	300-800
5	<i>Topi</i> *	Cap	Cream, Black, Grey (Pure Wool)	30-45
6	<i>Mufflers</i> *		Cream, Black, Grey	50-75

			(Pure Wool)	
7	<i>Sweaters*</i>		Cream, Black, (Pure Wool)	100-200
8	<i>Thulma**</i>	Piled blanket	White, Black, Brown, Grey	800-1000
9	<i>Kambal**</i>	Blanket	Black, White, Brown,	400-500
10	<i>Dun**</i>	Rugs and carpets	Multi Coloured	2000-4000(pure wool)
11	<i>Asan**</i>	Cushion	Multi Coloured	200-300
12	Wall hanging**	--	Cream Base Multi-Coloured Designing	250-300

*Apparels **Household articles*

Manufacturing Process:

It is a series of operations one after another described below:

Sourcing of wool: Mainly source of wool is from local market in semi-urban and urban places such as Naigwar and from villages in rural places like Bhimtalla, Chinka. 20% of the units have their own cattle for procurement of raw matter. Normally in every six months wool is sheared from the sheep. Although a good breed gives 2.5 kg of wool at a time and percentage of such sheep is as low as 10%. In this district an average sheep gives 1.5-2.5 K.G. Wool and percentage of such sheep ranges from 70 to 80%. This wool is rough, uneven and worn out and of cheap quality. Average diameter of the woollen yarn is 20-30 micron. For this type of wool a rear gets RS. 80-90 per kg as market price at village rate but still is generally purchased by outside merchants.

Shearing fleece: In every six or seven months, wool is sheared out from the sheep or goat, is cut by special type of shears locally called as 'ramtha'.



Figure 5: Spinning of the yarn

Sorting of wool: Bhotia sort wool quickly by opening up the wool bundle and manually, removing the dirtiest parts, burs and other physical impurities, placing each in its correct pile.

Cleaning: Because fibres are too dirty, they are subjected to cleaning by boiling the fibre in soapy water or instead of soap they traditionally use ritha in combination with river water. Then the wool is rinsed in the cold water.

Combing: Bhotia are practicing equipment locally called "Shikshnan" for combing the wool fibre. This equipment is made up of wood and in which iron wires are arranged as a comb on it.

Carding: It is done in a carding machine. These carding machines are available at centres like

Bunkar Seva Kendra, UP Khadi Gram Udyog etc.

Pulling: Sliver is formed by carding and combing the wool fibre, these fibres are loosely wound in circle.

Spinning: (plate) loose sliver is spun into the yarn by the traditional wooden spindle (*takli*). This work is carried out by males and females at leisure time or on the way to forest etc. In some families spinning is done on *charkha* or the spinning wheel.

Dyeing: Survey revealed that at present 100% Bhotias are using synthetic dyes viz. acid, basic and sulphur dyes and 10% of units rarely on demand use natural dyes extracted from walnut skin (*Juglan regia*), kilmora (*Rheum hestatus*), bichubooti (*Urtica urdis*), dolu (*Rheum tibaticum*) etc.

Local designers have very effectively used the available natural plant dyes as a design tool. But now this design tool is replaced by synthetic dyes for various reasons.



Figure 6: Weaving in 'Pithacahn' & 'Ranch'



Figure 7: Finishes given to the woven products

Weaving: (plate) a variety of woollen articles are woven employing various methods and using different tools. Tools employed for weaving are *PITHIA CHAN* (primitive loom), *ranch* (horizontal looms) shears, knife, beater, kund a (supporting stick). Rug and asans are made on vertical looms (Thagri) with knotting technique on the warp yarn followed by weft interlacing after each row. Other woollen articles i.e. shawls blankets, thulma, lava etc. are made upon ranch.

Special finish: Extra and surplus yarn is sheared off from the woven material. In some articles like rugs and asans, cutting around the boundaries of the design creates special effects. A special finish called *madhai* is applied in lava. In this process lava is immersed in hot soapy water under pressure until pilling occurs on the surface of the fabric. Fabric is rinsed and dried in the Sun. Another finish called

“teaseling” is done on the rugs using a wooden brush with hooks on it; the knotted pile surface of the woollen article is brushed to remove fluff and lint.

Marketing:

Customer demand of for manufactured goods: Domestic apparels are always in high demand and there is never slump in the market of these articles e.g. lava (a female woollen costume) is a popularly demanded article. Besides these articles like shawl, blankets, gudma (a heavy piled blanket) are mainly demanded during winters. There is a very high demand for other decorative household articles like rug, carpet, wall hanging etc. mostly during the summer season, when the tourist and pilgrimage season is at its peak.

Household units: The prevailing system of merchandising woollen goods is far from satisfactory. In the absence of a marketing centre or showroom only an aware customer can approach them to buy the commodities. They display their products on the roadside or in small kiosks (Figure 8). In addition the selling price of the article is not fixed by any formula. Generally the product sold reaps in only about 8-10% profit. They advertise and sell their products during local fares like “Gauchar mela”, “Ukhimath mela” etc.

Organisation and small-scale unit: These organisations and units have their own retail shops. They make these articles in bulk and as there is no trademark under which the product can be sold, these products are sold to traders of big cities like Lucknow, Delhi, and Dehradun. For advertising they display their articles in town fares and exhibit in tourist/ pilgrimage places in the seasons. Generally the profits taken by these units are around 10-12 %.



Figure 8: Retail set up

Government run organisations implement projects like “Mahila Utthan Yojna” and “Gramin Vikas Abhikaran Avasthapan”, 1999. The objective to start these Government run organisations was to give practical training of woollen industries among youth in order to generate employment and to save the traditional craft from extinction.

Demerits of Prevailing Techniques

Use of primitive techniques:

- 1) Today when the world is moving so fast with technology the technique involved in this craft is still primitive. Even today shepherds in Uttarakhand are unaware of these new scientific achievements. They are using locally made shears like “bakarmath” and “makhraj” for shearing fleece. It is very tedious and difficult to work with these shears.
- 2) They use their conventional labour intensive techniques to produce woollen clothes. Washing, cleaning, spinning, combing is done manually. They still use hand driven wheels and spindles, mostly the Bageshwari Charkha. It takes 8 hours to spin 250g on charkha and 200g on spindles.

- 3) Previously the thread was woven with “pathyachan” but now the use of ranch and vertical loom has been increased greatly.
- 4) Dyeing techniques are also very poor. They do not have wide range of colours and designs. Though the products manufactured by these units are quality wise very good and are comparable with the woollen products of Himachal Pradesh, but do not have recognition of their own.
- 5) Competition is too high and marketing policy is severely bad.

Steps Taken By the Government

- Government has established so many wool cutting centres in various districts. In Chamoli there are Mana, Mulari, and Kasali ghat.
- U. P. khadi gram udyog is providing modern charkha, 8-6 spindles working simultaneously but this requires long, clean and carded wool.
- Government has started small-scale units under various schemes to promote self-employment among youths and to give practical training to them.

At the end of fifth five year plan according to government industrial planning district industry centre were establishment was to help the workers and the units in every possible manner in the district level. Majority of the population residing in district Chamoli is rural hence in 6th five year plan rural development was focussed by the government and the objective were –

- Development of interior backward areas.
- Development of resources for upliftment of SC/ST.
- Providing employment to unemployment poor villages.
- Provide self-employment to literate unemployment.

For development of hilly area following centres were established by the Indian government and state government:

- 1) *Bunkar sewa Kendra* established in upper Chamoli to provide knowledge and skills to hand weavers and to make them aware of new techniques of weaving designing and dyeing.
- 2) Planning for literate unemployed youth: Prime minister of India implemented this scheme during 1983-84. In which 94 men and women of district Chamoli received loan from various banks for starting their own small scale units, preference was given to scheduled tribes and handicaps.
- 3) Planning for the weaker section in urban area: UP Government started this scheme for the up-liftment of weaker section in towns and cities. On 2nd October 1984 100% financial assistance was granted to SC/ST for setting up their own weaving units. In year 1981-82 under this planning production was made by *Bhotias* in their own houses and according labour was given to them. Initially under this scheme 43 persons got employment and net production for the year was RS 41 lakhs.
- 4) In 1983-84 “*kaleen Kendra*” was established for training of the carpet weavers.

Preserve the Dying Art

A traditional art of Garhwal, a rich heritage of culture is dyeing for so many reasons viz. urbanization, globalization, less profit by the craft, high competition, lack of competent

design and colour range discussed and analysed earlier. Following points can be considered to save the dyeing art.

- Design and colour range should be introduced competitive enough to stand in the domestic and international market yet preserving cultural essence.
- Scientific and organized efforts should be made to uplift the tribal society and thus their art.
- Coaching and vocational centres should be established to make the local folk craft oriented.
- Establishing proper marketing centres and merchandising should be channelled and managed properly to get maximum profit.
- Entrepreneurial schemes for woollen industries should be increased to meet the goal of unemployment through uplifting local traditional craft of the region.
- Whole manufacturing process and selling arrangement should be scientifically governed and for it training programs should be given to the entrepreneurs.
- Raising of live stocks from which raw material is availed should be encouraged with certain efforts for raring good breeds of cattle.
- Most importantly special efforts should be made for tapping the natural plant resources in the form of dyes which are used command higher price as they are considered premium products are nontoxic non allergic to the skin and are aesthetically appealing and have a niche market of its own.
- New design as per demand should be practiced. It has to make a modern generation aware of our scientific and eco-friendly heritage to be of relevance in today's world.

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