



# The untold story of Pattu textile weaving traditions in the Indian Mountains of Kullu Valley, India

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## Abstract

*Traditional art and craft are evidence of India's cultural legacy. Handloom is an important part of Kullu valley's cottage industry. Himachal Pradesh's tribal people are well-known for producing wide variety of woollen apparel. Pattu is one among them and holds a distinctive position among Kullu's textiles. It's a hand-woven craft that Kullu women wear as a traditional outer garment. The difficult living conditions and limited resource availability have made local crafts an important part of people's life and pattu is no exception. It is an integral part of local communities' social and cultural life, balancing utility with decoration. It's important to preserve the core characteristics and essence alive. The paper explores the process of Pattu weaving, its types and motifs and how this craft can be revived in today's contemporary society. It also addresses the prominent characteristics and the need for cohesive work collaborations that promote the craft's progressive expansion.*

**Keywords:** Pattu, Kullu, Himachal Pradesh, Handloom, Weaving, Craft, Design.

## Introduction

With a rich history, cultures, and stories, India is known throughout the world for its vibrancy. Every year, the presence of tourists who come to see the various traditions reflects the Indian mark on the world map. From freezing mountains to arid deserts and the southern sea belt, the diversity of language, food, traditions, colors, myths, and stories reflects the experience of multiplicity<sup>1</sup>.

Craftsmanship and artisan skills are the backbone of India's nonfarm rural economy. Artisans use indigenous methods of production, traditional skills, and a technique to create a handmade product that is widely popular in both Indian and international markets<sup>2</sup>. The application and understanding of traditional skills and techniques is unparalleled in any other occupation. The handicraft industry is classified as unorganized, and the Indian industry's organized sector is eager to absorb the products of these rural handicraft and handloom industries. This industry has benefited economically from the establishment of various organizations to mobilize rural communities to produce their traditional handicrafts in accordance with market demands<sup>3</sup>.

In the midst of lush green mountains, a beautiful valley known as Kullu is home to the most amazing woven textile crafts. The woven craft cherishes its uniqueness and beauty both nationally and internationally, with tales and stories that can be heard by locals<sup>4</sup>. The Kullu Valley, located between Manali and Largi, is a lush green valley carved out by the Beas River. This valley is

renowned for its temples, pine and deodar trees, and vast apple orchards. Kullu valley is known as the "Valley of the Gods" or "Dev Bhumi" because of the numerous pilgrimage sites for Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs. Kullu is well-known for its magnificent Himalayan mountain views and open valley grasslands. Kullu is famous for its Kullu shawl, which is made from a variety of natural fibres such as pashmina, sheep wool, and angora<sup>5</sup>.



Figure-1: Weaving in Kullu.



Figure-2: Kullu Architecture.



Figure-3: Kullu jewellery.



Figure-4: Caps of Kullu.



Figure-5: Pattu of Kullu.

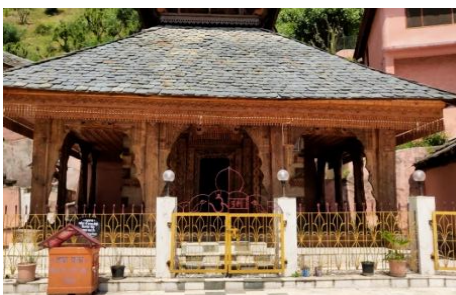


Figure-6: Temple of Kullu.

### Popular Textile Crafts of Kullu

**Kullu Shawls:** Kullu is well-known for its magnificent woven textiles, also known as Kullu shawls<sup>6</sup>. A shawl is a 1 x 2-meter piece of light weight woollen fabric. It is typically draped around and over the chest and shoulders. Merino wool, Angora wool, Pashmina wool, and yarn from local sheep found in Kullu and nearby villages are used for making the shawl. To reduce

the cost of a shawl, yarn blending is also preferred. Kullu shawls are distinguished by their traditional coloured stripes woven border. Borders are woven separately and then applied to the edges of shawls.



Figure-7: Kullu Shawls.

**Kullu Cap:** The magnificence of Kullu caps has cast a spell in the region. The Kullu Cap is made out of colourful woollen cloth. The cap is round in shape, comes in different sizes for adults and children, and has colourful woven borders with geometrical designs.

Kullu is also well-known for its cane and wood crafts. Cane is the long and hard central part of certain plants such as bamboo, which is known locally as 'Nargal.' It can be found growing wild in the upper reaches of the valley. Cane is used to make baskets (Pataris) and other items. It is also used to transport grasses, fruits, and cow dung. Kullu's primitive art is woodcraft. The exquisite temples, rural houses, and castles feature exquisitely carved flora and fauna.

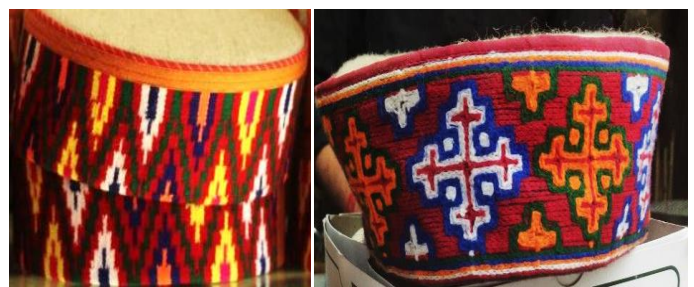


Figure-8: Kullu Caps also known as Bhuttico.

## Pattu, a Forgotten Traditional Textile

When winter arrives in Kullu's beautiful valleys, the women wrap themselves in a pattu, a rectangular piece of handwoven fabric, to keep warm in the coldest of temperatures<sup>7</sup>. The Pattu is a Kullu 'delicacy' that has yet to be discovered.

The history of weaving Pattu spans many generations, and it is still woven in almost every other household today. Pattu is available in a variety of designs, ranging from plain and plaid to ek, do, and teen phool. It is made in two equal-sized parts and then hand stitched together in the middle to form a full Pattu. The designs are created with such skill that they appear seamless after the two parts are stitched together. The length of a Pattu can range from 50 to 52 inches, while the width can range from 12 to 15 inches, depending on the needs of the consumer. The pattu, similarly, can be prepared in various ways, according to consumer requirement.



Figure-9: Pattu.

### Types of Pattu

On the basis of design, Pattu is divided in three main categories:

**Ek Phul Pattu-** It consists of only one Dhari (border) and it takes approximately 5-6 days to be ready.

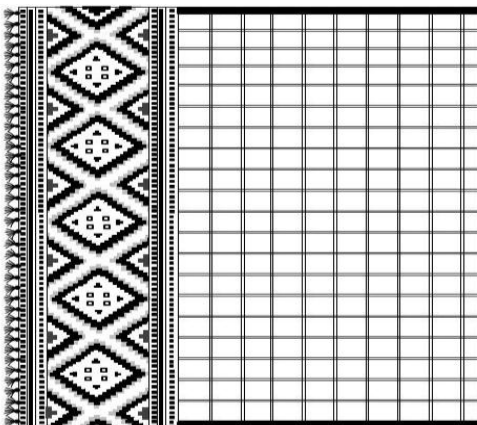


Figure-10: Ek Phul Pattu.

**Do Phul Pattu-** It consist of two Dhari's (borders) and it takes 15-20 days to be woven completely.

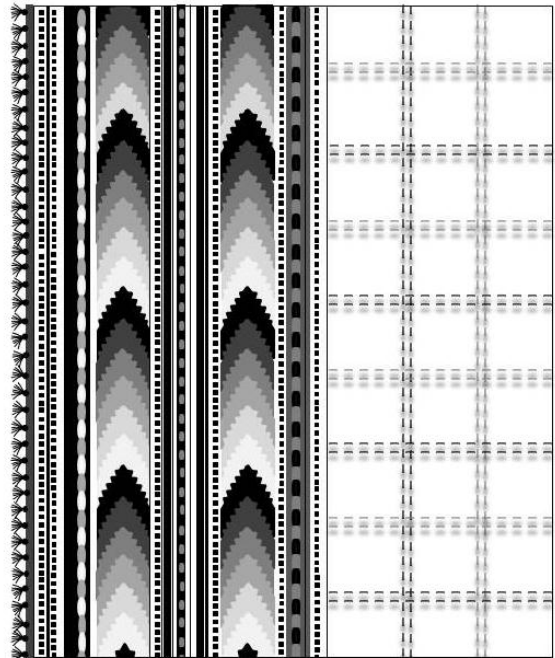


Figure-11: Do Phul Pattu.

**Teen Phul Pattu-** This is worn by brides on their wedding day and it takes almost a month time to weave it.

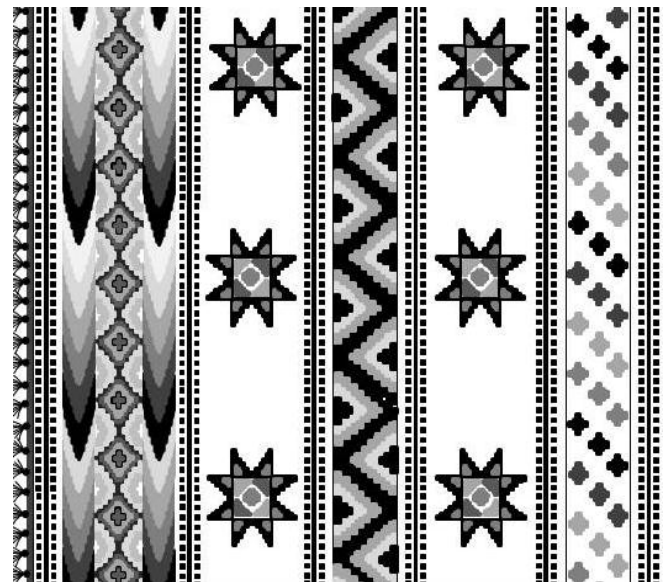


Figure-12: Teen Phul Pattu.

The average cost of pattu in local market varies between 2000 to 15000 rupees depending upon the design intricacy and time taken to weave.

On the basis of weave, Pattu is again divided in three categories:

**Chitra pattu** – This fabric is woven in hounds tooth weave and is referred as regular ‘Plain pattu’.

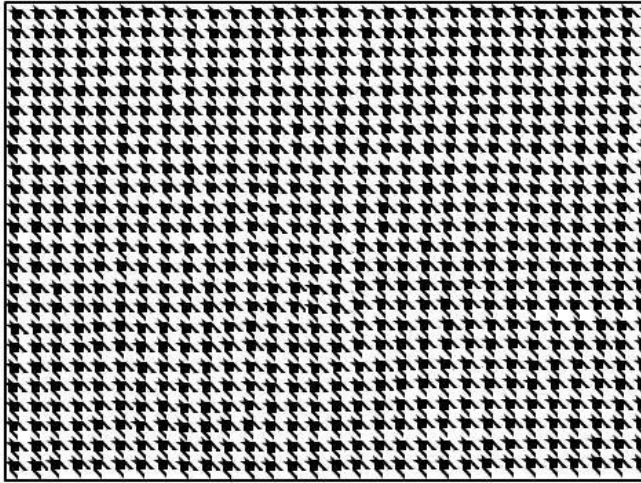


Figure-13: Chitra Pattu.

**Dabi Dari Pattu** – This fabric consists of dabi checks.

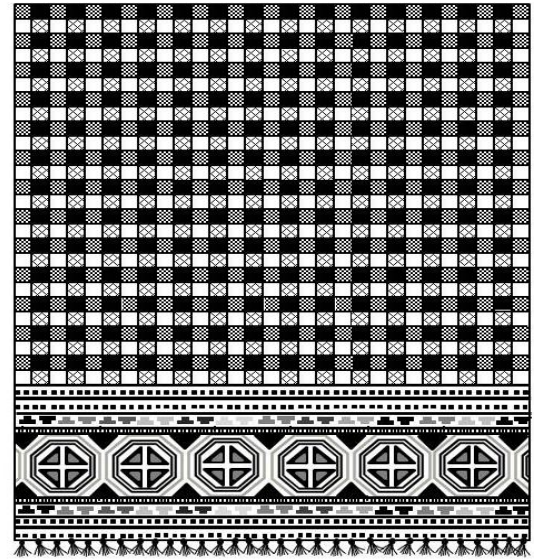


Figure-15: Dabi dari Pattu.

**Mongoru Pattu** – Mongoru Pattu is woven in diamond twill weave.

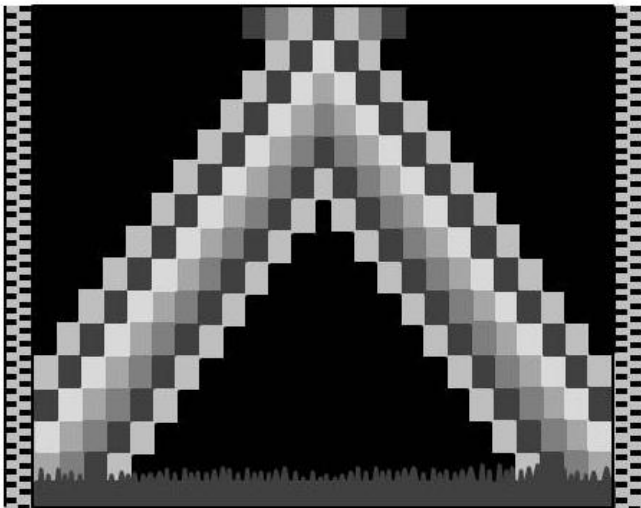


Figure-14: Mongoru Pattu.

**Colours:** The harmonious color combination of Pattu is a testimony to the enriched art and craft of the region. Eight different types of colors are used in different pattu among which seven colors are from the band of rainbow and black hues in addition. Red, black, yellow, green, and blue are the five primary colours taken from the five elements of life.

**The Plain Pattu:** It is constructed with lateral and vertical straight lines, with red borders.

**The Chitra Pattu:** It has a stunning blend of black and white colours with a rich red border.

**Daba Pattu:** It is composed of a fusion of black and white ground with coloured threads on the ends.

**Ek Phulwala Pattu:** It is a great combination of many hues with a single ethnic pattern on either side.

**Teen Phulwala Pattu:** It's a lovely combination of bright colors with three distinct motifs on each side. It features three borders and up to eight colors, which include black, white, red, orange, purple, yellow, green and pink.



Figure-16: Colors used in Pattu.

**Motifs:** Pattu designs are garnished and influenced by the weaver's background, environment, religion and customs. The following is a list of a few typical pattu motifs and designs: i. **Phul-** The different types of flowers and their combinations are used as motifs in pattu. ii. **Tara-** refers to star, iii. **Mandir-** refers to temple, iv. **Bel-** is vine and leaves pattern, v. **Chortan-** refers to Buddha Temple, vi. **Trishul-** It is an Indian trident and is commonly used as a Hindu-Buddhist religious symbol. The word means "three spears" in Sanskrit and Pali and is found in the hands of almost all the deities, especially Lord Shiva. vii. **Ganesha-** Lord Ganesha is the most worshipped God in Hinduism.

**Draping a Pattu:** Pattu is worn over their clothing (suit, which comprises of a shirt up to the knees and salwar/pyjama) and is embraced with two traditional ways of draping. It is a full length piece of fabric covering a women's entire body from neck to feet. The most common way involves draping the entire pattu around the body and securing below the shoulders on the front side with a silver pins or broaches called 'bhoomni', which is a long silver chain. A muffler, known as a 'gachchi,' is knotted around the waist to keep the Pattu in place.

The other way involves draping the pattu around the body and securing only one end below the shoulders.

**The Looms:** There are several variety of looms utilised for weaving pattu. Traditional looms include pit loom, warp loom, warping loom, box frame loom, warp weighted loom, vertical

warp loom, horizontal warp loom and frame loom. Presently, the pit loom is in almost every home in the district, and everyone can be seen spinning yarn on a spindle.

The other houses, mainly the non-household industry of the region make use of handlooms, which are above ground level. These are also known as 'rachh' and have paddles above the ground, supported with a wooden frame. They are also largely dependent on fly-shuttle frame looms.

The pit loom used by them is set up with a pit in the ground having peddles; so that the weaver may handle peddles that regulate the movement of the harnesses or 'Brua' by putting his legs within the pit. This loom is quite popular in India as it's inexpensive and easy to maintain. Due to its structure and set up, it also protects the weavers from the cold throughout the winter.

The other varieties of hand looms are also used that are set above the ground. The weaver sits in the middle of the loom, with parapet walls on either side to support the loom frames and accessories. The rest of the features are identical to those of a pit loom. However, due to the cost of construction of the wooden frames, these are more expensive. These looms also carry advantages as many different weaving designs can be produced because the weaver can operate with more than two treadles and these looms can be moved from one place to another.



Figure-17: Style of wearing Pattu.



Figure-18: Pit Loom.



Figure-19: Handloom set above ground.

### Tools and Raw Materials

**Wool:** Wool is regarded as the symbol of ‘purity’ by the people of Himachal. Cashmilon wool is popularly used as the foremost raw material. Other raw material includes angora, pashmina, local wool and merino wool.

**Weighing machine:** It is used to determine the yarn's weight prior to dyeing process.

**Flying shuttle:** It carries the weft across the shed and helps in making different types of designs.

**Pit loom:** It is the most accepted loom used for weaving pattu.

**Charkha:** It is used to make the yarn into spools.

**Carding Machine:** It is used in cleaning the impurities entangled in the wool and the straightening of the fibres.

**Takli:** It is a small support-style spindle used to spin wool fibres into yarn. It is known for spinning a much finer diameter yarn.



Figure-20: Flying Shuttle.



Figure-21: Wool.



Figure-22: Takli Tools and Raw materials for weaving Pattu.



Figure-23: Charkha.

### Preparation Process: Weaving

**Preparation of Yarn: Wool making:** The weavers often outsource the dyed wool from marketplaces, however some households use white, brown, and black coloured wool from local sheep known as 'bhedu' or from the Gaddi community. Before being used for weaving, bhedu wool goes through a various cleaning processes<sup>8</sup>.

The first step is carried out by shearing off the wool from the sheep. This shorn wool is referred as ‘fleece’. Any impurities that can be physically removed are handpicked before the fleece is washed. The fleece is then washed with water and detergent to get rid of the remaining impurities, after which it is left for drying. Once dried, the wool is spun into yarn using a Takli (a yarn winder made up of wood), and is ready to be woven. This process is known as ‘Soorna’.

After the wool is obtained, it is wound onto bobbins using a charkha (spindle) to make the warping process easy and for carrying the ‘Baana’ (weft). The weft yarn is filled up in the ‘Naaru’ (shuttle) using a Charkha. The yarn is rolled onto the detachable rod on the Naaru, which is then attached back to the Naaru once it is entirely rolled. In case the weavers don’t have a Bhedu, Cashmilon wool is sourced from the market.

**Pre-Weaving Processes: Warping:** The ‘taana’ (warp) is wound around an ‘airnu’ (warp frame). The weaver starts by tying one end of the taana to one of the rods in the corner, then winding the yarn across the adjacent rod, and then upward on to the rod above it, then across to the adjacent end and then finally upward again<sup>9</sup>. The process continues till the weaver reaches the

last rod (or till the desired length of the warp) and then repeats the process backwards till the weaver reaches the first rod. The whole process is then repeated over and over again depending on the number of ends required in the taana. The taana is then removed from the frame and a knot is tied at the end of it.

**Gaathna (drafting and denting):** Before the process is started, the 'brua' (harness) is detached from the loom and the 'kanghi' (reed) is detached from the 'aathu' (beater). The weaver wraps four ends of the taana around his/her four fingers at a time. The ends are then placed through the heald eyes (made up of yarn) of the brua with the help of fingers. After passing the ends through the brua, they are then passed through the 'ghar' (dents) of the kanghi. Hence, the drafting and denting is done simultaneously. The end is passed through each heald eye and two through each ghar. Drafting pattern follows straight drafting.

The 'brua' is placed back in the loom, supported by 'gugti' (treadles) and the kanghi is reattached to the 'aathu'. One end of the taana is tied to a sturdy wooden or steel rod in parts. Each part is knotted equally and tightly to maintain uniform tension throughout the taana. The other end with the remaining warp folds up onto the loom in such a way that as the weaving process continues and the fabric wraps around the cloth beam, the warp can easily move. The loom is now ready for weaving.

**Weaving Process:** The weaving process starts by creating a shed in the warp for easy insertion of the weft. The weaver presses the Paoli (paddle) with her feet. This result in the harness linked to that paddle to lift, hence a shed is created.

The weaver presses the paddles according to the weaving structure and then passes the weft through the shed using the Naaru (shuttle). The weft is then battened in place using the aathu (beater). The beater is pulled towards the weaver till it reaches the weft and every pick is secured in place using kanghi. The process is repeated over and over again throughout the whole weaving process<sup>10</sup>.

**Post-Weaving Process:** The pattu is woven in two parts. The pieces woven on the loom is half the width and double the length of the pattu. Once woven, the piece is cut off from the loom and cut in between width wise, to separate the two parts of the pattu.

Both the parts are then sewn by hand lengthwise. The protruding ends are knotted to make 'choklu' (tassels). After the pattu is completed, it is sent to 'bhuttico' for dry cleaning.

## Conclusion

Woven clothing have been recognised for their unique originality and craftsmanship, in the same way Pattu of Kullu is recognized for their intricacy and delicacy, but handicrafts are on the verge of extinction owing to development, market

competition, and changing social setups of tribes<sup>11</sup>. Men and women working at their huge looms, pausing to feed the bobbin through the warp threads and working in the exquisite perfection of the geometrical motif needs significant craftsmanship and years of practise and experience. Injuries in accidents and other health problems including back ache and poor eyesight due to too excess strain is very common in their profession which is currently impact their ability to work, hence affecting their livelihood.

New designs, colours, and innovations are more readily accepted by the markets with cheaper alternatives, but clusters lag behind due to lack of innovation skills and the reach of design intervention and low prices. The informal pedagogy, learnings from family members and within the social sphere of the village—must be preserved for future generations if pattu weaving and the creative process underlying it are to survive.

Any craft requires three elements: the equipment, raw materials, and the skill and expertise to employ the resources, raw materials and equipment creatively. It is possible to learn the expertise required to combine them creatively with relatively few instructions.

Weaving provides manual skill, creativity, confidence, hue and appearance expertise, and, lastly beautiful things to utilize or put on sale. As one gains expertise and understanding, the breadth of design expands. Although there hasn't been much change in the traditional designs of the pattu, people have been coming up with different ways to drape the pattu, which might greatly affect how the garment is worn by the current youth and other people.

It is important to mainstream the weavers and seek to strengthen the craft identity through appropriate craft intervention. The scope of craft is limitless, necessitating greater public awareness and implementation of government programmes. They have strength to resist the market if proper institution support is provided and can expand the marketing facilities of these products.

**Local terms glossary:** Aathu – Beater, Airnu - Warping frame, Baju - Wears in hand, Bumni - Silver jewellery worn with pattu, Chalk - Tassels, Chandrahaar - Necklace, Checks on pattu - Dabi dari pattu, Dhari – Borders, Diamond twill – Mongoru, Gathana - Drafting & Denting, Ghar (kanji ka ghar) – Dents, Gokhru – Earring, Gachhi - Cloth used as belt, Hounds tooth weave – Chitra, Kangi - Reed (made out of bamboo), Kutai - Yarn twisting using takli, Local name of sheep – Vedhu, Local term of warping - Banna Lagana, Local term for shuttle – Naru, Local term of spindle – Charkha, Local term of yarn winder – Takli, Local term of loom – Rachh, Local term of harness – Brua, Local term of Beater – Aathu, Local term of wood used for uplifting harness – Gugti, Motifs - uongru - Swastik, Naalu – shuttle, Paoli - leg paddle, Process of filling yarn in shuttle – Sorna, Tik – Mangtikaa, Laung - Nose pin.

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