

THE ANCESTRAL ART: AN INDIGENOUS BACKSTRAP LOOM OF THE VAIPHEI TRIBE OF MANIPUR, INDIA

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Abstract: *Traditional Weaving using blackstrap loom called 'puan-bu' which is a symbol of discipline and prestige of a woman has been practiced among the Vaiphei Indigenous people of Manipur for several decades, and it has played an important role in the community, particularly among the women. However, no study of the corpus of recorded knowledge about Vaiphei Indigenous handicrafts on weaving has been conducted to date. This study aims to document the process involve in weaving, identify the equipment and raw materials use on the traditional loom among the Vaiphei's. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to interview people between January 2021 and December 2022 to gather information about the Vaiphei tribe's traditional weaving in 3(three) different villages. From the study conducted, 33(thirty three) informants were interviewed and various weaving equipment and certain numbers of raw materials involved in weaving were identified. Traditional blackstrap loom weaving has been practiced by the Vaiphei's for centuries, not only as a duty to provide for their family's basic needs but also as a discipline and honor. It is demonstrates to be of a highly regarded culture value in the society. But, According to surveys, the younger generations are uninformed of the skill and technique of weaving, as well as the traditional meanings of each traditional outfit. As such, the rich indigenous knowledge of the Vaiphei community faced a threat due to the process of modernization and other certain factors.*

Keywords: Back strap loom, Bamboo, Cane, Cultural expression, weaving

1. Introduction

'Textiles are central to not only our daily lives but our cultural identity and human heritage' states Henry skupniewicz in Artisans center (2023). Traditional weaving is a functional need and a professional practice among indigenous women who are guardian of culture at home and in the community (Dewan,2002). They are stories not confined to writing, Instead, they are living, breathing, audiovisual narratives – intangible cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation (Chen, 2023). Zbucha(2022) also state "Traditional crafts are also vital for the restoration and conservation of heritage. Traditional techniques and know-how are the ones allowed to regain the original shape of both built cultural heritage."Curkovic (2021) brings that 'The results of the researchers in the world show that traditional crafts play a very important role in presenting the culture and traditions of any country and provide opportunities for employment with low capital investments'. Ancient handicraft techniques in many societies across the world they still play an integral role in daily life. These products are products are unique and often personalized to each individual's taste and preference and they have been a source of livelihood, heritage and creativity (Wadhwa, 2017). Therefore, it is significant for the protection of traditional folk arts and crafts which is an important development direction for the professional construction of designs art disciplines, which deserve to be further explored (Sufang,2019).

Backstrap weaving is one of the oldest forms of weaving. It involves set of sticks, threads or strings and the hand technique of the weaver. However, the stories and the significance behind the patterns and designs in the woven products were not yet known to the new generations (Napanoy, 2019). 'The most primitive weaving technique known is the backstrap loom. It receives its name from its primary constituent- a strap that is worn around the weaver's waist. Weaving using primitive tools is a practice that has stood the test of time. Historical archaeological evidence of the use of blackstrap looms has been found across Peru, Gautemala, Bolivia, China, Tibet, Korean, Japan, Myanmar and India- specifically in Ladakh and the North-East, where they are still in use today. In several communities in the North East state of India, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Assam backs trap loom is a customary and domestic practice for women and is passed down the generation in a family' Map academy (2022). The backstrap weaving of Bontoc is full of mathematical ideas and concepts. Mathematical skills are also seen in their weaving. It all starts in the counting principle (Napanoy, 2019). Also known as loin loom or body tension loom, This loom is operated using the lower body to regulate the tension on the wrap threads. The backstrap loom is a simple yet elegant mechanism which is easy to assemble, easy to dismantle and can be stored anywhere. Traditionally the various components of the looms are made of locally available wood and bamboo. It looks like a simple set of wood and bamboo however, originally varieties of bamboo and wood are specifically chosen to meet the desirable needs of the weaver. However, with the change of time and unavailability of natural resources in the present time, although a few women from the community practice weaving, the original equipments were found to be replaced with other readily availability materials.

Weaving using a traditional backstrap loom among the *Vaiphei* indigenous people can be traced back several decades ago; it played a pivotal role in the community, especially for the womenfolk. It contributed immensely to the socio-economic aspects alleviating the sustenance of household livelihood. The valuable traditional products obtained further symbolize honor, discipline, and can be given as a show of love and affection on significant occasions, such as funerals. It was also crucial in preserving the *Vaiphei* tribes' culture and traditions. A qualitative study is used in this study to identify, and document the process involve in weaving among the Vaiphei's in three (three) selected Vaiphei villages in Churachandpur district. This study also captured the various types of backstrap loom components, the raw materials used to produce the equipments, and meticulous documentation of the procedure involved in weaving in order to obtain the exquisite Vaiphei traditional attires and clothing's product.

Weaving is a practice that is deeply embedded in the culture of the people and community (Inoveru et al., 2021). And the knowledge of weaving is not passed on by writing but by Indigenous process of person-to-person communication, by watching and practicing (Dewan, 2002). Poorna et al. (2014) stressed that "since preservation empowers the community/country to protect its knowledge from misuse, it will be of great benefit for the community to document and preserve its traditional knowledge in the contemporary format that will be familiar for the future generation and can be utilized for better development of the community as traditional knowledge is a knowledge that accumulates over time". Dewan (2002) describes that By preserving, they educate future generations, show pride in being part of a unique culture and affirm their lasting connection to their ancestors. Dangi and Saraf (2017) stressed that traditional knowledge is mostly stored in people's minds and is passed on orally rather than in

written format, which can be easily lost if the person carrying the information passes away. Therefore this information should be documented and stored in some physical format. Laloo (2019) emphasized that libraries being the holders of various knowledge, play a vital role in documenting and preserving the knowledge of handicrafts of the indigenous people. Dimmuanching (2019) contended that "the threats faced by a community on their traditional practices can only be solved if the local people take initiatives on documenting, by sharing their knowledge to the concerned professional and making it available for use by any interested person".

1.1 Expression of Culture through Arts and Crafts

Traditional arts and crafts are a medium of cultural expression and play an important role in preserving the culture and history of a community or a culture. Clifford Geertz in 1983 in his essay "Art as a Cultural System." Bring 'art is a way of life, and as such, it is a fundamental part of the culture of a people.' Yang, (2018) in his studies brings, It is a means of preserving and promoting cultural and artistic traditions, such as various techniques and skills of traditional crafts are transmitted from generation to generation. For many countries, a significant unique heritage is retained in their handicrafts. Zbucha, (2022) Traditional crafts are also vital for the restoration and conservation of heritage. Traditional techniques and know-how are the ones allowed to regain the original shape of both built cultural heritage. Yang, (2018) Cultural heritage embodied in traditional crafts is an integral part of any nation which reflects the culture and tradition of a particular region. Chakma et al.,(2022) also state 'The culture and sustainable development of East Timor Women Australia (ETWA) are centered on traditional textiles and weaving as a medium for cultural preservation and poverty reduction at the same time'. They have also been a point of interaction and sharing of ideas (Wadhwa, 2017)

The results of the researchers in the world show that traditional crafts play a very important role in presenting the culture and traditions of any country and provide opportunities for employment with low capital investments (Curkovic,2021). Ancient handicraft techniques in many societies across the world they still play an integral role in daily life. These products are products are unique and often personalized to each individual's taste and preference and they have been a source of livelihood, heritage and creativity (Wadhwa,2017).In fact, traditional folk arts and crafts are also an integral part of design art. Moreover, it is necessary to pay attention to traditional folk arts and crafts in order to be successful design. Therefore, it is significant for the protection of traditional folk arts and crafts which is an important development direction for the professional construction of designs art disciplines, which deserve to be further explored (Sufang,2019). Das (2015) Traditional Indian handloom, on the other hand, is highly regarded in the worldwide market and is in high demand in local marketplaces in the Bargarh District of Odisha. However, in spite of its value and significance it has been found to be facing threats as Wadhwa (2017) states that, 'These traditional crafts are being marginalized due to urbanization and industrialization. Artisans are abandoning crafts in favor of more lucrative professions. There is an imminent danger of traditional crafts becoming extinct'.

1.2 Sustainable use of biological resources in Traditional weaving

The use of traditional knowledge related to biological resource is not restricted to the lives and livelihoods of agrarian, rural and indigenous societies (Srivastava,2016).Traditional tools used by aboriginal communities, inter alia, include tools for making woolen products like handloom, spinning

wheel, spinning top etc (Singh, 2021). Traditional weaving processes such as picking cotton, sprout, ginning cotton, carpeting and fluffing cotton, spinning cotton into thread, dyeing, starching, and winding threads into skeins (Changkija, 2013). Among the tribal people of the region, the designs and colors of the garments embody symbolic meaning and the cultural identity of the tribe (Changkija, 2013). The intricate motifs and designs, and the combination of colors, all reflect the social status and ethnic origins of the people (Singh et al., 2008). Changkija, (2013) also added, Such symbolic meanings are reflection of their past as head hunters and also represent significant indicators of merit amongst the community members, more than just personal decorations, jewelry symbolizes social and economic status. In the North East region of India, each tribe or community has its own specific designs and motifs (Panda &Thoujam , 2010). So as such, weaving has a very long tradition in Naga society (Changkija, 2013). And the people of Nagaland have a rich and varied cultural heritage. In Manipur, this craft has been woven with the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the natives of Manipur since time immemorial (Panda &Thoujam, 2010). Khantoon et al., (2014) also states that Handloom weaving is the most culturally and traditionally practiced industry in Manipur. The Naga Handloom and Handicraft have and still are given utmost priority by the tribals as it is a part of their cultural identity and is what makes them different from people of other states (Murumi ,2019). Weaving in Manipur is a time-honored occupation, fine-tuned to an art with its intricate designs. Women undertook weaving as a part of their domestic chores (Panda &Thoujam, 2010). Therefore, Handman textiles are important sources of Traditional Knowledge with symbolic and ritual meaning. They can serve as the conduct of cultural information (Tepper, 2008).

1.3 The dying of the backstrap loom

In spite of the long history of its importance for the tribal people, it has been found that the traditional knowledge of weaving is slowly losing its place among the younger generation. According to Singh et al, (2008) In modernization and rapid acculturation process, this culturally important heritage of women is at risk and eroding. Pand and Thoujam (2010)also state that " Handloom weaving has been practiced by the Meiteis which was even insignificant with the culture and tradition, but due to certain conditions the traditional looms of Manipur are rapidly changing in terms of designs, motifs, yarns, and posses, majority of the weaver themselves are not aware of the textile woven and produced. It must also be noted that imported synthetic dyes have completely replaced the traditional dyes. Similarly, (Changkija ,2012)states that " preparing the wrap for weaving and finally weaving cloth was widely practiced by the older generations. But, today, very few, if not nobody, knows about the natural dyeing process, thus considered as a dying art. Marumi also states that " today we do witness many new additions in the Naga Handloom and Handicrafts of the state which are made in order to meet the needs and demands of the people. Singh et al, (2008) "Weaving is one of the major traditional sources of income and livelihood. However, the younger generation does not show considerable interest in learning and continuing such culturally important practices. Indigenous knowledge is essential to development. It must be gathered, organized and disseminated in the same systematic way as modern knowledge, (Agarwal, 1995).

2.Methodology

The study was conducted from January 2021 to December 2022, wherein a semi-structured questionnaire was framed to interview the villagers to collect information about Vaiphei traditional back strap loom. During data collection, each house from all the three villages was visited and identified if

there were traditional looms in all the houses, and all the households were also asked if they had the knowledge of traditional weaving and its equipments. A personal interview was conducted among respondents who have knowledge of weaving and traditional cloths; these include – 33 (thirty three) Informants from the selected villages. And a special meeting with the Chairman of the Vaiphei Literature Society, the village chief from the selected villages was also held. Intensive observation and interviews utilizing an audio recorder, written notes, and photography were used to document samples on the basis of the name of objects, raw material, components, usage, and procedure of weaving, as well as cultural importance.

2.1 Study site

The present study is conducted in three (three villages) of Churachandpur district, namely Chongkhozo village of Henglep sub-division of Churachandpur district and Pengjang village and Kangvai village of Churachandpur sub-division of Churachandpur district of Manipur, India.

3. Data Interpretation and Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Village Name	No. of house covered	Loom in incomplete	loom in good condition	Currently weaving	Other looms	Age group (30-60)
V-1	62	24	10	5	NIL	11
V-II	67	17	7	3	6	8
V-III	70	15	7	3	5	14

This table provides a snapshot of the weaving activity and expertise in different villages, highlighting the number of looms, their condition, and the number of knowledgeable individuals, particularly those in the 30-60 age group. In Village -I, 62 houses were surveyed. There are 24 looms were identified however all of them are not in complete sets, with only 10 in good condition. Currently, 5 looms are being used for weaving which are in good and usable condition. This village used only traditional *puan-bu* for weaving and no other type of looms were used. 11 people are interviewed who are aged between 30 and 60. In Village-II, 67 houses were surveyed. 24 looms were identified however only 7 looms were in good condition. Currently, 3 looms are being used for weaving. Here, in this village 7 additional other types of looms other than *puan-bu* were identified which were mostly flying shuttle looms. There are 8 individuals with weaving knowledge of aged between 30 and 60. In Village -III, 70 houses were surveyed. 15 *puan-bu* were identified with 7 in good condition. Currently, 3 looms are being used for weaving. There are 5 other types of loom in additional to *puan-bu* looms. There are 14 individuals with weaving knowledge of aged between 30 and 60. Hence, a total number of 33 person with *puan-bu* knowledge were interviewed. The other type of looms identified were mostly flying shuttle looms.

The following are the raw materials used by the Vaiphei tribe in making the different equipment of the *Puan-bu*:-

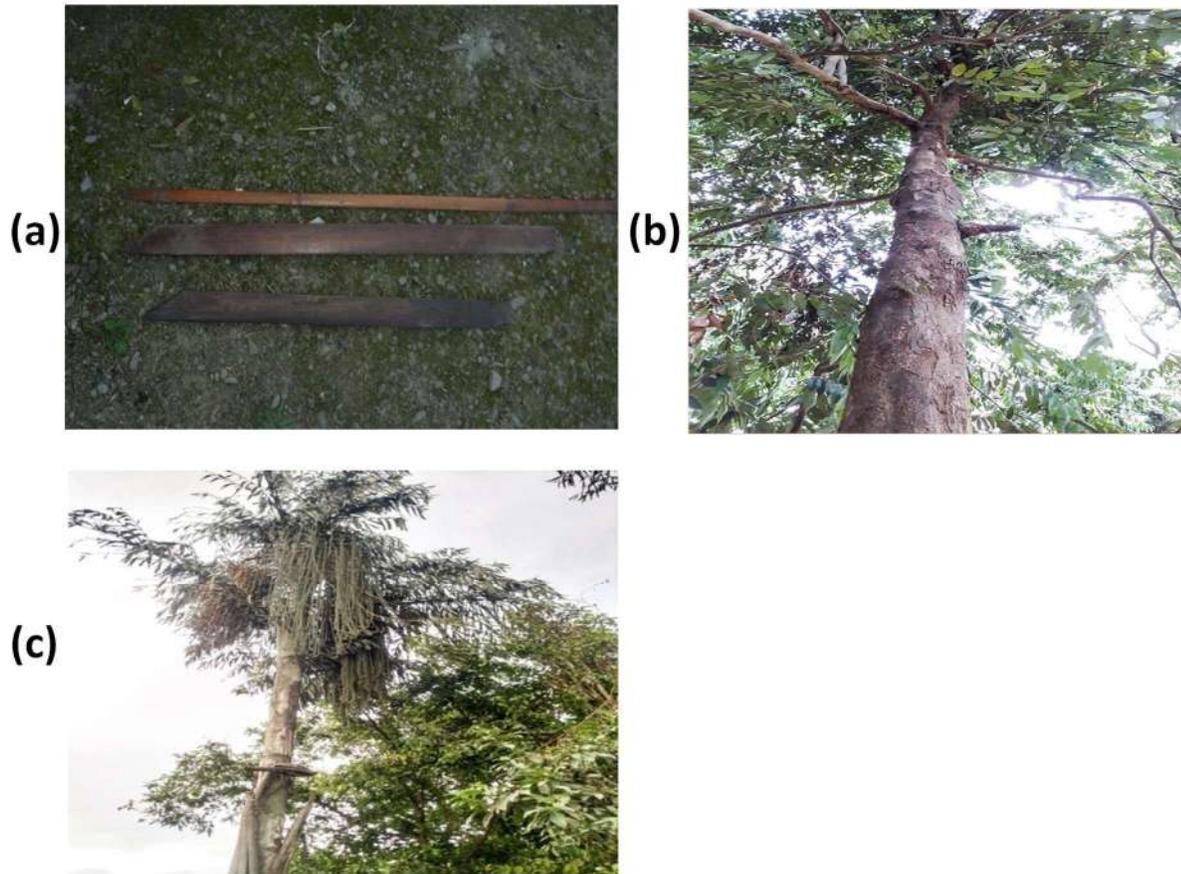


Fig.1: (a) *Tiam*, (b) *Mesua ferrea*, (c) *Caryota Urens L.*

The beater, locally known as *Tiam* Figure 1(a) is crafted from the trunks of *Mesua ferrea* Figure 1(b) and *Caryota Urens L.* Figure 1(c). This tool consists of a hardwood plank of suitable length and width, with one end pointed and sharpened along the edge. It is primarily utilized in weaving to secure cloths tightly by applying force and slamming towards the opposite ends of the loom straps. The size of the *tiam* can vary, ranging from small to large, depending on the nature of the loom strap and the dimensions of the woven cloths.

The far loom bar, or end bar, locally referred to as *Puan Lena* Figure 2(a) is made from *Mesua ferrea* Figure 1(a) and *Melocanna bambusoides* Figure 2(b). These end bars are essential components of the loom, used to hold the warp (vertical threads) at the upper ends of the loom. This ensures that the threads remain taut and in place during the weaving process.



Fig.2: (a) *Puan lenna*, (b) *Melocannabambusoides*

The back strap, locally known as *Kawng Duap* Figure 3(a) is a belt made of cane, bamboo, and sometimes leather. It goes around the weaver's back and connects to the wooden holder, which is the base of the loom where the thread is woven around, called the "near-loom bar." This belt helps to create or provide the necessary tension on the warp by allowing the weaver to lean forward and backward, ensuring the threads are appropriately taut for the weaving process. The raw materials used for producing this equipment are *D. Tulda* Figure 3(b), *Calamus Rotang* Figure 3(c). Animal products such as cow skin are also used to produce this item Figure 3(d).



Fig. 3: (a) *Kawng Duap* (b) *D. Tulda*, (c) *Calamus Rotang* (d) cow skin

The shuttle, locally referred to as *Kho-thei* Figure 4(a) is a crucial tool in the weaving process, made from the culm of *Melocanna bambusoides* Figure 4(b), a type of bamboo. This shuttle plays an essential role in transporting the thread to weave each line meticulously. During its preparation, bobbins are inserted into the shuttle. The shuttle itself features a tiny hole through which the thread passes, serving as the weft for the wraps. In a display of skill and precision, the weaver deftly blows the thread through this small hole, preparing it for the weaving process. The use of the shuttle exemplifies the intricate craftsmanship and traditional techniques passed down through generations, highlighting the importance of precision and expertise in the art of weaving.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 4: (a) *Khaw thei* (b) *Melocanna bambusoides*

(a)



(b)

Fig. 5: (a) *Puan Kamna*, (b) *Dendrocalamus hamiltonii* culm

The shape corrector, locally referred to as *Puan Kamna* Figure 5(a) is made from *Dendrocalamus hamiltonii* culm Figure 5(b). It is a thin and flat bamboo piece of suitable length and breadth used to maintain the shape of the woven cloth. The ends are pointed on both sides, projecting over the cloth breadth-wise. As the weaving progresses, the shape corrector is moved forward over the wraps, ensuring the cloth retains its intended form. This process involves the prongs of the shape corrector being repeatedly projected onto the wraps, gradually advancing towards the opposite end of the woven cloth.

**(a)****(b)**Fig. 6: (a) *Kol-ka* (b) *Gmelina arborea*

The Near Loom Bar, locally known as *Kol-ka* Figure 6(a) is a medium-sized hardwood cubical beam crafted from the trunk of *Mesua ferrea* Figure 1(a) or *Gmelina arborea* Figure 6(b) tree. It features depressions on both ends and is of an appropriate length to fulfil its purpose. This bar plays a crucial role in the weaving process by connecting the weaving back strap belt, which exerts a backward pull, to the loom's body, which exerts a forward pull. Thus, it acts as a central hub for the entire weaving operation.

Fig. 7: (a) *Tanna*

The Heddle Stick, locally known as *Tanna* Figure 7(a), is crafted from circular bamboo with sufficient length and width made from *Dendrocalamus hamiltonii* culm Figure 5(b). It serves as a weaving lease rod, specifically designed to raise alternate warp threads during the weaving process.



(a)

(b)

Fig. 8: (a)*Takhai* (b) *Corchorus Olitorius*

Takhai Figure 8(a) is a cord for the loom usually made of raw material such *Calamus Rotan* Figure 3(c), *Corchorus Olitorius* Figure 8(b). It is a rope to secure the loom which is usually tied to a pole or tree from which the necessary tension is pulled.



Fig. 9: (a) *Khawjum*

This equipment in backstrap loom is locally known as *Khawjum* Figure 9(a). Raw materials such as the culm of *D. Tulda* Figure 3(b), *Melocanna bambusoides* Figure 2(b), is used only when the cloths need the

design to be included. It is used to slide on the extra heddle space to stitch up for the design.



Fig. 10: (a) *Pat bawm*

The bobbins basket locally known as *Pat bawm* Figure 10(a) is made from the stem of *Calamus Rotang* Figure 3(c). Bobbins play a crucial role in the weaving process, where the weft thread is wound onto a bobbin that moves horizontally from one end to the other across the warp. This movement occurs between the alternate raised and lowered warp threads, facilitating the interlacing of threads to form a fabric. The bobbins are often stored conveniently within the shuttle, aiding the smooth flow of the weft thread through the warp during weaving. These bobbins are typically kept organized and accessible in a basket woven from cane, ensuring they are readily available for use by the weaver. This setup not only supports efficient weaving but also maintains the integrity of the weaving process by keeping essential tools close at hand. This combination of rattan-based bobbins and a cane-made basket exemplifies traditional craftsmanship and practical design in textile production.



Fig. 11: (a) *Tiam bupi*, (b) *Bambusa Nutans*

A lease stick, known locally as *Tiam bupi* Figure 11(a) is a small-diameter bamboo stick of suitable length. It plays a critical role in weaving processes by detecting errors in the interlocked warp and adjusting the take-up rate or tension during weaving. This adjustment ensures the smooth and consistent weaving of the fabric, maintaining the integrity of the weave structure. Crafted from *Bambusa Nutans* Figure 11(b) bamboo culms, the lease stick is designed to be lightweight yet strong enough to handle the weaving process intricacies. Its use exemplifies the practical application of natural materials in traditional textile craftsmanship, facilitating precise and efficient weaving techniques.



Fig.12: (a) *Tiangchang*

The Shed Stick, known locally as *Tiangchang* Figure 12(a) is crafted from *Dendrocalamus hamiltonii* Figure 5(b), and is a small-diameter bamboo stick of suitable length. It is used in weaving to detect errors in the interlocked warp and to adjust the take-up rate or tension during the weaving process.

The *Tang khang* Figure 13(a), locally named, is a long and sturdy bamboo typically used as a temporary

base during the preparation of a loom. It serves as a foundational support during the initial setup of the loom, providing stability and structure to facilitate the weaving process. Crafted from *Dendrocalamus hamiltonii* Figure 5(b), this bamboo exemplifies the strength and resilience necessary for its temporary role in loom preparation. Its length and durability make it ideal for supporting the initial stages of setting up a loom, ensuring a solid foundation for weaving operations.



Fig. 13: (a) Thang khang



Fig. 14: *Tukkil*

Tukkil 14(a) is a sharp object resembling a hairpin, traditionally crafted from a porcupine spine Figure. It serves several functions in the weaving process such as smoothing and Uniformity: After completing each weave, the weaver uses *Tukkil* to swiftly run it across the fabric, ensuring a smooth and uniform surface. *Tukkil* is also used to pick up threads, particularly when manual handling is difficult or when precise thread placement is needed. This tool demonstrates the resourcefulness of using natural materials like porcupine spines in traditional crafts, contributing to the quality and finesse of woven textiles.

4. The Process of Weaving

The process of the Vaipheis indigenous knowledge of weaving involves the following step-by-step

procedure:

4.1 Preparing the wrap

Preparing the wrap is the first step in the process of weaving. First, the length of the final piece is pre-calculated by the weaver. The length of the wrap depends on the requirement of the weaver. According to which, a wrap is coiled around the two ends of the beam called “*tangkhang*“. The “*tangkhang*“ is a temporary base needed only during the preparation of the wrap, later on, it will be replaced by the permanent base i.e the far loom bar. The thread which makes the warp should be coiled in such a way that it should cross the center each time and come around from the outside of the other ends in the exact same direction the entire time. After wrapping the thread, one should slip her hands into the loop created by the upper and lower wrap and remove the wrap from both the auxiliary bars. Now, insert the permanent wrap base on both ends of the wrap as upper and lower ends into the loop created.

4.2 Sitting down at the loom:

Sitting down at the loom is the next step after preparing the wrap. Now, attach the *kawngduap* with the nearer loom bar *Kolka* and create the necessary tension. As set, the tension helps to keep the loops in place. The weaver must attach both ends of the upper base with a lasso called *Ta-khai*. The *Ta-khai* should be tied with a sturdy pole or tree because all the necessary tension will be pulled and stretched from it, the *Ta-khai* will act as a pillar for the whole loom set.

4.3 Dressing the loom:

Dressing involves inserting all the necessary weaving tools for weaving on the loop, it includes – tying shed sticks called *tiambupi*, installing the other pair of the upper wrap bar called *Ta-khai* and lower or nearer wrap bar called *kolka*, installing of optional stabilizer called *puanlenna*, inserting of the wooden beater called *tiam*, installing of the heddle sticks called “*tanna*”, installing of cane bar called *tiangchang*, installing of loop setter called *tuk-kawt*, and installing of wooden leg supporter called *taw-chak*.

4.4 Preparing the heddle stick

The heddle stick is used to lift the wrap's alternating threads, the weaver picks up the alternate thread and passes a heddle thread, each alternating thread is attached to the heddle stick using a cow hitch knot over the heddle rod, therefore, the heddle stick is used to lift the wrap yarns which passed under-neat the shed rod using the heddle thread. Here, one can use two fingers placed in between the rod and the wrap, maintaining the same distance to make the same length of heddle. Continue with the cow hitch knot a few more time, wrap and secure it with a bow tie in the end. It should be noted that the amount of heddle sticks used on a loom varies on the type of wrap design; a single heddle stick is used for a plain weave. The Vaiphei's traditional weavers used four heddle sticks to make a traditional shawl called *puandum*, and twelve heddle sticks to make other traditional clothes called *khiangkawi*.

4.5 Start weaving

Weaving is governed by the three primary motion of weaving, these are the shedding motion, the picking motion and the beating motion. Usually, the weaver sits in L-shape in front of a loom keeping

both legs against the footrest, the weaver create the necessary tension using her upper body and her legs. Weaving starts with:

- (i) passing the weft thread across the wrap from one end to the other using a shuttle called *khawthei*. The shuttle consists of a rolled thread inside which is called *pat-tui* which acts as a weft.
- (ii) The weaver then slides the heddle stick and shed bar together back and forth, using the left hand to lift up the heddle stick, in the meanwhile, the body should release tension and bend the upper body forward towards the loom and the right hand simultaneously presses the round bamboo bar down. The weaver should now pull the beater out and slide it in the space created right below the heddle stick and pull the beater down toward the waist.
- (iii) Followed by which, the sword must be placed vertically in the shed to create a space for the shuttle to pass the weft, again send the shuttle in the opposite side, this time, instead of pulling up, pull the beater out and carefully place it in the space created right below the heddle stick and pull the beater down toward the waist. This is the beginning of weaving. Repeat the action and so on.
- (iv) One must note that these 4 (four) actions the passing of the weft, the sliding of the beater, the stitching of the upper and lower and the pulling down of the beater are the base of the weaving process. So, the pattern is *stitch-slide-stitch-pull = stitch-slide-stitch-pull*.

The study on traditional Vaiphei weaving using *puan-bu* highlights weaving as a significant cultural practice among Vaiphei women, deeply rooted in their societal fabric. The backstrap loom, locally known as Puan-bu, is central to their weaving tradition, requiring extensive experience, skill, and knowledge. Weaving is not merely a means of livelihood but also imbued with cultural significance, providing prestige and identity within the community. The traditional handloom Puan-bu comprises 14 distinct equipment pieces, crafted from 11 different types of raw materials. These materials include various bamboo species (*Dendrocalamushamiltonii*, *Melocannabambusoides*, *D. tulda*, *Bambusa nutans*), plants (*Calamus Rotang*, *Corchorus Olitorius*), trees (*CaryotaUrens L*, *Gmelina arborea*, *Mesua ferrea*), and animal products (porcupine spine, cow skin). Identification of bamboo species and trees is carried out with the help of bamboo experts from botanical backgrounds and local knowledge experts from the field studied area.

However, the study found that traditional weaving practices are declining. Factors contributing to this decline include shifting occupations, limited time for weaving, and the availability of commercially produced textiles. Younger generations are increasingly disconnected from traditional weaving knowledge and cultural values associated with the *Puan-bu*. Despite efforts to preserve traditional techniques, such as documentation and visits to museums, there is a notable lack of institutional support for maintaining these skills and knowledge within the Vaiphei community. The encroachment of modernization and industrialization poses a threat to the authenticity and continuation of the "*Puan-bu*" weaving tradition.

5. Conclusion:

In conclusion, the study underscores the urgent need to preserve the intricate skills, equipment,

and raw materials associated with the traditional Vaiphei backstrap loom. Efforts to document and transmit this cultural heritage to younger generations are crucial to ensure its survival amidst rapid societal changes. While modernization brings efficiency and economic benefits through modern looms, the unique quality and cultural significance of traditional "Puan-bu" products must be recognized and valued. Preserving the "Puan-bu" tradition not only safeguards Vaiphei cultural heritage but also sustains livelihoods and enhances community identity. Continued advocacy and education are essential to instill pride and awareness in the younger generation about their cultural legacy, encouraging a renewed interest in traditional weaving practices despite the challenges posed by modernization.

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