Handicrafts heritage of Gaddi tribe of Himachal Pradesh

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The tribal people of Himachal Pradesh are living close to forests and facing unfavorable climatic conditions. Gaddi, the semi-agricultural tribe of Bharmour area of Chamba district is identifiable due to their typical dress comprising topi, chola and dora. They sport a hukah (smoking pipe) in their hand and khali containing cereals and other essential articles on their back. Due to tough topography and harsh climate, these people have developed their unique handicrafts, which is still manufactured as well as used by them. In the paper, an effort has been made to document the costumes, ornaments and various woven and other handicraft products used by the Gaddi tribe of Himachal Pradesh.

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From the early period of history, Himachal Pradesh was inhabited by many tribes like Kailis, Halies, Dagis, Dhuris, Gaddis, Dasa, Khasas, Kinners, and Kirats. The Gaddi is a generic term used for all of the indigenous population of the Bharmour area of Chamba district. Bharmour is situated at an altitude of 2,133.6 meters in the Budhil valley (32° 26' and 76° 32' E), 64.37 meters to the south-east of Chamba. Bharmour is known not only for its scenic beauty and ancient temples but also for Gaddi tribe. Bharmour has extreme weather and tough terrains and so are the Gaddis residing in these areas. The Gaddi are semi-agricultural tribe and own large flocks of sheep and goats, which are their main source of wealth. They are better shepherds than farmers. They are not nomadic in strictest of sense since they have villages where they reside, however, they do make their way to the higher pastures in the summer season with their flocks. They go far a field with their sheep and goats, the summer being spent in the higher mountains of Pangi and Lahol and the winters in the low hills bordering on the plains. They are very hard working and keep concern with their job only. Gaddi women are bright and cheerful. Gaddis are very firm with their faiths and beliefs. In the paper, efforts have been made to describe their handicrafts including traditional costumes and their jewelry.

Costumes

Gaddies can be recognized because of their dress as it includes Cholu, Dor, Topi for men and Luanchari, Dora and long Dupatta for women. The costume of Gaddi is markedly different as compared to other areas. As Gaddis are basically shepherd by profession and have to bear extreme weather conditions, Patti (A woven woolen cloth) is used for making their costume. A loosely-sewn Pattu (hand-spun coat) popularly called, Chola reaching below the knees is worn on the body (Fig. 1). It has a deep collar, which hangs loose in two lappets in front. The Chola is tightened around the waist by means of black cord, called Dora made of sheep’s wool, which may run up to 60 m length. The coat is loose over the waist-band (Dora) and on this receptacle the Gaddis stow many of their belongings including lambs. On migration march of the Gaddis, one can have glimpse of lambs nestling in the pockets of their Chola. The legs are covered with patti pyjamas, called unali suthan. The headgear is markedly different as compared to other areas. The headgear of a man is a cap called, topi with a peak-like projection and flaps round the margin. The peak of the cap is said to represent the mountain Kailash peak. The flaps are used to cover the ears during cold weather. The front of the cap is adorned with dried flowers, a tuft of feathers or a string of beads. Shoes generally made of leather, called Mocharu are very heavy and run for a longer period. During the marriage, a Gaddi boy

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wears a very gorgeous dress. It is a long red or maroon colored cotton frock with same colored yolk and decorated with different types of mirrors, frills and pippins. It is called as Kadd or Luancha (Fig. 2). It is tied on the waist with white and yellow cotton piece, called as Patka. A red or maroon coloured shawl is also taken over it. On the head, they wear a very intricate sehra made by local people.

Female costume consists of luanchari, Dora along with long dupatta with frill, called Ghundu. Luanchari is a frock with contrast colored yolk and also decorated with different types of frills and pippins (Fig. 3). It requires about 20 m of fabric to make a luanchari. It is tied on the waist with a black colored Dora, which is 40-50 m woolen string weighing 1.5-2 kg (Fig. 4). Besides being a part of the costume, it is also used to carry load on the back. Sometimes, it is dyed in black if the colour is dull. Alike men, some of the women also wear white coloured woolen Chola during winters instead of cotton one. It is different from the one used by men in length. Gaddi girls wear the same Luanchari but in bright combinations (Fig. 5). A square piece of cloth decorated with sequins and frills is placed on head over dupatta. Foot wears are heavy in general but lighter than Gaddi males.

Jewelry

Gaddi women are very particular about their jewelry. The only available evidence to the ornamentation is the metal and stone sculptures dating back to Seventh century AD onwards. The female figurines in Pahari miniature paintings are depicted with elaborate ornamentation like Chiri, jhumka, and toke, gojru, chandrahar, commonly worn by Gaddi women. Silver is considered sacred in the Gaddi community. So most of the traditional Gaddi jewelry is of silver and with mina work over it. In mina work, pattern of the jewelry work is filled with colour. Ornaments have peculiar motifs and designs. Though silver is considered sacred in the Gaddi community, but for nose they wear only gold ornaments as they have some bad notion for wearing silver in nose. Ornaments are worn on both the sides of their nose, i.e. Balu on one side and Fulli on other side. Traditionally, the Gaddi jewelry was very heavy but now a day its weight is reduced according to the taste of the wearer. The community has a total dependence on local market for the silver jewelry.

Some of the ornaments of Gaddi tribe are:

Chiri

Chiri is worn on the forehead (Fig. 6). It weighs approximately 140-150 gm and fixed on the forehead with the help of strings. It is given in place of mangtika. It is considered as an important ornament for a married lady.

Clips

Clips are like other ordinary clips. These are connected with silver connections, which fall over the plait, where clips are fixed on the both sides (Fig. 7). Each clip weighs approximately 20-25 gm.

Jhumka

Ear rings are called Jhumka (Fig. 8). Each Jhumka weighs 15-20 gm and its shape may vary.

Pari

Pari is payal. It is worn on ankles and makes loud sound while walking. It is a symbol of the presence of newly wedded in the house. Its width is 5-10 cm and its weight may vary from 300-500 gm (Fig. 9).

Chanderahar

It is the big sized necklace made up of silver with Mina work over it (Fig. 10). It is worn in marriages and fairs. Its weight is about 300-600 gm. It is hanged with the Chola-Dora can be worn with salwar kamij.

Chack or Chonk

It is put in the back portion of the head. It is conical in shape. Two small round structures, called chakdi in uniform size are also attached with the help of silver strings, which are fixed on both sides of the main part after mounting it over the head with the help of string called dori (Fig. 11). It is also considered as important symbol of a married lady.

Singi

Singi is small sized necklace, light in weight and clings to the neck. String consists of golden coloured light weight beads but the pendent is of silver only, which weighs up to 25-30 gm in earlier times but now the weight has been reduced to nearly one gm only (Fig. 12).

Gojru

Gojru are bracelets and are given in pair (Fig. 13). These are 100-120 gm in weight and narrow in width.
Toke
These are also flat bracelets as compared to gojru. Tokes are also given in pair. They weigh up to 140-150 gm (Fig. 14).

Beeni chack
It is round in shape and fixed over the plait after combing hair properly. One loop and two strings are there which are helpful in fixing the beeni chak. It weighs up to 50 gm.

Phullu
These are meant for wearing on toes (Fig. 15). These are of different shapes and designs. Although these are worn by most of the women, but for newly wedded it is mandatory.

Dur
Dur are gold ear rings worn by men. Traditionally, it was compulsory for the bridegroom to wear dur at the time of marriage.

Fulli
Fulli is the big sized nose pin, which is made up of gold. It weighs up to 3 gm. It is round in shape and generally red coloured stone is placed in the middle of fulli. It is also considered as the symbol of a married lady (suhag).

Balu
Balu is a big sized nose ring. It is made up of gold and weighs 150-200 gm. Traditionally, all the jewelry of the Gaddis was made manually, but now with changed trends it has been replaced with machine work.

Handicrafts
The Gaddi tribals are shepherds, but some of the families are engaged in semi-agricultural activities such as rearing of cows, sheep, got, buffaloes, etc. and ploughing small fields, which are their source of sustenance. Agriculture, animal husbandry and trade are the main occupations of these tribes. Generally, Gaddi people used to go to the tough areas with their sheep and goats, called Dhan. During most of the seasons, they remain without any roof on their heads. They carry a big load on their back containing bedding and other things of their use, called kharchi. Sheep and goat are considered as property of the Gaddi; its meat and milk are used for consumption; wool is used for making various woolen articles; and skin is used for making kharchi and other useful products. During the absence of males; females are busy in the preparation of woolen articles for the family from the sheep wool. First of all wool fibers are sorted out as different lengths are used for making different articles. After that it is washed, cleaned and combed. The combed wool is spun with the help of the spinning wheel, called charkha (Fig. 16) and cloth is woven on handloom called Rachh (Fig. 17).

Woven woolen articles
Blankets
(i) Gardu
Gardu, a blanket, which has black and white squares patterns formed alternatively, is a specialty of a Gaddi community (Fig. 18). Cloth of 45 x 60 m width, called patti is made and then two pieces are joined together to broaden it. Its length is approximately 5 to 5.5 m and width is 1 to 1.25 m. Possession of gardus is considered as a status symbol of the Gaddi family. Gardu is considered so warm that it protects Gaddi shepherds from both snow and rain.

(ii) Gardi
Gardi is a blanket of smaller in size and weighs lighter than Gardu (Fig. 19). It is also having same pattern as that of Gardu but is smaller in size.

(iii) Dodh
It is generally of one colour, i.e. white or gray (Fig. 20). It is almost equal in size and weighs that of the gardu. It can be decorated with the coloured threads.

Patti
Patti is a cloth woven in single colour, i.e. off-white or black and is narrow in width, i.e. 45 x 60 m wide and length is approximately 5-6 m. It is generally used to make coat, cholu (gent’s upper costume), suthan (gent’s lower costume), kurti, topi (cap), etc.

Shawls
Shawls are woven for both males and females but are of remarkable difference. The shawls made for males are of one colour and in black and white check, whereas shawls of females are woven in multicolored designs. Male shawls are large in size, heavy in
weight as well as rough in texture as compared to female’s shawls. The size of female shawl is 2.5 X 1 m, whereas male shawl is about 3X 1.5 m (Fig. 21).

Thalch

*Thalch* is an intricate rope made from goat hair (Fig. 22). It is generally 8-10 m in length. These are used to carry load or dry woolen clothes. The goat hair are first spun and then woven for making *thalch*. A provision of loop is also kept at the one end so that load can be tied properly and carried to the destination.

Khalri

*Khalri* (means skin) is a bag made up of skin of the sheep or goat (Fig. 23). The whole skin of sheep is taken off, dried and hairs are removed, openings are stitched to make a bag. It is used for keeping flour, grains, etc. The size of the bag varies according to the size of the sheep or goat. The bag prepared from lamb and kid is used for keeping the jewelry by *Gaddi* ladies. Some times the small bags are also used to keep money.

Thobi

*Thobi*, a carpet made up of goat hair is very rough in texture but very durable (Fig. 24). Its dimensions can vary according to the requirement of the users.

Conclusion

Woolens of *Gaddis* are generally woven for fulfilling their own personal needs. These woolens are generally very heavy as well as rough to meet local weather needs. As there is no popularization of these products, many of the weavers, who even try to sell their products do not get appropriate price. Thus they have to depend upon the local market only. Besides this, they have less exposure about the outside world too so there is a strong need of value addition to these ethnic products and popularization to help to continue this tradition.

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