20. The base colour of this pair of saddle-cloths is natural-coloured wool, and the designs are woven with acrylic wool.

Tsering explained that there was always an assortment of different coloured wool available in Rupshu, and so this incorporation of several colours in their weaving is not a new phenomenon. The only difference is that in the old days women, like her mother, used to have to dye the local wool the colours that they wanted. These dyes came from Leh and Manali, much as the acrylic wool does today. It is said that the only reason one sees more colours in the articles being woven these days is because it has become easier to buy coloured wool. Before, dyeing used to be hard work and took up a lot of time, and so it is rarely done any more. On the other hand, there are also a few new colours being used, such as pink, for which there were no dyes in the past. Dyeing practices are discussed in Chapter Six. The last section in this chapter discusses fibre preparation.

4.3 Preparation of Fibres

The first part of this chapter described the process by which hair, pashmina, and wool are removed from the livestock. The second section discussed the yield. Once all the fibres have been harvested, each family portions out how much to keep for their personal use and trades the rest. The fibres that remain in Rupshu have now to be processed, which involves cleaning and washing, carding, spinning, and twisting.

While women work with wool from sheep and yak, men primarily work with goat and yak hair. Men also process yak wool, but only if and when they need it for their weaving. Although all fibres are cleaned, only sheep wool is washed. Carding is

also exclusively done to sheep wool. In most cases this is lamb's-wool which will be used to weave their clothes.

4.3.1 Cleaning and Washing

Fibres are cleaned through two processes: washing (*'khrud-cis*), or beating out the dirt (*'dam-dbyug*). All sheep wool is washed, while dirt is beaten out of the yak wool, as well as yak and goat hair. Pashmina is never cleaned before it is sold, and quite often the Rupshupa may add more dirt or small pebbles into their pashmina to increase its weight. However, if they need to keep a little pashmina for their own use, it is cleaned by dehairing (*sing-cis*). Dehairing is the process of separation of raw pashmina, where the short, soft downlike fibre is separated from the outer, hard guard hair.

Wool is washed in order to remove grease, because wool that is high in grease is relatively difficult to spin. Washing wool is women's work and is done by immersing the entire fleece in the river, holding it down with rocks to prevent the current from taking it away. Depending on how dirty the fleece is, it is kept in the water for four to five hours, or even a day or two. Ama explained that wool has to be washed in flowing and not still water, because the motion of the water running over the wool cleanses it and removes the grease. In contrast, Myers observed that in Lower Ladakh women also clean the wool, but they take care not to squeeze or run it

too hard for fear of removing the lanolin (1983: 43).[29] Once washed, the wool is then spread out on the ground or the roof of the tent, and dried in the sun (Plate 21). However, there are times in Rupshu when wool is used without washing. This may occur when there is not sufficient water for washing, and there may even be occasions when there is none at all. In such cases, the women are more particular about their choice of wool and use only that which has the least grease.

Men beat the dirt out of yak wool, and yak and goat hair using two thin long wooden sticks (*nu-gu*). This beating fluffs up the hair and gives it the right texture for twisting and weaving, and also gets rid of any dust or other foreign matter that may be trapped in it. First a thick fabric is spread out on the ground, and over this the hair is laid out. Hair of different colours and qualities is kept and cleaned together. The man then takes a stick in each hand and rhythmically hits the hair. After several beatings and once he is satisfied that all the dirt has been removed from the hair, the fibre is now ready for twisting. The same procedure is also used to clean the wool and hair collected from the pens. However, the wool is not separated from the hair, and the two fibres are cleaned together. Once cleaned, this is also twisted and used for weaving articles that do not require to be fine, or used by men when they are learning to weave.

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[29] The Hebers noticed that in Central and Lower Ladakh wool "is further cleaned with white chalk [lime] from the cliffs near by, with which it is well mixed, then teased out" (1978: 122).

21. The wool is washed and then dried in the sun.

4.3.2 Carding

Carding (*'dabs-cis*) is done only by women after the wool has been washed and dried. It is defined as an operation, preparatory to spinning, in which fibres are formed into a loose but orderly roll (sliver) without being laid parallel to one another (Burnham 1980: 22). The women say that it is done to untangle and clean the wool fibres, making them soft and fine. However, not all wool used for weaving is carded; the process is used primarily for sheep and lamb's-wool that will be used for making the fabric for clothing. However, carded wool is specifically kept for weaving the male robe; wool is seldom if ever carded for the female dress. These gender specifications regarding the production of garments is discussed in section 6.3. Wool used for weaving articles such as blankets and carpets is not carded.[30]

Carding is done with the use of a pair of wool cards (*bal-shed*), which are bought by the Rupshupa in Manali or Leh. These are rectangular wooden implements covered, on one side, with small metal teeth, approximately one inch in length. Wool cards are used in pairs to clean and untangle wool fibres to form slivers of wool ready for spinning (ibid: 191). A small amount of wool is placed over the metal teeth of one of the wooden cards and then the two cards are worked one against the other (Plate 22). The process is repeated a few times until the wool is sufficiently cleaned and softened to meet the weaver's requirements. The wool is then ready for spinning.

[30] Woollen yarn spun from carded fibres is called woollen, as opposed to worsted which is made from combed fibres (Burnham 1980: 22).

22. Thinley Angmo cards her wool before spinning it.

4.3.3 Spinning and Twisting

While spinning (*'khal-cis*) is an all-female activity, twisting (*yog-cis*) is specifically a male one. In Bhutan, spinning is also women's work, "although men in the herding communities of Laya Lingshi and Merak Sakteng spin yarn from sheep, yak, and goat wool" (Myers 1994c: 192). Women spin with a hand spindle (*phang*), and men twist using a *yog-shing*.[31] Spinning is defined as the process of twisting together fibres, other than filaments, into a continuous thread, by hand, with the aid of a spindle (Burnham 1980: 129). A hand spindle is usually weighted at one end with a spindle whorl, usually a stone, which is meant to increase the momentum of the spindle.[32] Twisting is defined by the twist of a thread around its axis resulting from spinning, twisting, throwing, or plying. The twist that makes a plied yarn is also referred to as the ply of a yarn (ibid: 161).

The female spindle is a slender cone of willow wood with pointed ends.[33] It has a shaft length of approximately ten inches, and is not weighted down on one end with a spindle whorl. Instead, the lower end is balanced in a small container (*ba-gor*),

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[31] In the English language the term "spindle" is used to refer to implements used both for spinning and twisting. In this thesis, I have differentiated between the two by calling them the female spindle and male spindle.

[32] Depending on fibre and method of handling, spindle whorls vary greatly in size and weight. They are made from such materials as clay, stone, wood, bone, and ivory (Burnham 1980: 130).

[33] The first spindle like the first loom is also in some cases identified with Duguma, Gesar's wife. Vohra says that there are a number of sites in Ladakh that are associated with Gesar; one of these is known as *'Brug-mo'i Phang-lo* - "Spindle of Duguma" located approximately two miles below the village of Nurla in Lower Ladakh (1983: 66-67).

made of the meat of apricot kernels after the oil is pressed out of them, or a small hollowed out block of wood. The spindle may also be turned in a metal or wooden spoon, and some women just turn it directly on the ground. The spindle is twirled in a clockwise (*g.yas-skor*) direction with the right hand while the left hand feeds the yarn onto the spindle and pulls it out into long threads of wool (Plate 23).

The male spindle is larger in size than the female spindle, and has a shaft length of about sixteen inches. It is held in the man's right hand and turned in an anti-clockwise (*g.yon-skor*) direction, while the left hand feeds the yarn onto it (Plate 24).

Once women have spun their wool they twist or ply the lengths together using a *yud-phang*.[34] This is set apart from the twisting done by men, and is known as *thu-cis*. The *yud-phang* comes in two sizes, a smaller one is used to twist wool for thread (*skud-pa*) and a larger one is used to ply the wool. Unlike the female spindle, both types of *yud-phang* are weighted down with a whorl, *yud-lo*, made from stone.

The implements used for spinning and twisting are purchased from Leh or villages in Lower Ladakh where timber is available. They are usually made from willow (*lcang-ma*). At other times the Rupshupa carve their own spindles, and this is usually from pieces of wood they may come across along the way or those that they

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[34] A quicker way to do this is practised by women in Lower and Central Ladakh, where the balls of wool are attached to hooks on the roof from which the spindles are suspended. "Then, sitting on the ground with four or more spindles in a row, each in turn may be given a twist with the hand, and so four or five balls can be twisted up in less time than one" (Heber and Heber 1978: 124). This system is still practised today.

23. Tsering Yoden turns her spindle (*phang*) in an old metal spoon.

24. Tsewang Dorje twists yak hair with a *yog-shing*. He is Rupshu's astrologer (*dbon-po*).

receive as gifts. Since there are no trees in Rupshu, gifts of wood from relatives and friends in other villages in Changthang or Kharnak where trees do grow is much appreciated. In the old days when traders from Lower Ladakh used to frequent Rupshu to purchase pashmina and wool, Aba Palle recalled that they also often took spindles along with them. These were never sold for money, but always bartered for wool, and the rate was one spindle for a quarter kilo of wool.

There is a clear distinction in Rupshu between the spinning of women and the twisting done by men. The first contrast is in the fibres women and men use for spinning and twisting respectively. Women spin only wool, from both the sheep and yak. Men mainly twist goat and yak hair, but they are also known to twist a little yak wool if they need it. This difference is further reinforced in that men do not and should not spin; if they do it is considered inauspicious and bad luck may befall the offender. Sonam Rinchen explained that it is said that if a man should ever spin or even so much as touch a woman's spindle then he will never hit his "mark".

> "He will never be a good marksman. Whether in archery or in shooting, or if he goes to war, he will never be able to hit his mark. He will never again be able to use the arrow or the spear properly."[35]

The opposite does not hold, most Rupshupa said that a woman could do a little twisting if it was necessary.[36]

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[35] It is interesting to note that a similar statement is made by male weavers in Lower Ladakh: if a woman touches their loom then their "mark" will be affected.

[36] They are not referring here to the twisting done by women when they ply already spun wool.

Previous literature on this subject in Ladakh does not distinguish between spinning and twisting. Myers, though she does notice the difference in fibres men and women use, states that men spin (1983: 44). Jaitly makes similar observations and she states that "in every home men and women spin yarn - the women spin sheep's wool while the men spin the wool of the yak and goat" (1990: 31). In fact, it is commonly acknowledged throughout Ladakh that men do not spin; men twist while women do all the spinning.[37] Further, spinning and twisting are referred to by different terms, *'khal-cis* and *yog-cis* respectively. When talking about them people will demonstrate the contrasting actions, and categorically state that they are not the same thing.

Kaplanian suggests that the difference in spindles used by men and women reflects the symbolic opposition between gender roles in Ladakhi cosmogony (1983: 99). Male and female spindles reflect both gender roles, and there is a concept of spindles as an implement used for defence - mainly by women. Aba Palle narrated two versions of the same story related in Ladakh that demonstrate this, both concerning a *srin-mo* (female ghost). The first states that at one time the spindle was the *srin-mo's* weapon, and she kept it in her ear. Anyone who wanted to catch and kill the *srin-mo* had to cut off her ear, take out the spindle, and plunge it into her heart or eye. The second narrative recounts that once there was a man who was sitting carving

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[37] Aba Palle stated that there was a difference between women spinning and men twisting, but dismissed all the references to a man incurring bad luck or not hitting his mark if he should spin, as "old talk". Further, he said that in the last five to ten years some men from the villages around Leh have also started spinning, and it is not regarded as such a taboo any more. However, the Rupshupa remain emphatic that only women spin and men twist.

a spindle. A *srin-mo* saw him and came to eat him. He got up and thrust the spindle in her eye. The *srin-mo* fell down and died immediately. Since the spindle killed the *srin-mo*, people began to think of it as a weapon. Associations between the spindle and a weapon have been noted before. Francke cites what he calls an ancient "call to arms" from the Gesar epic, which he says was probably composed after the model of a real "call to arms" of bygone days (1907: 45-46). One line in the song reads: "You girls who know how to use the spindle, go to the war!" (ibid: 46).

Once the preparation of the fibres is complete the next stage towards weaving can commence. This is the laying of the warp, with which the next chapter opens.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CRAFT OF WEAVING

Lanze was laying a new warp on the loom to make cloth for her family. As she stretched out one end of the warp, her mother, Abi Yangzom, helped her by straightening out the warp threads with her fingers and removing any knots. Lanze attached her end of the warp to the front roller and tied the belt securely across her back. She held firm to her end, while her mother tightly pulled and pulled on the warp threads in her hands. The warp had to be taut and firm, in order for the cloth to grow straight and strong. Any slackness and Lanze knew, from previous experience, that she would not "give birth to a healthy child".[1]

Men and women have significantly different experiences and explanations of their weaving. Tharchen related that a man's loom and a woman's loom are not the same, and this difference is expressed in the same way as the contrast between a man and a woman. "You see," he informed me, "a woman's loom is like a woman giving birth." His mother, who sat spinning nearby, continued:

> "We say that this warp is like the mother, and these balls of wool, the weft she inserts to make her cloth, is like the child conceived within her womb. As her cloth is made so the child inside her grows. Women are the creators of life we say."

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[1] In Rupshu an analogy is made between weaving and reproduction. Geirnaert observed that among the Laboya of Eastern Indonesia, the beginning stages of weaving are sacred because it represents the weaving of a human being and starting to weave askew is comparable to raising an abnormal child (1992: 62).

In the female loom the relationship between the warp and weft is said to be similar to that between the mother and her child respectively. The making of the cloth is compared with "giving birth". Among Muslim women in North Africa mounting the warp on the loom is equated with giving birth, and the textile in preparation undergoes a growth marked by birth and death (Messick 1987: 212-213). In this Islamic society the developing being is "male", and weaving enunciates the relationship of a mother to her son (ibid: 212). In Rupshu the child is usually gender neutral, apart from the time when woollen cloth (*snam-bu*) is made specifically for men or women (cf. Section 6.3).

It can be said in Rupshu, that through her weaving a woman reveals her regenerative abilities and the making of cloth is regarded as an expression of her reproductive nature. Thus, weaving is more than just a technical activity, and the loom more than just a piece of equipment. However, weaving in Rupshu is not the exclusive domain of women. Weaving can also be a means through which males express their creativity, and exemplify their procreative energy. Thus, I want to contend here that textile production in Rupshu reflects the complementary yet separate worlds of men and women and gives dimension to their concepts of gender.

This chapter begins with a look at the learning of the craft. All women in Rupshu work on looms or have worked on them in the past, and this includes nuns. In contrast most, but not all, men weave, and lamas never weave.

The next section describes the system of warping, a preparatory stage before weaving on the loom can begin. The final section portrays the different types of looms used by men and women in Rupshu, and includes a discussion of their metaphorical interpretations.

5.1 Learning to Weave

From a very young age girls in Rupshu start helping their mothers spin and clean wool, and by the age of fifteen or sixteen they begin learning to weave. This knowledge is transmitted to them by their mothers, grandmothers, or aunts.[2] Men learn to weave at a later age than women, generally around the age of seventeen or eighteen, and some even learn as late as thirty.[3] They are taught by their fathers, uncles, or elder brothers.

It was October and the camp had just reached Zara when Ama decided it was time for her daughter, Rinchen, who was about sixteen years old, to start learning to

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[2] Nicholas J. Allen mentioned that among the Thulung Rai of East Nepal a model loom is made at the birth of a daughter, and a model bow and arrow at the birth of a son. As girls grow up they often imitate their mother's weaving and make toy looms with which they play (personal communication, Oxford, 1995). I did not make similar observations in Rupshu.

[3] In Rupshu one reason why nuns weave and lamas do not, may be that girls are ordained at a much later age than their male counterparts, generally in their late teens or early twenties and will have already learnt to weave before joining the religious order. In contrast, boys become lamas around the age of seven or eight before they are even taught to weave, and later it is probably considered inappropriate for them to learn.

weave. The balls of wool (*bru-'u*), prepared previously, were taken out the night before and kept ready. The warp was laid early in the morning and the loom set up. On one side of Rinchen sat her grandmother, Abi Yangzom, and on the other her mother, both busy explaining to her the techniques involved in weaving. Though she had seen both women and her many aunts weave before, and had even helped them at times, her first attempts were clumsy and the threads would keep breaking. Her mother, who is known to lose her patience fast, grew exasperated and as soon as she heard the wailing of her youngest son, Tandin, went off to attend to him. Abi Yangzom, the more tolerant of the two, stayed on and continued to teach Rinchen. It was her first attempt, and so Rinchen sat there struggling with the threads, growing agitated each time they snapped. Later, she confided that she envied Norgey, her younger brother, going with the sheep and goats.

> "I miss going grazing. I long for the open space, and the freedom of doing what I wanted when grazing. I was happy then. Here I have to sit cramped all day, my legs hurt, my back hurts. But they all say that I must learn to do this. Wait till Norgey has to learn to weave!"

Little did she know then that he would never have to learn to weave - two years later Norgey became a lama.

At first a young girl finds it tiresome to weave and wishes she could be out grazing instead. Gradually she learns the importance of her task, which is to weave clothes for the entire family, and later for her new home when she gets married. Once the girl has become competent at her weaving, it is common for a mother not to weave and to leave the entire family's weaving to her young daughters, who generally work under her supervision. In the following years Rinchen became an adept weaver, and

her weaving is in some ways better than that of her mother. She weaves designs into her carpets and blankets with a skill even her mother does not possess.

Skarma also began to first weave around the same time as Rinchen, and he was about twenty-seven years old. Tharchen helped Skarma set up the loom outside the tent of an elderly neighbour, who would instruct him during the course of the day, as Tharchen had other work to do around the camp. Skarma initially expressed some of the same anxieties as Rinchen, largely that the threads would keep splitting and that it was difficult. However, unlike Rinchen, Skarma gave up after a day and asked Pema Wangyal to finish weaving his cloth.

It is customary for girls to first learn to weave the *snam-bu* (woollen cloth used for all clothing in Rupshu),[4] for boys the tent (*re-bo*). The *snam-bu* consists of a simple twill weave, and the tent cloth is woven in a tabby weave.[5] In the early stages they practise weaving with coarse wool or hair, and only later are they given fine-quality fibre to weave with. Once they have sufficiently mastered the technique of weaving, the girls and boys progress on to other skills which allow them to weave a wider variety of items. Girls also learn the technique of pile weaving (*rug-cis*), and make blankets (*tsug-dul*) and rugs, *tsug-gdan* (Plate 25). The young men are taught to

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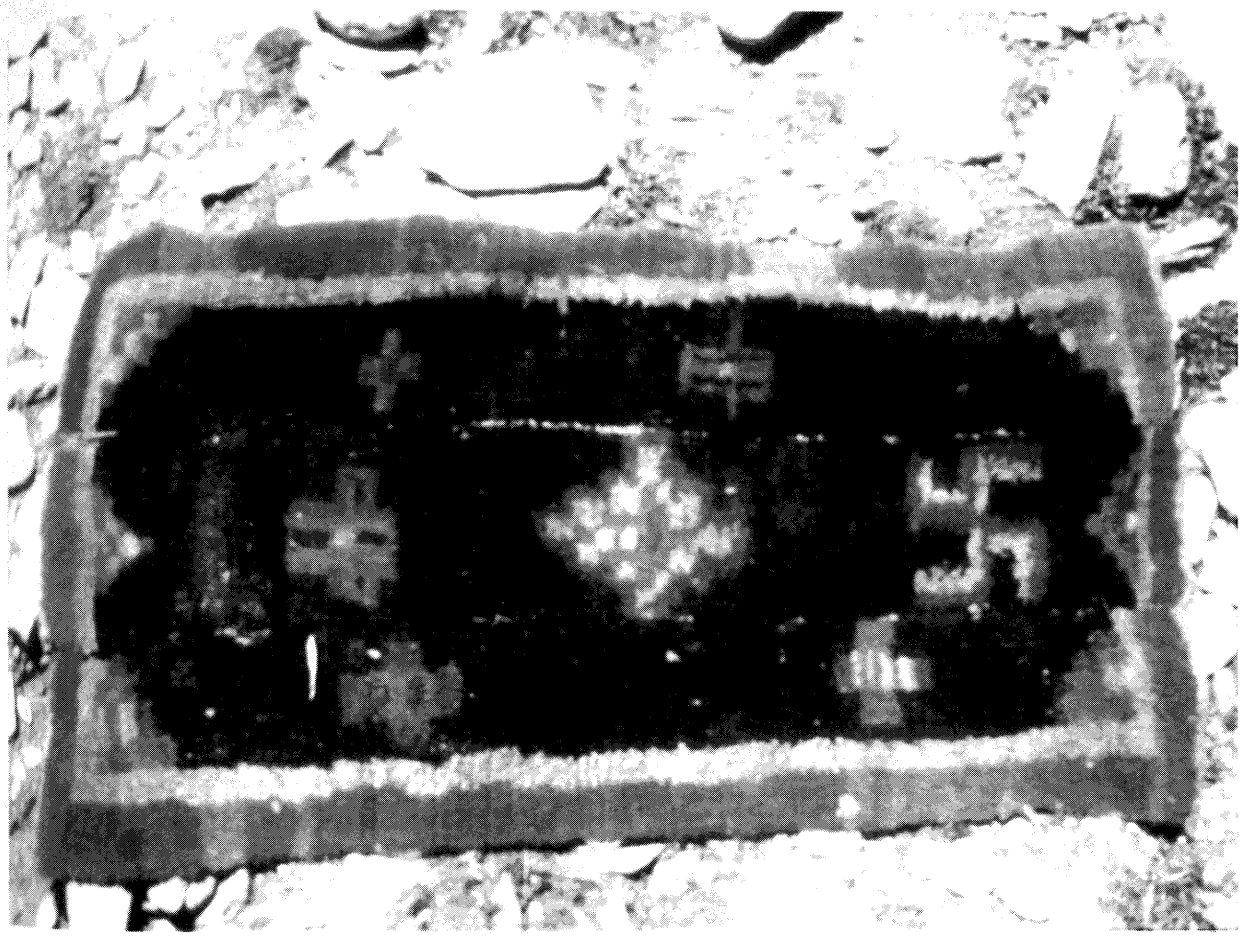
[4] The Urdu term *pattu* is also quite commonly used in Ladakh when referring to this woollen cloth.

[5] Tabby weave is a basic binding system or weave based on a unit of two warp and two weft, in which each warp passes over one weft and under the other (Barnes 1989a: 143). Twill weave is based on a unit of three or more warp and three or more weft, in which each warp passes over two or more weft and under the next one or more (Burnham 1980: 154).



25. This is one of the first rugs (*tsug-gdan*) Rinchen wove.

weave the small saddle-bags (*lug-sgal*), meant for sheep and goats.[6] Later they weave the larger saddle-bags carried by horses and yaks, and the coarse blanket made from goat and/or yak hair.

Comparisons are made between weavers, and some will be considered good and some not so good. Good weaving is defined in terms of speed and tightness. Thus, Chemit Tsering, who has been weaving since the age of fourteen, is acclaimed as one of the finest female weavers in Rupshu because she is quick and is generally the first to experiment with new designs, colours, and fibres. Sonam Rinchen is considered the best amongst the male weavers because he is said to be one of the fastest and most competent at his work, and his fabric the most taut.

While both men and women weave as long as they are able to, it seems that women tend to be able to weave for many more years.[7] Men, such as Sonam Rinchen, say that they would like to weave until they get old, and see themselves weaving until the age of sixty-five or seventy years. But after that Sonam worries that, "my hands will be too stiff and so I won't be able to weave any more."

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[6] Skarma did not begin by weaving the tent, because he owned a tent made from white fabric, and instead went directly on to learning to weave the saddle-bag.

[7] Abi Yangzom, in her mid-seventies, was probably one of the oldest female weavers that I actually saw weaving. Amongst the men the oldest weaver I saw was Sonam Angchuk in his late sixties.

5.2 Preparing the Warp

Before weaving can begin, the first step involves the setting up of the warp. Setting or laying the warp is referred to as *'thags-'dren-cis*, and the procedure differs between men and women. While all warp laying is casually referred to as *'thags-'dren-cis*, the Rupshupa do make distinctions and refer to the warp by the particular item it is being prepared for. Warp laid for a blanket would be called "*tsug-dul 'dren-cis*", and that for a saddle-bag "*lug-sgal 'dren-cis*".

Warp lengths are measured in *mtho* (a span), the distance stretching from the extended thumb to the top of the middle finger. While the amount of warp is always measured, there is no fixed amount of weft as it is always the warp length and the breadth of the loom that determines the amount of weft that will be used. Wool may also be weighed to determine the quantity required for the warp and weft. However, this is usually the case in Lower and Central Ladakh where families weigh the wool before they give it to the professional weaver to make up into cloth. Standard practice is for warp yarn to be doubled and twisted (or plied), and weft yarn only doubled. All warps are continuous.

Women set up their warp by means of twelve wooden or warping pegs (*phur-sha*) anchored in the ground at regular intervals from each other (Plate 26). Warping is usually done alone, and a little distance away from the tent where there is a clear patch of ground into which the wooden pegs can easily be pushed. Balls of wool used for the warp are usually kept ready the night before in order that they can begin laying

26. Padon is laying warp for a brown *snam-bu*; behind her Rinchen is weaving a blanket (*tsug-dul*).

the warp first thing in the morning. The balls of wool are placed in a container, usually a sieve, and the wool is drawn out from here. A continuous warp thread is wound around each of the twelve pegs, as is shown in Figure 1. The cross in the weave is determined by the two double-eight figures the woman winds around the five pegs closest to her.

Once the warp is ready, it is removed from the pegs and either set on the loom straightaway or stored for a later date. Only the cross sticks (or lease rods) are kept in place, as they maintain the proper order of the threads.

While a woman can lay a warp alone and usually does, when putting it on the loom she requires the help of at least one other woman - as all women do at the time of birth (Plate 27). At the time of laying, the warp is stretched out, and the front and rear beams of the loom are placed through it to maintain the tension. The heddles are made next, and these are devised out of wool or thin rope. It is said that the weaving will be bad if someone steps over the loom before the heddles are made. However, once the heddles are in place no such rule applies.[8] Each heddle is wound around every two warp threads, and the heddle rod is then passed through the entire row of heddles. Finally, the lengths of the warp are rubbed down with water to make them smooth before weaving begins (Plate 28).[9]

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[8] In Bhutan it is said that if a woman steps over the warp or a pattern-shed rod for picking out designs, she will never marry or she will have a mute child (Myers 1994a: 85).

[9] This is known as "sizing" which refers to the treating of warp threads with a substance to increase their strength and smoothness (Barnes 1989a: 142).

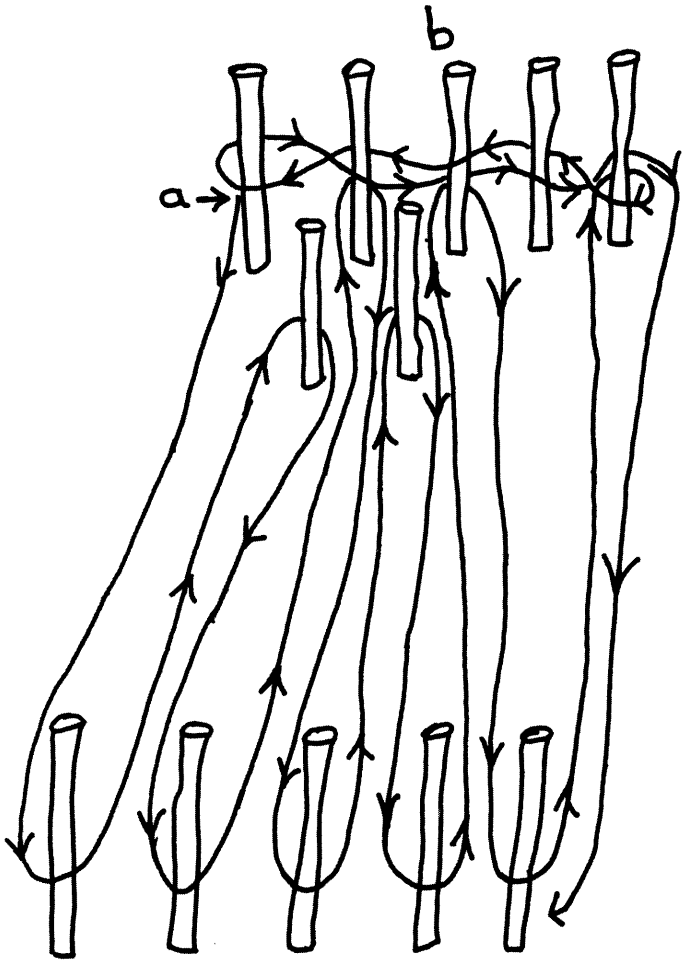

Figure 1 Procedure of Setting the Warp for the Backstrap Loom

a) Warp thread begins here.
b) Two double-eight figures wound here.

27. Namgyal Lhamo, on the left, gets the help of Karma Tsomo, to stretch the warp before putting it on the loom.

28. Sizing the warp - Karma Tsomo rubs water on the warp threads to make them smooth.

Men lay their warp in a different method from that described above, and they always require the help of at least one other male while doing so. The warp is wound directly onto the loom and no additional pieces of equipment are required for this process. Each warp thread is looped around a thin metal rod, known as the *srog*, then passed over the front beam and carried over to the rear beam. Here the warp thread passes under the rear beam, then over it and back to the *srog* around which it is looped (Plates 29 and 30). The process is repeated until all the warp is laid, and weaving starts immediately.[10]

5.3 The Loom

Weaving is defined as the system of interlacing at right angles one set of threads, the warp, with another set, the weft, according to defined rules and in order to produce all or part of a textile (Hecht 1989: 9, Burnham 1980: 178-9). The loom is the means through which this is achieved, because it keeps the warp threads under tension in parallel order. Further, the loom has the addition of a device for opening a shed for the passage of the weft and this shedding device may be complex or very simple, consisting of only a very few sticks and loops of cord (Burnham 1980: 87). The heddle is part of this device.

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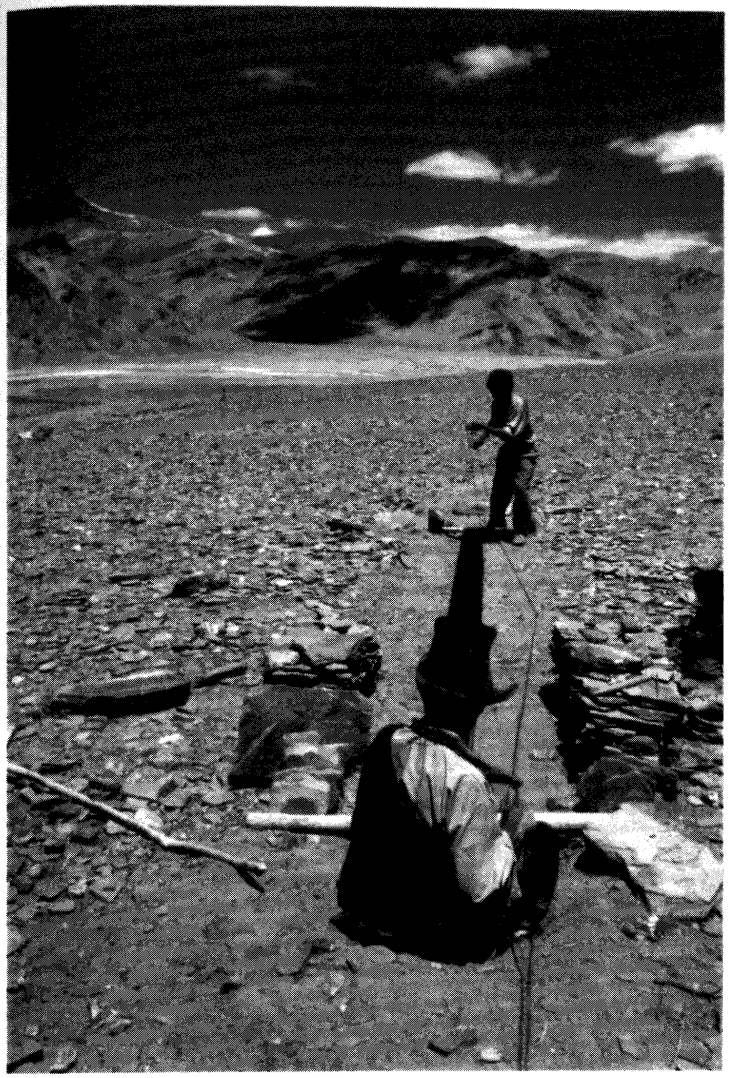
[10] The procedure is similar among male weavers in Lower and Central Ladakh where the warp is prepared out in the road and the weaver walks up and down its length (Heber and Heber 1978: 124). Some people told me that sometimes a donkey was used to take the warp threads up and down, but I never observed this.



29. Laying the warp for a tent - Angdu carries the warp thread from the rear beam to the front beam, while Meme Samten helps him loop the thread around the *srog*.

30. Angdu checking the warp has gone smoothly round the front beam.

Looms are generally inherited from parents, and one loom can last for generations. Loom parts are primarily made from wood, rope, wool, and metal. Similar to the spindles, most of the wooden parts come from Central and Lower Ladakh, where they are also made, or the Rupshupa purchase pieces of wood and make the parts themselves. Men make looms for both men and women, and though there are standard sizes, women will tell them if they have any particular specifications. If a part of the loom breaks, it is either fixed or replaced. The Rupshupa assert that there is little difference between the looms they use now and those used in the past, and that they continue to be made in the same way. The one contrast may be that they are using more metallic parts as these are now easily procured from shops in Leh. The advantage of this is that metal lasts longer than other materials and does not break. However, the use is restricted to a few sticks or the edge of the beater, because the weight of the loom increases and it becomes difficult to transport during moves of the camp.[11]

All women and men in Rupshu weave on looms that are portable. Women weave using a backstrap or body-tensioned loom (*sked-'thags*),[12] and men a fixed-heddle loom (*sa-'thags*).[13] While looms are commonly referred to as *'thags*, the Rupshupa do differentiate between the looms used by women and men by calling

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[11] They asked if I could bring them parts of the loom made from plastic, as these would be lighter. However, others added that plastic was also useless because it would break.

[12] The word for belt is *sked* or *sked-rags*, and *sked-'thags* translates as "belt of the loom".

[13] *Sa*, which means ground or place, refers to the fact that the front roller which maintains the tension in the warp is fixed into the ground.

them *bo-mo 'thags* (female loom) and *bu-tsha 'thags* (male loom) respectively. Both these looms are horizontal, the warp lying parallel to the ground, and the cloth stretching out in front of the weaver. In both female and male looms the weavers control the tension of the warp with their body, rather than having it supported by a frame. Women control the tension by a belt around their waists or backs, hence the term "backstrap", and men by placing their knees on the front roller. The remaining part of this section describes the female loom first and then the male loom.

A backstrap loom or body-tensioned loom is any loom with a tension to stretch the warp ends applied by the weight of the weaver's body (Burnham 1980: 10). The warp is stretched between two beams: the front beam or cloth beam (*tshig-pa*) nearest to the weaver, which practically sits in her lap, and the rear beam or warp beam (*thal-shing*) at the far end (Figure 2 and Plate 31).[14] While the rear beam is held in place by rocks (*'thags-ra*), the front beam is attached to the weaver by a belt or backstrap (*sked*) that goes around her back and is tied to the front beam at either end. Unlike the rear beam, the front beam consists of two parts that are tied together by the belt; the warp or woven cloth passes between the two sections of this beam. When the weaver has woven a certain amount of cloth the warp has to be moved. This is done by untying the belt, opening the two parts of the front beam and pulling the cloth towards her to the edge of the woven part. She then fastens the front beam in place, ties the belt around her, and continues with her weaving. The weaver controls the warp tension with the weight of her body by pulling at the belt around her waist. She keeps

[14] The general characteristics of body-tension looms, wherever they occur, are similar and in my description here I have referred to Barnes (1989a: 33-37).

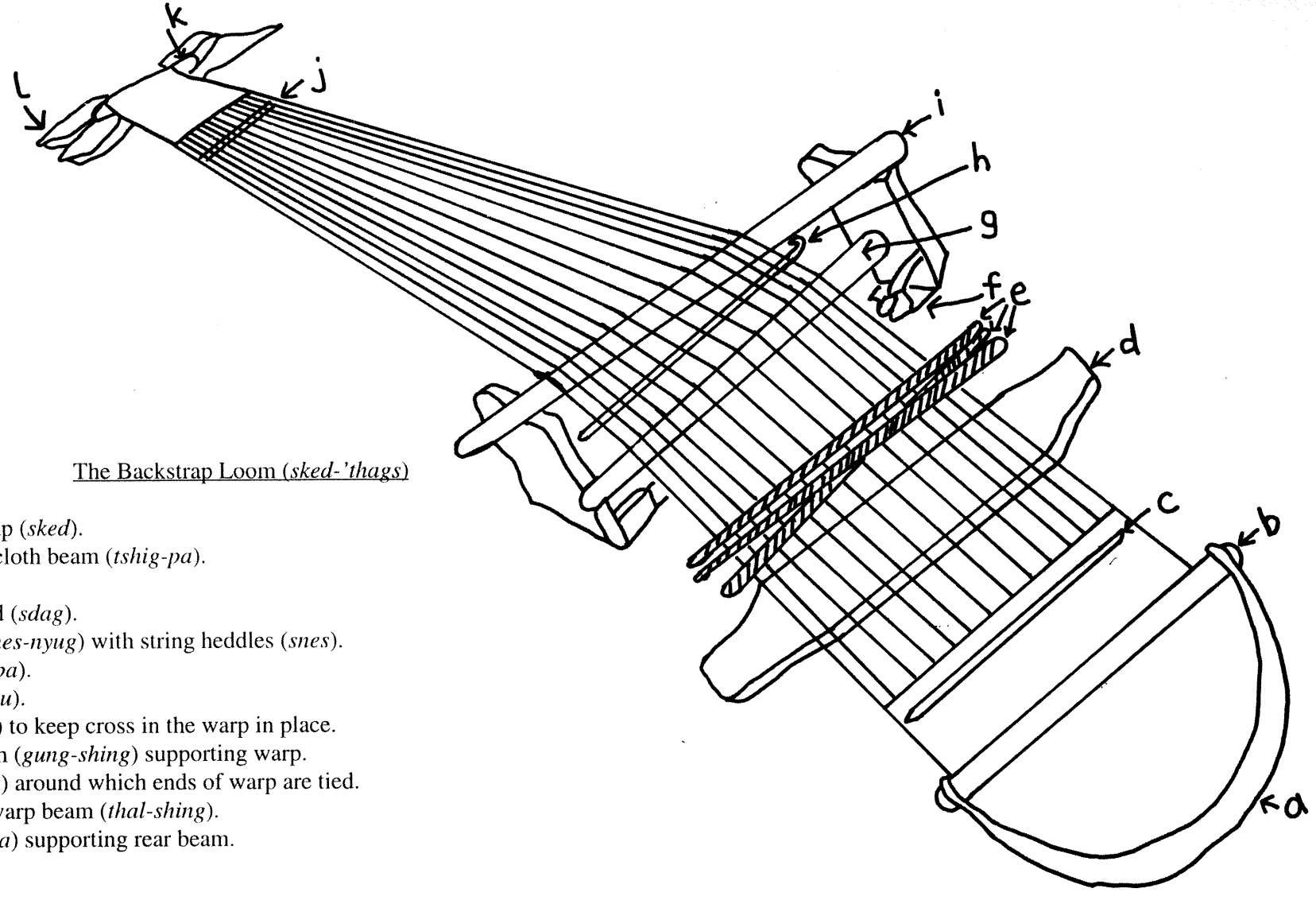


Figure 2 The Backstrap Loom (*sked-'thags*)

a) Belt or backstrap (*sked*).
b) Front beam or cloth beam (*tshig-pa*).
c) Temple (*tser*).
d) Beater or sword (*sdag*).
e) Heddle rods (*snes-nyug*) with string heddles (*snes*).
f) Foot rest (*sod-pa*).
g) Shed stick (*'u-lu*).
h) Thin stick (*sril*) to keep cross in the warp in place.
i) Additional beam (*gung-shing*) supporting warp.
j) Thin stick (*srog*) around which ends of warp are tied.
k) Rear beam or warp beam (*thal-shing*).
l) Rocks (*'thags-ra*) supporting rear beam.

31. Rinchen weaving a *snam-bu* on the backstrap loom (*sked-'thags*).

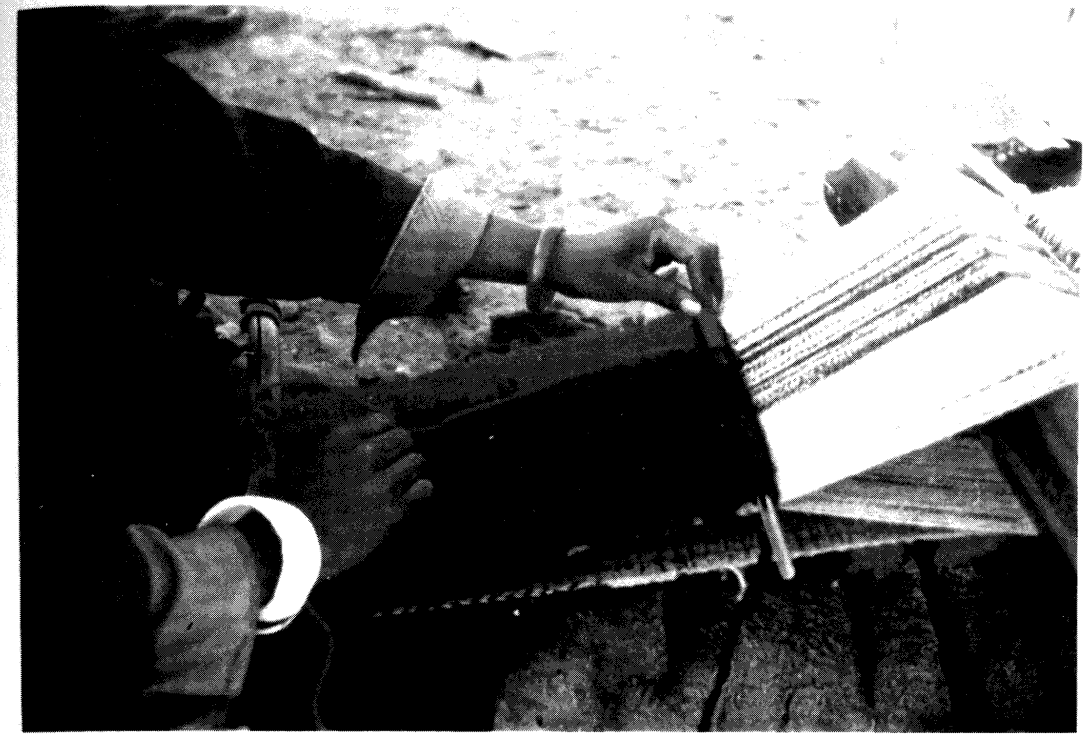
her legs stretched out in front of her and they push against a foot rest (*sod-pa*), made from large stones. This also helps her control the tension. On either side of the foot rest, larger rocks support an additional beam (*gung-shing*) over which the warp passes. Other parts of the loom include the heddle rod (*snes-nyug*) with string heddles (*snes*), used to raise the warp threads and create a shed through which the weft threads pass. A shed stick (*'u-lu*) is used to create the alternate shed, and a large oval-shaped stick with a metal edge (on the flat side) is the beater or sword (*sdag*) used to beat the weft threads into place. The cross of the warp is held in place by the cross stick or lease rod (*sril*). The two ends of the warp are tied around a thin stick, *srog*.[15] Women also always keep a ball of extra warp threads beside them when they weave. If a warp thread should snap during the course of weaving, the two ends are either tied together or another length knotted between them. At the end of the day's weaving the woman rolls up her warp beginning with the rear beam, and then ties all the parts of the loom together with a piece of woven cloth.

Beyond these general requirements, there are variations in the loom depending on the article being woven. A *snam-bu* is always woven with three heddles, the blankets and rugs with two heddles, and small bags with one heddle. Further, a thin stick, notched at each end, is used as a spacing device in the *snam-bu*. This is the temple (*tser*). It stretches the width of the newly woven fabric and is inserted to stretch from selvedge to selvedge. This stick ensures that the width of the fabric remains even and prevents the warp from curving inwards under the tension of the

[15] The word *srog* literally means "life".

weft. The stick is removed every five or six inches and reinserted at the very beginning of the newly woven cloth. The weaver uses another thin stick (*gra-tser*), which is sharply pointed at one end. The pointed end is used to beat down individual warp threads that the larger beater may have missed or to pick out threads that have gone astray. For pile weaving a gauge or guide rod (*tsug-lcags*) is used and it is around this that the knots are made. The shaggy pile is made by passing yarn under two warp threads at a time, with the help of the guide rod which is usually the width of the warp. A narrow metal pipe, or any other long metal implement, functions as the gauge. Once the gauge rod is covered with loops for the full length of the warp, these are then cut across the top with a sharp implement, like a knife or blade (Plate 32). Later, when the carpet or blanket is complete, the weaver trims the pile to give an even finish to the piece.

Men weave using a fixed-heddle loom (Figure 3), where the heddle rod is firmly held in place to create a permanent shed (Plate 33). A counter shed is obtained by forcing the warp ends that lie over the shed stick to rise above those that are held by the fixed-heddle rod, by manipulation of the shed stick or by hand (Burnham 1980: 57). The warp is stretched between the front beam (*lag-sden*), and the rear beam (*thal-shing*). The tension in the warp is created by the male weaver pulling at the front beam and holding it firmly into the ground with the help of small stones (*sod-pa*) placed on either side of it. In addition, the man places his knees firmly on the front beam to ensure the warp remains taut. In the female loom the front beam is in two parts, but in the male loom it is one and the warp or cloth passes around and under it, not between it. The beam (*nam-mkha'-shing*) supporting the heddle is propped up on



32. A gauge rod (*tsug-lcags*) is used in pile weaving, and the knots are made around this.

33. Tundup Dorje is weaving a saddle-bag (*lug-sgal*) on the fixed-heddle loom (*sa-'thags*).

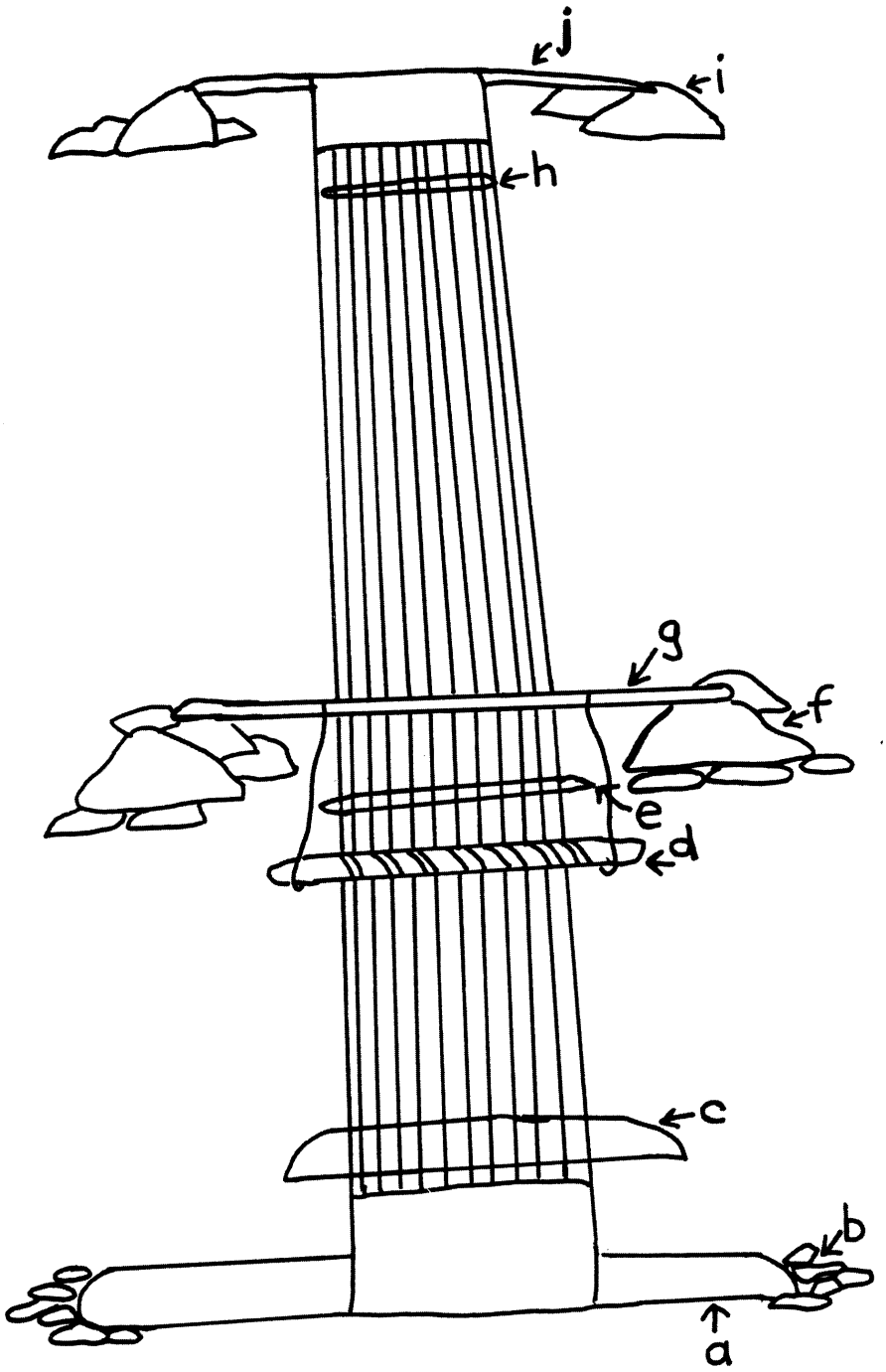


Figure 3 The Fixed-heddle Loom (*sa-'thags*)

a) Front beam or cloth beam (*lag-sden*).
b) Small stones (*sod-pa*) holding down front beam.
c) Beater or sword (*sdag*).
d) Fixed-heddle rod (*sab-rgyed*).
e) Shed stick (*'ul-chen*).
f) Rocks (*'thags-ra*) supporting beam from which fixed-heddle rod hangs.
g) Beam (*nam-mkha'-shing*) from which fixed-heddle rod hangs.
h) Thin stick (*srog*) around which warp ends are looped.
j) Rear beam or warp beam (*thal-shing*).
i) Rocks (*'thags-ra*) supporting rear beam.

a high wall of rocks (*'thags-ra*) between the front and rear beams, but closer to the front. From this beam there hangs a fixed-heddle rod (*sab-rgyed*), and behind it is the shed stick (*'ul-chen*) which creates the cross. Other parts of the loom are similar to those included in the female loom, such as the beater (*sdag*), and the thin stick (*srog*) around which the warp ends are looped.

One of the main differences between female and male looms that weavers indicate is the number of heddle rods present in the loom. The male loom has only one heddle rod in it; in contrast women can weave with one, two, or three heddle rods depending on the cloth being made. Thus, while a woman can freely interchange the number of heddle rods she uses, it is prohibited for a man to weave with more than one heddle rod. It is a result of this restriction, men say, that they are prevented from weaving the cloth a woman does. However, since there is no similar stipulation for women, they can weave a man's fabric. The number of heddle rods present in the loom also determines the fineness of the textile being woven, and textiles woven with one heddle rod are relatively thicker than those woven with three.[16] It is often remarked in Rupshu that one of the main differences between male and female weaving is the thickness of the fabric produced, which is brought about by their looms. Textiles woven on the male loom are said to be fat (*rom-po*); those woven on the female loom will be comparatively finer and thin (*phra-mo*).[17] Thicker fabrics,

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[16] While the greater number of warp threads present also determine the fineness of a fabric, this is usually not commented on by the Rupshupa, and they tend to say it is because of the number of heddle rods present.

[17] Cloth woven on the foot-loom is relatively thinner than that woven on either the backstrap or fixed-heddle loom. This results in the foot-loom also being known as

such as those woven by men, can be finished in a day. In contrast, a woman's weaving because of its fineness takes her days to finish. The significance of women spending more time on their weaving is discussed in the next section. Apart from thickness and speed, tightness and strength are also attributes associated with male weaving. These characteristics are also achieved by virtue of the fact that men weave with only one heddle rod. Men claim it is essential their weave contain these qualities, because what they make is crucial for their survival on the Changthang. Without the tents there would be no shelter, and saddle-bags are necessary for the transportation of grain and other foodstuffs.

The cloth produced on both the backstrap and fixed-heddle loom is always narrow in width, and this ranges from ten to fourteen inches. Narrow widths of fabric do not restrict the Rupshupa's style of weaving or structure of their finished pieces. "On the contrary," Chemit Tsering remarked, "they are superior to broad ones because small widths are easier to wash in the water after weaving, and washing the cloth makes it stronger." In a narrow strip it is also easier to hit the weft down with the beater and to really push it in, with the result that the cloth is much tougher. Further, clothes worn in Rupshu are made from several pieces of narrow lengths of fabric, and this is an essential part of the design (cf. section 6.3.1).

> "So even if the widths were broader, we would still cut them up to make them narrow in order to make our traditional clothes," Tharchen commented, "Besides, in order to weave a broader cloth the entire structure of the loom would have to change."

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li-'thags in Rupshu, where *li* means thin.

The design of the loom indicates more than just the breadth of the cloth being woven. It has bearing on other notions and beliefs regarding nurturance, spirituality, procreation, and birth, in the same way as the Tukolor weavers of Senegal resist changes to the structure of their loom because they believe it to have originated in the world of spirits (Dilley 1987: 265-266). In Rupshu too the loom is sacred, because it was given to them by Pulon Rigpachen. Thus, the Rupshupa conceive of the loom not merely as a technical device for producing cloth - it is more than just a piece of equipment - and the final part of this chapter discusses their representations of the craft.

5.3.1 The Language of the Loom

Looms in Rupshu are described with reference to the popular expression: "*Mi rgyu la rtsam-pa spun*" ("weft is like a man, warp is like barley flour").[18]

> "We say that this warp (*rgyu*), it is like an empty body or a man (*mi*) without food," Tharchen explained, "It is only when we fill the warp with the weft (*spun*), or the man with *rtsam-pa*[19] do we get form and life."

It is said that in the same way that the weft gives the warp form and then only is it cloth, food gives a body life and then only can a man work - the one without the other is just not possible. The term "work" (*las-ka*, Leh: *las*) is also associated with a man

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[18] Gergan mentions a similar saying in his collection of Tibetan proverbs: "Bread is the warp and weft of man" (1942: 219).

[19] Though *phye* is the word widely used throughout Ladakh for barley flour, in this proverb the Tibetan word *rtsam-pa* is used instead.

offering or delivering sexual services to a woman, and further interpretations of the male and female loom may also suggest this connection.[20]

The introduction to this chapter showed that the female loom is representative of "giving birth", where the warp is the mother and the weft the child growing within her womb. At one level then, and corresponding to the proverb given above, the weft which is seen as "food" is analogous to a mother feeding the growing child within her womb. The more the mother feeds the child, the faster it will grow. Thus, a woman's weaving symbolises both birth as well as nurturance.

Apart from the warp and weft, the various parts of a female loom are also associated with the analogy of a mother and child. "We refer to the beater as the mother," Abi Yangzom told me, "and the other parts of the loom, apart from the belt, as her children."[21] Further, she also said that the front and back rollers, and the large shed stick are also identified with the mother.

Distinctions are drawn between male and female looms, as Tharchen and his mother both pointed out in the beginning of this chapter. One of the most immediate and common responses given by the Rupshupa when asked about the difference between male and female weaving is:

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[20] Diemberger mentions a similar analogy among the Khumbo of North-East Nepal (1993: 108).

[21] The beater is literally known as *sdag-mo*, "mother-beater".

> "Men do not sit and weave, they kneel. Women sit on their backsides and weave."

"It's because men can't have children," Padon stated. Though women give birth lying down, it is because of the analogy of the weft to the growing child within her womb that this difference in sitting postures is alluded to.[22] Instead, men sit on their knees and weave, so as not to associate themselves with the weaving of women and with childbirth.[23] A man who sits and weaves is ridiculed.[24]

It is interesting to note that in Lower and Central Ladakh where only men weave, if a woman should touch his loom it would lead to her infertility.[25] It is also said that if a woman touched her husband's loom there would be terrible fights between the two of them, and in the most extreme circumstance the man may even divorce his wife.[26] In the foot-loom the word for beater *(ra-yi)*, is the same as the

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[22] Jasleen Dhamija, who has worked with nomadic weavers in Iran, suggests that in a backstrap loom the warp "looks like" it is coming out of the woman's genitals, where the warp resembles an extension of her pubic hair. Therefore the whole act of weaving is closely tied in with a woman's reproductive nature (personal communication, New Delhi, November 1994).

[23] This could also be analogous to the fact that the conventional posture while making love in Rupshu is for the man to be on top and the woman below. It is interesting to observe that among the Khumbo when making love, though the man is always on top of the woman, the common position is for the man to sit on his knees (Diemberger 1993: 109).

[24] This is not to say that men do not sit and weave, because I saw several that did.

[25] This theme amongst male weavers is common and also extends to other male crafts. Herbert mentions that in Zaire the iron-smith and the smelter are always male and if a woman tried to use a smith's tools, he would make a fetish that would render her infertile (1993: 25).

[26] A weaver in Stok told me that if a woman were ever to weave, her hands would burst into flames. Kim Gutschow, who has done fieldwork in Zanskar,

word for sword (Aggarwal, fieldwork notes, 1991).[27] In the English language as well, the two words are used interchangeably (Burnham 1980: 138). Aba Palle remarked that in the same way that women were not allowed to touch a man's loom, they were also prohibited from touching his sword or arrow as these would then become polluted and useless in battle.[28] A man's sword or arrow also become ineffective if he should touch a woman's spindle (cf. section 4.3.3).

It can nevertheless not be said that life-giving capabilities are associated with females alone, and textiles also speak of the union between male and female. The metaphors associated with the male loom embody the sexual union of man and woman, with the end result being a "child".[29] Here the warp, which is strong and tightly twisted, is said to represent the man. The weft, which is weak and loose in comparison, is the woman. However, the two are said to support each other and work together towards a common goal. Hence, the union between the warp and weft which produces the cloth, also symbolises the conception and eventual birth of a "child". Thus, while men cannot biologically reproduce society, their part in it is also given its due importance through their weaving. The metaphor of the union of the male and

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mentioned that it was said there that if a woman were to weave, the mountains would collapse (personal communication, Leh, August 1993).

[27] Among the Tanimbar of Indonesia, swords are identified with the male and cloth with the female. While swords are the epitome of fierce inflexibility and are meant to penetrate and sever, cloth embodies softness and pliability and is meant to encompass, encircle, and bind (McKinnon 1989: 31-33).

[28] This was probably why I was prohibited from touching the Rupshu Goba's sword.

[29] These metaphors are also spoken about by male weavers, who work on the foot-loom, from Lower and Central Ladakh.

female also prevails in Tibetan *thang-ka* painting, especially in the mixing of colours, where the painters are also mainly men. "The various colours resulting from the mixture of a "father" and a "mother" could be called their "sons" (*bu*)" (Jackson and Jackson 1984: 91). Further analogies relating to the union between male and female are also made in Rupshu. For instance the earth is *sa-ma* ("mother-earth") and water *chu-pha* ("water-father"). When they meet *phu-rtswa* ("son-grass") is born. Salt is also seen as arising from the fusion between female (in this case the dirty water in the lake) and male (the clean rain).[30]

As such there is no differentiation in the sex of the child developing on the loom. The only time a distinction is made is when women weave the *snam-bu*. Before beginning to weave they must decide whether the cloth is being made for a male or a female; as the choice of wool and techniques employed in its processing and weaving will vary (as is discussed in section 6.3).[31] The resulting cloth is referred to as *bo-mo gos* (female robe) or *bu-tsha gos* (male robe). Thus, by controlling the process of weaving a woman metaphorically shows that she mediates not only in the birth and shape of her future child, but also in its sex.

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[30] Representations of the union of male and female are common throughout Ladakh. At funeral feasts wheat bread (*pa-ba*) known as *pha-gnyen ma-gnyen* is offered, symbolising the synchronization of the mother's (*ma-gnyen*) and father's kin (*pha-gnyen*), agnates and affines, meshed and ground together, from which the child, now passed away in his old age, first emerged (Aggarwal 1994: 158).

[31] No such variations or distinctions take place when male weavers make the *snam-bu* on the foot-loom.

Discourses on the loom as a metaphor for reproduction and birth are not unusual. In Bhutan beliefs about weaving suggest that a woman's reproductive nature as well as her artistry are expressed through the activity of making cloth, and any interference with activity at the loom has dire implications for marriage, fertility, and even life itself (Myers 1994a: 85). Among Kodi women weavers of Eastern Indonesia, the metaphoric parallel begins right from the stage of dyeing and extends to the production of cloth (Hoskins 1989: 151-154).

The technology of the female loom is also associated with Buddhist teachings and the world of spirituality; this is not the case with the male loom. Abi Yangzom recalled that, in the past, as women began to weave each year they commenced the season with this song:[32]

See the loom as precious,
That is good.
See the loom as a lama's shrine room,
That is good.
See the loom as Buddha's shrine room,
And you will grow.[33]
The parts of the loom are like a mother with her twelve children,[34]

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[32] Abi Yangzom sang this song for me, but added that this was not the full version. Unfortunately she could not remember more than this and few women in Rupshu are familiar with this song. A similar song on the spiritual metaphors of the loom is included in a Tibetan text on the biography of Ashi Nangsa; a Dzongkha version is used in all schools in Bhutan (Aris 1994: 42).

[33] This refers to spiritual growth.

[34] I was told that here the beater represented the "mother", and the other parts of the loom her "children". This is similar to what Abi Yangzom had described to me earlier (see page 183). The parts of the loom add up to twelve only when a *snam-bu* is being woven, and not at other times. Buddhist culture reflects the image of women as "nurturers" of Buddhism through routine merit-making activities and provision of sons as potential monks (Kirsch 1985: 311). Thus, this line could be encouraging women to have more children in order to perpetuate Buddhism.

Only twelve.
See the loom as religious books,
That is good.
See the raising of the heddle while weaving as ascending in this world after death,
That is good.
See the lowering of the heddle while weaving as pushing all sin down with your feet,
That is good.
Hear the clap of the beater as the voice of a lama,
That is good.
Hear the clap of the beater as the voice of Buddha reciting prayers,
That is good.
See the balls of weft passing from right to left as the lama's kettle that serves tea up and down the monastery hall,
That is good.
See the two pieces of the front roller as the wooden covers of a lama's religious books,
And you will grow,
That is good.

Abi Yangzom, the singer, said this was an auspicious song, similar to a prayer to the gods, to propitiate them before beginning to weave in the new year. She recalled that some women also recited these words each time they laid a new warp on the loom.

The spiritual metaphors of the loom are clearly evident from the above verses. The whole process of weaving is turned into a constant reminder of fundamental spiritual concepts, and demonstrates the constant movement on the part of Buddhism to penetrate and absorb every aspect of life (Aris 1994: 43).

Weavers in Rupshu express shock that in other parts of Ladakh cloth is made with the "feet", the lowest part of one's body, and not with the "hands". Cloth is pure, they say, connected to the gods and the ancestors, so how can we make it with our feet? Women also weave on backstrap looms among the Dolpo, but recently the Tibetan frame-treadle loom has been introduced there. Dunsmore reports that on

religious grounds this loom was met with considerable opposition because the women considered that weaving on this *khri-'thags* (literally "seat loom", the seat being part of the frame) would be a grave religious error because only a lama has the right to use the raised seat or *khri* (1993: 161).[35] To the present day they abstain from weaving on this loom from the third to the eighth month - the time of field cultivation - in order to avoid a bad harvest (ibid).[36]

Religious beliefs are recognised and reinforced only through women's weaving, not through men's weaving. The Tamang make a similar analogy between weaving and writing in a song called "Story of the Loom", where writing essentially refers to Buddhist scriptures (March 1983: 733-734). In her analysis, March juxtaposes weaving with women and writing with men, and suggests the tension between the two demonstrates women's spiritual subordination to men (ibid: 734-735). The same attitude prevails in Bhutan where the value accorded to a male weaver's work manifests the tension between women's esteemed role as weavers and their spiritual inferiority to men (Myers 1994a: 86). The common term for woman in Tibet is *skye-dman*, literally meaning "low birth" (Jaeschke 1987: 28). According to Buddhist principles, men are superior to women in the hierarchy of life forms. "They are born in this life as males because of good deeds in previous lives; they have more

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[35] It is interesting to note from my conversations with Ane Zilla, that when women first came to learn weaving on the foot-loom at Asboe's Industrial School most of them were Christians and not Buddhists (personal communication, Leh, July 1996). This may have had something to do with the religious beliefs associated with the loom.

[36] As such, women in Rupshu have no taboos associated with weaving, and a woman may weave when she is menstruating and during her pregnancy.

"spiritual merit" than women" (Myers and Pommaret 1994b: 143). This is explicit at several occasions and events. At the birth of a child, if a boy is born he is offered a *kha-btags*, a girl is not.[37] Women are not permitted to make offerings at the village shrine to the gods (*lha-tho*). It is said that divinities are more dangerous to women, because they are sooner infuriated by a woman than a man (Reis 1983: 225). In the monastic order itself nuns are inferior to monks, and this applies even to comparisons between a senior nun and the youngest or lowest male novice. Havnevick writes that though women are granted the possibility of becoming a Bodhisattva or a Buddha, it is only on condition that they change their sex (1989: 29). Women can also be excluded completely, or from a part of, a pilgrimage because they are considered ritually impure to men (Sax 1990: 492, Huber 1994: 351-352). Thus, the ambiguity of a woman's situation is reflected in female symbolism, and also portrays a distortion from the Buddhist image of an exalted woman (Klein 1985: 111-112). This is because Buddhism is obliged to hold down and suppress that which is uncontrolled and threatening - the feminine form (Gyatso 1987: 47).

Cloth also signifies the reasons why women must keep weaving, and in the same way that the Tamang are bound by the oaths of the Buddhas to weave and give cloth, the Rupshupa are bound by their fear of the *bdud-mo* (demoness, cf. Introduction). Abi Yangzom, who in spite of her 74 years, failing eyesight and arthritis, faithfully unrolls her loom each morning, accentuates another point of

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[37] It is the same in Dingri in Tibet, close to the border with Nepal, where to announce the birth the householder places a stone outside, at the front of the house: a white stone indicates a boy, a black stone a girl (Aziz 1988: 28).

importance for a woman's weaving: "There is always the danger that women who don't weave will become the *bdud-mo* again," she explained, "that is why we women must keep weaving." Abi Yangzom realizes that the risk of not weaving or of stopping in turn may mean her transformation back to the *bdud-mo* and thereby imperil the order of the everyday world.[38] However, in spite of weaving, the identification of women with the *bdud-mo* persists in Rupshu today. The *pad-rag* (turquoise-studded head-dress) and other jewellery worn by women is said to have been fashioned along the lines of jewellery once worn by the *bdud-mo* (Plate 34).[39] In other parts of Ladakh women wearing their *pad-rag* are associated with the *klu* (Ahmed 1990: 33).

The representation of women with demons and their cannibalistic tendencies, is found in most areas of Ladakh and Tibet. Human creatures, especially of the feminine sex who change themselves into demonic beings, are called "living demons" (*gson-'dre*), and can cause the same misfortune as real demons (Tucci 1970: 186). Mehta narrates a tale from Rudok in Western Tibet (not far from Rupshu), where a group of women hold a cannibalistic feast at which they eat a man - "tearing him, limb from limb, they ate up every bit of him" (1975: 29). The Buddhist Dards also have a belief equating normal women of the village with witches (*rui*) who congregate at

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[38] Though men also originated from the *bdud-po* (demon) there is no similar assumption about having to control them - perhaps because they listened to the lama and learnt religion.

[39] Divinities central to Tamang shamanic practice, the *tsen*, are transmitted from one woman to another (i.e. typically from mother to daughter) along with the inheritance of silver jewellery or fine cloth (March 1983: 732).

34. Chumit Zangmo is making a *pad-rag* (turquoise-studded head-dress).

night and play a game, the winner receiving human flesh to eat (Vohra 1989b: 119). The same themes relate to other parts of Ladakh where women are visualized as witches (*gong-mo*), denizens of the dark, and ordinary women by day can turn cannibalistic nocturnally (Aggarwal 1994: 233). Women who wander alone at night are considered promiscuous and evil (ibid). Amongst Tibetans the five unworthy qualities of a woman are: attachment to other than one's own husband, jealousy, wickedness, miserliness, always doing what is not good or acceptable (Chophel 1983: 78).

In Rupshu, women who are seen as dangerous and marginal to Buddhism, must be controlled through weaving. It is said that a woman who is preoccupied and absorbed with her weaving will have little time to think wicked thoughts or commit sinful actions.[40] Thus, it can be said that the making of cloth is also linked to notions about feminine virtue and morality. Further, while men do weave, their weaving is not associated with these beliefs because they are spiritually more advanced than women. Thus, while a woman must be kept weaving the whole day, a man only weaves occasionally.

Women's weaving is therefore critical to preserving the order of the everyday world. But more than that, their weaving is also important in ensuring the continuity of the world. Thus, the language of the loom suggests links to reproduction, birth, and

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[40] The Rupshupa make the same analogy with women in agricultural societies, saying that they work in the fields the whole day and so have little time to stray.

religion. Beyond the womb, weaving and cloth also signify ideas related to kinship and descent, and the next chapter turns to a discussion of this.

CHAPTER SIX

CLOTH OF THE FEMALE LOOM

It was early in the morning and time for the bride to leave for Kharnak. Amid all the tears and boisterous singing, the gifts Namgyal Lhamo had received from her family and friends were being recorded in a ledger. There were long robes made from the locally woven woollen fabric (*snam-bu*), along with others made from velvet and corduroy. There were long-sleeve blouses made from polyester, narrow woven red belts, and a sash of pink silk. Her father had made her a cape (*sbog*) from red felt and lined it with fleece. A second one, made from brocade (*gos-chen*), he bought for her from Leh (Plate 35). There were also blankets of yak wool, rugs, small brightly striped sacks (*phi-rgyis*) to store her future family's food, and a small bag (*lag-kyig*) to keep her jewellery and money. Household utensils, like stainless steel cooking pots, a pressure cooker, and porcelain tea cups, were all placed in large saddle-bags (*tshang-'dur*), woven specially for the occasion by her mother. Her parents also sent several sheep and goats along with their daughter.

Though pretending not to look, everyone discreetly cast glances in the direction of the presents. "Do not be fooled by the amount you see," Ama quietly told me when we went to say goodbye to the bride, "The family has to send more. You see the boy's family in Kharnak gave *chang* (barley beer) for her eldest sister but she ran

35. Bride, centre with head lowered, dressed in a woollen robe (*sul-ma*) edged with brocade. Her head and back are covered by a brocade cape (*gos-chen sbog*). The man to her left is wearing a brocade robe (*gos*) and hat (*ser-thoḅ*) made from gold thread.

away with a Tibetan man yesterday."[1] Now the family is angry, and Namgyal's parents have to placate them. So to keep them happy they are giving many more gifts to their younger daughter. Also, Namgyal Lhamo is not considered to be as pretty as her older sister.

Two months later the bride was returned to her family in Rupshu. Nawang Skalzang, her brother-in-law, was sent to fetch her belongings. "What happened?" everyone enquired from him when we saw him return carrying her bags and dragging the sheep and goats behind him. He related that the groom's parents had said that their son was returning the girl: she was not pretty, she was lazy, and never did any work. She did not know how to cook, and besides, she could not weave. She was of no use to them.

The weaving of cloth is a measure of a woman's worth in Rupshu, and a woman who does not weave, or one who does not weave well, is not considered a good bride.[2] A skilful weaver is always highly commended by others, and they will praise her by saying that she weaves quickly and neatly, and pays attention to detail. Those who do not weave are thought of as useless and unproductive. It is the same

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[1] When making a proposal for marriage, the boy's parents offer the girl's side *chang*. An acceptance of the *chang* indicates that the latter are interested in the proposal. A refusal of *chang* does not always mean that the girl's side is not keen on the proposal. It can be that they feel their daughter is still too young to get married, or that they think the prospective groom is not yet well settled.

[2] Even among the Tai many men's choice of a wife is influenced by evidence of her accomplishments as a weaver (Lefferts 1989: 60). The reverse occurs among the Yekuana of Venezuela, where the weaving of baskets is a male occupation. It is stated that a boy is not ready for marriage until he is capable of making every basket, and parents will refuse to accept one for a son-in-law who is not (Guss 1989: 80).

among the Tamang where women are evaluated in terms of their weaving: a skilled weaver is thought of as clever, hard-working, and admirable (March 1983: 730). In Lower Ladakh, were women do not weave, the test of domestic prowess is also important when choosing a bride and people praise those women who are agile, conscientious workers in the field (Aggarwal 1994: 224-225). The previous chapter demonstrated that an analogy is made between weaving and the creation of life. Thus, it can be said that a gifted weaver will be blessed with several healthy children, a poor weaver may remain barren and is therefore unwanted as a bride. Such was Namgyal Lhamo's predicament, and one of the reasons why her bridegroom returned her.

Throughout Ladakh, a woman is first and foremost seen as a potential mother, and a woman that will not or cannot fulfil her reproducing functions is looked upon as bad or pitiful (Reis 1983: 228). Thus, the importance of weaving in a woman's life is a measure of the maturity and character of the developing girl. Weaving, therefore, becomes a significant indicator in the general growth and competence of an individual. Chapter Five revealed that weaving has a particularly strong metaphoric interpretation and link to religion, reproduction, and birth. However, beyond the womb, weaving and cloth also signify ideas related to kinship and descent. The first part of this chapter looks at these themes.

Women weavers create a number of textiles for a wide variety of uses: as clothes, containers for foodstuffs and valuable possessions, coverings for floors, tent walls, blankets, as well as saddles. The most important of these articles is the *snam-bu*, which is used for all garments in Rupshu, and this chapter looks specifically at its

preparation. It is the weaving of this fabric that typically occupies a woman, and during the course of a year she weaves a new *snam-bu* for each member of her family.

The second part of this chapter describes the weaving of the *snam-bu*, and the stages involved in its processing once the fabric is woven. Gender distinctions are made at the time of weaving the *snam-bu*, and these are apparent through the different techniques employed in weaving the *snam-bu* for women and men. Women weave the *snam-bu*, but men cut and stitch all garments. The last section describes clothes made from the *snam-bu*, as well as the use of the fabric to make other garments and articles in Rupshu.

6.1 The Threads of Connection and Continuity

Among Buddhist Ladakhis descent is largely recognised through one's father, and members are said to belong to a *pha-spun* (literally "father's brothers", a patri-fraternal group).[3] One's *pha-spun* is instrumental in forging strategic historical links, negotiating marriage alliances and endorsing other systems of stratification which include caste, ethnic, and religious distinctions (Aggarwal 1994: 66). In Rupshu members of a *pha-spun* assist each other at the time of birth, marriage, and death rituals. If a lama has to be called to perform the marriage ceremony or attend to a death ritual, then only a member of that *pha-spun*, along with his horse, can be sent to

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[3] "Although the concept of *ma-spun* (matri-fraternity) is recognised, people seldom trace their lineages in this manner except in the context of uxorilocality" (Aggarwal 1994: 65). Uxorilocal marriage is generally practised in Rupshu, and other parts of Ladakh, in the absence of a son in the family.

fetch the lama. Each *pha-spun* has its own tutelary deity (*phug-lha*; Leh: *pha-lha*), which is known as the "tent god", and is represented by the *mda'-zar* (sacred arrow).[4] *Pha-spuns* are exogamous, and when a woman marries she forsakes her father's *phug-lha* and is obliged to accept her husband's.[5]

Kinship and descent are for a community the "flow of life"; cloth can be the essential mediator (Barnes 1989b: 51). In Rupshu, the woven cloth is seen as an expression of a family network - a medium that links men to women, and mothers to their children. These themes are also representative of other areas in Asia where women weave. For example, Tai textiles function both domestically, to articulate relationships within the household, and also to mediate relationships between households and community (Lefferts 1989: 59). Thus, kinship links are designated and continued by textile exchanges between individuals of a single household (ibid). For the Tamang, weaving stands for the femaleness of exchange, and a skilled weaver must know how to distribute her textiles so as to tie her into the widest possible web of social relations (March 1983: 731). Similarly in Bhutan, cloth, cloth production, and uses are emanations of the organising principles that underlie Bhutanese society (Myers and Pommaret 1994a: 71).

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[4] Apart from the *phug-lha*, there is also the *yul-lha* (village deity) which is propitiated by the entire village.

[5] Members who have left Rupshu and settled in Leh are also said to have given up their rights to their *pha-spun*. Tharchen's brother who has been living in Leh since the last twenty years is no longer considered to be a part of his brother's *pha-spun*.

At the time of a woman's marriage, and after the gift-giving ceremony (*sba'-zar*) is over, her brother fashions a rope out of *kha-btags* and white cotton cloth. He ties one end of it first to the *phug-lha*, then to each of the inner tent poles and out the door to the tent pole just in front of it (cf. section 7.1 for a description of the structure of the tent).[6] The rope may also extend beyond the outer tent pole, but its length is determined by the number of gifts a bride receives from her parents and other relatives, as these are all hung from the rope. The length of a bride's dowry rope (*rdzong-thag*) is talked about, and Ama remembers that hers stretched a good distance outside the tent and stated, "They don't make them that long any more."[7] *Rdzong-thag* means woven goods, and almost all these gifts are made from cloth. Some of them will have been woven by the bride's mother or the bride herself, and stitched by her father or brother. It is said that women who are eager to get married tend to do most of the weaving themselves, while those who are reluctant do little or none. The bride also receives gifts of cloth from relatives, on her father's side (*pha-gnyen*) and mother's side (*ma-gnyen*). These are usually specified by the bride's parents to their relatives well in advance of the wedding. Thus, cloth moves within and reaffirms the most reliable reciprocal networks of affection and mutual obligation, and establishes ties between people.

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[6] In homes in Ladakh this rope is strung from the central pillar in the kitchen, blocking off the hearth and the inner portion of the kitchen (Aggarwal 1994: 213).

[7] The length of the "rope" is a topic of much interest and concern in Ribbach's semi-fictitious novel when a bride is being chosen for the male heir of the Dragshos family (1986: 44).

At the time of marriage each household keeps an exact record of the goods the bride has received, entering them into a collection list (*rdzong-yig*). All gifts are recorded in a ledger, along with the guest's name, by a man known as *sba'-zar kar-mkhan*. This is so that a similar reciprocation can be made by the family to that person at a later date. Brauen refers to this list as *'brel-tho*, where *'brel* means to adhere, to be connected (1982: 323). Later, when a marriage occurs in another family the list is consulted so that an appropriate return gift may be made. However, such gifts are not made only at the time of marriage. They are also given on the occasion of a boy's first hair-cutting ceremony and when a girl receives her turquoise-studded head-dress, the *pad-rag*,[8] as well as when a father relinquishes his tent to his eldest son (see section 7.2). This exchange of gifts demonstrates the close connection and cohesion of individual households, and shows the stretch of one's agnatic and affinal relations.

In Achinathang in Lower Ladakh, marriage is conceived as a rope (*thag-pa*) between families, and divorce is visualized as a "cut" in conjugal ties (Aggarwal 1994: 229-230). In Lamelera where all cloths are woven with a continuous warp, a cut warp is worthless as a bridewealth gift (Barnes 1989b: 51). When a woman returns to her natal home after her divorce, as Namgyal Lhamo did, her in-laws return all the items in her *rdzong-thag*.[9] This could imply that the boy's side is no longer

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[8] In Lower and Central Ladakh a woman usually receives a *pad-rag* when she gets married. However, this differs in Rupshu where girls receive it at the age of sixteen or seventeen.

[9] Another purpose of the collection list is to ensure that all of a woman's goods are returned along with her.

interested in maintaining kinship links with the girl's. Thus, a return of cloth signifies the severing of relations.

Once married, a woman continues to forge relations within her new home, by weaving for her husband and his family. In the case of the Mt. Hagen region of New Guinea, Strathern writes that when a bride first comes into her husband's house she distributes netbags to her new sisters-in-law in the hope of establishing friendly relations with these women (1972: 14). At the same time women in Rupshu continue to maintain their links with their natal home through weaving, by making gifts at the time of a wedding in their family, or on the occasion of their brother's son's hair cutting ceremony. Parents try to marry their daughters to men as near to their natal home as possible, and they hope to receive proposals within Rupshu itself or from families in Kharnak and Korzok. For those who remain in Rupshu, it is common to see women set up their looms beside their mother's and spend the day weaving in the vicinity of the tent they once grew up in. Strathern describes married women as being "in between", as a link between two sets of in-laws (ibid: viii). Thus, their role, like the yarns of a textile, is to bind together a multiplicity of discrete houses through the encircling flow of the life-blood they bear (McKinnon 1989: 33).

The significance of ties enforced through weaving may extend into male weaving communities as well. Among the Ansari, a Muslim weaving community in North India where men weave, the techniques they employ in making cloth reflect not only upon the quality of cloth and on the work that goes into its production, but also on the social relationships that are organised for the purpose of weaving cloth (Mehta

1992: 79). Diemberger suggests that the logic of kinship resembles the weaving of cloth where the warp consists of "ties by bone", the weft of "ties by blood" (1993: 95). Ties by bone persist in clan names which transcend genealogical memory, whereas ties by blood disappear and make way for new alliances (ibid). It is always men who weave the death shroud (*ro-re*) in Rupshu, and the weaver will always belong to the deceased's *pha-spun*. Thus, ties between men also define the patriclan and patrilocale which constitute the tangible origins and linear immortality of Tamang society (March 1983: 736). The same applies to male weaving in Rupshu where men inherit the *yud* (a definite pattern of identification men weave into their fabric, see section 9.1.1), from their fathers, thus showing the continuity and imperishable nature of the male line.

The discourse on women's identification with weaving is stronger in Rupshu than a man's. While it is mandatory that all women weave, it is not essential for a man to weave. Since weaving is linked to metaphorical interpretations of procreation, a woman's weaving is vital for maintaining and establishing links between households as well as for initiating new links, through the progeny to whom she gives birth. My own attempts at weaving were often mocked by women, and at first I could not understand why, since I do know how to weave. Further, I did not have my own loom and other women seemed reluctant to let me sit and work on theirs. Abi Yangzom was one of the few who acceded to my requests. In retrospect this could have been because, though married, I was still childless. Ama, especially, would constantly nag me about why I had not had a child and inquired if I was infertile? She has heard about contraception from the doctors in Leh and once asked if I was taking any. "If

so," she admonished, "you are preventing the natural course of life and going against religion [Buddhism]." Meanwhile Tharchen turned the beads on his rosary and prophesied that I was going to have four children. However, my state of childlessness, which continued right through the years of my fieldwork, was a persistent subject of interest among women in Rupshu, and perhaps some speculated that there was something wrong with me. This could have been the reason they were reluctant to let me weave on their looms. Abi Yangzom, well past her reproductive years, did not see my childlessness as a threat to her and so allowed me to sit at her loom.

It is perhaps interesting here to emphasize the weaving done by nuns. Reis suggests that not only are nuns inferior to monks, they are also inferior to married women who owe their value to their birth-giving ability: "A nun has denied herself this value and, in a sense she is seen as a less successful woman" (1983: 223). At one level then, I suggest that a nun's weaving may be one way through which she bridges this gap and accommodates to this disparity in her values. It can be said that a nun weaves the "threads of life", and thereby plays out the act of reproduction which she is forbidden from participating in. When nuns leave for the nunnery they or their mothers weave the same large saddle-bags (*tshang-'dur*), woven for a bride at the time of her marriage (Plate 36). On the other hand, celibate lamas are not permitted to weave. "Female monasticism emerged much later in the history of Buddhism and the celibacy of their members possesses little ritual status" (Grimshaw 1983: 131). Thus, while Buddhism does not condemn nuns who weave, lamas are dissuaded from doing

36. Kunzang Lhaskid wove this saddle-bag (*tshang-'dur*) when she became a nun. Similar bags are woven by a bride, or her mother, at the time of her wedding.

so. A reason for this may be that a nun is thought of as being less pure than a lama because she goes through a period of impurity each time she menstruates.

Cloth as a metaphor for society and thread for social relations expresses more than connections and continuities. "The softness and ultimate fragility of these materials capture the vulnerability of humans, whose every relationship is transient, subject to the degenerative processes of illness, death, and decay" (Schneider and Weiner 1989: 2). However, while male lines continue through the *pha-spun*, female textiles, on the other hand, are the more elusive social thread. "Like women, it moves between groups, and symbolically ties people together, but is always in danger of becoming frayed" (March 1983: 737). At the same time, women's weaving and the cloth of their loom is important for the continuance of life in Rupshu. The *snam-bu* is the most prominent of the cloths woven by women, and the next section looks specifically at it.

6.2 The *Snam-bu*

> "At one time all our clothes were made out of the *snam-bu*, even our pants. There were no shirts or sweaters then," Sonam Rinchen narrated, "Sometimes we did wear clothes made out of animal skin, and then we kept the fur part close to our body to keep us warm. Otherwise we just had the *snam-bu*."

Although machine-made fabrics and ready-made clothes are available in Rupshu, the women continue to weave the *snam-bu* as it is an integral part of all articles of clothing worn there.

During the year a woman is mainly occupied with weaving the *snam-bu*. It is said that each member of the family must have a new robe made from *snam-bu* every year, but in reality only the affluent families are able to provide their members with a new one each year. Members of less prosperous families usually receive a new *snam-bu* every four to five years.

The importance and widespread use of the *snam-bu* is demonstrated throughout Ladakh. Oral versions of the Gesar epic often recount how fond Duguma, Gesar's wife, was of the *snam-bu* and that this made it popular with the rest of the people (Tashi Phunsog 1979-80: 79). Lengths of *snam-bu* would often be stretched along the path to a monastery, right up to the main chapel, so that Rinpoches or high lamas may walk over them. People would also spread *snam-bu* on the ground of their homes when exalted clergy visited, extending from the entrance of their main door to the room in which they resided (ibid: 78). In both cases, the cloth would be considered to be blessed, and robes made from it were said to be auspicious for the wearer.

In Lower and Central Ladakh the *snam-bu* is only woven by men, while in Changthang the weavers are all women. Male weavers are appalled at the thought of women weaving this cloth, at the same time men in Changthang scorn their counterparts for weaving the *snam-bu*. While men in Rupshu may weave a woman's item when the need arises, the one they will never weave is the *snam-bu*. "A man cannot weave the *snam-bu*, that is bad," Ama reiterated, "We have our own things to weave, and the men have theirs." If a man has no wife or is a lama, then he requests

his mother or sister to weave him a *snam-bu*. He can also buy one from another woman.[10] With a wider choice of fabric available to people these days, men can also stitch their garments out of other cloth. In any case, in winter a man makes his own *shang-lag*, a long robe made from several goat fleeces.

Tashi Phunsog mentions that in the past women wove the *snam-bu* so thin and fine, that you could pass it through a ring (1979-80: 75).[11] What is interesting about his remark is not that the fabric went through a ring, but that he says the weavers were women. Galwan, who lived in Leh, also comments that: "My clothes and coat were Ladaki pattoo [*pattu*], white, a very good one which had made my mother" (1923: 72). It could be that perhaps in the past women did weave the *snam-bu* in Lower and Central Ladakh, but it is difficult to say for sure until more conclusive evidence is found apart from these two observations.

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[10] A *snam-bu* costs between Rs.800 to Rs.1,000, and the price varies depending on the fineness and length of the fabric. It is interesting to note that in Moorcroft's days the same thing cost Rs.3 (1827: 323).

[11] His statement is most probably influenced by the Kashmiri custom of passing shawls made from pashmina or shahtoosh through a ring. The Kashmiri claim that only the purest and finest of these shawls will pass through a ring, and they often practise this in their shops when they sell shawls to customers. I have witnessed this, and there have been times when the shawl has passed through and there have been occasions when it has not. I have not observed this practice, or heard it being mentioned, by Ladakhis when they sell a *snam-bu*.

6.2.1 Weaving and Processing the *Snam-bu*

Finer yarn is kept for weaving the *snam-bu*. It is generally a combination of lamb's-wool and sheep wool. Padon explained that the reasons for this are that lamb's-wool gives the fabric softness and warmth, while sheep wool gives it strength. A *snam-bu* made entirely from sheep wool is not considered to be a good one. However, there is never enough lamb's-wool and so a *snam-bu* can rarely be woven entirely from it. The practice is to use sheep wool for the warp because of its strength, and lamb's-wool is kept for the weft (cf. section 4.2 for gender differences between wool chosen for warp and weft). At other times, when lamb's-wool is in short supply, the weft may be a combination of the two: one ply would be lamb's-wool and the other sheep, the latter usually that from a ewe.

The warp laid for a *snam-bu* generally consists of 158 warp threads in double ply. Warp lengths generally depend on the size and height of the person for whom the *snam-bu* is being woven, and are measured in terms of a span (*mtho*, as was noted in section 5.2). These range from forty-four spans for men, to thirty-six for women and children. An average size *snam-bu* would measure forty spans.[12] If one length (*bubs*) of *snam-bu* is not enough to make an individual's robe or dress, and this is usually the case, then two or more lengths are used. The breadth of the fabric is determined by the width of the loom, and is generally twelve to thirteen inches.

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[12] When wool is weighed for an average size *snam-bu*, about one-and-a-half kilos are used for the warp, and two-and-a-half kilos for the weft.

A *snam-bu* is always woven in one colour. White wool is the standard, but dark brown and black are also used. Dyeing practices and colour symbolism are discussed later on in this chapter. Patterns are not allowed, except when a cape is being made. More than one person can work on a *snam-bu*, and when Rinchen goes out grazing then Ama usually sits at the loom. Lanze and her mother, Abi Yangzom, also take turns at weaving. However, the practice is generally confined to women who are related and non-relatives would rarely be involved. It takes about fifteen days of continuous weaving to complete one *snam-bu*. In contrast, male weavers on the foot-loom are able to weave a *snam-bu* in a day or two.

The last ten to fifteen inches of a *snam-bu* are the most difficult to weave as the warp is very taut. At this time the women remove two heddles and weave the last part of the fabric with only one heddle. In addition, the remaining part of this warp is finished off with a weft in six ply, and not two ply, as this fills up the warp faster. This end bit of the *snam-bu*, known as *gyer-ka*, is much thicker and is used in the upper part of boots.

Once the *snam-bu* is woven it is removed from the loom, but the two ends are kept knotted to each other. They will be separated only when the *snam-bu* is ready for dyeing. The processing of the *snam-bu* can now commence, and the stages involved in this are important for the finishing of the fabric. They make it easier for the dye to be applied. First the *snam-bu* is napped (*sher-cis*), and while this is sometimes done directly on the loom, it is more common to hang the cloth over a rope, usually strung between the tent and a tent pole. Napping refers to the manual raising of fibres on the

face of a fabric to give a pile-like surface (Burnham 1980: 92). In Rupshu, napping is done to raise superfluous fibres and to remove any dirt that might be lodged in the fabric. Napping is done by combing the *snam-bu* with a *khrug-shed* (Plate 37). This is a tightly tied bundle of small lengths of wood that have been sharpened on one edge. Napping may also be done using a wooden comb, or one of the wooden cards used for carding wool (cf. section 4.3.2). The next stage involves the shearing or cutting of the raised fibres, and this is known as *pu-co-cis*. Napping and shearing off the fabric are done to only one side of the *snam-bu*, not both, and this will be the right side up which is always taken as the side facing the weaver while the cloth is still on the loom.

In the regions of Zanskar and Kargil, the *snam-bu* is napped over a small fire (Tashi Phunsog 1979-80: 74). Two women sit on either side of the *snam-bu*, while it hangs over the fire, and comb the excess fibres out of it. The fire is said to help remove the hairs in the *snam-bu* by raising them. Aba Palle explained that the reason for doing this over a fire is that the heat coming from below the cloth causes it to "open" and the fibres are easier to remove. Once the hairs have been combed out, a little water is sprinkled on the *snam-bu*, and it is then beaten with a stick to smoothen and flatten it out. This makes the remaining curly hair in the *snam-bu* come out.

After napping and shearing, the *snam-bu* is washed. This stage is called *phyag-phyag-cis*. However, before this takes place, the cloth is stitched up along one side, which is said to facilitate the washing. This washing of the *snam-bu* is known as "full", and it is the process to thicken and condense cloth by controlled shrinking

37. The *khrug-shed* is used for napping the *snam-bu*.

(Burnham 1980: 62). The washing shrinks the *snam-bu*, both in width and length. Tharchen explained the reasons for doing this:

> "The washing makes the *snam-bu* hardy, it brings all the holes and gaps in the fabric together. We say that the stronger the person who is washing it, the stronger the *snam-bu* will be."

Since strength is an important factor in the washing and the process is strenuous, it can be done by men, as well as women. The other reason for washing the *snam-bu*, apart from shrinking it, is to remove any grease that did not get removed out when the wool was washed.

Washing the *snam-bu* takes a whole day, or may even last for a few days, and is usually done at campsites where there is an abundant supply of water. The *snam-bu* is washed by placing it in a running stream of water and vigorously stamping on it with one's feet (Plate 38).[13] Debring is the most popular campsite for this, as the stream, though far from the camp, is fast-flowing and in September the days are usually hot and sunny. In the morning, as soon as the sheep and goats leave, a member or two of a family head for the higher inclines of the stream with their *snam-bu*. Rinchen went along with her younger brother Norbu, and while she washed, he kept the fire going and plied her with numerous cups of hot tea. She first rolled up her trousers, placed the *snam-bu* in the stream close to the bank, and then began stamping on it.

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[13] In the villages of Ladakh, in addition to soaking the *snam-bu* in water, it is washed in *chang* or the leftovers of *chang* (*bang-ma*), and then it is washed using hands or feet for two to three days (Tashi Phunsog 1979-80: 74). This is done because people believe that *chang* makes the cloth shrink faster and also bleaches it, making it whiter.

38. Washing (*phyag-phyag-cis*) the *snam-bu* in the stream at Debring.

There are also those who choose not to make the long trip up to the stream to wash their *snam-bu* and instead do this near their tents in a tub or a pit in the ground. Skarma was one of these, and he took a huge metal barrel he had obtained from the army, filled it with water and soaked the *snam-bu* in that. He then climbed into the barrel, held on to the sides, and stamped away on the *snam-bu* for the whole day, taking breaks for food. When asked why he did not join the others at the stream, he replied, "I feel too lazy to walk up to the stream, it's better to be near my tent where there is always hot tea to drink."

A *snam-bu* may be washed continuously for two to three days. After the washing is over the stitches are removed, and the knots joining the two ends of the warp opened. It is stretched out on the ground and dried in the sun.[14] The *snam-bu* is now ready for dyeing, before it is cut and stitched into garments.

6.2.2 Dyeing

Once the *snam-bu* has been washed and combed, it is then ready for the dye (*tshos*) to be applied. While washing of the *snam-bu* is done by both men and women, napping, shearing, and applying dye are specifically women's work, and each family dyes their own cloth. In contrast, in the villages of Lower and Central Ladakh dyeing is a specialized occupation, where certain households traditionally dye cloth for the

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[14] In Lower Ladakh the *snam-bu* is not dried immediately but left twisted for about two days. It is then opened and a thick wooden stick is rolled over it several times. This is to ensure that all the hairs stay flat on the surface of the fabric.

whole community. These professional dyers, known as *tshos-mkhan*, are mostly men.[15] Aba Palle recounted that in the 1960s it cost around Rs.20 to get one *snam-bu* dyed, while dyers today charge around Rs.150 and often expect you to supply the dye as well.

All dyes used in Rupshu today are commercial, the powder being bought from traders who come to Rupshu from Manali or it is purchased from the market in Leh.[16] The colours usually used are red, brown, and maroon, the last being preferred. Dyeing is always done by a woman in her tent, generally when she is alone. In Bhutan too, Myers noticed that dyeing was always done in a quiet place where it should not be observed by outsiders, lest they steal the colour: "A pregnant woman should avoid dyeing yarns so that her baby may not steal the color" (1993: 2). The dye is prepared by first boiling it with a little butter and salt for about an hour. The dye is then taken off the heat and allowed to cool for a short while, before the *snam-bu* is unrolled into it. The *snam-bu* is left overnight in the dye, or depending on the strength of the colour it may be left in it for a day or two. At times, *snam-bu* are dyed in two stages, which usually depends on the dyes available. If maroon is not available, then the fabric is first dyed yellow, and after it has dried the fabric is then soaked in a red dye. After dyeing, the *snam-bu* is then ready for stitching (Plate 39).

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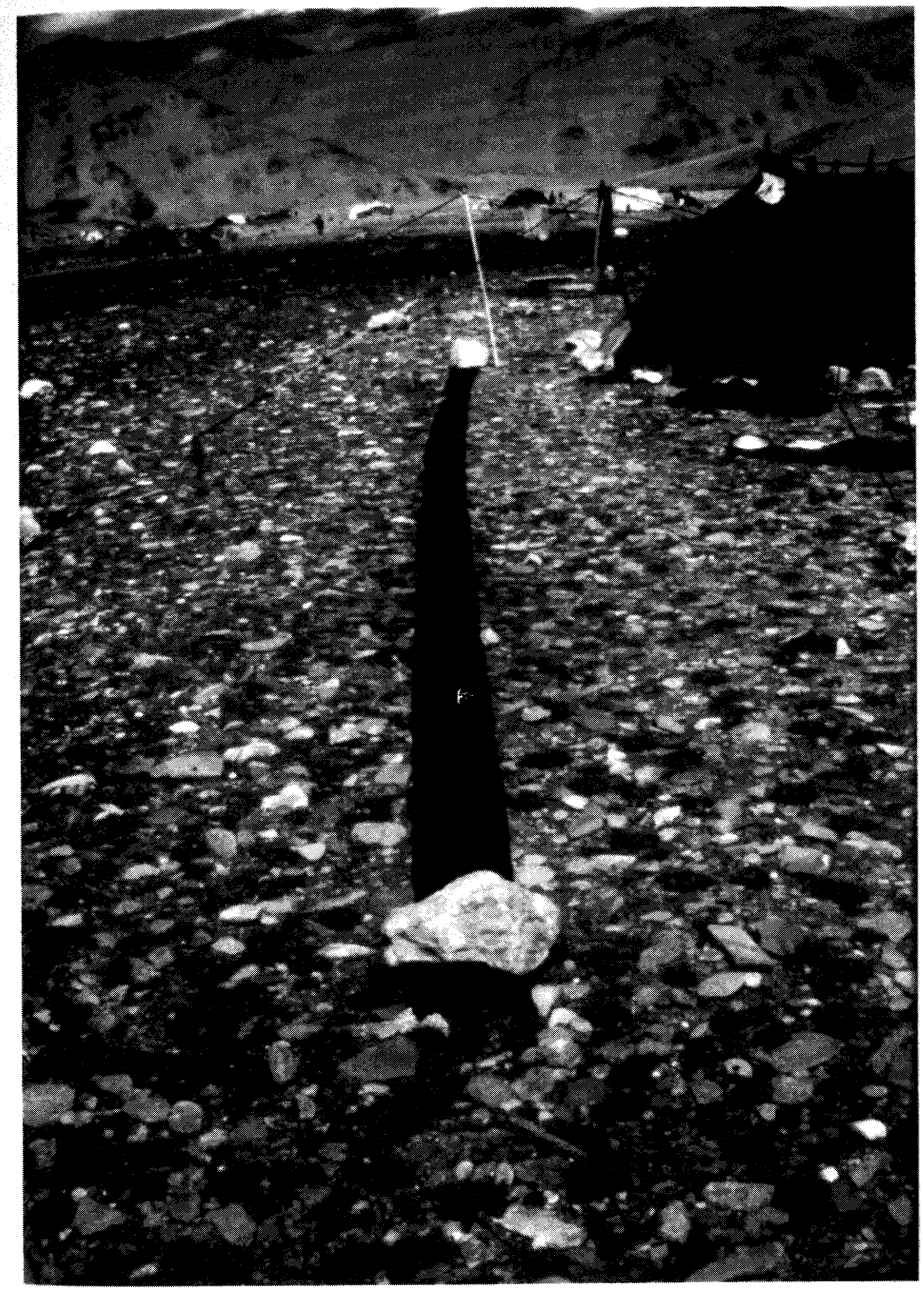
[15] However, Aba Palle remarked that at one time everyone did their own dyeing at home and it was mainly women who were occupied with this. Only later did male professional dyers enter the scene, and now even a few women are becoming professional dyers.

[16] One of the most popular commercial dyes used in Rupshu is known as FEDCO, and is manufactured in Bombay.



39. A length of dyed *snam-bu* drying in the sun.

It is difficult to determine whether or not natural dyes were made and used in the old days in Rupshu.[17] If they were at all, then most of this knowledge is now forgotten as few could tell me about these earlier dyeing practices. Nowadays the women depend completely on commercial dyes. Tsering Paljor and Angmo Tsering, both now well into their seventies, revealed that dyes were never made in Rupshu and that they were always bought from outside, mainly from Manali. "Very little, if anything, was ever dyed before the "powder" came to Rupshu," Tharchen explained, "Natural-coloured wool was mainly used, and while the men wore white the women wore black or brown." Thus, dyeing the *snam-bu* is seen as a relatively new phenomenon in Rupshu, and most people attribute this to the easy availability of commercial dyes there.

However, Ladakh does have a rich tradition of natural dyeing using both mineral pigments and organic dyes.[18] However, little of this is practised today, and most of the weavers use commercial dyes or coloured wool. In Tibet as well, organically dyed homespun yarn was used up to the 1960s, but now most of the weavers use ready-dyed, industrially processed and machine spun yarn (Kuloy 1982: 40). However, though amongst the Tibetans wool is seldom dyed these days using

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[17] Denwood mentions that in Tibet the craft of dyeing was often a semi-secret and hereditary art, transmitted by example and word of mouth, making it difficult to investigate (1974: 18-19).

[18] Nevertheless, little information exists on this subject. Few, if anybody, remember or implement this today in Rupshu, and so this thesis does not include a description of the wider practices of natural dyeing that might have been followed at one time in other parts of Ladakh. In July 1994 a workshop on Natural Dyes was held in Leh, and the documentation resulting from this is probably the first of its kind (Savant 1995).

natural materials, traditional methods are still used for the preparation of pigments for painting (see Jackson and Jackson 1976). While much research has been done on traditional methods of preparing pigments, this is not the case with dyes.[19]

The only occasion at which a natural dye is still used in Rupshu is at the prayer ceremonies. This is when the *mchod-pa* (religious offerings made from butter and barley flour) have to be coloured red. The red colour is obtained from a plant known as *mug-se*, which grows mainly around Tso Kar.[20] The dye is prepared by first washing the plant, after which it is wrapped tightly in a thin white fabric and kept in the shade for about an hour. Then a small amount of oil is heated in a pan and the plant, still wrapped in the white fabric, is plunged into the hot oil. The hot oil absorbs the colour of the plant, and the dye is now ready to be used.[21]

6.2.3 Colour Prescriptions

Colours are not mere personal preferences of individuals, but are determined by specific customs, changes in fashion trends, and availability of dyes and different fabrics. It is stated in Rupshu that women must never wear white, but men may.

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[19] However, Denwood does cover some of the major dyes used in Tibetan carpet making (1974: 19-24), and Myers looks at dyes used in Bhutan (1994c: 193-196).

[20] Incidentally, this plant is not included in Savant's (1995) documentation on natural dyes in Ladakh.

[21] I was told that at one time this plant was widely used in Rupshu to dye cloth, but that this was mainly for the clergy. However, the process would require vast quantities of oil which were not available in Rupshu, unless of course the dye is a concentrate and is then mixed with water before use. No one in Rupshu could remember and these remain my own assumptions.

However, very few men wear white today, and it is a colour usually associated with the older generation.[22] Instead it is now stated that men must wear red or maroon, though some people said that men wore only maroon. In the past, when dyes were not so easily available, women wove their *snam-bu* with black or brown coloured wool. This continues to be the practice for women from families who find it expensive to buy dye, of which Ama is one. When dye is available, men's clothes are always given first preference. Thus, these days most Rupshupa take great pride in wearing dyed garments, and even the wearing of white by old men is derided and looked down upon as a practice from the past.

It is difficult to ascertain why exactly women were and still are prevented from wearing white. One possibility is that white is the colour of the gods (cf. Chapter Three), and women are prohibited from wearing it because they are deemed less pure than men. Some of the elders in Rupshu mentioned it was only the married women who were prohibited from wearing white and the unmarried could wear white, but not everyone was clear on this point.[23] However, the common consensus remained that it was not appropriate for women to wear white.[24]

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[22] In Rupshu I would be told that, "look, you will only see our old men wearing white." When I asked about this in Leh I was told that only in remote villages would I still find some old men wearing white.

[23] The Hebers report that "an unmarried girl wears white trousers, but a married woman must wear black, at any rate after the birth of her first son" (1978: 129).

[24] At the same time the death shroud is white in colour, and so is the long white cotton cloth (known as *bag-thod*) draped over a bride's head at the time of her wedding. Further, when a woman chooses goat fleece to line her cape, the preferred colour is white. These discrepancies make it difficult to ascertain why women are prohibited from wearing white, as the rule does not seem to apply to all garments.

This practice, in the past, of men wearing white *snam-bu* and women natural-coloured ones of brown or black is common throughout Ladakh. Aba Palle and David Gaphael both recalled that when they were young, white was still the predominant colour worn by men. Aba Palle said that it was considered inauspicious for women to wear white, but he was not sure why. However, he mentions that in the southern areas of Ladakh, mainly Suru-Khartse, Dras, and Skardo (in Baltistan, now in Pakistan), the women wore white and people who travelled there from Leh used to remark that they looked like demonesses. The Buddhist Dards, who live in Southern Ladakh, also wear mainly white, and Vohra narrates that this was adopted during the reign of Senge Namgyal in the seventeenth century (1989a: 33). An assembly was once held at the court of the King in Leh, the people from Ighu (near the village of Martselang) arrived drunk and were ordered by the King to stop wearing trousers. The Dards arrived late at the gathering and were ordered to stop wearing black clothes. It is said that from this time onwards they began wearing white clothes (ibid).

Colour was primarily a sign of status. In the past, wearing dyed or coloured garments seems to have been the prerogative of the nobility and the clergy, while the rest of the population was dissuaded from wearing dyed cloth.[25]

> "In the period of Kings and Queens in Ladakh ... brown and red *snam-bu* were only to be worn by high, noble families like the king, minister, and *ka-ga* [big man] ... The other people below the king and nobility wore white *snam-bu*" (Tashi Phunsog 1979-80: 72).

When Azevedo, the first European traveller to Ladakh in 1631, describes his audience with the King Senge Namgyal he remarks that he, and the queen who was dressed like

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[25] This did not include lamas and nuns who wore maroon.

her husband, wore a garment of some red material (Wessels 1924: 109). Moorcroft and Trebeck made similar observations:

> "The cloth worn by people of property is dyed of an imperfect black, or dark-brown colour. The Lamas wear red or yellow, according to their order. ... The poorer classes wear the cloth as it comes from the loom" (1841: 323).

Galwan, who came from a poor family in Leh, also wrote that he wore white (1923: 72). Grist mentions a further colour distinction wherein the middle class (*ton-pa*) wore white in accordance with the rules, and the low-casts (of musicians and blacksmiths) wore black woollen cloth (1985: 99-100).

Almost a hundred years after Moorcroft, little had changed with respect to the male colour prescription because Dainelli wrote that the men "wear a great robe of fine white wool (which in the case of the notables is of a dark wine-colour)" (1933: 248). However, he mentions that women also "wear a heavy woollen garment of dark wine-colour" (ibid: 249). This could mean that women, apart from nobility who were already doing so, began wearing dyed *snam-bu*.

Colour revealed costliness because the process of dyeing was expensive and lengthy, and one which few could afford. Apart from cost and prestige, colour patterns were also determined by changes in fashion. Dainelli mentions that before the wine-coloured garment became popular in Leh, the women used to wear dresses in which the "petticoat" was made of so many thin vertical strips of every colour and alternating irregularly (ibid: 250).[26] He says that this can now be found only in the

[26] Drew mentions women wearing a gown of which the skirt was made of vertical stripes of woollen cloth, generally blue and red alternately, but sometimes

most remote and lonely villages in the direction of the Tibetan plateau [Changthang] (ibid). At one time it was also the trend in Ladakh to wear *snam-bu* patterned with tie-dyed circles (*thig-ma*) in different colours (Plate 40). Aba Palle recalled that this was also the monopoly of the queen and the wives of ministers, but later when the king's powers decreased, the public also started wearing these clothes. However, they are rarely worn today.[27]

It was only when commercial dyes began to come from India, which required little effort to process and were cheaply and easily available, that colour prescriptions also began changing in Ladakh.

> "The *lālā log* (Hindi: Hindu merchants) who brought the dye here, would take white cloth and spit on it, apply the red dye and rub the cloth. They'd show this to the people and say 'see how easy this is to make'. Then everybody would buy it up, and that's how they all started wearing dyed clothes," Aba Palle related, "But few of these people actually knew how to apply these dyes and not only would the cloth become red, but also their body! For many years their bodies would be red in colour."

Undeniably then, colour was a sign of status and prestige, and it could be as a result of this that today the wearing of white is looked down upon.

When ordinary people started to dye their clothes, the nobility started to use expensive foreign cloths such as brocade, velvet, and later machine-woven cloths. The use of the foreign cloths was restricted to the royalty, nobility, and monasteries,

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patterned and sewn together (1875: 241),

[27] Tharchen recalled that his grandmother used to make the tie-dyed circles and wear dresses patterned with them, but not his mother.

40. A woman's robe made from strips of red and blue *snam-bu*, and patterned with tie-dyed circles (*thig-ma*).

and by not allowing the majority of the population to get hold of these goods of what might be called "the higher sphere of exchange", they also secured their own symbols of prestige (Grist 1985: 100). When cotton cloth first became available it was too expensive for some people to make an entire robe out of, and so they used just a bit of it as a border around the cuffs of their sleeves and the slits on either side of their robes. This border is known as *cha-ga*, and this fashion is still followed today. Aba Palle remarked that those who could afford to make an entire robe out of cotton would show off and wear one robe over the other - a red cotton one underneath and a woollen one over that. Thus, in the same way that colour and fabric were markers of a person's social status in Ladakh, the wearing of textiles made a political statement and could be an identity symbol for the wearer in Bhutan (Pommaret 1993: 6).

Fashion and colour trends will certainly continue to change in Ladakh. In Rupshu women now wear Punjabi-style outfits consisting of loose pants (Urdu: *shalwar*) with a long blouse (Urdu: *kurta*) during summer, and men wear western-style clothes such as jeans and T-shirts. However, both wear the *snam-bu* in winter when temperatures drop.

6.3 The Female Robe and the Male Robe

The *snam-bu*, the main product of a woman's loom, is primarily used to make garments in Rupshu. These include the *sul-ma* for women and the *gos* for men. Trousers (*rkang-tshes*), and capes (*sbog*) are also made from this. Apart from clothes, the fabric is also used to line boots (*lham*),[28] and hats (*ti-pi*).[29]

While all weaving is done by women, all cutting and stitching (*'tshem-cis*) is done by men. Most men in Rupshu will know how to stitch, but not all of them will be experts. There are about ten professional tailors (*'tshem-po-pa* or *'tshem-mkhan*), one of whom is Tharchen.[30] Men generally stitch the clothes their families wear on a daily basis, but for festive occasions and more specialized goods they will request the tailors, such as Tharchen, to stitch for them. Tharchen receives orders to make velvet and brocade robes, capes, and hats. He also stitches patchwork and appliquéd felt saddle-cloths and bands carrying a bell which encircle the neck of a horse (Plates 41 and 42).[31] The tailors are usually paid in kind for their service, though Tharchen

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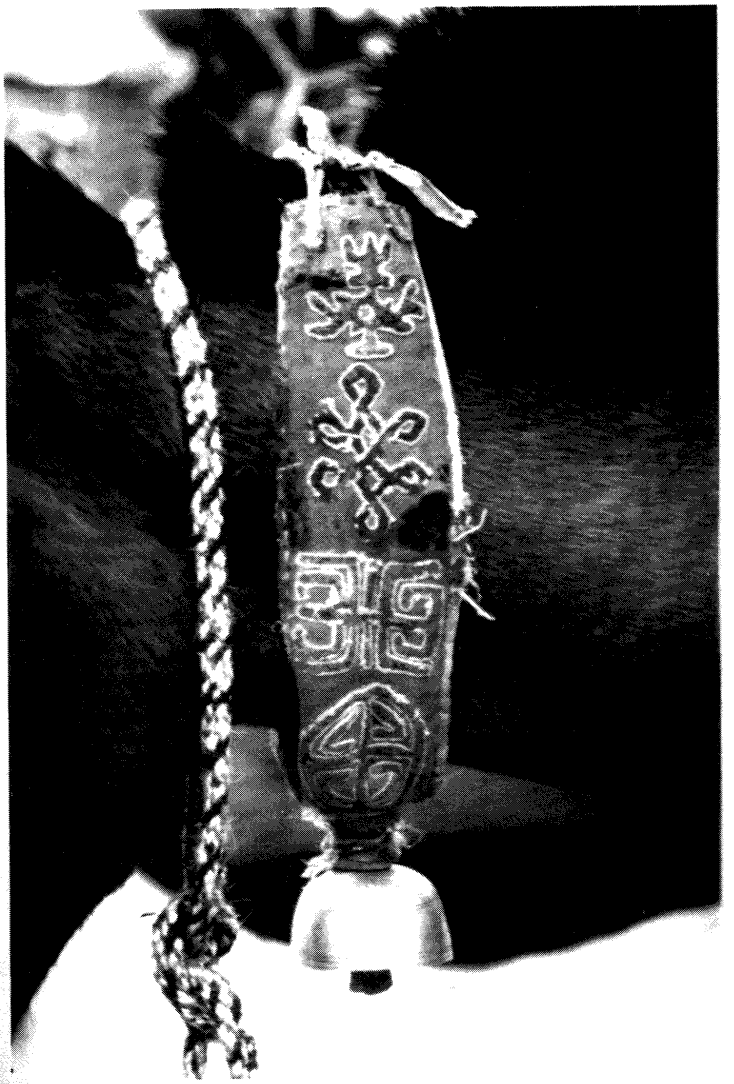
[28] Boots are gender specific and known as *po-lham* (male boot) and *mo-lham* (female boot). Both boots are basically styled the same: the only difference is that white *snam-bu* is used for the male boot and black for the female boot.

[29] This is no doubt derived from the Hindi word *topi*. This hat, with its turned-up corners and fur lining is said to be of Indian origin (Heber and Heber 1978: 126).

[30] Throughout Ladakh men dominated the sphere of tailoring, but nowadays women are also becoming professional tailors and setting up their own shops. Many of these women, like those who first learned to weave on the foot-loom, have trained in the handicrafts centres in Ladakh.

[31] Appliqué and patchwork are not a local craft in Rupshu, or other parts of Ladakh; they have come with the influx of Tibetans into Ladakh.

41. Tharchen making an appliqué band to hold a bell around a horse's neck.



42. A horse wearing the *thing-thing* (appliqué band with a bell).

mentioned that these days some of them were beginning to take money for their work. These tailors are often so busy, mainly in the summer months when most weddings and religious ceremonies are held, that orders have to be given to them well in advance.

To understand the role of dress in a given society, an analysis of the creative act of making clothes is essential, and usually the production of objects that are to be worn is itself gender-specific (Barnes and Eicher 1992: 4). Clothes are essentially gender-specific in Rupshu, and apart from stylistic differences in their design, distinctions are made right from the time of processing the wool and weaving the *snam-bu*. While weaving the *snam-bu*, women distinguish between that being made for a woman and that for a man, and refer to it as *bo-mo gos* (female robe) and *bu-tsha gos* (male robe) respectively.[32] Softer and finer wool will always be used for weaving the male *snam-bu*, and the wool will always be carded. This is not the case with the female *snam-bu*. Whilst weaving, one row of the male *snam-bu* will contain two lengths of weft thread.[33] Thus, the fabric will be thicker and warmer. Again this is not the practice with *snam-bu* made for women, where only one ball of wool passes through each row of weft. Further, napping and shearing of the excess fibres must be done for all male *snam-bu*, but is optional in the case of females. Abi Yangzom explained that these differences were there because a man's clothes have to be well

[32] Male weavers in Leh told me that they made no such distinction when weaving *snam-bu* for men and women, the only difference may be that the fabric meant for a woman would be slightly shorter in length than that for a man.

[33] The weaver sits with one ball of wool on either side of her, and at each row both balls of wool are passed through the warp.

made, and men must look good in them. It was not the same thing for a woman; she could wear anything and it would not matter. "We say a woman is born in this world to work," Tharchen reported in explanation of this disparity, "A man to do good things and to travel here and there."

A woman's clothes are essentially considered to be bad (*btsog-po*) or polluting (*'bag-pa*). This is especially the case with a woman's trousers, and Ama said it was because they have a lot of blood in them.[34] This is articulated in the idea of women's bodies as "dirty" when they are menstruating and in the concept of *khrel-ba*, "shame" (Aggarwal 1994: 232). Women's bodies are also "polluted" at the time of childbirth, and they are purified only after they have bathed and prayers have been recited. It is for this reason that a woman's clothes cannot be placed on yak or *'bri-mo* that are dedicated to the gods (cf. section 3.1). Her loom can also not be carried by them because of its strong metaphoric relationship to reproduction.

Meanwhile, the dress of a new-born child is essentially gender-neutral, and they are kept wrapped in kid's skin in which heated sheep and goat dung is kept. The child, wrapped in the skin, is placed in a bag (*tsha-'u*) which is made out of felt or *snam-bu*. The preferred colour is white, though black is also used. Children are kept like this for a year or so, after which they are dressed in a blouse made from flannel. Only when they start walking is a robe from *snam-bu* made for them, and it is the

[34] Amongst the Siames and Lao as well, women's garments worn below the waist are more polluted and polluting than those worn above, and it is considered inappropriate for a man to walk underneath a woman's garment hanging from a washline (Lefferts 1992: 198).

same for both girls and boys. The pattern follows that of the male *gos*. Girls can wear this right till they get married, though some change over to the female *sul-ma* well before this time or interchange between both types of dress. However, once they are married, women may no longer wear the male *gos*.

6.3.1 Cut and Stitched - Garments made from *Snam-bu*

The *sul-ma* is a woman's main garment (Plate 43). It has probably been structurally the same for many generations, as older women emphatically stated that it had been this style for many, many years.[35] In contrast the men's robe has been influenced by the Tibetans, and this is mentioned later on. The *sul-ma* is a round-necked, long-sleeved dress which gathers (*sul*) around the waist and has knee-length slits. It is an ankle-length garment, though often it falls midway between the knee and ankle. Ankle-length garments are generally worn on special occasions, while the shorter ones are kept for daily use when there is work to be done. It is secured by a belt (*sked-rags*) around the waist. The belt is about six inches in width and is as long as a length of *snam-bu*. There are tassels (*kha-'dzar*) and sometimes a design on one end. The end with the tassels is held hanging down in front of the *sul-ma* while the rest of the belt is tightly wound around the waist, with the other end tucked in at the back. Though generally made from *snam-bu*, the belt is sometimes also a length of corduroy or cotton cloth. Even rope is known to be used. Belts made from silk are worn at festivals, weddings, and religious ceremonies.

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[35] Aba Palle remembered his elders saying that the design had come, a very long time ago, from China via Tibet.

43. Abi Rigzin Tsomo in her *sul-ma*.

On top of the *sul-ma*, women wear a short sleeveless jacket (*khan-mjar*, Leh: *stod-thung*). This has a Chinese collar and two round brass buttons (*tub-ci*) along the right side. The jacket is made from velvet; black, dark green, maroon, or navy blue are the colours generally used. Around the collar and down the side of the buttons the jacket is edged with a white, nylon cord-like piping. A recent Tibetan influence has been the *gres-len*, a Tibetan style blouse worn under the *sul-ma*.[36] This is a loose long-sleeved blouse made from polyester or cotton. Silk ones are worn for special occasions. The blouse is waist-length, with a soft collar that rolls over the neck of the *sul-ma*. The sleeves of the blouse are rolled over the sleeves of the *sul-ma*, into a wide cuff. Like the *sul-ma*, the *gres-len* has no buttons, and both are held in place by the belt.

Over the *sul-ma*, women wear a knee-length, rectangular cape (the *sbog*). The cape wraps around a woman's back and shoulders, and is secured in the front with cloth or woollen ties. Similar garments, known as raincloaks (*charkab*), are worn by both men and women in Bhutan (Myers 1994b: 139). There are a variety of capes worn in Rupshu, depending on the occasion and the seasons. While a cape made from *snam-bu* is mainly worn in summer, at marriages and other ceremonies capes made from brocade are worn (see Plate 35). The cape made from *snam-bu* consists of four panels of equal size cut along the weft of a loom length, and stitched together lengthwise with tassels at the lower end (Plate 44). In winter a cape made from felt

[36] The *gres-len* is a relatively new article of clothing in Rupshu; it must have come with the Tibetans, as many of the older women do not remember wearing this when they were young.

and lined with fleece from the kid is worn, and this is called *yo-sgar* (Plates 45 and 46).[37] Depending on the size of the woman, one *yo-sgar* may contain from five to ten fleeces. The fleece will all be one colour, and white is commonly used. The purpose of all capes, apart from shielding women from the cold, is to protect their clothes when they carry loads on their backs and to carry their babies papoose-style. In other parts of Ladakh women wear a goatskin on their backs, and this is the *slog-pa*.[38] This is not worn in Rupshu, and women say that since the *slog-pa* must be made from a goatskin which has long hairs a goat has to be killed for the purpose. Their lamas have told them that this is bad and that the wearer will incur great sin. Thus, to make all their capes, including the *yo-sgar*, no animals are killed.[39]

A married woman, after she has had her first child, wears a *rked-slog* over her *sul-ma*. This is a rectangular garment that wraps around her lower back and hips, and is tied in the front at her waist (Plate 47). The *rked-slog* is made from *snam-bu* that has been woven from lamb's-wool, and is lined with lambskin. These days the *rked-slog* is also made from corduroy. Women say they wear the *rked-slog* to protect their reproductive organs and to keep them warm.

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[37] Fleece from the kid is warmer and softer than that from a lamb. However, in extremely cold periods a cape made from sheepskin, known as the *thu-lu sbog*, is worn and these are larger than the *yo-sgar*.

[38] It appears that women in Leh did once wear the *yo-sgar* because Dainelli includes a description of it (1933: 248). However, few if any women there wear this today.

[39] The young goats are never killed for their skins, but since they are born when it is still very cold many do not survive, and it is these skins that are then collected and used for the *yo-sgar*.

44. Women wearing their capes (*sbog*) made from *snam-bu*.

45. As it gets colder, women wear the *yo-sgar* - capes made from felt and lined with goat fleece.

46. Felt-appliquéd capes are worn by Tibetan women.

47. Abi Yangzom shows her *rked-slog*. This is made from blue and red corduroy and lined with goat fleece.

The man's *gos* is a full-length robe that overlaps on the left side (Plate 48). This is buttoned from the left shoulder down the length of the *gos*, with the same brass buttons that appear in the woman's short jacket. It has a Chinese collar and slits along the sides. Chinese collars were not common in Rupshu before the Tibetans came in, and it is this feature of the male robe that indicates it has been influenced by the Tibetans. The *gos* is also secured by a belt around the waist. Before tying the belt, the *gos* is folded into two wide pleats from the hip towards the back and then the belt is tied around. The belt is tightly wound around the waist and then twisted through at the centre of the back where both ends are left hanging down. The front part of the robe blouses over the belt and this acts as a pocket in which the men keep things such as a purse, bowl or cup, dried apricots, and sweets. In the past it was not customary for men to wear anything under their robes, but these days many wear T-shirts, shirts, or sweaters. It is common to see a man going around with one hand out of his sleeve (usually the right) and the sleeve hanging down, or tucked into the waist. The men say this increases their mobility. Women claim they do this to show off, especially on cold days. During winter most men wear the *shang-lag*, a long robe styled in the same manner as the *gos*, and made from goat fleece.

Both the *sul-ma* and *gos* have a slit (*zu-ral*) on both sides, with the slits just ending above the knee. Brightly coloured cotton fabric, of about an inch or two in width, is stitched onto the inside edges of the garments like a border or piping. This is the *cha-ga* (see above, page 219) and is generally made from plain or patterned cotton fabric. The Rupshupa say that the colour of the *cha-ga* must contrast with the colour of the *snam-bu*, as it is important that the *cha-ga* be seen through the slits of their