

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"When the hands of a craftsman are engaged in his craft, it is always ceremonial..... The craftsman thus combines within his being the tradition that embraces both the producer and the consumer within the social fabric."

(Kamladevi Chattopadhyay)

On tracing the history of cultural evolution it became evident that in the very early stages of civilisation man took to making objects which were primarily utilitarian in nature. His yearning for something aesthetically more satisfying led to creation of articles of every day use which were not only functional but were elegant and beautiful at the same time. Here was the transformation of mere functional into work of crafts. This led to the evolution of objects of immense beauty and blossomed into many craft forms such as pottery, weapons, wall decorations, jewellery, basketry and various forms of textiles.

The urge for some kind of floor covering was felt as soon as man built houses. Beaten earth floors needed

further protection as these were hard, dusty and possessed an unaesthetic severity. Animal skins and rush mats were perhaps the earliest floor coverings. The mats had certain advantages over the animal skins which hardly met the need for comfort. In the East rush covering followed basketry, one of man's earliest arts and later gave way to plaited rush fabrics. Floors completely covered with reeds, "odd fragments of reed mats" have been discovered recently. A tablet from Ur (3rd dynasty, 2100 B.C.) made mentions of a reed mat approximately 3.19x5.47 m, furnished on a basketry model (54).

The subsequent history of plaited reed mats indicated that these became an important art form. By medieval times, in the East, these had attained a fineness and beauty that gave them a high status as works of art, commanding high prices. Individual centres of production became famous for their work: Palestine, Cairo and North Africa. In India even today these mats are being woven with astonishing refinement, flexibility, beauty of texture and richness of colour (54).

Inspite of their beauty, limitations of size and durability precluded these mats from pre-empting the field. Other fibres such as wool and silk offered exclusive advantages which were both practical and

aesthetically more satisfying.

With the domestication of wool bearing animals, probably around 7000 B.C., came the development of spinning and weaving which was adapted to all sorts of domestic uses (54). Reed mats into which tufts of wool were tied close enough together to make a continuous surface were thought to be more agreeable under foot or to sit on and as covers for sleeping on. This was the beginning of carpet weaving. By 800 B.C., the Assyrian palaces were furnished with carpets having general format of field and border.

Wool and woollen materials have figured in India from very early times and woollen shawls have been mentioned in ancient books. It has been accepted that the pata-lika mentioned in Pali literature was a carpet of some kind. It was inevitable that in countries where people sit on floor, such coverings were devised with imagination and aesthetic sensitivity which grew into works of art in due course of time (17).

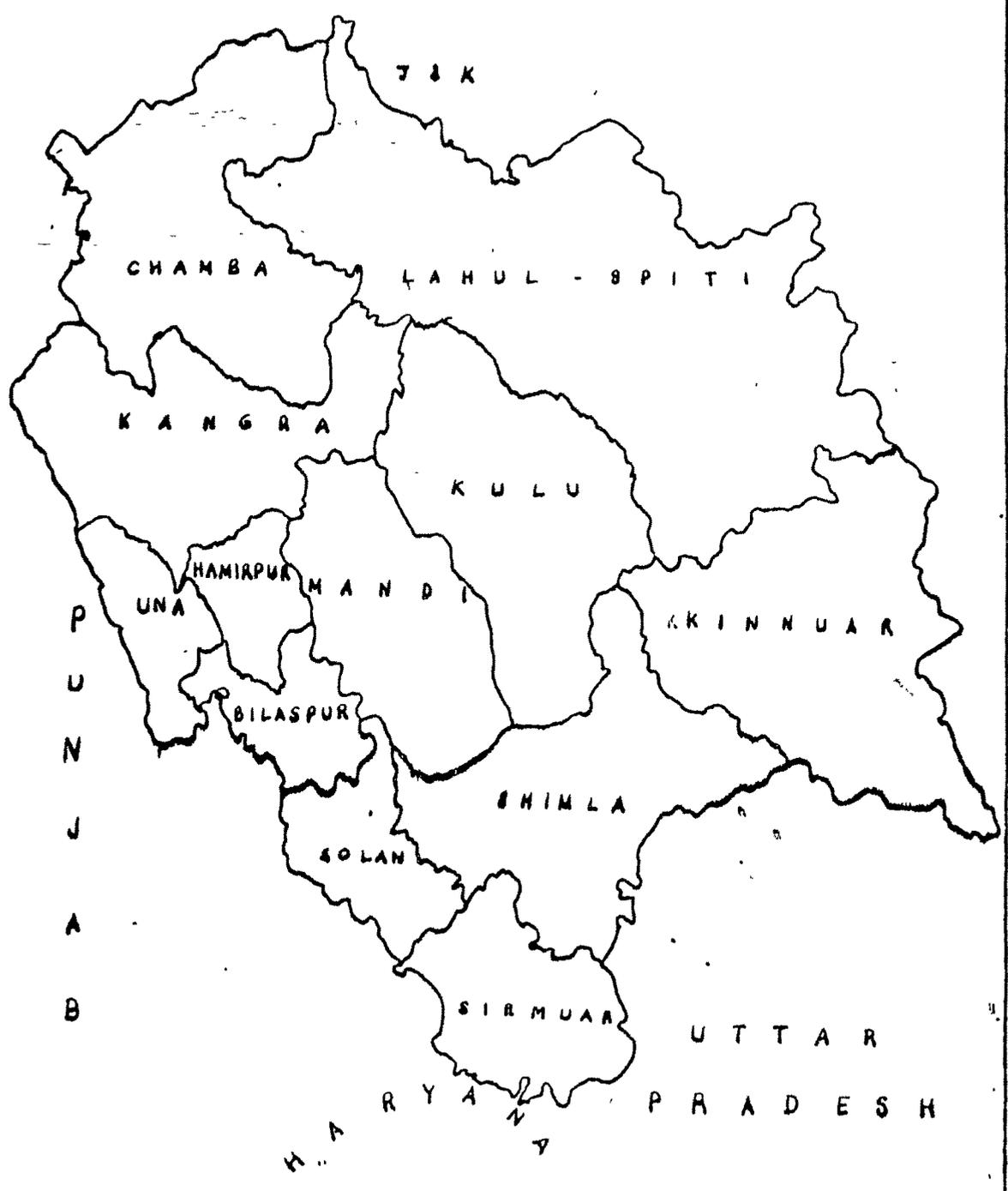
Depending on the climatic conditions of the area and its socio-cultural traditions, a large variety of floor coverings is being manufactured in India. These include carpets of different types; durries, suttringees,

namdas, gabbas and tapestry rugs. Besides these a number of other floor coverings, indigenous to a particular area or a social group, are also made.

1.1 Introduction of the State

Himachal Pradesh or the Devbhoomi as it was known earlier lies in the heart of western Himalayas (67). The state is spread over an area of about 55,673 kilometers. In the north it is bound by Kashmir, in the east by Tibet, south east by Garhwal hills and Uttar Pradesh plains and in the south and south west by Punjab and Haryana. The state can be broadly divided into three regions: First the long Shivalik range, comparatively low, stretching from Kangra to Sirmaur; Second, the lesser Himalayas, is a complex old zone, here the average height of the mountain summits is 4,500 meters. It is thinly populated and dense tropical forests cover its lower ranges. Dhauladhar and Pirpanjal are its famous mountain ranges and its outer fringes have hill stations like Dalhousie, Manali, Shimla, Solan and Nahan. The upper reaches of lesser Himalayas have the districts of Kinnaur, Lahul Spiti and some parts of Chamba districts; Third, the great Himalayas is aligned parallel to the Shivaliks and its crest rarely falls below 5,500 meters. It has no population to speak of.

FIG.1 POLITICAL MAP OF HIMACHAL PRADESH



The climatic conditions of the state vary from semi tropical to semi arctic. The climate of Kangra valley, Beas and Shivalik area in summer is severe and in winter is pleasant with only a mild variation between the day and the night temperature. The climate of lesser Himalayas covering Shimla ranges and Ravi valley is pleasant in summer and very cold, accompanied by snow fall in winter. In the Chandrabhaga and Kinnuar valleys the climate is temperate in summer and semi arctic in winter. Communications are totally cut off and the villages are isolated in winter (67).

Through centuries of social migration people of different races have settled in Himachal Pradesh. First the people of prehistoric Indian culture came into Himachal Pradesh, settling in the southern and the central parts. Their characteristic features were mixed economy of shifting agriculture and livestock, indigenous religion and Kolarian language. The second strain was that of the people of Aryan origin, who migrated from north west. Their principal traits were settled agriculture and Pahari language. Today they form a large majority of the population. The Indo-Mongoloids came from the north east. Distinguishing characteristic of these people were Indo-Tibetan language, Lamastic

Buddhism and mixed economy of shifting agriculture, livestock rearing and trade. The Indo-Aryan culture came from the Indian plains from the southern part of the state. Their distinctive features were Indo-Aryan language, Vaishnavism, settled agriculture and the caste system (67).

It is not only Indian civilisation and culture that has influenced the cultural life of the people of Himachal but also the culture of neighbouring areas like Tibet and Central Asia had an impact on it. Of these the Indian and the Tibetan influence has been the strongest as there has been interaction between the two cultures (68). The creative power of these people has been brilliantly expressed in their art and architecture. Backed by the old traditions of culture and art, these people possess an extraordinary skill for fashioning objects of art. Architecture, paintings, metalware embroidery and weaving of the state have been legendary for fineness and workmanship.

1.2 Weaving in Himachal Pradesh

Weaving of various types of floor coverings, shawls and woollen materials (pattus) has been a traditional craft in Himachal Pradesh. Floor coverings

are used by the people of the state for furnishing and decor. Because of the cold climate, covering the floor becomes a necessity as it provides warmth and comfort from chilly floors. In the higher reaches of the state, the hill folk rear goat and sheep for obtaining wool and hair, the raw materials which go into the making of famous Himachali blankets and rugs (6%). Gudma is the name given to fleecy, soft but quite heavy blanket that is produced mainly in Giabong and Kulu valleys. Gudma is usually made in natural colours, finished with red or black trimmings. Thobies and kharchas are made from goat hair. Of the more recent origin are the namdags made by felting wool and decorating it with embroidery.

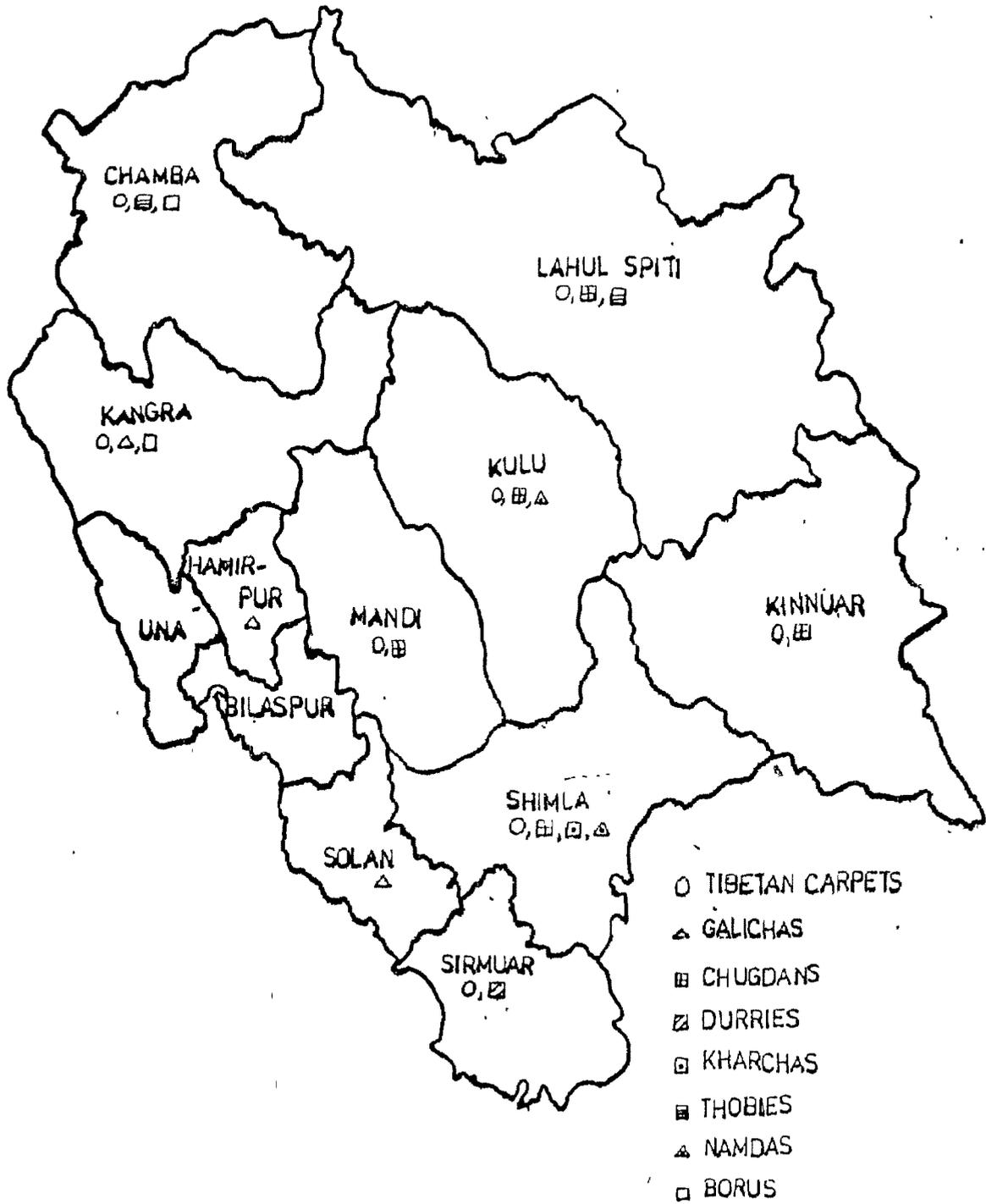
Fraser has thrown some light on the manufacture of woollen materials in the erstwhile Bushahar state and Kinnuar district (27). Manufacture of woollen cloths of several kinds was the only product of the district. Blankets of finest quality, woollen cloth and webs of a very fine fabric were produced. In the winter season people occupied their time in weaving. Soft and thick gudmas and shawls were woven in Bushahar state and Sangam and Kanam villages of Kinnuar district. All these were woven for self consumption as well as for commercial purpose. Most of these fabrics were sold at the Lavi fair at Rampur (27).

According to a survey report of handicrafts of Kinnuar district kharcha, chuktu and chugdān are the main handloom products of the district although dohru, gudma and pattu are also woven. Kharcha is a rough carpet of goat hair which people use as a mattress also. Manufacture of kharcha is centred around Labrang village in Pooh. Chuktu is a fleecy blanket manufactured in the manner similar to carpet weaving. The wool for chuktu was earlier imported from Tibet. These are woven at Sangla, Rorang, Labrang and Sonam. Chugdāns are small woollen carpets made by Kinnuaras (21).

Bhotias living at higher altitude in Pangri area of Chamba district are accomplished weavers. In earlier days Chamba was famous for its Bhotia carpets. Prominent places where carpets weaving was done by Bhotias were Sarwal, Bhatari and Brahmour. Pangri is also well known for its thobies which are woven from goat and yak hair (22).

In the gazetteer of Lahul and Spiti (44) it has been mentioned that wool spinning and weaving were carried out in almost every household in the district. The wool and hair raised from the flock of sheep and goat were spun and woven into cloth. Goat hair was spun and loosely woven into a coarse texture of narrow

FIG.2 DISTRICTWISE DISTRIBUTION OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF FLOOR COVERINGS MANUFACTURED IN HIMACHAL PRADESH



width called thobi. Five or more strips of thobi were sewn together to provide a serviceable carpet and bedding. Strong bags for carrying merchandise were also made out of these. Weaving here was done on a primitive loom dug into the ground. Since 1959 a carpet weaving centre has also been established in Keylong. The carpets enjoyed a mass popularity in the district.

Brahmin and Sud women of Chauntra (Mandi district) wove carpets and mats from leftover knitting yarn (69). The tools used for weaving were a frame and a fork. A cotton warp was arranged vertically on a frame and plain weaving was done. After each row of plain cotton weft, three or four small pieces of leftover wool were tied around each pair of warp yarns. The short ends of the pile were then spread out to make it a closely woven piece. These articles were produced for household use as well as for sale.

To make use of the local raw materials, a carpet training centre was started in 1957 at Palampur. Traditional carpet weavers from Kashmir were employed to impart training. The carpets were woven in 8 x 8 and 12 x 12 knots per 250 cms. sq. The influence of Kashmir predominated in these carpets and talim system was followed. An attempt had been made to introduce

traditional motifs of the area (20).

Carpets in brilliant hues, having dragons and swastika motifs were produced by Tibetan craftsmen engaged in carpet weaving. This craft is centred in the villages of Bhuppur, Purewal, Satuan and Kamsan in Paonta block of Sirmuar district (63).

Cotton durries which were usually plain, in blue or red colours were produced by expert weavers of Sirmuar area (17). Striped durries were also produced by a clever arrangement of warp and weft threads. Weaving here was done on a two harness pit loom.

Several factors such as availability of raw materials, craftsmen and settlement of Tibetan refugees in the state have led to a rapid growth and development of the floor covering industry in Himachal Pradesh. On observing the unexplored potential presented by the industry, government undertakings have also opened training and production centres to impart training and to manufacture carpets and rugs. To continue the age old tradition of carpet weaving, almost every Tibetan settlement has a carpet weaving centre, which has also given an impetus to the carpet industry of Himachal Pradesh. In this context it becomes pertinent to study

the socio-economic aspects, the production and marketing pattern of these floor coverings. A study of the socio-economic aspects can serve as a ready reckoner for the manufacturers for expansion of their existing units as well as for the persons interested in venturing into this field. Planners and policy makers may find it useful in chalking out avenues for the growth and development of the industry and well being of the craftsmen.

From the above references it is clear that Himachal Pradesh has plenty of raw materials and human resources for undertaking weaving. This has given way to manufacture of a wide range of floor coverings which are made for self consumption and for commercial purpose. Though these are used for singular, common purpose i.e. to cover the floor, there exists a lot of variation in the raw materials, manufacture as well as characteristics; some are flat, pileless while the others have thick, lush pile, some are warp faced whereas others may be weft faced, some are plain but some are ornamented with elaborate designs. Because of such vast differences in the basic nature of the floor coverings, the investigator thought it to be of utmost importance to study the production processes, techniques, designs

and colours used for manufacturing each one of these floor coverings. Such a study will serve as a document for providing technical and production details of the floor coverings manufactured in the state.

1.3 Importance of Application of Finishes on Textiles

In order to enhance the saleability and suitability of textiles for different end uses, it becomes important to give some kind of finishing treatment to these. According to their use, some properties such as dimensional stability, flame retardancy, soil release properties and abrasion resistance are desirable in household textiles. Finishing treatments are helpful in improving the hand and wrinkle resistance of textiles and alteration of the above mentioned properties. Choice of finishing techniques and chemicals used for the purpose is determined by the fibre used in the manufacture of a particular textile.

According to Rollins and DeGrey (62), coating finishes often increase the flat abrasion resistance of a fabric by forming a fibre binding and covering the fabric face with polymeric material. Though less successful in the past, recent work with flexible polymer lattices such as polyacrylates and polymethanes

has indicated that polymer deposition on fibre, yarn or fabric surfaces could increase both the flex and edge wear abrasion resistance.

Acrylic monomers undergo additional polymerisation to form linear polymers. Through cross linking, by incorporation of reactive monomers into the polymers, durability of the resin on fabrics can be improved. Such treatments result in improved fibre binding and increased resiliency (56).

According to Taylor and Hurwitz (71) the term acrylics is used for the family of polymers based primarily on esters of acrylic and methacrylic acid. These can be readily polymerised by an anionic or free radical catalyst system in bulk, emulsion, suspension or solution. The self cross linking acrylic polymers exhibit greater tensile strength and reduced elongation. Acrylic resins have been used in textile finishing where these improved crease recovery, abrasion resistance and partially controlled shrinkage of woollens. Application of acrylic binding and finishing has been helpful in increasing the durability of tufted carpets (38) and appearance retention of woollen carpets (80). These instances led the investigator to believe that application of acrylic finish may be helpful in

improving the wear characteristics of carpets.

The investigator undertook the present research with a view to study the socio-economic aspects, production processes, techniques and designs used in the manufacture of different types of floor coverings in Himachal Pradesh. An attempt has also been made to study the effect of acrylic finish on wear characteristics of the carpets manufactured in the state.