

Woolens of the Himalayas

**Creating Sustainable
Livelihoods through Handicrafts
- Weaving - Bhotiya Tribe**

An Initiative by Sewa International

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Woolens of the Himalayas

Bhotiyas

The Himalayan Wanderers



The Community

The Bhotiyas are high altitude nomadic people of the Himalayan region. During earlier times their primary occupation was sheep and goat rearing. Travelling between the high and low Himalayan region they also got attached to the Indo-Tibetan trade route. But after the Indo-China War of 1962 the trade route closed and they settled on this side of the border. They had to look for alternate sources of livelihood and maybe that was the key factor that led to the creation of a demand for these traditional woolens which were previously made for personal use only. They were highly skilled at it and enjoyed monopoly in the business for quite some time as their products were of high quality and were long lasting.

The raw material which they used for making the craft was the wool of local sheep which is relevant in today's increasing awareness and action regarding sustainable fashion reducing the carbon

However, a major shift in the lives of the Bhotiyas impacted the craft itself. With the availability of cheaper and synthetic substitutes in the market, the demand for these handwoven products reduced drastically. Even the availability of new job opportunities with fixed income drove the youth further away from the craft.

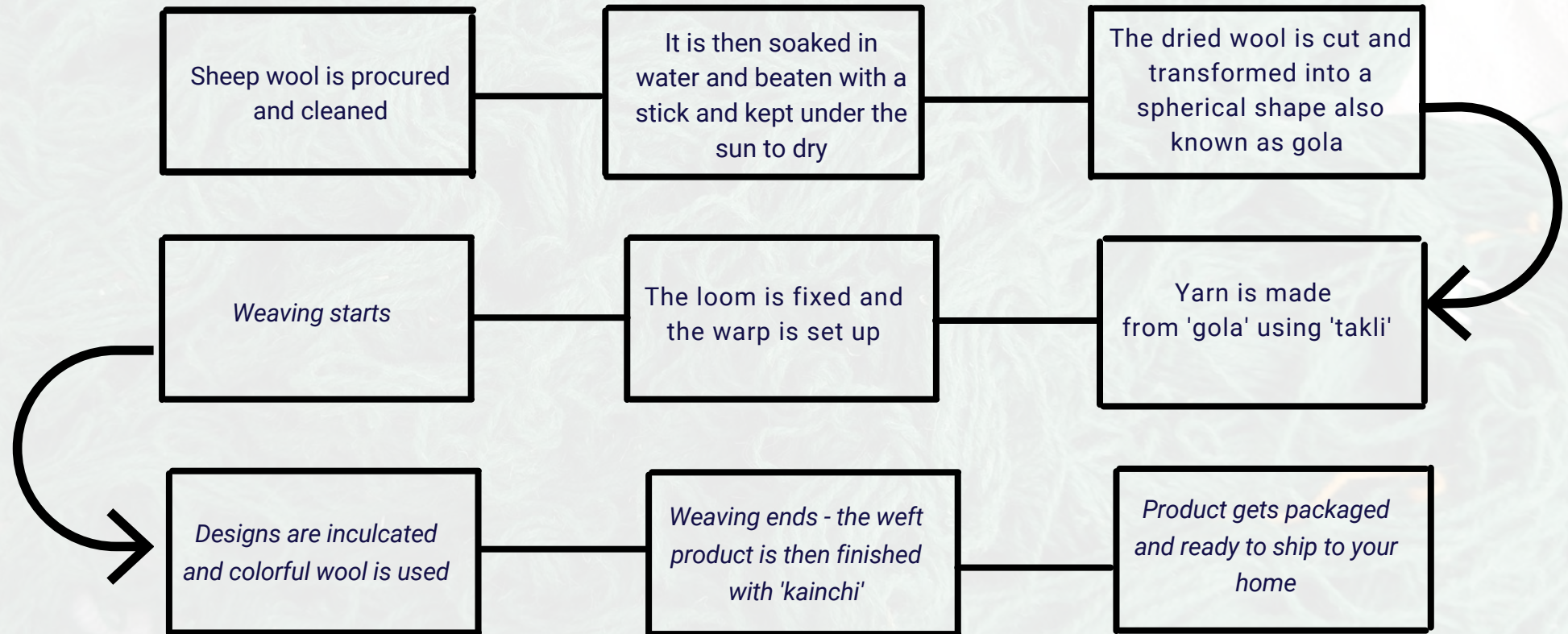


The Craft

Tracing back in time it is believed that the need for comfort and the availability of wool gave birth to the craft. Traditionally women who are the primary workforce of the family used to rear sheep, card wool, spin yarn out of wool and weave shawls, duns and asanas. With the passing of time, the craft may have lost its once flourishing market but its usage is still relevant amongst the people. Every Bhotiya household is a storehouse of beautiful duns and asanas. Even today when a girl gets married, a pair of traditional asanas, duns and pankhis are included in her trousseau. Over the years weaving has become an essential part of the Bhotiya lifestyle. Women now collect wool from shepherders; cleanse it; make spheres of wool; spin yarn from wool and weave. They do it in their leisure time and the products are primarily made for household usage.



Process



Design

The designs found in the craftwork are mostly made from memory. Sometimes they also get designs by working on graphs. Usually, the designs comprise of a border with four corner motifs and one or two center motifs. Gyanak Boota (Swastika Flower), Bada Boota (Big Flower), Sankli (Chain) etc. are the most common motifs used in the center. Like other communities, the Bhotiyas also consider Swastika very auspicious. Often three circular motifs are woven in the central area enclosed with borders. The border is a very important element in Bhotiya woolen work and can go up to 8" in width.



*Designs are only representative

Tools

Kainchi (for wool cutting)

The pair of scissors is used to cut wool from the body of sheep

Takli

Takli is used to spin yarn from curded wool. Before the charkha (Bhotiya's have a different kind of charkha to spin yarn) came into existence, Takli was used to spin yarn. All the Bhotiya households still possess this tool. On lazy afternoons women are often seen spinning yarn on Takli

Kainchi (used in a loom)

This is used for finishing the weft dun

Hattha

Hattha works similar to the reed of a handloom. It pushes the weft against the felt of the cloth



Raw Material

The raw materials used for making this craft are sheep wool and cotton thread. Previously the people used to curd wool from their own sheep's. Nowadays they procure wool from the sheep herders. Cotton thread is procured from local market. Colored wool (except black, white and grey) are also procured from the local market





Products

Aasan



Product Code: SI/TW/Aasan

Size: 21" x 18" *

Cost: Rupees 500-800 **

Usability: Used as a chair mat, sofa mat and aasan for worshipping

*Size may slightly vary

**Price is variable depending upon the design and availability of the product

Pankhi



Shawl

Product Code: SI/TW/Shawl

Size: 12' x 4' *

Cost: Rupees 1200 - 1500 **

Usability: Can be used as a shawl, also used under the bed mattress to keep warm in winter



*Size may slightly vary

**Price is variable depending upon the design and availability of the product

Dunna



Floor Carpet

Product Code: SI/TW/Dunna

Size: 65" x 35" *

Cost: Rupees 6000-8000 **

Usability: Can be used as a floor carpet, also used under the bed mattress to keep warm in winter

*Size may slightly vary

**Price is variable depending upon the design and availability of the product

Dunna

Floor Carpet



*Size may slightly vary

**Price is variable depending upon the design and availability of the product

Sofa Carpet



Product Code: SI/TW/Sofa Carpet

Size: 45" x 23" *

Cost: Rupees 2000-2400**

Usability: Can be used as Sofa Carpet,
bed runner etc.



*Size may slightly vary

**Price is variable depending upon the design and availability of the product

About Us

Sewa International is a 'not-for-profit' organization registered in the year 1997, inspired by the noble tradition of "Service before Self", working for providing disaster relief and rehab during calamities, promoting volunteerism among all, empowering children and youth through skill development and education, reaching out to the underprivileged in the remote hilly/tribal villages of India, and supporting grass-root efforts that promote cultural and moral value systems in the society. The organization envisions to work towards promoting and fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) defined by United Nations, and aligning all its future efforts in that direction. Sewa International has always been a frontrunner in serving the society in a holistic manner from all corners of the nation. We, at Sewa, strive to do our best in upholding the dictum of, "**SEWA HI PARAMO DHARMAH !!**"

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