

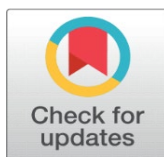


TEXTILE TECHNOLOGY OF MEITEI COMMUNITY AND ITS ASSOCIATED BELIEF SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

The present paper aims to understand the textile tradition in relation to its technology and associated beliefs of the Meitei community of Manipur. Technology not only means understanding raw materials, tools/implements, and processes of the technological system, but it also incorporates the psyche of the craftsmen and cultural values. Textile carries the cultural knowledge and ideological perception embedded in the community's social, economic, and political structures. Moreover, the tangible and intangible dimensions of technology reflect the collective Meitei folklife. Meitei traditional technology shapes not only the communal identity but also holds their social norms, values, belief systems, and gender identity. An account of ethnographic study has been approached to understand the values, norms, beliefs, and worldview of the Meitei community employing various tools and methods like an interview, focus group, and observation method. Therefore, the paper tries to study textile technology to understand the community's cultural expressive behavior.

Keywords: Tradition, Technology, Beliefs, Textile

1. INTRODUCTION

Textile is a cultural product with tangible and intangible cultural links with the social groups that produced them and those who apply them in their folk life. The people make it to fulfill both utilitarian and aesthetic purposes in different cultural contexts of society. This usefulness indicates or suggests the existence of a person who defines the purpose of using objects or activities. Textile is considered a folk

craft¹ and is not a part of rapidly changing fashion, unlike popular and elite object. It is an object which is handed down persistently through time.

In a geographical area, depending upon the availability of natural and human resources, the culture groups mould their lifestyle and livelihood patterns and design their respective way of folklife. Further, all aspects of everyday life – verbal and non-verbal expressive behaviors are transmitted orally across generations. Like other communities, the Meitei community also practices traditional expressive behaviors at various levels, including familial, ethnic, occupational, religious, regional, and so on. The distinctiveness of the cultural life of the Meitei community still echoes in their material culture, religious life, ritual practices, beliefs, and every aspect of their mundane life. From the oral and the Royal Chronicle "Cheitharol Kumbaba", it is evident that Meitei community was formed by amalgamation of different groups having individual territorial principalities under the suzerainty of Meidingu Nongda Lairen Pakhangba of *Mangang/Ningthouja* in 33 A.D. [Ibungohal, And Khelchandra \(2012\)](#). Historically, Manipur was ruled by 76 Meitei kings from 33 A.D. to 1949 A. D. [Kabui \(1991\)](#). Since, Meitei community was formed by integrating the several groups under one political and administrative unit the cultural ideology made to construct common identity, perception, beliefs, and world view. Meitei community was settled down in the valley of Manipur and had engaged in the professions of handloom, basketry, and pottery production from time immemorial. Meitei community has unique traditional textile that separates them from other ethnicities settled in Manipur. This traditional textile has cultural motifs, patterns, and clothing styles (text and texture) that have been confined to the community members since time immemorial [Apanthoi \(2019\)](#). The textiles related to Meitei folklife are created in various forms using different techniques and raw materials demanded by the needs and functions of the social groups. However, the textile (s) is used not only for the fulfillment of an individual(s) but for their community. Hence the authorship of any cultural product is anonymous but communal. Their textiles' productions are based on the norms, values, and ethics of the Meitei community.

The study of textile technology is another aspect in the spectrum of folkloric research that is different from verbal expressive behavior. This paper is an approach to understanding the raw materials and textile techniques, which have tangible and intangible dimensions from the community's perspective. Since Meitei women are generally engaged with textile production, Meitei women weaver strongly connected to the loom and the textiles that manifested their communal perception, belief systems, and values. The identity of the Meitei community is defined by their textile technologies that indicate the collective thought of the community. So, the textile technology can be understood and interpreted by its respective tangible (the artifacts that could be seen and touched) and intangible (the knowledge, beliefs, and cultural perspectives of the commonalities connected with the consumption and production of the artifacts) dimensions of its material culture.

In light of the above discussion, the present paper *Textile Technology of Meitei Community and its associated belief Systems*, try to study the technology used for producing different textile to understand the cultural life of the Meitei community. An ethnographic research approach has been used to understand beliefs, practices, and ideologies connected to traditional weaving technologies. The study is an outcome of both first-hand and secondary data. For the primary resource, data has

¹ According to Richard M. Dorson (1972), folk art is identified by the characteristic of the traditional aesthetic philosophy that governs the selection, production, treatment, and use of forms. Whereas folk craft can be identified by its specific form and technique. Most folk art exists within the context of folk craft because of its utilitarian function.

been collected from the researcher's field visit during his doctoral period in different phases from February 2015 to June 2017. The ethnographic study was conducted in the valley areas of the Imphal region, including the districts of Imphal East and Imphal West. As a part of the study, various methods like focus group discussion, interview method, questionnaire method, and participation observation method have been used to understand not only the tangible aspects but also the underlying intangible aspects associated with the textile tradition of the community. The study primarily deals with a descriptive analysis approach to explain its technical features describing its core values, norms, beliefs, and worldview that carry the basic community social structure.

2. MEITEI WOMEN AND TEXTILE TECHNOLOGY

Generally, Technology is based on the availability of raw materials and the purpose of making a craft to meet the need and requirements of the group.² Technology is developed by people to shape or create various crafts, a medium for interaction between craftsmen and people in a particular group. According to [Schiffer \(2008\) 4-7](#), the relationship between people and things can be recognized or found out in terms of regularity in the manufacture, use, and disposal of material. The variety of the crafts produced by the people is directly related to the requirement of the people. Again, the necessity of a craft is determined by its functional values to the people. [Sebнем Timur \(2001\) 14](#) says that the existence of a group of people is defined by the existence of cultural products and vice versa. A cultural product is shaped not only by the technique only but also by dynamic abstract cultural norms as a way of manifestation or expressing their worldview. So, an artifact is an index of the conceptual state of mind, and technology has always been with it. Further, it is also a fact that a craft is inherited from a group of people employing the technology developed within their environment. According to [Hicks and Mary \(2010\) 321](#), society shapes the technology, and technology shapes society. Such technology is handed down within or outside the group or it can be transmitted to others. In addition, [Soumhya \(2009\)](#) says that material or object is predominantly handmade by an artisan of a particular community using a technique that can be hereditary, assigned, or traditional. Technology is not static because of either internal innovation, diffusion from outside, or dynamic social norms. [Skibo and Schiffer \(2008\)](#) mentioned six phases of technology transfer- (1) Transferring information through oral, written or technology itself, (2) Experimentation (3) Redesigning according to convenience, (4) Replication, (5) Acquisition and (6) Incorporation of other's technology. The knowledge of technologies is transferred according to the needs and requirements within and outside the communities. However, it is difficult to state how and when new technology is developed. It shows that technological evolution is with time, place, and worldview of the society, paving the way for producing various types of art and craft. So, technology means the kind of artifact, material, technique, and embedded ideology of the community.

In the Meitei community, the primary engagement in textiles among the Meitei womenfolk provides economic stability. Traditionally, women of all ages are engaged in weaving, and there is no restriction while possessing the various traditional techniques to produce different textiles. Meitei woman plays a vital role in their socio-economic life. Such engagement in the weaving attributes classifying occupations and social status regarding gender and their role in economic responsibility. It differentiates their roles in economic activities and the division of

² Technology is not only the combination of techniques, methods, and processes but also a part of cultural behaviors developed in a particular group or society.

labor in their society. It says that men are born as warriors and women should have the skill and knowledge of weaving. It reflects the division of labour in their social structure and the association of a particular art to a specific gender. This may be because men worked for the royal palace in the *Lallup* system as a warrior. During the birth ritual, the classification of gender identity is symbolised by using axes and weaving tools when cutting the umbilical cord. So, weaving is an element of the identity of the woman folk constructed by the community.

On the other hand, weaving is a classless and castles occupation. Historically, it is found that weaving is done even in the royal families, homes of aristocrats, pundits, and tribal chief. It gives equal dignity to the labour of weaving. The book *Loiyumba Shinyen*, a royal edict, was the first constitution for dividing and distributing occupation or duties among the clan and particular family to maintain their social-economic life. During King Loiyumba³ (1074-1122 A.D.), he distributed certain works of weaving cloths with specific designs and dyeing textiles among different *Yumnak*/lineage [Manikchand \(2012\)](#). After the conversion of Meitei into Vaishnavism, the hierarchy in the assigning of occupations was visible, and some occupations like pottery, silk rearing, and blacksmith became compulsory for their life [Saha \(1994\) 87-90](#). [Hodson \(1908\) 27-28](#) mentions that the manufacture of silk cloths is done by the *Loi* community, who are of low social position in the Meitei community. Further, he notes that weaving is a common practice done by all Manipuris [Hodson \(1908\) 30](#). Since Meitei women engaged in textile technology, there was a division of work within the weaving practices such as weaver, yarn maker, dyer, washer, and embroiderer etc. Moreover, the technique deployed in the weaving process differs from the cloth's texture and the loom used for weaving. So, weaving depends on their social values and norms, customary laws, belief systems, and perception constructed by the community that signifies the personal and social identity of the craftsman.

3. RAW MATERIAL FOR WEAVING

Generally, a suitable environment is a primary condition and factor for developing a particular craft in a specific region. The availability of raw materials in an environment is a source of continuing its practice. Moreover, the sources, location of resources, and raw materials are concerned with the techniques employed to make suitable textiles. The raw materials for *Meitei's* textiles are *Lasing* (cotton) and *Kabrang* or *Kabolang* (silk). Meitei women were involved in the cultivation and production of cotton and silk yarning activities. Traditionally, women follow the processes taught by their older generation and learn through observation and involvement directly and indirectly. From historical records, the yarning of silk is done by only *Chakpa*⁴ and yarning of cotton is done by *Meitei*. The yarning process for both raw materials is different, and they have different activities.

Yarning of *Lashing* (Cotton): Earlier, the plantation of *Lashing*⁵ (cotton) was done in both hill and plain areas as a traditional occupation. It says that – “*Thoibina saba phidi lupana mayung karaga sana na maphen oibani, lasing angangbana sana*

³ Moreover, during his time, there were different persons, namely- Charei Phisapa, Naotam Phisapa, Yangnu Phisapa, Heisu Naha Phisapa, and Khoiriyen Phisapa. They were assigned to specified works for weaving royal robes. Charei Phisapa was the head of the royal weaver. Naotam Phisapa, Yangnu Phisapa and Heisu Naha Phisapa were those who were assigned to work of spinning, twisting yarn and kneading thread, etc. Heisu Naha Phisapa performed the duty of cutting woven royal robes out of the loom and kept the same at the Langsang Sanglangmei, the royal dressing chamber. This information reveals that men were engaged in weaving activities in the royal court.

⁴ Chakpa is the group of people who proclaim themselves as descendant of Salailen and are subjugated under socio-cultural life of the Meitei community. After the Meitei king had converted to Vaishnavism, Chakpas were considered lower in social structure, and their silk-yarning practices became their identity.

⁵ There are two types of *Lashing* - one is reddish and another white.

olli, lasing angoubana lupa olli" meaning white cotton thread of weft and red cotton thread of warp of the cloth made by the legendary heroine Thoibi turn silver and gold respectively.⁶ During the king Loiyumba, hilly people offered baskets of cotton yearly to the *Meitei* king. Most of the plantation of cotton was done by the hilly people. Roy (1979) says that cotton production is less in the valley and neither enough nor good quality. However, hilly people used to cultivate and produce their needs in the jhum fields between two crops. So, Meitei weavers purchase yarn through co-operatives or local shops. Cotton production is significantly less at present, but they still practice specific traditional techniques in making suitable threads from the cotton buds. It is a long process that starts from ginning cotton plants' buds to make fine strands of threads. It involves different methods of applying various tools/implements. There are necessary activities in sequences for making yarn from the buds of cotton with various equipments. So, it can be divided into the following steps – *Tak-khaiba* (Ginning), *Lashing Kapon Kappa* (Carding), *Moithap Taba* (Cotton Rolling), *Tareng Naiba* (Spinning), *Langkhai Sagatpa* or *Tawot Naiba* (Winding), *Langchak Chakpa* (Twisting), dyeing, and sizing.

Rearing of silkworm and Yarning of Silk from the Cocoon: Silk is also one of the earliest primary raw materials used for weaving fabric by Meitei community. Tensuba (1993) 111-143 traced out the probable period of using silk in Manipur, and he mentions that weaving of silk fabrics was found when Khoiyum Ingouba the husband of Nongpok Paanthoibee reigned in Manipur after the Taangja Leela Pakhangba⁷. He assumed silk yarn might have been brought from China in *Meitrabak (Meitei-Leipaak)* during the Khuiyom Ingouba⁸. He concludes that the silkworm culture commenced from the time of Meidingu Khoi-Yoi Tompok despite having many dissimilar oral narratives behind this.

Nowadays, silk yearning is found in some *Chakpa* villages- *Khurkhul, Leimaram, Thongjao, and Kameng* village. This occupation to them by the Meitei king when the king adopted *Vaishnavism* and considered them lower in social status. However, women of these villages engage in the occupation of rearing silkworms and production of silk yarn traditionally before the advent of *Vaishnavism*. The custom keeps certain prohibitions on the activities of women while engaging in the process of rearing silkworms. A woman, during her menstrual period, is not allowed to touch the silkworm and not allowed to enter the hut where the worms are living. Before feeding the leaves of *Kabrangchak* (*Morus indica*), some *Khoiju Lakham* (*plactranthus ternifolius*, a shrub, and its dry leaves are used to exorcise by burning) set fire to give smoke to the leaves to ward off evil spirits. It is believed that spirits are followed when someone goes outside the house. It is also said that one cannot look at the silkworm by supporting their hands on the two knees.

4. ASSOCIATED BELIEF SYSTEMS TO THE LOOM

In a Meitei family, *Iyong* (loom) is an essential item, and it was a tradition to give a loom as a gift when a daughter gets married. Most houses keep loom on the northern side of the porch; otherwise, it is kept in the *Sang-goi* (a storehouse of household materials). The place where the loom is kept is called *Yongkham*. The weaver follows certain activities, belief systems, and perceptions in connection with their loom that builds a relationship between the weaver, space, and tools in their social life. One does not pass and jump above and under the *Yongkham*, the space

⁶ According to Mutua, there are three types of Cotton - white cotton, reddish cotton, and tree cotton.

⁷ The husband of Sinbee Leima.

⁸ According to K. C. Tensuba. (1993, pp. 111-143), Khoiyum Ingouba reigned after Taangja Leela Pakhangba and before Poireiton, which means before the reign of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba who ruled at Kangla in 33 A.D.

where the loom is placed. One does not touch the loom by their leg; if anyone touches it by mistake; the person must show respect for it. It is believed that the place where the loom is kept is the abode of Goddess *Yongkham Lairembi*, also known as Goddess *Panthoibi*. There is also believed that if the preparation of warp element or weaving is started on the first day, fourth day, sixth day, or ninth day of a month in the lunar calendar, then the woman who wears the cloth may die soon. The preparation of the warp element does not start from Tuesday, Sunday, and *Tatnaba* (inauspicious day). In the same way, the weaving activity starts from an auspicious day of worshipping the goddess of the loom by appeasing and offering not to disturb the weaving. Weaver does not start on Tuesday because it is believed that if started on Tuesday, the cloth will remain unfinished, which is called *Lum Thai*. If a cloth starts to weave from the mentioned day, then the cloth is considered *Laiphee* (God's cloth). A weaver does not cut any finished cloth if it is finished on the day it started weaving. Before starting weaving of cloth and if weavers feel uncomfortable coming closer to the loom for weaving, water is sprinkled at the place of the loom with the leaves of *Tairen* (*Cedrela Toona*). Otherwise, the weaver offers fruits, flowers, edible foods to the Goddess. Traditionally, the first day of preparation of the weaving is started on a good day *Numit tha phaba* by a *Phee-houbi*⁹. The first phase of weaving, known as *Phee-houba* means the preparation of warp by stretching the yarn from a prepared bobbin. *Phee-houbi* does not start working on a bad day and also does not complete on a bad day. However, from this stage, the textile is decided for a particular purpose. When the weaver finds a problem during weaving, either disconnection of thread or not progressing in weaving, or laziness of sitting with the loom, she offers fruits and grains to Goddess for smooth weaving. During their menstrual period, the women weavers are not allowed to touch or weave some designs such as *Namthang Khuthat* because the design is derived from the body of the mythical god serpent Pakhangba. In addition, *Laiphee* (deity's cloth) is not woven during menstruation. There are three types of looms that the Meitei weaver used from the very early period for making different types of cloth use of various functions. They are - *Khwang Iyong* (Back Strap Loom), *Pang Iyong* (Throw-Shuttle Loom), and *Kon* (Fly-Shuttle Loom).

1) Back Strap Loom: *Khwang Iyong*¹⁰ is considered an indigenous loom made by readily and easily assembled parts introduced from the immemorial time, which is connected to their mythology connecting certain cultural life activities. The textile used in the first coronation of the king in the attire of *Khwangli Laikhal* and queen was in *Chinphee Phanek*, and *Laiphee*. It can be understood or assumed that the male cloth size is small, which might be made by this loom. The type of *Khwangli Laikhan* is no more used in the present day. This loom is suitable for thick and heavy textile production because of its tight weft technique and width, which depends on the beating stick and the hand of the weavers. The cloth is also not long because they weave only one textile covering the lower body as a wrapper. This technique is more suitable for thick cloth, which is helpful in cold regions. *Phanek Mayek Naibi*, a traditional female Sarong, is one of the common products woven by the weaver with this technique.

This loom has different parts made by assembling different tools, which two women do. The tools are assembled only when a weaver makes the warp element. Each part of the loom has its function in relation to each other. Installing the loom is the first step of preparing warp element by stretching yarn vertically from the *Yeppu*

⁹ Phee-houbi is an expert woman who works making warp elements.

¹⁰ The introduction of this technique is connected to the creation of the universe by the Almighty god Atiya Sidaba.

Kannaiba (front rod) to *Yeppa Chei* (back rod). The yarn is stretched from the front rod to another back rod at a distance of one length of a *Phanek* (Sarong). The sitting woman holds *Nayetchei* (weaving poles), *Utong* (bamboo rod), and *Sunachei* (heald rod) by left hand covering the end part of the three pieces of equipment under a cloth. It is believed that if a woman does not cover the three pieces of equipment at the time of stretching thread, it is meant that she is not respecting her brother-in-law. It is also believed that if one does not cover it while working, the thread that will be used becomes insufficient for making cloth. The sitting woman takes an end of two yarns tied to the front rod and takes a solid twine to the *Sunachei* (heald rod). Again, pass to another *Sunachei* (heald rod) and twin to make a loop. The warp yarn passes under and over the *Utong* and again passes under and over the *Nayetchei*. Then, the yarn is passed to the standing woman and warped to the back rod. It is brought back to the seated person. Then the same process will continue till the desired breath is reached. This stretching of yarn continues until the required width is attained. During the weaving, if a person is touched by the *Tem* (weft beater), it says that the person may not get into married life. It is believed that *Tem* is a weapon of Goddess *Lairembi*. In a narrative, it tells that Goddess *Lairembi* kills several *Saroi-Ngaroi* (evil spirits) by using *Tem*. So, people avoid touching *Tem*. *Utong* (bamboo rod) is also not used to beat someone. It is believed that goddess stands on the *Yeppu Kanhaiba*.¹¹ It is a movable type of loom that one can carry to any place for weaving, and also, the materials of its tools are readily available at low cost. It is made of bamboo and wood available in their vicinity. There is no change in tools and the traditional technique that had been continued. The tools and their functions through behavioral patterns of the weavers are incorporated with their customs and belief system.

2) Throw Fly-Shuttle Loom: *Pang Iyong* is one type of apparatus for weaving cloth, which is structurally different from the *Khwang Iyong*. It is introduced in response to making more types of cloth textures for different purposes. Function of throw shuttle loom is the same as that of the back-strap loom. However, it provides more control to the weaver for producing more delicate and uniform cloths. In the Meetei community, the narrative of *Khamba* and *Thoibi* reveals that *Thoibi* used the throw shuttle loom as a weaving loom in *Moirang* and *Tamu* (Burma). The exact time is obscured, and it is not easy to trace its origin. But it has been used from very early since the invention of back strap loom which has a different technique. This loom may be innovated or developed by people within the community over time. The community possesses this loom for weaving different fabrics in a more convenient and lesser time-consuming from the back strap loom and getting some relaxation in working time. Weaver uses this loom to produce certain fabrics which are delicate and thin with various motifs and decorative designs. The loom is suitable for weaving *Innaphee* (Shawl), such as *Wangkhei Phee* (thin cotton shawl), *Rani Phee* (thin silk shawl), *Harao Phee* (thin cotton shawl), and *Kokyet Phee* (thin cotton shawl for making turban), which are characteristically thin and have huge decorative designs. However, it can also produce compact cloths like *Khudei*, *Pabun*, *Phanek*, *Innaphee Matek*, etc., but it is lesser in production. So, the craftsman uses a suitable loom according to the convenience and purpose of the cloth. In this loom, two techniques are applied to produce different types of designs: weft design and extra weft design. The throw shuttle loom is not movable, and it is fixed to a

¹¹ Informant: Pheiroijam (o) Memcha, Luwang, Kongpal, weaver, 22-06-2015, 7:30 am

particular place. It is a loom that can produce various sizes and lengthy cloth than the back strap loom in various quality thick and thin textures.

- 3) Fly-Shuttle Loom:** This loom has a structure similar to the throw shuttle loom but more mechanical. This is the latest loom with a new mechanism that the shuttle flies from one box to another. From the record, *Kon* (fly shuttle loom) was introduced by Huiem Keipha Singh Selungba of *Yaiskul Hiruhanba Leikai*, an expert craftsman, during 1921 A.D. It is a quick and effective mechanism, and weavers possess this loom for producing various fabrics. On this loom, cloths of any width can be woven. Heaviness of the loom allows less vibration on the loom, and it is more efficient in producing better quality. It is suitable for both fine and coarse textural clothes.

There are some instruments that are used for making warp elements; they are – *Phee-hou Keirak* (a ladder), *Samchet Keirak* (a type of reeds), *Drum* (cylindrical wheel), *Suna* (heald) and *Konnaba* (wrap beam). After the desired threads are wrapped around the wrap beam, the weaver installs it in the proper place of the loom. When the wrap beam is kept at the right part of the loom, two women are engaged in making warp yarn in the loom. The wrap beam is kept above the frame of the loom, dropping the ends thread which is wrapped around the wrap beam. One of the women sits at the weaver seat, and another woman sits inside the free space of the loom just behind the heald. The second woman passes the thread separately to the first woman. The first woman takes and inserts the threads into the heald, then into the reed, and binds them to a rod. After passing all the threads, the warp beam is attached to the lower part of the loom. Even if the mechanism of throw shuttle loom and fly shuttle loom may have slight variations, some tools are common in their function. The names of the tools are- *Khongnet* (Treadle), *Samjet* (Reed), *Natchei* (weaving pole), *Singmit* (heald rod), *Konnaba* (warp beam), and *Nawongkhok* (a bamboo rod tie to two banks of the heald rod).

5. OTHER METHODS EMPLOYED FOR GETTING THE TEXTURE AND DESIGN

Textiles of different textures and designs are produced for specific functions representing physical structures embodying sociocultural meaning. The texture and design become cultural motifs to identify their group. Further, the method employed for making texture and design identifies the skill and knowledge of women. There are some methods used for producing different motifs; they are discussed below:

- 1) Extra-Weft weaving method:** Extra-weft weaving method¹² is employed to make various designs. This method is more applicable in the fly-shuttle loom and throw-shuttle loom to produce delicate designs like *Namthang Khuthat*, *Kharoithet*, *Thangjing Mapum*, *Tangkhai*, etc. However, this method is less found in the Back Straps loom.
- 2) Stitching method:** Most of the cloths are made by stitching two same woven cloths of equal sizes. So, such a method differentiates their identity from other ethnic tribal communities inhabited in surrounding hilly region. It is believed that using such textiles gives good luck and good fortune. Culturally, the two equal sizes of cloth symbolise male and female and stitching together represents the creation of a complete one. It is

¹² In this method, the extra weft yarn is used along with the regular weft yarn. At the time of passing the weft, the warp threads are lifted by lifting heald through pressing the treadle and making a shed for the passing the weft yarn. When the weaver wants to make design, only the required warp yarns are lifted to pass the extra weft with the help of the shuttle.

believed that the creation of any living being is because of the unification between male and female. The time invention or development of this method is difficult to trace out. However, it may be from when the Meitei community started using big shawl, sarong, dhoti, etc.

- 3) Needlework:** This method is used for making intricate designs by hand. From the Royal Chronicle of Manipur, it is found that the needlework was introduced during the reign of king Keiphaba (969-984 A.D) and was first seen on the border of Sarong of women's wrapper.¹³ With this method, the community produces different designs in the clothes to identify social status among the people and between the ethnic groups. Now, different designs are introduced by the needleworker from their creativity and skill apart from the traditional designs- *Khoijao Mayek*, *Khoi Mayek*, *Phige Mayek*, *Hija Mayek*, etc. It is found that the creativity of individuals can lead to the popularization of their culture in a contemporary cultural trend such as fashion. Craftsmen derive their designs from traditional elements into more refined forms which are more exuberant and fashionable with time. But the craftsmen or the designer does not make much change in the traditional elements to preserve indigenous features. Moreover, the specific indigenous designs remain continuing without any alteration. The cloth with designs produced by needlework is consumed by the community in relevant to social, political, economic, and ritual practices.

6. CONCLUSION

The study of technology determines not only the raw materials, and process of textile weaving but also brings their set of socio-cultural dynamics, emphasizing in environment determining every human action in relation to their worldview. The settlement of the Meitei community in the valley influences them to establish their socio-cultural expressive behaviors politically and socially to maintain and regulate their socio-politico-economic and religious understanding. It is visible that the Meitei community is not a homogeneous group, and there is a classification of identity between the inter-ethnic segments in the production of textiles.

It is a fact that weaving is an occupation of women of all ages that attributes to the classification of gender identity and their role in economic responsibility. A crafter's gender and social identity is highlighted by the craft associated with the crafter. There is no restriction while possessing the various techniques for weaving, except the yarning of silk is done by only *Chakpa*. Besides, a craftsman's restrictions and taboos in crafting classify the dynamism of craft with the craftsmen. The social structure of the community can be seen from their technique and skill of art and craft which a craftsman engages. Women's skills and knowledge of technique may vary, but it is prevalent throughout the valley because of their intermarriage practices. Even if it is not giving particular women, there is recognition of the craftswomen through the techniques and methods. It is also evidence that the weaver of the Meitei community has the same ideological perception towards their crafting works following certain dos and don'ts in the activities. However, the textile produced from different villages or geographical regions are distributed within the community without separating and identifying the region or village.

¹³ The method was so prevalent during the 15th century when king Khagemba introduced the cloth Mana Phee as an item of reward given to politically recognized persons. Mana Phee is a cloth decorated with intricate designs and used as a gift for the state award. The making of design such as flowers, animals, fish, etc., are not done in complete form in the clothes, and they are left for some part at the end. Because it is believed that men are not the creator of the world and God is the only one who can create perfect and completed form.

Every villager's weaver employed three types of looms equally to produce various types of textiles. There is no change in tools/implements and the traditional technique that had been continued because tools are readily available at low cost which is made of bamboo and wood available in their vicinity. The tools and their functions through behavioural patterns of the weavers are incorporated with their customs and belief system. The technology developed from their geographical location shapes the socio-cultural and economic life. Their environment becomes a factor for giving invisible forces to construct or reconstruct a visual form of culture. It is clearly revealed that the study of technology means the understanding of the raw material, the whole process of crafting, the psyche of the craftsman and the community, the tools/implements, the technological systems that incorporate knowledge, ideological correlates, embedded in social, economic, and political structures. They have a culture of learning a technology from other through sharing knowledge of techniques and marriage relationships from one village or family to another. It is also found that some of the techniques are introduced and modified according to better suitability. They still employ skill and knowledge taught by their older family member, which is handed down from one generation to another. Texture and design of a cloth convey socio-cultural meaning and belief systems. However, it is found that most of the motif and clothing is derived from their ideological perception. Myths, beliefs, nature, and environment of the people are the source of the Meitei art from which various visual images i.e., motif is developed. The motif woven into a cloth carries specific meanings concerning the wearer within the community and is prescribed with a sense of social and cultural value.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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