CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
"I have seldom seen anything more beautiful than the handloom fabrics which we have in our country. It is craftsmanship and artistry of the highest order".

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

The weaving craft is as old as the relics of civilization and wool is considered as the first fibre ever used for weaving clothes. Wool is the only fibre devised by nature for the purpose of clothing an animal to keep it dry and warm. The use of all other fibres of plants and silk for the purpose of clothing were discovered later.

The importance of wool was realised by man ever since the dawn of civilization. Earlier he took advantage of the woolly skin of slaughtered animals to keep himself warm by wrapping it around his body. Subsequently it was discovered that the woollen fibres when damped and pounded could be easily matted to form a fabric to wrap around the body. Then man was able to spin these fibres into long continuous length of cloth as he learnt weaving. Gradually he added touches of beauty to the woollen fabrics and became adept in the art of weaving.

Wool weaving has been cited in vedic literature. In Rgveda period the wool of Ghandhara was highly prized. There is a reference to words Samulya means a woollen garment,
Pusan as vāsa-vāya weaving woollen clothes, Indra is wearing wool Parushni for adornment.

The reference to goat’s hair to be used for shawl weaving appeared in early Jain literature. In ancient Buddhist literature shawls are found among the recorded inventories of woollen textile.

Shawl is a square, oblong or triangular article worn generally by women over the shoulders or head and by men on shoulders. From ancient times, a shawl has been used as an essential decorative piece by the rich and noble and as a protective covering by common people. The degree of fineness of a shawl is traditionally accepted as a mark of status in society.

Shawls are mainly made from sheep and goat hair. There are around 200 varieties of sheep all over the world. The Australian exotic corriedale is a dual purpose sheep with high adaptability, suitable for depasturing in any country, and is considered to be one of the best all round sheep in the world. Besides sheep and goats, deer, dogs, wolves, cats and rabbits are also sheared for making woollen shawls.

Oriental shawls first appeared in Europe after Napoleon’s return from his Egyptian campaign in 1798. The period of nineteenth century upto 1870, when fashion silhouette changed was known as the 'shawl period' because
women in Europe and America wore shawls with almost all their clothing, as their dresses were thin and decollete and it was considered a symbol of gentility to wear a shawl gracefully.\textsuperscript{96}

In India shawls are woven not only from wool but also from cotton and silk. Manipur produces cotton shawls with geometric designs in extra weft technique; sometimes they use silk yarns for incorporation of the design. Assam also produces shawls in silk and blends of silk and cotton apart from cotton alone. Motifs are usually in pyramid shapes. Orissa is famous for silk ikat shawls. Surendranagar and Bhujouri in Gujarat produce shawls in cotton, wool and their union fabrics with designs in extra weft technique. Tangalas, woollen shawls of Gujarat are woven in half width and two pieces are joined together in the centre. The pattern is usually woven on the vertical half of the shawl by wrapping yarn around a group of warp yarns, making sort of bead called dana.

Woollen shawls are produced in Nagaland with red and black verticle bands. Kumaon and Garhwal, a hill region of Uttar Pradesh produce shawls in wool usually with stripes at the two ends in extra weft technique. Kashmir shawls, produced in wool, Pashmina wool and sometimes in blends of silk and wool are world famous. Motifs are woven in extra weft and tapestry techniques. Famous motifs are paisley, lotus and foliage. The outstanding feature of Himachal Pradesh shawls are their colourful intricate designs in
Weavers of India weave in their home surroundings assisted by other family members in the various ancillary processes. In the early days, the weavers produced cloth primarily for meeting their own demand and on the demands of their village people. Subsequently on account of increase in production and development of transport and communication the market for handloom products expanded not only within India but also abroad.

Crafts play a significant role in building up a stabler national economy. In addition to provide employment to lakhs of artisans and occupation to many traders, dealers and exporters, they uphold India's age-old tradition and reputation for excellent craftsmanship.

Crafts not only contribute a lot to the sustained development of the country's rural economy, but also constitute a prominent element to the cultural unity of the people. They flourish in rural life, but function as connecting link between various constituents of a society. They are also an effective medium of cultural contacts between nations.

With the invention of machine made cloth handloom industry is facing problems. Large number of weavers belonging to hereditary weaver castes have given up weaving but many others have also taken to weaving.
To preserve/revive our cultural heritage of handloom weaving, the government of India has introduced many credit schemes and is spending crores of rupees. Loans are given for the purchase of looms for loomless weavers and establishment of new development centres.

1.1 WEAVING IN HIMACHAL PRADESH:

Himachal Pradesh, the Dev Bhoomi, the land of Gods as it is known, is located in 32°22'40" - 33°12'40" north and 75°47'55" - 79°04'20" east of Himalayas. Spread over an area of 55673 square Kilometers, the state of Himachal Pradesh harbours a population of 42.8 lakhs spread over 16807 villages and forty seven towns and cities. The area as a whole is hilly and mountainous but a sizeable area of the state is inaccessible physiognomically complex, snow clad and with a lush green forest cover.

Major part of the population in Himachal Pradesh consists of Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs. However Muslims and Christians also find a respectable place in the state. Except for a few towns, the life in the state is mainly rural. People depend on agriculture for a living and keep large herds of goats and sheep.

Himachal Pradesh finds a prominent place in woollen industry of India. Gaddis and Bhakharwal are the two main types of sheep found in valleys of Himachal Pradesh. Wool obtained from them is of superior quality and white in colour. Rampur Bushahri sheep found in Himachal Pradesh are
black in colour and the wool obtained from them is comparatively of an inferior quality to that of the sheep of Kashmir.51

Pashmina wool, superior and warm wool is obtained from Chiggu goat found in high hills and Angora wool from Angora rabbits reared in Kangra and Kullu districts of the state. Shahtush, the most superior wool, collected from greater elevations, is very soft and fine, which almost melts to touch. For superior wool, the flocks are reared in arid pastoral conditions. Among the well recognised breeds of sheep merino and its cross-breeds produce superior quality of wool.

The woollen handloom activity, in Himachal Pradesh is concentrated in Kinnaur, Kullu, Chamba, Mandi, Kangra, Lahul Spiti and Simla districts. The temperate areas where agriculture is sub-servient with only one crop during the year, sheep and goat rearing is a paying occupation. These two animals play a vital role in the economy of these semi-pastorals who live in high hills of Pangi, Bharmour, Chotta Bhangal, Bara Bhangal, Kinnaur, Kullu, Sirmur, Lahul Spiti and higher reaches of Simla.18 Due to the unfavourable climatic conditions and geographically difficult terrains, it becomes inevitable for the people of these remote areas to remain indoors for about six months. So they utilize their time for processing and weaving wool. Such communities are
self reliant and mainly depend on local production for the necessities of life.

A large number of woollen handloom products like Dohru, Pattu, Patties, Doras, Gudmas, Namdas, caps, mufflers, carpets and shawls are made in Himachal Pradesh. Some of the articles are made only for household consumption while others are marketed, of which shawls are of the most common interest. People from all places and all walks of life buy and use shawls as a part of their dress. Main shawl producing districts in the state are Chamba, Kangra, Mandi, Kullu and Kinnaur. (Fig. 1).

In remote areas many houses own a loom to meet their own requirements. In district Kinnaur exists a separate weavers' community who weave for the whole village. These weavers also weave to sell their products in village/city fairs to earn their livelihood. Every member of the family helps in some way or other for making woollen shawls. In some families it is a custom for only women to weave for consumption of the family. There are variations in looms, equipments and techniques used for producing shawls with a variety of colours and designs.

1.2 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY:

The woollen handloom industry in Himachal Pradesh is very ancient and it is not possible to trace back the footprints of this remarkable craft. The art of weaving was so advanced in the early seventeenth century that Begum Mumtaz
Mahal was presented shawls and blankets of intricate and delicate textures.

Besides other woollen products, two types of shawls are produced in Himachal Pradesh viz. Kullu and Kinnauri shawls. Kullu shawls have their origin from Kinnauri shawls. Although some old weavers are maintaining their traditional colour combination, intricate and meticulous designs, the originality of the Himachali shawl design is slowly fading away.

Various types of wool fibres are used for weaving shawls. Himachal Pradesh is a house of raw wool where sheep breeding and rearing is practised in almost every household for their personal use. Larger units cater to the demands of commercial units. The total availability of raw wool is estimated to be 11.64 lakh Kilogrammes, out of which seven lakh Kilogrammes are sold out of the state. Besides Desi wool, wool from Pashmina bearing goats is also available in the Chinni valley of district Kinnaur and Lahul Spiti. Many Angora rabbit farms have been established in Palampur and Kullu.

The number of handlooms in the state is around thirty one thousand, installed in about twenty nine thousand household units with 2.03 metres productivity per loom per day.
Many traditional weavers in the state are abandoning their generation old occupation because of the constraint of space in the market for the handloom products. Powerloom produced shawls from Ludhiana with angular geometrical designs, though not as intricate as original Himachal handloom designs, are finding place in the market at a lower price. The handloom weavers of the state are not able to compete with the imitation shawls from powerlooms. As a result they are compelled to adopt some other profession and their children are taking up jobs in cities or towns.

Keeping in view these points, it becomes imperative to document the original weaving craft of shawl making and take steps to save the traditional art from dying. Thus an indepth study on Himachal shawls has been planned.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM :

Study on traditional woven shawls of Himachal Pradesh has been undertaken to study the processes, techniques, designs, colours used and problems of the weavers at various levels. An attempt has also been made to study the structure of the industry and the socio-economic background of the weavers.

1.3.1 Specific objectives of the study :

1. To understand the socio-economic background of the weavers.
2. To study the structure of shawl producing units in Himachal Pradesh.

3. To study the production processes and techniques employed in shawl making and their marketing.

4. To establish the significance of colours, designs and motifs with special reference to their culture.

5. To probe into the problems faced by the weavers and manufacturers in the shawl industry.

1.3.2 Delimitation:

The study was limited to five districts of the state viz., Chamba, Kangra, Mandi, Kullu and Kinnaur.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

1. The study will provide an indepth documented account on the shawl production of Himachal Pradesh.

2. The study will provide information regarding techniques and designs to the new entrepreneurs of shawl producing units in Himachal Pradesh.

3. The working conditions and socio-economic information will give a better insight into the problems of weavers which would help the policy makers to frame new policies and revise the old ones, thereby helping the growth and development of craft and upliftment of craftsmen.