

*SPECIAL ARTICLE*

## **A loom for grass mat weaving in Tamil Nadu, South India**

CHRISTINE KELLNER

*Rehabilitation Training Unit, St Thomas Hospital and Leprosy  
Centre, Chettupattu—606801, North Arcot District, Tamil Nadu,  
South India*

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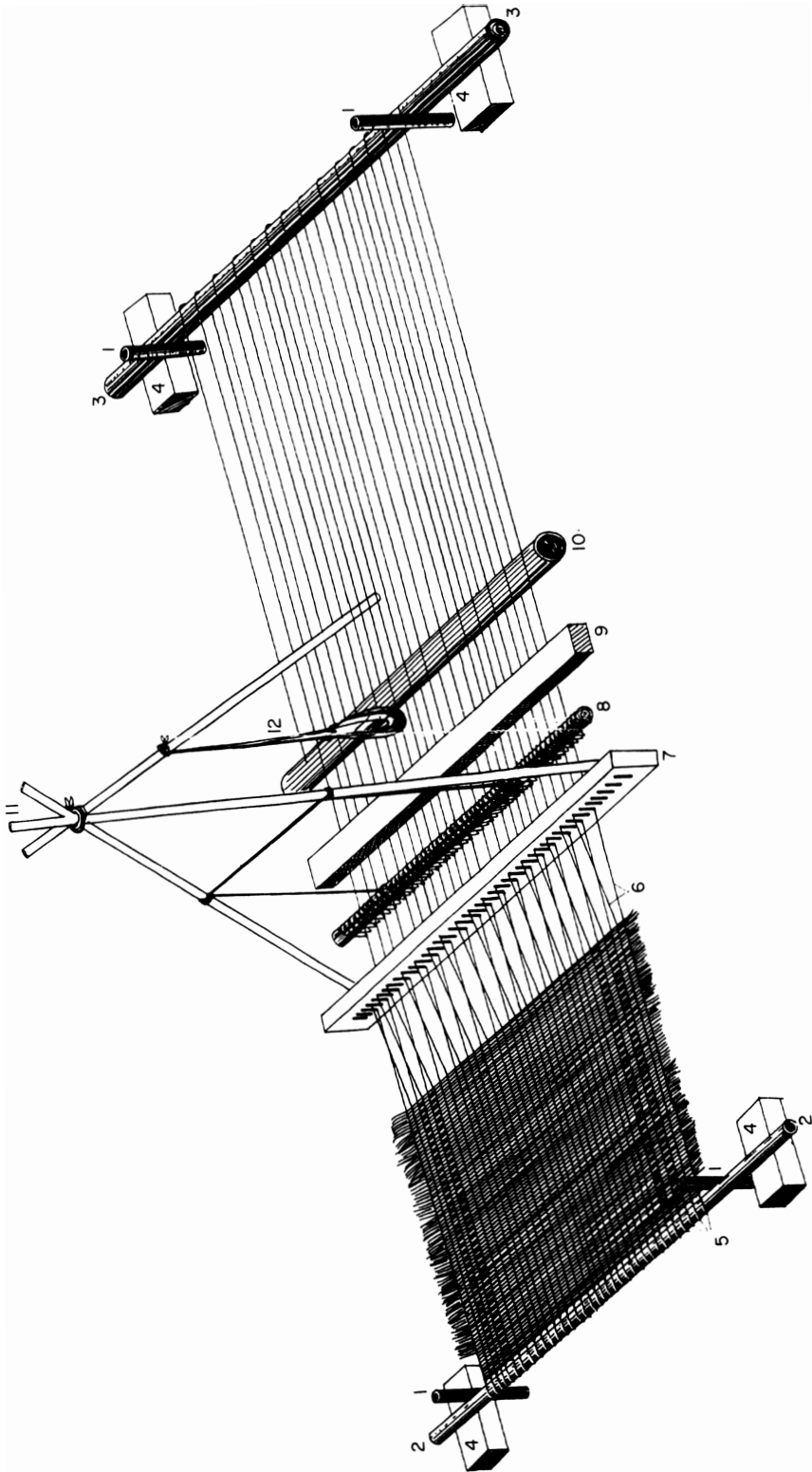
A grass-mat is one of the most used articles in a household in India, especially in the South. The ordinary natural colour mats can be found in the home for sleeping and sitting on and for general use in place of tables and chairs. When not in use they can be conveniently rolled up and set aside. For more festive occasions like weddings, engagement parties and so on, colourful mats with designs are in use.

The raw material for the mats is a certain kind of long grass which grows in various parts of Tamil Nadu. Grass-mat weaving is an ancient skill and many villages can be found in Tamil Nadu where for many generations the whole family has been engaged in this work. It can be done as a family enterprise or, as is often the case nowadays, people are organized in a Co-operative Society which purchases the raw materials and markets the finished goods.

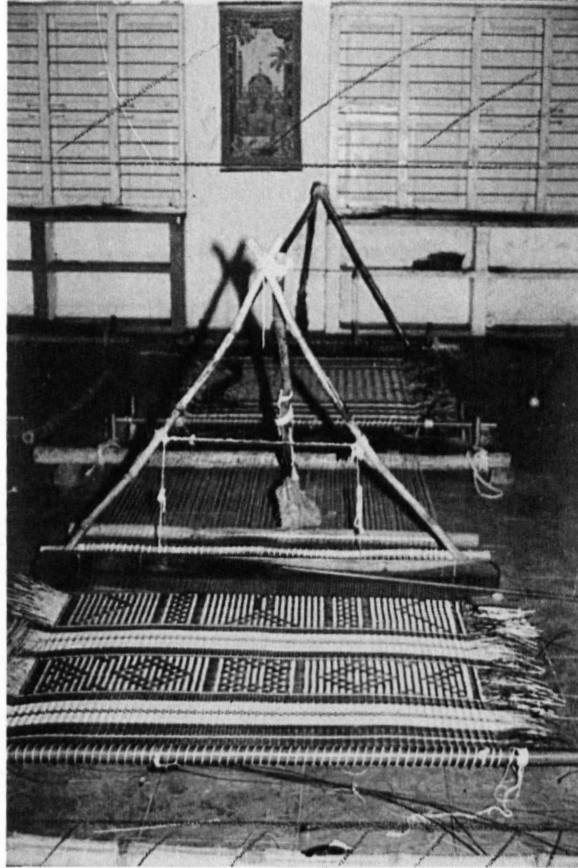
A stiff competitor to the hand-operated loom is a power loom which was introduced and developed some years ago. It produces fifty to seventy times more, but provides work for only a few persons. However the investment is still a very big one and therefore the hand loom continues to have a place.

In 1979 a few looms were installed in our hospital premises. Among our patients were found experienced mat weavers and for them it was a welcome opportunity to work and earn a little, while undergoing the long-term treatment they needed. This trade became part of the 'Rehabilitation Training Unit' which gradually developed. Its workshop houses several sections: embroidery, textile hand printing, textile hand weaving, wood carving and cane-work. The number of grass mat looms is limited to eleven only and they are intended mainly to provide training and work for patients and learners from the 'Non-Formal Education Scheme' of the hospital 'Community Development Programme' (CODEP). Since 1979, altogether 65 persons have been trained and worked in this section for a period varying from 4 weeks to 2 years.

There is a good local market for the mats as they are of good quality. The price is reasonably low because the raw material—grass and a fibre, or cotton thread for the warp, are relatively cheap. The payment for one mat varies according to size and design. Our workers are able to produce one or even two mats per day which brings them an income in addition to food and medical health care from the Institution.



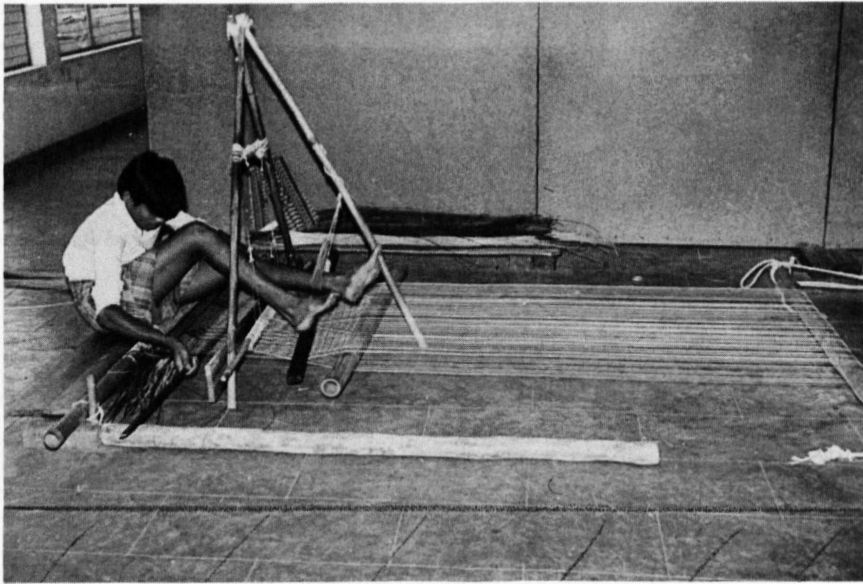
**Figure 1.** Diagram of loom.



**Figure 2.** Triangle of bamboo sticks to hold up part of the loom.

A diagram of the loom appears in Figure 1. The construction details are as follows:

- 1 One-inch pipes fixed in the ground (material: iron, wood or bamboo).
- 2 One-and a half-inch pipe, six feet long (material: iron, wood or bamboo).
- 3 Three-inch pipe (material: iron, wood or bamboo).
- 4 Wooden blocks or ordinary bricks, 2 × 3 ins, 5 × 8 ins to support the pipes.
- 5 Rope to fix the thread of the loom.
- 6 Cotton or fibre thread fixed between pipes No. 1 and 2—'warp'.
- 7 'Comb' made of wood, 55 × 5 × 1 in, with holes in one quarter distance.
- 8 One-inch bamboo stick with a rope that holds the thread of the loom (warp).
- 9 Wooden reaper—'loom-operator'.
- 10 Three-inch bamboo stick which separates the thread-layers.
- 11 Triangle made of bamboo sticks to hold one part of the loom (see Figure 1) and the loop for the foot rest.
- 12 Foot rest—a loop made of cloth or leather.
- 13 Sitting-board for the weaver, in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Operating position for the weaver.

This approach has proved successful in a protected environment, with limited working time, mainly for training and occupational therapy. To establish such a unit in a village would call for a different approach, involving the entire faculty or the formation of a co-operative society.