

ABSTRACT

India is a land of multicultural experiences and expressions. One such region in India is the Northeast, bound by the political boundary of China, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Burma (Myanmar). North-East India is comprised of eight states and they are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim.

Sikkim is a state near to Siliguri also known as Chicken Neck Corridor, due to its narrow resemblance to a chicken's neck. This brother state of seven sisters comprises of twenty-two ethnic tribes. The indigenous communities here were the Lepchas and Bhutias. Lepchas, existed much before the Bhutias who migrated to the state much later. The Lepcha communities were a strong believer in bone faith or mune faith and were nature worshipers. Later, when they were introduced to the Bhutia's they started following Buddhism. Bhutia's on the other hand were of Tibetan origin and believed to have migrated from Tibet in various waves. They were the followers of Buddhism. During their migration, they carried their culture and beliefs along with them.

Sikkim is known for its traditional Handicraft, paintings, motifs, carpet, traditional tribal shoes, textiles, garments, ornaments, carpet weaving and *Thangka* paintings. Handloom weaving was done on a backstrap loom/ loin loom. Since there was not enough formalised information available on the textiles and costumes of these two communities in terms of raw materials, motifs, its symbolism, clothing patterns, cuts and the styles of the garments. Therefore, this study was undertaken to understand and document the historical roots, textile and costumes, understand its design patterns as well as to re-imagine Lepcha and Bhutia traditional costumes through designs innovation and documentation of the traditional along with the changes and trade patterns.

To achieve the objectives, the researcher adopted a mixed-method approach, combining descriptive, exploratory and experimental study. Data collection methods included personal interviews and observation methods. Data was collected from the three generations of the Lepcha and Bhutia communities, weavers, designers, tailors local retailers, wholesalers and Govt officials from all four zones of Sikkim and Kalimpong in West Bengal. Based on primary and secondary data, the history of Sikkim was traced along with the origin of the Lepcha and Bhutia communities. To understand its cultural significance, textile tradition, trading patterns, cuts and styles, samples were collected and studied from the different families, art collectors and Sikkim Govt. cultural centres. Traditional textiles and costumes

were studied for both men and women of both Lepcha and Bhutia communities. The pattern and motifs were changed across the communities. It was observed that these motifs were modified to fit the local repertoire which enjoyed symbolic meaning across the Lepcha and Bhutia tribes. Unique traditional attire, both men and women wore were long loose robe-like garments, Lepcha women wore the *dum-dyam*, a draped garment similar to a sari, along with a waist belt called *Naamrek*. Whereas Lepcha men wore the *dum-praa*, which serves dual purposes as attire during the day and as a blanket at night. The *dum-praa*, which was also known as *Thokroah* bears a striking resemblance to the medieval dress worn by the Romans and Greeks. Men often wore headgear made out of bamboo known as *Suymok Thyaktuk*, while Lepcha women typically cover their heads with a piece of cotton or silk scarf. Similarly, Bhutia women wore *Kho* also known as *Mo-Kho*, *Honju* and *Bakhu* and Bhutia Men wore *Po-Kho*. These *Kho* share similarities with that of Tibetan costume. Since the community travelled to Sikkim in several waves, they shared their textile culture with them. Rich woven brocades like *gyasar*, and Chinese brocades with medallion motifs were some unique features of their clothing, apart from this the clothing construction also has a similarity with that of Chinese-origin garments. Historically they shared the Mongolian race. Researcher took inspiration from the traditional cuts and styles of their costumes and designed a capsule collection of 16 new garments in order to give Sikkim a bigger market beyond Sikkim and to popularize their culture among the youth.

Designs were made under four different categories: category1: Layered lore, Category2: Colour Narratives, Category3: Tribal Analogues, Category 4: Spiritual Sojourn, 48 designed sketches were shared among the design practitioners and thinkers along with theme and inspiration boards for their opinion and acceptance of designs in terms of relatedness of the design with the said community culture. The responses were collected digitally and based on that 16 designs were shortlisted for the development of a capsule collection. Researcher used fabrics like silk, Chinese brocade, satin, cotton khadi for the preparation of the line. Later the developed designs were presented at Northeast Festival, New Delhi and the Faculty of Family and Community Sciences, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara and responses were collected digitally in terms of the acceptability of designs in the market. The results discovered that people preferred the new designs for both National and International market. In the end, a design catalogue was prepared which will serve as a look-book to Sikkim and its culture focusing upon the traditional and newly designed clothing for the future generation. The documentation of traditional styles and development of new designs went through a huge

struggle in terms of reaching to places and exploring small hamlets in the difficult terrain, sourcing the fabrics and constructions finding the right material, tailors and right platform to showcase the designs in the market. However collective efforts of the people directly or indirectly associated with this research made this possible. I would appreciate the effort of the weaver's Sujata, Gyaltzen and Govt. officials from DHH, The Culture Department, The Sikkim Biodiversity Board and other organization in the field who were the guiding light throughout the data collection process in the field. This research will serve as a guide for the future generation who wants to go deep into the history of these two communities and into the little intricacies of the textiles and costumes of the Lepcha and Bhutia communities of Sikkim.