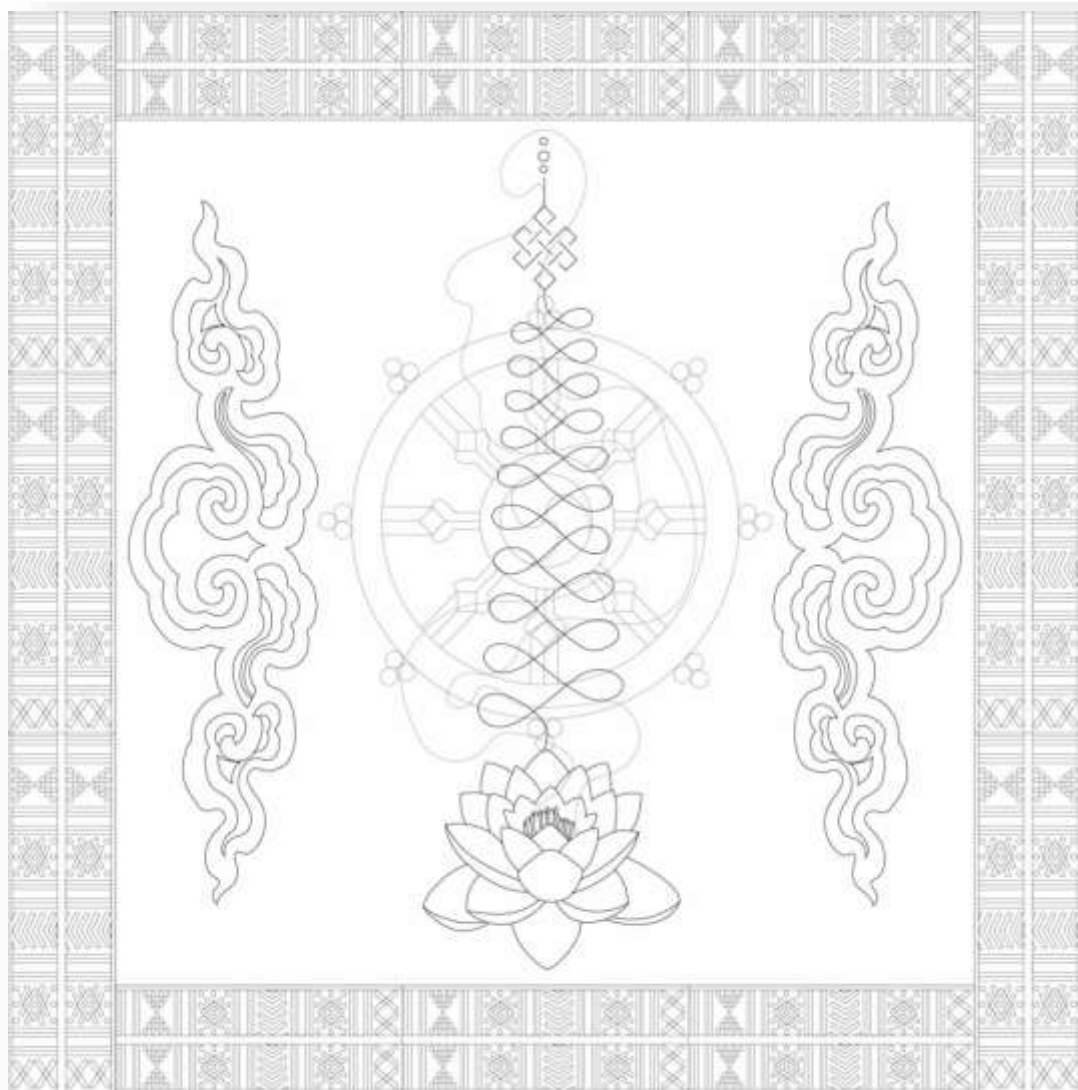


Chapter

1 INTRODUCTION



Artwork created by the researcher for Sutr Santati Textile exhibition at
Delhi National Museum

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Indian culture is the most complex and colourful culture on the planet. The way people look at their language, their food, their dressing, and their music and dance-everything changes every fifty or hundred kilometers in this country. Sadhguru.

The evolution of a community's attire across different eras provides crucial insights into its social and economic conditions, aesthetic preferences, and adaptability to its surroundings. The history of people's clothing serves as a dynamic representation of their lifestyle, artistic inclinations, and ability to navigate external and internal influences. Attire decisions, including style and distinctions based on age, gender, class, religion, and occasion, are shaped by the community or its leaders. These choices, such as which part of the body to cover or leave bare, contribute to a collective cultural identity.

In essence, clothing is a cultural visual that mirrors the ethos of a particular time and society. It serves as a reflection of collective thinking, determining the style and significance of dress within a community (**Biswas. A., 1985**).

The vicissitudes of history and the tides of time have not robbed the enchanting diversity, rich landscape and beauty of Indian crafts.

The crafts, forms, shapes, and colour palettes of India reflect its aesthetics, much like the diverse and flavorful cuisines of the country.

The multitude of hues and forms seen in the shandy's and melas of India tell the stories of hundreds of crafts that belong to a vast country with 18 major and 1600 minor languages and dialects, 6 major religions, 6 major ethnic groups, 52 major tribes, 6400 castes and sub-castes, 29 major festivals and over 1 billion people, 50 per cent of them in rural areas, spread over coastlines, valleys, hills, mountains, deserts, backwater, forests and even inhospitable terrain. It is not easy to group the breadth and depth of Indian craft. There are more than 23 million craftsmen engaged in different craft sectors and it is estimated that there are over 360 craft clusters in India. In an era characterized by rapid documentation of traditional crafts plays a pivotal role in preserving the historical legacy of these practices for future generations. This documentation not only ensures the survival of

traditional crafts but also allows for their continued appreciation and understanding in a changing world. India, with its rich oral history tradition, stands as a testament to the significance of preserving cultural heritage.

The documentation of crafts, textiles, and costumes from diverse cultures within India and around the world becomes a way to immortalize the unique skills and artistry of artisans and craftspeople. By documenting these cultural treasures, we ensure that they are not lost to time and are appreciated by future generations. The panorama of Indian crafts reflects a vibrant mix of social, economic, cultural, and religious influences. Craft items vary from practical products to sacred objects, with diverse levels of intricacy. The craft world exists within a complex milieu, shaped by historical processes and a multitude of influences. The wide array of artefacts and personal decorations signifies a deep desire to maintain a unique identity distinct from neighbouring groups. **(Ranjan, 2009)**

Textile research over the period indicates that crafts have been an integral part of human history from its inception. Artisans have transmitted these skills to successive generations, striving to preserve them despite various challenges. Despite the rise of automation, handicrafts continue to thrive, displaying exceptional craftsmanship and unique designs. India, with its diverse and culturally rich states, boasts a remarkable textile and costume heritage.

The Northeastern region of India stands out in this regard. Home to over 100 tribal communities, Northeast India is a hub of diverse cultures and exquisite handicrafts. This region is distinct from the rest of the country, often considered the epicenter of handmade traditions. Handicrafts in India, particularly in the Northeast, have been a longstanding family tradition, with skills being passed down through generations. Surrounded by China to the North, Bhutan to the West, Bangladesh to the South, and Burma to the East, this region comprises eight states collectively known as the "Seven Sisters" (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura) along with one Brother State, Sikkim. The Northeastern states not only showcase remarkable cultural fusion and rituals but also serve as a stronghold of traditional handmade craftsmanship. (<https://www.quora.com/Why-are-the-Northeastern-states-of-India-called-Seven-Sisters-when-there-are-8-states>).

Tribal communities have been residing in India since ancient times, and even in the contemporary era, various tribal groups are distributed across different regions of the country. Typically inhabiting green and hilly areas, these communities often live in isolation. While

educational qualifications among tribals have historically been low, there has been a notable improvement over the years.

Tribal's engage in diverse occupations, including agriculture, business, and migrating to other areas for employment. The tribal groups in India are characterized as nomadic communities that traditionally sustained themselves through hunting and gathering wild fruits, vegetables, and other edible plants. The traditional crafts and objects crafted by these tribes encompass weapons such as daggers, machetes, axes, bows and arrows, as well as utilitarian items like traditional pots, baskets, and handloom textiles. (Purshottam and Dhingra, 2017).

State-wise distribution of STs according to states (%)

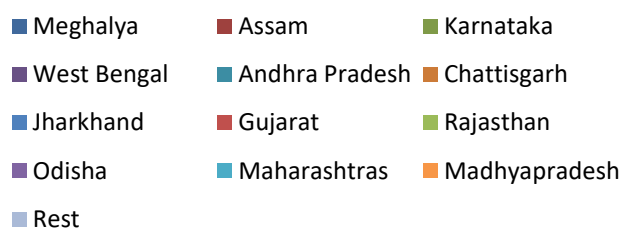


Figure 1.1: State-wise distribution of Schedule Tribes according to state (%) as per 2011 census data.

Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2011 (https://tribal.nic.in/downloads/Statistics/3/STinindiaascensus2011_compressed.pdf)

As per the 2011 census, tribal communities make up 8.61% of the total population in India. The highest concentration of indigenous groups is observed in the seven states of northeast India and the central tribal belt stretching from Rajasthan to West Bengal. The Constitution of India recognizes over 700 Scheduled Tribes under Article 342, distributed across different states and union territories. Typically, each state hosts numerous distinct tribes. **(Census of India, 2011).**

Orissa stands as the state with the highest count of tribal groups, boasting 62 tribes, according to the 2011 Census of India **(Figure 1.1)**. Among the notable tribal communities in India are the Mizos, Gonds, Khasis, Naga tribes, Bhils, Santhals, Bhutias, and the Great Andamanese. Each of these tribal groups exhibits distinctive cultures, festivals, traditions, languages, and ways of life.

Furthermore, there are many other tribes in the country leading secluded lives, distancing themselves from larger communities. Additionally, several ethnic groups qualify for Scheduled Tribe status but have not yet received official recognition. In the Northeast region, multiple tribes exist in each state. **(Table 1.1)**

State	Tribal groups
Sikkim	Bhutia (including Chumbipa, Dophthapa, Dukpa, Kagatey, Sherpa, Tibetan, Tromopa, Yolmo), Lepcha, Limboo, Tamang
Arunachal Pradesh	Abor, Aka, Apatani, Nyishi, Galo, Khampti, Khowa, Mishmi, Idu, Taroan, Momba, Sherdukpen, Singpho, Hrusso, Tagin, Khamba, Adi.
Assam	Chakma, Dimasa, Kachari, Karbi, Barmans in Cachar, Boro, Borokachari, Deori, Hojai, Kachari, Sonwal, Lalung, Mech, Miri, Rabha, Dimasa, Hajong, Singhpho, Khampti, few Garo groups.
Manipur	Tangkhul, Anal Liangmai, Zeme Tribes, Thadou, Koirao, Thangal, Monsang, Vaiphei, Chiru, Koirang, Moyon, Zou, Chothe, Kom,
Meghalaya	Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Synteng, Pnar, War, Bhoi, Lyngngam.
Mizoram	Mizo, Hmar, and Kuki tribes, including Baite, Changsan, Chongloi
Nagaland	Naga, Kuki, Kachari, Mikir, Garo

Table 1.1: List of tribal groups in the Northeast of India
(<https://tribal.nic.in/Statistics.aspx>)



Figure 1.2 Map of Sikkim

Source: <https://www.tourmyindia.com/states/sikkim/map.html>

1.1 Introduction to Sikkim

India and its glorious states are filled with rich cultural heritage and every state has its own textile and costume story to put in the picture. Among all, there is one such region of India, the Northeast. This ethnically diverse region with its diverse cultural tradition is home to many separated tribal communities. This region is known as the land of seven sisters, with an only brother, Sikkim. **(Figure 1.2)**

Sikkim with its captivating history and diverse cultural legacy stands as one of the most recent additions to the Indian Union. Nestled in northeastern India, it shares borders with Bhutan, Tibet, and Nepal, offering picturesque landscapes featuring lush valleys, snow-capped peaks, and a thriving cultural mosaic. Attaining statehood in 1975, Sikkim is the 22nd state in India, characterized by its relatively small population. Gangtok, the capital and largest city, boasts a remarkable biodiversity, housing a variety of flora and fauna.

Sikkim had been a monarchical state before its integration with India in 1975, Sikkim functioned as a monarchy for 333 years. Throughout this period, Sikkim faced various invasions and influences from neighbouring countries, and these experiences are evident in the composition and lifestyle of its people. This is reflected not only in the socio-cultural aspects but also in the politico-administrative structure and governance, which were tailored to suit the specific needs of the kingdom. **(Gurung, 2011)**

Sikkim comprises a diverse, multi-ethnic society, with various ethnic communities representing different racial and linguistic groups. According to the Anthropological Survey of India, Sikkim is home to 21 identified communities, **(Figure 1.3)** and the state boasts more than 13 distinct languages originating from different linguistic backgrounds.

According to the 2011 Sikkim census, the state has the smallest population in all of India, totaling just six lakhs. This sparsely populated state has experienced an increase of approximately one lakh since the last census. Sikkim is well-known for its traditional handicrafts, including carpets, tribal shoes, costumes, jewellery, and weaving, which have great cultural significance. These crafts employ a large number of Bhutia, Lepcha, and Nepalese women. Women dominate carpet weaving, a major export business, as well as handloom weaving. Lepcha *durees* fashioned from wool and cotton yarns are well-known handloom items.

For generations, the art of wood carving and Thangka painting has been predominantly practised by Buddhists, Bhutias, and Lepchas. Typically, men have been the primary artisans of these crafts due to the use of heavy instruments. **(Roy & Mowsume, 2008)**

Sikkim's traditional garments reflect the state's social and ethnic lifestyle. Lepchas dresses are bright, with males wearing "*pagi*" and ladies in two-piece stitched and draped garments. Bhutias wear distinctive garments known as '*Kho*', long-sleeved blouse (*Honju*) underneath the '*Kho*'. Chupa is a skirt-like dress held at the waist by a long piece of belt-like cloth '*Kera*'. A Bhutia man underneath the *kho* wears a double-breasted and high-necked shirt (*tson-ta-ti*) and pants (*gya-ton*). These traditional crafts and costumes are integral to Sikkim's cultural heritage. **(Roy & Mowsume, 2008; Mukharajee, 1995).**

Like most northeastern states in India, the land in Sikkim has not undergone extensive development, with just over 20% of the population residing in cities. Gangtok, the capital and largest city, represents a significant portion of the urban population. The growth contrast between urban and rural areas is stark. Gangtok is both the capital and the largest city in Sikkim. The languages spoken in the state include Nepali, Bhutia, Lepcha, and others.

Sikkim (SK) state comprises of four districts, and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has assigned the code SK for Sikkim. **(Census of India 2011, Sikkim)**

The cultural fabric of this region is a harmonious blend influenced by numerous ethnic groups, primarily the Lepcha, Bhutia, and Nepali communities. Collectively, the people of Sikkim are referred to as Sikkimese. Lepchas, considered the original inhabitants of Sikkim, predate the migration of Bhutias and Nepalese to the state. They practised a nature-centric spirituality, worshipping the spirits of mountains, rivers, and forests, reflecting their harmonious coexistence with the natural surroundings. Lepcha folklore is particularly rich, narrating tales that capture the essence of their unique cultural heritage. **(Sadangi, 2008).** Whereas Bhutia, also known as Drenjongpa migrated to Sikkim during the 8th century through Tibet. Later during

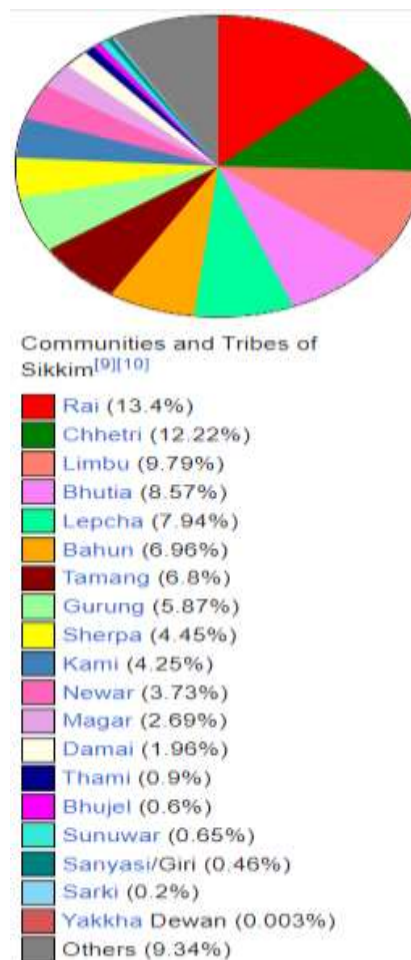


Figure 1.3 Communities and Tribe in Sikkim according to the Anthropological Survey of India. Source: Population of Sikkim: A geographical Analysis

the 13th century, many clans came in thereafter there was a series of lamas who came in because of the conflict between the Red Hat and Yellow Hat in Tibet. They migrated to Sikkim through different passes in the Himalayan region. In North Sikkim, they are known as *Lachenpas* and *Lachungpass* which mean inhabitants of Lachen (Tibetan: ལ་ཚེན་; "big pass") or Lachung (Tibetan: ལ་ཚུང་; "small pass") respectively. "La" in Tibetan means hill. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhutia>.

There has always been a debate about which community is the indigenous community of Sikkim, between Lepcha and Bhutia. Between the oral narratives and the lack of written evidence, people consider both the communities as the old and indigenous tribes of the Sikkim.

1.2 Rational of the study:

The study of the textiles and costumes of Sikkim holds paramount importance due to the unique cultural tapestry woven into the fabric of this Himalayan state. Sikkim, with its diverse ethnic communities such as the Lepchas, Bhutias, and Nepalese, boasts of a rich heritage reflected in their traditional attire. However, despite the visual prominence of these textiles, there is a notable gap in comprehensive scholarly investigations regarding the historical evolution, cultural symbolism, and craftsmanship embedded in the textiles & costumes of Sikkim. This research on Sikkim's textiles and costumes is crucial to fill existing gaps in scholarly understanding. Investigating these textiles is essential for preserving the cultural legacy, understanding the identity of Sikkim communities, and addressing the challenges faced by traditional artisans in the face of globalization. Moreover, the research aims to contribute to the sustainable evolution of textiles in Sikkim and empower local communities. Furthermore, the study aims to bridge the gap between traditional costumes of Sikkim and contemporary fashion. With the amount of urbanization and globalization, we will lose the cultural identity of these two communities. Understanding their textiles and costumes, their migration patterns and how the changes came in their traditional attire is crucial for the generations to come. Documenting these oral narratives of their craft, and culture along with design innovation will help in conserving it for posterity. This fusion will not only ensure the continuation of cultural practices but also open avenues for economic empowerment within the local communities.

During preliminary visits to Sikkim and interactions with local craftsmen, the researcher observed that the craftsmen had expressed a desire to share their unique techniques. Despite possessing distinctive skills, these artisans remained confined to the local market and were not

able to promote their handicraft, textile and culture beyond the market of Sikkim. There was a need to contribute to a deeper understanding of Sikkim's cultural dynamics, supporting preservation efforts and raising awareness. While researchers in the past have extensively studied the textiles of the seven sister states, Sikkim's unique aspects have been largely overlooked. Unfortunately, there's not enough formalized information available about the textiles of the Lepcha and Bhutia communities in Sikkim.

Consequently, a documentation initiative was necessary to raise awareness and foster an appreciation for the hidden cultural gems of this captivating state. The research aims to document the history, textiles, and costumes while exploring innovative design adaptations, striving to blend tradition with modernity and contribute to the vibrant development of Sikkimese textiles. This research also aims to raise awareness and sensitize people and communities about this region of India and its craft design culture. Without proper documentation, there won't be sufficient awareness. This effort will also unveil Sikkim's cultural intricacies, breathing new life into traditional crafts and giving local artisans a global stage. Additionally, it will provide insights into the preservation and promotion of Sikkimese culture.

1.3 Objectives of the study:

1.3.1 To investigate the historical roots and origin of the Lepcha and Bhutia communities, with a specific focus on understanding their evolving relationship with textiles and costumes.

1.3.2 To study and document the traditional textiles, costumes and accessories of the Lepcha and Bhutia communities.

1.3.3 To document changes in traditional textiles and costumes through generations.

1.3.4 To study the draping styles and the construction details of Lepcha's and Bhutia's costumes.

1.3.5 I. To design a capsule collection for contemporary wear inspired by traditional costumes of the Lepcha and Bhutia communities.

1.3.5. II. To develop a design catalogue.

1.4 Delimitation of the study:

The study was delimited to:

1.4.1 Apparel textiles only.

1.4.2 The state of Sikkim and Kalimpong district in West Bengal

1.4.3 The silhouette of the apparel for design innovation.

1.5 Scope of the study:

- 1.** The study will help to comprehensively explore and document the historical and cultural dimensions of traditional textiles and costumes in Sikkim.
- 2.** It will provide broader understanding of material procurement, weaving techniques, motifs, and the cultural symbolism in textiles, along with the examination of cuts, styles, and designs in traditional textiles and costumes.
- 3.** The research help in understanding the social and cultural influences, contemporary adaptations, and comparative studies with neighbouring regions.
- 4.** It also aims to inform preservation strategies, contribute to academic knowledge, and raise awareness locally and beyond and will act as a rich database for the future researchers and craft enthusiasts.
- 5.** Study will increase the potential of the crafts in the region to be explored through newly developed androgynous clothing line.
- 6.** New developed designs will provide demand in the market. And will help in creating awareness in preserving the traditional art forms of Sikkim for the future generations.
- 7.** Additionally, it identifies opportunities for market expansion, particularly in the fashion industry through design innovation, while still retaining and respecting cultural values and ensuring the holistic understanding and preservation of Sikkim's unique heritage.