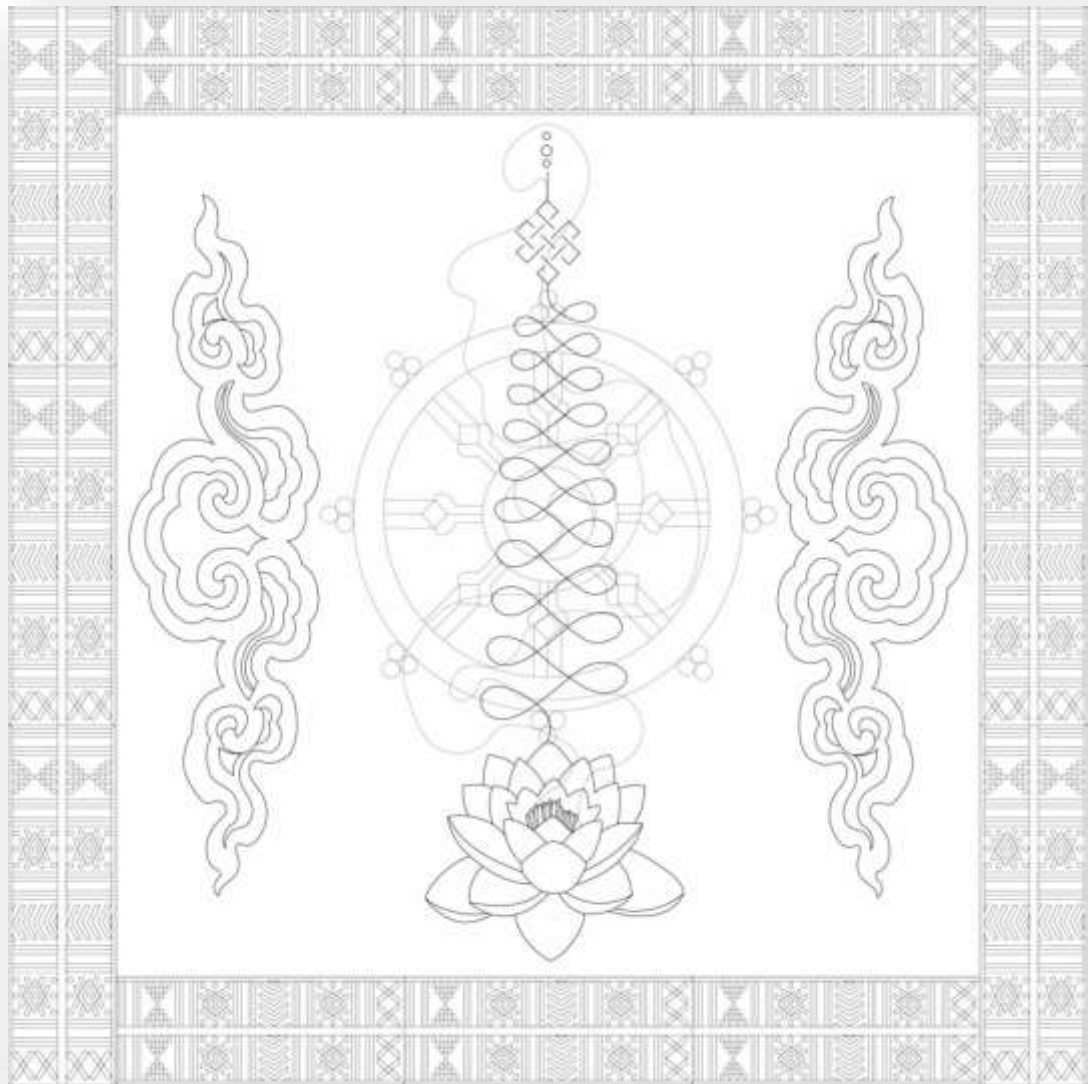


## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE



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

## **Chapter II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

A comprehensive literature review is the cornerstone of any scholarly thesis, enabling researchers to gather and analyze pertinent information from diverse sources systematically. This crucial chapter, integral to thesis composition, allows scholars to integrate significant findings from prior research into their work. This review of literature is organized under specific subheadings, facilitating a structured examination of relevant research themes and ensuring that the gathered information aligns seamlessly with the overarching research objectives which are as follows.

#### **2.1 THEORETICAL REVIEW**

##### **2.1.1 History of Indian Textile and Costumes**

##### **2.1.2 Indigenous Textile Culture of Northeast India**

##### **2.1.3 The Indigenous People of Northeast India and their origin**

##### **2.1.3.1 Culture and Tradition of Northeast India.**

##### **2.1.4 History of Sikkim State**

##### **2.1.5 History of Lepcha's and Bhutia's.**

##### **2.1.6 Oral Traditions and Folk Literature**

##### **2.1.7 Art and Crafts of Sikkim**

##### **2.1.8 Influence of Neighboring Borders on Northeastern Fashion**

##### **2.1.9 The current status of textiles from the Northeast, as viewed through the lens of Indian designers, reflects the traditional heritage of the region.**

#### **2.2 RESEARCH RELATED REVIEW**

#### **2.3 GAP ANALYSIS**

##### **2.1 Theoretical Review**

##### **2.1.1 History of Indian Textile and Costumes**

According to (**Bhatnagar, 2004**) Costumes and textiles have historically played an important role in various areas and climates around the world. People employed the materials accessible to them, resulting in the creation of textile and costume design by artisans. Today's textiles and costumes reflect our society's vitality, spirit, and awareness. This depicts the evolution of Indian textile and costume design. Artisans have played an important role in textile design since antiquity. Artisans' vision and the practical application of certain products have made

significant contributions to creative creations. Techniques frequently interwoven, resulting in different styles and forms. Sustaining, restoring, and analyzing the finest textiles and costumes is critical to sustaining exceptional craftsmanship. Over time, these designs have evolved to incorporate indigenous abilities, new cultural influences, and symbolic iconography. Today, fashion designers and artisans create crafts with designs and decorative patterns that are distinctly Indian, serving as inspiration for future generations.

In order to gain a profound comprehension of the abundant cultural heritage of India, it is imperative to undertake a thorough examination of the historical development of Indian textiles and costumes. A rich tapestry comprised of a wide array of textiles, weaving methods, and sartorial trends that have transformed throughout countless centuries. The origins of Indian textiles can be traced back to the Indus Valley Civilization, since archaeological evidence has revealed the cultivation and weaving of cotton during this period. According to (Krishnan, 2019), the *Arthashastra*, an ancient work authored by *Kautilya* during the 4th century BCE, makes reference to a highly structured textile industry in India.

In a similar study by (Krishnan, 2019), the Mughal era witnessed significant developments in Indian textiles, with intricate designs, luxurious fabrics like silk and brocade, and the introduction of Persian and Central Asian motifs. Akbar's patronage of the textile industry led to the establishment of royal workshops known for their craftsmanship <https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/history/the-mughal-empire/mughal-textiles/>. In a study by Subramanian (2018) during the British colonial period, Indian textiles faced challenges, including the exploitation of labor and the suppression of Indigenous industries. This period also marked the introduction of machine-made textiles. Post-independence, India's textile industry underwent modernization and global expansion, with regions like Tamil Nadu and Gujarat becoming textile hubs (Krishnan, 2019). Today, India's diverse culture is reflected in its clothing styles, from the vibrant *sarees* of South India to the intricate embroidery of Kashmiri shawls.

### **2.1.2 Indigenous Textile Culture of Northeast India**

According to (Chakravarty & Kakaty, 2015) the region of Northeast India, renowned for its awe-inspiring natural scenery and remarkable cultural heterogeneity, is additionally distinguished by a thriving and opulent indigenous textile heritage. The art of dyeing has been practiced by the people of Assam since ancient times, utilizing natural sources such as lac, indigo, madder, and other materials. Lac dyeing was an integral part of the ancient

Assamese culture. Presently, Lac industries are predominantly located in the Kamrup district of Assam, as well as in the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo hills districts of Meghalaya. The vibrant robes dyed with Lac are highly favored among the eastern tribes. The textiles in this particular region encompass more than just materials; they serve as vessels for the narratives, customs, and cultural legacy of the diverse indigenous groups residing inside it. This article aims to examine the indigenous textile culture of Northeast India, encompassing its historical background, various techniques employed, cultural relevance, and the prevailing issues encountered by this unique tradition. The historical importance of indigenous textiles in Northeast India is closely connected to the cultural legacy and collective identity of its many groups.

In a study by (Mishra et al. , 2021), the production of these textiles has been passed down through multiple generations, serving as a means to express and preserve the unique cultural and historical narratives associated with each ethnic community. Archaeological evidence reveals that the textile traditions of the region have a history spanning thousands of years. As an illustration, Meghalaya, renowned for its matrilineal social structure, possesses a culturally significant practice of crafting elaborate designs on its textile artefacts. The *Khasi* women residing in Meghalaya are renowned for their adeptness in the craft of weaving, which has been transmitted across successive generations. Women weavers, down the ages, have taken pride in passing on their skill to their succeeding generations. Women's entrepreneurship is critical for women's development, as women-owned micro, small, and medium-sized businesses (MSMEs) contribute considerably to economic growth. The Meghalaya handloom sector provides a chance to examine the impact of rural women-owned microenterprises on local economic development. However, women weavers encounter difficulties in finding inspiration and designing solutions to increase the economic sustainability of existing woven products. The handloom industry holds the distinction of being the oldest industry. In India, the handloom industry is the second largest employer, following agriculture.

For a significant period, the Indian handloom industry has had a significant role in exporting to foreign nations. The majority of handloom weavers in India are self-employed artisans who conduct their work within their own homes, with the assistance of their family members for pre-loom and post-loom processes. The handloom sector has been meeting the clothing needs of India and various other countries for many centuries.

The modern textile industry has flourished from this sector through mechanization and modernization. Nevertheless, the most modern industry adheres to the weaving principles established by traditional handloom weavers.

In a similar vein, it is noteworthy that the Manipuri community has an extensive historical background in the realm of textile manufacturing, as evidenced by the existence of records documenting the existence of their exceptional textiles since ancient periods. Manipuri sari has a great reputation like Dhakai *Jamdani*, Tangail *Jamdani*, Rajshahi Silk and Mirpur Silk. The tradition of Manipuri culture is vibrant and diverse, with its renowned dance performances featuring stunning and elegant attire. The majority of Manipuri people are engaged in agriculture, while others participate in small-scale enterprises, handloom weaving, and carpentry. The traditional costume of Manipur, known as the "*Phanek*," serves as a witness to the sophisticated weaving techniques that have been practiced in the region (**Sadiqul & Rakeullah, 2017**).

The textile culture of Northeast India is characterized by a wide range of weaving techniques, materials, and designs that are unique to indigenous communities in the region. Every ethnic group possesses distinct techniques and aesthetics, frequently employing materials originating from their native surroundings.

The backstrap loom is widely utilized by several indigenous populations in the region, including the Naga tribes, as a means of weaving. According to **Vishal & Amit (2021)**, the utilization of this conventional loom facilitates the creation of elaborate and exact designs. The utilization of frame looms to weave elaborate patterns and designs into textiles is prevalent in regions such as Manipur and Assam (**Akhil et al., 2021**). The Supplementary Weft Technique is frequently employed in the production of textiles in Arunachal Pradesh, with the primary purpose of creating intricate geometric patterns and motifs (**Lyndem & Bhandari, 2022**). Indigenous textiles frequently employ natural fibers, including cotton, silk, and plant materials drawn from the local environment. The production of Muga silk in the region of Assam is widely recognized for its exceptional sheen and is deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of the Assamese community. Muga silk gets its name from the Assamese word "*Muga*," which translates to "yellow." It is created by the caterpillars of the Muga silkworm, a species found exclusively in Assam. The origins of this beautiful silk can be traced back over a millennium, with evidence of its usage dating back to the 4th century CE. Historically,

it was exclusively reserved for royalty and the aristocracy, often given as a symbol of prestige and respect <https://fashionology.in/exotic-golden-muga-silk-of-assam/>.

The utilization of natural dyes derived from plants, roots, and minerals for dyeing textiles is a prevalent practice among numerous cultures residing in Northeast India. The dyes mentioned by (Mishra et al., 2021) are responsible for the vivid and natural tones observed in the fabrics. Traditional Patterns: Cultural Significance of Traditional Patterns and Motifs among Ethnic Groups. According to (Lyndem & Bhandari , 2022), these designs frequently incorporate aspects derived from nature, mythology, and everyday existence. Tribal tattoos have influenced the design of some textiles, incorporating designs that draw inspiration from these tattoos. These tattoos hold significant cultural value and serve as a fundamental element of identity among specific communities.

In Manipur, weavers utilize the Loin loom alongside other looms. The warp, which is of suitable length and width, is prepared and anchored at one end, typically to the wall of a house or two fixed shafts, while the other end is fastened to the lower back of the weaver using a cotton or animal skin belt . Occasionally, the belt is crafted from cane or bamboo. Cotton weaving in Manipur is steeped in indigenous culture and emotion. The various processes and designs are steeped in legends and tied to special events, rituals, and dances (Textile value chain, 2020). Today, the use of the Loin loom is less prevalent when compared to throw shuttle looms and fly shuttle looms (Pandhya and Thoudam, 2010).

Geometric patterns hold significant prominence in textile designs originating from Arunachal Pradesh, frequently embodying symbolic representations of safeguarding and cohesion. The cultural significance of indigenous textiles in Northeast India extends beyond their material nature, as they serve as invaluable vessels of cultural heritage and identity. These textiles serve as crucial components in multiple facets of the people' livelihoods. The incorporation of indigenous textiles holds significant importance in shaping cultural identity and preserving the customary practices of many ethnic communities (Akhil et al. ,2021).

According to ( Mishra et al., 2021), these objects function as indicators of cultural association and frequently denote an individual's tribal, clan, or societal standing. The cultural relevance of traditional textiles is further emphasized through their utilization in festivals, rituals, and ceremonies (Lyndem & Bhandari, 2022). The practice of weaving serves as a substantial economic resource for numerous indigenous women residing in the area. The fashion industry and international markets place a high demand on handwoven textiles originating from Northeast India, which in turn contributes to the economic prosperity of the

local community (**Lyndem & Bhandari, 2022**). The preservation of tradition is a significant aspect of cultural heritage that plays a crucial role in maintaining social cohesion and identity within communities. According to (**Sadiqul & Rakeullah, 2017**) the perpetuation of weaving customs is imperative to safeguard the abundant cultural legacy of Northeast India. The transmission of information and skills from older individuals to younger generations serves to preserve and safeguard traditional practices, preventing their potential loss. Globalization and urbanization are slowly and gradually destroying indigenous cultures, traditions, and languages. The potentiality in the garment industry notwithstanding, traditional Manipuri costumes is being disregarded by the government and people of business. Though the cottage industry is kept alive with traditional handlooms, the profits are inconsequential. To enhance the profitability of the Manipuri dress, it needs to get a more strategic approach- effective planning, branding, and the use of contemporary technology is what all is required to do the trick.

This would require the marketers to shift the emphasis towards the rich cultural heritage, history, and traditions that such fabrics represent and would deeply resonate with customers. Marketing success also depends upon carefully crafting and executing promotional strategies that really connect with an audience, which makes the story of Manipuri clothing as compelling as the garments themselves.

Despite their considerable cultural significance, Indigenous textiles in Northeast India encounter a multitude of challenges:

The phenomenon of modernization has prompted certain younger cohorts to deviate from customary garments and adopt alternative lifestyles, hence posing a threat to the maintenance of indigenous weaving practices (**Vishal & Amit, 2021**).

**Socio-economic Factors:** Numerous weavers within the region encounter economic difficulties due to the unpredictable nature of the market for traditional textiles. According to (**Bora & Bezbaruah, 2018**), weavers frequently encounter challenges in terms of limited access to marketing avenues and inadequate remuneration for their labour.

**Environmental Considerations:** The utilization of natural dyes and materials demonstrates ecological sustainability. Nevertheless, the accessibility of these resources is declining as a result of environmental shifts and the depletion of forests. The use of natural dyes for textile dyeing and printing is gaining popularity due to environmental concerns over synthetic colorants and growing awareness of environmental rules. (**Ambre, 2019**).

Cultural Appropriation: Instances of cultural appropriation have been observed, wherein traditional designs and themes are utilized without proper recognition or compensation to the indigenous community (**Lyndem & Bhandari, 2022**).

The textiles from the Khasi hills have received little attention in terms of research, customer experiences, and customization, compared to other textiles in the North East region. For generations, the Khasis have been practicing handloom weaving using unique and traditional techniques. However, the current generation has shifted their focus to more westernized clothing and apparel, leading to a decline in interest in traditional handloom weaving. Additionally, the market has been flooded with imitation products at lower prices, which many locals and tourists are unaware of. The lack of organized supply systems has further contributed to the decline of authentic weaves in the market, affecting the livelihoods of the weavers. This has led the weavers to seek alternative sources of income as the market for authentic weaves dwindles. There is a need for innovation in these traditional textiles to appeal to the present market while preserving their cultural identity. This research project aims to explore ways to revive the Eri silk market by introducing modern, innovative ideas that can help artisans compete in today's competitive environment. One of the main reasons for the decline in the traditional handloom market is the influence of westernized lifestyles on the younger generation. Eri silk weavers are struggling to come up with ideas to attract a wider market (**Lyndem & Bhandari, n.d**).

In conclusion, the indigenous textile culture of Northeast India serves as a noteworthy monument to the region's abundant cultural diversity and historical legacy. The textiles in question are not only fabric materials but rather embody live traditions that have been transmitted across centuries, carrying the narratives and cultural identities of indigenous tribes. In the midst of navigating the complexities of a dynamic global landscape, individuals in Northeast India encounter various obstacles. However, it is crucial to recognize that this context also presents a favorable circumstance to save and commemorate their indigenous customs. By doing so, these traditions can persist and make valuable contributions to the rich cultural tapestry of the region.

### **2.1.3 The Indigenous People of Northeast India and their origin**

The study by (**Dikshit & Dikshit, 2014**) highlighted the indigenous populations of Northeast India and their origin is a topic of significant scholarly interest in the fields of history, anthropology, and culture. This geographical area, commonly known as the "Seven Sisters,"

encompasses the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, Assam, and the relatively recent addition of Sikkim. Northeast India is notable not alone for its distinctive geographical characteristics, but also for its remarkable cultural richness and intricacy. The population of North-East India was said to be formed of several racial stocks, principally, the Mongoloids, the Indo-Aryans, the *Australoids* or *Austriac* and the *Dravidians*, the last being a very minor group represented by some immigrant population. While the original settlers were said to be Mongoloids, the Indo-Aryan and other similar groups arrived later.

According to (**Haolai ,2022**) the historical origins of the indigenous groups of Northeast India are still enveloped in an aura of uncertainty, akin to the enigmatic nature of the region itself. For ages, this particular country has been a source of fascination for explorers, anthropologists, and scholars alike. During a historical campaign some three centuries ago, Mulla Darvish provided an account of the Northeastern forests, characterizing them as possessing a distinctive sky and topography that deviated from traditional patterns, thereby showcasing nature's defiance of established norms. [https://www.petervanham.com/Pages/Northeast\\_India.html](https://www.petervanham.com/Pages/Northeast_India.html). The author's poetic depictions of the area's unique characteristics continue to have a lasting impact. The region of Northeast India is characterized by a diverse and awe-inspiring array of scenery.

According to ( **Kaur et al., 2018**) The migration of people from ancient to modern times and from numerous directions to North-East India has greatly contributed to the growth of ethnic diversity. North-East India has a rich cultural legacy, to learn about the indigenous tribes that live in these areas.

Arunachal Pradesh is one of the major states in North-East India and it was formed in 1972. It shares its boundaries with China, Bhutan, Myanmar, Assam, and Nagaland. It has five major districts which are named after the rivers of that area. It has an age long social and economic contact with Tibet so it has influenced their culture, language, religion, dress and interpersonal habit. This area follows the democratic process. It has vibrant beauty of flora and fauna. It has 25 major and many minor tribes. (**Kaur et al., 2018**)

According to (**Vakkayil ,2023**) the territory under consideration encompasses a wide range of climatic zones, extending from the elevated *Himalayan* peaks, notably Mount Kang to in the western Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh, to the lush plains of Assam and Tripura. This geographical expanse encompasses nearly all possible meteorological conditions found

on our planet. The region in question is globally recognized as one of the most humid areas, with the notable exception of deserts. The distinctive geographical features of the "Seven Sisters" are a consequence of the tectonic convergence between the Indian subcontinent and the Central Asian plateau. The impact of this collision has resulted in the formation of a topography characterized by hills and forests, interspersed with deep gorges and intersected by multiple rivers, which support a diverse range of aquatic organisms. The *Brahmaputra*, an exceptionally renowned river in the region, holds a prominent position as one of the most formidable rivers in Asia. The river commences its course in the Himalayas, namely at the Indo-Tibetan border. It navigates through the perilous and uncharted Siang Gorge located in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, prior to its arrival in Assam.

In oral traditions, folk narratives give meaning to the lives and experiences of Lotha people. The common subjects of these narratives deal with creation, the cosmos, community origin, division, and sub-division inside the tribes. These usually focus on the social reality and the relationship between man, nature, and the spirit realm. Nagas belong to a different racial stock from the mainland Indians; the definition of Nagas' identity has many varied stories about their existence. Apart from this, the Lothas have tales of separation and settlement of their tribe in various villages, which relate through folk stories and tales amongst these communities. (Sangma, 2017)

Further (Serto & Lotha ,2017) concluded that the *Brahmaputra* River has significantly influenced the livelihoods, cultures, and economics of the indigenous populations residing in its vicinity. The inhabitants of Northeast India exhibit a remarkable diversity that mirrors the region's varied geographical features. For decades, these regions have been occupied by Indigenous communities characterized by their unique languages, customs, and traditions. The genesis of these societies frequently exhibits interconnections with myths, legends, and folklore, rendering the region an enthralling domain for anthropological and historical inquiry. Each of the "Seven Sisters" states of Northeast India, along with Sikkim, includes many ethnic groups, each possessing its distinct historical and cultural legacy. In the region of Nagaland, the Naga tribes exhibit a diverse cultural heritage characterized by unique linguistic variations, traditional attire, and vibrant celebratory events. The *Bodo*, *Mising*, and *Karbi* people in Assam have played a pivotal role in enriching the cultural diversity of the region. Meghalaya is renowned for its indigenous communities, namely the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes, which are distinguished by their distinct cultural practices and societal norms. In the state of Arunachal Pradesh, a multitude of tribes such as the *Nyishi*, *Adi*, *Apatani*, and

*Monpa* inhabit the elevated regions.

In a study by (Hartzell ,1995) Nepalese Textiles are well known for an immense range of traditional textiles amongst the many ethnic groups of Nepal. She further discussed, in her presentation, the raw materials nettles, methods of production, and usage of textiles across different ethnic groups while illuminating weaving techniques and designs of many such ethnic tribes as Rai and Limbu of Eastern Nepal, Sherpas, and Tibetan-speaking tribes in the "Himalayan North."

The specific cultural practices and traditions of tribes from Northeast India, such as Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, Sikkim, and West Bengal, are distinctive. The Mizo tribes are known for their vibrant music and dance, while Manipur is famous for the *Ras Lila* dance. In the southwest, Tripura blends indigenous customs with Bengali culture. Sikkim also contributes to this unique cultural blend. Anthropological research sheds light on how tribes adapt to local conditions and how historical exchanges, like the Silk Route, have influenced their cultural identity. The written and oral traditions serve as evidence of these communities and their exposure to external influences.

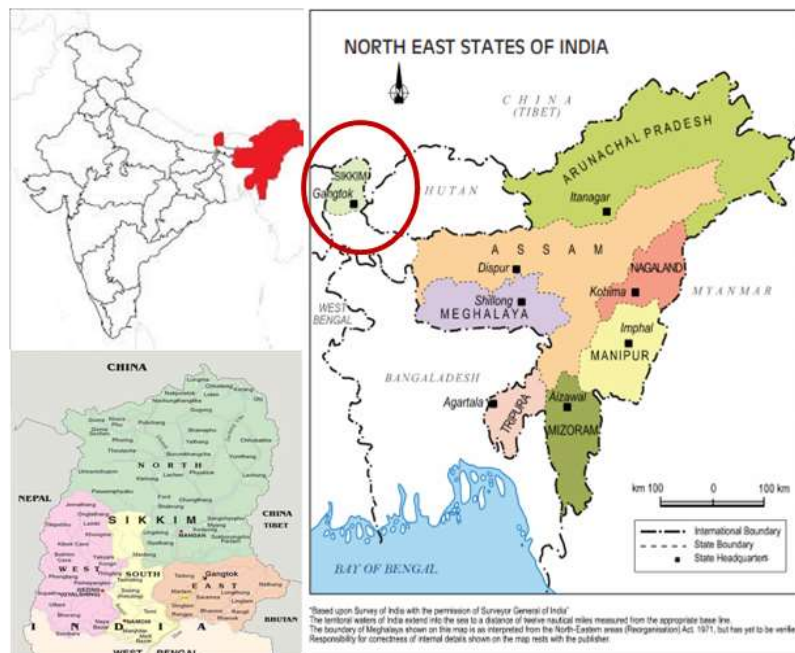
The topography varies from the plains of Tripura to the high flatlands of the Imphal Valley in Manipur and up to the mostly hilly and mountainous areas of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh. Peopling Meghalaya are pre-dominantly the Khasis and Garos, while Nagaland is home to tribes like Ao, Angami, Lotha, Sema, and Konyak, collectively called the Nagas. The Mizo/Lushai and Kuki are the dominant tribes of Mizoram. In Manipur, the Meitei people are the main inhabitants in the Imphal Valley, while the tribal groups such as Kuki, Naga, Hmar, and Tangkhul prefer hills as their main residential area. Arunachal Pradesh has a very rich variety of tribal populations. The Monpa, Aka and Sherdukpen are the inhabitants of Kameng, while the Adi/Abor belong to Siang and the Nishi/Dafla, Apatani, Tagin and Galong to Subansiri. Again, the Khamti, Singhpho and Mishmi inhabit Lohit, while the Wancho, Nocte and Tangsa live in Tirap. Some of these tribes have specific religions which they follow, such as Nocte, who are a part of Buddhism and Vaishnavism. The aboriginals or the natives of Tripura are known as the Tripuri, though in the state, tribal groups such as Kuki, Chakma, and Riang do exist. The area's spoken languages are from the Austroasiatic language group, which includes Munda and Mon-Khmer subgroups. The local Tibeto-Burman languages spoken by Bodo, Naga, and Kuki-Chin have been influenced by the Munda language family. The Khasis and Konyak Nagas speak languages within the Mon-Khmer group. The textiles in this region are linked to the

traditional belief systems that existed before the introduction of Christianity. This is particularly relevant today as the reinforcement of local identities is leading to a search for cultural roots predating Christianity. It is commonly believed that all worn items, including jewelry, are integral parts of the self that continue into the afterlife. Traditionally, an Ao Naga would only wear items woven by his wife. Any purchased items would need to be brushed with stinging nettles five times to ward off bad luck. If cloth or ornament was to be sold, one thread would be pulled out of the cloth and the ornament would be washed before the sale. For the Idu Mishmi, absence of weaving was viewed as punishment in the afterlife. The Meiteis of Manipur believe that the act of weaving reflects the cosmic process. In Arunachal Pradesh, the Adi attribute symbolic significance to colored cloth, known as "pore," while cloth without symbolic color is reduced to mere pattern. Dog and goat hair, dyed red, symbolize the destructive fire that wiped out an enemy village. Woven items are characterized by edge definition through stripes, with notable absence of checks and predominance of geometrical motifs. However, the Mishmis of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizos of Mizoram show considerable creativity in design, possibly sharing a common source of inspiration, perhaps from Myanmar. Tattoo patterns are also adapted for use in textiles. Among the Ao Nagas, women are prohibited from weaving during the agricultural season but they can spin yarn for later use. The back-strap loom, also known as the foot-braced or loin loom, is widely used, with some minor variations in different locations. Metal use was initially prohibited, and finished cloth was cut with a bamboo knife instead of a dae, while narrow structure of this loom remains consistent throughout the region. (**Varadarajan, 2010**)

The indigenous communities of Northeast India have undergone significant historical changes due to the influence of the British, Burmese, and the spread of Christianity. This has resulted in notable transformations in religious beliefs, particularly in Nagaland and Mizoram. Despite their rich cultural heritage, the region grapples with issues such as land rights, cultural identity, and political self-governance. Multiple ethnic groups have established self-governing councils and areas, as seen in the Bodo Territorial Region in Assam. Historical grievances, political ambitions, and ethnic tensions have fueled uprisings and disputes in the area. However, the cultural diversity and historical importance of Northeast India stand as a testament to the resilience of its native inhabitants. Preserving and honoring the unique cultural heritage of the "Seven Sisters" and Sikkim is essential for the well-being of future generations.

### 2.1.3.1. Culture and Tradition of Northeast India

(Phonglo , 2019) asserts that Northeast India is commonly acknowledged as a region characterized by a plethora of cultural diversity and tradition, establishing it as a prominent place within the nation in terms of its cultural opulence and ethnic variety. The Northeast India is rich in the culture of tribal communities, which includes folklore, mythology, superstitions, and a deep-rooted belief in living alongside the supernatural realm. The Northeast region of India (**Figure 2.1**) is distinguished by its exceptional ethnic and linguistic diversity. The geographical area under examination is renowned for its extensive range of languages, with an approximate tally of 220 linguistic varieties. These languages are primarily classified into three major language families: Indo-Aryan, Sino-Tibetan, and Austric. The geographical area being examined is renowned for its notable Indo-Aryan languages, like *Asamiya* and *Bangla*, as well as Austric languages like *Khasi*. Additionally, the region is home to the Sino-Tibetan language family, which has subfamilies such as Tibeto-Burman and Siamese Chinese (**Bora & Bezbaruah, 2018**).



**Figure 2.1** Map of Northeast India with Sikkim highlighted on it.

Source:

<https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/sikkim/sikkimlocation.htm>

The Northeast Indian region is geographically positioned between two significant cultural traditions, specifically the Indic Asia and the Mongoloid Asia. The presence of geographical and cultural intermediacy has played a significant role in shaping the identity and cultural uniqueness of the region. During the period of British colonial rule, the region in question exhibited political alignment with India. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that throughout history, this territory has exhibited a distinctive cultural identity that has been molded by the impact of neighboring regions and cultures. The handloom industry in Northeast India is renowned for its economic success, establishing the region as the leading hub for handloom production in the country. Based on recent scholarly investigations, it has been determined that India harbors a substantial quantity of establishments involved in handloom operations, amounting to roughly 25.4 lakh. Within this set of units, a significant aggregation of 1.46 million can be observed in five distinct states, specifically Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, and Tripura. Based on recent research findings, it has been discovered that a considerable percentage, precisely 53% or more, of looms and a large number, above 50%, of weavers are concentrated in some states within the country.

Folklore plays a very important role in documenting the history of northeast India, which comprises seven states and is a home to many tribal communities. In view of the inadequacy or rare possibility of written records and archaeological evidence, folklore offers an alternative source for cross-cultural understanding and research into diversified culture, especially of the indigenous peoples and other deprived sections of society. It reinforces the ethnic and social identity of each tribe and nation, so relevant to the modern context of ethnic conflicts. For this reason, a necessary undertaking is the protection of folklore expressions by intellectual property rights, particularly in the modern era of information technology. The examples given in the statutes of folklore to include: poetry, riddles, songs, instrumental music, dances and plays, as well as varied artistic productions such as drawings, paintings, carvings, sculptures, pottery, terracotta, mosaic, woodwork, metalwork, jewelry, handicrafts, costumes, and indigenous textiles. The traditional knowledge concerning plant varieties that farmers cultivate and extracts developed by the local medicine men also constitutes folklore, as such techniques harbor valuable scientific knowledge passed down the generations in the community, which would be irreparable if lost. The prevalence of exploitation concerning such traditional knowledge justifies its inclusion in any protective legal system. The role of folk music is not limited to entertainment. They are part of the historical record, carrying information about crucial events that had taken place in the past. Also, music plays vital roles

in rituals, healing and in preparing for war, as well as a tool for critiquing and overseeing governmental abuses. Dances and dramas are combined with rituals and religious festivals. On fabrics and arts, designs may represent religious, social, or cultural ideas. Although in the more general uses of the word, folklore may be restricted to oral literature tradition, modern usage tends to view it as a field of study embracing the totality of traditionally derived or orally transmitted literature, material culture, and custom within predominantly literate and technologically advanced societies. **(Deka, 2011)**

Therefore one can easily notice immense and varying cultural and historical importance of each state in the Northeast region. Arunachal Pradesh, being the largest in the region, enjoys high levels of ethnic and linguistic diversity across India. Notably, Tawang is noted as the home for one of India's oldest and largest Buddhist monasteries. With a beautiful natural environment and housing the upper catchment of mighty rivers like the Brahmaputra, Assam has enjoyed the status of most populous and developed states in the region. The region is very popularly known for its large-scale production of tea, which played a crucial role in the development of economic growth and shaping its culture. It also houses well-known tourist destination places that include the Kamakhya temple, which holds great cultural and religious importance.

According to **(Kazi, 2022)** the state of Manipur, located in northeastern India and bordering Myanmar, possesses a notable historical heritage and is widely recognized as the birthplace of the sport of Polo. Moreover, the locality is recognized for its unique dance genres, notably the celebrated '*Ras-Lila*.'

According to **(Karolia & Ladia., 2012)** the tribal textiles and costumes of Meghalaya, shedding light on a cultural heritage at risk of extinction due to modernization. Through personal interviews and observations, the research documents the intricate details of yarns, looms, colors, motifs, and ceremonial attire. Particularly noteworthy is the revelation of women's pivotal role as the primary weavers, maintaining the tradition within their household looms. The study underscores the evolving nature of traditional textiles, highlighting changes in materials and designs over time. Overall, this paper contributes valuable insights into the preservation and understanding of Meghalaya's rich textile heritage amid contemporary shifts. There is a rich repository of tribal arts and crafts in North East India, a region so full with diversified culture. With more than 100 dominant tribes and communities, North East India is known as a hub of handicrafts, each region having distinct craft traditions.

Meghalaya, often referred to as the abode of clouds, and is one of the seven sister states in the North Eastern Region of the country. Characterized by a rich traditional textile profile, pulsating tribal life, and vibrant fairs and festivals, it is composed of seven districts that cover a plethora of tribes and tribal groups. Each of the tribal groups has its traditional textiles and costumes which reflect communal solidarity and beliefs. However, with growing competition, rapid development, and changes in the tribal social system, the tribes' handicraft has declined considerably and stands on the verge of extinction. It thus becomes important to recognize the need for preservation by discussing the future prospects of traditional textiles, the present status, and its resilience to support the craftsmen. Other specifics are: describe distinctive features of the traditional textiles in regards to type of yarn, type of loom, color, motif, and symbolism. Document traditional costumes worn by males and females on different occasions.

Natural dyes are colorants that emanate from plants, animals, insects, and minerals. The botanical sources involve all various parts of a plant, including leaves, stems, bark, seeds, flowers, and roots. Assam, in North Eastern India, has rich resources of natural materials such as trees. Natural dyes have gained increasing demand for value in the international market, with people all over the world discovering color from sustainable and nontoxic sources. The present research is located within the study of natural textile dyes in Assam, focusing on oral traditions, extant documented knowledge, sources, extraction, and dyeing procedures (**Chakravarty & Kakaty, 2015**).

#### **2.1.4 History of Sikkim State**

According to (**Singh et al. ,2023**) Sikkim, in the eastern Himalayas, is known for its beautiful scenery and rich history. This topic has a fascinating history of indigenous cultures, Buddhism, monarchy, and geopolitics (Singh et al., 2023). This article examines Sikkim's history from ancient times to its current status as a state in India.

According to (**Lepcha et al.,2012**), Lepchas, an indigenous group, shaped Sikkim's history. The locals had unique cultural practices, societal standards, and a deep appreciation for the natural beauty of the area. The Lepchas have a rich oral tradition of history and culture. Buddhism greatly influenced Sikkim's culture and religion. According to historical accounts, Guru Rinpoche, also known as *Padmasambhava*, a revered Buddhist figure, influenced Sikkim's spiritual practises in the 8th century. Guru Rinpoche is believed to bestow blessings upon the land and introduce Buddhism. It is attributed to Guru Rinpoche for founding the

Dubby Monastery, the first monastery in Sikkim. Guru Rinpoche holds a significant place in Sikkim's religious and cultural heritage. <https://www.drishtias.com/blog/the-impact-of-buddhism-on-sikkim-s-culture-and-society>

The state is surrounded by land and has boundaries with China to the north, Nepal to the west, Bhutan to the east, and the Indian state of West Bengal to the south. Sikkim has a population of 610,000 and is home to the third highest mountain, Mt. Kanchendzonga, in the Great Himalaya range, making it a distinct and inhabitable place (**Bhutia et al., 2023**).

The formation of Sikkim's state structure has been significantly influenced by various factors. First, the original founder of the Namgyal dynasty in Sikkim has roots in Tibet and was ordained by Tibetan monks as prophesied by Guru Padma Sambhava. Second, Sikkim's geographical location, nestled among Bhutan, Tibet, and Nepal, has subjected it to the influences of these neighboring countries. Throughout its historical and political development, Sikkim was closely associated with Tibet, and many of the legacies upheld by the Bhutias originated from Tibet, encompassing culture, tradition, societal structure, religion, politics, and language. Nevertheless, these aspects have evolved over time, leading to differences when compared to contemporary Tibetan culture, tradition, religion, and language. Third, the Chogyals of Sikkim frequently sought refuge and assistance from Tibet during external threats. During times of danger, Sikkim received support from Tibet, including shelter for the Chogyal and military assistance. The close mutual support and reliance established Sikkim's dependence on Tibet for immediate help and protection. The historical background of Sikkim's state formation highlights the significance of Guru Tashe, a Tibetan Prince, who was destined to travel to Denzong, which translates to "Valley of rice" in Bhutia and "Demozong" in Bhutanese. Guru Tashe had three sons, with the eldest, Jo-Khye-Bumsa, considered a prominent figure in the history of the Bhutia kingdom in Sikkim due to his marriage to Gurumo, the daughter of the Sakya ruler, and his settlement in the Chumbi Valley, a part of Sikkim at that time. The rulers of the Namgyal dynasty trace their lineage back to Khye-Bumsa. Historical accounts initially suggested that Kye-Bumsa and his wife were childless until they visited the Lepcha spiritual leaders, Thekong Tek and Neylong Nyel, in Sikkim, to seek their blessings. Following this visit, three sons were born to Khye-Bumsa and his wife in the Chumbi Valley: Kaybo-Rab, Mi-tponRab, and Lhag-moRab. <https://ir.nbu.ac.in/server/api/core/bitstreams/5b1aa149-831d-4cea-aa09-9d00bdeb13ac/content>

Tibetan lamas founded monasteries in Sikkim in the 13th century. This period saw the spread of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan culture throughout the region. As Sikkim's first royal dynasty, the *Phuntsog Namgyal* dynasty established a Buddhist-based theocratic government. The *Chogyals*, (**Plate 2.2**) or "Dharma Kings," ruled Sikkim for centuries based on their spiritual instruction. The initial *Chogyal*, *Phuntsog Namgyal*, founded monastic institutions that were centres of academic endeavour and cultural enrichment. The Chogyal ruled Sikkim with a delicate balance between Buddhism and politics. The Chogyals maintained diplomatic relations with neighbouring Tibet and Bhutan while maintaining autonomy. The Anglo-Sikkim Treaty: British Influence's Impact.

In 1670, the first Chogyal's rule came to an end, and he was succeeded by his only son, Tensung Namgyal, who became the second Chogyal of Sikkim. Tensung Namgyal, born in 1644, commenced his reign in 1670. One of the initial accomplishments of the Chogyal was the construction of a new palace at Rabdentse in West Sikkim and the relocation of the capital from Yuksom to Rabdentse, a decision influenced by Lha-tsum Chempo's recommendation. Tensung Namgyal had three wives. His first wife, Numbe Ongmu, a Bhutanese woman, gave birth to a daughter named Pende Ongmu, who later asserted her right to the throne. The second wife, Debasam-serpa, a Tibetan, bore a son named Chakdor, and the third wife, a Limboo, the daughter of a Limbu Chief of Arun Valley in West Sikkim of Greater Sikkim (now Nepal), gave birth to two children, a son named Shalngo-Guru and a daughter named Pende Tshering Gyemu. Not much of significance transpired during his reign. He was succeeded by Chakdor Namgyal, born in 1686, who assumed the throne in 1700 at the age of 14. His eldest sister, Pende Ongmu, challenged his ascension by asserting her right as the first child of Tensung Namgyal to the throne. Although her attempts to seize the throne failed, she conspired against the Chogyal and formed an alliance with the Bhutanese forces to invade Sikkim and assassinate her brother. However, Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal was rescued and escaped to Lhasa, Tibet with the help of his loyal councillor, Yugthing Teshe, traversing through Illam and Limboo Country Wallung. Upon reaching Lhasa, he sought refuge under the sixth Dalai Lama, Gyalwa Tsang-yang Gyamtso, and the Regent, Gyalpo-Lha-bZang. In Lhasa, he engaged in the study of Buddhist texts and Tibetan writings and eventually became the official astrologer for the sixth Dalai Lama in Tibet. His services were recognized by both the Tibetan and Chinese governments, and he was honored

with the title of Thajee13 and rewarded with landed estates (Padi-jong, Nagartsejong, Tinkejong, and Gyalkharmangpa) in Central Tibet. **(Namgyal and Doma, 1908)** .

<https://ir.nbu.ac.in/server/api/core/bitstreams/5b1aa149-831d-4cea-aa09-9d00bdeb13ac/content>,<https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP880-1-6-27#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=4&xywh=-2024%2C-67%2C7824%2C4746>

According **(Das., 2014)** Sikkim was part of the British Empire's 19th-century Indian imperial expansion into the Himalayas. The 1861 Anglo-Sikkim Treaty established Sikkim as a British protectorate.

Further **(Gupta.,1975)** added that the events in the sensitive eastern Himalayan state of Sikkim came full circle with the April 1975 referendum approving its merger with India and the abolishment of the monarchy. Since the late 19th century, various constitutional experiments were undertaken to establish the country's status. The location of Sikkim between India and China made its status both geopolitical and ethnic. Initially, it served as the gateway to Tibet and later as a passage to India following Tibet's annexation by China, resulting in pressure from both sides. During the mid-19th century, Britain's influence grew as a result of its connection to the Dalai Lama's court, but in later years, Tibetans opposed its proximity to Britain. The Young husband expedition to Lhasa from 1903 to 1905 saw Sikkim attempting to remain impartial, but this was unsuccessful when confronted. The Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1951 and the Sino-Indian conflicts in 1959-60 led to efforts to affirm a distinct Sikkimese identity, which was supported by the ruler (Chogyal). India's efforts aimed to secure autonomy without international acknowledgement, concentrating solely on domestic affairs, while the Chogyal aimed for international recognition of Sikkim. Within Sikkim, political groups such as the Sikkim National Congress and the Sikkim Janata Congress advocated for internal progress and increased political liberty, recognizing the complexities arising from the ruler's Tibetan heritage as Bhutias. Further they concluded that the treaty gave the British extensive control over Sikkim's external affairs and defenses while accepting the Chogyal's domestic jurisdiction, protecting the realm's sovereignty. India annexed Sikkim when India gained independence from Britain in 1947, although Sikkim remained a protectorate. The Chogyal of Sikkim, Tashi Namgyal, began discussions on Sikkim becoming an independent state. However, in 1975, Sikkim faced a political crisis with growing calls for democratic representation and greater ties to India **(Rai, 2013)**.

Democracy in Modern Sikkim: The union with India changed Sikkim. The region adopted the Indian Constitution and held its first democratic elections in 1979. From 1642 to 1975, the Chogyal, also known as the divine ruler, held absolute power in Sikkim. In 1975, the monarchy was abolished, and the people of Sikkim decided in a referendum to transform Sikkim into India's 22nd state. The title of Chogyal, which means "Dharma Raja" or "Religious King," was also given to a distinct type of leader who held both temporal and spiritual authority. After elected representatives took over state control, the Chogyal's position became ceremonial. The tourism, agriculture, and hydropower sectors of Sikkim have grown the economy. The state's lush forests, clear lakes, and breathtaking Kanchenjunga peak attract travelers from throughout the world (**Gairola.,2023**) , (**Rai, 2013**).

Cultural Diversity and Heritage: Sikkim's diverse population includes Bhutias, Lepchas, Nepalis, and others. Every social group contributes its own traditions, dialects, and festivals to the state's rich culture (**Gairola, 2023**). Monasteries, stupas, and prayer flags (**Plate 2.1**) dot Sikkim's landscape, demonstrating Buddhism's importance (**Bhutia et al., 2023**). The *Saga Dawa* celebration in Sikkim commemorates Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death, making it significant.

Sikkim has made progress since joining India; although it still confronts challenges as according to **Gairola (2023)** Sikkim is organic because of its environmental commitment. The state must balance its growth goals with protecting its fragile nature.



**Plate 2.1 H.H Chogyal (Sir) Tashi Namgyal, KCSI, KCIE, was the 11th Denjong Chogyal. The most decorated Chogyal of Sikkim.**

**Source: <https://www.instagram.com/sikkimhistorycollective/>**



**Plate 2.2 : Prayer Flag**

**Source: Splendors Of Sikkim, Cultural Affairs & Heritage Department Government Of Sikkim.**

### **2.1.5 History of Lepcha's and Bhutia's.**

According to **Roy (2017)** the Lepcha and Bhutia communities' history in the eastern Himalayas is marked by indigenous traditions, migratory patterns, and interactions with neighbouring societies. Indigenous communities in Sikkim and its neighbours have contributed greatly to the region's culture (**Bhutia, 2019**). This essay examines the Lepcha and Bhutia communities' history. Sikkim and adjoining nations are home to the Lepcha ethnic group (**Thapa & Tarafdar, 2021**).

The Tibetan lamas are said to have destroyed documentary evidence when migrating to Sikkim, but various Lepcha and Tsong (Limboo) oral traditions suggest the existence of tribal

chiefs and a rudimentary monarchy-like institution. The king was chosen through open competitions held from time to time. According to Lepcha legend, the heir to the throne needed to have knowledge in religion, administration, and military tactics. The king was expected to be courteous, modest, sociable, remain unmarried, and have no property. Such an ideal king was referred to as 'Panu' by the Lepchas. The spiritual leader was known as Athing. Pohartak Panu, believed to be the earliest significant Lepcha ruler of the Mayel region (now known as Sikkim), is said to have lived during the reign of Chandragupta of the Gupta dynasty. While there are no records of his direct successor, Turvey Panu, another Lepcha king, is thought to have ruled Sikkim from approximately 1230 to 1316 A.D., establishing his capital near Kurseong, which is currently a town in the Darjeeling district. Historical accounts suggest that Turvey Panu had Limboo and Mangar individuals as part of his court. He is rumored to have been killed in a military campaign, likely by the Kirats of eastern Nepal. Following his reign, Tubh Athak succeeded him, but very little information is available about this ruler. The last of the Lepcha rulers may have been Gaeboo Achok Panu from the Damsang area in the Kalimpong region. According to one source, Gaeboo was the son of Tshongzod Bolek, the slain Lepcha Prime Minister of Sikkim. Gaeboo met a treacherous end at the age of 36 in 1856 A.D. at Daling fort. However, another account suggests that the Lepchas of Damsang were part of the independent principality of Kalimpong and that Gaeboo Achok was murdered by the Bhutanese in 1780, resulting in Kalimpong being annexed to Bhutan. A different version of events indicates that Gaeboo was the son of Kya-bo-Rab, a Bhutia ruler of Damsang and Daling, and was slain by the Bhutanese General Ari Sethi near Ambiokh. Fonning also expressed skepticism about Gaeboo Achok's true identity. **(Gurung, 2011)**

The Lepcha, also known as the Rongkup, have long been Sikkim's indigenous people, having settled in the eastern Himalayas. Geographic elements, cultural practises, and spiritual beliefs of the locals shape the region's history. The name "Sikkim" is derived from the Limboo language word "Sukhim," which means "New House or Palace." Sikkim was previously a small kingdom governed by a "Chogyal," or "Religious King," from the "Namgyal dynasty" before it became a part of the Indian Union. It gained official statehood in India on May 16, 1975, and became a member of the North-Eastern Council in 1998. Sikkim is the 22nd Indian state and the smallest in size, located in the Eastern Himalayas. It shares borders with Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, and the Indian state of West Bengal, with a total area of 7096 sq km. As of 2011, its population was 607,688, marking it as the least populated state in India. **(Bhutia &**

**Mishra, 2014**). The Lepcha community has old mythical origins. According to Lepcha legend, they are the first residents of the country, chosen by divine forces. The Lepcha language reflects their culture (**Thapa & Tarafdar, 2021**).

The term 'Bhutia' originates from the Nepalese language "Bhotay," which refers to the people of Tibet. They are of Tibetan descent and migrated from southern Tibet, including Chumbi Valley and Kham, in the 13th century. Over time, Bhutia tribes and settlers from Paro and Haa in Bhutan settled in various parts of Sikkim and became naturalized as Bhutias of Sikkim. These include Butsawopa, Lagdingpa, Botpas, Gyengyap, Gorongpas, Topas, Sharpas, Barphung-putso, and Adenphutos. (**Bhutia & Mishra, 2014**). The advent of Buddhism in the region resulted in the emergence of a syncretic amalgamation of local customs and Buddhist doctrines.

The Lepchas have historically engaged in interactions with neighbouring communities, such as the Bhutias and Tibetans. The aforementioned interactions exerted a significant impact on their cultural practises, language, and social structure. The eastern Himalayan Bhutias are a large indigenous community. Population movements, commercial exchanges, and a strong connection to Tibetan culture define this group's history. Tibetan Origins: According to **Mukharajee (1995)**, the Bhutias originated in Tibet and moved to the eastern Himalayas centuries ago. Tibetan Buddhism, language, and culture have shaped their lifestyle thanks to the diaspora.

According to **Purkayastha (2013)** The Dzongu in the North Sikkim was declared as a land reserved only for the Lepchas of Sikkim. The Bhutias have shaped Sikkim's political and cultural landscape for decades. The Sikkimese Chogyals often allied with the Bhutia nobles to strengthen their dominance. After Bhutias and Nepalis from neighboring countries arrived, the Lepchas began to rapidly disappear. The British rulers of pre-independent India encouraged the Chogyal (Bhutia Monarch) of Sikkim to safeguard the Lepchas and their distinct culture from extinction. Responding to this, the Chogyal designated a significant piece of land comprising thirteen revenue blocks on the western side of the Teesta River in North Sikkim as a Lepcha Reserve, which was already populated by the Lepchas.

Like the Lepchas, the Bhutia relied on agriculture, animal husbandry, and commerce for their livelihood. According to **Thapa & Tarafdar (2021)** Bhutia culture values yak herding because yaks provide food and culture.

Bhutia Monasteries: The Rumtek Monastery was an example of how the Bhutia community helped construct monastic institutions in Sikkim. This famous Tibetan Buddhist centre is prominent in the region. The monasteries have preserved and spread Buddhist ideas and rituals. **(Bhutia & Mishra, 2014).**

Cultural Exchange and Integration: Like the Lepchas, the Bhutias have actively exchanged culture with other communities, particularly the Tibetans. The contacts above have improved their cultural legacy and increased the region's diversity.

Both cultures are passionate about maintaining and safeguarding the natural environment by actively participating in conservation efforts. Sikkim follows its ancient organic farming practices. **(Thapa & Tarafdar, 2021).**

The convergence of tourism and identity presents opportunities for cultural exchange but also challenges in preserving sacred sites and local customs.

The eastern Himalayas' geography, culture, and spirituality are intertwined with Lepcha and Bhutia's history. Indigenous communities have shaped Sikkim and its culture **(Bhutia & Mishra, 2014)**. Even as modernization continues, the region's unique traditions, dialects, and practices preserve its legacy. Preserving and commemorating these communities' cultural identities were not only important historically, but it also helps preserve the eastern Himalayas' diverse cultures.

### **2.1.6 Oral Traditions and Folk Literature**

Oral traditions and folk literature serve as dynamic archives of a community's cultural history, facilitating the transmission of narratives, wisdom, and societal principles over successive generations via verbal communication, musical expressions, and live enactments. This essay aims to examine the importance of oral traditions and folk literatures, their function in the preservation of cultural identity, and the obstacles they encounter in a swiftly evolving global landscape.

According to **Chattopadhyay, 1975**, *Arthashastra*, an ancient Sanskrit text, mentions the existence of workshops producing elaborately designed textiles during the 5th century BC reign of kings. Furthermore, frescoes from the 16th century AD, depicting narratives from the Jataka Tales, showcase finely crafted textiles with exquisite weaves, textures, and decorative patterns, indicating their superior quality.

Social customs in India determine the selection of colours and types of textiles worn by

individuals of different faiths and tribes, considering their social and marital status. This practice varies across regions and communities. The diverse range of Indian weaves, colours, and designs has been greatly enriched by the influence of various rulers and invaders who have governed the Indian subcontinent throughout history. **(Karolia A, 2019)**

According to **Prasad (2018)** the article "Fabric and Tradition – Textiles of the Northeast," published in Marg Magazine, explores the prevalent use of the backstrap loom, also known as the foot-braced and loin loom, across the North-eastern states. While the loom remains consistent throughout the region, minor variations have been observed in certain areas. The author emphasizes the importance of focusing on technical processes rather than surface appeal and patterning.

In Nagaland, traditional methods such as seed separation by rolling cotton on stone bases with sticks are evolving, with the adoption of ginning contrivances like the nakrong. The documentation highlights innovations in pre-loom procedures, such as the introduction of a bobbin transfer contrivance at the Chakhesang Women Welfare Society in Pfütsero, developed at the Weavers Services Centre in Imphal.

Specific attention is given to the loin loom practices at the Chakhesang Women Welfare Society in Pfütsero, detailing looming techniques and their descriptions in local languages.

Overall, the article offers valuable insights into the evolving textile traditions of the North East, showcasing both traditional practices and modern adaptations.

In modern times, the Lepcha population is spread across five countries - India, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Tibet, but the majority now reside in the first three countries. In Nepal, they have been settled in the eastern part of Mai Khola in the Ilam district since ancient times, with a small number also residing in other districts. In Bhutan, the Lepcha population primarily resides in the southern and southwestern parts, close to the Indian border. India serves as the homeland of the Lepcha, with settlements in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal (particularly in the Kalimpong sub-division), Sikkim, and a small number in Tripura. Initially, the Lepchas were followers of nature worship, but over time, many converted to Buddhism (Lamaism under Tibetan rule) and Christianity (during British rule). Some Lepcha individuals also practice Hinduism.

The peace-loving Lepcha people lead a simple tribal life that is rich in culture. Tribal art is characterized by their signature music, with dancing playing a central role, while folk tales and songs contribute to their overall artistic expression. Their tribal folk craft, folklore, folk

dance, wood carvings, and facial expressions collectively offer an aesthetic life that is noteworthy. All age groups actively participate in these activities, with a fondness for riddles being prevalent among the Lepcha. These artistic expressions vividly depict tribal life, encompassing aspects of their hunting, agriculture, and everyday life. Various aspects of their economic, social, conjugal, and sacred life, as well as their thoughts, cattle, poultry, vegetables, and fruits, are well represented in their folklore, art, and craft. Folklore serves as the unwritten record of their cultural life, acting as a mirror for their tribal culture. Lepcha folklore is melodious and includes intriguing folk stories, one of which is the creation story ("Aa-Ect-Sung") from the traditional Lepcha story ("Lungten sung"). This story tells of the creation of the world and the creation of the first human, Fudong Thing. **(Jha, 2015)**

According to **Doma , (2010)** the mythical tale of Rangeet and Rongnyu, the two iconic rivers in Sikkim, as per Lepcha folklore. It narrates their love story and how their journey symbolizes the power and beauty of nature. The narrative explores themes of love, pride, forgiveness, and the consequences of thoughtless actions, all wrapped in the rich tapestry of folklore. The story also highlights the cultural significance of the rivers in the lives of the Lepcha community, reflecting their reverence for nature and tradition. Overall, it provides a captivating insight into the folklore and cultural practices of the region, offering readers a glimpse into the deep-rooted beliefs and traditions of the Lepcha people. **(Plate 2.3)**

In the beginning, amidst vast emptiness enveloping earth and sky, Ibtu-moo, the Mother Creator, embarked upon a grand design. Initially, she sculpted Kongchen Kongchlo, accompanied by his wives, Samo Gayzong and Paki Chyu, along with his siblings, PawoHungree and Bagok Chyu, along with other towering peaks known as chyu bee. In harmony with these mountains, she fashioned daa, the lakes, and roong, the rivers. Yet, despite her efforts, a sense of incompleteness lingered. Surveying her creation, Ibtu-moo sensed a void. From a fresh snowball atop KongchenKongchlo, she sculpted the first man, Fudongthing, imbued with unparalleled power. However, her vision remained unfulfilled. Thus, she bestowed upon Fudongthing a companion, crafting the first woman, NazongNyu, from a fragment of his bone marrow. They later ascended to become revered deities among the *Rongs* or Lepchas **(Doma , 2010)**.



**Plate 2.3: Free flowing river Teesta ,Dzongu**

According to **Ahmed (2002)**, various trades happen between, India, Tibet, Bhutan and Ladakh,. Traders belonging to the Marwari community, renowned for their business expertise and hailing from Rajasthan, were established in Kalimpong, a prominent commercial hub along the trade route linking India and Tibet. They transported samples of gos-chen to Benaras. Some individuals in Benaras claimed that it was the Nepali traders, also residing in Kalimpong, who introduced the initial samples to Benaras. Alternatively, traders from Benaras, who were active in the Kalimpong market, brought a sample back to explore the possibility of replicating it.

#### **2.1.6.1 Preservation of Cultural Identity:**

The use of oral traditions facilitates the transfer of customs, ceremonies, and customary practices. Young people are taught how to actively participate in their cultural heritage. Many indigenous languages are on the verge of extinction. Oral traditions are critical to the preservation and revival of these languages, reducing the risk of their slow decline and eventual extinction. Folktales and moral fables are frequently used to teach cultural values, as they encapsulate and transmit a community's ethical ideas and beliefs. The educational institution teaches virtues like kindness, honesty, and cooperation, hence developing these ethical standards within the society framework.

The Government of India has established the North East Zone Cultural Centre (NEZCC) in Dimapur and the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre (EZCC) in Kolkata to safeguard and advance the diverse traditions and culture of the North East Region. These centers operate under the

Ministry of Culture and engage artists from the member states, including Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura, to showcase the region's cultural heritage through various cultural activities and programs. Additionally, they implement schemes such as Award to Young Talented Artistes, Guru Shishya Parampara, Theatre Rejuvenation, and Research & Documentation, with 93% of the budget allocation dedicated to folk and tribal art forms. Furthermore, there are other organizations in the North East Region involved in preserving and promoting its folk art and culture, including the Central Institute of Himalayan Culture Studies in Dahung, Arunachal Pradesh, and three grantee bodies: the Centre for Buddhist Studies at Tawang Monastery, Arunachal Pradesh; the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in Gangtok; and the GRL Monastic School in Bomdila, Arunachal Pradesh. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1742778>

The term "culture" originates from the French word "Cultura" and the Latin word "Colere," which means "tend" or "cultivate." It signifies the cultivation of the mind, faculties, or manners and also conveys the notions of "honoring" and "protecting." In cultural studies, culture is understood as a way of creating meaning and concepts. Popular culture encompasses the customs, beliefs, and practices shared by a community, shaped by their daily lives, including their food preferences, fashion, modes of transportation, music, reading habits, and the spaces they inhabit and traverse. The modern culture strongly impacts Naga society, and if the society is not prepared to confront it, the Naga culture could be overwhelmed by cultural influences. To maintain its identity, the Naga society must safeguard its culture, continually nurture, develop, and refine it, and shield it from external influences. As John Martin stated, educational institutions should not only transmit cultural heritage, but also prepare the youth for future careers, cultivate strong character, promote physical well-being, and impart cultural knowledge. Without culture, a community lacks identity, and a society without identity lacks one of its most essential attributes. According to UNESCO's modern definition, culture encompasses a society or social group's distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional aspects, including lifestyles, ways of coexisting, value systems, traditions, and beliefs, in addition to art and literature. Culture defines our ethnic identity and is not an inscrutable mystery. As we reflect on nurturing our Naga culture inherited from our ancestors, which comprises a wealth of traditional and cultural heritage, it is disheartening to observe that we are losing these values while being influenced by the outside world, whether through imitation or learning. The Naga people are increasingly emulating Western culture, resulting in the erosion of their original cultural

values. Today, among the modern generation, there is a departure from the reverence for traditions, customs, and practices in favor of embracing science and technology (**Jessymol & Chupuo, 2021**).

The influence of globalisation and Modernization on traditional practices and values. Younger generations may prefer current sources of entertainment and communication over old oral traditions. Language shift is defined by the increasing prevalence of global languages such as English, which may result in younger generations lacking competency in their native language. As a result, they may be less able to actively engage in and perpetuate oral traditions. In many societies, elderly people act as stores of knowledge and oral tradition. As people pass away, they may leave behind beloved traditions and tales. The introduction of digital media and the internet has resulted in a tremendous technical shift, transforming how people get information and engage in. Conventional speech patterns are forced to compete for prominence and acknowledgement in the sphere of communication.

In the past few years, various ethnic groups in Northeast India have been actively asserting their identities and demanding "indigenous rights." These movements can be interpreted as the groups' coming of age and their involvement in transnational discourses, but it's important to consider the influence of the state. State intervention and insensitive government policies have also shaped many of these movements. Other factors such as religious conversions, changes in lifestyle due to agro-ecological shifts and population pressures, as well as improvements in education, infrastructure, telecommunications, and media accessibility, have significantly impacted awareness and interconnectedness among different groups in the region.

Analyzing contemporary struggles in Northeast India through micro-level analyses and historical data helps to clarify the specific implications and consequences of a distinct identity for these ethnic groups. Furthermore, examining the performative aspects of identity assertions in events such as festivals and public gatherings can provide a more insider's understanding of the situation. There is a growing necessity not only to better understand the commonalities and differences in ethnic identity assertions in the region but also to develop more grounded theoretical perspectives.

The authors of this volume do not blindly use essentialist arguments but rather employ empirical, ethnographic micro and context analyses to revise classical theories and argue based on their empirical findings. As the empirical perspective becomes more detailed and

multilayered, there is an increasing urgency to reconsider our understanding of culture, tradition, ethnicity, and religion as conceptual tools. Rather than seeking agreement on a single definition, the focus is on conceptualizing these aspects in relational, processual, and dynamic terms, rather than viewing them as concrete, enduring, and delimited entities **(Barkataki et al., 2002)**

The history, myths, and daily life of the Northeast region are reflected in folk songs and dances. Traditional instruments accompany these music styles, telling tales of love, bravery, and community. The Indian Subcontinent's Northeast region encompasses a diverse mix of ethnic groups and indigenous communities, all contributing to the vibrant cultural tapestry of North East India. The region features a variety of landscapes, including hilly terrains, dense forests such as temperate, deciduous, Alpine, and subtropical forests. Throughout the Northeastern region, the people have preserved their rich culture and traditions, including folk music, folktales, dances, and handicrafts, all of which highlight their profound connection with nature. Tribal culture is enriched by the oral traditions, which involve the passing down of stories, myths, and legends through generations. These narratives serve to entertain and also preserve essential cultural values and historical knowledge <https://globalindiannetwork.com/all-you-need-to-know-about-northeast-indian-culture/>.

### **2.1.7 Art and Crafts of Sikkim**

According to **Artistic Textiles of Sikkim (2018)**, Sikkim's artistic and artisanal practises are intricately related to the region's cultural heritage, serving as a manifestation of the customs, values, and ways of life of its diverse inhabitants. Ancient customs and traditions in Sikkim uphold decades-old styles and forms of craftsmanship, with over sixty monasteries in the state preserving ancient religious rituals and traditional art and crafts. Handlooms, woolen carpet weaving, mask making, metal craft, wood carving, and Thangka paintings are among the renowned craftworks from this region. The primary practitioners of these crafts are the three prominent ethnic tribal communities: Lepchas, Sherpas, and Bhutias. Transmission of elaborate textiles and bright paintings across generations has had a dual purpose, involving both economic viability and the preservation of cultural legacies. This essay will look into the diverse spectrum of artistic and craft traditions in Sikkim, delving into their cultural and historical relevance as well as the issues they confront today <https://www.scribd.com/document/72777625/Weaving-Sikkim-1>.

Textile and weaving studies include the investigation and analysis of several techniques, materials, and processes used in the manufacture of cloth, as well as the art of interlacing threads to form fabric. Weaving transcends fundamental craftsmanship, gaining significant cultural value for diverse Sikkim groups. The state is well-known for its handcrafted textiles, which are distinguished by painstaking handweaving craftsmanship. Each region of the state takes pride in its weaving designs and customs **(Dikshit & Dikshit, 2014)**.

Backstrap loom is a common sight in Sikkim's homes, where skilled artisans, mostly women, work to create beautifully appealing fabrics. The looms available range from backstrap looms used by Lepcha women to frame and pit looms used for the manufacturing of larger fabrics. Textiles that stand out include: Many Sikkim communities, such as the Bhutias, Lepchas, and Limbus, have distinctive textile patterns and motifs that are unique to their cultural identities. Striped designs and vivid colours are popular among the Bhutia people. **(Lepcha handloom of Sikkim, 2021)**

Weavers frequently employ natural dyes acquired from various sources such as plants, roots, and insects to make a wide range of hues **(Bhutia et al., 2023)**. This environmentally conscious approach is in line with Sikkim's commitment to organic and sustainable practices. Thangka Painting is a traditional Tibetan Buddhist practice that comprises the creation of ornate and intricate holy artworks.

Thangka painting **(Plate 2.4)**, which stems from the rich traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, is an essential element of Sikkim's cultural past. The elaborate scroll paintings have a multilayered nature that goes beyond their aesthetic function, as they are also significant religious icons and useful instructional instruments. Thangkas are spiritually significant since they depict many deities, religious symbols, and scenes from Buddhist texts. Crystals are employed in a wide range of religious ceremonies, meditation practices, and educational applications. Thangka painting necessitates a high level of precision and care in its execution. Artists combine mineral colours, gold leaf, and delicate brushwork techniques to produce these religious artworks. The thangka is often seen as the highest achievement of Buddhist art, following precise iconographic guidelines from religious texts. It serves as both an article of veneration and a tool for contemplation. A thangka typically portrays a deity, a religious idea, or a spiritually important occurrence <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/buddhist-art-in-sikkim-dastkari-haat-samiti/fgUxKf4J9R7vJA?hl=en>.

The art of painting on cloth thrives in Sub-Himalayan Darjeeling, supported by religious groups as well as the royal and affluent communities. Both Buddhists and Hindus highly value these scrolls. All things considered, it can be concluded that scrolls are a distinctive art form in Sub-Himalayan regions. <https://ir.nbu.ac.in/server/api/core/bitstreams/0955af29-cf56-4527-a5a8-7be6011d4f4e/content>

The physical proximity of Sikkim to Tibet has tremendously affected Thangka art. Several local artists have adopted Tibetan aesthetic inspirations while adding local features, resulting in a distinct synthesis. The art of wood carving is the professional manipulation of wood to create intricate and detailed sculptures or decorative items. Wood carving is a well-known craft in the Sikkim region, where skilled artisans create intricate patterns on wooden panels and furniture. Throughout the Sikkim region, wooden carvings adorn monasteries and temples. The panels in question are decorated with elaborate carvings of religious motifs and scenes. Wood carvings are often employed in the construction of traditional Sikkimese houses and furnishings, adding an aesthetic touch to everyday life.

Handloom weaving : The carpets found in Sikkim showcases state's rich culture. Carpet weaving is a cherished tradition passed down through generations within families, often taking place in the home. Sikkim is known for practicing one of the oldest forms of carpet weaving globally, with hand-knotted woollen carpets, locally called Den, being the state's specialty. The women of the Bhutia community proudly uphold this art form and are recognized as skilled carpet weavers. They utilize a unique weaving method known as 'frame-loom weaving' while drawing inspiration from Buddhist iconography and Tibetan designs for their color schemes and decorative motifs. The dyeing and weaving styles, however, can vary across the different regions of the state <https://indianculture.gov.in/snippets/art-carpet-weaving-sikkim>.

Wooden carvings comprise excellently carved doors, windows, and other decorative items that speak volumes about the expertise and minute details of the artisans of Sikkim. The designs, drawn from nature and Buddhist symbols, exude a sense of spirituality and beauty.

Thangkas are considered sacred works of art in Sikkim. Done by highly trained artists, the paintings are usually of the deities of Buddhism and also scenes and mandalas of Buddhist mythology. The colors used in thangkas are bright and the strokes of the brush are fine. The thangka paintings are pleasing to the eyes.

Handicrafts: The craft reflects profound artistic traditions. Artisans here are skillfully crafting beautiful potteries, bamboo things, and handcrafted jewelry using ancient techniques. These exquisite pieces makeup some of the unique souvenirs that capture Sikkim's culture (Omatrav, 2023).

The economy of Sikkim state greatly depends on the handicrafts sector, which offers employment to many artisans in both rural and semi-urban areas, thus contributing significantly to the income generation. Challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, transportation, low capital, limited exposure to technology, lack of market knowledge, and institutional framework have impacted the handicraft sector. Nonetheless, it has the potential for substantial growth, particularly due to the readily available and affordable labor force in the region. Sikkim's handicraft industry can diversify its product range and create employment opportunities, but it requires the introduction of new technologies, innovative designs, product advertising, efficient logistics management, and increased consumer awareness about product features. Consequently, it is evident that the handicraft industry in Sikkim holds promise for expansion and the establishment of a competitive market structure. (Sharma, & Sezhiyan, 2014).

In order to improve the craft sector, the Sikkim government promotes craft festivals, exhibitions, and training programmes. The tourism business is crucial in marketing and presenting Sikkim's crafts to a wider clientele, allowing indigenous artists to earn a living.

The traditional handicrafts of Bhutias and Lepchas were primarily religious, and their costumes reflected their gender, profession, and ethnicity. The Lepchas wear colorful, vibrant dresses, while the Bhutias have a distinct style of clothing called 'Kho'. Bhutia women wear a long-sleeved blouse '*Honju*' and a '*Kho*' underneath, while men wear a double-breasted shirt (*tson-ta-ti/wonthatsi*) and pants (*gya-ton/daura*). These distinctive costumes reflect the social and ethnic lifestyle of Sikkim. Sikkimese women have a fondness for jewelry, and Bhutia women prefer Tibetan-style ornaments. Necklaces adorned with precious stones like Yen, Dhow, and Zi are considered the most sacred and valuable. In remote villages, earrings and bracelets are still commonly worn. Necklaces of various designs are referred to as the khou, the ka-chung, and the zuri. The chyap-chyap is worn with the khou as a brooch. Bhotia names for different types of ornaments include the ten-darh for earrings, zuku for rings, and den for bracelets, among others.

(Mukharajee, 1995).

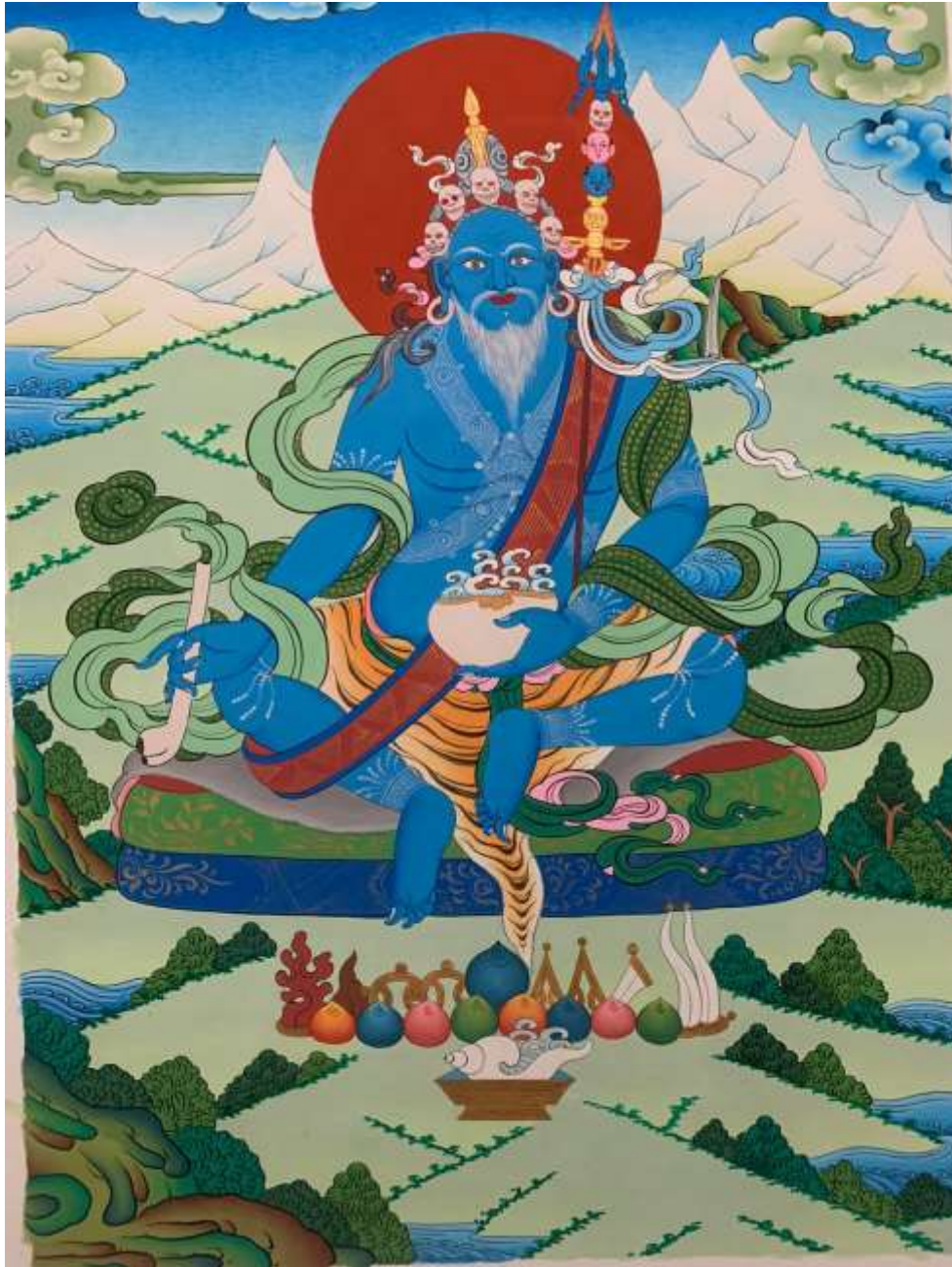


Plate 2.4: Thangka Painting, Gangtok, Sikkim

### 2.1.8 Influence of neighboring borders on Northeastern Fashion

The eastern part of South Asia shares nearly all of its border with the northeast region of India. The interaction between the North Eastern states of India and neighboring countries significantly influences cross-border transnational developments, encompassing social, economic, cultural, and political aspects. These dynamics are often overlooked in regional studies that primarily focus on economic relationships, such as trade and capital flows, between two countries. Our study endeavors to depart from the conventional method of analyzing cross-border trade patterns, opting instead for an economic anthropological

approach to examine specific cross-border market areas. We aim to understand the distinctive trade composition, supply chain operations, dual currency usage, and the influence of political geography. The challenging terrain, hostile neighbors, and infrastructure barriers have hindered the development of the North-Eastern 'chicken-neck' corridor. As part of our research, a team of six researchers conducted field-based investigations to explore cross-border trading practices at the India-Bhutan border. We collected diverse observations through interviews with vendors and merchants in the border villages of Dadgiri in Assam, India, and the border town Gelephu in Sarpang district, Bhutan. The case study primarily focuses on the narratives from the weekly-organized Dadgiri market in Assam, providing valuable insights into the social, economic, and political landscape of the Indo-Bhutan border area beyond the Chirang district of Assam, India (**Mohan et al., 2017**).

The perspective for the study of a border is drawn from several disciplines: Geography, Political Science, International Relations, and Literature. Recently, European integration, globalization, and migrations have given new perceptivity to the question of the border. Borders in South Asia, in particular, are perceived as a means of defense against external aggression. The concept of Border and the borders of India with its seven neighboring countries; the physical characteristics and recent administrative advancements of all the North-East India's borders; and lastly, presenting recommendations to enhance the overall development of the border regions. (**Krishnan & Prashanta, 2020**)

According to **Haolai (2022)** the sartorial manifestations observed in India's Northeast are a colourful indication of the region's enormous cultural variation and distinct historical trajectory. The region under study has arisen as a confluence of numerous cultural influences, giving rise to unique and appealing sartorial manifestations due to its proximity to neighbouring nations such as China, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. The purpose of this article is to investigate the impact of adjacent borders on fashion trends in the Northeastern region, with an emphasis on how cross-cultural contacts have contributed to the creation of its own sartorial identity.

The historical context refers to the circumstances, events, and conditions that surround and influence a specific historical period. It includes the northeastern Indian states of Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, and Sikkim, which have a rich and vast historical heritage marked by considerable cultural exchanges with their

neighbouring nations. Their habits, fabrications, and attire are deeply connected with this cultural contact. The northeastern Indian states of Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh are geographically next to Tibet and Bhutan. Tibetan and Bhutanese attire has been inspired by various cultural aspects from their respective regions. Tibetan culture is visible in the use of vibrant colours, intricate embroidery, and traditional clothing such as the *chuba*, a robe-style garment. Tibetan designs are commonly used in clothing and accessories. Bhutan's influence can be seen in the adoption of its traditional costumes, the *gho* and *kira*, by people in Sikkim and certain sections of Arunachal Pradesh, influencing fashion trends in these areas. The use of handwoven textiles and intricate designs attests to the impact of this culture. The northeastern Indian states of Manipur and Mizoram are geographically adjacent to Myanmar, resulting in a convergence of fashion influences. Manipur's traditional attire, which includes the *phanek* for ladies and the dhoti for men, features intricate weaving techniques and vibrant colours that reflect Myanmar's cultural past. The traditional apparel of the Mizo people in Mizoram has a strong influence from Southeast Asian aesthetics, with bright colours and distinctive patterns. The *puan*, a handcrafted textile, is proof of this cultural influence. The state of Tripura's proximity to Bangladesh fosters the exchange of fashion concepts, resulting in idea cross-pollination. The impact of Tripuri culture is visible in traditional attire, which features brilliant colours, carefully produced handwoven fabrics, and intricate embroidery. The use of similar patterns and designs demonstrates the influence of Bangladeshi culture. Despite the influence of bordering cultures, fashion in the Northeast region is based on indigenous traditions and uses local materials. Natural fibres such as silk, cotton, and bamboo are frequently used in the manufacturing of traditional textiles, highlighting the abundance of botanical resources in the particular locality. The Northeast handloom sector is lively and prospering, distinguished by the manufacturing of textiles famous for their high quality and delicate craftsmanship. Within the cultural setting, handwoven shawls, mekhela chadors, and stoles are highly valued. The ongoing use of traditional clothes, such as the *mekhela sador* of Assam, the *puan* of Mizoram, and the *phanek* (**Plate 2.5**) of Manipur, exemplifies the preservation of cultural identity. In recent years, the Northeastern region's fashion styles have seen a merging of traditional and contemporary elements. Fashion designers from the region have received recognition for their extraordinary artistic ability, as seen by their trailblazing designs that flawlessly mix traditional materials with contemporary forms. Fashion shows, such as the North East India Fashion Week, are important platforms for designers to showcase their artistic creations, attracting major attention at both the regional and national levels. Cultural festivals like *Bihu* in Assam, *Sangai* in Manipur, and *Hornbill* in Nagaland

serve as platforms for the celebration and promotion of the respective region's cultural history through activities like fashion shows and exhibitions. (Mukharajee, 1995).

The growing popularity of Western fashion trends needs a fine balance between modern patterns and the preservation of traditional ethnic clothes. There are continuing activities in the Northeastern region to preserve and promote the fashion sector. Assistance to weavers and artisans, such as skill training efforts and increased market accessibility, is critical to sustaining long-term economic viability. The incorporation of traditional fashion education into official curricula serves to teach younger generations about cultural heritage. The cultivation of respect for traditional attire and the promotion of cultural awareness can be useful methods in preventing cultural appropriation and safeguarding the authenticity of cultural practices. The fashion trends observed in the Northeastern region serve as a tribute to the region's cultural abundance and historical cross-border contacts. Each state in India has its own particular sartorial culture, influenced by bordering borders, as seen in Assam's vibrant fabrics and Mizoram's elaborate designs. The preservation and promotion of this diversity is important not only for cultural pride, but also for encouraging economic empowerment among the region's artists and weavers. The evolution of fashion in the Northeast region serves as a conduit that unites historic aspects with contemporary inspirations, thus reflecting the region's broad and dynamic cultural past.



**Plate 2.5: Meitei woman at her loom weaving Phanek**

**Source: Seven Sisters**

**Project <https://www.facebook.com/sevensistersproject/photos/a.275872299209294/647388795390974/?type=3>**

### **2.1.9 The current status of textiles from the Northeast, as viewed through the lens of Indian designers, reflects the traditional heritage of the region.**

Northeastern region of India is well-known for its diverse cultural legacy, which includes a variety of distinct textile traditions. Textiles from Assam, known for their luxurious silks, and those from Nagaland, noted for their vibrant weaving, have enthralled designers from all over the country. Indian fashion designers like Ritu Kumar, Krishna Mehta, Rahul Mishra, and Anita Dongre are dedicated to safeguarding traditional fabrics through their work. Anita Dongre introduced the Grassroots line a few years back, aiming to highlight India's handmade traditions. Through Grassroots, she collaborates with reputable NGOs in India that are leading efforts to work with artisans and present traditional techniques to the global audience. <https://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/9697/revival-of-indian-traditional-textiles-bridging-the-gap-between-heritage-and-modern-demand>

Assam is famous for its production of all four types of silk. The tradition of sericulture in the state dates back to ancient times, and it takes pride in its traditional production of Muga and Eri silks. Muga culture is unique to former Assam and stands as the world's leading producer of the renowned golden Muga silk. Muga culture is primarily found in the districts of Kamrup, Goalpara, Udalguri, Kokrajhar, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Lakhimpur, and Dhemaji. Eri silk is widely produced throughout the state, especially in Kamrup, Goalpara, Udalguri, Darrang, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Nagaon, Morigaon, Darrang, Cachar, Karbi Anglong, N.C. Hills, Kokrajhar, and Dhubri districts. The production of Mulberry silk has dwindled over the years and is limited to areas such as Jorhat, Golaghat, Sibsagar, and Darrang. Oak Tasar production is confined to a very small scale in the North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong districts <https://sericulture.assam.gov.in/how-to/know-about-silk-and-its-production-in-assam>.

Naga Shawls are handwoven shawls from Nagaland that are known for their careful craftsmanship. These shawls are widely prized for their exceptional creativity, which is generally adorned with tribal themes. The "*phanek*" is an important part of Manipur's traditional attire, serving as a wrap-around skirt. The item comes in a range of patterns and colours.

The *Khasi* people of Meghalaya are well-known for their indigenous cloth, "*ryndia*," which is precisely created by hand and used to make traditional outfits. There is a growing tendency among Indian fashion designers to focus on materials from India's Northeast area, recognising their special attractiveness and cultural significance. It is critical for a designer to evaluate certain aspects of the current status of these textiles. Designers are collaborating with local weavers and artisans to reinvigorate traditional weaving processes and designs. Individuals are revitalising traditional fabrics, ensuring their preservation and long-term value. Current fashion trends typically combine traditional fabrics from the Northeastern region with new design components, resulting in modern forms and styling. The combination of classic and innovative components has piqued the interest and attractiveness of both designers and consumers. Designers are actively promoting handloom fabrics from the Northeast region, contributing significantly to the economic prosperity of local weavers and encouraging the adoption of sustainable fashion practices. Designers are incorporating indigenous themes, designs, and stitching skills into their collections to show their respect and appreciation for the cultural significance of these fabrics. Textiles from the northeastern region have gained a strong presence on both domestic and international fashion runways. Fashion events and exhibitions centred on these textiles serve as platforms for highlighting and appreciating the region's native artists' abilities and knowledge. The academic community is becoming increasingly interested and concerned about the issue of sustainable fashion. The use of natural fibres and traditional dyeing techniques corresponds to the growing global demand for ecologically aware fashion. Textiles manufactured in the northeastern region have inherent eco-friendly properties that align with the values of conscientious consumers.

Designers frequently collaborate with local craftspeople and weavers, supporting economic empowerment and creating a sense of pride in their own skills. Numerous designers have made significant contributions to the improvement and distribution of textiles from the Northeast. Ritu Kumar, a well-known Indian designer, in a personal interview with her she revealed that she has been instrumental in incorporating Assamese silk and tribal fabrics into her designs, thereby promoting the preservation and promotion of the region's traditional history. She believes in the concept of sustainability and craft revival by creating great craft and motif repertoire (**Plate 2.6**). Sanjukta Dutta is well-known for her efforts to the preservation and promotion of indigenous Assamese textiles, especially her knowledge of Muga silk and Assamese designs.



**Plate 2.6: Research in conversation with Padamshree Ritu Kumar**

The North Eastern area of India is home to varied biological and ethnic communities, creating a complex tapestry of cultural traditions that are inextricably linked to nature. These civilizations are divided into two categories: tangible objects and customary practices. Traditional textile goods serve as both artifacts and customs for North East India's indigenous ethnic groups, signifying distinct identities for each community. Textile items also have aesthetic qualities, particularly color and form, which are important in textile appreciation. The colors utilized in these fabrics, such as red, black, yellow, and white, have special meaning for the hill tribes of North East India and are frequently mixed to create elaborate designs. Each color has its own meaning and reflects close relationship between nature, culture, and tradition in the region (Sarma, 2016).

According to **Jasreen Mayal Khann (2020)** Various textile and fashion designers like Nixon Bui from Arunachal Pradesh, Daniel Syiem from Meghalaya, Jigmat Norbu from Ladakh, Jenjum Gadi, Aratrik Dev Varman from Tripura and others highlighted the current resurgence of traditional crafts within the Indian fashion industry, with a particular focus on the often overlooked regions of the North East. They highlighted the growing recognition and appreciation for indigenous textiles such as ahimsa silk and handloom fabrics (**Plate 2.7**) produced on the loin loom, which are known for their unique craftsmanship and cultural significance. Designers like Daniel Syiem and Jenjum Gadi are lauded for their efforts in revitalizing these traditional textiles and incorporating them into contemporary fashion.

Despite the growing interest, she also discussed the challenges faced by artisans and weavers, including difficulties in scaling production and a lack of awareness about these crafts outside of the North East region. Overall, Jasreen advocates for a unified vision and conscious consumerism to support and preserve the rich heritage of Northeast crafts within the broader fashion landscape. The fashion designers emerging from the Northeast of India are helping put India and its diverse states on the global fashion map, standing out due to their unique tribal sense of color mixing. It's no surprise that the majority of well-established fashion designers hail from the northeast and dominate the industry, reflecting their deep connection to their tribal cultures and the fusion of ethnic tribal significance with modern fashion.

At the recent Lakme Fashion Week in Mumbai, models showcased stunning ensembles with a prominent narrow black stripe amidst modest ivory colors, presenting designs inspired by the Meitei tribe. Rachana Khumanthem, representing Manipur, dedicated her work to her homeland and its customs, aiming to preserve and educate people about Northeastern crafts and indigenous materials.

The influence of Northeastern designers extends beyond the region, with individuals like model Dipannita Sharma and Monika ngana Dutta of Assam paving the way for a new generation of designers like Andrea Kevichusa of Nagaland, Jantee Hazarika, Suzanne Baker of Assam, and Peka Fanai of Mizoram. This is just a glimpse of the vibrant talent from the region, with Nagaland's Ketholeno Kense becoming a prominent face for Fabindia.

Fashion analyst Prasad Bidapa observes that Indians are embracing inclusivity, recognizing the thriving community with a youthful and cosmopolitan mindset in the Northeast, with designers and models leading the way. Rin Jajo, a creative consultant from Manipur, has witnessed the industry's transformation, noting the increasing willingness of brands to feature Northeastern faces in their advertising, signifying the change taking place.

The global fashion industry is acknowledging the importance of diversity, as evidenced by the appointment of renowned designer Virgil Abloh as the artistic director of Louis Vuitton's menswear. Embracing diversity was at the forefront of Abloh's first collection during Paris Fashion Week 2018, showcasing people of color and their origins through the models' walks and even a map in the show notes (**Bot verification, n.d.**).



**Plate 2.7: Traditional Loin loom weaving from Northeast India**

**Source:**<https://www.vogue.in/fashion/content/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-exceptional-weaves-from-indias-north-east>

## **2.2 RESEARCH RELATED REVIEW**

According to **Kumari (2021)** According to **Kumari (2021)** Handloom and handicraft were strongly established in Indian customs and rituals, and they contribute to the country's economy through both home and export markets. Her research on Mashru weaving revealed that for ages, Muslim community and locals have relied on Mashru, an indigenous handloomn woven cloth from Gujarat. This cloth was created as a way to wear silk without violating religious conventions, as it was outlawed by Muslim communities save under extreme circumstances such as war and sickness. Mashru became a traditional textile in numerous Hindu tribes, including the royal family of Bhuj, the Rabaris of Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh's tribal communities. However, Mashru was not properly nourished to thrive in Gujarat, resulting in marginalized growth and the loss of indigenous designs. Industrialization has pushed handloom and handicraft into the sunset industry category, generating economic suffering at the grassroots level. The goal of this research was to trace Mashru's history, comprehend its design idiom, and reestablish it through new design and development, as well as product diversification.

According to **Bhalla (2022)** Khadi is a traditional Indian fabric made of cotton, silk, or wool that was first introduced in 1920 during Mahatma Gandhi's Swadeshi movement. Khadi represents strength, peace, and war, and is regarded as the research's patron saint due to its

organic nature and low carbon footprint. Khadi manufacture is environmentally friendly because it doesn't require energy or textile dyeing. Khadi adds to the charm of traditional fabrics and has gained popularity among the public. Khadi fabrics and clothes are of high quality, such as salwars, kurti shirts, wall hangings are currently in the market. However, the products were limited to specific styles and were unsuitable for the youth market. The research intended to design an apparel product for the college going girls. The study aims to create a clothing product for college girls in Mumbai and Pune, who belong to fashion and non fashion field. Best cotton khadi was selected for the development of new designs. The developed apparels were evaluated by college girls and industry experts, who exhibited a strong interest in the product and a desire to make it more marketable.

**Malik (2023)** revealed that Millennials have a favorable impression of sustainability in the fast fashion business, with the majority of respondents expressing concern about the impact that fast fashion has on the environment and society. This finding was found in the study that found that Millennials have a positive perception of sustainability in the fast fashion industry. The Millennial generation has demonstrated a high level of knowledge regarding sustainable practices in the sector, such as trash reduction and recycling. They also stated a preference for brands that put an emphasis on environmental responsibility. According to her repairing and mending of clothes can be done and it can be done by using various materials and it may add to artistic and creative task. According to the findings of the study, Millennials' planned purchasing behavior is influenced by variables related to sustainability. Furthermore, a sizeable percentage of respondents stated that they would be prepared to pay extra for environmentally friendly fashion products. However, the study also indicated that price and convenience continue to be major criteria for Millennials when making shopping decisions. She also further discussed that few fashion brands needs to look their production and distribution planning. Results of her study indicated that there is a possibility of big business opportunity via mending and repairing services. This may further help in economic development. This suggests that there is still a demand in the market for sustainable fashion solutions that are both affordable and easily accessible.

According to the findings of the research conducted by **(Desai, 2020)**, it was discovered that nylon woven fabric, which is a thin layer consisting of porous fibrous materials, possesses sound-absorbing qualities that are a mixture of at least two different methods for sound-absorbing. Experimentation was used as the primary way of inquiry in this study so that the

researchers could analyze the relationship between the sound-absorbing qualities of thin fabric and its structural factors. It is possible to contribute to the design of thin fabric by gaining an understanding of the transmission and attenuation of acoustic waves in thin fabrics. This will boost the uses of thin fabric in noise control and interior acoustics.

According to the findings of the research conducted by **(Sindwani, 2020)**, the quality of bhimal fibres, extracted from *Grewia optiva* trees, for textile production. By exploring chemical treatments, such as urea retting, the study aims to improve fibre quality and extraction efficiency. Bhimal fibres exhibit promising properties, including high cellulose and lignin content, making them suitable for textiles. Dyeing experiments show excellent results, and blending with cotton and viscose yields desirable yarns for weaving. Innovative applications, such as lamp shades, blinds, and sanitary napkins, highlight the versatility of bhimal fibres. Overall, the study underscores the potential of bhimal fibres as a sustainable resource, benefiting rural communities in the Himalayan region.

According to research done by **Jamal (2023)**, consumers' opinions about social media influencers and bloggers have a favorable and considerable influence on the attitudes they have toward brands as well as the intentions they have to buy such brands. Consumers' sentiments towards social media influencers are positively impacted by consumers' perceptions of the influencers' behavioral control and knowledge. The customers' perceptions of the influencers' credibility and trustworthiness have a detrimental impact on their views toward those influencers.

According to **Lyndem and Bhandari (2022)**, the transmission of traditions to new generations is facilitated by various means such as workshops, training sessions, and cultural events. Government initiatives aimed at supporting traditional artisans and fostering the promotion of traditional textiles are of significant importance. Furthermore, the emergence of cultural tourism has provided craftspeople with viable economic opportunities, so contributing to the preservation of these invaluable traditions.

**Lalmuankimi (2015)** in her research which focus on documenting and preserving the traditional textiles and costumes of the Lusei and Lai tribes in Mizoram, India, revealed valuable insights into the unique garments worn by these tribes, as well as the cultural significance attached to them. Through detailed fabric analysis and field surveys, the

researchers gathered comprehensive information on traditional weaving techniques, garment styles, and materials used. Researcher also conducted various awareness activities, including seminars, group discussions, talk shows, and quizzes in schools, to educate both the younger generation and the broader community about their cultural heritage. The findings highlighted the importance of traditional textiles in reflecting the social status, identity, and cultural practices of the Mizos. Additionally, the study shed light on the efforts made by government departments, such as the Art and Culture Department and the Mizoram State Museum, to preserve and showcase traditional textiles and costumes. Overall, this research not only documented the rich textile traditions of the Lusei and Lai tribes but also contributed to raising awareness and promoting appreciation for Mizoram's cultural heritage among its inhabitants and beyond.

**Sobti (2017)** in her research delves into the origins and evolution of the Salwar Kameez, a staple of women's attire in the Indian subcontinent. It traces its roots back to ancient Indian draped garments and explores its transformation influenced by Persian culture brought by the Mughals. The study highlights how this traditional costume has adapted to modern trends while remaining comfortable for contemporary Indian women. Furthermore, it examines the correlation between traditional Arabic costumes and the Indian Salwar Kameez, shedding light on cultural exchanges and shifts. Divided into three phases, the research methodically analyzes historical perspectives, current status, and documents findings, offering valuable insights into the cross-cultural evolution of attire in the region. Overall, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the Salwar Kameez's journey and its significance in contemporary Indian fashion.

**Lo & Wangchuk (2021)** research delves into the transmission of weaving skills across three generations of Bhutanese weavers, spanning six decades. By analyzing the narratives of these weavers, the researcher seeks to understand the evolution in the transmission of weaving knowledge and skills, as well as the perspectives on the relevance and appropriateness of teaching this traditional practice to new generations. The underlying goal of the research is to explore strategies for sustaining traditional cultural practices. This study offers valuable insights into intergenerational knowledge transfer within the context of Bhutanese weaving traditions, shedding light on challenges and opportunities for the preservation and continuation of these cultural practices.

**Goyal & Pant (2021)** study highlights ethnographic research conducted on the tribal costumes of Tibetans residing in exile in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh, India. The study delves into the cultural connotations, aesthetic characteristics, and compositional features of costumes belonging to three tribes: Amdo, Khampa, and Utsang. Focusing on Khampa costumes, the study analyzes materials, cultural customs, and dressing habits, particularly in response to geographical and climatic factors. It notes the persistence of traditional attire in ceremonial and marital contexts, albeit with some changes in textiles, colors, and motifs. Additionally, the study acknowledges the impact of modernization and socio-economic development on the preferences of contemporary tribal women, who increasingly adopt Western garments. Overall, the research underscores the multicultural influences shaping cultural identities, as manifested through the textiles and costumes of the tribes.

According to **Kalaiya (2018)** Royal textiles and costumes are regal and each state has its own royalties who has their own unique textile techniques and different silhouettes. As she worked upon the Royal textiles and costumes of the rulers of Kutch, her findings revealed that since the royalty belong to Gujarat. And Gujarat is known for rich traditional textiles, same has been reflected in their textiles and costume patterns. Findings revealed the usage of rich silk, velvets, *mashru*, *kinkhabs* and brocades were popular among the Kutch royals. Draped garments were often embellished with *badla*, *zari*, *mukaish*, *kamdani* work. Her entire research was about unveiling the history and exploring the mystery of the royal textiles.

Similar study was done by **Sharma (2013)** showed that textiles and costumes of Gaekwad women of Baroda State has uniqueness in terms of the kind of textile they use, their buying patterns. Findings showed that Royal Gaekwad women use to wear *chanderi* sarees, along with *nauvari* (9yards) *saree* interesting with a flowing *ghol* at the back. All the sarees were made in *chnaderi* tissue with gold and *zari* work on the border (*kinar*) and (*Pallu*). Blouses worn by them were unique in itself with long corset fitted silhouette with pockets in front; *fituhi* was another intrest garment which came up in her research. French Chiffon saris were also embraced by these royal women. Study revealed that these Gaekwad women had classic choices and preferences of textiles, clothing and adornment, which they have still preserved.

### **2.3 Gap Analysis:**

Based on the literature review the researcher was able to identify the gaps in the data that was collected to form the basis of the research:

- Limited historical documentation on Sikkim's traditional textiles and its textile trade patterns. Sikkim has a rich history of trade between, China, Bhutan and Tibet. Trade use to happen through four routes in Sikkim which has majorly affected textile and costumes choices and patterns among the Lepcha and Bhutia community.
- Insufficient exploration of cultural symbolism in Sikkimese textiles.
- Lack of research on the impact of modernization on traditional craftsmanship.
- Absence of detailed documentation on traditional weaving, embroidery, and dyeing techniques in Sikkim.
- Limited study on contemporary adaptations and innovations in Sikkimese textiles.
- Scarcity of comparative studies with traditional textiles from neighboring regions.
- Brother state Sikkim remains unfaced for a longer period of time which leads to lack of awareness about the various communities of and their culture. Few local organizations found working towards the revival of their crafts and making efforts to preserve their culture for generations to come.
- These gaps highlight the need for extensive research and documentation on the textiles and costumes of Lepcha and Bhutia Communities in Sikkim.