

# Chapter 5

## Summary and Conclusion



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

## Chapter V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Introduction

India's diverse culture and vibrant textile heritage have been passed down through generations. Its system of values and social structure has remained continuous since ancient times. **(Bhandari, 2004)**

India and its glorious states are filled with rich cultural heritage and every state has its own textile and costume story to put in the picture. Among all of these is one such region of India, the Northeast. Northeast India is home to diverse cultures and exquisite handicrafts created by its many tribes. In this tiny region of India, known for its exquisite handicrafts and home to more than 100 tribal communities, there is a distinct population from the rest of India. Many people view this area as the center of handmade tradition. The state is a fusion of culture with wonderful rituals. It is surrounded by the political frontier of China in the North, Bhutan in the West, Bangladesh in the East, and Burma in the South, which embraces eight states, which are famously known as seven sisters (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura) including one Brother State (Sikkim.) Sikkim, with its extraordinary history and rich cultural heritage, is one of the youngest members to join the Indian Union. Sikkim is known for its magnificent landscapes, which include lush green valleys, snow-capped peaks, and thriving cultural diversity. The state became the 22nd Indian state in 1975 and has the fewest people in the country. The region's cultural tapestry is woven with influences from numerous ethnic groupings, resulting in a unique and harmonious blend of customs. The leading communities of Sikkim are often known as Lepcha, Bhutia, and Nepali. The original inhabitants of Sikkim are said to be Lepchas. They existed much before the Bhutias and Nepalese migrated to the state. They worshipped spirits of mountains, rivers, and forests which was but natural for a tribe that co-existed so harmoniously with the rich natural surroundings. **(Sadangi, 2008)**. Sikkim is known for its traditional handicrafts, paintings, motifs, carpets, traditional tribal shoes, dresses, ornaments, weaving, and so on. The traditional handicrafts in Sikkim have enormous cultural significance and many of the Bhutia and Lepcha women were engaged in traditional handicraft production. Traditionally, Carpet weaving was a symbol of cultural expression and was a very important export-oriented handicraft industry in Sikkim. Carpet weaving was

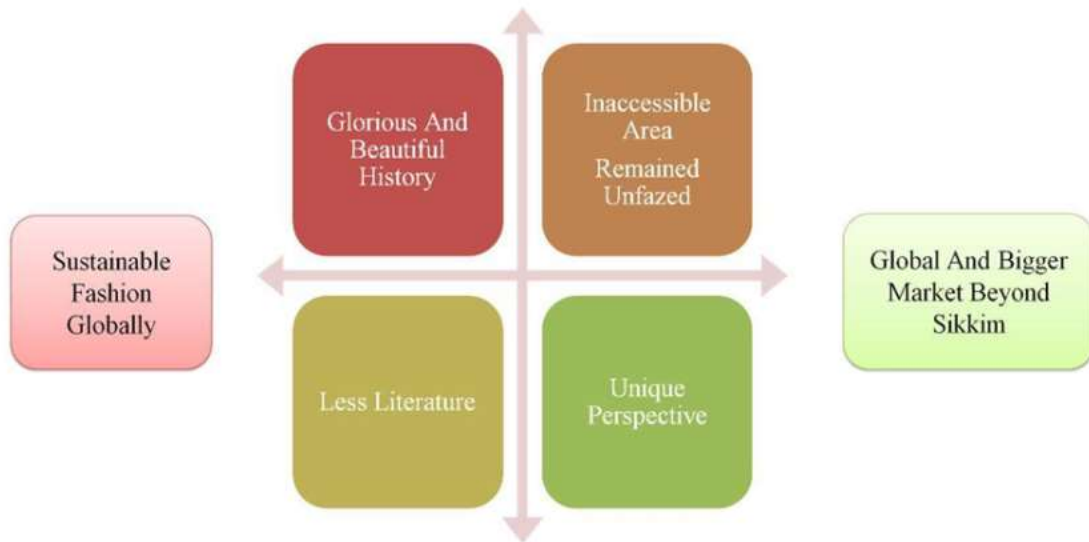
dominated by women. Besides carpet, handloom weaving was another important handicraft, and women in Sikkim played a predominant role in handloom weaving. In this craft, *Lepcha'duree* was woven and ranged from 30 inches to 36 inches. This *duree* was made of wool and cotton.

**(Mowsume, 2008).**

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. **(Mukharajee, 1995).**

## **5.2 Rational of the study:**

Sikkim's textiles and costumes were important to study because of its distinct cultural tapestry and varied ethnic culture. However, there was a lack of significant scholarly examinations of the historical data, cultural meaning, and craftsmanship of these fabrics. This study was attempted to bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary fashion and scholarly understanding, and specifically addressing the challenges and changes acquired in traditional practices due to globalization. By documenting history, fabrics, and costumes, the study aims to achieve a harmonic understanding of traditional Lepcha and Bhutia communities and the modernity which acquired during the period. Urbanization and globalization pose a threat to the cultural identity of these two communities and in order to safeguard this identity, it was crucial to understand textiles, its migration patterns, and traditional attire. Documenting oral narratives and encouraging design innovation was a key strategy to preserve cultural practices while innovatively promoting traditional costumes for future generations. **(Plate 5.1)**



**Plate 5.1 Rational of the study**

### **5.3 Objectives of the study**

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

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

**5.3.3** To document changes in traditional textiles and costumes through generations.

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

**5.3.5 i.** To design a capsule collection for contemporary wear inspired by traditional costumes of the Lepcha and Bhutia communities.

**5.3.5. ii.** To develop a design catalogue.

### **5.4 Delimitation of the study:**

The study was delimited to:

**5.4.1** Apparel textiles only.

#### **5.4.2** The state of Sikkim and Kalimpong district in West Bengal

#### **5.4.3** The silhouette of the apparel for design innovation.

### **5.5 Scope of the study:**

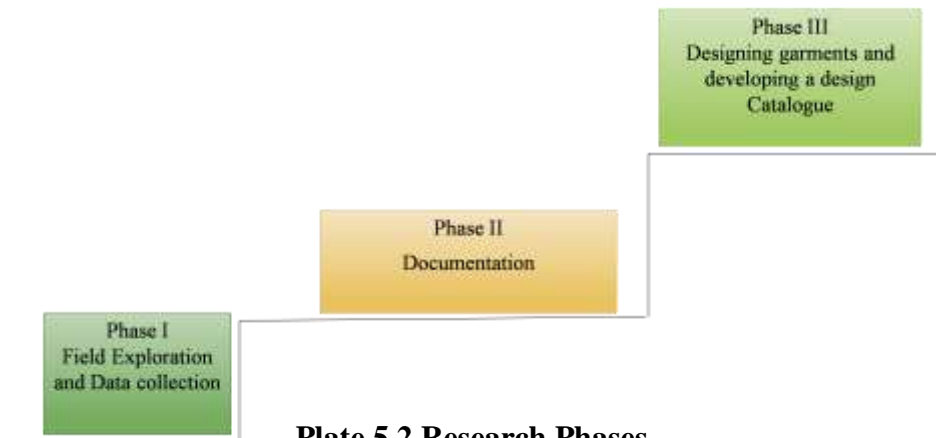
1. The study aims to comprehensively explore and document the historical and cultural dimensions of traditional textiles and costumes in Sikkim.
2. It covers material procurement, weaving techniques, motifs, and the cultural symbolism in textiles, along with the examination of cuts, styles, and designs in traditional textiles and costumes.
3. The research examines social and cultural influences, contemporary adaptations, and comparative studies with neighbouring regions.
4. It also aims to inform preservation strategies, contribute to academic knowledge, and raise awareness locally and beyond.
5. Additionally, it identifies opportunities for market expansion, particularly in the fashion industry through design innovation, while still retaining and respecting cultural values and ensuring the holistic understanding and preservation of Sikkim's unique heritage.

### **5.6 Methodology adopted for the study**

This study aimed to document the traditional textiles and costumes of the Lepcha and Bhutia communities in Sikkim. The researcher used a descriptive research design that involved fieldwork and reviewing literature, tailored to meet investigative goals. The research focus was on studying and documenting details about textiles, costumes, purchasing patterns, and other influences shaping Sikkim's craft design culture. The researcher gathered historical and cultural insights from literature and personal interviews with members of the Lepcha and Bhutia communities.

In this qualitative study, the researcher analyzed historic costumes using both descriptive and exploratory approaches. Descriptive research meticulously documented textile origins, production processes, symbolic meanings, and cultural influences. Exploratory research critically assessed the current state of textiles and garments, while also fostering new design developments that honor traditional styles. Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, keen observation, and thorough photography. Overall, this research offers a

deeper understanding of the textile heritage of the Lepcha and Bhutia communities, blending historical, cultural, and design perspectives. The complete study was carried out in three different phases (**Plate 5.2**).



**Plate 5.2 Research Phases**

### **Phase1: (Descriptive cum Exploratory Research)**

In the first phase of the data collection researcher did the field exploration in order to collect data related to the textiles and costumes of the Lepcha and Bhutia communities. Data was collected from various museums, libraries, and personal collections. An interview schedule was prepared for the families, tailors, designers, weavers, and Government officials to get first-hand information about the framed objectives. Open-ended ended questions were framed for data collection from the said communities. Information about the historical and cultural background of the communities was collected through oral narratives and some written literature available in various libraries. The tool used for data collection was interviews schedule, and photography. Visiting marketplaces helped to understand the community and their choices better. The data was collected through the snowball technique and analyzed and represented systematically.

### **Selection of the locale for the study**

The pilot study helped in selecting the local of the study. Through literature reviews and close interactions with the locals, it became evident where the members of these communities resided, as well as the locations of handloom weavers and other artisans involved in the arts and crafts of Sikkim. To identify the weavers and experts in these crafts, the Directorate of Handloom and Handicrafts centres were explored zone-wise, and contacts of weavers were

collected from there. Various places in all zones of Sikkim were covered to collect first-hand data.

### **Sample Size**

An extensive field survey was conducted, involving interviews, and attendance at local weddings, occasions, and festivals. Data was collected from various families within the two communities. The study's sample was divided into two parts based on two categories: One interview schedule was developed for community members across different generations, while the other was tailored for experts, including artisans, designers, tailors, and government officials. Before the field visit, the interview schedule was designed and validated by four experts. Data was collected from 160 individuals.

### **Phase 2: Documentation of Traditional Textiles and Costumes Lepcha and Bhutia Communities.**

In the second phase researcher did the documentation of traditional textiles and costumes of the Lepcha and Bhutia communities. Researcher studied the textiles and costumes in terms of its historical reference, fiber, weave, motifs, colour and its symbolism. In-depth documentation was done by observing the old photographs, and audio video records and by analyzing the interviews given by various families of the Lepcha and Bhutia communities about their traditional textiles and costumes. Photographs showcasing diverse textile and costume designs were gathered from personal collections, museums, and portraits. Subsequently, these visuals were documented to preserve traditional designs. The market survey provided data on the currently prevalent designs.

For better analysis and understanding, garments were studied in depth in order to understand the cuts and styles of the traditional garments along with the patterns. These garments were studied in order to understand the buying pattern and cross-border trade within the state and analyzing contemporized textiles and costumes in terms of various parameters.

Null and Alternate Hypothesis were framed and analysed to study the evolution of costumes and textiles due to various factors like education, media, merger with India etc

### **Phase 3: Design development (Capsule collection)**

This phase encompasses the entire design development process, commencing with flat sketches of traditional garments to grasp the cuts, styles, and associated changes. After sketching new designs, these designs were then presented to 50 design practitioners for feedback.

**Opinionnaire designed:** A Google form was created and circulated to gather opinions on design preferences within the community. The collected responses were analyzed, leading to the short listing of 16 designs for construction. Garments were designed for both genders, categorized as follows:

1. Layered Lore's
2. Coloured Narratives
3. Tribal Analogues, and
4. Spiritual Sojourn.

These designs aimed to seamlessly incorporate the richness of traditional textiles and costumes from the Lepcha and Bhutia communities in Sikkim into contemporary fashion, ensuring widespread acceptance and popularity among the youth. Following the development of these designs, the collection was showcased in a fashion show to introduce Sikkim's traditions to a broader audience.

**Collection of Design preferences:** Later a Google form for collecting design preferences was prepared and circulated among the audience during the fashion show and among the universities.

In the end, a design catalogue was created, showcasing a small research journey and culture of Sikkim along with the traditional costumes and new designs. This will serve as a look book for research scholars and design and culture enthusiasts.

## **5.7 Result and Discussion**

- 5.7.1 Historical roots and origins of the Lepcha and Bhutia community, focusing on the evolving relationship with textiles and costumes.
- 5.7.2 To document the traditional textiles & Costumes of the Lepcha and Bhutia.
- 5.7.3 To document changes in traditional textiles and costumes through generations.
- 5.7.4 To document the construction details and draping styles of Lepcha's and Bhutia's costumes.
- 5.7.5 Revamping Cuts and Styles: Crafting a contemporary capsule collection and design lookbook.

### **5.7.1 History and origins of the Lepcha and Bhutia community and evolving relationship with textiles and costume.**

The Lepcha and Bhutia communities, indigenous to Sikkim and surrounding areas, have rich histories intertwined with their unique textiles. Historically, the Lepchas, possibly originating from Assam or Tibet, lived in harmony with nature, practicing shifting cultivation and animism. They were later culturally marginalized by Tibetan migrants. Changes in traditional textiles and costumes across generations, who established dominance in Sikkim.

Under Bhutia rule from the 17th century, the Lepchas assimilated into Tibetan cultural practices and faced significant societal changes. Today, despite their cultural richness, the Lepchas constitute less than 25% of Sikkim's population, facing challenges from modernization and urbanization that threaten their traditional way of life and identity.

#### **Lepcha Community:**

The Lepcha community was believed to be one of the oldest indigenous groups in the Himalayan region. According to anthropologists the precise origin of the Lepcha's was unknown. However, they were said to have been a part of the Himalayan region for many years and have close relationships with its ecosystem.

Lepcha textiles were known for their elaborate patterns and conventional weaving methods. They made textiles for clothing, blankets, and other use out of natural fibers including nettle, cotton, and wool. Lepcha women were frequently expert weavers who transmitted their wisdom and methods through generations.

The Lepchas were recognized by contemporary anthropologists as the earliest settlers in the region between the western Rangit and eastern Teesta rivers, surrounded by the hills and peaks of Mount Kanchenjunga. Although modern borders divide their indigenous territory between Sikkim and Darjeeling, the Lepcha diaspora extends into eastern Nepal, southwestern Bhutan, and parts of Tibet. The establishment of the Chogyal monarchy in the seventeenth century marked a shift, leading to the adoption of Bhutia culture, Buddhism, and changes in clothing. British influence during the nineteenth century further impacted Lepcha textiles, introducing new weaving techniques and materials. The immigration of Nepalis was strongly encouraged by the British, which drastically altered the demographic and cultural makeup of Sikkim. By the end of British control, the Chogyals took back their independence. Rapid industrialization and urbanization after Sikkim was annexed by India in 1975 drastically altered the cultural dynamics of this area. (Faulkner, 2021)

The possibility of cultural loss has sparked a movement within the community to modernize and maintain Lepcha traditions. The community's traditional textiles of Lepcha have been preserved, even though modern Lepcha textiles frequently depart from what the Lepchas consider as the textiles' historical forms. Lepcha textiles remain integral to traditional Lepcha culture, showcasing a relationship between tradition and change in both production and aesthetics. Despite a lack of extensive literature on Lepcha weaving, these textiles provide insights into how contemporary Lepcha culture embraces cultural revival through the synthesis of tradition and modernization. Historical photographs from the culture department showed Lepcha men wearing traditional *thokro* garment which was made using local materials like nettle, and was draped over shoulders. Today, the Lepchas have adopted Western clothing, influenced by British colonialism and globalization, which contrasts with their traditional attire and signifies cultural transformation.

### **Bhutia Community:**

The Bhutia community, originally from Tibet and migrating to southern Tibet in the 13th century, settled in areas like Chumbi Valley and Kham. Known as '*Lhopos*' or '*Lhorees*,' they formed distinct lineages descending from Kye\_Bum\_Sa, with Lingserpa dividing into "Beb\_Tsan\_Gyat" (8 Clans). Various Bhutia tribes and settlers from Bhutan, such as Butsawopa, Lagdingpa, and others, also settled in Sikkim. Despite their Buddhist faith and distinct cultural identity, Bhutias influenced indigenous Lepcha culture through conversion and assimilation.

Traditionally governed by a legal system called "*Dzumsa*" under village headmen or '*Pipon*,' Bhutias in Sikkim had distinct identities like Drukpas, Chumbipas, and others reflecting their habitation origins. Bhutia textiles, known for their warmth and intricate patterns, predominantly use natural fibers like wool and silk, similar to the Lepcha community. Women often wear the '*Bakhu*,' and '*MoKho*' showcasing their skill in weaving. While men wore '*PoKho*'. Imported textiles like silk brocade were prevalent. These textiles serve beyond practical use, symbolizing the rich customs and spiritual traditions of the Himalayan Bhutia community alongside the Lepchas. (Bhutia & Misra, 2017& Bandana, 1995).

### **5.7.2 To document the traditional textiles & costumes of the Lepcha and Bhutia.**

As per the data collected the Lepchas used textiles primarily created from natural fibres such as *Sisnu* (nettle), cotton, silk, and wool. These fibres were sourced locally and processed by

hand. Lepchas used to wear animal pelts, but they found that textiles made from Himalayan nettle (*sisnu*) were better for them. As per Lepcha oral history, pre-modern Lepcha weavers produce simple nettle textiles on handmade backstrap looms. They fashioned garments by wrapping the fabric around their bodies and securing it to their shoulders, often with a pin. These garments served dual purposes, providing clothing during the day and doubling as blankets at night, showcasing the Lepchas' adaptability in their environment. Although historical examples of these tools and products are scarce today, backstrap looms (**Plate 5.3**) and similar textiles were still in use. Furthermore, garments continue to be worn in traditional ways, as passed down through oral history.



**Plate 5.3 Sujata Bhujel (Master Weaver from DHH, Gangtok) weaving on backstrap loom**

Long robe-like garments were worn by both Lepcha and Bhutia men and women. Lepcha fabrics were renowned for their vibrant and natural colour scheme. To produce these hues in the past, they frequently employed natural dyes made from plants, roots, and minerals. Colours including red, yellow, green, and brown were common. But weavers have been turning to chemical dyes these days since they are more readily available and people are less interested in the dye extraction procedure.

Traditional Lepcha textiles are typically coloured in earthy tones like browns, greens, and yellows, which are a reflection of the natural colours present in their surroundings. Lepcha culture makes extensive use of the hues white, blue, red, black, orange, and green, all

of which have great cultural significance. In contemporary times, synthetic and vibrant hues have become dominant in the Lepcha textile market. Textiles worn by Lepcha males known as '*Thokro*' have different motifs. Motifs like *Tungblyok* (X-shaped pattern), *Tungbrik* (Diamond-shaped pattern), *Sumok* (patterns similar to the Lepcha hat *Sumok Thyaaktuk*), *Tungtoskor* (arrow motif), *Vajra*, and *Erungi* (Buddhist sacred emblem) are some of the traditional motifs that the Lepchas embrace. Natural fibres like cotton, silk, and yak hair are commonly employed in weaving just similar to Lepcha textiles in Sikkim. Different regions in Bhutan utilize various materials to craft their signature textiles: Trongsa uses cotton and nettles, Bumthang uses sheep wool, and the highlands favor yak hair. Silk and raw silk (*bura*) are prevalent across many districts, with colours derived from both chemical and natural sources, including vegetable and herbal dyes, and it has been observed that a similar practice is also followed in Sikkim. Looms like backstrap looms and throw shuttle looms were used for the production of Lepcha weave fabric. Directorate of Handloom and Handicraft, Sikkim has set up a weaving unit and is training weavers for the same. Apart from woven textiles embroidered textiles is also used by the Lepcha community.

Elaborate and intricate embroidery work was often seen on clothing items like blouses, shawls, and skirts. These designs were made using colourful threads and might have incorporated motifs from nature and Lepcha mythology. Although it was mentioned in oral history, the researcher never came across any such piece in her field visits, except one in DHH museum and craft gallery. Modern Lepcha fabrics are changing significantly, with the growing synthetic market playing a major role. These contemporary textiles are attracting a lot of attention from young people because of their eye-catching patterns, eye-catching hues, and wide selection of fabrics. This move away from conventional weaving techniques represents a change toward modern ease and beauty.

Traditional Lepcha clothing included items like as the *Dum-prá*, which was usually paired with a high-collared blouse called *Tago* and drawstring pants called *Tomoo* that were knee- or calf-length. Lepcha clothing from before the contemporary era did not include these items. The *Dum-dyem* was the traditional clothing worn by ladies. It was traditionally fashioned from a huge rectangular material, draped over the body and pinned or buttoned at the front and shoulders to create a sleeveless, ankle-length garment, much like men's *Dum-práa*. It was crossed over the breast to the back and fastened at the waist with a *nyemrek*. These traditional techniques were used to create accessories including bracelets, necklaces, and earrings.

*Thyaktuk*, or Lepcha Hats, were elaborate creations crafted by master weavers and were worn with mantras chanted for good fortune. Five common hat types were *Papri Thyaktuk*, *Anok Thyaktuk*, *Seyraboo Thyaktuk*, *Sumok Thyaktuk*, and *Soring Thyaktuk*, primarily worn by men, while women opted for scarves to cover their heads.

The Bhutia, originating from Tibet and settling in the Himalayan regions including Sikkim, have distinct textiles reflecting their culture and craftsmanship. They migrated towards the south after the 9th century AD, blending Tibetan roots with Hindu influences despite variations among groups and recognized themselves as Denjongpas, they arrived in Sikkim from the 13th century onward, trading between South Asia and Tibet through the Himalayas. Bhutia/ Denjongpas textiles were renowned for their lavish use of silk, a material considered both luxurious and auspicious. Silk was frequently employed in weaving garments, imparting them with a distinctive sheen and elegance.

Bhutia communities arrived in Sikkim in waves from Tibet via Bhutan, bringing with them diverse textiles, fibres, and weaving skills. According to accounts like Yangchok Lachenpa's, the Bhutia migrated from China (referred to as *Ghyana*) to India (*Ghyagar*), carrying with them silk, wool, and fur. The silk predominantly used was often of Chinese origin. It's believed that the silk yarn was meticulously dyed in vibrant hues before being woven into intricate fabrics like *Gyasar*. *Gyasar*, reserved for ceremonial garments and religious textiles, showcased the Bhutia mastery in textile craftsmanship.

The utilization of silk in Bhutia textiles not only underscored their affinity for opulence but also symbolized cultural and spiritual significance. Each garment woven with silk reflected not just the weaving skills of the artisans but also the cultural heritage and beliefs of the Bhutia community.

Apart from silk, the Bhutia community relies heavily on wool, particularly from sheep and yaks. In places like Lachen and Lachung in North Sikkim, they still carry out the age-old tradition of wool shearing and extracting fibres. These areas, nestled in the Himalayan belt, face extreme cold, making it essential for people to create clothing from these natural sources to endure the harsh winters.

Sacred textiles such as *Gyaser* were brought from China, Tibet, and ultimately the looms of Benares; they were not made by monks. Decorative usage of heavy brocades was more common in monasteries than on secular apparel. Although written records are scarce, visual

proof indicates that these fabrics were introduced to the region from China during the Chogyal dynasty (1642-1670) in Sikkim. This indicates the start of *Khoechen* or *Gyaser* trade and use in the kingdom during 17th century CE. Missionaries going between Lhasa and Ladakh would frequently bring examples of brocade back to the monastery; they would usually take the form of robes, unstitched cloth, or trims around stitched boots.

Chinese silk brocade known as *Khoechen* /*Ghoechen* or *Gyaser* is crafted for traditional attire, called "*kho*" in Bhutia or "*bakhu*" in Nepali, and remains especially popular among Denjongpa women. Locals recall that silk brocades were imported from Tibet to create special garments like *Bakhus*, *Khos*, *Chubas*, and *Jajas*.

The traditional costume of Bhutia called *Pho Kho* for men and *Mo Kho* for women, was a long, full-sleeved garment tied at the waist with a silk belt (*kye-rah*). A variation of the same is known as *puru Kho*, which is a woollen gown, and was worn by men in the high-altitude valleys of Lachen and Lachung in North Sikkim. These garments had wide, elongated sleeves that almost touched the ground and were worn with silk undershirts (*wonthastsi*) and waistcoats (*jaja*) made from Chinese silk brocade. These brocades were also used in Buddhist monasteries for the backing of auspicious *Thangkas*.

These Chinese brocades were decorated with various oriental Chinese motifs like dragon designs, *tankas* (Chinese coin design), Khorlos (wheel of dharma or dharma chakra) in Tibetan other floral motifs like peonies and Buddhist motifs like *swastika*, *vajra*, endless knot and eight lucky signs. These fabrics were traded from China and Tibet. Motifs like Gyaltsen which is a representation of Buddha's victory of wisdom over ignorance and his attainment of enlightenment. The Parasol (*dug*) another motif which symbolizes protection and security from all evil. Endless knot which represents the cycle of rebirth that all living beings must forever repeat. On another level it represents the Buddha's teaching, it symbolizes the real of cyclic existence. These motifs were symbolic to Buddhist culture and are very much a part of Bhutia's costume. Historical records show that the Bhutia were traditionally dressed in cotton or silk brocade shirts during spring and summer. They wore a *Chuba* robe made of cotton and wool, fastened with a colourful *kyerah* belt. Their attire included wide trousers, short boots, and felt hats. In colder months like autumn and winter, they switched to warmer materials like wool and sheepskin for their *Chubas*, paired with leather caps, high boots, or handmade leather shoes.

Bhutia women wore *mokho* which was a sleeveless garment tied at the waist with a *kyeraha* waist belt and is made in various materials like brocade, wool, cotton, synthetic suiting

fabrics etc. Similar to the male *kho*, the *mokho* has a front fold where various items can be stored. Underneath, women usually wore a full-sleeved, button less blouse called *teygho*, which was made from light weight silk, polyester, or sometimes cotton fabrics. The *kushen*, an outer coat worn over the *kho*, was typically made of brocade, raw silk, or synthetic fabric.

Another woolen garment is the *gyapa* or *gyaba* bag was a hand-woven rain cloak made from sheep or yak wool, secured over the chest with a hook called *chahuk*, often made of silver and engraved with floral design, typically used by Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung. Another garment accessory was a *Pangden* which was worn by married women, a colorful striped apron tied around the waist over the *kho*.

#### **Accessories used by Bhutias:**

**Denjongpa /Bhutia/ Men Headgears:** *Thurilshambu* or *chingsha* (Hat), "*Tungtop*" or "*Dhatu*"

**Denjongpa/ Bhutia/ Men Footwear:** *Phosom* also known *astsompa/ Dhotey* (Hand stitched boots)

**Denjongpa Women Headgear:** *Tshering kinkhap* or *Siling shambu* (hat), *Mogrilnamchochen* or also *Tsehring kinkhap* (Hat with shorter ears)

**Denjongpa/ Bhutia/ Women Footwear:** *Somba* (Hand stitched and embroidered boots)

Both Bhutia men and women traditionally wore a range of jewelry, such as multiple earrings, necklaces, rings, and hair ornaments. These adornments, once more common during the Chogyal rule, have become less prevalent over time. Belt ornaments and rosaries, typically made from bone, ivory, wood, or seeds like rudraksha, are also worn, with rosaries often serving a religious function either around the waist or as necklaces. Items such as coral, amber, precious stones, dzi beads, pearls, gold, silver, and ivory have historically entered the antique market through cross-border trade from Tibet. Pouches and purses are also used as accessories by Bhutia men and women.

There were few other crafts like carpet weaving and thangka painting which contribute to Bhutia earnings and help generate revenue for both the artisans and the state. However researcher didn't went into the depth as the study delimitation were set to wearable textiles and costumes. While these two crafts were studied briefly because of the similarities in the motifs and the use of materials in there making.

### **5.7.3 Changes in traditional textiles and costumes across generations.**

The Lepcha and Bhutia communities in Sikkim, like many indigenous groups, have undergone significant artistic transformations influenced by various factors over time. These changes reflect a dynamic interaction between traditional practices and external influences:

**Influence of Modernization:** Modernization, increased connectivity, and exposure to global trends have profoundly impacted Lepcha and Bhutia cultures, influencing changes in attire and consumption patterns.

**Language Shift:** Efforts to preserve the Lepcha and Bhutia languages have encountered implicit shifts, particularly among younger generations who increasingly use languages like Nepali and English in education and daily life.

**Education and Employment Opportunities:** There is a growing trend among Lepcha and Bhutia youth to pursue formal education and non-traditional employment, altering social dynamics and artistic practices.

**Changing Gender Roles:** Modern influences have contributed to evolving gender roles within the communities, challenging traditional norms and opening new opportunities for both men and women.

**Religious Diversity:** While the Lepcha traditionally follow the Mun faith, exposure to other religions such as Buddhism and Christianity has diversified religious practices within the community. Bhutias predominantly follow Buddhism.

**Migration and Urbanization:** Increasing migration to urban areas for work and education has reshaped traditional customs and community interactions, influenced by city cultures.

**Media and Technology:** Access to media and technology has increased awareness and connectivity within the communities, impacting the preservation of traditional knowledge and adoption of new artistic influences.

**Tourism Impact:** Tourism growth in Sikkim has brought economic opportunities and cultural challenges. Tourist influence can affect cultural practices and lead to efforts to commercialize aspects of Lepcha and Bhutia culture.

Researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 160 respondents from the Lepcha and Bhutia communities highlighted these transformations, examining variables such as family structure,

gender, education, occupation, and religion. These changes in traditional textiles and costumes have been significantly influenced by educational pursuits, as indicated by statistical tests like the Kruskal-Wallis test comparing generational medians.

The acceptance or rejection of the null hypothesis was determined based on the p-value.

## **Hypotheses**

### **Hypothesis I**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the changes in textile and costume due to education.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant difference in the changes in textile and costume due to education.

### **Lepcha**

Observations revealed that in the 1st generation, there were respondents who lacked education (illiterate). The 2nd generation showed the highest number of individuals graduating, while the 3rd generation exhibited the highest count at the post-graduate level, with one individual attaining a PhD. This indicates a positive shift in the education levels within the Lepcha community.

P-value = 0.0001428

As p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance so we reject null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant difference in the median of the groups. Thus, we can say that over a period the education level has increased. Median values for generation are 3 (Secondary), 5 (Graduation) and 6 (Post graduation) respectively.

### **Bhutia**

Observations revealed that in the 1st generation, there were respondents who lacked education (illiterate), with a few having completed primary education and very few attaining secondary education. In the 2nd generation, the highest number of individuals graduated, while in the 3rd generation, the highest count was at the post-graduate level, with two individuals attaining a PhD. This indicates a positive shift in the education levels within the *Bhutia* community.

P-value = 1.202e-09: As p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance so we reject null hypothesis and conclude that there is significant difference in the median of the groups. Thus,

we can say that over a period the education level has increased. Median values for generation are 2 (Primary), 5 (Graduation) and 6 (Post graduation) respectively.

This shift in education in recent years has definitely affected the choices and preference of people in terms of textiles and the way they adorn. Changes can be seen as people have moved out of the rural areas and started living in urban spaces and the choice of clothing also changed. Now they prefer more of simpler clothing less complicated for daily wear. They are switching more to readymade clothing. Since brands like Fab India, Good Earth, Pantaloons, Puma, Uniqlo and others have also made their spaces in the local market. This doesn't mean that they have stopped wearing the traditional costumes. Both the communities still choose to wear traditional attire at every festival and occasion. These clothing preferences and changes which have occurred through the generations have been affected by three factors, and to find out the root of these changes three more hypotheses were set to see whether these changes came due to the merger of Sikkim in India or due to influence of mass media or because of influence of neighbouring countries.

### **Hypothesis II**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** The perception of all respondents to the changes in textile and costume was not due to the merger of Sikkim with India.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** The perception of all respondents to the changes in textile and costume was due to the merger of Sikkim with India.

### **Hypothesis III**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** The perception of all respondents to the changes in textile and costume was not due to the influence of mass media.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** The perception of all respondents to the changes in textile and costume was due to the influence of mass media.

### **Hypothesis IV**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** The perception of all respondents to the changes in textile and costume was not due to the influence of the neighbouring countries.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** The perception of all respondents to the changes in textile and costume was due to the influence of the neighbouring countries.

It was observed that changes in the traditional textiles and costumes of Lepcha and Bhutia occurred due to the merger of Sikkim, the influence of mass media and neighbouring countries. To assess this proportion test was carried out to analyze whether the data collected from different groups was the same or not the acceptance or rejection of the null hypothesis

was determined based on the p-value. According to the data collected it has been observed that major shift in the choice of clothing has come due to mass media followed by Sikkim merger with India. And least by neighbouring countries.

#### **5.7.4 To document the construction details and draping styles of Lepcha's and Bhutia's costumes.**

In-depth understanding and documentation of the traditional costumes worn by the Lepchas and Bhutia communities started with comprehensive research, fieldwork, and by paying attention to the constructional details. Detailed study of *bakhu*, *Honju*, *pangdin*, *Jaja*, *Khoand* and other garments was done in-order to understand the constructional details of the garments for both men and women from the Lepcha and Bhutia communities. After this line sketches were prepared to understand the cuts and styles of the garments in detail.

Researcher developed patterns through the adaptation of basic blocks. Meticulously documented the patterns to ensure accurate representation. Before starting up with the adaptation, garments were collected from the culture department in Sikkim. A detailed study of each garment was done in order to understand the constructional details of each garment worn by men and women of the Lepcha and Bhutia communities. Researcher has studied the costumes and develop patterns on 1/4 scale in order to understand the cuts and styles. Keeping in mind the objective sketches of all were prepared to understand the details by paying attention to details like seams, closures, cuts, and draping styles.

#### **5.7.5 Revamping Cuts and Styles**

##### **5.7.5.i Crafting a contemporary capsule collection and design catalogue.**

To complete the objective researcher designed various designs taking inspiration from traditional silhouettes. A capsule collection inspired by the traditional silhouettes of Lepcha and Bhutia clothing was designed for men and women. Prototype and then the final collection was made based on established anthropometric measurements, referencing Armstrong H.J. Size 6 for Women and Size 42 for Men was chosen as the standard template for the capsule collection

48 designs were selected for preference and then on the bases of that researcher has developed the Opinionnaire for the evaluation of the designs which was inspired from the traditional garments and silhouette of these two communities of Sikkim, and was divided into

four categories. **Category 1: Layered Lore's, Category 2: Colour Narratives, Category 3: Tribal Analogues, Category 4: Spiritual Sojourn.**

Opinionnaire was shared among the design practitioner & thinker which was important for rationalization of the study. A total of 100 responses were collected. Based on the opinionnaire best 4 designs were selected from each category and a total of 16 garments were designed based on the opinionnaire collected. Fabric procurement for the collection line was done from Sikkim. Fabrics like wool, Lecpha traditional weave fabric and *Khoechin* fabrics were procured. Researcher emphasized developing wool fabric by incorporating embroidered *tanga* designs on the fabric. Fabric design was also taken care of along with the garments. On the basis of the evaluation of the opinion collected for the new designs for the capsule collection, the best two designs were selected from the four different categories

After the construction, the designed garments were developed and a preference schedule was subsequently shared among the masses for the design acceptability. These new designs were also showcased in the Northeast Festival in New Delhi through a fashion show and at the Faculty of Family and Community Sciences, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara and results were evaluated for the same. The numberings gathered on the ranking of various designs in the four classifications indicate preference differences. The result shows that respondent's preferred garments designed in Category 3 more than those in Category 1 and Category 2. The first category was the most preferred and liked, while the second category showed heterogeneity of preferences with strong preferences towards the top-ranked item. In Category 4, the most balanced results were shown by Category 4. Participants from all groups opted for Category 3 for Rank 1, especially G1 (62% and 68%), with other ranks' preferences being more diverse among G3 and G4. G4 had a relatively higher preference for Rank 1 strategy (51%).(Plate 5.4) (Plate 5.5)

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Rank 1</b>	<b>Rank 2</b>	<b>Rank 3</b>	<b>Rank 4</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Category 1</b>	G1	65	24	6	5	100
	G2	24	35	23	18	100
	G3	29	27	21	23	100
	G4	35	26	27	12	100
<b>Category 2</b>	G1	40	23	17	20	100
	G2	44	31	20	5	100
	G3	29	37	22	12	100
	G4	39	28	15	18	100
<b>Category 3</b>	G1	62	18	11	9	100
	G2	68	19	7	6	100
	G3	45	17	16	22	100
	G4	61	13	14	12	100
<b>Category 4</b>	G1	38	23	26	13	100
	G2	40	32	18	10	100
	G3	30	28	27	15	100
	G4	51	17	16	16	100

**Table 5.1 Average score of the designs in various categories.**

**Category 1: Layered Lore's**

FRONT



BACK



G1

G2

G3

G4

**Category 2: Colour Narratives**

FRONT



BACK



G1

G2

G3

G4

**Plate 5.4 Category 1 & 2**

Category 3: Tribal Analogues

FRONT



BACK



G1

G2

G3

G4

Category 4: Spiritual Sojourn

FRONT



BACK



G1

G2

G3

G4

Plate 5.5 Category 3 & 4

### 5.7.5.ii Catalogue Design

In order to full fill the set objective of the study, catalogue was designed to spread the awareness about Lepcha and Bhutia communities of Sikkim, their culture and tradition along with the newly developed designs. This catalogue also serves as a look book, drawing inspiration from the cuts and the styles of traditional textiles and costumes of the *Lepcha* and *Bhutia* communities. This will serve as a great learning material and a visual guide for students, scholars and for those who are curious about different cultures and designs.

### Conclusion

- Sikkim nestled in the eastern Himalayas with breathtaking landscapes and rich cultural heritage. The textiles and costumes of this State play a significant role in reflecting the diverse cultural tapestry of this region. Traditional attire worn by the people, particularly the Lepchas and Bhutias, showcases a vibrant blend of colors, intricate patterns, and skilled craftsmanship.
- The garments were often made from locally sourced materials, emphasizing the community's connection to the environment. Traditional textiles and costumes of Sikkim include distinctive accessories like jewellery and headgear, adding to the overall grace of their attire. Rich textiles made out of *sisnu* (nettle), cotton and silk were used by the Lepchas, whereas the silk textiles known as Chinese brocade, wool, and cotton were used by the Bhutia communities of Sikkim.
- It was also observed that their textiles were deeply intertwined with their religious and social practices, with each design and motif often carrying symbolic significance. The craftsmanship involved in creating these textiles, whether it is weaving, embroidery, or dyeing etc is a testament to the skill and dedication of their local artisans. Moreover, the textiles of Sikkim often depict the region's flora and fauna, showcasing a harmonious blend of nature and culture.
- According to the data collected, in contemporary times, there has been a conscious effort to preserve and promote the textiles and costumes of Sikkim. Designers and enthusiasts are exploring ways to modernize traditional designs, creating a bridge between the rich heritage of the past and the evolving fashion preferences of the present. This fusion not only pays homage to the cultural legacy of Sikkim but also contributes to the sustainability of local craftsmanship.

- It has been observed that there is a vivid display of traditional textiles in local markets, especially during festivals. The allure of these costumes lies not only in their aesthetic appeal but also in the stories they tell, embodying the history, beliefs, and identity of the people of Sikkim.
- The Lepcha men wore a colourful shawl called *Thakro*, along with shirt, and a cap called *shambo*. The Lepcha women wore a draped fabric similar to saree and were called *Dumbun*, a loose blouse called *Tago*, a belt called *Nyumrek*, and a cap called Taro was worn. The Lepcha women also wear beautiful ornaments, such as *Namchok* (ear ring), *Lyak* (necklace) etc.
- The Bhutia men wore a traditional robe called *PoKho*, a waistcoat called *Jaja*, along with a shirt called *Yenthatse*, is worn. A cloth belt called *Kera*, and a cap called *Shambo* completes their look. The Bhutia women wear a traditional robe called *MoKho*, a loose blouse called *Hanju*, a jacket called *Kushen*, a cap called *Shambo*, shoes called *Shabcha*, and a striped colourful apron called *Pangden*. The Bhutia women also wear beautiful jewelry, such as *Yencho* (earring), *Khau* (necklace), *Phiru* (pearl ornament) etc.
- These communities' shared borders with Tibet and Bhutan and a lot of influence of neighboring countries were visible in their textiles and costumes. Trade used to happen between Sikkim, and China through Tibet and Bhutan. And Mongolian influence was visible in their textile culture.
- Media, and education also played an important role in affecting the clothing choices and preferences among the said communities. Youth has been influenced by modernization and western culture and the same has been reflected in their clothing.
- As Sikkim continues to embrace both, its past and future, the textiles and costumes stand as living artefacts that beautifully encapsulate the essence of this enchanting Himalayan state. Newly developed designs taking inspiration from traditional silhouettes is the need of the hour, this will help to preserve the culture for future generations. Thus, a new approach to these textiles has been given along with detailed documentation.

### **Recommendations**

- The current study can serve as a baseline model for reviving the other languishing cultural crafts.
- A similar study can be done in the other regions of North East India.
- A similar study can be done with the other crafts of Sikkim.

- A detailed study can be done on the use of textiles in Shamanism and its symbolism in Lepcha culture.
- An exploratory study can be done to revive nettle fiber and experimenting the same by blending it with other fibers and improving its properties and quality.
- Study can be done to train the artisan to weave more intricate design and pattern
- A similar study can be conducted with the art and architecture of Sikkim.

## **Researcher's Journey**

Documenting the traditional textiles and costumes of the Lepcha and Bhutia communities of Sikkim presented a challenging yet enthralling and inspirational experience. The research exploration into the textiles and costumes of Sikkim proved to be exceptionally rewarding for me as a researcher. The textiles and traditional garments of Sikkim have always vividly portrayed the cultural fabrics of the diverse people residing in Sikkim, reflecting the variations in their ethnic backgrounds.

The primary research began by analyzing the distinct costumes of the Lepcha and Bhutia people, which differ in design, fabrics, and symbolic meanings. The clothing of the Lepchas was characterized by simplicity and fashion, crafted from natural fibers using traditional weaving methods. On the other hand, the Bhutia community's attire featured vibrant and exquisite garments, particularly those woven from rich silk brocade, reflecting the sartorial diplomacy of the community.

Qualitative data collection involved field visits to the respective villages and interactions with local weavers, particularly the artisans. These experiences offered a unique opportunity to observe the creation of these textiles, the trade involved, and other crafts. The artisans' strong commitment to preserving their traditions through their work was particularly fascinating. These interactions also raised awareness about sustainable practices throughout the production chain, including the use of natural dyes and fibers, which are integral to Sikkim's textile-making process.

Moreover, the study uncovered significant efforts by the Sikkim government to preserve local arts and crafts. Interviews with locals provided insight into the process of passing down traditional art skills to younger generations, ensuring the preservation of these valuable skills. Recording the whole process, from the choices of fabric and its preparation to the weaving of the products and decorating the garments, gave a clear understanding of the process. Apart from acquainting herself with the context of Sikkim's textile tradition, the researcher also realized the significance of continuing and promoting these two indigenous communities in light of the modern world's adversity. The researcher feels privileged and enriched by this topic, which provided an indispensable view into the significance of the cultural fabric of Sikkim.

## Experiences and Challenges

Since childhood, a distinct memory has stayed with me, of a Lepcha bag, beautifully crafted, that always seemed to be around our home. My aunt, a proud Lepcha from Sikkim, visited us in Ajmer every winter break, bringing with her not just handmade products from her homeland but also stories. Each visit was like a window into a culture so different from mine yet so deeply fascinating. My uncle, with his passion for photography, would send us stunning landscape photographs from Sikkim, transforming them into greeting cards. Those images sparked my imagination, painting Sikkim as a land of breathtaking beauty, with the added charm of Lepcha culture woven into it.

But it wasn't until 2015, when I finally visited Sikkim for my cousin's wedding, that these long-held fascinations took on new meaning. Immersed in the wedding rituals and surrounded by the warmth of the locals, I felt a deep connection. I saw their traditions come alive, spoke with people who embodied them, and realized how precious and unique their textile culture was. It dawned on me that their art, especially the indigenous Lepcha weaving, needed to be documented, preserved, and shared with the world. That visit shifted something within me, inspiring a deeper curiosity and respect for their way of life.

I faced a couple of challenges during the data collection. It was informative to do the research on the textiles and costumes of Sikkim, though it was not an easy task. The cultural and geographical setting of Sikkim posed challenges that presented learning and difficulty for all concerned.

**Geographical and Logistical Barriers:** Transportation in Sikkim presented one of the most significant challenges during my research. The state, nestled high in the Himalayas, is dotted with remote, mountainous villages where many artisans live and work. Reaching these places was no small feat often, the roads were little more than rugged trails, and at times, I had to abandon vehicles altogether and continue on foot. These logistical hurdles meant I had less time to spend in each location, and on occasion, fewer artisans could be interviewed. The task, already demanding, became even more overwhelming when altitude-related health issues kicked in. It added another layer to the experience, one that was as unforgettable as it was challenging. There were days when the remoteness of these areas would get to me. With no network to rely on and

the conveniences of city life left far behind, fear would creep in. Hiring taxis to cover internal routes was essential, but it wasn't always smooth sailing. I remember a particularly harrowing moment when we encountered a landslide, and on another occasion, the tire of the taxi burst while we were at a high altitude, far from help. It shook me to the core. But by some grace, the driver handled the situation with remarkable calm. That incident is seared into my memory, a reminder of the unpredictability of the journey and the resilience it demanded.

**Language and Communication Issues:** Although English and Hindi are widely spoken in Sikkim today, I quickly realized that many of the elderly artisans and villagers still relied on their native tongues Lepcha, Bhutia, and Nepali. This created an unexpected language barrier during my fieldwork, one I hadn't fully anticipated. To overcome the language barrier, I frequently sought the assistance of local translators, who directed me to those who were experienced with their own specific weaving solutions. Challenging myself to improve my communication skills, I attempted to learn the fundamentals of Nepali in order to be more relatable to individuals I met. Although it was time-consuming, the slow pace did eventually break the ice. However, sometimes there were no words, I would sit beside the artisans and see them at work, the weave, the back and forth of hands, the confluences of one craftsman to another without the need for spoken conversation. In these calm moments, I learnt more than any person could have taught me.

**Seasonal Constraints:** The weather in Sikkim, a state that closely mirrored its complicated topography, changed by the seasons and was frequently made fieldwork unpredictable. The bulk of the field work was carried out under the heavy monsoon rains and winter snowfalls, which often delayed my travel arrangements and caused change to my research schedules. My visits had to be coordinated around unpredictable weather, so artisans and community members would have time to meet me. Although this made the task easier in some ways, it also complicated an already complex process. I was shivering in my layers, hopping between snowfalls and the mild breaks the weather gave me in order to glean insights from Lachung and Lachen. The remote snowy villages, it was a thing of magic and chaos; And, sure there were times my isolation and the harsh weather would make me re-think everything and immediately I felt discouraged, and I often considered just quitting and going back to the safety of home. However, what made me go on was the warmth of the locals; their tales and amazing hospitality. The way that they opened

their homes and hearts to a stranger, gave me the strength I needed to get through. Amidst the bone-chilling temperatures, I encountered a kind of gentle but tenacious resolve that perfectly paralleled the power in the communities I was being taught.

**Access to Authentic Information:** Some of the practices and techniques used are more traditional, and many times, these were trade secrets for generations. Obtaining artisans trust in order to reveal these specifics took time and nurturing trust, as well as claiming respect and interest in their work.

**Preservation of Traditional Knowledge:** The more I researched, the more change I saw taking place in Sikkim. The old, experienced hands were following a generation gone before them and the knowledge that they carried was inevitably slower being deleted from the centuries-old history. Finding artisans who still practiced traditional techniques became increasingly difficult, as more and more were influenced by modern approaches.

There were the days when I entered into the field without a plan and no fixed agenda, just a willingness to go meet whoever crossed my path. And I would talk with strangers, hear their stories and let the day happen as it may. Adopting this go with the flow kind of attitude truly opened my eyes to things I hadn't even realized yet. It was a real reminder that sometimes you don't have to plan and program every step, it just happens. And of course there was also luck involved. Spontaneous journeys, I met people who shared wisdom and experiences I could never have learned through research alone.

One such day led me to a place I hadn't even known existed. Of further wander I stumbled upon the hidden hamlet of Noam. The experience was beyond words. And I felt more moved by that, the discovery process, the serendipity of it all more so than any meticulously-crafted plan could ever do. The trip serves as a reminder that the journey itself is often the destination, and the people who we encounter en-route have the greatest lessons to offer us.

**Pandemic:** The COVID-19 pandemic changed everything, even my research. The world had slowed down, and so was my work. Traveling and meeting people became a task, and I remember those days having taken their toll on my mental health. When the lockdown hit for the first time in this area, I found myself stuck in North Sikkim. In the beginning, it was just peaceful, me and nature, surrounded by the stillness of the mountains. But as weeks went by, the

isolation finally started to get to me. I traveled down to East Sikkim after a month. The days dragged on for me. I longed to go back home as my father had met with an accident due to a serious heart condition. Now, it was urgent that I should see my family. With special permission, I was allowed to cross the borders and leave Sikkim. The journey back home was full of anxiety and uncertainty, but somehow, I managed to get back, and Dad got well. Still, the challenges didn't let up: no more than a couple of weeks after returning, I had an accident. With the unending stream of bad news regarding COVID-19, my anxiety worsened. I developed a deep-seated fear of travel, an ironic twist, given how much of my work depended on it. The thought of getting back into the field felt impossible, and for a long time, I avoided it altogether. Travel anxiety took hold, and it felt like trying to climb a mountain that I was not sure I could climb again. Eventually, time and patience helped me start healing. Bit by bit, I began regaining the courage to reconnect with the world, travel again, and return to the research that once brought me so much joy. Still, things were different, and the journey back into the field was full of new challenges. I had to relearn how to navigate a world changed for good.

**Documentation and Ethical Considerations:** It was also very important to pay attention to the ethical issues of documentation, including informed consent and cultural considerations. Altogether, the pleasant, resilient, and hospitable attitude of the Sikkimese people, along with the depth and density of the cultural heritage of Sikkim's textile aesthetics, made the hiking worthwhile. Such challenges pointed to the significance of maintaining these traditional arts and sympathetic appreciation of the artisans' role in conserving culture.

The entire research journey has changed me as a person and gave me time to understand the deeper meaning of life. The journey of my research was not just an academic pursuit; it was a transformative odyssey that reshaped my very essence. As I ventured into the heart of Sikkim, navigating its rugged terrains and intricate cultural tapestry, I found myself on a path of profound self-discovery.

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