

Impact of Modernisation on Tribal Textiles and Costumes-The Tangkhul Nagatribe of Manipur

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Introduction

It is well known that textiles have a utilitarian as well as symbolic function. The kind of cloth worn is reflective of social relations and of the expression of social identities and values. The cloth worn by a person is also suggestive of status with respect to other members of the community (Joshi,2003). Textiles have been produced in India since time immemorial. India has one of the richest traditions of woven textiles made from different materials using variety of weaving techniques for embellishing. In North East parts of India, art of textile designing has been a part and parcel for many indigenous people. Among the North-Eastern states, Manipur is one of the states which has been producing and preserving traditional textiles in spite of modernisation and globalization (Anynomous, 2015).

Tribes of Manipur represent a unique feature of the land and comprise of about 33 communities that originated from Tibetan-Burmese tribal group of Mongoloids. They are categorised into two main groups i.e the Naga and the Kuki.¹ Amongst the Naga tribes, Tangkhul Naga is the largest tribe. They are living in the Indo-Burma border area occupying the Ukhul district of Manipur and SomraTangkhul hills in Upper Burma (Anonymous, 2016).

Weaving is one of the largest and oldest industry in Manipur and way of life since time immemorial. Earlier in tribal society of Manipur, weaving was considered as an essential criterion for a girl to enter in the institution of marriage. In addition, there was no specific weaving site for the loin loom and the weavers could weave anywhere, whether it was in the veranda or inside the house or any open site. They carried weaving tools and implements if they happened to migrate or moved temporarily to any place.

It was said that most of the villagers in hills of Manipur used cotton grown by them only for weaving cloths. They wove using the natural fibres and cotton was the most widely used raw material (K. Sobita., 1998). Naga tribes in Manipur form a distinct ethnic and cultural entity. However, the use of traditional textiles and costumes by the tribes people has declined in not only in urban areas over the last few decades but also in rural areas. In addition, modifications are continuously made on traditional textiles which dilute the original traditional textile design. Hence, it is important to document the traditional textiles and costumes of Tangkhul Naga tribe of Manipur and the changes that have taken place there in.

Methodology

The study of traditional textiles and costumes of Tangkhul is a part of Doctoral research work.A preliminary survey and analysis has been carried out.It is a qualitative study. Survey cum observation method was used.As mentioned earlier,Tangkhul Naga tribe is one of the major tribes of Manipur. They mostly reside in Ukhul district. Hence, the district was the locale of the study.

Tools used for eliciting the data for the survey was un-structured interview schedules, photography and observation. Sample selection was selected by adopting purposive sampling and snow-ball sampling methods. The primary sources of the study were the tribe people in different age groups from diverse background in rural and urban areas and weavers belonging to the tribe.

Traditional Textiles and Costumes of the Tangkhul Tribe

It was noted that the Tangkhul tribe has its own traditional textiles, costumes, colours, specific design and motifs with significance and symbolism. It was found that base fabric wove in plain weave and swivel extra weft technique was used for designing motifs. It was also found that most of their garments were made by joining panels by hand stitching. Woven at the loin loom, the breadth of the cloth is narrow and in order to have a wider cloth, two or more pieces of cloth were stitched together lengthwise. The traditional textiles and costumes of the tribes were made of cotton yarn. The tribe has their unique identity in terms of textiles, costumes, festivals and cultural aspects. Information regarding traditional textiles and costumes of Tangkhul Naga has been briefly summarized as follows:

Unisex Textiles and Costumes

- **Sapa shawl:** It is made of home spun cotton. This off white shawl can be worn only by unmarried men and women. It is also used as a blanket during winter.
- **Raivat Kachon:** It is one of the important shawls used by Tangkhul male and females. It can be worn by chief and important persons in village, during ceremonies. It is used as a bridal shawl among Tangkhul. The shawl is decorated with embroidered design on black background. The shawl is embroidered by Meiteis (people living in plains of Manipur). It is a shawl which was given for bravery reward in war. It was also believed that a Meitei king married Yaozala, daughter of Champhung king (north west Ukhrul). Yaozala asked the King to declare that the shawl would be used only by Tangkhul elders. From then, the shawl is used by Tangkhul elders only.



Raivat Kachon Photo Courtesy: Author

Male Upper Garment

In earlier times, the men did not wear any upper cloth as their garment, but they used to drape their shawl round their body. The shawls were used as upper garment in their costumes.

- **Luirim shawl:** It is one of the important shawl, which used by men in Tangkhul Naga society. It is also called as "Ritimand" in Tangkhul dialect. It is also one of the important shawl of Meities called "Leirum" and used in binding blanket and bed covers which were to be carried by the bride.

- **Haorashawl:** There are two types of Haora shawl one, which is made of five panels of fabric, can be worn by all men and another type of Haora shawl which is made of by joining seven panels of fabric worn by only head of the family and eldest son of the family.



Haorashawl ,Photo Courtesy: Author



Raokha, Photo Courtesy: Author

Male Lower Garment

- **Raokha /Maloa:** It is loincloth used by men during festivals and folk dance performance. The background of the cloth is red and designed with black and white stripes

Female Upper Garment

- **Chongkhom shawl:** It is woven in red colour and black and white stripe at middle panel. The border of the shawl is black in colour. It is generally used as common wear by Tangkhul females.
- **Phingu shawl:** It is ladies shawl woven in black cotton with a pink colour border. The shawl is made by joining two panels by hand stitch. This shawl is specially kept by Tangkhul women, to wear in funerals.



Changkhom shawl, Photo Courtesy: Author

Female Lower Garment

The Sarong is a garment consisting of a long piece of cloth worn wrapped round the body and tucked at the waist or under the armpits used as a lower garment in North East India. In Tangkhul dialect, it is called Kashan. Some of the traditional Tangkhul female lower garments are summarized as;

- **PhorKashan:** This kashan (sarong) is made of cotton yarn in plain weave. It is ladies lower garment in red colour base with black colour broad stripes and thin yellow colour stripes. It is generally used as a lower garment for Tangkhul female.



Phor Kashan

- **Zingtai Kashan:**It is a Tangkhul ladies sarong woven in red colour with black stripes in middle and at the sides forming a border.It was believed to be named after a legendary lady named *ZingtaiMonsing-la* who invented the art of weaving.
- **Seichang Kashan:**The *Seichang Kashan* is woven in red cotton base. It is a designed with black and yellow colour stripes at base. It is a sarong worn only by the elder daughter of village chief's family.

Jewellery and Ornaments of Tangkhul Nagas

Naga are closely related to their environment and natural materials like bamboo, cane, orchid stems, stone, glass were used.Claws, bones, teeth, horns, sea-shell beads, birds and animal feathers found their way into their ornaments. The traditional ornaments used by the Tangkhulare *Chaokui* (brass bangle), Aluminum Armlet, *Huison*(bridal ornament made of brass), *Khommashin*(waist ornament of Tangkhul women),*Nahui* (crystal ear piece), *Konshang*(necklace made of ivory and sea shell, *Chamthrei*(beads necklace) and Brass necklace.



Huison, Photo Courtesy: Author



Khom-Mashin, Photo Courtesy: Author

Headgears of Men

It was found that Tangkhul women were not using any headgears. They used to open their hair or bind them. They used necklace to adorn their head on special occasions. Sometimes they covered them by a simple plain scarf of black colour when they went out for work. However, the Tangkhul men used headgears extensively to decorate their heads as well as to signify social status. They used varieties of headgear for different occasions. Some headgears used by the Tangkhul Naga men are headwear for Village Chief (Figure No.8), *Kuilap*(Tangkhul Warrior Cap) (Figure No.9), head wear for ordinary men and head wear for married men.



Headwear, Photo Courtesy: Author



Kuilap Tangkhul Village Chief, Photo Courtesy: Author

Change in Trends of Textiles and Costumes of Tangkhul Naga

Modernisation gives more exposure to the outside world and it has impacted the traditional textiles and costumes of the Tangkhul Naga tribe of Manipur. In earlier times, the women folk wore bodice, which just a piece of cloth used in order to cover the upper part of their chest covering the breasts. Also, with impact of modernization, women have begun to wear blouses over their sarongs. Especially, bridal wear seems influenced by western gowns and men have been adopting shirts and trousers and other casual wear (Figure No. 10,11).The young people do not understand the significance of the patterns on their tribal shawls, nor do they revere nature as once their ancestors did. The tribe people did not use traditional head wears. Moreover, many traditional costumes are no longer used today except for the few, which are worn on festivals and special occasions.



Influence of western wear on Tangkhul bridal
(Source:<https://www.facebook.com/tangkhulswags/>) Photo Courtesy: Author



Traditional Tangkhul wear bridal
Source:<https://www.facebook.com/tangkhulswags/>)wear , Photo Courtesy: Author

Change in Raw Materials

It was found that the indigenous hand spun cotton yarn has been almost replaced by mill made cotton yarn, acrylic, polyester and rayon yarn to design the motifs on textiles of Tangkhul. The indigenous dyes are almost fading away and are replaced by mill dyed yarns. This is due to the easily availability of dyed yarns in the local market. This in turn leads to discouragement of the indigenous dyeing practices.

Change in Design and Motifs

Due to impact of modernisation, modifications are continuously made on traditional textiles of the tribe. Changes in placement of motif were seen, for example Phorei motif was being used as an all over design in the contemporary sarongs whereas traditionally it was used on border of the shawls. In addition to this, contemporary motifs such as hunting implements, headgears, bullhead and necklace etc. were being used on their contemporary textiles and costumes.



Phorei motif, Photo Courtesy: Author



Contemporary female sarong of Tangkhul Naga all over design with the modified Phorei motif (Source: <https://www.facebook.com/tangkhulswags>), Photo Courtesy: Author



- Hunting implements
- Head wear
- Bull head

Male contemporary wear
Source: <https://www.facebook.com/tangkhulswags>
Photo Courtesy: Author

Conclusion

It can be clearly concluded that modernization has impacted the traditional textiles and costumes of Tangkhul Nagas. It was found that their traditional textiles and costumes have undergone a rapid change in terms of designs, motif placement, colour and yarn. Younger generation has started wearing western and North Indian garments like kurtis, salwar and sari etc. This study not only documents the traditional textiles and costumes before they are completely lost, but also helps to understand the changes in textiles due to modernisation.

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