

Arts And Crafts Of The Singpho Tribe Of Assam: An Empirical Study

Dr. Ashwini Machey

Assistant Professor, Department Of Economics, MDKG College, Dibrugarh, Assam

Dr. Sashi Knata Saikia

Principal, DHSK College, Dibrugarh, Assam

Dr. Jyoti Prasad Phukan

Associate Professor, Department Of Physics, DHSK College, Dibrugarh, Assam

Abstract:

Each tribe has its unique style and traditions, contributing to the rich tapestry of global indigenous art and craft. In tribal societies, daily living, cultural identity, and arts and crafts are intricately entwined. These artistic manifestations frequently convey spiritual beliefs, narratives, and communal values in addition to having utilitarian functions. Natural dyes, textiles, wood and bamboo are among the materials that tribal obtain locally. Their relationship with nature is reflected in their connection to the environment. Generations of people pass along traditional skills, which include weaving, carving and making of bamboo basket. Every technique could have a unique cultural meaning. Numerous pieces of art have motifs and symbols that allude to social rank, tribal heritage, or spiritual beliefs. Crafts like clothes, baskets for carrying things all have useful applications. They combine practicality with artistic expression. Many tribal crafts are integral to rituals and ceremonies, such as textile used in dances or ceremonial clothing that signifies important life events. Arts and crafts foster a sense of community and belonging. This paper has been tried to explore the arts and crafts of the Singpho tribe of North-East India based on empirical study. The Singpho tribe, primarily lived in North-East India, particularly in Arunachal Pradesh and parts of Assam, has a rich tradition of arts and crafts that reflects their cultural identity and way of life. The findings revealed that arts and crafts of the Singpho tribe is a reflection of their rich cultural and heritage.

Keywords: *Arts and crafts, Singpho tribe, north-east India*

Date of Submission: 05-10-2024

Date of Acceptance: 15-10-2024

I. Introduction

Tribal arts and crafts are rich in cultural significance and often reflect the traditions, beliefs, and natural surroundings of various indigenous communities. These artistic expressions often serve practical purposes while also conveying spiritual beliefs, storytelling and community values. Tribal artists often use locally sourced materials, such as clay, wood, bamboo, fibers and natural dyes. This connection to the environment reflects their relationship with nature. Traditional techniques are passed down through generations, encompassing methods like weaving, pottery, carving, and beadwork. Each technique may hold specific cultural significance. Many artworks feature symbols and motifs that represent spiritual beliefs, tribal history or social status. These symbols can be found in textiles, masks, and sculptures. Crafts often have practical uses, such as baskets for carrying goods, pottery for cooking and storage, and clothing. They blend utility with artistic expression. Many tribal crafts are integral to rituals and ceremonies, such as masks used in dances or ceremonial clothing that signifies important life events. Arts and crafts foster a sense of community and belonging.

The North-East India takes great pride in the rich historical, socio-cultural, and political landscape of the Indian subcontinent. A composite culture mosaic, Assam is located in the middle of the north eastern states. The state has been the meeting place of numerous racial stocks, including Mongoloids, Caucasoid, Indo-Burmese, Indo-Iranian, and Aryans with their fascinating and varied culture, since the beginning of time and throughout the evolutionary phases of development. Assam is home to a diverse range of ethnic groups, cultures, and customs. Every tribe has its own distinct language, dialects, custom, cultural traditions, eating habits, arts and crafts as well as religious practices and beliefs.

One of the well-known tribes from North-East India that has spread to the northern region of Myanmar and the Chinese province of Yunnan is the Singpho tribe. They are mostly lived in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in north-east India. In China, the Singphos are referred to as Jingpo and in Myanmar as Kachin (Machey, 2013). The Singpho tribe is undoubtedly artistic people, Singpho art and craft associated with religious beliefs and practices have formed an integral part of the Singpho society. The Singphos are talented in various arts and crafts and they are good blacksmiths, manufacturing several agricultural implements as well as weapons with ceremonial symbols. The handloom products of the Singpho tribe are renowned for elegant designs and striking colours using indigenous weaving techniques.

The Singphos are skilled in cane and bamboo work, and specially in wood carving (Boruah, 1977). Some of the domestic articles of the Singphos are *satfun* used for keeping flowers, *Cingka* used for carrying heavy loads, *karang* or the haversack used by men, *singnai* (haversack) for women. Some other articles of daily use are *lakap*, *upkkau*, *pankheng*, *phihon*, *lichup*, *cehiran*, *galam*, *kumku*, *cha-inthat* etc. The Singpho men folk do not wear any ornaments. On the other hand the women wear *khaichi* (Necklace), *pat lakan* (ear rings) and *lakchawp* (silver finger ring). The head of the Royal family sets tiger teeth on the Sheaths of the *pyan*. The men get tattoo as on the arm and shoulder, and all married women on both legs from the knee in broad parallel bands (Waddell, 2000). The Singphos know the use of iron, and their weapons are made of this metal; they weave their own cloths and colour them with different dyes obtained from the roots of trees, called *khai-khau*, *romi*, *chin-lu* etc (Barua, 1991). Their blacksmiths forged weapons, specially daos, using just a lump of stone as an anvil and a rude hammer. These daos are highly prized all over the frontier for their temper and durability. Similar to other tribes in the North-East, the Singphos were skilled blacksmiths and utilized dao frequently. They also made their own daos and swords.

II. Objectives Of The Study

The prime objective of the study is the find out arts and crafts of the Singpho tribe of Assam which offer fascinating insights into their cultural identity, traditions and way of life.

III. Methodology Of The Study

The study is based on primary investigation and secondary information are used where necessary. Incorporating both primary investigation and secondary information provide a comprehensive understanding of the Singpho tribe's arts and crafts. Conduct interviews with artisans, community elders, and local leaders to gather insights into the techniques, tools, and cultural significance of their crafts.

IV. Findings Of The Study

The study of the Singpho tribe's arts and crafts not only highlights their craftsmanship but also reveals deeper insights into their cultural identity. As the Singpho engage with the modern world, there are instances of blending traditional techniques with contemporary designs, helping to sustain their craft while appealing to broader markets.

Weaving and Textiles

The Singpho women are expert in the art of weaving and so their art is expressed mainly through weaving. Basically women member of the family is engaged in weaving, making both traditional and ordinary dresses which they used in every day. They are known for their traditional handwoven textiles, often made from cotton and silk. These fabrics are adorned with vibrant patterns and motifs that represent their culture and tradition. Singpho women create vibrant handwoven skirts and shawls featuring intricate patterns, often made of cotton and silk. The designs carry cultural significance and vary for different occasions. Natural dyes from plants are commonly used, contributing to the unique colours and sustainability of their textiles. However they collect cotton, silk and Thailand cotton silk from nearby market.

The most valuable specimens of the Singpho looms include the turban, women's skirts like the Mikhen Pakang, Mathat Pakang, Mukiy Pakang, Waist bands, Lungi (Bupa), Hand Bags (Mphen). The Singpho women are expert in ceremonial dresses which express their artistic skill in this profession.

Mikhen Pakang: This is a coarse-textured textile with alternating red, black, and green stripes woven through it. Mathat Pakang: A black background is woven with thin white stripes.

Mukiy Pakang: This piece uses Muga Yarn to weave a combination of thin green and purple stripes over a black background.

The Singpho women's skirts, known for their vibrant patterns and rich cultural significance, feature several distinctive motifs. Bold geometric patterns often represent natural elements and are woven in contrasting colours. Intricate floral motifs symbolize beauty and are common in traditional textiles. Animal designs that depict local wildlife, reflecting the Singpho people's connection to nature. Each design can carry specific meanings, representing aspects of daily life, spirituality or cultural beliefs. Striped patterns and

decorative borders often add to the visual appeal and can denote different styles or occasions. These patterns not only serve an aesthetic purpose but also tell stories about the Singpho culture and heritage.

Bamboo and Wood Craft

The Singphos are excellent artisans, particularly in the fields of cane, wood and bamboo crafts. The many exquisite patterns they weave into their basketry pieces will attest to their skillful craftsmanship and original artistic concepts. They employ bamboo and cane to manufacture a variety of domestic items, such as hats, jugs, trays, teapots, mugs, containers, rice plates, containers, mats, baskets, and other practical items for daily use. They produced a range of bamboo baskets, such as the Signo-Karon, which is used to transport firewood from the bush. They also made cane containers for carrying water, bamboo cooking pots, and attractive bamboo mugs that have two handles shaped like loops. As early as 1879, Sir S. E. Peal noted that “the Singphos covered the cane baskets woven by them with rubber, not only to make them water proof but also to make them spirit proof.” These baskets demonstrated their good technical expertise. The Singpho tribe also engages in wood carving, making looms, creating items like utensils, totems and ritual objects, often incorporating traditional motifs. Wood carving is an important craft among the Singpho. They create design and figures used in traditional dances and festivals, which often hold cultural or spiritual meanings. Carved wooden utensils and tools are also common, reflecting both utility and artistry.

Jewelry Making

Jewelry is typically made from natural materials like beads, shells, and metals. Designs often hold symbolic meanings and can indicate social status or identity.

Cultural Significance

Many of their crafts carry stories and traditions, preserving the tribe's history and values. Arts and crafts play a vital role in their cultural ceremonies, enhancing the communal spirit and identity.

V. Conclusion

The arts and crafts of the Singpho tribe not only serve functional purposes but also embody their cultural heritage and identity. Documenting and promoting these crafts can aid in their preservation and appreciation, ensuring that future generations continue to engage with their rich artistic traditions. Crafts and the arts encompass a broad spectrum of artistic endeavors that entail handicrafts. While crafts, which include things like knitting, woodworking, ceramics, and jewelry making, frequently place an emphasis on ability and technique, arts typically focus on visual aesthetics. Arts and crafts are closely linked to the tribe's oral traditions. Many patterns and designs tell stories, preserving the tribe's history and cultural values. Unfortunately, the traditional art of Singphos has to contend with novel ideas of modernity spelt the doom for the traditional crafts. Collaborative projects may strengthen social bonds, while individual artistry can highlight personal or tribal identity. In a world of rapid change, tribal arts and crafts are crucial for preserving languages, stories, and customs, often serving as a means of cultural resistance.



Women Turban
(Phogup)



Women's skirts





Bamboo work

Loom



Women with traditional dress



Women with ceremonial dress



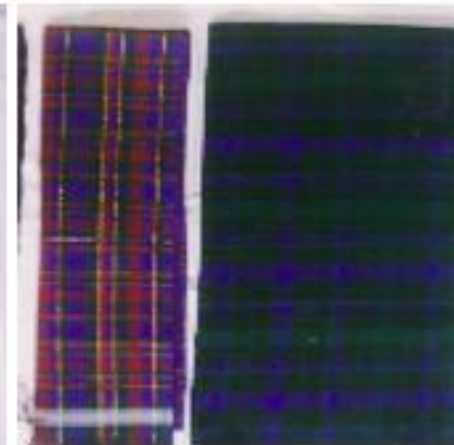
Sadar (Ningwat)



Waist bands (Singket)



Traditional Bag (Mnhen)



Men Turban & Lungi
(Phambam & Bupa)

References

- [1] Barua, S.N. (1991). Tribes Of Indo-Burma Border–A Socio Cultural History Of The Inhabitants Of The Patkai Range, Mittal Publication, New Delhi.
- [2] Boruah, T.K.M. (1977). The Singpho And Their Religion, Government Of Arunachal Pradesh, Shillong.
- [3] Machey, A. (2013). Socio Economic Characteristics Of The Singphos: A Study Of Assam And Arunachal Pradesh, International Journal Of Management Research And Review IJMRR/ Nov 2013/ Volume 3/Issue 11/Article No-7/3749-3758 ISSN: 2249-7196 Ww.ijmrr.Com 3749
- [4] Waddell, L.A. (2000). The Tribes Of The Brahmaputra Valley, Logos Press, New Delhi.