

## **TEXTILES OF SINGPHO TRIBE : A CASE STUDY IN TINSUKIA DISTRICT OF ASSAM**

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### **ABSTRACT :**

The very existence of weaving at home since time immemorial is lifeline of Singpho society. Here the principal role is played by women engaging its female populace within their community into weaving. Every Singpho woman is a skilled weaver possessing a strong sense of design. Within a household, special attention is given to a girl child in order to hone her skills in the art of weaving by the time she attains adulthood. So much so that, it is customary to offer a weaving set in Singpho marriage practices. The handlooms and handicrafts are integral to their existence. There are all sorts of costumes that a Singpho tribe member in a lifetime – and every outfit is hand-woven. Hence systematic, scientific approach to have a comprehensive idea on traditional textiles of the Singpho in the context of its socio-cultural significances is undertaken.

The cultural heritage of the Singpho is enriched by various colourful cultural components. The identity of the Singpho as a distinct ethnic community is deeply embedded in their folk cultures and traditions. The traditional cultures are the ancestral root of their identity. Hence, it is imperative to know the actual form, content, characteristics and significances of the socio cultural ingredients of the society. And to have a clear concept and idea about all these it requires extensive research, studies, analysis and collection of data and evidences. The study deals with the investigation and documentation of the traditional Textiles of Singpho community of Tinsukia district.

### **Key Words :**

Traditional ,Textiles ,Singpho community, Assam

### **INTRODUCTION**

The North East India is a colourful carpet of different indigenous tribal groups of Australoid, Mongoloid and Caucasoid origins with their own distinct culture, traditions ,languages, cuisines, textile and costumes and life styles. The North East India comprises

of eight incredible states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The habitants of North East India speak Tibeto-Burman, Siamese-Chinese, Austro-Asiatic and Indo-Aryan languages. According to the 1971 census there are 220 languages spoken in the North East India (excluding Sikkim). North East India is the home for more than 166 separate tribes consisting of 12.4 million tribal out of 45.5 million people. As per 2011 census this region has 27.3 percent tribal population.

The Singphos inhabited in the hilly outskirts of the Patkai ravine bordering the Kachin state of Myanmar and Yunnan province of China. The Singphos were most powerful tribe of the frontier for several generations. At present they are mainly concentrated Margherita subdivision of Tinsukia district and a small size population are inhabited in Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam and hugely found in Changlang and Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh. The mainlands of the Singphos are India, Myanmar and China. In China they are known as Jingphow, in India as Singpho and in Burma as Kachin.

The Singpho are a tribe who inhabit parts of India, China and Myanmar. According to A.F. Hanney the Singphos were the original inhabitants of the shan states in Upper Burma and they came to Assam in 1893. 'The Singphos are of the race called by the Burmese Ka Kliyan or Kaku whose original settlements were on the great eastern branches of the Irrawaddi river. It was only on spreading into the valley of Assam that they assumed the name of Singphos which in their own language means 'Man'

### **HISTORY OF SINGPHOS :**

Traditions about the origin and migration of the Singphos are many and inconsistent. The most commonly accepted tradition, however, claims that they were formerly inhabitants of Upper Burma. The original homeland of the Singphos according to their own tradition was in the Hukang valley, a vast tract lying towards the North-East of the Patkai ranges. Hukang is itself a Singpho word which means - "*a fence of human heads*" (Hu-human heads, Kang-fence). The name refers to a great massacre of the Singphos by the Burmese. It is said that the carnage was so great that the heads of the slain would have raised a barrier against any further advance of the Burmese. South of the Hukang valley stretches a vast plain inhabited by the Burmese. Being obstructed by the Burmese in their southward

migration, the Singphos turned towards south-east crossed the Patkai ranges of the Indo-Burmese border and entered Assam in the early part of 18th century. In course of time they occupied a large area of Upper Assam region. This is also evident from the fact that many a place name of this region is Singpho in origin. *Bangsu* is derived from Singpho *Pangsun* which means an open area. Similarly, the word *Tipam* is from *Biham* is the name of a Singpho spirit and the place is believed to be its abode. *Biyun* is said to be the original name of the river *Bihing* which names "*a water-source in the hills*" in the Singpho.

The habitat of the Singphos in Assam lay to the east of Muttok and was bounded on the north by the *Lohii river*, and on the south by the *Patkairange*. There is a great degree of cultural homogeneity between the Singphos living in Assam and the Kachins of the Hukang valley. The Singphos in many respects have assimilated themselves with the local people by adapting their religion and culture to a considerable extent. They worship their own spirits, as well as observe the religious practices of their neighbours- the *Kamptis*.

According to the oral history of the Singpho tribe, their ancestors migrated from 'Majoi Singra Bum' or 'Kaang Singra Bum' means naturally flat mountain. It may be somewhere in the highland of Mongolia. It is believed that the Singpho tribe originally migrated from Mongolia in B.C. 700-800 and entered to the south west of Tibet almost in B.C. 600-300 and settled down in the Singpho valley over 400 years and nearly in B.C. 300 – A.D. 100 the Singpho entered Brahmaputra valley (Singda Laban). According to Singpho scholar Manjela, the Singpho population in India is approximately 25000 in 2011. The 1991 census placed the Singpho population at 3575 in Arunachal Pradesh and a total population of 6442 in Assam according to official source of Margherita Development Block (2001 census).

The Singpho tribe has unique socio-economic-demographic characteristics with varied living patterns. The tribe lives in specified tribal areas, which are almost aloof from the mainstream of the society. Though, an important tribe of the North East India, not much study and research has been undertaken on the Singpho tribe.

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

Textile is as old as man. Man has been wearing clothes for ages and it has been one of the basic human requirements. It covers the body as well as protects mankind from heat

and cold. The dress code also implies the sense of modesty of man and women (Choudhury, 2006). When the person from different culture allowed standing in cultural parade then textiles became the criteria for their cultural identification.

The very existence of weaving at home since time immemorial is lifeline of Singpho society. Here the principal role is played by women engaging its female populace within their community into weaving. Every Singpho woman is a skilled weaver possessing a strong sense of design. Within a household, special attention is given to a girl child in order to hone her skills in the art of weaving by the time she attains adulthood. So much so that, it is customary to offer a weaving set in Singpho marriage practices. The handlooms and handicrafts are integral to their existence. There are all sorts of costumes that a Singpho tribe member in a lifetime – and every outfit is hand-woven. Hence systematic, scientific approach to have a comprehensive idea on traditional textiles of the Singpho in the context of its socio-cultural significances is undertaken.

1. To study the traditional textiles by the Singpho tribe.
2. To collect the different designs of Singpho textile.
3. To identify the cultural practices in relation to the dress.

An attempt has been made in this project to study the Textiles of Singpho community residing at Dibong village under Ketetong , Duarmara village under pengeri panchayat and Inthem village of Tinsukia District.

### **Significance of the Study:**

The cultural heritage of the Singpho is enriched by various colourful cultural components. The identity of the Singpho as a distinct ethnic community is deeply embedded in their folk cultures and traditions. The traditional cultures are the ancestral root of their identity. Hence, it is imperative to know the actual form, content, characteristics and significances of the socio cultural ingredients of the society. And to have a clear concept and idea about all these it requires extensive research, studies, analysis and collection of data and evidences. The study deals with the investigation and documentation of the traditional costumes of Singpho community of Tinsukia district.

## **METHODOLOGY**

For the present study Tinsukia district is selected, as the Singpho tribe have found concentrated over there. Three villages named Inthem, Ketetong and Dowermara were selected for the investigation. 100 samples were selected randomly for the proposed study. Field investigation was done personally by interview and observation through specially designed interview schedules.

In this study both primary and secondary sources have been used. The present study was based on primary data. Secondary data were collected from government and non-government organization in the form of records, reports, census, books, newspapers, journals, thesis and internet data consisting of ethnographic, socio-economic and demographic records.

**(a) Coverage:** The Singphos are presently habitat in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh of North East India. To conduct this study three Singpho village of Tinsukia district – Dowermara, Ketetong and Inthem were purposely selected for the study, considering the main habitant of the Singpho community. Wide range of Singpho traditional textiles and motifs were documented and selected from the selected village through random sampling methods and also an interview schedule/questionnaire and personal visit to common textile weavers.

**(b) Data Collection:** The primary data were collected through field study from the sample households of the sample villages with the help of questionnaire prepared for the purpose. From the sample households required information were collected from weaver or any other knowledgeable person of the family.

**(c) Data Analysis:** The data have been analyzed by using tabular analysis with averages and percentages at appropriate places.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **FESTIVAL :**

The Singpho people have two major festivals in a year. One is Poi Sangken which is celebrated in mid April by cleaning Buddha statues with water. Another is Shapawng Yawng Manau Poi, a dance festival to pay respect to their ancestors and is popularly called Manau Poi in Myanmar and Yunan province of China. According to Machey, the concept of ethnic tourism has gained much importance among them after Shapawng Yawng Manau

Poi was celebrated in the year 1985. Since the Singphos have their kinsmen in China and Myanmar, the cross border cultural interactions also promote tourism in this region. Every year number of tourists from those countries come to join them in this festival. Moreover, this festival also attracts many domestic tourists, Singpho people from rural areas also get chance to exhibit and sell traditional recipes, handloom and handicraft products.

**Shapawng Yang Manu Poi festival:** Culturally rich Singpho festival, Shapawng Yang Manou Poi is celebrated in the month of February every year. The Singpho youths in their traditional wardrobe display colourful dances with their usual tradition of drinking and eating. The prayers are offered to the almighty for peace and prosperity of the people and area during the festival



**SHAPAWNG YANG MANU POI FESTIVAL**

### **HARVESTING FESTIVAL:**

The Singphos generally do not perform elaborate festivals in connection with the agricultural activities. But when the paddy is damaged by insects or for any other reasons, they perform a ceremony called Numsang chote. It is performed village wise after performing divination and offerings are made to numsang, the jungle deity. For this they collect donation of money from the village as well as pigs and chickens. The ceremony lasts for three days and after completion all the village paths are closed for one day to prevent coming of outsiders. Before opening the paths the village priests offer some grains of rice to the jungle deity. The priest starts the 'puja' with incantation from the night of the

first day and continues till 3rd day. On completion of the puja the animals are cut. The hearts and livers of all animals are cooked separately which is then offered to the deity by the priest himself. Individually also some of them perform another ceremony called soanjo one or twice in a year after plantation of the seedlings or after harvesting. In this they sacrifice four chickens or one pig. Only the rich people perform this ceremony.

**PREGNANCY AND BIRTH:** The Singphos believe that a woman become pregnant not only due to sexual contact alone, but also due to the blessings of God almighty. A barren woman is considered as unlucky and referred as not getting the blessings of God. A child takes place in the womb of a mother only due to pouring God's blessings of the women and as such she is considered as lucky. There is not much restriction on the part of pregnant women during the period of pregnancy. She can do all the works as usual till the fifth month, after which she is of course not allowed to do any hard work and lift any heavy articles or load. They indulge in sexual contact till seventh month after which period a husband never approaches his pregnant wife. So far as the food is concerned, there is also not much of restriction, excepting that, after the fifth month, she is not allowed to eat any articles with bitter taste and too much of chilies. Honey is also a restricted item during this period, as well as after childbirth till 7th month. Else there is no restriction in diet, and can freely take any vegetables, fish and meat. During the fifth month of pregnancy a religious ceremony is performed sacrificing a female pig and a male chicken in the name of Tisam Nat, a female deity. There are two Tisam Nats one is mother and the other daughter. The pig is offered to the mother and the chicken is offered to the daughter. This deity is propitiated for the welfare of the expectant mother as well as the child in the womb. Else the child or the mother or both may die, due to the evil action of the deity. **CHILD BIRTH:** A delivery is conducted by the female members only. No man or children are allowed to go near the expectant mother. When the labour pain starts the women is made to sit or lie down on a mat with her legs tightly bent. A rope is tied on a post which is to be held by her. Then the expert women help her in the accouchement. If the accouchement is successful everybody feels happy. If however there is much labour it is believed that some spirits (Nats) are at work and the priest is informed immediately, who sit down to perform the necessary divination and the remedy there of, which is then performed accordingly. Now-a-days, of course, for difficult delivery the doctor is invited, along with consulting the

priest. After the birth has taken place, a sharp bamboo splinter cuts the umbilical cord. The placenta in case of a boy is buried near one of the middle posts and that of a girl near a side post of the house, encircling with a bamboo fence. Then the baby is washed with luke warm water. A pig is killed on the day of delivery, which is first shot by the father with bow and arrow. All the villagers are invited for a ceremonial health drink and a feast is given. On the next day the women goes to the water point to clean herself accompanied by her husband, while she goes, she takes a glowing piece of wood and a bamboo torch, and the husband follows her with bow and arrows, playing the bow as they go. After delivery, they observe a period of uncleanness till 14th day, during which period the women do not touch any eatable things or food stuff, others also do not take anything from her. She generally confines herself in her own .On the 7th day the name given ceremony is performed when the baby is named. A chicken is killed in the name of Natkun the household deity or guardian Nat, the Laruwang, the spirit responsible for name giving. The village priest performs the ceremony. On completion of one month the women can go to the fields and perform all the works as well as usual.

**MARRIAGE:** Marriage is the accepted form of union between a man and a woman in Singpho society. The possibility of marriage is determined virtually by the amount of bride price which a man has to pay, and it is very high. They practice all types of marriages and even marriage with the step mother is known to have been practiced by them. It is probably the heavy bride price that has compelled the Singphos to adopt all sorts of marriages. In fact they do not return a girl to her parents for whom the bride price has been paid. The Singpho society is exogamous and it is the fundamental rule that govern the marriage system of the Singphos, where also the family organization and the lineage groups or clans play important parts. The basic rule is that marriage cannot take place within the same family or in other way within the same clan. Once a girl is given marriage to another family the boys of the bride's family cannot marry any girl from the groom's family in future. For example if a girl of Wakheth family is married by a boy of Dumsa family, then Wakheth family boys cannot marry any girl from Dumsa. But subsequent girls of Wakheth family can be married by any boy of Dumsa family. This is to say after marriage the girl becomes the wife giving family. There is no restriction in coming into the marriage tie between the different families, or the lineage groups, but once the marriage takes place the



above rules have to be adhered to. Though monogamy is the general rule, yet there is no restriction of the part of a man having plural wives. The Imbogam of Imbo village had five wives of which one died recently. It depends on the wealth of man, as he will have to pay heavy bride price for each wife. But there are also certain causes of having plural wives. Such as if the first wife is barren or if there is no male issue or if the man has got enough cultivable land and want more wives to help in cultivation, these are the basic causes which indulge polygamy.

**MARRIAGE RITUALS:** Elaborate rituals are performed by the Singphos only in the case of negotiation. In other forms of marriage no ceremony what so ever is performed. Only payment of bride price signifies the union, where only the parents of both the party joins. A marriage is called Numladai which actually means taking of a girl. Negotiation is called Mutang-Ti-Fidai. To carry on the negotiation, at first the boy's father accompanied by 2 or 3 elderly persons of the village who knows all the formalities to be observed in such occasions, will go to the girls house and the other party members will go to meet the parents of the girl, to discuss about the marriage. These persons are called Khumbang. The Khumbangs will first convey the desire of the boy's fathers in a very tactful manner. The girl's father will also speak out whatever he has got to say to the Khumbangs who will then inform the boy's father. When the girl's father will agree in the proposal than a sum of seventy rupees and one Burmese cloth will be presented to the girl's father. Then the Khumbangs will decide about the bride price. Then a pig and a chicken from the girl's house will be caught to perform a ceremony called Kumbang Chun. A bundle of reed called Kumbanglap is brought from the jungle. A portion of the open space in front of the house is cleaned and a pit is cleaned and a pit is dug where the bundle of reed is planted. Near it the pig and the chicken is tied. Then the priest will utter some incantation and perform the ceremony. After completion both the pig and the chicken is sacrificed and then only the boy's father will enter the girl's house. Then the meat is cooked and the heads of the pig and the chicken is given to the Khumbangs. A feast is arranged to celebrate the negotiation. The father of the girl will bear all the expenses. After the feast the actual marriage day is selected. The girl concerned will not show her face to the party.

**DEATH AND DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD BODY:** The Singphos do not attribute the causes of death to the evil actions of any spirits or deities but they consider it as bad luck and think that the person has no luck to enjoy the earthly happiness anymore and hence died. They believe that man is mortal and is destined to die one day. Death due to old age is called Pathum disi dai and in immature death Pat imam disi dai. Similarly accidental death is called Li sai si dai. When a man dies due to attack of some diseases they call it Su I si dai and the death of a still born baby is called Dang I si dai. They practice both burial and cremation method of disposal which depends on the nature of death as well as on the result of divination. There are different places of disposal according to the nature of death. There are two places of disposal one for general death cases called Sang hiyeng inside the village boundary and the other for abnormal death cases which is called Immat Lup and this resides outside the village boundary. In the case of death due to disease, the dead is kept in the house for two days including the day of demise and on the third day it is disposed off. Similarly, they also treat the dead body of an old person. The cremation ground for such death cases is on the back side of the village and it is called Sanghiyeng. A rough coffin called Tuoo is made with some soft wood, where the dead is kept first. The villagers carry the coffin to the cremation ground where a pyrephunrong is made and the coffin is placed over that. Then fire is set into the pyre by some old men and the dead is allowed to burn completely. Burial is done generally in the case of accidental death in the place called Immat Lup, outside the village boundary. A pit of about three feet depth with the length of the death, where the corp can safely be kept, without fear of being damaged or taken out by wild animals, is dug, where the dead is disposed off. In the case of premature death or untimely death, the method of disposal depends on the result of divination, which is observed by the priest. The dead body of a still born child is disposed off in the jungle outside the village boundary and near a big tree in a half burnt condition or as it is wrapping it with a mat. The place is called Imbiye maling and the tree Nimai Phun. They fear much for such nature of death and are considered as worst. In such cases the persons who go for the disposal put thorns on the way on their return just to ward off the evil spirit. It is disposed off just after birth and not kept inside the house for a long time. Those who go for disposal of a dead body in all kinds of death clean themselves with water after the disposal is completed. There are no much grave goods offered by the Singphos to the dead. Only the clothings are buried inside a pit near the cremation or burial

place, over which a piece of white cloth is hoisted on a bamboo pole. It is called Majipfa. They do not observe any uncleanliness period on the death of a person. On the seventh day of death a ceremony called Po-sa-dai is performed for the good of the deceased. On this day it is believed, the soul of the deceased come to the house just to take the articles offered in his name. This is performed in all death cases whether natural or unnatural. The person who does the ceremony is called chere and he knows all the parafernalias and rules to be followed and observed in this ceremony. He takes such articles as utensils, clothings, umbrella, stick and articles of food, given from the house of the deceased to the Buddhist shrine locally called Bapu chang and give to the Buddhist monk (Mohaguru), taking the name of almighty for the good of the deceased. On that day a feast is arranged with rice, rice beer and meat of pig and chicken and the whole villagers are entertained. No other ceremony is observed afterwards

### **THE TEXTILE TRADITION OF THE TAI-SINGPHO**

#### **TEXTILES:**

The Singpho women are expert in weaving and they make their own dress themselves. Up till now women are using hand-spun and prepared home-made dresses. The Singpho women weavers have commandable intelligence and skills that include different colors and intricate designs.



**THROW SHUTTLE LOOM**



### **LOIN LOOM**

In Assam every houses has weaver's loom in almost all villages. Generally the knowledge of weaving is considered an essential part of a girl's education. A considerable number of Singpho women are engaged in weaving, who makes their own traditional costumes. Likewise, a Singpho boy automatically gets training in different handicrafts even in his very childhood (Baruah, 1977). The Singpho men are expert in cane and bamboo products and also carved out beautiful wooden sculptures.

The traditional costume of Singpho women include Bukang (sarong), Nangwat (a cloth worn around the chest), Singket (a belt), Kumphong plong (a special dress adorned with silver pieces).

The men wear a black shirt and Bapa (sarong). Both men and women wear a special turban called Phambam.

#### **Bukang :**

Bukang is the major item of singpho women's dress. It is worn to cover the lower part of the body from the waist extending down to the ankles. It is woven out of 2/80s cotton and occasionally with muga as weft. Three equal pieces of the size 0.75x 0.50 meters with characteristic stripes are joined lengthwise. On top of this a striped piece of 1.50x 0.50 meters size is attached to get the chin of the size 1.25x 0.75 meters green, white



The lower garment Bukang worn by women or yellow ,violet, blue and black or muga (golden brown) colour ,maroon, white, black or blue; are the colour schemes used popularly in bukang. No separate ornamentation is used in this, but the harmonious arrangement of different colours in the stripes themselves produces a rich and pleasing effect.

**Nangwat:**

It is a chequered cloth of the size 2.70x1.00 meters. Nangwat is used by singpho women to wrap over bukang, covering the breast and leaving both ends hanging in front . It is generally used by the women after marriage, but strictly not before attainment of puberty. These days, it is woven out of dyed cotton yarn of mostly 2/80s counts. But in the earlier days, it was also woven out of muga yarns, dyed in indigenous colours.



Such nangwat is called nangwat- puchung. Using nangwat- puchung as a part of the wedding attire is still considered as a mark of prosperity and high status. Two equal pieces of the size 2.70x 0.50 meters are woven separately and stitched lengthwise for nangwat. It is woven in checks and stripes of different colours with sparingly placed tiny flowers(

called maklu) as butis. Nangwat with cross borders having creepers and floral motifs at both ends, followed by fringes, are also being woven these days.



### TRADITIONAL TEXTILES

#### **Bupa:**

It is a typical item of men's apparel among Tai- singpho. It is tucked around the waist covering the lower part of the body like lungi. Bupa is made up of two pieces of chequered cloth of the size 2.00x0.60 meters. These two pieces are woven separately and stitched lengthwise. Further, a side seam is made to make the garment cylindrical.



Bupa

Generally 2/80s dyed cotton yarn of violet, blue, yellow, maroon, green, black, etc., are used to make this colourful cloth. No separate motifs of designs are found in bupa. The main feature lies in the clever arrangement of colours with checks, and stripes. However, very tiny flowers of geometrical shapes are woven sparingly as butis in the body of the cloth.

Muga silk yarns, dyed in indigenous colours were also used in the past in weaving Bupa. This was named Baka. These days, it has become a rare specimen and the few pieces available in the villages are being preserved only to be used on socio-religious occasions.

### **IMPHENG:**

The indigenous shoulder bag widely used by Tai- singpho men, is in sizes ranging from 0.30x 0.25 meters to 0.35x0.30 meters with a strap. It has increasingly acquired a distinct cultural connotation among the people. The shoulder bag is considered as a representative item of Tai- singpho culture.



### **Shoulder bag**

The impheng is woven out of 2/20s or 2/40s cotton preferably in black, blue or maroon colour. Motifs representing creepers, tree, butterflies, birds, flowers and fruits are woven in varieties of colours covering the body of the bag. The weaver's names and addresses are also woven along with the designs these days.

### **DANGKONG:**

Dangkong, the decorated sacred hanging, is offered to vihar by singpho women on sacred days of the Buddhist calendar and at various other occasions. It is woven out of 2/40s or

2/80s cotton in different shades. The size of the dangkong vary is from 0.50x 0.15 meter to 1.50x0.40 meters. It is divided into 3,5, or 7 divisions with fine bamboo sticks woven into the fabric. Colourful fringes are suspended from each of these bamboo sticks as an additional ornamentation. Various designs with motifs of flowers, trees, birds, butterflies and animals along with the weavers name and address are woven in dangkong. The two cross ends of the hanging are finished with fringes to which beads are also interlaced. Offering cloth at the vihar is regarded by the people as a pious act. One earns religious virtues from such acts.

### **Different costumes of Singpho Community**

#### **Dance Costume:**

Dance costume of Singpho women consist of 'Soiplong' which is up to the knee length and of long sleeve. Its colour is black, red etc. A red colour headwear is generally worn by the women while dancing known as Phogup. White coloured Singket and red coloured socks are worn during dancing.

Dance costume of men consist of black long pant , white or black shirt, socks,shoes, Phogup with peacock feathers and dhanesh bird's beak. They also carry a Nap with them while dancing.

Girls generally wear Bukan while dancing and also in other purpose. Old women wear Sambat (Riha) around the waist. It is generally white in colour or in muga colour also. Others wear grean colour Sambat. Women generally wear white plong and white coloured Phumbum as Cheleng chadar. The Singpho chief of the village wears a different type of attire known as Yampho long.





### **Bridal attire :**

The bridal attire of this community is known as “Manmokhing” which consist of Bukang, (mekhela), Singket (Tied around the waist), Nungwat(Methoni), Kumphong plong or Soi plong (long sleeve blouse) and Phambam (Headwear).

The groom wears a lower garment called Baka(Lungi), Plong(Shirt), or Yamplong(long shirt). And Phambam. The colour of the phambam are different in colour like red,black, marron and sometimes rolex thread is weaved in it to create a design.they also carry a long sword called ‘NAP’ with them and traditional designed bag known as ‘Soi Implong’.

The Singphos make their dress themselves and even now with the exception of a very few of them, all use homemade dress. The men’s dress consists of a lungee woven in checkered with yarns of various colours a jacket and a turban but now-a-days they wear white turban. The dress of the women consists of a beautiful designed scarf, a waist band and a turban. The women tie their hair in a large knot on the crown and some on the back and cover it with the turban. By custom the Singpho women do not come out before men and particularly before a guest with bare head irrespective of marital status. The Singpho men also wear their hair long and tie it in a knot on the top of the head when they wear the turban. But the younger generation has started cropping their hair. It is only the old people who are keeping their old tradition alive.Their traditional story says that in the very old days the Singphos do not have any dress but they simply use plantain leaf as under garments. It is only at Singra Fang Wayang that they learnt weaving and used wearing the different garments. At that time they put on a course lunge called Lejni Liliyeng Umbahanging up to the knee joint and a very rough jacket, Pulong. The lungeethat they use now is called Babu. The legend connected with the turban they use now is as follows. When they stayed at Sinngra Fang Wayang, Muthum matha(god) gave one turban (Totok pungbam), one jacket(pulong) and one Lungee(Baka) to a man called Singra Fang Maga. He also gave one skirt (Pukong), one waist band (Sing kiyet), one scarf (Ningwat) and a turban (Singlap Pungbam) to a woman called Phunglum Thusan. Since then the Singphos wear the dress which they still use. The white turban of women is called Pungbam Siphongand the black one Singla Pung bam. The Singphos do not have separate ceremonial dress but in marriage the bride and the groom put on a huge long cloak over their dress

decorated with beautiful designs. They do not make it by themselves but purchase from Burma. It is also an item included in their bride price

### **DYEING:**

The women weavers have commendable intelligence and skills that include amalgamating different colors and crafting intricate designs. Traditionally, they have a very unique and natural process of colour making to colorize threads used for weaving which is completely environment friendly. For that, they use to extract colours from naturally available materials like plants, seeds and barks etc through a specific process as mentioned below:

The different sources of colour extraction:

- From bark of Plum: Silky colour
- Bark of jack fruit: Saffron colour
- From seeds and bark of terminalia citrina Tree: Black colour
- Bark of Indian Gooseberry: Light brown colour
- From Luchet tree (a kind of wild plant): Violet colour

### **MOTIFS AND DESIGNS:**

The textiles of Tai- Singpho have distinctive ethnic characteristics. Tai singpho textiles are not decorated with elaborate designs. The checks and stripes are arranged in a harmonious pattern to produce conspicuous designs. The checks and stripes which make up the designs in Tai singpho textiles are very similar to tribal textiles prevalent in Upper Burma, the original homeland of the people. They still use their indigenous loin-loom and throw shuttle loom for weaving different textile items. As found among other communities, textiles are produced only for home consumption and not for sale. In the olden day, both cotton and muga yarns, used in their textile production, were produced at home. Those were also dyed with indigenous dyes. These days, home spun cotton yarn is mostly replaced by mill-made yarns. Muga yarn, used rarely at present, is also bought from local shops and dyed partly with indigenous dyes.

The designs are simple and mostly geometrical and the most common motifs are zig-zag, diamond, triangle, cross etc. Each tribe has its own favourite colours and combinations.

The colours are always bright and colour matching is always by contrast, thus giving a three-dimensional effect. The patterns are symbolic. It may be mentioned that the meanings of some symbolic patterns are gradually forgotten by them.

The styles and motifs in the textile are of symbolic patterns. The wood carving is done with realistic conventional designs and the tattooing with geometrical patterns. It may also be said that the singpho arts have some significance of their own with deep correlation with their cultural context and natural craftsmen having indigeneous technology and design and motifs of their own. With the march of time, influence of modernity and commercialisation of some art objects, changes in styles and motifs have been observed, specially in the textile items resulting in scarcity of some traditional textile designs. The production technology for raw materials etc are developed. The state government has also patronised cottage industries in order to develop the socio-economic condition of the tribesmen.

#### **GEOMETRICAL MOTIFS:**

Diverse elements of nature seem to be the main source of inspiration so far as ornamentation of textile is concerned. It is believed that the wonderful unity, orderliness, harmony of line and curve, the symmetry of form and shape which are all intrinsic characteristics of nature have inspired the geometrical design ( Bhavnani 1974:11-12) . Geometrical forms have been used for fabric ornamentation for a very long time in various culture setting. In the textiles of Assam also, geometric design, individually or in combination with stylized motifs have been used widely since the olden times. When old pieces of textiles in the different study groups are examined, these are frequently found to be richly ornamented with various types of geometrical designs. Such lavish and frequent use of geometrical forms is a clear indication of their popularity.

#### **CONCLUSION :**

The Singphos make their dress themselves and even now with the exception of a very few of them, all use homemade dress. The men's dress consists of a lungee woven in checkered with yarns of various colours a jacket and a turban but now-a-days they wear white turban. The dress of the women consists of a beautiful designed scarf, a waist band and a turban. The women tie their hair in a large knot on the crown and some on the back and cover it with the turban. By custom the Singpho women do not come out before men

and particularly before a guest with bare head irrespective of marital status. The Singpho men also wear their hair long and tie it in a knot on the top of the head when they wear the turban. But the younger generation has started cropping their hair. It is only the old people who are keeping their old tradition alive. Their traditional story says that in the very old days the Singphos do not have any dress but they simply use plantain leaf as under garments. It is only at Singra Fang Wayang that they learnt weaving and used wearing the different garments. At that time they put on a course lunge called Lehni Liliyeng Umba hanging up to the knee joint and a very rough jacket, Pulong. The lungee that they use now is called Babu. The legend connected with the turban they use now is as follows. When they stayed at Sinngra Fang Wayang, Muthum matha (god) gave one turban (Totok pungbam), one jacket (pulong) and one Lungee (Babu) to a man called Singra Fang Maga. He also gave one skirt (Pukong), one waist band (Sing kiyet), one scarf (Ningwat) and a turban (Singlap Pungbam) to a woman called Phunglum Thusan. Since then the Singphos wear the dress which they still use. The white turban of women is called Pungbam Siphong and the Fig-3-An old Singpho couple. Fig-4-Young Singpho women at their looms. black one Singla Pung bam. The Singphos do not have separate ceremonial dress but in marriage the bride and the groom put on a huge long cloak over their dress decorated with beautiful designs. They do not make it by themselves but purchase from Burma. It is also an item included in their bride price.

The very existence of weaving at home since time immemorial is lifeline of Singpho society. Here the principal role is played by women engaging its female populace within their community into weaving. Every Singpho woman is a skilled weaver possessing a strong sense of design. Within a household, special attention is given to a girl child in order to hone her skills in the art of weaving by the time she attains adulthood. So that, it is customary to offer a weaving set in Singpho marriage practices.

The handlooms and handicrafts are integral to their existence. There are all sorts of costumes that a Singpho tribe member in a lifetime – and every outfit is hand-woven.

The garb worn by the Singpho tribe is very traditional, yet stylish. The Singpho women wear the *khakhokhring*. They wear a lower garment called as *Bukang*. They also wear the *Nunguat* which is tied above the chest. The belt

called as *Singket* is used. They also wear a special dress adorned with silver pieces called as *Kumphong Plong*. In the Singpho society, one can determine the marital status of women based on their outfit.

The male member wear a lower garment called as *Bupa* or *Baka* and a white turban (Pham bam). Singpho men wear a black jacket and *Bap* (a cloth wrapped from waist down). A *bapa* is made of basically black and green threads. Another worth mentioning important ethnic attire of Singpho tribe is a traditional turban called the *fumbum* wore by both men and women. These colorful traditional dresses represent strong creative nous of Singpho women. Their intricate fabric and designs are descriptive of Singpho beliefs and folklore. These vivid designs made using natural colors bear different geometrical patterns and shapes. In an unfortunate event such as a death of a tribe member, the community pays its homage to the dead by offering a special cloth woven separately called *Mizip Omba*.

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