

TRADITIONAL DRESSES AND ORNAMENTS OF THE WANCHO TRIBE

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Abstract: The North East is a home of many ethnic languages. Culturally, Linguistically North East is diverse. Wancho is a minor tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. It is an offshoot to the greater Mongoloid group and in linguistic evidence it belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of language. They mainly live in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. In Arunachal Pradesh they are found mainly in six Circles of Longding District- Longding, Kanubari, Pongchao, Pumaõ and Lawna. And in Assam they are mainly found in Dibrugarh and Shivsagar District.

Like other Tribal Communities, the Wanchos also have their own sets of culture and tradition. They have different in Dresses and Ornaments from other tribes. And it reflects their identity. But due to the lack of scientific research their language and culture is in endangered level. So, in this prospect I have Chosen the above topic.

Keywords: *Traditional Dresses, Ornaments, Culture, Identity, Male dresses, Female dresses*

1. Introduction:

The North Eastern region of India is the abode of diverse numbers of communities, tribes and linguistic groups. Each of these groups reflect unique linguistic and cultural features. A large number of Indo-Mongoloid Tribes live in Arunachal Pradesh. Like other Indo-Mongoloids of North East India they are also agriculturist. Some of the major Tribes are the Aka, Monpa, Nishi, Wancho, Tangsa etc (Sen Gupta, 2011:P.6). One of the tribes amongst the diversities is the Wancho tribe. They mainly reside in the south west part of Longding district (undivided Tirap) of Arunachal Pradesh. They can also be found in the districts of Dibrugarh and Sivsagar of Assam. The six circles of Arunachal Pradesh's Longding district with Wancho inhabitation are- Longding, Kanubari, Pongchao, Wakka, Pumaõ and Lawna. In Assam Wanchos can be found in Gariabam Village in Naharkatia circle of Dibrugarh District; Kankupur, Tunglun, Achim Bosti and Tiokia in Sapekhati of Charaideo district.

Wanchos do not have indigenous scripts of historical introduction. According to the Wancho legends their original homeland was the place called Tinu Longpho Sanu situated at Tuensang district of Nagaland which is on the south west part of the other side of Patkai. From this place, they divided into groups and moved to their present accommodations through two different routes called Tangnu and Sangnu. Apart from the Tangnu legend, the Wanchos also have other legends of migration.

The varied norms, standards and practices of folk lives comprise folk culture. These include folk games, folk medicine, folk religion, folk beliefs, folk dresses, folk ornaments etc. Like the other tribal communities, the Wanchos also have their own sets of culture and tradition. They are rich in variety of traditional dresses and ornaments. In this study, a discourse on the traditional dresses and ornaments of the Wanchos is being presented in a methodical and systematic manner.

2. Need for the study :

Traditional attire comprises mainly of traditional dresses and ornaments. The rich variety of Wancho traditional attire not only provide them a special status but also contribute extensively towards Assamese culture. However, researches done so far on the Wanchos cannot be considered as sufficient. Therefore, there is the need of a systematic study to bring to light the exotic nature of the traditional attire of the Wanchos.

3. Objectives of the Study :

- i. To collect the names of the traditional dresses and ornaments of the Wanchos.
- ii. To study the different between the dresses of male and females.
- iii. To study the time and occasion of wearing their traditional dresses and ornaments.
- iv. To study the mode of presentation of their traditional dresses and ornaments use of color and design etc.
- v. To study the changes in the dresses and ornaments over time.

4. Methods and Techniques of the study :

In the presentation of this notable article titled "Traditional Dresses and Ornaments of the Wancho Tribe", I used mainly descriptive method. The sources of the methods are both primary and secondary. Primary sources include field study, observation, interview and secondary sources include books, magazines, research letters, internet etc. I selected Longding, Kanubari, Pongchao, Pumaõ and Lawna circle of Longding District of Arunachal Pradesh as the place of my field work.

5. Sphere of Study :-

The research article presented a discourse on the Wancho tribes traditional dresses and ornaments. Accordingly, some villages of the Longding district and Wancho inhabiting villages of Assam are taken into consideration.

6. Traditional Dresses and Ornaments of the Wancho Tribe :

The Wancho tribe is rich in variety of traditional dresses. An insight into Wancho people's traditional dresses and ornaments makes it prominent that the male and the female have special attires. The ornaments are made from ivory, animal

bones, birds wings, pearls and metals (coins). These ornaments cover the majority portion of their body. The varied ornaments worn by Wancho Men and Women are as follows-

Male dresses

- a) Khiya Hit
- b) Nefa Coat
- c) Khohom
- d) Dakhau-Pak
- e) Nyibun
- f) Nyipong

Female Dresses :

- a) Nyikhhex
- b) Nisa
- c) Nyibun
- d) Nyipong

Wancho Ornaments : The Wancho Ornaments are also different from other tribes. It has own styles in Shape.

Male Ornaments :

- a) Khohuom
- b) Kho-Pat
- c) Nathu and Natu
- d) Likwai and Liktasp
- e) Shan-Fat
- f) Zepak

- g) Sia and Likhhol

Female Ornaments :

- a) Lik-Kha-Sen
- b) Nakha-Thuak and Natu
- c) Lik and Ngunlik
- d) Tu and Shak-Ben
- e) Khapsen
- f) Khaptat

6.1 Traditional Dresses of the Wancho Men :

The Wancho tribe features traditional dresses bearing unique characteristics. In comparison to other tribes, number of dresses for the men are very less. A discourse on these is given below :

Khiya-Hit : The piece of cloth, similar to a wrapper and worn around the waist by the Wancho Men is called Khiya-Hit. Khiya means waist and hit means wrapping. It is made from thread and wool. Khiya Hit worn by the Wancho men are general in nature and design. But those worn by kings are ornamented with pearls, stones, beads of multiple colours etc. It is mainly worn in Oriya festival. When a male child reaches the age of 17, the Wancho people hold a folk festival called Khia-Tham and make these children wear Khia Hit.

Nefa-Coat : Another important dress worn by Wancho men is Nefa coat. The name was given by the British. These coats are prepared by the women at their homes. But now they are also available in the market. The colour of a Nefa-Coat is generally black but nowadays varied colours of Nefa Coats can be found. This coat is sleeveless.

Khohom : The cap worn by the Wancho men is called Khohom. It is generally made from bamboo, fargesia, cloth and animal skin. After attending the Khia Tham festival at the age of 17, a young Wancho male child acquires the eligibility to wear a khohom. However, Khohom is also worn during dancing in the Oriya festival. It is a general cap and can be worn casually.

The Wancho Head gear of different Shapes and designs are worn by both man and women. For ordinary everyday use they make a kind of bamboo head dress Conical in shape. (Dutta, 1990: p.42)

Dakhau-Pak : The small bag carried by the Wancho men on their shoulder while presenting their dance in the villager's homes during Oriya festival is called Dakhau-Pak. Multi colored flower designs are woven on this bag. It is also ornamented with ivory and bird's feathers.

Nyipong : The piece of cloth resembling a shirt and worn on the upper body is called Nyipong. These are weaved at home by the women. Nyipong is both sleeveless and with sleeves.

Nyibun : Nyibun is a shawl which is worn by the Wancho men to protect themselves from cold. It resembles Assamese Eri shawl. Designs of elephants tooth, tiger, tiger head, wild boar's tooth, khohom and so on can be found in a Nyibun.

6.2 Traditional dresses of Wancho Women:

The traditional dresses of the Wancho women also reflect unique features. Each of the Wancho woman is an expert weaver. A discourse on the traditional dresses of the Wancho women is presented below:

Nyikhhex : The piece of cloth, similar to a skirt, worn by the Wancho women around their waist is called Nyikhhex. A bride wears it on her wedding day. It is woven at homes and also prepared commercially. Two important centers of Arunachal Pradesh preparing traditional dresses commercially are Khunsa and Kanubari of Longding District.

Nyisa : The piece of cloth draped around their shoulders is called the Nyisa. Many different colors of Nyisa can be found. It functions like the Assamese 'Chador'. It is greater in length and lesser in breadth. It is made from wool.

Nyipong : Nyipong resembles a top and is worn on the upper part of the body. It is made from wool at homes by the women. It can be found in different colors like black, blue, red, green, white, yellow etc. and designed with or without sleeves.

Nyibun: Nyibun is made from wool and it worn by the women to protect themselves from cold. These are woven at homes. Generally Nyibun can be found in red. But now, one can also find them in black and blue.

6.3 Male Ornaments:

The sense of beauty and its enhancement is inherent in all human beings. And Wancho people are no exception. The Wancho men wear different and varied kinds of ornaments. Male ornaments are limited to small beads garland, bead chains, bracelets (made of beads, long leaves of grass etc). A discourse on the male ornaments is presented below-

Khohoum: The ornament worn by the Wancho men on their head is called Khohoum. It is made from bamboo and fargesia. There is a very little difference between Khohom (a cap) and Khohoum. A general Khohoum is ornamented with bird's feathers and tooth of elephants and wild hoars. Whereas, king's Khohoum is extra ornamented with pearls and beads of different kinds.

Kho-Pat: Kho-Pat is worn on the hair by the men to enhance their beauty. It is made from bamboo, wood and animal bones. It is worn casually.

Lik-wai and Liktasp : These are worn in the neck. Likwai is made from multi-coloured beads and Liktasp is made from grass. Likwai can be worn only by men from the royal family and Liktasp can be worn by general men.

Shan-Fat : These are worn on the biceps tightly. It is prepared by materials like ivory, brass, wood, beads and grass.

Nathua and Natu : These are worn in the ears. Nathua and Natu are home-made and prepared with seeds, beads, grass etc.

Zepak : Similar to a belt, the ornament worn around the waist is called Zepak. It is made from fargesia. It is worn both casually and occasionally. According to some Wancho myths, wearing Zepak reduces back pain.

Sia and Likhol : These are worn in a round pattern on their legs. Likhol is made from fargesia, coconut string, cloth and rice straw. Cloth and wool are also used to prepare Likhol. Likhol is termed as Sia when it is extra ornamented with colorful beads and pearls and becomes a little expensive.

6.4 Female Ornaments:

Beauty enhancement through ornaments is an inherent feature of the female irrespective of any society. Wancho women use bead rings, finger ring, armlet, chain, baskets, different types of necklaces and earrings. A wonderful discourse on the female ornaments of wancho tribe is presented below-

Lik-Kha-San : As per Wancho language, Lik means beads, Kha means head and San means to wear. Therefore Lik-Kha-San refers to the ornaments similar to a cap, worn on the head. It is made from beads, pearls, coins, thread, red ribbon and red colored wool. The Wancho women wear it on marriages and festivals (Oriya).

Nakthouak and Natu : These are worn on the ears. Nakthouak is made from seeds of wild trees. The seeds are coloured red. Natu is made from beads, brass and bell metal. These are round in shape and are used casually and occasionally.

Lik-Nyunlik: These are worn on the neck. Lik is made from multi-colored beads and Nyunlik from coins. They resemble a chain and are round in shape. A Lik, ornamented specially with a red Kam-Khoi (a kind of bead) can be worn only by Wancho women belonging to the class of village heads.

Tu and Shak Ben: These are worn on the biceps. Tu is made of metals. But nowadays it is also made of aluminium. Tu is worn by women belonging to the class of heads. Shak Ben is made from short bamboos and rice straw and is worn by common women. Both Tu and Shak Ben are worn on special occasions.

Khap-Sen: Khap Sen is worn in the hands and resembles an Assamese "Kharu". Brass, bell metal and copper are used to make Khap Sen. However bamboo, fargesia, beads etc. are also used to prepare it.

Khaptat: Khaptat resembles a ring and worn in a finger. Generally, it is made of bell metal, brass or ivory. There is no specific rule or institutionalized social direction to wear it. It is a general ornament.

Nobit: The belt worn around the waist by the women is called Nobit. It is made of Natural and commercial white beads. It is worn during Oriya festival and while climbing hilly areas.

Tradition and Transition: Transition is an indispensable part of tradition. Infact every tradition undergoes transition. These changes are not confined to a certain point. Wancho community also features distinct marks of transition. Effects of foreign culture can be clearly seen in the changes over time. Transition has occurred in the spheres of raw materials, time of use, age, availability, design and so on. However the original traditional dresses and ornaments now can be found only in the royal homes.

7.0 Conclusion:

The article entitled "Traditional Dresses and Ornaments of the Wancho Tribe" paves the way for the following inferences:

- i) The Wancho tribe traditional dresses and ornaments still inhibit unique features.
- ii) The difference and variety observed in the traditional attire of a king and his countrymen determine the arena of social respect.
- iii) The Wancho women, till the present day have been weaving the traditional dresses in their handlooms.
- iv) To some extent, influence of modern culture on the traditional attires can be perceived.
- v) The Wanchos generally prepare their dresses and ornaments at homes, using natural items and also commercially available beads and pearls.

At the end of the discourse, it can be said that, the distinctive features of the dresses and ornaments of the Wancho tribe still enables them to hold a special status and identity. However, significant changes have occurred over time. Despite these changes, Wancho tribe is able to hold intact their individual exotic identity.

References

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