

# COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, NAGAON



## FIELD VISIT REPORT

ON

**TITLE: CULTURE OF A "SINGPHO" COMMUNITY OF  
ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION :

### 1.1 COMMUNITY :

A community is a social unit ( a group of living things) with commonality such as place, norms, religion, values , customs or identity. Communities may share a sense of place situated in a given geographical area (e.g. Country, village, town, or Neighbourhood ) or is virtual space through communication platform.

### 1.2 THE SINGPHO TRIBE :

Singpho Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, India, is vibrant and culturally rich community. They are known for their unique customs, traditions, and practices that have been passed down through generations. Singpho people resides on the banks of Siang and Noa Dihing rivers and spreading to as far as the south-eastern part including the land of the Khamtis. Singpho Tribe is numerically a minor tribe in **North-East India**. They are found in **Tirap district** and some parts of the **Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh** and **Tinsukia district of Assam**. They are scattered in **villages** like Ketetong, Ulup, Dibang, Pangsun, Mungbhon, Bisa, Pangna, Hasak, Namo, Ingthem, Katha and Kumsai. The proper **tribal** name of Singpho is 'Ching-po'. The Singphos are the most powerful tribe bordering on the valley. They drove out the Khamtis from the low lands under the Patkai hills and settled themselves on the bank of Tengapani, east of Sadia and on the upper Buri-Dihing in Namrup.

### 1.3 ORIGIN OF SINGPHO TRIBE :

Singpho tribal group is said to be the sub group of the Burmese tribe named 'Kachin'. According to some historians the Singpho were formerly inhabitants of Upper Burma. According to their own belief, they were the inhabitants of the Hukang Valley in the north-east of the Patkai ranges. The Singphos are of the Mongoloid racial stock. The dialect used by them belongs to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the main Sino-Tibetan family.

Traditionally, the Singpho community has been agrarian, relying on activities such as farming, weaving, and hunting for sustenance. Their cultural heritage is reflected in their music, dance, and intricate handcrafted items. The tribe has its distinct language, which plays a vital role in preserving its identity.

#### 1.4 SOCIETY OF SINGPHO TRIBE :

The Singpho tribes are segregated into quite a number of clans, each under a leader locally known as 'Gam'. The principal Gams are the Bessa, Duffa, Luttao, Luttora, Tesari, Mirip, Lophae, Lutong and Magrong. The Singphos are also separated into 4 classes, known as Shangai, Myung, Lubrung and Mirip. Their numerous clans have their own leaders, and they live in the houses on stilts. Traditionally the king is the chief of the Singpho **community**. There are systems of Gaon Panchayat and Anchal Samity for administrative structure of the community. Gaon Panchayat is headed by village headman. Moreover, the social **customs** of the Singpho tribes are maintained with honour. Marriage is a valued institution. 'Exogamy' is adept to **marriage**. However, it is customary that they do not marry within the members of a clan. Only marriages are being confined to definite clans. Once a man gets married to a clan it becomes customary for his heirs to seek wives from the same **family** line.

#### 1.5 OCCUPATION OF SINGPHO TRIBE :

Traditionally they are hunters and gatherers. Since hunting is a strenuous work they have resorted to **agriculture** that has gone to become the main source of livelihood. They are very fond of **opium**. This habit is a characteristic feature of the Singphos. All the Singpho tribes have developed expertise in their professions of being blacksmiths, largely producing iron artworks of excellence. Mainly the **women** folks create nicely woven clothes and dress materials.

#### 1.6 RELIGION OF SINGPHO TRIBE :

They are **Buddhist** by religion and the Buddhist Monk is a greatly revered figure in the Singpho community. He plays a significant role as far as social ethos and moral values are concerned.

#### 1.7 COSTUME OF SINGPHO TRIBE :

The people of this community make shields and helmets from buffalo hide and they are decorated with artistic touch. The Singpho males wear coloured cotton jacket to cover their upper portion. Some of the people of this tribal community have also adopted the **costume** pattern of the Burmese or Shan. The females of this community wear **Mekhala** that covers the entire body and embellish their hair with beautiful **silver** chains.

Tattooing is also in vogue amongst the married females. Exquisite tattoos are drawn on the legs covering ankles, knees, etc. Men do not prefer to wear jewellery, only the female folk deck up in conventional neckpieces, earrings and finger rings. They carry a sword, locally popular as 'sheathed dao'. The sword that the leader carries has been engrafted with tiger claws.

## **2. Changing Scenario of the Singpho Community :**

In recent years, the Singpho community has witnessed significant changes due to globalization and modernization. The younger generation is exposed to outside influences through education and media, which has led to a shift in their lifestyle and outlook. As a result, some of the traditional customs and rituals have begun to fade.

However, efforts are being made to preserve and revitalize Singpho culture. Local authorities and organizations are promoting cultural events, festivals, and heritage programs to ensure the continuity of their rich traditions. Additionally, eco-tourism has gained popularity, providing economic opportunities for the Singpho people while encouraging the conservation of their natural environment.

Despite the challenges posed by changing scenarios, the Singpho community continues to cherish their cultural roots and takes pride in maintaining their distinctive way of life. With a balance between preserving traditions and embracing modernity, they strive to create a sustainable and prosperous future for their community.

## **3. In-depth explanation of the festival, culture, dress, food, and social system of the Singpho community of Arunachal Pradesh.**

The Singpho community of Arunachal Pradesh, India, has a fascinating festival, culture, dress, food, and social system. Let's delve into each aspect in detail :

### **a. Festival:**

The major festival celebrated by the Singpho tribe is the "Shapawng Yawng Manau Poi" festival, which usually falls in the month of February, usually celebrated

between 12th to 15th February. This festival marks the beginning of the agricultural season and is an occasion of joy and merriment.

The festival is primarily organised to show the varied and rich culture, customs and exotic flora and fauna of vast Arunachal Pradesh. At the same time it is also an effort to preserve, protect and promote the age old cultural heritage of this small tribal population. The festival is also an effort to deviate the substance addiction of the youth to valuable efforts.

During, "Shapawng Yawng Manau Poi" the Singpho people perform traditional dances, sing folk songs, and engage in various rituals to seek blessings for a bountiful harvest and prosperity. The festival also involves offering prayers to their ancestors and deities, symbolizing their deep reverence for nature and the spirits that govern their lives.

#### **b. Culture :**

The Singpho community boasts a rich and diverse cultural heritage. They have their unique language called "Singpho," which plays a pivotal role in preserving their cultural identity. Traditionally, they lived in bamboo and thatch houses raised on stilts, but modernization has led to the use of more permanent housing materials. Singpho music and dance are essential elements of their cultural expression, with rhythmic movements and melodious tunes reflecting their close connection with nature and daily life activities.

#### **c. Dress :**

The traditional attire of the Singpho men consists of a woven chequer pattern lungi (Khaithung) of black and green colour, lined with red, yellow and white yarn and shirt (Samtong), bag (Khak), and a turban (Khuphok). The Singpho women traditionally wear colourful Choi/Pipa tops and Singket wrapper (Skirt), Manmaokring (hat), Phugak around the neck, Ningwat waist wrapper and Bathang in lower legs.

**d. Food :**

The Singpho community has a unique and delectable cuisine, heavily influenced by their agrarian lifestyle. Rice is a staple food, and they consume it with various meat and vegetable dishes. The tribe is known for their love of tea, and they have their indigenous tea variety called "Phalap," which is a special treat during festivals and social gatherings. Bamboo shoots, wild herbs, and locally sourced ingredients form an essential part of their diet, making their cuisine distinct and flavorful.

**e. Social System :**

The Singpho community has a close-knit social structure based on familial ties and village communities. They follow a patriarchal system, where the eldest male member is usually the head of the family. Villages are led by a council of elders who make important decisions and resolve disputes within the community. Marriage is an essential institution, and traditional arranged marriages are still prevalent. Family and kinship bonds are highly valued, and festivals and ceremonies provide opportunities for social cohesion and strengthening community ties.

In summary, the Singpho community of Arunachal Pradesh holds a unique and vibrant cultural heritage. Their festival, dress, food, and social system reflect their strong ties to nature, traditions, and ancestral roots. While facing the challenges of modernization, the Singpho people continue to preserve and celebrate their rich cultural identity.

**4. Changing scenario in the Singpho community of Arunachal Pradesh (traditional culture vs. changing culture). ★**

In recent years, the Singpho community of Arunachal Pradesh has experienced significant changes, leading to a shift from traditional culture to a changing culture. Let's explore some of the key aspects of this changing scenario:

**a. Lifestyle and Economic Shift :**

The Singpho community, which was predominantly agrarian, has seen a gradual transition towards other economic activities. Younger generations are now exploring opportunities beyond traditional farming, such as education, government

jobs, and entrepreneurship. This shift has led to changes in their lifestyle, as they adapt to modern work patterns and urban living.

#### **b. Education and Exposure :**

With improved access to education and exposure to the outside world, the younger generation of Singpho people has become more open to new ideas and perspectives. Education has played a vital role in shaping their aspirations, leading to a desire for greater opportunities and a willingness to explore beyond their ancestral lands.

#### **c. Language and Communication :**

While the Singpho language remains significant in the community, increased exposure to mainstream media and communication tools has led to greater usage of national and global languages like Hindi and English. This linguistic shift is gradually impacting the transmission of traditional knowledge and oral histories.

#### **d. Cultural Exchange :**

As the Singpho community interacts more with people from different regions and cultures, they are exposed to diverse customs and lifestyles. This cultural exchange has influenced their belief systems and practices, leading to a gradual blending of traditional customs with new elements.

#### **e. Changing Dress and Fashion :**

With the influence of media and fashion trends, the traditional attire of the Singpho community is undergoing changes. Younger generations may prefer modern clothing styles over traditional attire, which could lead to a decline in the use of traditional dress in everyday life.

#### **f. Religious and Spiritual Shift :**

While the Singpho community's animistic beliefs and reverence for nature remain integral, exposure to other religions and spiritual practices has led to some individuals embracing different faiths. This religious shift may impact traditional rituals and ceremonies in the long run.

#### **g. Social Structure and Gender Roles :**

As modern values and ideas seep into the community, there could be evolving notions of gender roles and family dynamics. This may lead to changes in traditional social structures, although some core family values and kinship ties are likely to remain intact.

Overall, the Singpho community of Arunachal Pradesh is undergoing a dynamic transformation, balancing their traditional culture with the influences of modernization and globalization. While some aspects of their heritage may be evolving, the Singpho people continue to take pride in their cultural roots and work towards preserving their identity in the face of changing times.

It is important to note that cultural changes are a natural part of any society's evolution. While the Singpho community may experience shifts in their traditional culture, they also value the preservation of their unique identity and heritage. The balance between embracing change and preserving traditions is a delicate process that communities worldwide face in this rapidly changing world.

### **5. Influences of changing culture ★**

The changing culture of the Singpho community in Arunachal Pradesh has been influenced by various factors, including:

#### **a. Education :**

Increased access to education has exposed the younger generation of Singpho individuals to new ideas, knowledge, and perspectives from beyond their traditional community. Education has empowered them to seek better opportunities outside of traditional practices and explore different career paths, leading to a shift in their lifestyle and aspirations.

**b. Industrial Development :**

With industrialization and economic development, there might be increased job opportunities in urban areas, leading some Singpho people to move away from their ancestral villages in search of employment and a better standard of living. This urban migration can result in changes to their traditional social structure and family dynamics.

**c. Globalization :**

Globalization has brought the Singpho community in contact with diverse cultures and lifestyles. Exposure to global media, the internet, and technology has influenced their preferences, fashion choices, and consumption patterns, leading to a gradual blending of traditional customs with modern elements.

**d. Infrastructure and Connectivity :**

Improved transportation and communication infrastructure have made it easier for the Singpho community to connect with the outside world. This has facilitated the exchange of ideas, goods, and services, contributing to changes in their cultural practices and values.

**e. Media and Entertainment :**

The influence of mainstream media, television, and social media has introduced the Singpho community to new trends and lifestyles. These platforms can shape their perceptions and choices, leading to changes in their cultural expressions and entertainment preferences.

**f. Tourism and Cultural Exchange :**

As tourism grows in the region, the Singpho community might engage more with tourists and visitors, leading to increased cultural exchange. This exposure can both enrich their cultural awareness and potentially impact their traditional practices.

**g. Government Policies and Initiatives :**

Government policies, initiatives, and development projects in the region can also influence the Singpho community's culture. Development schemes may lead to changes in their traditional occupations and livelihoods.

**h. Religious and Spiritual Influences :**

Contact with people from different faiths and spiritual practices might prompt some Singpho individuals to explore alternative religious beliefs, leading to changes in their traditional animistic practices.

**i. Inter-marriage and Intercultural Relationships :**

Interactions with individuals from different cultural backgrounds through inter-marriage and intercultural relationships can also influence the Singpho community's cultural practices, leading to the incorporation of new customs and traditions.

It's essential to recognize that cultural changes are a natural part of societal evolution, and communities adapt to new influences while also valuing their heritage and identity. The Singpho community's ability to strike a balance between embracing change and preserving its cultural traditions will play a crucial role in shaping its future.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Singpho tribe of Arunachal Pradesh stands as a resilient and culturally rich community, deeply connected to their ancestral traditions and natural surroundings. Their unique identity is reflected in their language, festivals, traditional attire, and close-knit social structure.

In the face of changing times brought on by modernization, globalization, and educational opportunities, the Singpho tribe faces the challenge of striking a balance between preserving their heritage and embracing new influences. Efforts to promote cultural preservation and awareness play a crucial role in safeguarding their unique identity amidst the evolving cultural landscape.

*Abhishit*  
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## FAMOUS TEA OF SINGPHO TRIBE 'PHALAP'



## TRADITIONAL FOOD THALI OF SINGPHO TRIBE



# COSTUME OF SINGPHO TRIBE

