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**Costumes of North East India  
(Special reference to Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Monipur and  
Nagaland)**

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**Sosila Narzary**

Assistant Professor, Department of Bodo, Purbanchal College, Silapathar

**Corresponding Author – Sosila Narzary**

**DOI- 10.5281/zenodo.14130622**

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**Abstract**

North East India, a region of breathtaking diversity, is home to over 200 ethnic communities, each with their unique cultural identity. This study explores the traditional costumes of North East India, examining their cultural significance, historical context, and symbolic meanings. From the intricate weavings of Assam's Mekhela Chadar to the vibrant headgear of Arunachal Pradesh's Nyishi tribe, this research delves into the rich textile heritage of the region. Through an interdisciplinary approach, combining anthropology, history, and cultural studies, this study:

1. Documents and analyzes traditional costumes of North East India's major ethnic groups.
2. Examines the cultural significance of costumes in relation to identity, social status, and spirituality.
3. Investigates the historical context of costume evolution, including influences from neighboring countries and colonialism.
4. Explores the symbolic meanings of colors, motifs, and embroidery in traditional costumes.

This research reveals the traditional costumes of North East India as:

1. A reflection of the region's cultural diversity and richness.
2. A symbol of community identity and belonging.
3. A testament to the region's historical and cultural exchange.
4. A vibrant expression of artistic craftsmanship.

Ultimately, this study aims to promote cultural awareness, preservation, and appreciation of North East India's traditional costumes, contributing to the region's cultural revitalization and empowerment.

**Keywords:** North East India, Traditional Costumes, Cultural Heritage, Identity, Symbolism, Textile Heritage.

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**Introduction**

North East India, a region of breathtaking diversity, is home to over 200 ethnic communities, each with their unique cultural identity. The traditional costumes of this enchanting region serve as a vibrant canvas, weaving together the threads of history, mythology, and cultural heritage. From the intricate weavings of Assam's Mekhela Chadar to the colorful headgear of Arunachal Pradesh's Nyishi tribe, the traditional attire of North East India is a testament to the region's rich cultural tapestry. These costumes not only adorn the physical body but also carry the weight of cultural significance, conveying social status, marital status, occupation, and spiritual affiliation. As a window into the region's soul, traditional costumes offer a glimpse into North East India's fascinating past, its cultural exchange with neighboring countries, and its resilience in the face of colonialism and modernization. This exploration of traditional costumes as a cultural heritage of North East India aims to unravel the intricate narratives embedded in every thread, pattern, and motif, revealing the region's stunning cultural diversity and its enduring legacy.

**Traditional Costumes of Arunachal Pradesh: A Cultural Heritage**

Arunachal Pradesh, India's north-easternmost state is home to 26 major tribes and over 100 sub-tribes, each with their unique cultural identity. The traditional costumes of Arunachal Pradesh reflect the state's rich cultural diversity, craftsmanship, and historical significance.

**Major Tribes and Their Costumes:**

1. Nyishi: Known for their vibrant colors, Nyishi costumes feature intricate designs, stripes, and geometric patterns.
2. Adi: Adi costumes are characterized by colorful cane hats, bamboo jewelry, and traditional shawls.
3. Apatani: Apatani women wear distinctive nose rings, colorful scarves, and intricately designed jackets.
4. Monpa: Monpa costumes feature Buddhist-inspired designs, vibrant colors, and intricate embroidery.
5. Sherdukpen: Sherdukpen costumes are known for their bold patterns, stripes, and colorful headgear.

**Components of Traditional Costumes:**

1. Jackets and Coats: Worn by both men and women, these garments are adorned with intricate designs and patterns.
2. Shawls and Scarves: Used to signify social status, marital status, and occupation.
3. Headgear: Cane hats, bamboo hats, and turbans are worn by different tribes.
4. Ornaments: Bamboo jewelry, beads, and metalwork adornments are used.
5. Footwear: Traditional shoes, sandals, and boots are made from leather, bamboo, or wood.

**Cultural Significance:**

1. Identity: Traditional costumes distinguish one tribe from another.
2. Social Status: Clothing indicates wealth, occupation, and marital status.
3. Spirituality: Certain motifs and colors hold spiritual significance.
4. Community: Costumes unite the community, reinforcing shared heritage.

**Symbolism:**

1. Colors: Red represents courage, white symbolizes purity, and black signifies strength.
2. Motifs: Geometric patterns represent nature, while animal designs signify bravery.
3. Embroidery: Intricate stitches convey skill and craftsmanship.

**Contemporary Relevance:**

1. Cultural Revival: Efforts to preserve traditional attire and techniques.
2. Economic Empowerment: Handloom and handicraft industries support local livelihoods.
3. Cultural Exchange: Arunachal Pradesh costumes inspire contemporary fashion designs.

**Design Elements:**

1. Geometric Patterns: Representing nature and ancestral heritage.
2. Animal Motifs: Signifying bravery, strength and protection.
3. Colorful Beads: Symbolizing wealth, status and spirituality.
4. Bamboo Jewelry: Representing cultural significance.
5. Intricate Embroidery: Reflecting skill and craftsmanship.

The traditional costumes of Arunachal Pradesh are a testament to the state's rich cultural heritage. Each tribe's unique attire reflects their history, craftsmanship, and cultural identity. Preserving these traditional costumes is essential to maintaining the cultural diversity and continuity of Arunachal Pradesh.

**Traditional Costumes of Meghalaya: A Reflection of Cultural Heritage**

Meghalaya, a state in northeastern India, is home to three main ethnic groups: the Khasis, Jaintias, and Garos. Each community has its unique

traditional costumes, reflecting their rich cultural heritage and identity.

**Khasi Traditional Costumes**

1. Jainsem: A traditional Khasi garment worn by women, consisting of two pieces of cloth wrapped around the body.
2. Dhara: A long, white shirt worn by men, often paired with a dhoti or trousers.
3. Kymsheh: A colorful, embroidered shawl worn by women.

**Jaintia Traditional Costumes:**

1. Ka Shin Tlang: A traditional Jaintia garment worn by women, similar to the Jainsem.
2. Ka Raksham: A long, white shirt worn by men, adorned with intricate embroidery.
3. Ka Thoh Ksih: A colorful, woven scarf worn by women.

**Garo Traditional Costumes:**

1. Dakmanda: A traditional Garo garment worn by women, consisting of a long, wrapped cloth.
2. Gamlama: A white shirt worn by men, paired with a dhoti or trousers.
3. Bekok: A colorful, woven scarf worn by women.

**Cultural Significance:** Traditional costumes in Meghalaya hold significant cultural and symbolic meaning:

1. Identity: Costumes distinguish one community from another.
2. Social Status: Clothing indicates wealth, occupation, and marital status.
3. Spirituality: Certain motifs and colors hold spiritual significance.
4. Community: Costumes unite the community, reinforcing shared heritage.

**Symbolism:**

1. Colors: Red represents courage, white symbolizes purity, and black signifies strength.
2. Motifs: Geometric patterns represent nature, while animal designs signify bravery.
3. Embroidery: Intricate stitches convey skill and craftsmanship.

**Contemporary Relevance:**

1. Cultural Revival: Efforts to preserve traditional attire and techniques.
2. Economic Empowerment: Handloom and handicraft industries support local livelihoods.
3. Cultural Exchange: Meghalaya costumes inspire contemporary fashion designs.

**Design Elements:**

1. Geometric Patterns: Representing nature and ancestral heritage.
2. Floral Motifs: Symbolizing fertility and prosperity.
3. Colorful Beads: Representing wealth, status, and spirituality.
4. Intricate Embroidery: Reflecting skill and craftsmanship.

Traditional costumes in Meghalaya are a vibrant reflection of the state's cultural diversity and heritage. Each community's unique attire weaves together history, mythology, and cultural significance, making them an integral part of Meghalaya's identity.

#### **Traditional Costumes of Manipur: A Reflection of Rich Cultural Heritage :**

Manipur, a northeastern Indian state, is renowned for its vibrant cultural heritage, and its traditional costumes are an integral part of this rich legacy. The state's diverse ethnic communities, including the Meiteis, Kukis, and Nagas, boast unique and exquisite traditional attire, reflecting their history, mythology, and cultural identity.

##### **Meitei Traditional Costumes:**

1. Potloi: A traditional Meitei garment worn by women, consisting of a long, wrapped cloth adorned with intricate designs.
2. Phanek: A long, wrapped cloth worn by women, often paired with a Potloi.
3. Kabui: A traditional Meitei shirt worn by men, adorned with intricate embroidery.

##### **Kuki Traditional Costumes:**

1. Chadon: A traditional Kuki garment worn by women, consisting of a long, wrapped cloth with colorful stripes.
2. Paikha: A traditional Kuki shirt worn by men, adorned with intricate designs.
3. Thangjing: A colorful, woven scarf worn by women.

##### **Naga Traditional Costumes:**

1. Tangkhul: A traditional Naga garment worn by women, consisting of a long, wrapped cloth with geometric patterns.
2. Kabui Phang: A traditional Naga shirt worn by men, adorned with intricate embroidery.
3. Lainingpao: A colorful, woven scarf worn by women.

**Cultural Significance:** Traditional costumes in Manipur hold significant cultural and symbolic meaning:

1. Identity: Costumes distinguish one community from another.
2. Social Status: Clothing indicates wealth, occupation, and marital status.
3. Spirituality: Certain motifs and colors hold spiritual significance.
4. Community: Costumes unite the community, reinforcing shared heritage.

##### **Symbolism:**

1. Colors: Red represents courage, white symbolizes purity, and black signifies strength.
2. Motifs: Geometric patterns represent nature, while animal designs signify bravery.
3. Embroidery: Intricate stitches convey skill and craftsmanship.

#### **Contemporary Relevance:**

1. Cultural Revival: Efforts to preserve traditional attire and techniques.
2. Economic Empowerment: Handloom and handicraft industries support local livelihoods.
3. Cultural Exchange: Manipuri costumes inspire contemporary fashion designs.

#### **Design Elements:**

1. Geometric Patterns: Representing nature and ancestral heritage.
2. Floral Motifs: Symbolizing fertility and prosperity.
3. Colorful Beads: Representing wealth, status, and spirituality.
4. Intricate Embroidery: Reflecting skill and craftsmanship.

Traditional costumes in Manipur are a vibrant reflection of the state's cultural diversity and heritage. Each community's unique attire weaves together history, mythology, and cultural significance, making them an integral part of Manipur's identity.

#### **Traditional Costumes and Designs of Nagaland**

Nagaland, a northeastern Indian state, is home to 16 major Naga tribes, each with their unique traditional costumes and designs. These costumes reflect the state's rich cultural heritage, mythology, and historical significance.

#### **Major Naga Tribes and Their Traditional Costumes:**

1. Angami: Known for their vibrant red and black shawls, adorned with intricate designs.
2. Ao: Wear traditional garments featuring geometric patterns and animal motifs.
3. Chakhesang: Adorned with colorful beads and cowry shells.
4. Konyak: Famous for their tattooed faces and traditional headgear.
5. Lotha: Wear vibrant blue and red garments with intricate embroidery.
6. Phom: Known for their traditional shawls with geometric patterns.
7. Pochuri: Adorned with colorful beads and shells.
8. Rengma: Wear traditional garments featuring animal motifs.
9. Sangtam: Known for their vibrant red and black shawls.
10. Tangkhul: Wear traditional garments featuring geometric patterns.
11. Thou: Adorned with colorful beads and cowry shells.
12. Zeliang: Known for their traditional shawls with intricate designs.
13. Khiamniungan: Wear traditional garments featuring animal motifs.
14. Kuki: Adorned with colorful beads and shells.
15. Maram: Known for their vibrant red and black shawls.

16. Mao: Wear traditional garments featuring geometric patterns.

#### **Design Elements:**

1. Geometric Patterns: Representing nature and ancestral heritage.
2. Animal Motifs: Signifying bravery, strength, and protection.
3. Colorful Beads: Symbolizing wealth, status, and spirituality.
4. Cowry Shells: Representing fertility and prosperity.
5. Intricate Embroidery: Reflecting skill and craftsmanship.

#### **Cultural Significance:**

Traditional costumes in Nagaland hold significant cultural and symbolic meaning:

1. Identity: Costumes distinguish one tribe from another.
2. Social Status: Clothing indicates wealth, occupation, and marital status.
3. Spirituality: Certain motifs and colors hold spiritual significance.
4. Community: Costumes unite the community, reinforcing shared heritage.

#### **Contemporary Relevance:**

1. Cultural Revival: Efforts to preserve traditional attire and techniques.
2. Economic Empowerment: Handloom and handicraft industries support local livelihoods.
3. Cultural Exchange: Naga costumes inspire contemporary fashion designs.

Traditional costumes and designs in Nagaland are a vibrant reflection of the state's cultural diversity and heritage. Each tribe's unique attire weaves together history, mythology, and cultural significance, making them an integral part of Nagaland's identity.

#### **Conclusion**

The traditional costumes of North East India are a vibrant testament to the region's rich cultural diversity and heritage. From the intricate weavings of Assam's Mekhela Chadar to the colorful headgear of Arunachal Pradesh's Nyishi tribe, each community's unique attire weaves together history, mythology, and cultural significance. These costumes not only reflect the region's cultural identity but also symbolize the resilience and creativity of its people. As a cultural treasure trove, North East India's traditional costumes deserve preservation, promotion, and celebration. By embracing and showcasing these exquisite garments, we can foster cultural exchange, empower local communities, and ensure the continued vitality of this precious cultural heritage. Ultimately, the traditional costumes of North East India stand as a powerful reminder of the region's breathtaking beauty, cultural richness, and enduring spirit.

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