

A CASE STUDY ON THE TRADITIONAL COSTUMES OF *RONGPA* TRIBE OF UTTARAKHAND

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ABSTRACT

The document beholds a study of *Rongpa* tribe from the Niti and Mana village in Uttarakhand. Clothes of *Rongpa* people were made of mostly woolen which help them to survive in extreme atmosphere. As the *Rongpa* people migrated to India in 1962 from Tibet. The costume of this tribe had very mix features of both the places. Traditionally the female wore *Paakhi, Angadi, Ghagri, Ghunti, Kanchupa* and male wore Woolen Cap, Woollen Coat, Woolen Pant and Sweater in winter. The woolen fabric for the garments was fabricated by the people of this community itself. Costumes preserved the aspect of functionality as well as costumes were aesthetic also, which provide them more significant place in the costumes of India. As people moving out of their native places in hunt of livelihood the dresses have been changed and modernized. But people inhabiting in the villages have kept the tradition still alive.

KEYWORDS: *Rongpa*, Costumes, Woolen, Tribe, Traditional

INTRODUCTION

A community living in the trans-Himalayan regions of India -Tibet border (in Garhwal) is called *rongpa*. The community name "*Rongpa*", derives from the word "Rung", which means valley and "Pa" means inhabitants. Those living in *Chamoli*, Uttarakhand are generally referred to as *Rongpa*. *Rongpas* of *Niti* and *Mana* valleys are also known as *Bhotiya* (Rana, 2013). *Bhot* is area of Tibet. *Marchha* and *tolchha* are the two sub-groups of *Rongpa* community. It has been denied that *Rongpa* of Garhwal are people from Tibet migrated to India. There is no connection found of the community with the Tibet other than trading in olden days. *Rongpa* practice pure Hindu culture (History & Tradition: *Rongpa* community).

The *Marchha* sub-groups inhabit in the *Niti* and *Mana* valleys whereas *tolcha* sub-groups inhabit in the *Niti* valley only. Dialect of *Marchha* sub group is different than *tolchha* sub group. Traditionally, *Rongpa* were traders, farmers, weavers, shepherds and herders. Before 1962, when Indo-Tibetan Border got closed, *Rongpa* used to trade with Tibet through the *Mana* and *Niti* passes, which are at an elevation of 5,800m. In trading centres, they bartered their goods for local Tibetan merchandise to be resold in local markets in India. Large numbers of caravans of mules, yaks and sheep were traded. *ghee*, salt, beans, potatoes, peas gains etc. were other main items for trading. The herders sold wool, meat, and milk to earn a living (Pahwa and Ahmed, 2011).

The costumes of the *tolcha* and *malcha* were similar. So it was covered under the name of costumes of *rongpabhotiya*.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A systematic descriptive research design was planned to achieve authentic data for the study. Personal interviews cum observation method were used to suffice the purpose. A check list was prepared for interview and the data was also collected through secondary sources including books, internet and news from newspaper. It was a case study and the case was selected using information rating technique. This is the method in which some members of a social system are randomly selected and asked to designate persons giving advice and information on a general or particular topic. This method is economical and quick as it saves cost and time. In present study 30 percent of the people out of total population of the village or community were selected. After the selection, respondents were asked about the people aged between 45-85 who possess more and accurate information regarding the traditional costumes and jewelleryes of their respective tribe. On the bases of their responses total 5 cases were selected. Self designating technique was applied on the five selected cases. In this each selected person was asked a series of questions related to costumes, jewelleryes and accessories of their tribe. This technique was helpful in determining the key communicator. Finally person with the maximum responses was selected as case.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Female Costumes of Rongpa Tribe

Upper Garment

Angadi was a kind of coat made of Jean fabric. Due to cold weather in high Himalayas, *Angadi* was very useful to keep females warm in winter season. Due to cold weather in high Himalayas, this twill weaved fabric was very useful to keep females warm in winter season. It comes in brown, black and in grey colours. It was a fabric wore on the upper part of body in place of blouse. Its length was up to waist level and it was stitched quite loose so that other garments like woollen sweaters can be worn inside this. It was full sleeved blouse with Chinese collar. The Chinese collar leaves no gap for cold breeze to enter the clothing. The heavy pleating at the cuff of the blouse provides excess and ease to the wearer. It was open from front and there were buttons at the front. Mostly black or white buttons were used. It was having slits at the corners and two pockets were at the bottom of *angadi*.

Lower Garment

Ghagara was the lower garment made by using the printed cotton fabric. It was measured up to twelve gaz. It was like *kallidar* skirt, this *kalli* was also called as *paat* in their local language. One *kalli* was measured up to 1.25 meter and near about 7 to 10 *kalli* were attached together to made the *ghaghra*. According to the length of the *paat* the cost of *ghagara* increases or decreases. In the bottom of this garment lace called, *gota*, was attached to this leaving six inches from its bottom. It was simply for the beautification of the *ghagara*. With the time the cotton fabric was replaced by other fabrics and size of the *ghagara* was also decreased to four gaz only. A lining called *sajam* was stitched inside the *ghagra*.

Wraps

Rongpa female used to drape a fabric called *lavva* or *gatta* or *pakhai*. It was a black coloured plain weaved fabric. It was 7 feet in length and 3.5 feet in width. This is the only traditional garment that is still weaved by the *rongpa* women and it was not changed at all till now. To make it more beautiful running stitch was done at the sides of this with red and white woollen thread. Instead of woollen fabric jean fabric could also be used. The style of draping this garment was as interesting this garment was itself. Clothes of Rongpa people are made of mostly woollen which help them to survive in

extreme atmosphere. *Pakki* (the drape) is the best example of this. It is made of woollen and is drape in such a manner that it forms lots of cowls in the front which gives warmth to the wearer. The cowls formed at the sides create a place for *Rongpa* women to rest their hand and warm it up, similar to how one covers their hand inside denim pockets for insulation.

Lavva used by the bride was white in coloured and known as *diudee*. It was having flower at the all four corners and flower was made by the coloured lace, called as *furka*. White colour was a symbol of purity during the time of wedding.

Pegri was a white cotton piece of fabric which is tied on the waist. It is 12-15 feet long. This was tied on the waist to secure the pleats of the *pakki* on the waist. *Paghada* is also called *peghari* or *pighari* sometimes. Always in white colour and Light weight fabric (kind of mal-mal) Decorative border weaved on the edges.

Head Gear

Female head gear was called as *chubalu* or *ghunti* or *ghunghati*. *ghunghati* was the symbol of the married women in the society, use of *ghunghati* was prohibited for the widow women and unmarried girls. It was a very different garment worn by the females of *Rongpa* community. It is always in white colour. 4 to 6 inch shiny fabric of contrasting colour is stitched on the *ghunghati* covering the forehead. This rectangular piece of fabric is known as *cheka*. On the centre line of the *cheka* on the *ghunghati*, red colour piping's measuring 6cmx1cm stitched. This symbolised the marital status of the women as it was a symbol of *sindoor*, this was the main reason that it was not used by any female of this tribe other than the married women in the society. To tie the *ghunghati* on the head, two tie ups are provided. For the widow women in the society, shawls were used to cover their head. It is decorated by a special kind of cloth. Girls mostly wear cotton scarf or handmade woollen scarf which is called *kanchupa*.

Foot Wear

Chapyol or *bavaccha* were used as foot wear. These were knitted by using the small woollen yarns. People with very low economic status used to make *chapyol* by using torn out woollen blankets. They made socks kind of structure from old blanket. Some people made *chapyol* from the bags used for string the food grain for some used the goat skin, which was called as *challa* or *thamma*. They put this on the bootm of their feet and attach lace to hold that. They go outside to work wearing these foot wears.

Munda juti were similar to Rajasthani style *juti*. These were made by the famous shoemakers.

Lahome were the colourful shoes. They were up to knee level or below that. Bottom of these were made with thick threads. They come in fashion from Tibet. These were only used by the females.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Hairstyle

Rongpa female used to make a special hair style. For this they take hairs from the front of the head, divide them into four parts and made four plaits form them. These plaits were attached with the main plait which was made with the rest of the hairs. Chiladi was used at the end of four plaits to join them with the main plait. Chiladi was similar to paranda

used as a decorative means for enhancing the beauty of the *Rongpa* female. It was made by using coloured fabric pieces into flower shape two flowers were joint with the lace, which was made of woollen yarn. Total nine flowers were there on the *chiladi*.

Jewelleries

Bichuva was the silver ornament worn on the toe. it look like the ring but it was open from back side so that it could be tightened or loosened according to the size of the toe of the wearer.

Potha were similar to the sliver bangles but larger in width. Some were round in shape and some were oval in shape. They were hollow from inside.

Jhanjhar was made of sliver chains joined together in one.

Poliya was a kind of anklet. *Laccha* was also a silver anklet.

Lapcha or *munadi* was the silver ring. Some rings were having floral designs and some were having stones in that. People with high economic status used to have golden rings also.

Paunchi was the silver ornament tied on the wrist. In *paunchi* there were 30 to 40 diamond shaped or round shaped beads were studded on the black or red valuate fabric. It was fastened with the help of buttons at the end.

Nangcha was sliver round shape thick but hallow from inside bangle. At the both ends knob like structure was found. No designing was found on it. It was plain and smooth.

Pati was worn on the wrist, made of silver. The length of *pati* was equal to the length of two dozon bangles. It was It is in a cylinder shape which was open from one side portion that come toward the hand was having less circumference than the back portion.

Gulaband is a neck ornament which is made of gold. The average weight of this ornament is 2-3 tola (20-30 grams). There are around 6-7 units in one *gulaband*. Each unit are engraved with patterns and motifs. These units are attached on a red strip of fabric. At the both ends, button and a button hole are provided to help the wearer fasten the *gulaband* around the neck.

Hansuli or *sutawas* 1 inch thick towards the front and its thickness decreased towards the back of the neck. Its weight varies from .5 kg to 1.5kg.

Kaldar mala was the necklace made with the silver coins used in 1910. Knobs were joined on the coins and then joined with the help of thread. Some time pearl was also used in between.

Other than this people used to wear necklace made with different stone or pearls.

Jhappaya was a neck ornament made of gold. It was long in length and having pendent at the middle. At the corner coloured beads were used. It is like a "mala" with a single string of gold beads.

Chandrahar was a sliver neck ornament. It was prepared joining 8 chains together

Siyuni was a silver safety pin. *Lavva* was attached with the help *siyuni*. *Sangal* was attached with this also. *Siyuni* was larger in size than a safety pin. It was used at the right side below the shoulder. Following ornament were attached to this-

Sangal- A silver ornament measured from 1 to 1.5 feet's in length and 3 inches in width. It was started as square, round or triangular shaped structure, from this sliver chains were joined and again ends up with square, round or triangular shaped structure. It was having hook at the one end this hook was attached with the *siyuni*.

Sayundad - It was made from the teeth of tiger, *kasturi* deer or other animal. There number varies from two to ten. These all were sewn together with the help of thread and a hook was attached to it and it was inserted in the *siyuni*.

Kankawari – It was used to clean the ear, made of silver and 3 inches in length.

Sungarjata – It was nothing but hairs of pig joined together with thin silver sheet. It was used to clean the dust of the ear. It was kept close to the small children as they feel that *sungarjata* would keep away the evil spirit and work as the safe guard to the children.

Chimti- A silver pin.

Daantkavacha- It was similar to needle used to clean the tooth. It was also made of silver.

Bulaak was worn on the mid portion of the nose. Its shape was like leaf.

Nath was the gold ornament worn on the nose. It was a circle made of gold wire and coloured bead were in that. Earlier time *Rongpa* women used to wear these *nath* in their route life. This *nath* was only worn by the married women, not by the widow. *Murki* was ear ornament. It was having the shape like boat and made of gold.

Murkali was like round shape ear ring but it was worn above from the main ear ring there number vary from 2 to 4. It was larger than size as compared to *murki*.

Bindibeeda was silver ornament worn on the forehead. It was having pendent at the middle, in which picture of god or flower was engraved. Chains with the hooks were attached to it so that it could be worn on the forehead.

Sisfool was a head ornament which is made out of silver. Its shape was like of a flower. It was attached at the middle of the bun, made by securing the hair at one point. Except *Sisful*, *Janeir* (chain) were also worn on the head by female of *Rongpa* community.

Mangteeka- It was worn over forehead, fastened on the hairs with chain.



Figure 3: *Pontha*



Figure 4: *Paunchi*



Figure 5: *Nangcha*



Figure 6: *Pati*



Figure 7: *Gulaband*



Figure 8: *Hansuli or sutawas*



Figure 9: *Kaldar mala*



Figure 10: *Jhappaya*



Figure 11: *Siyuni*



Figure 12: *Sayundad*



Figure 13: *Bulaak*



Figure 14: *Nath*



Figure 15: Mangteeka

(Image courtesy: *Digital document oncostumes of *Rongpa bhotiya*: Garima Pahwa & Shafique Ahmed.
***Uttarakhand ki jan-jati*: A book by Dr Meenakshi Rana)

Male Costume of Rongpa Tribe

Upper Garment

Sayattu Coat or Sheed Coat

Fabric Characteristic

It was white coloured woollen garment worn on to the upper body part by the male of this tribe. Literal meaning of *sheed* was white. This white coloured coat was also the symbol of peace. Fabric for the coat was woven by the tribal people itself, mostly twill weave was observed. No dyeing or printing was done on the fabric

Constructional Details

This garment was worn by the male *Rongpa* during the any cultural activity. It was hip-length tailored coat. The Nehru collar, three front welt pockets and side slits characterize the functional styling. It was front open and buttons used as fasteners. Medium sized white coloured buttons were used in the garment. Slits were observed at both the sides of the *sheed* coat. Lining was attached at the inner side of the garment which provides stiffness as well as warmth to the wearer.

Dharang

Fabric Characteristic and Constructional Details

Dharang was like a robe, a loose-fitted outer most garment the upper garment, also called as *chola*. It was woven by using woollen yarn in the plain or sometime in twill weave. It was woven in black and white colours.

It was very loose and full length garment used as the upper most garments and worn at the time of cold to protect the body. It was open-fronted gown closed with a white fabric which was tied over it. Layering material was stitched inside the garment which were usually woollen fabric pieces.

Mirjai

Fabric characteristic and Constructional details

It was front open, knee length, full sleeved upper garment called *mirjai*. It was made of *khaddar*. It was double breasted at the front and fastened with lace at the side. Slits were found at the both the sides in this and neck line was kept

low from both front and back due to the climatic conditions of the region.

Lower Garment

Revdarpajama and *Janguli*

Fabric Characteristic and Constructional Details

Revdar pajama was a simple white coloured *chudidaar pajama* made of plain weaved muslin cloth.

Janguli was made by weaving the woollen yarn in to the fabric from that simple *pajama* was made. It was also plain weaved and white in colour

Wrap

Suti kapda as the name suggests that a simple cotton fabric usually white in colour. It was measured 8-10 hands. This was used to wrap around the waist over the *mirjai*. This fabric was used to safe the money or any other things.

Head Gear

Topi was a head gear. It was made by the people themselves using woollen thread. *Topi* was made by using knitting by *rongpa* female.

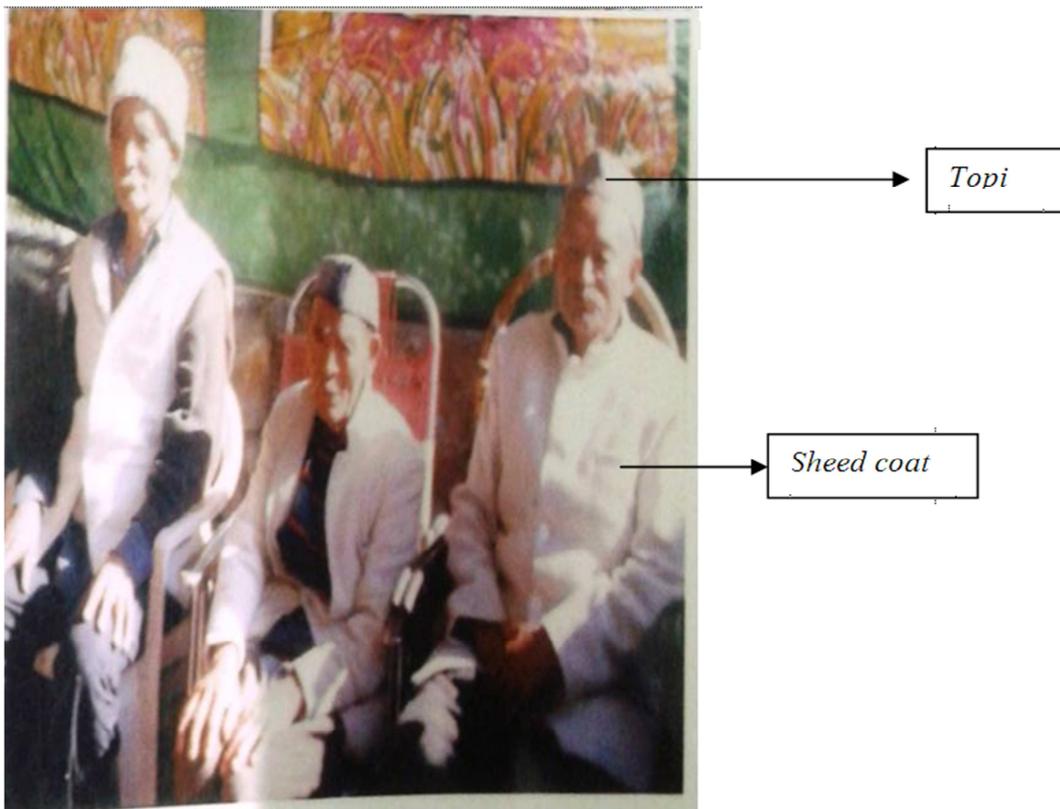


Figure 16

Jewelleries

Earlier men of this tribe used to wear *murki*, golden ring in their ears. These are not in fashion now. Men also wear a thick and hollow bracelet in their one hand.

Hasuli was also worn by the *rongpa* male.

Foot Wear

Chapyol or *bavaccha* were also used by the male of this tribe. Other than this *cham jyada*, the leather shoes were used by the male of this tribe. But these leather shoes were only used by the people with high economic status. They brought these shoes from the Tibet.

Nakyaal juta was the *rajsthani rajput* style shoes. They were pointed from the front. Some time embroidery was also done in those shoes.

CONCLUSIONS

It is an attempt at documenting a culturally rich costume of an Indian Tribe which holds significance in the timeline of Indian Clothing. There is a drastic change in the traditional costume of *Rongpa* community. With the development of technology, people have also started adapting according to the environment. *Rongpa* community lives in a very extreme climatic condition. So their costume has functionality element also with aesthetic element.

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