



“Decoding The Tangkhul Naga Folk Textile: An Ethnobotanical And Ethnozoological Analysis Of Plant And Animal Motifs”

Sochanphy A. Shimray

Research Scholar, Department of Cultural and Creative Studies, North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU)
Shillong, Meghalaya -793022, India

Abstract: This research paper explores the intricate symbolism embedded in the folk textiles of the Tangkhul Naga tribe, focusing on how these designs reflect the tribe's relationship with their natural environment. The study seeks to uncover the traditional knowledge and cultural significance encoded within these visual representations by analyzing the motifs of plants and animals depicted in these textiles. It also exhibits their extraordinary craft and shares the weaver's skill through woven stories.

Keywords: Folk textile, Weaving, Tangkhul Naga, Motifs, Plant, Animal.

I. INTRODUCTION

Textile motifs, intricate and diverse, weave a silent yet powerful narrative that transcends the limitations of spoken language. These fabric patterns, born from the hands of artisans become a language of their own, intricately communicating the rich tapestry of human experience. In the warp and weft of textiles, motifs carry the stories of cultures, traditions, and emotions. Each pattern reflects the unique identity of a community echoing its history and values. From the vibrant hues of traditional clothing to the subtle elegance of tapestries, textiles serve as a visual vocabulary that connects generations and preserves the essence of human existence. Moreover, textiles often encode symbols that convey profound meanings. A single motif can encapsulate a tale of love, resilience, or spirituality. Whether it is the intricate paisley design symbolizing “the time of harvest, a time of both socio-economic and spiritual significance” (Veenu, Katare, and Sharma, 2016: 314) or the symbolic motifs adorning ceremonial garments, these textile expressions become a silent dialogue that speaks across time and space. Textile motifs also serve as a canvas for personal expression. Through the choice of patterns, colours, and fabrics, individuals articulate their identities and experiences. The fabric becomes a medium through which they share their stories, dreams, and aspirations, creating a non-verbal language that resonates universally. Furthermore, the art of textile creation itself is a testament to the human spirit. The meticulous craftsmanship involved in crafting these motifs reflects dedication, skill, and the desire to leave a lasting imprint. Textiles, in their intricate designs, mirror the complexity of the human journey, from the trials of creation to the beauty of the finished product. In a world often dominated by spoken and written language, textiles provide a unique form of communication that is both tangible and sensory. The touch of a fabric, the sight of a well-crafted motif, transcends words and speaks directly to our senses, creating an emotional connection that words alone may struggle to achieve.

In the realm of fashion, textiles, and motifs are pivotal in shaping trends and individual styles. Clothing becomes a canvas for self-expression, and the choice of textiles and motifs allows individuals to communicate their personality, affiliations, and cultural roots. The global fashion industry thrives on the diversity and creativity embedded in textiles and motifs, contributing to the interconnectedness of cultures. Furthermore, textiles are the backbone of many economies, driving industries and providing employment opportunities. The production and trade of textiles have been instrumental in shaping global commerce throughout history. Dating back to ancient civilizations, textiles have been essential commodities, driving economic growth and cultural exchange. From the Silk Road connecting East and West to the European textile industry during the Industrial Revolution, this trade has been a powerful force. In ancient times, regions like China and India were known for their advanced textile production, particularly silk. The Silk Road, established around 200 BCE became a crucial network facilitating the exchange of silk and other goods between Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. This interconnected trade route not only enriched economies but also fostered cultural diffusion, as ideas, technologies, and traditions were exchanged along with textiles. The infusion of Japanese silk into Chanderi silk sarees in the 1930s marked a significant evolution in Madhya Pradesh's weaving tradition, blending diverse influences to create a distinctive textile (Gujral, 2017).

The origins of many Indian craft traditions can actually be traced back to the Mohenjo Daro and Indus Valley civilizations, which flourished approximately 5000 years ago. Most of the documentation regarding Indian textiles during the ancient and medieval periods comes from archaeological excavations, sculptures, and written sources like Rig Veda, the oldest sacred book of Hindus, and Ancient Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. The designs and patterns made by Indian artisans are a representation of artistic knowledge; they are interwoven with religious beliefs, the environment, culture, history, architecture, and everyday activities. India's rich cultural tapestry has woven a diverse and intricate pattern into its textile art, creating a kaleidoscope of unique traditions that mirror the essence of each region. The vast and varied cultural background of India has played a pivotal role in shaping the distinctiveness of its textile art. This diversity is not only a reflection of the local traditions but also a testament to the historical and social influences that have shaped each region's artistic identity. In every corner of India, the loom becomes a storyteller, narrating the tales of generations and echoing the spirit of the land. From the vibrant and intricate patterns of Banarasi silk in the north to the earthy tones and geometric designs of Kalamkari in the south, each region has fostered its own distinctive style. The craftsmanship embedded in these textiles is a manifestation of the skills passed down through generations, encapsulating the cultural ethos and aesthetic preferences unique to each region. Motifs embedded in Indian textiles further enhance this regional distinctiveness. These motifs often draw inspiration from the local environment, mythology, or historical events, weaving a narrative that connects the fabric to its roots. For instance, *Paithani sarees* renowned for their exquisite craftsmanship often feature intricate peacock motifs. These elegant designs symbolize grace, beauty, and cultural richness. The peacock, a revered bird in Indian mythology adds a touch of tradition and mystique to *Paithani sarees*, making them a coveted choice for special occasions. On the other hand, *Kashmiri shawls* are celebrated for their delicate floral patterns. Each shawl is a masterpiece of artistry, with artisans meticulously crafting blooming flowers onto the fabric. These floral motifs reflected the breathtaking beauty of Kashmir's natural landscapes, capturing the essence of the region's flora. While *Paithani sarees* showcase the regal allure of peacocks, *Kashmiri shawls* encapsulate the charm of blossoming gardens. Thus, "symbols represent concepts and beliefs personified in human, animal forms, floral and geometric shapes" (Veenu, Katare, and Sharma, 2016: 311).

As India is a land of varied cultural backgrounds, "traditional textile crafts in India carry their own cultural, social and emotive baggage, with designs, colours and motifs, each having their significance, and different communities each having their own distinctive techniques and styles" (Tyabji, 2016:23). It is obvious that the country's art has been influenced by local customs in each area. This led to the development of unique styles in every region. The Tangkhul Naga textile is known for its vibrant colours, intricate patterns, and designs, which often convey cultural and symbolic meanings. Each and every piece of cloth had its own traditional value and meaning as the design and pattern symbolize a specific community and the wearer's status in society. Shawls, wraparounds, and kilt are some examples of traditional Tangkhul Naga clothing. These textiles are created using traditional weaving techniques and though the traditional folk textiles were related structurally, there would be differences, such as a noticeable shift in colour, a change in the pattern or

motif of the shawl and wraparound, or some other specific element. This clearly shows that every shawl and loincloth of the Tangkhul Naga is patterned with beautiful designs and different colours with immense cultural significance. However, the practice of the art of weaving cannot be thought of without the imprint of the nature of ecology, and its cultural relevance could not be noticed in oral traditions. For the Tangkhul Naga society, nature played a vital role in their creation of exquisite textiles which convey the people the deeper meaning of the idea or concept which are sought to be expressed by the common man using various symbols. Some common motifs include animals, plants, and geometric shapes, each carrying its own cultural significance and stories.

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research design

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and ethnographic approach to explore the folk textiles of the Tangkhul Nagas. It aims to understand the cultural meanings, traditional knowledge, and cultural significance encoded within these visual representations by analyzing the motifs of plants and animals depicted in these textiles.

2.2 Data collection and analysis

The study relies on multiple sources of data, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Additionally, the researcher conducted interviews with key informants, such as elders, expert weavers, and intellectuals who have acquired knowledge about the Tangkhul folk textiles. The researcher also collected and analyzed relevant documents, such as oral narratives, historical records, and folk songs, to supplement and triangulate the data. The study employs a thematic analysis method to identify, code, and interpret the ethnobotanical and ethnozoological motifs or patterns and meanings within the data. This qualitative approach allows for a detailed examination of the themes and patterns that emerge from the participants' narratives and cultural practices, providing insight into the symbolic and practical significance of plants and animals in their cultural context. By coding the data, the researcher can organize it into meaningful categories, which then facilitate the interpretation of the underlying cultural values, beliefs, and traditions related to ethnobotany and ethnozoology.

2.3 Ethical considerations

The study adheres to the ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and justice in conducting the research. The researcher obtains informed consent from the participants, ensuring their voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity.

III. TANGKHUL NAGA FOLK TEXTILES

3.1 Weaving

The Tangkhul Nagas recognized the importance of the uniqueness of the materials, and the amount of labour put into the weaving process. It had been a custom for the Tangkhul Naga community that every girl who attained the marriageable age should be able to spin and weave. The use of vibrant colours and distinct patterns distinguishes their creations, each piece telling a unique narrative. Motifs often draw inspiration from nature, and folklore, creating a visual language that transcends generations. The Tangkhuls' weaving techniques have been passed down through generations, with women playing a crucial role as custodians of this ancient craft. Among the Tangkhul Naga, it is believed that "Zingtai Mansingla", the fairy lady, first started the art of weaving and with her strange knowledge, invents all the designs used in the Tangkhuls' clothes. Her masterpiece is known as "*Zingtai Kashan*" (Zingtai wraparound) which is attributed to the expert weavers and not to any particular social status.

On the clothes of the Tangkhul, red is the colour that stands out the most. Red represents the blood of adversaries and, by extension, bravery. White and black are both distinct colours that are frequently used as backgrounds or in combination with other hues like green, yellow, and blue. Many of the skills needed for collecting and extracting natural dyes such as dark blue colour from indigo, red dye obtained from the roots

of a creeper known as ‘*Mayong*’ in the Tangkhul dialect, yellow dye is prepared from the stem of an orchid plant known as ‘*Harthawon*’ in Tangkhul dialect and the white colour is obtained from the cotton plant which is grown by the women folk for weaving purposes. One of the oral accounts claimed that the recipe for the dye used to weave *Luirim kachon* was given by a spirit in the dream of Yonangla Kashung Philava, a woman gifted with the ability to communicate with spirits (Shimray, 2023: 28). As per the spirit’s instructions, native plant species such as *Makothing*, also called *Ingkothing* and *Nabithing*, were used to make yellow dye; plants from *Matungthing* and *Zakwonthing* were used to make red dye; *Chiruthing*, *Kaenah*, and *Shirangthei* were used to make black dye (Ibid: 28).

Traditionally, women play a pivotal role in weaving Tangkhul Naga folk textiles, employing age-old techniques passed down through generations. Loin looms are often set up in households, serving as both a practical necessity and a communal space for sharing stories and traditions. The meticulous process involves spinning, dyeing, and weaving, with the weaver infusing her creativity into every thread. These textiles serve diverse purposes within Tangkhul Naga society. They are integral components of ceremonial attire, worn during weddings, festivals, and other significant occasions. The motifs embedded in the textiles hold symbolic significance, representing elements of nature like animals, plants, and celestial bodies; folklore, and daily life. Weaving the various intricate designs required time, patience, and excellent coordination of hand and eye. Following are some of the Tangkhul Naga loin textiles that were collected from expert weavers and intellectuals who have acquired knowledge of the Tangkhul folk textiles.

Luirim kachon: *Luirim Kachon* is one of the most remarkable shawls entitled for the royals and a meritorious person. It is also referred to as “*Kapong Leirong*” in the Tangkhul Hundung village. *Luirim kachon* (Shawl) is an exclusive men’s wear covering from the neck down to the heel. To acquire the right to wear this shawl, one should be of royal birth, a wealthy person who performs a feast of merit by the erection of “*Tarung*” (Y- Post), killing buffaloes, whereby he is also allowed to carve his pillars and deck his house. Furthermore, *Luirim kachon* (Shawl) is used to wrap the deceased body of a male member and the bones of the dead must be wrapped with *luirim kachon* (Shawl) as a gesture of respect and honour during the rite of recycling the previous burial site. This reflects its significance in Tangkhul society.

As per the oral accounts of the Meitei (the Ningthouja lineage), and Hungpung, a Tangkhul Village, the chief clan of Hungpung village is considered the older brother of the Meitei (Ningthouja lineage). It is said that the elder brother was unable to attend the marriage ceremony of his younger brother’s daughter due to his illness. Therefore, the *Luirim kachon* (Shawl) was given as a betrothal gift, signifying the elder brother’s blessings on the younger brother’s daughter. Given that the *Luirim kachon* (Shawl) is considered to be the shawl of the elder brother by the Ningthouja lineage, it is believed that failing to deliver the *Luirim kachon* (Shawl) as a gift on the day of marriage will bring unfavourable outcomes to his daughter’s future. Hence, the parents wrapped their daughter’s belongings, known as *potloi*, in *Luirim Kachon* (Shawl) by the meiteis before sending her off to her husband’s house.

Seichang Kashan: It is a royal dress (wraparound) worn only by the eldest daughter of the village chief(s) or chief of the clan(s) who are traditionally addressed by others as “*Achon Kharar*” (first sister), commanding respect in the society. One of the unique features of this wraparound is that three pieces are woven separately and stitched together. The Tangkhul weavers created the middle band in the 1950s, and it soon became popular. It is now considered to be an essential item of clothing for the majority of Tangkhul women.

Thangkang kashan/ Kachon: This particular outfit was made for elderly members of wealthy families. Women’s *Thangkhang* uses red horizontal lines for the end borders, while black and red serve as the bases for both the *kashan* (wraparound) and the *kachon* (Shawl). The men’s *Thangkang* features a red border with a yellow line adorned with black and white *ramik*. *Ramik* means “eyes of the loom” in the Tangkhul dialect, “which is a metaphorical representation of the gateway into the source of beauty and knowledge of the art of creation” (Shimray, 2023: 27). Beyond its aesthetic appeal, the *Thangkang kashan* (*Thangkang* wraparound) and *Thangkang kachon* (*Thangkang* Shawl) provide warmth in the cold mountainous regions where the Tangkhul reside and it also serves as markers of status and age within the Tangkhul society.

Shinetong Kashan: It is usually donned during *Pheichak* (folk dance) by the royals of the Tangkhuls in the east, particularly by the women of Grihang village. Narrow black horizontal lines are present on the white backdrop, while red, black, and narrow white horizontal lines are used for the end borders. The significance of loin textiles in Tangkhul Naga folk dances extends beyond aesthetics. The attire worn while performing folk dance is a form of cultural expression, fostering a sense of community and pride. As dancers move gracefully, the wraparound comes to life, enhancing the overall visual spectacle and adding a layer of authenticity to the performance.

Phangui kachon: It is a harvest shawl, used during a feat known as ‘*Otrei Kaphung*’ (the test of strength), which is carried out during harvest celebration and is exclusively for men. This practice is more common in the Western Tangkhul region, particularly in the villages of Somdal and Phalee. In this practice, during harvest, the strongest man would be loaded with as many as thirty to forty tins of grains, or even more, exceeding that according to the strength of the carrier. The grains would be packed in firmly woven *Phangui Kachon* (*Phangui Shawl*) by joining them. The carrier would then begin carrying the load from the field, accompanied by numerous members of the group as an act of encouragement to the carrier until he arrived at the owner’s house. When he returned home, he would be regarded as the strongest guy in the group or village. The presence of *Phangui kachon* (*Phangui Shawl*) at the harvest festival fosters a sense of collective identity and shared purpose, reinforcing the vital role of agriculture in Tangkhul Naga life. In this way, the shawl is more than a piece of clothing; it is a living testament to the enduring connection between the Tangkhuls and the land they cultivate. It also highlights the women’s folk weaving skill, as seen by the fact that they carry such enormous amounts of grain in handwoven shawls rather than sacks.

Shonglakhom kachon: The *Shonglakhom kachon* (*Shonglakhom Shawl*) worn exclusively by women (Western Tangkhul) during harvest embodies more than a fashion statement. The shawl serves both practical and symbolic purposes. It not only shields against the autumn chill but also encapsulates a profound connection to the land, a celebration of tradition, and a visual representation of the agricultural journey. The designs and patterns of this shawl most likely correspond to the annual cycle of planting and harvesting as every thread of the shawl appears to convey a story, mirroring the cycles of sowing, growing, and gathering that has been deeply ingrained in the community’s collective recollections. This not only reflects their agrarian lifestyle but also serves as a visual narrative, passing down the rich cultural heritage from one generation to the next.

The *Shonglakhom* shawl holds cultural significance among the Tangkhul Naga community, featuring a unique tradition where men showcase their appreciation for women’s weaving skills through distinctive tests. The test involves the menfolk skilfully throwing a spike bamboo rod onto the intricately woven shawl. If the rod could pierce the *Shonglakhom* shawl, it is declared inferior and the weaver is low-graded. If it fails to pierce through, the Shawl is considered a masterpiece, and the weaver is entitled “*Chonsak kathamva*” meaning expert weaver (khayi, 1987: 102). The weavers, often seasoned artisans, must navigate the delicate dance of threads while contending with the presence of the bamboo spike. This not only demands a heightened level of concentration but also underscores the weaver’s mastery over their craft. Thus, this event not only celebrates the craftsmanship of the women but also serves as a cultural spectacle, embodying the rich heritage and communal bonds within the Tangkhul society.

Phingu kachon: It is traditionally worn at funerals or sad occasions by the women folk. Hence, this shawl is known as the shawl of mourning. In the olden days, it was worn during “*Thisham* or *Kathi kasham*” which is the traditional term for the ritual of removing the deceased. This shawl serves as a visual expression of the community’s respect for the departed soul. The choice of colour for the funeral dress holds cultural significance because “the Tangkhul believe that black colour can ward off evil spirits” (ibid: 39). Therefore, the funeral dress becomes a bridge between the material world and the spiritual realm, embodying the cultural values that guide the Tangkhuls in their understanding of life after death.

Angjhar Angjhu Phi: The Chingjui village wears this finely knitted sarong, particularly reserved for unmarried maidens. This practice represents a crucial rite of passage for Tangkhul Naga adolescents as they transition from childhood to adulthood. *Angjhar Angjhu Phi* (*Angjhar Angjhu Phi* (wraparound) serves as a symbol of maturity and signifies the individual’s readiness to take on adult responsibilities within the

community. Hence, it not only marks a personal achievement but also reinforces the interconnectedness between generations.

Chingjui Haora: The *Chingjui Haora* shawl is exclusively designed for men. It is often worn during significant cultural and religious events such as festivals, weddings, and community gatherings. The creation of this shawl can be traced back to the early 1990s. Rev. Jonah M. Solo, a prominent figure in the Tangkhul community, envisioned a shawl that would encapsulate his people's rich heritage and distinct identity. His vision was brought to life by his wife, Mrs. Asenath M. Solo, who wove the first *Chingjui Haora* shawl with meticulous care and artistry. The shawl made its debut in 1991 during the triennial gathering of the Tangkhul Baptist Long (TBL) at Kasom Khullen village. Rev. Jonah M. Solo, donning the *Chingjui Haora* shawl for the first time, presented it not merely as a piece of clothing but as a cultural emblem. This event marked the beginning of the shawl's journey towards becoming integral to Tangkhul men's attire.

The shawl's intricate design, embodying the rich textile heritage of the Tangkhul, quickly captivated the attention and admiration of many. The shawl's popularity soared, particularly during the 1996 Tangkhul Centenary celebration. As many participants wore it during this event, it gained widespread recognition and affection among the Tangkhul people. This led to a common misnomer, where the *Chingjui Haora* shawl was often called the "*Centenary Kachon*". Despite the widespread mislabelling during the Centenary celebration, the shawl remains a unique and revered symbol in Chingjui village.

The Tangkhul Naga loin textile is a testament to the rich cultural tapestry of the Tangkhul Naga tribe, renowned for their vibrant colours, intricate patterns, and profound symbolic meanings. The vibrant colours employed in Tangkhul Naga loin textiles are not merely aesthetic choices but carry cultural significance. From vivid reds to plain white, these hues are often extracted from natural sources connecting the textiles to the region's lush surroundings. Intricate patterns characterize Tangkhul Naga loin textiles, showcasing the skill and precision of the weavers.

3.2 Tangkhul Naga motifs and their significance

The Tangkhul Naga traditional attire is adorned with intricate motifs, each carrying profound cultural significance. These motifs, intricately woven or embroidered onto shawls and wraparounds serve as visual narratives, conveying the rich history, beliefs, and values of the Tangkhul community. The significance lies not only in their aesthetic appeal but also in the profound cultural messages they carry. Each motif represents a unique aspect of Tangkhul Naga's life, often reflecting the community's connection to nature, spirituality, and the tribal landscape. The motifs may depict symbols of fertility, symbols of protection, or elements inspired by local flora and fauna. This symbolic language fosters a sense of belonging and unity among the Tangkhul people, reinforcing shared cultural bonds. The traditional attire, adorned with these motifs serves as a tangible link to the past, reminding the community of its roots and the enduring traditions that have shaped its identity. It becomes a powerful pride, especially in a rapidly changing world where cultural homogenization is a challenge. Here are some important motifs related to plants and animals in the Tangkhul Naga folk textiles:

Uri-Urā Makha: The *Uri-Urā Makha* motif (the hoolock's chin motif), resembling the chin of a hoolock in Tangkhul textiles holds profound significance within Tangkhul culture. This intricate design reflects a symbiotic relationship between man and animals, symbolizing the harmonious coexistence and interconnectedness of the Tangkhul community with the natural surroundings. The pointed chin of the hoolock, meticulously woven into Tangkhul textiles signifies more than a mere aesthetic element. It serves as a cultural emblem, embodying the spiritual and ecological bonds between the Tangkhuls and the environment they inhabit. This motif is a testament to the reverence Tangkhul people have for the hoolock; a primate native to the region. Beyond its aesthetic appeal, the *Uri-Ura Makha* motif (the hoolock's chin motif) also serves as a cultural marker, reinforcing a sense of identity and belonging among the Tangkhul community. The intricate craftsmanship required to replicate the hoolock's chin in textiles showcases the skill and artistry passed down through generations, underscoring the cultural continuity and pride associated with this motif. Moreover, the representation of the hoolock's chin in Tangkhul textiles is a reminder of the traditional ecological wisdom embedded in the community's ethos. It reflects an acknowledgment of the

delicate balance between humans and nature, urging responsible and sustainable cohabitation with the environment.

Khaifa Kashan: The *Khaifa kashan* motif (frog's waist motif) holds a poignant tale within the fabric of Tangkhul textiles. Originating from the heart-wrenching story of two lovers torn apart by societal constraints, this motif captures the essence of enduring love. In the narrative, the lovers faced separation due to the disapproval of the girl's parents, influenced by their differing social standings. Undeterred by the challenges, the young man, symbolizing unwavering devotion, sacrificed himself, dwindling into a skeleton. Faced with the harsh reality of starvation, he fastened a loin cloth to alleviate his hunger, ultimately succumbing to death. The girl left with the indelible imprint of her beloved's sacrifice, translated her grief into art. The *Khaifa Kashan* motif (frog's waist motif) emerged as a poignant tribute, immortalizing the lover's memory. Shaped like the waist of the frog, this motif intricately weaves the tale of love, loss, and the resilience of the human spirit. Woven into Tangkhul textiles, the *Khaifa Kashan* motif (frog waist motif) goes beyond mere aesthetics. It becomes a living legacy, a symbol of love.

Chamva Phor: This motif is widely used in Tangkhul Naga textiles. The word *Chamva Phor* is composed of two words; '*Chamva*' means Cicada and '*Phor*' means design or motif. Hence, it means the Cicada designs or motifs. According to the oral tradition, *Chamva phor* originated from the story of two lovers who dearly loved each other but were forcefully separated by the girl's parents as the boy was an orphan. The design or motif is represented in an abstract form symbolizing true love and courtship. At the same time, it also reminds the unfortunate event that happened during their courtship.

Chonkap: The *Chonkap* motif is widely used in woven Tangkhul's textiles. It is considered one of the most powerful symbols, symbolizing strength, power, responsibility, and protection. In the past, when headhunting practice was very common, the Tangkhul villages were perched on a highland and every village had to build a fortified wall known as *Raipan* in Tangkhul dialect around their village by using a strong wood and the main gate called *Ngavei* was sealed with a strong wooden post in order to protect from their enemy in times of war. Hence, this motif stands for the fortified wall that was built around their village.

Through textiles, motifs evolve into a language that speaks volumes about the human experience. From cultural narratives to personal expressions, the intricate patterns in fabric form a silent dialogue that transcends linguistic barriers. In every thread, we find a story waiting to be unfolded, a tale woven into the very fabric of our existence.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Given that a person's costume serves as both an expression of their identity and a symbol of the complex interactions they have both with and inside their group, Tangkhul loin cloths serve as a metaphor for the identity of a folk community. Tangkhul textiles distinguish the wearer based on the following factors: sex, age, and status in society. It also distinguishes them from other communities. For instance, unmarried women wear *Angjhar Angjhu Phi* wraparound, signalling their eligibility for marriage. This not only reinforces traditional gender norms but also serves as a visual language, communicating societal expectations and individual identities. Furthermore, the loincloth is seen as a symbol of modesty and decency within the community. It covers the essential parts of the body while allowing freedom of movement, which is important in their agricultural and daily activities. Furthermore, the Tangkhul Naga folk textiles are no exception, imbued with rich symbology that reflects the intertwined relationship between humans and nature. Decoding these textiles through an ethnobotanical and ethnozoological lens reveals a tapestry of meanings and relationships, particularly as illustrated by motifs such as the *Uri-Urā Makha Phor* (the hoolock's chin motif), *Khaifa Kashan* (frog's waist motifs), *Chamva Phor* (Cicada motifs), and *Chonkap* motifs. These motifs not only highlight the Tangkhul Naga's symbiotic relationship with the environment but also immortalize cultural narratives, showcasing love, protection, and community resilience.

4.1 Ethnobotanical and Ethnozoological Symbolism in Tangkhul Naga Folk Textiles

Ethnobotany and ethnozoology are pivotal in understanding how indigenous communities like the Tangkhul Naga interact with their environment. These fields study the relationships between people, plants, and animals, respectively. In Tangkhul Naga textiles, plant and animal motifs are more than decorative elements; they encapsulate ecological knowledge, cultural narratives, and social values.

The *Uri-Urā* motifs, depicting the hoolock gibbon, stand as a testament to the Tangkhul Naga's harmonious coexistence with their natural surroundings. The Hoolock gibbon, an arboreal primate native to the forests of Northeast India, symbolizes the deep connection the Tangkhul community has with the forest ecosystem. This motif underscores the understanding and respect for the animals that share their habitat, reflecting a symbiotic relationship where both humans and wildlife thrive together. It symbolizes not just the presence of gibbon but also the broader ecological balance that the Tangkhuls maintain with the environment. The *Khaifa Kashan* (frog's waist motifs) motif carries a poignant tale of love and remembrance. This motif immortalizes and commemorate a pair of lovers, serving as a living legacy that celebrates their bond. The frog, a creature often associated with fertility and renewal, here becomes a symbol of enduring love and memory. The motif serves not just as an artistic expression but as a cultural artifact that keeps the lovers' tale alive across generations, reinforcing the values of love and fidelity within the community. The *Chamva Phor* (Cicada motifs) motif, inspired by cicadas symbolizes true love and courtship in Tangkhul culture. Cicadas known for their distinct and resonant calls during the mating season are natural symbols of love and romance. By incorporating cicada motifs into their textiles, the Tangkhul people celebrate the beauty and vitality of courtship, reinforcing the cultural significance of love and companionship. This motif also highlights the community's appreciation for the natural rhythms and cycles of life, as embodied by the cicada's lifecycle. The *Chonkap* motif represents the fortified walls built around Tangkhul villages in the recent past. These walls, constructed from locally available trees, symbolize protection, resilience, and the ingenuity of the Tangkhul people in adapting to their environment. The presence of this motif in textiles serves as a historical record, commemorating a time when community defense was paramount. It also reflects the intimate knowledge of local flora used in building and sustaining their defenses.

The motifs in Tangkhul Naga folk textiles offer a unique perspective on the community's ethnobotanical and ethnozoological knowledge. plants and animals are not merely resources but are woven into the cultural and spiritual fabric of the Tangkhul people. Each motif represents a deeper understanding and relationship with the environment, illustrating how cultural practices and natural knowledge are interwoven. This symbiotic relationship underscores the Tangkhul belief in the interconnectedness of all life forms and their mutual dependencies.

4.2. The Cultural Significance of Tangkhul Naga Folk Textiles

Tangkhul Naga folk textiles are cultural artifacts that bridge the past and present. Each motif is imbued with layers of meaning, reflecting the community's interactions with their natural environment and their socio-cultural realities. The textiles serve as a medium for storytelling, preserving the collective memory and values of the Tangkhul people. They are also a testament to the community's artistic expression and ingenuity, showcasing the intricate craftsmanship and the depth of their symbolic language. By decoding these textiles through ethnobotanical and ethnozoological perspectives, one gains insights into the Tangkhul Naga's worldviews, their reverence for nature, and their ability to find meaning and continuity in their surroundings. These motifs are not only artistic expressions but also educational tools, teaching future generations about the importance of biodiversity, environmental stewardship, and cultural heritage.

Decoding the Tangkhul Naga folk textiles through an ethnobotanical and ethnozoological analysis reveals a deep interconnectedness between the Tangkhul community and their natural environment. The motifs of *Uri-Urā Makha Phor* (the hoolock's chin motif), *Khaifa Kashan* (frog's waist motifs), *Chamva Phor* (Cicada motifs), and *Chonkap* each tell a unique story of harmony, love, resilience, and protection. These textiles are more than just artistic expressions; they are cultural documents that preserve and celebrate the Tangkhul Naga's rich heritage and their profound relationship with nature. Through these motifs, the

Tangkhul people express their values, histories, and social narratives, making their textiles a vibrant and meaningful part of their cultural identity.

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