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Documentation of traditional costumes, textiles and accessories of Bhotia tribe of Uttarakhand

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Abstract

The costumes and textiles of Bhotia tribe have changed and are still changing due to the social change process. Variation that occurred in the traditional costumes and textiles over time is due to the interaction of various social change factors which affect the perspective, requirements, interest and preferences of the people for the selection of their costumes and textiles. At the same time it bequeathed the way for contemporary and modern costumes and textiles which eagerly accepted in the society. Traditional costumes and textiles adversely affected by this trend and did not pass to next generation but to the antiquity. This study aims to document the traditional costumes and textiles of Bhotia tribe. Bhotia tribe has many recognisable sub-groups; this paper mainly compiles information about Uttarakhand Bhotia.

Keywords: Bhotia, costumes, textiles, accessories

1. Introduction

Costume, whatever might be its origin, provides the visible index of the homogeneity and the unity of people or their absence. Very often it expresses some of the structure and aspirations of a society. In modern occidental civilization it has grown into something more than a mere accessory designed to set off physical beauty. Costume has been functioning as a fashioner of personality and has tended to be cultivated as an art. The need for costumes originated with mankind's need for coverage and protection from the elements of nature. Later, it became a means of adornment to help enhance beauty and reflect social factors such as religious symbols, personal identity and status.

According to Roach and Eicher (1974), the step towards dress was the impulse that arouse in man to attach something to his body. According to Bishwas (1989), the idea of the upper garment emerged perhaps after the skirt. It could be that one day the chief of the tribe came home wearing the skin of some animal about his shoulders and that started a craze. Every hunter would try to save the best animal skins to display over his body. It made him to look impressive. The chief and the principal men of the tribe claimed special clothing and ornaments. This gave birth to the idea of dress as a symbol of dignity, distinction and status. The experimenting process plodded its way through time till it reached the gates of ancient river valley civilization. The Egyptians were the first to leave their records of costume.

Indian culture and its rich heritage of tradition are reflected in many ways such as art, costumes, textiles and embroideries of various region of the country. Clothing in India varies depending on the different ethnicity, geography, climate and cultural traditions of the people of each region of India. Historically, male and female clothing has evolved from simple *kaupinam*, *langota*, *dhoti*, *lungi*, *saree*, *gamucha*, and loincloths to cover the body to elaborate costumes not only used in daily wear but also on festive occasions as well as rituals and dance performances. India also has a great diversity in terms of weaves, fibers and colours. The clothing in India also encompasses the wide variety of Indian embroidery, prints, handwork, embellishment, styles of wearing cloths. A wide mix of Indian traditional clothing and western styles can be seen in India.

India has 29 states which are different in their culture and tradition. The state Uttarakhand is one of them is famous for its unique culture and tradition. Uttarakhand is also famous for its different tribes and their culture which represent the ethnic groups residing in the state. The treasure of tribal arts and crafts of Uttarakhand, a land of myriad culture and people, is

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immense and has an astounding range diversity and beauty. (Eco India, 2013). It is said that officially Uttarakhand is the home for around five tribes. The Tribes of Uttarakhand have retained their age old traditional ways of living. Tribes of Uttarakhand mainly comprise five major groups namely- Jaunsari tribe, Tharu tribe, Buksa Tribe, Raji Tribe and Bhotiya tribe. (India net zone, 2008). These Tribes use a particular dressing pattern according to their deep rooted tradition. The tribal costume has its own charm with its traditional textiles and accessories which shine in their highest glory of beauty.

Tribal lifestyle has remained unchanged over the decades, as a result of which the costumes, perfectly suited to the weather and their lifestyle, have also remained the same. Since traditional apparel is also a symbol of tribal identity, it is not surprising that change has been slow to come. The old and rich traditions of Indian tribal textiles have helped to add to their modern expansion and style. The great style and design of Indian tribal textiles have remained strong for thousands of years. Their future will remain strong and beautiful

This documentation is an attempt to know about the traditional costumes and textiles of Bhotias, Raw material, designs and present status of their costumes. This study will be of great help in understanding the types of Tribal costumes; raw materials used, designs, their present situation and their status of survival. It can also provide some basis for future researchers. As government is giving more emphasis for preserving traditional art and crafts, a study is therefore undertaken to promote the traditional crafts of Bhotias and to combine their style of costume with the modern clothing.

2. Traditional female costumes of Bhotia Tribe

Females of Bhotia tribe mainly wore *Honju*, *Chhua* and *Pangdin* as their traditional garments. Costume of Bhotia community shows influence of both Bhotia and Tibetan culture. Bhotia people weave their personal apparels at their home itself. Other Female costume mainly includes *ghagra* (coloured gathered skirt), *ghunghati* (white head gear with brocade patch), *chuba* (long sleeved woollen coat up to ankle).

1. **Honju-** *Honju* is the principal, all time worn garment of the women of Bhotia Tribe with very little variations in its features. This garment is a modified form of Indian women's ancient upper garment *Choli*, which got its present shape by incorporating various features of the British garment 'Blouse', which was introduced in India by the British ladies. It is a waist length blouse like garment of silk fabric. Sometimes, printed cotton is also used for the construction of *Honju*. This semi-fitted anatomic type of garment was front-opened for ease of wearing. Small sized buttons were used as fasteners and mostly color of the buttons matched with the garment depended on the availability. Due to cold climate conditions usually low round neckline are constructed, but sometimes square shaped, low neck lines and collar are also made. Darts were used to add fullness at the bust. Silken *Honju* is the full sleeves blouse but casually three quarter length is constructed, so that it can protect the wearer from the harsh working and climatic conditions as well as did not create hindrance in the movements of hands during the work. (Plate-1 A and B)
2. **Chhua-** *Chhua* is a loose gown type garment. It is dark-colored wrap dress garment fastened near the waist, tightened with a belt. *Chhua* was ankle length, sleeveless garment which is mainly made up of woollen fabric. It

was front closed with V-shaped deep neckline or a flat collar. It had straight front and back lower end. It was worn over the blouse (*Honju*) and was a sleeveless garment from which the sleeves of the blouse can be seen. *Chhua* was generally made from a plain coloured fabric over which a colourful striped cloth was worn which enhances the beauty of the garment. (Plate-1 A and B)

3. **Pangden-** *Pangden* was considered as the traditional and principal garment for the married women. This garment resembled with an 'Apron'. It was tied at the waist and length is till the calf. *Pandgen* was made up of multicoloured woollen cloth and worn in the front part. The garment is designed with colourful geometric designs which are usually worn by wedded/married women. A long piece of cotton or silk cloth belt is tied on the waist known as *kamarband*. (plate-1 A)
4. **Ghagra-** *Ghagra* was considered as traditional lower garment of old women of *Bhotia* tribe. The traditional *Ghagra* of *Bhotia* women was stitched like skirt. The waist to ankle length *Ghagra* was of circular silhouette with lot of fullness and was made up of 3-4 meters of fabric only. A waist belt was used into which string passed and tied around the waist to adjust the fullness at the waist using gathers. Lower edge of the garment was mostly finished by attaching pleated narrow band of the same material. This was worn with the blouse (*Honju*) illustrated in the Plate- Some women still wear *ghagra* in the ceremonies. (Plate-1d)

3. Traditional Male costume of Bhotia Tribe

1. **Bakhu-** The traditional outfit of *Bhotias* men is called a *Bakhu* (similar to the Tibetan *chuba*, but sleeveless) which is a loose cloak type garment that is fastened at the neck on one side and near the waist with a silk/cotton belt. Male members array the *Bakhu* with a loose trouser. This traditional outfit is complemented by embroidered leather boots by both men and women. The Bhotia man underneath a *Kho* (*Bakhu*) wears a double-breasted and high-necked shirt. (Plate-2A,C)
2. **Chhuba-** *Chhuba* is also a male costume. It is a long capacious robe with wide, elongated sleeves which hang almost to the ground. This is caught up at the waist by a woollen girdle, so that its skirts reach only to the knees and its upper folds form an enormous circular pocket round its wearer's chest. This is called the *ampa*, and in it are stowed a wide range of implements — an eating bowl, a bag and many other small necessities. Many *chubas* are made of wool, either the plain gray wool; originally they were the un-dyed white colour of the sheep's wool. (Plate- 2B)

4. Accessories

Females of *Bhotia* tribe did not possess a range of accessories. They only had very few items to which they could attach the term accessories. Some of them are as follows:

- **Purses:** Purses were used to preserve hard earned money and personal belongings. These functional types of purses were usually hand stitched by the women from the old, discarded fabric. Usually women were not carried purse along with them in religious and other ceremonial events.
- **Wrist watch:** Very few providential women had wrist watch, for which they used to be very protective.
- **Stick:** Old aged women used to take walking stick with them for the support during walking, but they were not

fashionable one but only of functional type.

- **Jewellery:** The *Bhotia* women folk have a preference for earrings and neck ornaments. Neck ornaments studded with stones like Mani, *Yu* (blue turquoise stone), gold, silver considered to be most sacred and precious stone. Necklaces of various designs are called as the *CHURRU*, *KHOU*, *MUNGA FROJU*, *FASO* etc. The *Bhotia* names for different items of ornaments are the *TEN-DARB* (earring), *THE ZUKU* (ring), *THE DEN* (bracelet) etc. various types of semi-precious stones are also used in traditional jewellery designs. The photographs of the jewellery are shown in the plate- 3A.

- **Head dress:**

- a) **Pattu:** Females of *Bhotia* tribe covered their head for the protection from sun while working and to show their respect to elders. This is rectangular piece of cotton or wool fabric which was worn over the head, so that it will cover upper part of forehead and then tied at the back of the head and is decorated with various stones like Munga and Moti as shown in plate-2(e)

- b) **Ghunghati:** *Ghunghati* was the main head gear of old women of *Bhotia* tribe. It was the white coloured head gear which is patched with brocade. It covered the full forehead and then tied in different styles. This *ghunghati* head gear was worn with the traditional female costumes like *honju*, *chhua*, *pangden* etc. (Plate-2e)

- **Footwear**

Sompa: In the past, *Bhotia* traditional shoes represent the status symbol of the person in the community of the wearer, or what village or what is the kind of job he has. It is not like any other shoes you know which has the left and the right pair. *Sompa* shoes are identical, they neither have left or the right. Thus, it is quite hard to manufacture.

There are different styles of *Bhotia's* shoes such, the *Sompa* shoes, *Galuo* and *Duozha* shoes. They are handcrafted and made of natural materials such as pulu, furs and woollen clothes; it is comfortable and colorful as well.

Sompa Tinyima is a kind of *Sompa* shoes that bears patterns of nobility and wealth; these are worn by noble women in the past.

Sompa Tiri is for the working class women, Sown with thick thread and linen. The soles are made of locally hand - crafted linen. Herder's shoes are usually made of animal's skin and other materials unlike the Farmers, which favors woollen shoes. Monks and priests wore the *Gyiachin shoes*, meaning rainbow.

It has a religious meaning hence worn by monks and

priest. They are made of lightweight material, using wool fabrics. Tibetan monasteries and monks, the shoes they are wearing are made up of silk and satin materials. On the other hand, monks of the other monasteries are wearing *Shasum* shoes. Which they wrap the front of the shoes with ox-hide. (Plate- 2d)

- **Make up:** Females of *Bhotia* tribe are example of natural beauty and were not using any kind of make-up. Even if they were able to afford them they did not have time to apply make-up for personal grooming.

5. Documentation of traditional textiles of *Bhotia* tribe

Various woollen products, blankets and rugs, basket, different types of woollen fabrics, fans etc are traditionally produced by the people of *Bhotia* tribe. Since present study was limited to the textiles used for apparels and other household products only, detailed information and data regarding their features was collected from the respondents. According to the inferences drawn from generated data, various traditional textiles of *Bhotia* tribe were found to be very useful and are as follows-

5.1 Woollen fabric

It was thick, warm fabric produced on handlooms, generally by employing right handed twill weave. The wool yarns were hand spun from the Tibetan wool or locally available wool fibers mainly Harsil cross or local merino wool. Handloom woven tweed was also known as *pattus*. Sometimes tweed fabric from the Tibet was also used, as it was often finer than the locally manufactured fabrics. The tweed generally produced with small width and in the colours of natural wool like white, cream, gray and black. This fabric was used for construction of various female and male garments.

The *Bhotia* tribes from ancient times of their trade with Tibet accepted the woollen industry as an essential part of their tribe in their winter villages. For centuries their women have been moving their small "*pithachan*" (loom). *Ptdu*, *thulma*, carpets, *chutka*, lava, blanket, shawl, *asan*, *pankhi*, *gudma* etc. are prepared very artistically. There was a very close bond between the *Bhotia* and Tibetans across the mountains for centuries.

Weaving is essentially the domain of the *Bhotia* women folk even today woollen industries in Chamoli are totally dependent on *Bhotia* womenfolk as the entire process of business such as weaving, finishing and partially merchandising is practiced by the female members of the household. They consider weaving as women's job. (Plate-4 a, b, c)

Table 1: Woollen Articles Produced by the *Bhotia* Community

S. No.	Articles	Description	Colour Range	Price/Piece (RS)
1.	<i>Dokha</i>	Male upper costume	Cream, Grey, Black	-
2.	<i>Lava</i>	Female woollen wrapping costume	Black, Brown	250-300
3.	<i>Pankhi</i>	Fine woollen shawl	White, Cream, Brown, Black	300-700
4.	<i>Shawl</i>	Female upper garment	White, Black, Coloured	300-800
5.	<i>Topi</i>	Cap	Cream, Black, Grey (Pure Wool)	30-45
6.		<i>Mufflers</i>	Cream, Black, Grey	50-75
7.		<i>Sweaters</i>	Cream, Black, (Pure Wool)	100-200
8.	<i>Thulma</i>	Piled blanket	White, Black, Brown, Grey	800-1000
9.	<i>Kambal</i>	<i>Blanket</i>	Black, White, Brown,	400-500
10.	<i>Dun</i>	Rugs and carpets	Multi Coloured	2000-4000(pure wool)
11.	<i>Asan*</i>	Cushion	Multi Coloured	200-300
12.	<i>Wall hanging</i>	--	Cream Base Multi-Coloured Designing	250-300

5.2 Weaving

A variety of woollen articles are woven employing various methods and using different tools. Tools employed for weaving are *PITHIA CHAN* (primitive loom), *ranch* (horizontal looms) shears, knife, beater, *kund a* (supporting stick). *Rug* and *asans* are made on vertical looms (*Thagri*) with knotting technique on the warp yarn followed by weft interlacing after each row. Other woollen articles i.e. shawls blankets, *thulma*, lava etc. are made upon ranch. (Plate-5c)

5.3 Special finish

Extra and surplus yarn is sheared off from the woven material. In some articles like rugs and asans, cutting around the boundaries of the design creates special effects. A special finish called *madhai* is applied in lava. In this process lava is immersed in hot soapy water under pressure until pilling occurs on the surface of the fabric. Fabric is then rinsed and dried in the Sun. Another finish called "teaseling" is done on the rugs using a wooden brush with hooks on it; the knotted pile surface of the woollen article is brushed to remove fluff and lint.

5.4 Loom

According to the Prem Singh of *Bhotia* market, the first vertical loom developed for carpet weaving was called Dan Raanchh or Khadda. He described the loom as a 4'x4' structure consisting of 2 vertical beams, *kharha balli*. The beams are mounted on 2 flat rectangular wooden platforms for balance and support. Another wooden rod called *fatti* is used at the base for extra support. There are 2 pairs of holes in the vertical beams to accommodate both the warp and the cloth beam. After placing the beams through their respective holes, they are tightened by means of screw. At one edge of the cloth beam is a small hole for an iron rod called *Khunti*. *Khunti* is used to rotate the cloth-beam for winding the carpet. When *Bhotias* shifted their attention from carpet weaving to shawl weaving the vertical loom was simplified. The size of the simplified vertical loom is 4'x4'. It consists of a pair of uprights with 2 cross-bars. Cross-bar is about 5" wide and 1.5" thick and 4-5" longer than the size of the frame. There are no extra pegs or beams for support or tensioning devices. The loom rests against the wall while the weaver weaves the carpet. In case of simple loom, the woven carpet moves to the backside of the loom automatically when beating is done. (Plate-5c,4e)

5.5 Carpets

Carpet's weaving is an art form surrounded with the aura of mystique. It has been romanticized to such an extent that it is difficult to separate fact from fancy, there are number of stories and legends associated with the birth of carpets. *Bhotias*, a nomadic tribe, produce carpets mainly for personal use. They have a distinctive style of weaving and designs used. But because of certain reasons, the art of carpet weaving could not flourish in the region.

The main raw materials required for carpet weaving are wool and cotton. Earlier, large amounts of wool were imported from Tibet. Wool obtained from locally reared sheep was also used but the quality of the local wool was inferior to that of Tibetan wool. It was coarse, thick and had short fiber length (1.5 -3.0"). Tibetan wool on the other hand was supple, lustrous and had long fibers (4-6").

Wool was brought from Tibet in form of *balchas*, each weighting up to 12-15 kg. *Balcha* had wool in sliver-like form wound around a rim to form a tire-like structure that made

opening of fibres easy and free form entanglements. The entire process was a five stage process involving opening and cleaning, washing, carding, spinning and dyeing.

• Designing the Carpet Pattern

There is no written record of the technique to guide the weavers to make the designs on carpets. Unlike the **Talim** in Kashmir, *Bhotias* had no graphical or pictorial representation that would guide through the knotting process. It was probably because *Bhotias* produced carpets for personal use at a leisurely pace whereas in Kashmir, carpets being commercial products, emphasis was on both accuracy of the pattern and speed of execution. In *Bhotia* households ladies generally use old carpets to copy the design.

• Colour

Colours used in *Bhotia* carpets are generally bold and brilliant but always harmonious giving warmth to the surrounding. The ground colour is generally dark and provides an ideal base for vibrantly coloured motifs.

Traditionally, the ground color was either of natural colored fleece i.e. dark brown (bhoora), black (tind), fawn (halka bhoora) and occasionally white (sheed) or dyed in dark colours like dark blue(neela), maroon (mahroon) and shades of brown were obtained.

The motifs were often worked out in bright combinations or monochromes and the outline sculpted in white or light colours. The outline gave a 3-dimensional effect to the carpet. The popular colours for motifs in old pieces as observed were turquoise blue, sky blue (aasmani), red, yellow and shades of green. Traditionally, carpets made for bride's trousseau often had yellow as one of the colours. (Plate- 5d, e)

• Motifs

Patterns used in *Bhotia* carpets are often reminiscent of snow-capped mountains and surrounded by the sky and the brown and red earth with flowing waters. The entire surface is not covered with designs but the design is worked into a smaller area and an impression of space is given. Quite often along with the border enclosing the four sides, three circular motifs are worked out in the central field. Sometimes a single pattern is woven in the centre of the field. (Plate-6A)

The designs woven in most of the carpets are essentially central Asian. The motifs are inspired by Mahayana Buddhist symbolism.

1. **Swastika or Laabh Chinh or Shubh Chinh** : It is the most common motif used. Swastika is considered auspicious by the *Bhotias*.
2. **Double key meander design** : Locally called *Matu* design. It is a popular motif. Traditionally, carpets made for bride's trousseau often had yellow as one of the colours used.

A close study of old pieces reveals an influence of Tibetan motifs, motifs like dug the dragon; *Dak and Jira*, the mythological birds and cloud and mountain motifs have been adopted from Tibetan iconography.

• Border Designs

Border is one of the important elements in *Bhotia* carpets. It is often wide and can go upto 8" in width.

1. **Swastika or Laabh Chinh or Shubh Chinh** - It is the most common motif used. Swastika is considered auspicious by the *Bhotias*.
2. **Double key meander design** - Locally called *Matu* design. It is a popular motif for narrow borders.

3. **Changri motif** - This important traditional design was used in combinations with other motifs.
4. **Pearl border** - Locally referred to as *Moti* border is either used as edging of main border or used exclusively as narrow border.

- **Corner Designs**

Corner motifs were either geometrical or floral.

- **Central Field Designs**

Central motifs are both floral and animal motifs.

Floral motifs – (Plate- 8A)

- a. Lotus - Locally referred to as *Kamal* is a popular motif used to represent the *Brahma Kamal*, a flower considered sacred by the *Bhotias*. Lotus flower is represented in simple, geometrical and stylized forms.
- b. *Chameli* - often used as a filler motif in the field.

Animal motifs – (Plate- 8B)

- a. *Dug*, the dragon motif
- b. *Dak* and *Jira*, mythical birds
- c. *Hiran*, deer
- d. Yak

- **Significance of Carpets**

On all auspicious occasions the *Bhotias* use wool in some form or the other. It was found that amongst the *Bhotias* it is imperative to give carpets to the bride in her trousseau as symbol of blessings for marital bliss. The number of carpets given to the bride depended on the financial status of the family.

5.6 Shawl

Shawls were also available only in natural colour of wool i.e. cream, gray and black. Sometimes combinations of differently coloured yarns were used for the creation of beautiful designs in the female shawls. Shawls were constructed on hand looms with finer yarns using either twill or plain weave. Later use of synthetic dyes in red and green colours for dyeing of wool was also come into existence and thus the shawls in various colours for dyeing of wool was also come into existence and thus the shawls in various colours became available to the consumers. Some creative weavers used extra coloured woollen yarns to produce small geometrical motifs like dots, diamond, oval, squares etc. by inserting them with the ground warp and weft yarns along the borders and all over the base of the shawl.

Plate- 1

Traditional female costumes of Bhotia tribe



(a) Traditional *Honju*, *Chhua* and *pangden* worn by married *Bhotia* Female



(b) Traditional *Honju* and *Chhua* worn by *Bhotia* widow female (*pangden* is worn by married women only)



(c) *Bhotia* girls wearing *Honju*, *chhua*, *pangden* and a *kamarband* (long piece of cotton or silk) at waist.



(d) *Bhotia* girls wearing *ghagra*, *blouse* and a *kamarband*

Traditional male costumes of *Bhotia* tribe

Plate- 2



(a) Bhotia man wearing the *Bakhu* and the *Chhuba* which is of very long sleeve touching the ground



(b) Bhotia man wearing the *Chhuba* which is of long sleeve tied at waist by a girdle



(c) Bhotia man wearing the *Bakhu* tucked on one side and tied around the waist by a girdle.

Traditional accessories of *Bhotia* tribe



(d) Traditional *Sompa* shoes of Bhotias



(e) Headdresses



(A) Necklaces of coral amber, pearl and turquoise worn by people of Bhotia tribe

Plate- 3



(B) Women wearing *Pattu* (C) and *Ghunghati* (B) headaddresses



(c) Woman weaving the woollen fabric



(d) The colours used in Bhotia carpets

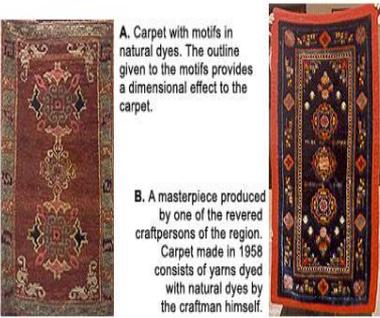


A. Saddle rug with natural coloured black

Plate- 5

(f) The patterns used in Bhotia carpets

(e) Traditional carpets of Bhotia tribe



A. Carpet with motifs in natural dyes. The outline given to the motifs provides a dimensional effect to the carpet.

B. A masterpiece produced by one of the revered craftpersons of the region. Carpet made in 1958 consists of yarns dyed with natural dyes by the craftsman himself.



Carpet made in early 1960s for giving in bride's trousseau. Yellow colour in the motifs is representative of blessings for wealth and fertility.

COMMON BORDER DESIGNS



A. Influence of stylized Tibetan cloud, ocean and mountain motif in Bhotiya carpet (Source: Indian Carpets and Floor Coverings by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, 1966)

B. 'Swastika' or 'Laabh Chinn' motif

C. 'Matu' or double-key meander motif

(a) Common motifs used in Bhotia carpets

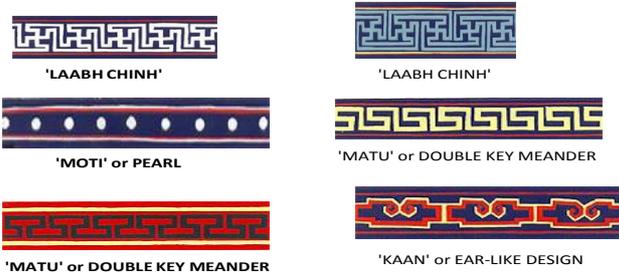
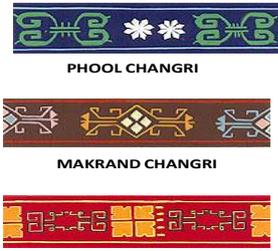


Plate- 6

(b) VARIATIONS OF 'CHANGRI'



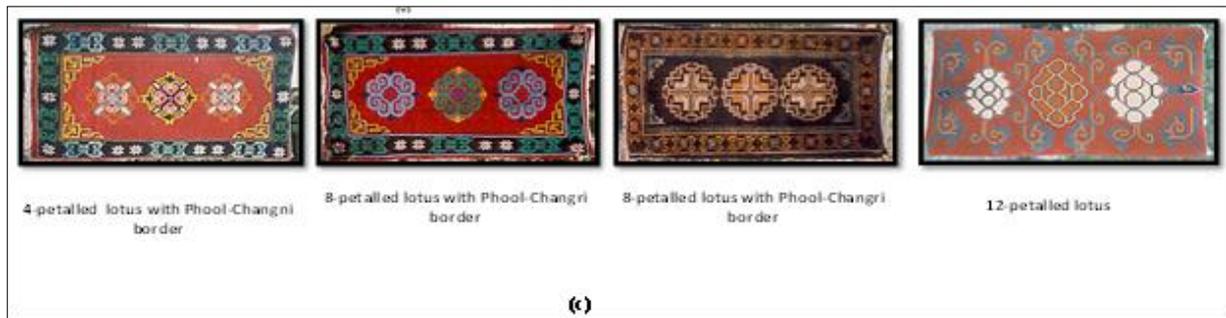
Traditional motifs of Bhotia tribe

(a) OTHER COMMON BORDER DESIGNS



Plate- 7

(b) Geometric and floral border designs



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