



Rural Craft & Cultural Hubs of West Bengal



Department of MSME&T
Government of West Bengal

Hill Crafts & Performing arts





The notion of education through handicrafts rises from the contemplation of truth and love permeating life's activities.

Mahatma Gandhi

Rural Craft & Cultural Hubs of West Bengal

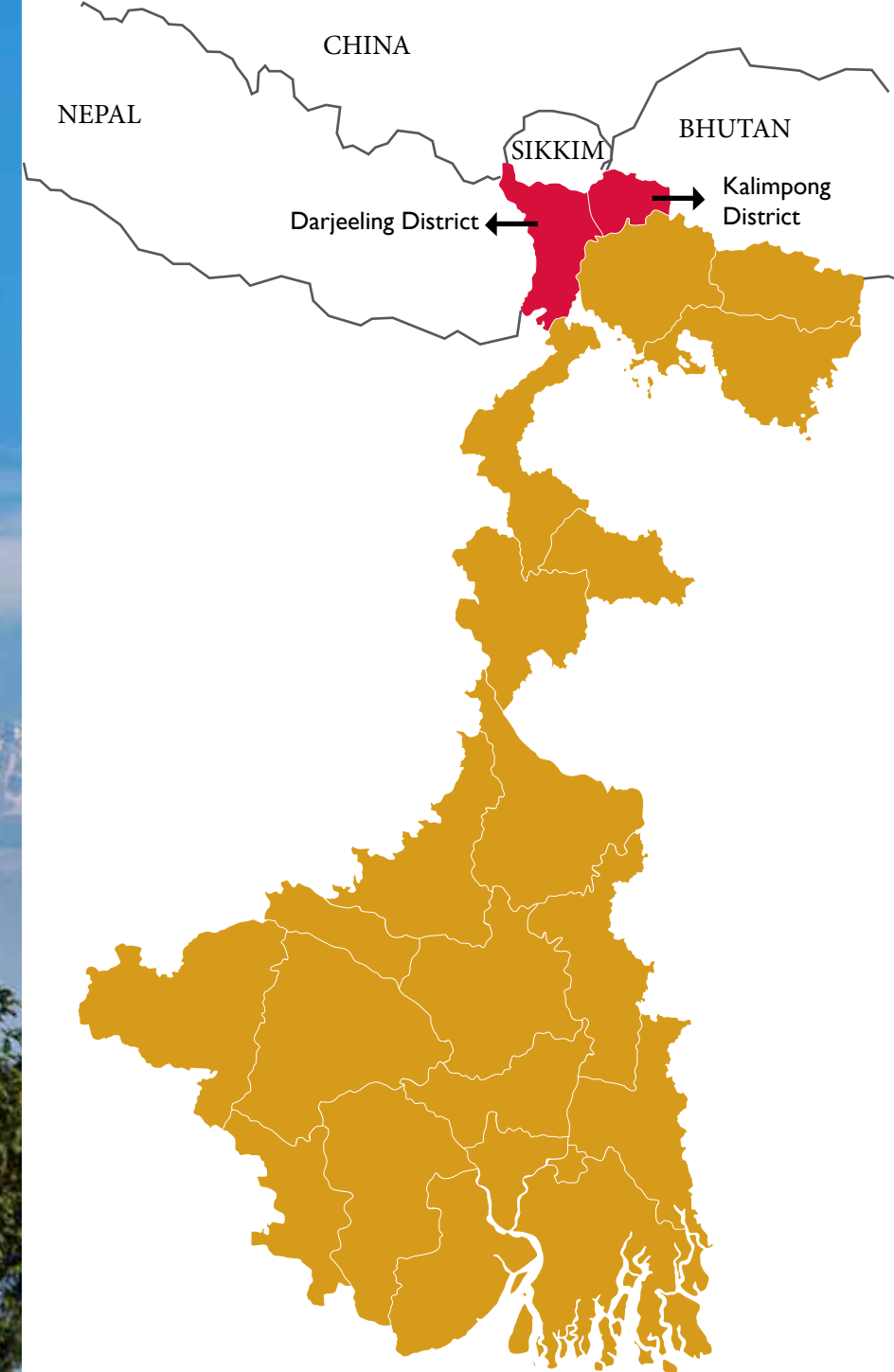


West Bengal is a treasure trove of natural and cultural heritage. The intangible cultural heritage of Bengal is an exemplary instance of the aesthetic lineage of Bengal. Utilitarian lifestyle items like basketry made with date palm leaves and Sabai grass, hand spun and hand woven jute rugs (Dhokra), mats made with cane slips (Sitalpati) or Madurkathi (Madur), pottery, Kantha-spreads, decorative and ritualistic items made out of Shola and others, reflect a curious fusion of indigenous craftsmanship and utility. Bengal's art and craft reflect cultural history, ethnic roots and lifestyle in-tune with nature. Variety of masks, Dokra and metal work, range of indigenous weaves and embroideries, dolls, masks and figurines curved out of wood are examples of Bengal's artistry. The hilly region of Bengal is also infused with immense natural and cultural riches. Culture of Bengal is enriched by the mellifluous tunes of the Baul, Bhawaiya, Bhatiyali singers, rapturous dances of Chau, Raibenshe and Jhumur, storytelling traditions like puppetry and Patachitra, and folk theatres like Gambhira, Banbibir Pala among other folk forms.

The Rural Craft and Cultural Hub (RCCH) Project is an initiative of the Department of Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises and Textiles (MSME&T) and UNESCO aiming to rejuvenate the rich cultural heritage of West Bengal and strengthen rural creative enterprise. The journey started in 2013 and RCCH project currently covers 50000 handicraft and folk artists across the state. It has strengthened the ecosystem supporting transmission of traditional skills in art and craft, fostered direct market linkage, engaged youth in pursuing their traditions and promoted cultural tourism to the villages of the artists. The project is indeed a testimonial to the contribution of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) to sustainable development, social inclusion and also to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Kalimpong and Darjeeling are the two most beautiful hill stations located in the northern tip of West Bengal, adorned by the mighty Kangchenjunga.



Kalimpong

Kalimpong district of northern West Bengal is a hotspot of exquisite natural and cultural heritage. It is located in the foothills of the eastern Himalayas at an average elevation of about 1,250 metres perched on a ridge above the Teesta River.



The social and cultural fabric of the district carry influences of neighbouring communities from Bhutan, erstwhile Tibet, and Sikkim, showcasing a wide cultural diffusion.



Kalimpong used to be a trading gateway between former Tibet and India. Under the British rule, it became a centre of attraction for the Scottish missionaries who contributed to its architectural landscape, schools, and other community support institutions. In Tibetan language, Kalimpong means 'Assembly of King's Ministers'. It is also documented that the name Kalimpong came from the earlier name 'Kaalempung' in Lepcha language, where Kaa means 'we', len means 'gather' and pung means 'ridge'. The Lepchas used to gather on the ridge during summer for sporting events, and hence the name.



Although the original settlers of Kalimpong are the Lepchas, majority of Kalimpong's population includes the Indian Gorkhas who hailed from former Tibet. Other indigenous people of this region are the Bhutias, Limbus, Rais, Sherpas, Mangars, Chettris, Bahuns, Thakuris, Gurungs, Tamangs, Yolmos, Bhujels, Yakkhas, Sunuwars, Sarkis, Damais, and the Kamis.

Known for its bustling bazaars and colourful people, tourism has been the most significant local economy.

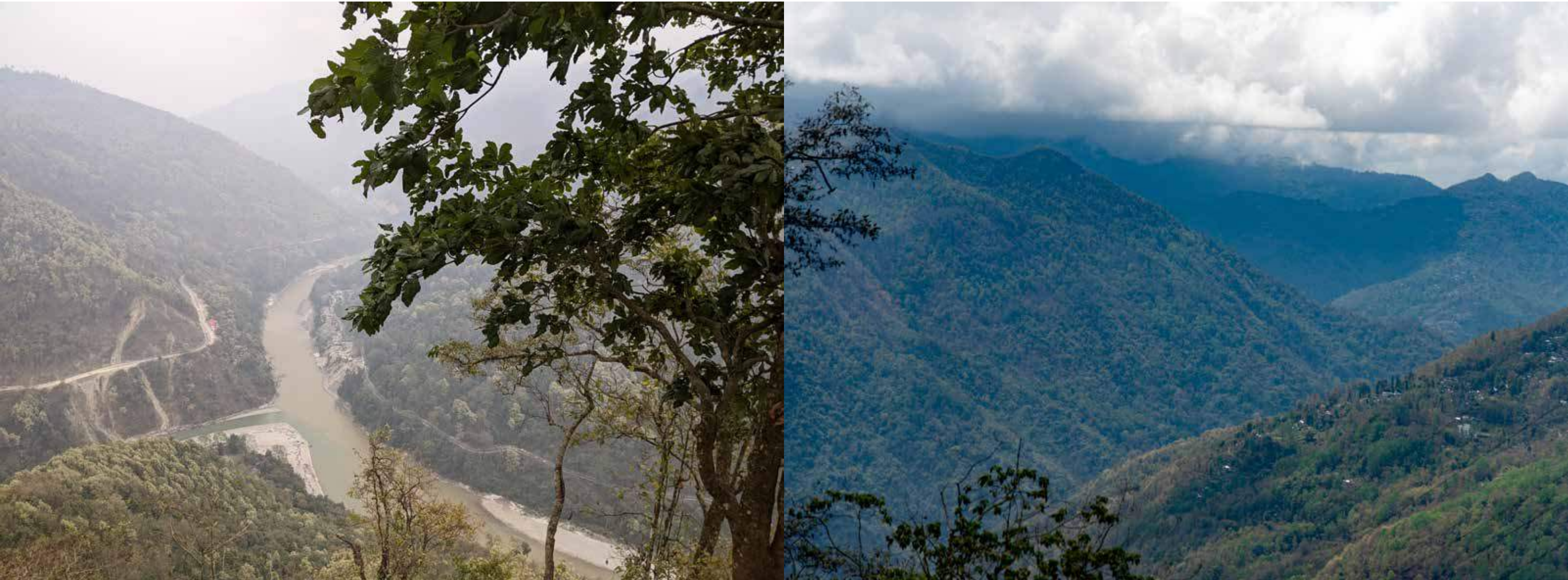


Kalimpong is well known for its wide array of indigenous Orchids and Gladioli, and its industry of flower exports. It is home to the famous Neora Valley National Park.

Darjeeling

Darjeeling district is located in the northernmost region of West Bengal, in the eastern Himalayas, at an average elevation of 2045 metres. The hill station lies between the Mechi and Teesta rivers. Teesta is the major river of Darjeeling.

The place is rich in a diverse range of flora and fauna including a wide variety of rare Orchids. The Lepchas called this place Dorje-ling, or the 'Place of the Thunderbolt'. Darjeeling shares borders with Nepal in the west, Bhutan in the east, Sikkim in the north, and in farther north, lies erstwhile Tibet.





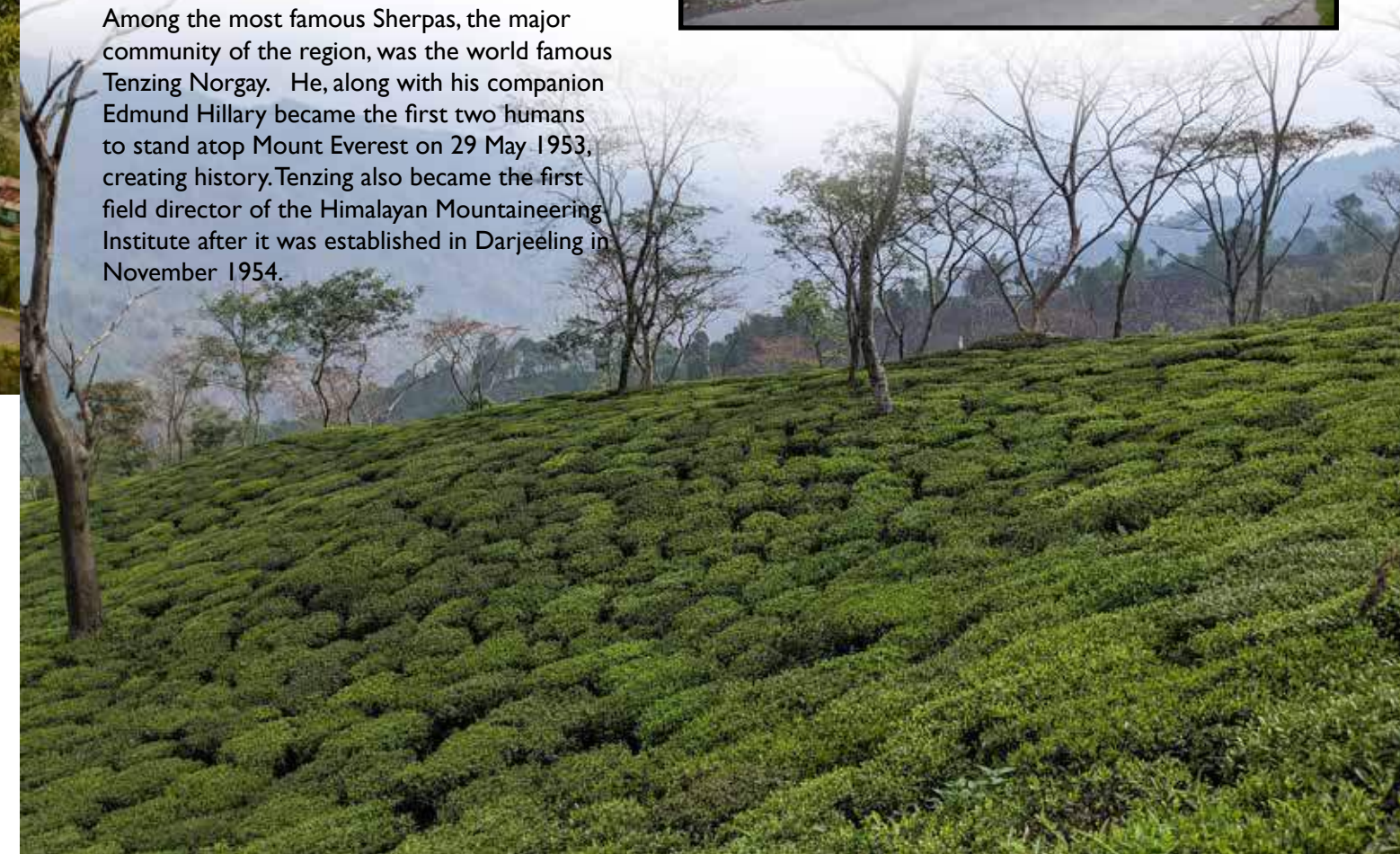
Darjeeling can boast of many jewels in its crown. The Darjeeling Himalayan Railways is a World Heritage Site nominated by UNESCO, for its design that applies bold and ingenious engineering solutions to the problem of establishing an effective rail link across a mountainous terrain of great beauty.

In 2005, Darjeeling tea was given Geographical Indication by the World Trade Organization as much for the protection of the brand as for the development of the region that produces it.

Among the most famous Sherpas, the major community of the region, was the world famous Tenzing Norgay. He, along with his companion Edmund Hillary became the first two humans to stand atop Mount Everest on 29 May 1953, creating history. Tenzing also became the first field director of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute after it was established in Darjeeling in November 1954.



During the different periods of history, migration from these neighbouring regions have led to a multifarious socio-cultural amalgamation shaping what Darjeeling is today. It is documented that since the 1840s, when East India Company had targetted developing tea cultivation for their business in Darjeeling, carts and pack animals were found to travel to Darjeeling for trading fruits, wool, salt, etc., from Nepal and erstwhile Tibet. The special interest of the British in Darjeeling for its beauty and cool climate, dense evergreen forests of sal, oak, semi evergreen, temperate and alpine forests, led them to develop the town as a summer destination by investing in its infrastructure and architecture.





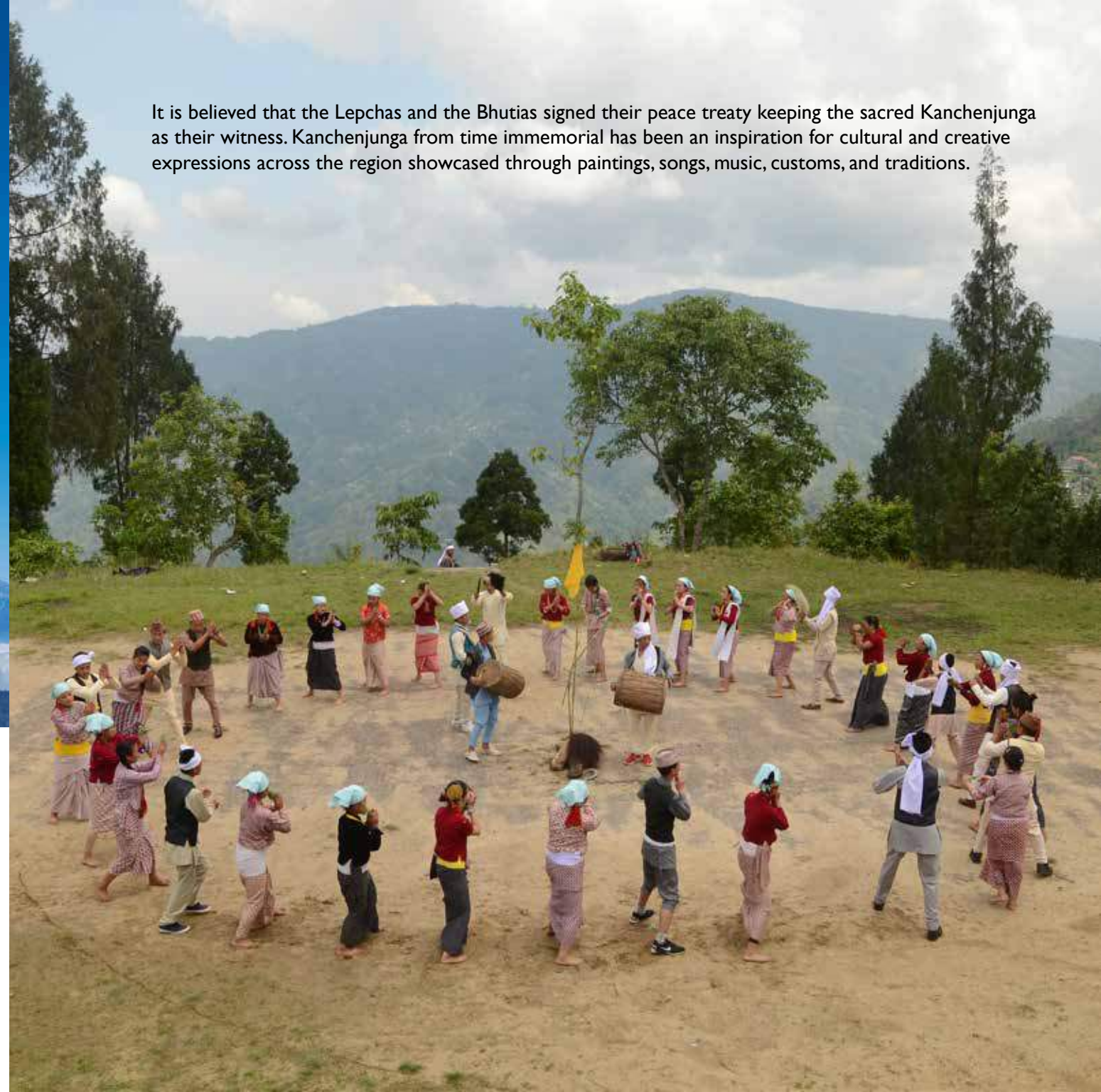
Darjeeling, also known as the 'Queen of Hills', possesses breathtaking natural beauty, and is home to a rich cultural diversity of folk, pop, and rock cultures. Indigenous communities residing here are the Lepchas, Gurungs, Khampas, Gorkhas, Sherpas, Bhutias, Newars, and people from erstwhile Tibet and Sikkim.

MYRIAD SPLENDOR OF THE HILLS



One thing that binds all the inhabitants of Darjeeling and Kalimpong, across various ethnic backgrounds and histories, is the mighty Kanchenjunga, towering at 8,586 meters - the world's third tallest peak. The snow clad Kanchenjunga stands high over Kalimpong and Darjeeling as the omnipotent entity. It is as much revered as a Goddess, as it is loved by the locals as their own.

It is believed that the Lepchas and the Bhutias signed their peace treaty keeping the sacred Kanchenjunga as their witness. Kanchenjunga from time immemorial has been an inspiration for cultural and creative expressions across the region showcased through paintings, songs, music, customs, and traditions.



The hill districts have a wide variety of unique mouth-watering food, including those from Nepal and erst-while Tibet. Among the popular street food delicacies are the momo, noodles, thukpa, sha shaley, etc. Sel roti with aloo achari is one of the most common dishes that is consumed by the local communities during major festivals or any kind of auspicious occasion. Steamed rice and meat preparations constitute essential components of their cuisine. Kalimpong is particularly well-known for its lollipops. Fermented gundruk, sinky, kinema are devoured by the majority. Yak cheese or churpi is a common condiment used in their dishes, or consumed as it is in the hard form. Tibetan thukpa and sekuwa are famous winter time dishes. Their hot soup and spicy flavouring help to keep the body warm from inside. Dalle, a famous local chilli that is grown specifically in this region, is used in various dishes and is also the main ingredient for local sauces, pickles, and chutneys.



Darjeeling tea is the only tea in the world to get protection under the Geographical Indication trademark. The salient features of this tea are its distinctive aroma, and that it is seasonal. Darjeeling tea is produced in a very specific amount, which makes it more valuable. The traditional ways of plucking and processing the tea are still followed in these tea gardens and factories.



The ethnic communities of Kalimpong and Darjeeling bear a strong cultural identity based on their unique languages, attires, customs, and folk forms. They have a wide range of traditional handicrafts, including wood craft, bamboo craft, weaving and embroidery, copper ware, handmade paper, hill paintings, Tibetan jewellery and artifacts. They have a rich repertoire of festivals, musical instruments, and traditional folk music and dance. Fifteen major hill communities, whose intangible cultural heritage have been documented, include the Bhutias, the Lepchas, the Damais, the Dhimals, the Sarkis, the Rais, the Khas, the Gurungs, the Bhujels, the Tamangs, the Kamis, the Sherpas, the Mangars, the Limbus and the Newars.



CRAFTS FROM THE RIDGES



Handmade Papercraft

Kalimpong being the oldest town in the early Silk route and a trading hub, many crafts found their market in this region. The art of paper making came down from Tibet during the trading period. In Tibet, these handmade papers are used to print Buddhist scriptures. Handmade paper industry in Kalimpong is now dependent on a single unit of Gangjong Paper Industry owned by Tsangbu Tshering Bhutia. It is a family business started in 1992.

They produce a wide range of handmade papers following a completely natural process which make their papers pest free, 100% pure, light, and durable.

They also innovate in paper craft items including textured and surface ornamented papers, lampshades, stationeries, etc. The workshop has a small retail outlet with all products where sometimes tourists visit.

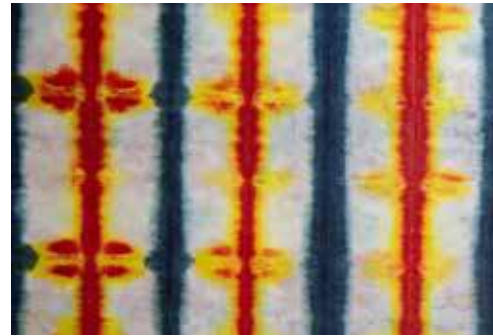
The paper pulp is made from the skin of a shrub called 'Algeri' (Nepalese name: Lokta, scientific name: Daphne) which is about 6 – 8 feet high. The plant grows in the low altitudes of the neighbouring habitat of Lava. The skin of the plant is sourced during September only and the forest department provides NOC to get the raw material.

The barks are soaked in water before the outer skin is peeled off. The peeled skins are sun dried and pressure cooked with caustic soda. After the matter cools for twelve hours, it is further cleaned by hand and is put in the beater machine to beat the content into a pulp. Bleaching is also done at the same time. The bleached pulp is then washed thoroughly, and put in a tank of water which they call vat. In the vat, natural gum is also added. A fine bamboo screen attached to a Japanese net is used by hand to make the paper sheets from the vat content. The bamboo screen used is also handmade by the artisans. The wet paper sheets are put on a table in a stack.



Once they have got 300 sheets, those are taken to a pressure machine to press the extra water out of the sheets. Then, those are sun dried by stretching the sheets individually by hand on a frame. Finally they put the papers in calendaring machine, and then grade the papers as A,B,C. In case of dyeing the paper they use chemical compounds and artificial colour but they have a sound knowledge of natural colours also.





Different types of paper sheets , Batik and tie-dye paper, crushed paper, sandwich paper (with leaves and flowers in the sheets), diaries, envelopes, bags, wine bottle bags, paper lanterns.



Bamboo Craft

Bamboo is one of the most widely available native plants of the hill regions. The Lepcha community is well known for their expertise of carving different bamboo items, including daily utilities, and folk musical instruments for Lepcha festivals. In the village of Upper Santook, there is an enterprise called Anand Bamboo Enterprise with about twenty skilled craftspersons making both utility and other diversified products. In Lower Santook village Lepcha families make traditional moras from bamboo which are sold locally.



Different types of bamboo are used to make different products. Those species include Kaanr baansh, Malli baansh, Choya baansh, Bhalo baansh. Choya baansh and Bhalo baansh are of the best quality used to make bottles, and cups. Kaanr baansh is used to make straws and other smaller items. Maize leaf covers are used for making coasters.



The long bamboo poles are cut into smaller pieces and are boiled for 3-4 hours with Rock salt, and local medicinal plants, such as, Tita Patta, Banmara, Neem, Chuna, Bagena to disinfect the bamboo. The process also helps to remove the first layer of bamboo skin and other stains on it. The boiled bamboo pieces are cooled and are ready for crafting.







Wood Craft

Whenever we think of hills it reminds us about houses of wood with snow on the roof. Wood has been the most important resource for the communities living in the hills, not only for building houses but also for various handicrafts. In Kaffer gaon, a small hamlet adjacent to Lolegaon in the district of Kalimpong resides a small group, named Surya Kiran, of 10 wood-craft artisans. They are involved in house construction, and also make furniture and other utility items mostly with Buddhist motifs and designs.

Various types of woods are used, which are sourced from the nearby forests and also from saw mills present in the town. These species include Gamar, Pine, Teak, Tuni, Kimbu.

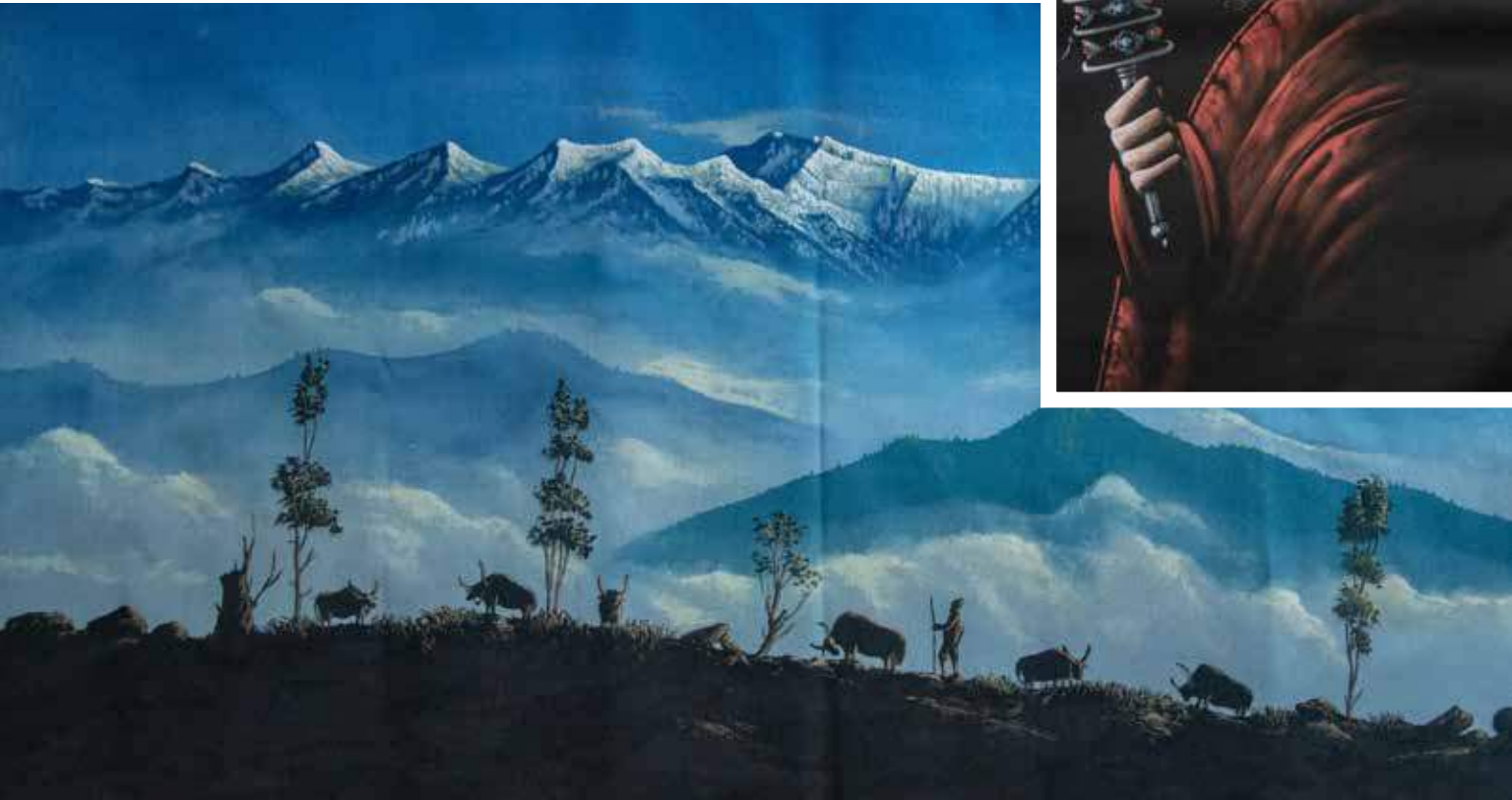
Drying of wood is done for one full year. The pieces of wood are cleaned and skinned. Simple hand tools like a hammer and a chisel are used to carve out different shapes as desired, after marking the measurements with a compass, scale, and a pencil. After the carving is complete, the products undergo finishing. Polishing is done with a polishing machine.





Hill Painting

There are colours everywhere in the hills of Darjeeling and Kalimpong and local artists have been recreating nature on cotton fabrics for years. Hill painting has been one of the most popular souvenirs for the tourists.



In the village of Upper Tanek lives Tika Pradhan, a hill painting artist with great skills. He has been continuing the traditional painting style, and showcases his art in exhibitions and expos all over India.

Direct brush work is applied on fabrics of various sizes for developing the paintings. No pencil outlines are drawn. The paintings are done on cotton cloths with base colours of black or white. Previously, they used to paint with natural colour but gradually fabric colour has become the medium of painting. Nowadays, colours used in hill paintings are Tibetan colour-powders mixed with gum, poster colours, and fabric colours.






Silver Craft

Silver and other metal craftsman, settled in Kalimpong, have been practicing the art of silver craft for generations. The Newar community people are the traders and the Biswakarma communities are the craftsmen.





Tiny silver balls are bought from the market and melted in their workshop to make various crafts. One of the many workshops is of Ganesh Biswakarma and his group by the name Biswakarma Silpakar Sanstha.



Silver balls are poured into a stone container and placed on coal fire for 15-20 mins for melting. The containers are of various sizes and are used according to the quantity of silver required.

The molten silver is then beaten with a hammer to make it flat, giving it a basic shape.

During the process the item is continuously softened by putting it in fire for making the beating easy. The fire is controlled by a hand operated machine.

After the basic shape is created, it is passed on to another craftsman who then further beats it into the desired shapes of bowls, lamps, containers, etc.

After making the product, it is taken to the finishing and engraving section. The hollow area, of the object to be carved, is first filled with a paste of semi thick density made of Sal tree dust, brick dust and Mustard oil. This paste solidifies inside the object making it hard for engraving.

Engraving is a specialized skill borne by only a few who have artistic flairs. The designs are either their own or are given by the traders. The carvings are done with precision with chisel and hammer. After the carving is completed, the solid matter inside the object is melted and scraped out.

Then the object is cleaned and further finished by the master artisan of the unit. A minimum of seven days are required to finish a product. The tools used by the craftsmen are all handmade.



Tibetan Crafts

The **Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre** was set up on 2 Oct 1959, in order to provide emergency relief to the Tibetan refugees who migrated to India. The centre was planned as a self-sufficient rehabilitation space, and registered as a charitable organization with the Govt. of India. The organization evolved to promote various activities such as handicrafts making, artisan training, social welfare, education, cultural activities, etc. Handicrafts have been a major source of income for the residents of this Centre, Tibetan carpet weaving being the most popular.



Weaving carpets has been a traditional art for the Tibetans. The Tibetan Refugee Centre in Darjeeling runs a workshop of carpet weaving.



About 20 artisans are involved in carpet making and they are segregated into three different sections – thread making, weaving, and finishing.



The weaving is done on handlooms. The artisans are paid a wage according to the amount of weaving done. The wage increases according to the complexity of design work.





Carpet weaving is done with cotton and wool. The cotton is bought from Panipat, Kolkata and Bangladesh. The wool is purchased from Ladakh.



The cotton is spun into yarns and are kept in rolls. The wool is first separated according to the colour – black, white and brown. The threads are washed and sun dried. After drying, the yarns are dyed with chemical colours. When the yarns are ready, they are set on the looms. The weavers follow a sample design which is fixed above their looms. Different counts of threads are used for weaving. After weaving is completed, the carpets are sent to the finishing section. They use 5-6 types of scissors with varying shapes and sizes to remove extra threads. For new designs, the pattern is first traced, and then used for weaving reference.





Other crafts include Tibetan thankas, woolen shawls, wood carvings, metal items, and leather products. Their workshop also has different sections such as weaving, carpentry, tailoring and stitching, knitting and painting. The Centre has its own showroom, selling handicrafts to domestic customers. They also export their products. The venture had started with only 4 workers, and has now expanded to more than 600 people.

TUNES AND RHYTHMS OF THE HILLS



Musical Instruments of the Lepchas

Tumbok/Tungbuk is a traditional musical instrument of the Lepcha community. The instrument is carved out of a single piece of soft wood, about 2 ft in length. Goat leather is stretched over a hollowed box and 3 holes are bored into the leather. A bridge is fixed to the leather surface. It has 3 strings attached to 3 tuning pegs, which are stretched across the bridge. The strings are nowadays made of nylon, but in the past they used to be made of nettle fiber. It is usually plucked with a bamboo plectrum. A cloth band is often attached to the instrument so that it can be hung around the shoulder of the performer.



Nimbryok Plith is a traditional flute of the Lepcha community, consisting of 2 end-blown bamboo flutes joined side by side, which produces one tone. Each flute has six holes and is one foot in length. It is played by pressing the holes with fingers, while blowing on the end holes.



Bomphatyut is a Lepcha flute with one hole, which is played to make sounds of birds. These short bamboo pipes can be of various sizes and are used as bird whistles or to create sound effects in music. Bomphatyut was primarily invented for signalling in the jungle, and short distance communication.



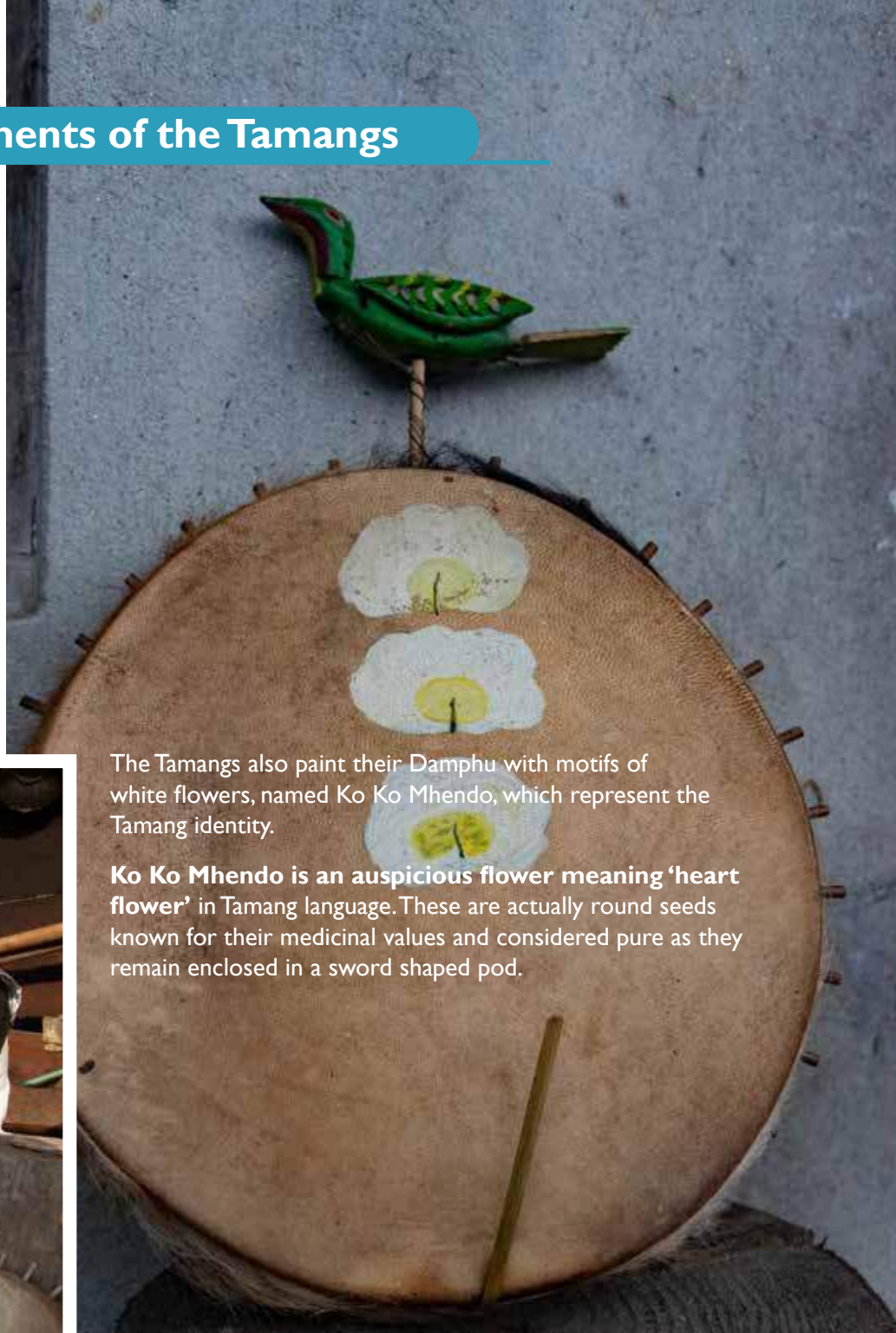
Popatek is a bamboo tube-like percussion instrument which was traditionally used by the Lepchas to scare away the birds and animals from the fields. Nowadays it is often played as an accompanying percussion instrument during their cultural programs. It is held in one hand and struck on the palm of the other hand in a definite rhythm. Popatek is also used to maintain the rhythm of a song.



Musical Instruments of the Tamangs

Damphu is the primary musical instrument of the Tamang community. It is a double-sided disc-shaped drum resembling a Tambourine.

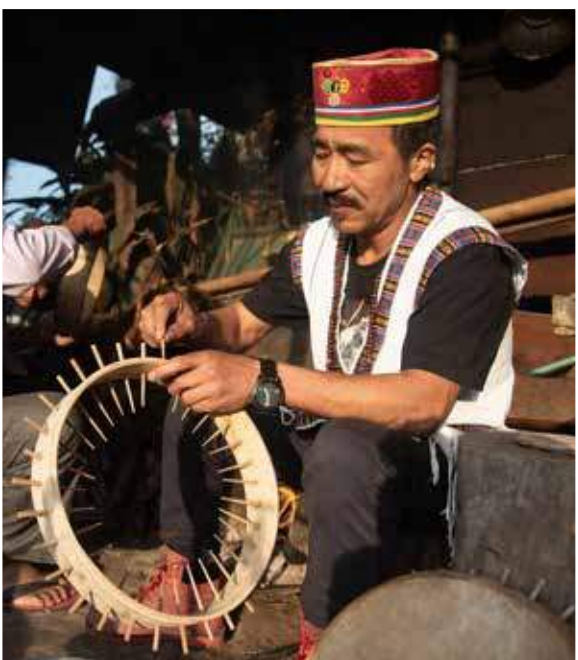
The Damphu often has a green wooden bird attached to it on the top surface which appears to move in a dancing rhythm when the Damphu is played.



The Tamangs also paint their Damphu with motifs of white flowers, named Ko Ko Mhendo, which represent the Tamang identity.

Ko Ko Mhendo is an auspicious flower meaning 'heart flower' in Tamang language. These are actually round seeds known for their medicinal values and considered pure as they remain enclosed in a sword shaped pod.

There is a legend associated with the instrument. It says that Peng Dorje, an ancestor of the Tamang people once killed a beautiful deer and brought it home. Seeing the dead animal, his wife became sad and Peng tried to lift her mood but all effort went in vain. One day he brought a piece of wood, four feet in length, and shaped it into a circle of four inches width. He tightened a goat skin to the frame with 32 wooden spikes. Peng started playing this new instrument he made, singing songs on the gods and his ancestors. All the creatures from the jungle started dancing to the tunes. His wife forgot her sorrow and joined in the dance. A green colour bird, 'Danpha', danced so beautifully that Dorje decided to name his instrument after her. The Damphu soon became an integral part of the lifestyle of the Tamangs.



Tungna is another very important musical instrument of the Tamangs which is played along with the Damphu on all auspicious occasions, and festivities such as the ushering of New Year or harvest seasons. It is a plucked string instrument having four strings which are anchored to the keys and body at both ends. The bridge acts as a cantilever thus maintaining the tension of the strings. The front hollow sound box is covered with stretched animal skin. The musicians play the Tungna and sing songs, which they compose themselves.



DIVERSITY OF THE HILLS



The diverse ethnicities of Darjeeling and Kalimpong have much to offer in terms of their traditional folk dances, songs, music, and festivals. A glimpse of some of the prime and unique cultural practices are presented here.

Sakela dance of the Rais

The Rais belong to the ethnic group of the Kirats. They are spread across Nepal, Bhutan, as well as Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Sikkim of West Bengal. Sakela is the major festival of the Rais which is organized to pay tribute to their ancestors. It is organized during the full moons during May, and November to December time period. The first full moon festival is also termed as Sakewa by some of the Rai communities. During this festival they worship natural elements such as the sky, earth, rivers, and forests, and the dead. The traditional dance of this festival is called Silli, which has different versions too. Usually performed by both men and women the dance form portrays their daily activities, agricultural practices, imitation of birds and animals, etc.



Lakhe dance of the Newars

Newars are a distinct cultural community of Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman origin, who historically inhabited the Kathmandu valley of Nepal. Many Newars reside in Darjeeling and Kalimpong. Their main religions are Hinduism and Buddhism, and their language is Newari. Newars have continued their age-old tradition and practices, and pride themselves as the true custodians of their religion, culture and civilization. Lakhe dance is a popular dance form where the dancers enact the role of a demon called Lakhe, and dance vigorously wearing a mask, accompanied by songs. Lakhe is performed during the Indrayatra festival. Majipa Lakhe is another dance form, and Mepuu Lakhe or Mechya Lakhe is based on the concept of the body emitting fire. Kati Pyakha is a stick dance performed on auspicious occasions and harvest seasons.



Naumati Baja music of the Damais

The Damai community is an ethnic group native to the Himalayan region, especially the eastern parts. The Damais residing in Darjeeling perform Deora dance which requires the traditional Naumati Baja, literally meaning nine instruments. The Naumati Baja is a major tradition associated with folk dances of Nepal, which are also important treasures of the cultural heritage of Darjeeling. This ensemble of nine instruments is played during certain auspicious occasions like a wedding.



Baja Puja is a ritual performed to purify and worship Naumati Baja before the playing of the instruments. The artisans start their performance with Dabbling, and then play Mangaldhun, followed by Kheyali. The nine instruments are Narshingha, Karnaal, Shehnai, Voice Shehnai, Tyamko, Dholaki, Jhyamta, Bautaal, and Dama.

Senggeh Garcham dance of the Tibetans

Senggeh Garcham, also called Singhi Chham literally means lion dance. It is a ritual dance, an unique Tibetan tradition practised by various Tibetan communities spread across North Bengal, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh in India.

The dancers perform in a lion costume that represents the snow lion. The snow lion is a divine animal and an emblem of Tibet. The snow lion represents power, strength, courage, and joy which are emanated through this traditional dance form.

This dance is usually performed during Panglaspool festival, where two men wear a traditional snow lion costume representing the white snow lion having a bluish mane. There may be multiple pairs wearing the lion costume and performing the dance. The dance is accompanied by a single drummer.



Tibetan Opera is a centuries old classical theatre form performed in Tibetan culture. It is called 'Lhamo' or 'Ace Lhamo' in Tibetan language, and involves performances with music, dance, and dialogues. The performers wear colourful masks. The subjects of the dance drama are mostly based on Indian Buddhist folk tales, and historical events from Tibetan civilization. The performances are known for their elements of comedy and satire.



Chu Faat dance of the Lepchas

Chu Faat dance is a ritual dance of the Lepcha community which is performed to celebrate nature and to offer tribute to Mt. Kanchenjunga. The Lepchas are the indigenous people of the eastern Himalayas, residing in the hills of West Bengal, as well as Nepal and Bhutan.

The Lepchas are traditionally nature worshippers, and believe that they are the natural descendants of the mountains. Mt. Kanchenjunga is their primary deity. The word Chu means 'snow-clad mountains' and Faat means 'to worship'. Through this dance, they pay respect to sacred nature as their supreme provider- mountains, rivers, lakes, trees, and waterfalls. Lepcha folk tunes and music are based on various natural sounds of nature, animals, birds and insects. Lepcha folk dances are also inspired by the movements of animals, birds, and fishes.



Chyabrung dance of the Limbus

The Chyabrung dance is a traditional dance practised by the Limbu community. The Limbus are a Tibeto-Burman indigenous group of the eastern Himalayan region, majorly found in parts of Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim, but also scattered in smaller numbers across Darjeeling and Kalimpong.



Chyabrung in Limbu language means a traditional drum, which is also called Kay. The drum is an oblong shaped percussion instrument made of wood and leather, about 12 to 14 inches in diameter and with a length of about 22 to 24 inches. The drum is suspended from around the neck of the drummer with a cord, and is played only by the male members. It is the main instrument played during all auspicious occasions, and festivals such as Chasok Tangnam. They also play it during harvest dances and full moon festivals. The performers dance to the rhythmic beating of the drum depicting graceful movements of wild animals and birds.





Maruni dance of the Mangars

Maruni dance is one of the oldest and famous Nepalese folk traditions practised by the Mangar or Mangar community. The Mangars are an indigenous community of western Nepal and north-east India. They also reside in Darjeeling district where they immigrated over the years. Maruni dance is customarily performed during the Tihar festival, which is one of the biggest Nepali festivals.

In this dance, the main dancer is a male dressed like a woman. The dance is performed to the beat of a Madal. This dance is believed to be of divine origin, having its links to Hindu mythology. The role of the person playing the Madal is considered to be the most important. The dance begins with the worship of the Madal, the attire, and other ornaments which the dancer wears, followed by offering respect to all gods and goddesses. The other folk dances and songs of the Magar Community are Kauda/Chudka/Kanraha, Ghatu, Jhorra, Yanimaya, Sunimaya, Salaijo, Rung, Hurra, Bon Lama Nach, and many more.



Tamang selo folk song of the Tamangs

The Tamangs are a Tibeto-Burmese ethnic group residing in Nepal, southern Bhutan and northern India, especially in Darjeeling and Kalimpong.



The most well-known Tamang folk song is Tamang selo, which is accompanied by their traditional instruments of Damphu, Madal and Tungna. Tamang selo upholds the Tamang culture, and is performed during Sonam Lochar, the beginning of the Tamang new year. Various folk dances are also performed during the festival. The Tamang selo songs are popular for their witty and humorous nature along with communicating the deep philosophical meaning of life.



Syabru dance drama of the Sherpas

The Sherpa community is one of the Tibetan ethnic groups native to the eastern Himalayan region. In West Bengal, they mostly reside in the Darjeeling district. They practice Buddhism with a mix of shamanism from the Bon religion.



One of the main traditional dances of the Sherpas is Syabru. In Sherpa language, syab means 'feel' and ru means 'rhythm'. It is a group dance, performed by both men and women, in every festival as well as in various auspicious events and gatherings. The performers in their traditional attire dance in a line or in a circle singing traditional folk songs. This dance is also performed by some of the other Himalayan communities.



Ghatu dance of the Gurungs

The Gurungs are an indigenous ethnic group of Nepal, who are also scattered across northern India, including Darjeeling. A rich cultural tradition of the Gurungs is Ghatu dance — a slow and rhythmic Nepalese folk dance with clockwise and anti-clockwise twirling of the performers.



The dance is performed mainly during Baisakh Purnima (full moon) festival, which is the birthday of Lord Buddha. Ghatu dance is a narrative folk performance, enacting scenes from local mythology, which can go on for hours leading the dancers into a trance-like state. This dance begins with the invocation of nature spirits. Along with the Gurungs, Ghatu dance is also performed by a few other ethnic communities.



Dhimal dance of the Dhimals

Dhimals belong to the Kirati ethnic group who reside mostly in southern Nepal and Darjeeling district of West Bengal. They are mostly engaged in agriculture and fishing, and worship nature. Dhimal dance is usually performed on rainy days, before they go out for fishing. This dance is also performed during various festivals of the Dhimals.



They have different songs for fishing, paddy cultivation, village rituals and the rains. They have an array of traditional musical instruments, about twelve, which they play during performances. These include Dhol, Tunjai, Unni, Chonga-Medong, Khuidhuika, Chi Dhuika, Dotara, Gumna, Marchunya, most of which are made of bamboo.





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