

Chapter 35

Thangka Paintings and Sikkim's Heritage Art as a Pillar of Cultural Identity in Tourism

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will explore the convoluted relationship between Thangka paintings and heritage tourism in the mountainous region of Sikkim, India. Thangka paintings, a traditional Buddhist art form, serve as cultural artefacts and tourist attractions, playing a critical role in preserving Sikkimese cultural identity. Through a detailed examination of the art's history, religious significance, and evolving role in the tourism industry, the chapter will present an analysis of how heritage tourism can support the sustainability of local culture.

INTRODUCTION TO THANGKA PAINTINGS

Thangka a scroll painting made on canvas had a great influence on the Buddhist people and is considered a mystic art in Buddhism which looks complicated and is a composite of three-dimensional objects. Thangka is a beautiful wall hanging painting i.e. is further decorated with gold, silk, and wood, and while making also the artists have to maintain a certain discipline. Dorji (2003) Further added that Thangka meaning seal, talks about the life of Buddha and the teachings of Buddha and it's a symbol of spirituality. Thangka has been used for meditation purposes for the transformation of the practitioner and to develop inner strength. Thangka paintings are a very important part of Buddhism and its practice as it is considered an integral part of Buddhism. Peng (2014) explored various arts and crafts of Tibet, which was considered an important aspect of Tibetan Buddhism. But the paintings have religious value in front of local people and have always been crucial in both the religious and ordinary Tibetan people because the paintings illustrated the importance of Buddha and the life of Buddha in picture form. Paintings have become one of the ways to transfer the knowledge of Buddhism from one generation to another in a pictorial form, they have learned the traditional techniques, methods, and materials used in paintings which are considered an important part of learning as an artist.

The history of thangkas dates back more than 1400 years Wang (2014) Thangkas are Tibetan Buddhist paintings on cotton or silk, usually depicting Buddhist deities, subjects, or mandalas. Thangkas are traditionally stored unframed and rolled up when not on display, fixed on some textile backing, with additional silk covering on the front. Thangka is a scroll

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painting made on canvas, which is hung in a Buddhist monastery or a family altar and carried by monks in ceremonial processions. It is a very unique form of art that belongs to the Buddhist community, in Tibetan the word 'than' means Flat, and the suffix 'ka' stands for Painting. The Thangka is thus a kind of painting done on a flat surface but which can be rolled up when not required for display. Gardner (1988) observed the Thangka paintings are considered religious paintings among the Buddhist community, which was unknown to the rest world unless the people started traveling across the Himalayas. Thangka paintings gave illustration to the people about the presence of God in paintings form which importance spread among other communities as well. Rawat et al. (2021) thangka paintings aid in the understanding of Buddhism in a better way which are intricate paintings of Buddha, Buddhist deities, or mandalas. Namgyal (2014) It is considered a cultural art of Tibet and has placed a very important place in the heart of Tibetan Buddhists because it has spiritual value for the people and it is not a painting for the locals it is considered a religious purpose. Shrivastava (2018) However, the development and origin of art and craft in the region across North Asia with the influence of Buddhism and paintings has been considered as a major source of information about Buddhism. Lama (2016) also found that the art of mastery in meditation was found in painted tapestries or linen scrolls thangkas religious representations of deities and religious figures generally depict spiritual or historical events and are typically painted on cotton or line. Shaitel (1991) further stated that thangkas are complex objects with intricate iconography and technical construction, and the conservators must be fully aware of a thangka's religious and cultural aspects before attempting treatment. Combining media such as textile, painting, wood, and sometimes leather and metal, thangkas require a balanced approach in conservation treatment. Bhutia et al. (2018) also studied Thangka. This religious art originated in Tibet for meditation purposes and has played a significant role in the lives of the Buddhist people, as those paintings have a considerable role to play in the lives of locals. This art has been an integral part of the local people as it is the way to express their culture and traditions to the world. Peng (2014), however, found it was considered an essential aspect of Tibetan Buddhism, and the art skill has been passed from generation to generation. More importantly, the style has to be the same, and the artists must follow strict discipline to be part of this art. Kapsner et al. (2011) further illustrated that the painters needed to follow a systematic way to draw Thangka, which included six steps for making. The first step is the preparation of the painting surface. Second comes the establishment of a design on that surface using a sketch or transfer. The third step involves the initial coats of paint, followed by steps four and five: shading and outlining. The sixth and final step consists of several finishing touches. As a Thangka painting is designed to be rolled up in a scroll fashion, it is painted on cloth with a surface that has two layers: the support and the ground. The most common cloth, or support, used today is lightweight Indian cotton, which features a fine but slightly open weave. This open weave allows the 'gesso'—a type of white paint—to settle more evenly. This underlying material holds the subsequent layer of ground and paint. Once the artist has acquired the cloth, it is washed, dried, and cut to fit the wooden frame upon which it is stretched. This must be done carefully to avoid any bulging, once the fabric is secured onto the frame, three steps are taken to prepare the cloth for painting. First is the sizing of the cloth, which involves preparing a warm solution of hide glue that is applied to both sides of the cloth using a large brush or a wadded rag. After the cloth is saturated, any excess glue is removed, and the cord connecting the cloth to the stretcher is tightened. The canvas is then set aside to dry.

The second step involves coating the cotton support with gesso, which is a mixture of chalk or white clay combined with a size solution until it reaches a consistency similar to buttermilk. This mixture is strained to eliminate lumps and is applied to both sides of the cloth in thin, even coats. The artist checks the cloth after the first coat dries to determine if a second coat is necessary; if light penetrates through, another application is made. The final step is polishing the surface until it is perfectly smooth and ready for painting Kapsner et al. (2011).

Jackson (2012) stated that there is also extensive effort while making Thangka paintings, and there has to be more extra effort for beginner artists because the painting process is very different from Thangka paintings. The colour has a difference that makes it interesting. Thangka making is more often regarded as spirituality and is believed to bring merit to the painter. Tarlow (2011) states that we see art anywhere we find that embodiment of the soul in communication with others' souls. As such, we may also think of both cultural and religious expression as a form of art. Doza (2013), however, found that the painting has a great connection with the Pala dynasty. This art form was very much influenced and started growing throughout the country. Kapsner et al. (2011) state that the origin of the painted image of the Buddha is believed to have emerged in central India, in the area now known as Bihar. It is said that during the Buddha's lifetime, two kings, Udayana and Bimbisara, who lived in the region, used to exchange gifts. One day, King Bimbisara, upon

receiving a priceless gem from King Utayana, decided, after much thought, to have an image of the Buddha painted on cloth to present in return. After receiving the Buddha's consent, Bimbisara sent some of his court artists to paint the Buddha's portrait. However, when the artists looked upon the Buddha, they were so filled with wonder that they were unable to draw. In response, the Buddha led one of the artists to a clear pool and instructed him to paint his likeness from the reflection in the water. The artist complied, surrounding the portrait with images of the twelve links of dependent arising and some words of religious advice, as recommended by the Buddha. When Utayana saw the gift, he was greatly moved and, later that day, after prayers and meditation on the symbols of the twelve links, he attained the path of seeing. Consequently, this style of painting came to be known as 'The image of the Sage taken from the water' (Chu-len-ma).

Xue (2024) found that it was considered an essential aspect of Tibetan Buddhism, and the style of painting they have learned has been passed through many generations. Jackson (2012) studied the art style, which makes it look different from the other and even different in the style of the paintings. It was a teaching tool for Buddhism during ancient times as it was easy to carry from one place to another. More interestingly, it has been nomadic for the ages since it came in contact with the different region's artists. Straub (2011) further elaborates on the significance of Thangka paintings and the methods used for making them, which have been different since ancient times. Even the style of paintings and the selection of thread and colors to use in the art have been exciting parts for the painters. Every art has its own identity and the color used in it. The paintings have been using different techniques since they started; Thangka's importance and true meaning, even its color processing, is also essential and needs to be understood. Maki et al. (2011) stated that there is a need for the prominence of Thangka art. They intended to study the iconography to understand the significance of this beautiful art and its uses in our lives, which helped the researcher understand the idea and purpose of this painting. Bhatta (2016), however, the enhanced knowledge and the importance of art has also touched down in the tourism sector, which not only spread the knowledge of art but also brought opportunities in terms of employment to the local people, which enhanced not only the income sector but also the upliftment and enhancement of knowledge and the respect towards thangka by the other part of the world. Loh (2002) highlighted the spiritual significance of thangka paintings, emphasizing their message that transcends mere artistic form and design. Regarded as sacred art, each thangka serves a specific purpose and possesses its own uniqueness. The study aimed to preserve the value of this art for both present and future generations, revealing that the conservation of thangka paintings is a complex and challenging process due to their intricately embroidered cloth. The researcher noted that while there are various perspectives and approaches to thangka conservation, differing methods proposed by conservators complicate the decision-making process. Bhutia et al. (2018) the increasing demand for thangka paintings due to increasing demand has been a source of motivation for local artists and it has been noted that more opportunities they are getting in terms of explaining the beauty of thangka paintings to tourists and the local communities have great respect for the artists as they are being considered as a teacher.

Similarly, Bhatta (2016) examined the role of art in the development of the tourism industry, highlighting its ability to create employment opportunities for local communities, both directly and indirectly. Art, in its many forms, is inherently unique and visually appealing. Thangka art, known for its spiritual essence, is particularly significant on a global scale. Traditionally crafted from mineral pigments, these vibrant paintings not only showcase various shades and colors but also attract tourists with their rich artistic heritage.

HERITAGE OF SIKKIM, INDIA

The identity of Sikkim is layered by the cultural, religious, linguistic, and racial diversity of the groups residing there, along with the class, educational, and occupational differentiation within them. Broadly speaking, there are three main ethnic categories in Sikkim: the Lepchas, the Bhutias, and the Nepali groups Arora (2007). Sikkim, a small and beautiful state in northeast India, is renowned for its rich art, culture, and traditional craftsmanship. Its exotic location in the Himalayas adds to its unique charm (Bhutia & Sharma, 2018). The social structure of Sikkim was invariably framed on the Buddhist pattern prevailing in Tibetan society. This structure was rightly preserved and strictly maintained for more than a decade, with the indigenous tourism of Sikkim giving immense pleasure to its culture and arts. Hiltz (2003) further explained that Sikkim was an independent country that became part of India. Since then, they have been doing their best to maintain their cultural art and tradition, a significant part of the locals until today. The Himalayas region

of Sikkim has been one of the hot spots for mountain tourism in India, and it has been known for its natural, beautiful mountains, culture, and history (Chakrabarti, 2010). Sikkim is a land of culture and heritage the beautiful mountains make it unique, and the frozen lake and the old Silk Route all make this small place more attractive among tourists (Bhutia et al., 2018). This figure of natural attractions plays a significance in the natural beauty of Sikkim. Its growth towards the development of community development through sustainable approaches has shifted the role of the economy through pro-poor tourism development and the economic significance of tourism, and its growth is little surprise that there is particularly in remote and backward areas (Chakrabarti, 2010). Tourism in the Indian Himalayan Region has shown a perpetual and increasing trend over many decades despite several disasters and crises (Demkova et al., 2022). In the Himalayas, rural tourism is often known for the cultural/heritage of the tourist destinations that provide a holistic development for tourist destinations like Sikkim, where the Indigenous communities provide community development through economic and social benefits, and it is an approach to the sustainable development of rural tourism through the community participation (Fuchs, 2024; Sarkar, 2023). Rizal et al. (2013) found that the tourism organisations of northeast India, with the government's involvement in developing tourism in this region, have met the requirement. The beauty is that the state has its own identity among the tourists because of the ethnicity of different groups. The importance of tourism growth for the economic and cultural benefits in destinations like Sikkim, and to manage negative and positive impacts effectively, sustainability must be integrated into tourism development strategies (Sarkar, 2023; Das, 2019). Bhattacharya (2008) observed that tourism needs development, which should be done with proper planning and a proper tourism management system to get the desired results. Paul (2013) found that the perception of tourists towards the infrastructure plays an essential aspect in deciding places to visit as bare necessities are mandatory to maintain a certain level of satisfaction towards the tourist, and based on that, the selection process of a destination in the context of tourists. Konar et al. (2024) emphasize their travel behavior and intention among millennials, identifying several positive consequences when they visit a destination, and their few infrastructures can provide the tourist with positive results. Developing the millennial's travel outlook through virtual reality technologies at tourism destinations (Konar et al., 2025) can significantly help marketers position themselves uniquely, attract more potential customers in the future, and maintain sustainability. Bhutia & Sharma (2018) furthermore empathized with the origin of Buddhism in Sikkim and their cultural belief system, symbols, architecture, and evolving culture of the monasteries. Sharma et al. (2010), however, observed that the handicraft and handloom of Sikkim, which are considered the real art of their local and their tradition and are deeply rooted towards their culture and arts with their old traditional style of doing things, included handloom weaving, Thangka paintings, wooden mask making, and wood carving are their typical conventional art form. Koirala (2011) added that handicrafts are essential to a place's culture and tradition. Many are trying to make this available through international trade fairs.

Sikkim is a state based on the tourism industries and other traditional agriculture, mainly focusing on handicrafts and handlooms as the crucial skills of the locals and the beautiful landscape, which provides a treat to the eye of the tourists. Sikkim relies relatively on the tourism business, which offers maximum jobs for the local people. Further, Sikkim is known for its culture and tradition, but at the same time, understanding the value of the culture is also an essential task for the local communities to understand tourists. Sikkim, one of the northeast states of India, is considered one of the most beautiful states, and it lies in the Eastern Himalayas. Sikkim is regarded as a beautiful state of the Indian Union. It is famous for its magnificent views, culture, and traditions, and the welcoming nature of the locals has influenced many tourists to travel to this place. Bora (2009) studied the tourism industry in Sikkim and the glance of beauty in its snow-covered Himalayas, which are a beautiful small state of India known for its natural beauty and ethnic groups. Das et al. (2014) found opportunities for Sikkim tourism and the development of ecology; Sikkim is the habitat for more than 5000 species of angiosperm, including ecology and natural beauty, which makes the state different from the rest. Saha et al. (2015) studied the various districts of Sikkim, has the potential for the development of tourism in the hilly regions of India, especially Sikkim because, as the study showed, the state has a lot of attractions not only the eco-system of the place but also culture and tradition and this could be the positive light for the Sikkimese people to start for the tourism business.

Das et al. (2014) further studied the local community's perception of tourism development in their state and its contributions to the economy, culture, society, and environment. Chakrabarti (2010), however, analysed the economy's growth with the help of tourism, which has been an essential source of income for the local community. Maji et al. (2016) that handicrafts and handloom are also a part of their contribution to the development of tourism, which has been considered

one of the aspects of cultural tourism, are displayed, and these rural artifacts have gained popularity among tourists. However, Rizal et al. (2013) observed that the tourism industry, which is the backbone of the Himalayan states of India, plays a significant role in the local income of Sikkim. It has been doing great in the development of tourism infrastructural development and other services lacking in the transportation facilities for the state, which could be an alarming point for the development of tourism because the tourism industry is the service industry. It is essential to provide the desire of the customer. Saha et al. (2015) further added that the geographical condition of a place is an important aspect that contributes to tourism. Sikkim's geographic location has been a boon to developed tourism as a destination motive to travel. Sikkim is a small but beautiful state located in the Himalayas. Its magnificent view offers tourists many opportunities for traveling; the fresh air, green vegetation, and the peaceful nature of the locals have been great places to visit.

However, McKercher et al. (2003) studied cultural tourism as the basis of the trips and showed that travel motivations and activity preferences influenced the type of tourist individuals. This helps the tourist understand the preferred experience and gain more in-depth knowledge of cultural tourism choices. It helps to learn how to participate in cultural activities. Cultural tourists are well motivated to travel further with the emergence of physical and cultural motivations, and the influence factor helped the service provider. Gulati (1995) added that the culture of the local people of Sikkim is mixed now but still cultivated its importance for its culture and heritage, and they have been trying to keep it safe in the form of arts and handlooms. Hence, they have understood the significance of their identity and culture for a long time. Art and crafts were essential aspects for the ethnic people of Sikkim, so that's the reason they still have the skill of weaving carpets, blankets, art, paintings, and beautiful wooden carved tables, which are very famous among tourists. They also make ornaments of different stones; the rituals are an essential cultural aspect of the local community heritage and tradition, which has become an exciting discovery for tourists. Given the unique cultural and environmental landscape of Sikkim, the local community's perspectives on tourism and its impacts.

Thangka Paintings as a Pillar of Cultural Heritage Tourism: Cultural tourism is considered the oldest form of tourism that can be counted from the 16th century to the time of the Grand Tour when the elite class of Europe travelled to know the culture. Defining Cultural Tourism is a complex task as its definition changes from person to person; also stated by McKercher & Du Cros (2002), cultural tourism has as many definitions as the number of cultural tourists. As identified by Mac Cannell (1994) that all the tourism experience is a kind of artistic experience, and Smith (1989) stated that Cultural tourism is a broader category and is sub-divided into ethnic tourism and heritage tourism furthermore the researcher added that culture tourism is itself a category and is defined as the travel to know the traces of the human lifestyle that is fading away, it also involves the folklores, art, performances and festivals and Thangka paintings is the culture heritage of Sikkim's tourism which is considered it as one of significant religious for the Buddhist community.

Thangka art, a Buddhist art, has been a significant part of Buddhist culture since the early days. Its unique craftsmanship and profound religious and cultural meaning attract more and more art enthusiasts. Bhaumik (2020) stated that cultural patterns have been gathered from ancestors and passed over the successful generation. Some cultures captured through patterns using econometric analysis of various technical research on cultural heritage related to Buddhist iconography have been presented, is been transferred from one generation to another so, that the art and culture would survived through. Wangmu et al. (2011) studied that culture and history play at present as eventually, this will be a motivation factor for the development of tourism significant roles in the development of tourism. Still, the problem arises when it comes to preserving culture and heritage. Tourism development is always necessary for a state like Sikkim because of its rich culture in many forms. Thangka painting is one of the essential aspects for developing cultural tourism, but to keep this painting's originality. Chakraborty et al. (2010) attempt to bring awareness of sustainability, a crucial aspect of tourism these days, as the tourism industry is growing simultaneously, and the conservation of culture is significant as the development of tourism brings the mixture of culture and adoption of another culture and traditions. Bhutia & Sharma (2018) studied that the cultural significance of Thangka paintings has motivated the painters. It was found that these paintings not only provided employment opportunities with the increasing demand for the thangka paintings but at the same time the more tourists became aware of the art the demand had increased but also gave meaning to life. They try to deliver cultural and traditional arts messages to tourists to enhance their understanding of the culture of others, not only as an eye pleaser. Kapsner et al. (2011) studied that painters must follow a systematic way to draw Thangka. While making a Thangka, the artist has to follow six steps; for each step, a specific procedure of making a Thangka needs to be kept in mind the first step is the preparation of the painting surface. Second, comes the establishment of a design on

that surface using a sketch or transfer. The third step involves the initial coats of paint, followed by steps four and five: shading and outlining. The sixth and final step consists of several finishing touches. Jackson et al. (1984) further elaborates on the extensive effort involved in making Thangka paintings, which helped the researcher understand the Thangka but also helped the beginner artist with the detailed description guidelines for making Thangka. The painting process is very different in Thangka paintings, and the use of colours differs. The exciting area is that the paintings follow the same pattern, making them unique. The author spent 11 years understanding the insight of the Thangka paintings, their uses, the methods involved in creating paintings, and their importance.

Maji et al. (2016) further studied the handicraft industry, which was doing great at that time and contributing to preserving cultural aspects. Wein (2016). Translating Tibetan studies, the Thangka paintings, considered a cultural art of Tibet, have placed a significant place in the heart of Tibetan Buddhists because they have some spiritual value for the people, and they don't just consider them paintings only. Still, it has also been used for meditation purposes, depicting the life of Buddha and other deities. The paintings have been used for many ritual ceremonies, and it is believed that paintings originated in Nepal, especially the Tibetan Thangka, during the seventh century. However, there are still no proper pieces of evidence to prove that; thus, it is believed that the Thangka paintings influenced Nepali art, as well as Chinese and Indian art. The traditional thangka paintings are considered one of the important paintings of Sikkim and one of the essential aspects of tourism in Sikkim from a cultural point of view and handicrafts. The development of tourism is always necessary for a state like Sikkim because of its rich culture in many forms. Thangka painting is one of the important aspects of the development of cultural tourism, but keeping this painting's originality is very important because it's part of the culture of the Sikkimese people, and this painting has given them an idea to the tourists about the importance of art and cultural for the Sikkimese and how much they have regards for the cultural identity.

Choudhary's (2001) study found that Sikkim had two distinct art forms of Thangka paintings, *Menri*, the '*Mensar*' and the '*Karma Gadri*' styles; these paintings can be differentiated by looking at the colour and fabric thickness. The karma garden Thangka used light colours; clothes were light, and drawings and fine lines were always thin, and white gave a more natural look. In the many styles, there used to be brighter and thicker Thangka paintings, and fabric must be thick in this style of paintings, and they used the colour from bright minerals pigment. The Thangka that was painted by the Kargyu sect was also made by following the pattern to make Thangka from the selection of cloths to bamboo frame and the colour. In the Nyingma-pa sect, they use all the natural mineral pigment, but since the minerals these days are costly to find so, they have replaced them with synthetic colours. However, today, for red and white, they also use natural mineral pigment for making Thangka paintings. Once the painting is completed, they need a sharp knife to make the surface smooth, and the tsampa dough is required to be rubbed on the painting to remove fine dust from the paints, but this is not needed in the case of Karma-gardi because of its light and delicate surface of Thangka are the styles of individual artists whose work played an influential role in the development of Tibetan painting. Kapsner et al. (2011) Further added, the '*Menri*' style, developed by Menla Dhondrup in 1440 C.E., emerged from studies under Dhopa Tashi Gyatso, focusing on religious figures and new pigments In 1645 C.E., Chöying Gyatso created the '*Mensar*' style, innovating tone, pigment, and texture based on the Menri school. Namka Tashi, born in 1500 C.E., founded the '*Karma Gadri*' school after learning strict proportions from Könchok Penday and incorporating influences from Chinese and Indian art. The three styles can be distinguished by their treatment of backgrounds; Menri features flowing clouds and rounded mountains, Mensar employs sharper, more detailed elements, and Karma Gadri emphasizes realistic forms with more open space. Many artists contributed to Tibetan thangka painting, often merging their styles into existing schools rather than establishing distinct traditions Karma Sidral developed the '*Second Gadri*' style, while the 10th Karmapa, Chöying Dorje, created his approach by blending Menri and Gadri techniques Additionally, Patshu Byiu combined various techniques to form the '*Byiuris*' style, noted for its unique shading and color choices Kapsner et al. (2011).

Sikkim is a Buddhist state, and Thangka is a significant part of the Buddhist people. Sikkim Thangka can be found in every monastery, and the walls depict the life of Buddha, God, and goddesses. Thangka in Sikkim has religious and spiritual significance and is regarded as a sacred object by every individual in Sikkim. In Sikkim, Thangka is brought from Tibet and is considered one of the most critical crafts. The Thangka paintings have been known for their religious and spiritual significance to the local people of Sikkim. However, Thangka paintings have also been very well-known to international tourists because of their design and purpose for meditation. Sikkim, as a Buddhist state, has always had an excellent regard for the Thangka paintings since the first Chogyal. Buddhism was the religion of Sikkim, so they

adopted the style of Thangka, and one can see Thangka or murals in every corner of the state. It is not only a painting for the people of Sikkim, but it has more than that. At the same time, due to the development of the inflow of tourists from around the world, the paintings have been known to most tourists as well. So, it has been considered one of the astatic arts of Sikkim, which has spiritual and tourism importance there. So, for that, one has to understand the aspects and value of paintings in Sikkim's tourism industry.

Thangka paintings are critical art for the Sikkimese people because of their spiritual significance and value of this paintings. The paintings have been considered one of the essential aspects for the people of Sikkim. The paintings are known to every local of Sikkim, and every community of Sikkim has regarded them, but at the same time, it has also been a great attraction for tourists. These days, tourists have recognized this art form, and some even know its purpose. For some, it is an exquisite artistic style that is very beautiful. Thangka paintings, because of their precisely drawn and the colour combination for everything, have been fascinating, and tourists have started knowing it as one of the art forms of Sikkim.

Bhatta (2016) studied the importance of art in developing the tourism industry and helped create employment opportunities directly or indirectly for the local community. Arts, which come in different forms, are always unique and attractive to look at, and one of the arts is Thangka art, known universally because of its spirituality. It comes in various shades and colours, but usually, old Thangka used to be made from the mineral pigments and many other art forms, which attract tourists. Tourism and art have a significant role to play. This art is considered one of the forms of cultural tourism, the heritage and culture of a particular place, which usually have great importance in developing cultural tourism. Tourism is an essential sector for employment, and the involvement of people has a significant influence on development. Still, at the same time, it needs to focus on the proper promotional plan required to be applied for the long-term benefits. Gupta (2009) illustrated the significance of thangka in Buddhism and how to conserve it for the future. It is regarded as the portable icon for Buddhist educational tools, which can be carried by the monks from one place to another to educate the general people and teach them about Buddhism and its practices. It also describes the techniques and procedures used to make thangka paintings. Thangka of Sikkim is considered one of the essential arts of Sikkimese people; though the origin of the paintings is yet a mystery, it has been found that the development of Thangka paintings in recent years is experiencing more in terms of tourism as well because of increasing interest of tourists towards this art. It is believed that the Thangka paintings started to influence many people in Sikkim. With the increasing demand for Thangka among tourists, the young generation has started to take an interest in learning Thangka paintings, and its disappearing tradition is becoming a new way to attract tourists. Sikkim has been doing that by encouraging new artists. It is giving new opportunities for the youth of Sikkim to get training for the same, and it has been found that once they get the training, they get jobs in monasteries and sometimes abroad. In this way, Sikkim preserves its art and culture while attracting many tourists to this art form and creating awareness among the people about the importance of Thangka paintings in one's life.

The contribution of thangka painting to developing Sikkim's cultural tourism and cultural tourism opportunities through local communities. For the locals, it is one of the other sources of income, but in terms of tourism, it is one of the rich cultural identities that holds a significant amount of respect in the minds of the locals. The local artists have been respected by all the locals and they are also satisfied with their skills as it allows them to become self-independent.

Though the commodification of culture has turned for economic well-being, it has simultaneously opened several opportunities. Thangka painting is well-known among tourists because of its unique artistic style and colour combination. The important part is that after commercialising this art as a tool for the contribution towards the development of tourism, it helps sustain the art, culture, and tradition carried from generation to generation. Thangka painting is a cultural legacy passed on from generation to generation and is part of the tradition and culture of Sikkim. Thangka painting is a rich art and carries a tradition of cultural resources. This painting is put into a product for tourists to understand the culture, values, and traditions of local communities. This includes providing facilities for the researcher to understand the art and the making process and its importance, and it provides the researcher with a part of this art by sharing their ideas during the classes at Thangka Institute. They provide lots of input to make one understand the importance of these beautiful paintings. Bhutia & Sharma (2018) compliment tourists on making this lovely painting and its uses and benefits in individuals' lives. The painters even narrated how thangka painting used to be carried from Tibet to Sikkim and the meditation process, looking at the mystique art, rituals, and spiritual importance. The contribution of Thangka painting

is essential to overcoming the future demands of the paintings due to competitors and the preservation of culture and tradition in making this art. The painters believed that anyone who had the skill to make thangka art could have many opportunities and, at the same time, high respect from society. However, it has been observed and felt that there is a need to upgrade the quality of material used and increase the production of painting by providing suitable training programs to the painters. There is also a need to add theoretical knowledge to the painters to educate the tourists to give detailed information about the painting and help develop attributes towards the tourism upliftment's.

Bhutia et al. (2018) However, it is noticeable that the painters could not contribute as demands because of their target work and the lack of information, and sometimes because of the tourists' interest in this traditional art of Sikkim, which struggles with promotions. The painters who are engaged have found that they are satisfied with what they are doing due to its high demand, but at the same time, there needs to be more skilled painters, which is somehow affecting the tourist demand as well. So many machine-made Thangka have been imported from China. In terms of price, it is much cheaper than handmade thangka, so it is essential to provide proper knowledge about the difference between thangka and its effects on one's life. The locals involved in thangka painters are mostly school dropouts. With the lack of proper communication, they sometimes cannot deliver the information they meant to convey. That leads to the question of how they can contribute towards tourism development.

If one looks at the positive side of this internationally known painting, tourists have lots of in-depth knowledge about this art. They come to learn about the making of this art, their preservation process, and its uses. At the same time, it has also been found that domestic tourists are significantly less aware of this art, but only a few tourists are aware that this is a traditional art. Sikkim attracts many tourists every year, including international and domestic tourists, and every time they visit, the locals or the painters have to develop their skills to meet the requirements of the people. The proper information about the thangka paintings is very important to tackle issues like machine-made thangka which is relatively cheaper than handmade thangka, one needs to understand that to make one thangka the painter needs at least 3 months but their durability also there are some the oldest thangka also there in many places in India like Ladakh, where they have kept 17th-century thangka while the tourist needs to understand this the machine made thangka might get in cheaper but it won't last and the cultural significance would not be there. So the painters need to have skills in terms of communication as well so that they can deliver the difference between the thangka and give the proper information to the tourists.

Gupta (2009) Buddhism has become one of the main attractions because of the many reasons behind the teachings, which attracts a lot of international tourists; so, does thangka painting because this beautiful Buddhist art has been used for meditation from the ages and it has given a high regard by the Buddhist people for individual benefits. This painting has created a considerable impression in the minds of tourists. Even though history says that thangka painting originated in Tibet, according to the artists' perception, Sikkim has been following the teachings of the Buddhist style of art from Tibet and contributions, which is now one of the most demanding cultural tourism aspects. The growing number of training centres for thangka painters would solve the issue mainly in the education of Thangka history. To meet the increasing demand among tourists, it's essential to educate people and convey your cultural message to the people through your local arts. This way, it conserves the regional identity and cultural significance of their culture, and the development of tourism would be maintained.

CONCLUSION

Traditional painters and locals of Sikkim with distinctive cultural characteristics are representative of the state. The locals are pursuing development strategies based on their cultural identity, dedication to their work, culture, tradition, and way of life. The development of ethnic cultural identity is increasingly seen as a critical strategy for the locals, which contributes toward the development of tourism, contribution toward the social and economic well-being of communities, as well as commercializing this art and making it popular among tourists. Thangka is a very significant art of the cultural part of the local community. They have been caring for their tradition for generations, and they continue to do so for the next generation as well because this painting gives them a sense of pride. Making this art available for the tourists if they are interested in getting part in it is not only for commercializing but, at the same time, it's for promotion of their culture

and tradition so that tourists are aware of this beautiful art of Sikkim which, place an essential role for the cultural and heritage development of tourism in Sikkim.

However, thangka painting has been recognized as one of the essential arts of Sikkim, and the Buddhist people still need to make this art more visible so that the tourist would have an idea behind the moto of this mystique art. The painters sometimes faced many situations due to needing more education to provide insight into the painting. Tourists are always interested in knowing about this art, but due to language constraints, the idea behind this beautiful art of Sikkim could not be able to reflect in the minds of tourists. The skilled painters put lots of effort into making them understand so that it would help in the promotion of Sikkim's art. The other is the proper infrastructure. According to the painters, they need peace at the time of making the thangka, which sometimes cannot be provided. Though their efforts to make tourists understand the painter's culture and identity have always been given priority, this painting is very popular among tourists. Seeing them making this art is a delight for their eyes, and it attracts their attention, as always. Thangka paintings make an extended contribution toward the development of Sikkim tourism. In this way, they can commoditize their art and culture to meet the tourist demand and tourism development. Thangka paintings are a vital art and are especially highly regarded by Buddhist communities. Thangka is a scroll painting made in cloth using a natural colour, and due to its lightweight, it was straightforward to carry from one place to another, so this beautiful piece of art crossed the Himalayas to make us understand the life of Buddha. But with time and demand, the paintings have been commercializing in a few places like Nepal and China; though they have been used as a product this would lead to some other things and make this art popular among tourists, and interestingly, due its value and usage the art has been a high regard then and now as well. The making of Thangka paintings, the type of colour used to make this art more valuable, and the different kinds of paintings are based on the various deities and sometimes according to the uses of the art.

The painting is usually based on the teacher (Lharipa) and the Buddhist sect they follow. There is a slight variation in the style of paintings based on their sects and the teacher. The skilled painters have precise ideas and understanding that the Thangka paintings originated in Tibet, and the teachings have been carried from there and passed from one generation to the next. Due to its lightweight, it used to be taken from one place to another to make others understand the usage and teaching of Buddha. Throughout the Himalayas, the art style has transferred to benefit the people and share the unique style of making art; this painting is an essential part of the local people from generation to generation, and not only that, the local communities highly regard this art.

The Thangka painting originated in Tibet. Still, some things need to be understood, i.e., dedication to learning, teaching quality, and memorising every detail, which has many constraints. The importance of these paintings is always there in the minds of locals and painters too, but to understand the interest of the tourists about this existence was also very important because when this art started to be known as a cultural commodity in the valley of Nepal. Though the tourists are aware of the painting and their interest in this art, they have given extra effort to the painters to make this art more beautiful by not only as a commercial but they providing insight into this lovely art so that later on they know about the benefits. The paintings are well known among most international tourists, but at the same time, there needs to be more awareness among domestic tourists. The positive part is that both categories of tourists are interested in beautiful art. Furthermore, with the demand and opportunities for the locals to make Thangka paintings, it is one of the essential sources of income for the painter. In society, they are highly regarded as having beautiful skills, which makes them feel contented with their work because it makes them more confident in making an income from it and societal respect.

Considering the tourism point of view, it has created job opportunities for the locals if they learn these art skills, and they also have realised that art has a lot of contributions towards Sikkim tourism and the awareness of the local people's cultural identity. This art is available in every place in Sikkim, from walls to the monasteries, and with its very catchy looking style of paintings, it draws the tourist's attention to get know more in-depth about the paintings. Further, tourists who have ideas about the paintings come to learn about this art to use its benefits, and some develop after seeing it. Due to the style of the paintings, it has been an excellent source for the demand for this art, and the skilled painters believed that Thangka had contributed a lot to the tourism of Sikkim. Not only did it start attracting lots of researchers as well, but sometimes, the quality of Thangka couldn't meet the expectations, and the infrastructure that was provided to the painters to learn art was not enough, and the education of the painters which is important because they deal directly to the tourists and if they couldn't able to give the details can be problematic. Though they are now providing detailed

information about Thangka paintings to tourists, sometimes language barriers have become another issue. The demand for Thangka is undoubtedly high, and there will be more looking at the interest of the tourists.

Thangka paintings are essential in Sikkim cultural tourism because they have been observing it for a long time. Thangka paintings have become an exciting topic of cultural tourism with continuous demand for Sikkim's tourism. Over the years, tourists have been showing interest in this art, and they took an interest in it and started knowing about it. Their perceptions of this art have been changing over the years, and the information they get online has changed the importance of this beautiful art. The design of the art attracts tourists, and they find it different, which is the exciting part. Their curiosity has become one of the motivations for the painters and the locals to provide more information about it and preserve their original identity. The curiosity of the tourists and many researchers has motivated the locals to protect their culture and maintain it for the future. They have also shared information to let the world know about the Buddhist people residing in the mountains with their beautiful art as their skills. It is part of their culture. This art was a significant part of their culture. It will remain the same for the locals because it's their identity and the way of life that they have been proudly carrying from generation to generation, and with the growing demand for cultural tourism, it has become the source of income for the local community which, is part of sustainability.

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