



The Reangs of Tripura

Dr. Jagadish Gan Choudhury



Tribal Research and Cultural Institute
Govt. of Tripura

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**To
The Reang & The Gurudeva**

FOREWORD

The Book '**The Riangs of Tripura**' written by Dr. Jagadish Gan Choudhury, published by Tribal Research Institute attract a good demand among the readers, research scholars, educationist, administrators and the first edition have been exhausted.

It is a great pleasure that the second edition could be published and wish that it will continue to be useful to those who need it.

Dated
Agartala, July, 2011

(SAILOHNUNA)
Director
Tribal Research & Cultural Institute
Govt. of Tripura

FOREWORD

In Tripura there are a large number of tribal communities who have a rich cultural heritage. With the onward march of history, the ways of life of the tribal communities are fast changing, as in the case of all other sections of the population.

2. The information about the customs and manners, rites and rituals and various aspects of the ways of life is still not adequate. In fact, it is to be remembered that the ways of life of the tribal are indeed very progressive as evidenced by absence of social hierarchy and large measure of equality and liberty.

3. Preparation of monograph of each on the tribal communities on a systematic and scientific basis is, therefore, very necessary for any modern administration. In this context, the monograph prepared by Dr. Gan Chowdhuri meets a long felt demand. The monograph covers all aspects of life of the Reang Community of Tripura and analyses their past and present.

4. The book will be of immense help to the administration and to the community alike. It is hoped that it will be studied carefully by all those concerned with administration and tribal life.

5. Dr. Jagadish Gan Chowdhuri deserves the gratitude of the Government for his valuable contribution.

18.7.1983

S. R. Sankaran
Chief Secretary,
Government of Tripura

PREFACE

Tripura is a tiny and hilly State in the north-east corner of India. Its population is heterogeneous. Diverse ethnic elements can be traced in it. The Bengalees and the Tripuris are the two major communities. The greater Tripuri community consists of a number of tribes, such as Tipra, Reang, Jamatia, Noatia, Uchai, Halam, Kuki, Lushai, Garo, Mog, Chakma etc. Whereas the Bengalees immigrated from the west, the Tripuris immigrated from the north-east in various waves and in different times.

The Tipras are the largest tribe who ruled Tripura for several centuries. The Reang are the second largest tribe. Historically the relation between these two major tribes is one of both conflict and co-operation. They all have a rich cultural heritage. There are both similarities and differences between the Tipra and the Reang cultural patterns. Their life patterns are now in a state of transition owing to acculturation and other factors.

While a comprehensive study about the Tipra culture and history has already been made by the present author, no such work has yet been done on the Reangs. There are, of course, casual references to the Reangs in the Gazetteers, Census Reports, Administrative Reports, memoirs, and the Rajmala. Popular writings in the forms of monographs, booklets, school text books journals and magazines also contain inadequate description of the Reang life. Thus something has been said, but vast remains unrecorded. This dissertation is a humble attempt at faithfully presenting the Reang culture and history as systematically as has been possible.

The methods adopted are participation, observation, seeking answers to questionnaire, preliminary knowledge of their language, field survey not only among the Reang but also among the cognate communities and consultation of books, journals, records and reports.

The mass of data thus collected have been compiled in six Chapters. Chapter I contain a brief description of the natural and social environment within which the Reang culture operates. The Reang have been introduced in Chapter II. The history of their migration and movement, their numerical strength and distribution, their ethnic identity and language are all dealt with in this Chapter. The third Chapter is on economic activities right from gathering, hunting, fishing, *Jhuming* to plough cultivation and white-collar jobs. The fourth Chapter narrates their social

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A work of this nature requires help from many quarters, and I got it. During the field survey the Reang and others gladly offered food, shelter and information. They appreciated, encouraged and felt the necessity of a written history of their own. I am grateful to all of them. The following helpers deserve particular mention: Sri Rajprasad Chaudhuri, Sri Durbajay Reang, Sri Surendra Reang, Sri Surja Reang, Sri Amrit Dev Barman and Sri T. M. Dasgupta.

Dr. Kartik Lahiri ever remains a source of encouragement. My teacher Prof. Saroj Chaudhuri has often inspired me with new ideas and insights. 'To my **Guru** Professor Sudhir Ranjan Das, retired Professor and Head of the Department of Archaeology, C.U., my indebtedness is incalculable. It is a rare opportunity to get both theoretical foundation and practical training from a versatile genius like Professor Das.

J. Gan-Chaudhuri.

CHAPTER I

THE ENVIRONMENTS

A review of the environments of man is an aid to understanding his culture. The first of these environments is the geographical setting, that is, the natural environment which consists of soil, plains, hills, climate, rivers, minerals, flora and fauna. The second element of the environments is the other human beings with whom he is found to cooperate and compete. What the natural environment does to the way of life of a people can be illustrated by referring to the polar Eskimo Culture. The Eskimos of the North Pole live in an extremely cold and arid environment; sun is not seen from October to February; no vegetable for food and no wood for tool are available. Chip of meteorites, bone and stone are used as artifacts for hunting and fishing. Agriculture is impossible. People who face so difficulties in coping with the rigorous conditions of natural environments are bound to remain at the stage of development that Stone Age men of Europe were thousands of years ago. They have small population, poor material culture, infrequent war and strife, very elementary political institutions and rudimentary religion. Another example may be taken to illustrate the impact of natural environment upon the life patterns of man. Most of the tribes living in the wild, rugged snow-clad terrains of the trans-Himalayan territories have the common custom of Polyandry. Dependent on scanty and rocky lands they are to take care to reduce population to prevent the fragmentation of land, and achieve cooperation of all in a household. So the origin of the Khasa Fraternal Polyandry in which several brothers enjoy one wife may be understood in the perspective of their habitat.

The purpose of this chapter is to present a brief description of the natural and social environments in which the Reang Culture has been taking its shape. The natural environs of the Reang are much more favourable than those of the Eskimos and the Khasas.

1. Natural Environment

The territory is not very old. It rose from a sea-bottom in the late Tertiary age, i.e., about four crore of years ago. The state of Tripura is largely mountainous. Plains and hills occur almost alternately. The soil is fertile. There are rivulets, brooks, rivers, hills, plains, valleys and lakes. There are seven long ranges and numerous hillocks. The names of the ranges are: Jampui, Sakhantang, Longtharai, Atharamura, Baramura, Devtamura and

Sardeng. The principal rivers, which are neither broad nor deep enough for heavy navigation and all of which flow into the Bay of Bengal through Bangladesh, are Gomati, Haora, Longai, Juri, Deo, Manu, Dhalai, Khowai, Muhuri and Feni.

The climate is neither too hot nor too cold. The average maximum temperature is 35° centigrade in May-June, while the average minimum is about 10 centigrade in December-January. The territory receives a heavy rainfall. The main seasons are: Summer between March and May, the rains, from late May to September, Autumn falls in October-November, Winter during December-January and Spring in February.

The floras of Tripura and of the neighbouring states are almost identical. The greater part of Tripura was, even up to the first half of the twentieth century, was densely covered with primeval forests. Various kinds of plant: grass, creepers, canes, bamboos, trees and vegetables are abundantly available. These are put to the purposes of food, fuel, tools, traps, weapons, basketry, house construction and medicine.

Like the flora, the fauna of Tripura are rich in number and variety. There are various kinds of insects like flies, locusts, scorpions, mosquitoes along with crabs, snails, slugs, mussels, fishes, birds, snakes, toads, frogs and also elephant, tiger, deer, bear, porcupine, monkey, cat, pig, dog, goat, buffalo, bison, jackal, etc.

It is thus clear from the above description that the natural environments of the Reang are far from rigorous, rugged and arid. Here they get ample scope for gathering wild vegetables, fishing, hunting and agriculture. So they have a steady increase in population; enough time for love making, gossiping and singing; enough surplus food for smoking, drinking and feasting; crimes, murders, and strife were not infrequent; a little elaborate political institutions; and a complicated religious rites, rituals and sacrifices. So the impact of natural environments is reflected in the Reang's economic activities, social life, inter and intra tribal relations and in religion.

2. Social Environment

The social environment is as much important as natural environment in shaping one's culture. The Reang live in groups of families and villages. The inter-family and inter-village relations are close. Besides, the immediate neighbours of the Reang are the various tribes mostly belonging to the same ethnic stock and cultural attainment. The following table shows the names and number of different tribes of Tripura:

Table I
CRI (Tripura)

SI. No.	Tribe	1941	1951	1961	1971
1	Tipra	...	1,50,971	1,89,799	2,50,382
2	Reang	...	48,471	56,597	64,722
3	Jamatia	...	2,764	24,359	34,192
4	Chakma	...	7,277	22,386	28,622
5	Halam	...	1,644	16,298	19,076
6	Noatia	...	1,916	16,010	10,297
7	Mag	...	3,789	10,524	13,273
8	Kuki	...	2,721	5,532	7,775
9	Garos	...	7,362	5,484	5,559
10	Munda	...	51	4,409	5,347
11	Lushai	...	1,947	2,988	3,672
12	Oraon	...	...	2,875	3,428
13	Santal	...	736	1,562	2,222
14	Uchai	...	...	766	1,061
15	Khasia	...	151	349	491
16	Bhil	...	41	69	169
17	Lepcha	...	5	7	177
18	Bhutia	...	19	7	3
19	Chaimal	...	...	50	...

It is evident from the above table that the Tipras constitute the largest tribe. They ruled the state for several centuries. The Reang are the second largest tribe. Besides the tribal, other populations in Tripura, include the Bengalee, Manipuri, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Marwari, Behari, Malayali, etc. The Hindu Bengalees constitute the major group; among them there are Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vashiya and Sudras.

The hills and forests of Tripura swarming with various games and rich in flora served as an allurements to the early people for food-gathering. The

earliest settlers were food-gatherers. The Tibeto-Burman speaking tribes were in all probability, the earliest inhabitants of this land: They crossed the eastern, north-eastern and south-eastern frontiers in successive waves and lived in and around Tripura. They had a self-subsistence economy based on gathering, fishing, hunting, shifting, agriculture, basketry, weaving and domestication of a few species of birds and animals.

In Tripura, the percentage of literacy increased from 2.28 in 1901 to 30.86 in 1971; the number of academies from 2 in 1874-75 to 3061 in 1973-74. Only 10.4% of the total population lives in the local towns. Of the tribal population, 1.23% is urban dwellers. The Tipras constitute the bulk of the tribal urban dwellers. The Reang are overwhelmingly rural people. Several political parties, national, regional, local and communal are active in Tripura. A ramified welfare state has replaced the old order of chaos, confusion and disorder and is extending protective privileges to the hitherto backward communities. Naturally, the Reang, are no longer left to themselves. So the impact of social environment is increasingly felt.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCING THE REANG

1. Nomenclature

The Reang whose history and culture are the subject matter of this dissertation call themselves Bru. In the Reang dialect, the term *Bru* means 'man'. It is significant to note that many tribal communities use almost analogous appellations meaning 'man'. The Tipra call themselves *Barak* meaning 'man',

Bru the Mikirs *Arleng*, the Garo, Achikmandi, the Lushais Mizo-all meaning 'man'. This is a manifestation of ethnocentrism which is a characteristic of so many people all over the world. It is a mental phenomenon that makes a people conscious of and contended with its own culture. They feel so proud of it that they take themselves as 'men' and others as something less than men. The *Tierra Del Fuegian* and the Eskimo also think alike.²

The term Reang is, however, the widely used appellation to denote this tribe. Ordinary Reang cannot explain the meaning of the word. However, we have got two contradictory interpretations; one from the aged Reang of Kanthali Charra and another from the Unchai of Amarpur. The former appears to be mixture of the Hindu and tribal myths, while the latter points out the waves of migration. The Reang claim that they are the children of the famous saint Kashyapa; they are Khshatyria and *Maladhara Jati* i.e. conservative Hindus who use the sacred necklace of basil plants. Tradition has it that in the Great *Kshatria-nidhan-Jagna* by the outrageous Brahmin Parasuram, only a boy and a girl survived. They too died after some time. Mahadeva had preserved their soul into a stone till the death of Parasuram.

Reang The stone was lying with the hermitage Kashyapa. In a battle between an elephant and a tortoise, the stone was under the foot of the tortoise. All on a sudden the famous bird Garura swooped down and took away the combatants and the stone. The bird laboriously collected them but could not eat. So the hungry bird asked the sage Kashyapa for advice. The saint had disclosed what was inside the stone and advised the bird to eat the animals and to hatch the stone. The bird after eating the elephant and the tortoise, made a long journey taking with him the stone and took rest on the peak of hill called Sibrang Khoong near the Jampui range in the north-eastern corner of Tripura. There it hatched the stone from which came out a girl and a boy called Devalakshmi and Deva Tarani respectively who were the ancestors of the Reang. In the Reang dialect Garur is called Biangma. The term

Biangma, it is said, has been first corrupted into *Biang* and then into Reang. So the *Reang* are *Bihanga Putra* (Son of Bihanga).

The Uchai tribe had a different story to tell. They said that in course of migration from the Burma-Arakan regions towards the Hill Tracts of Chittagong and Tripura, the Reang moved first and the Uchai followed them. The advanced party is called *Reanga*, and the rear party *Ulsa* which is now corrupted into Uchai.

2. Numerical Strength

The Reang are the second largest tribe in Tripura. There are some Reang people also in the Hill Tracts of Chitaagong in Bangladesh and in Mizoram. The numerical strength and decadal variations of the Reang of Tripura since 1901 have been shown from Census Reports in the following table.

Table II
CRI (Tripura)

Year	Number	Male	Female	Decadal variation	Percentage of change
1901	15,115	...	...	...	...
1911	22,483	...	...	7,368	48%
1921	28,959	...	...	6,476	29%
1931	35,881	18,399	17,482	6,922	24%
1941	40,347	...	...	4,466	12%
1951	48,471	...	...	8,126	20%
1961	56,597	28,974	27,623	8,126	17%
1971	64,722	33,452	31,270	8,125	14 %

In the locally available records, the figures for 1911, 1921 and 1941 are not found. So, these figures have been worked out by the method of interpolation. Had there been figures even, their credibility would not have been beyond doubt. There were several difficulites in making a reliable enumeration in those days: inaccessible hills, the impact of the two world wars; firy atmosphere in the hills owing to the communist activities; the Reang movement led by Ratanmani, insufficient adminstrative machinery to carry on the operation and superstitions of the people in disclosing exact figures. In the 1951 Census Report the figures recorded is 8,471. This is a clear case of gross aberration owing most probably to typing or printing mistake.

Whereas the Reang in every census, show a tendency of steady growth, a decrease of 79 % is abnormal. Interestingly enough the figure we obtained by the statistical method is 48,471. It clearly indicates that the initial number is missed.

3. Distribution

The Reang are unevenly distributed over the whole State. And within the State, internal migration took place. That is evident from a study of district-wise distribution.

Table III
CRI (Tripura)

	1931	1961	1971
North Tripura	11,953	27,785	31,638
West Tripura	5,159	6,515	7,235
South Tripura	18,769	22,298	25,849

Thus whereas in 1931 in South Tripura, the Reang had the highest concentration and in 1961 and 1971 the centre of concentration had been shifted to North Tripura. The answer to the question of this shifting can be found in the Raing movement of 1940-42 in South Tripura. The movement was suppressed by the royal force of *Maharaj Bir Bikram*. Some left the Amarapur-Belonia area out of the fear of persecution and some others having been declined to be involved in the turmoil moved North-East ward and settled mainly in Dharmanagar Sub-division.

What has been said above, can be further clarified from their Sub-division-wise distribution which is presented in the following table.

Table IV
CRI (Tripura)

Sub-Divisions	1931	1961	1971
Kailashahar	11,218	6,283	7,721
Dharmanagar	735	18,834	22,207
Kamalpur	...	2,668	2,710
Sadar	15	44	300
Sonamura	144	1	21
Khowai	5,000	6,469	6,914
Amarpur	11,758	12,537	13,653

Udaipur	2,151	2,374	2,957
Belonia	4,653	7,341	9,239
Sabroom	207	46	...

The distribution of the Reang as enumerated in the 1931 Census Report indicates the possible route of their immigration. Entering into Tripura centuries back through the Hill Tracts of Chittagong, they first settled in the nearby areas like Amarpur and southern parts of Kailashahar. In course of their migration and movement, many settled in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The legendary account recollected by the old Reang persons also suggests this very route. Subsequently however, they spread in other sub-divisions. But the sub-divisions which stand at long distance from the gate-way of their entrance still today have few Reangs. During and immediately after the contrivertial Reang revolt led by Ratanmani against the *Maharaja* Bir Bikram, many left Amarpur, Udaipur and Belonia for Dharmanagar. The movement took place in 1940s. But the inaccurate Census Reports of 1951 failed to indicate it. The subsequent Census, however, clearly proved the incident. Another important point to note is that since the partition and independence, both immigration and emigration in the Reang population took place. Many Reang people had immigrated from the Hill Tracts of Chittagong, and some Reang people had emigrated to the Mizo hills in the present Mizoram in search of fertile and virgin Jhum fields.

4. Ethnic affinity

About the history and origins of the Reang, we do not have correct information. There is no authentic record in writing. What they have in folklore bear little historical value. From where, when, why and how they reached their present habitat, are in darkness. The relevant folklore tradition contains contradictions.

The question of ethnic affinity of the Reang is undoubtedly a difficult one. Indefinite physical features like scanty hair on face and body, flat face with prominent cheek bones, epicanthic fold, broad head, brown and also dark skin colour present in the Reangs point to the Mongolian traditon. Fortunately, we have also anthropometric measurements taken by Sri A. K. Mitra.³ Mitra took measurements from the villages of Raibari, Nimaibari, Chandraipara and East Bagafa-all in South Tripura. Both male and female subjects were measured and an inter-village comparison was made. He found that the Raibari Nimaibari males differ from others in slightly higher percentage of dolichocephals. The Chandraipara females have high percentage of

mesocephalic element and low percentage of dolichocephalic element. But the females of Bagafa have high percentage of dolichocephals and low percentage of mesocephals. Again, the Raibari-Nimaibari females have almost equal percentage of dolichocephals and mesocephals.

So far as the nasal indices are concerned, all these three groups are of mesorrhine type. In stature, about 50% of the males of the three villages belong to short stature. Others are mostly medium statured.

So a consideration of the results of anthropometric measurements and indefinite physical features leads us to place them in the Mongolian race. The measurements and observations, however, indicate the presence of diverse elements. This is because, the Reang had admitted into their community some people of other tribes. Nevertheless, the Mongoloid features are prominent and dominant.

The racial affiliation of the Reang can also be ascertained, of course with less force, from another point of view. The language they speak, the dress, ornaments, baskets they use, the economy they depend on, the deities they worship, the food they take and the folklore they preserve, all have close resemblance with those of such other Mongoloid peoples as Tipras, Garos, Kacharis, Noatias, Jamatias, etc.

5. Movement and migration

The homeland of the Reang of the present day is the State of Tripura and the Hill Tracts of Chittagong. But here they have not been living from time immemorial. They immigrated here from elsewhere.

As the Reang tribe is one of the important members of the great Mongolian family, the history of migration and movement of the Mongolian people are also largely the history of the Reang. In this context it would be profitable to quote the observations of some scholars.

Grierson (1927) while undertaking the linguistic survey of India made interesting observations. He thinks that the original home of the people speaking Sino-Tibetan languages is somewhere in north-western China. In the words of Grierson:

“The Tibeto-Burman migrated from their original seat on the upper courses of the Yangtse and the Hoangho towards the headwaters of the Irrawaddy and of the Chindwin.”⁴ Afterwards some followed the upper course of the Brahma-putra, the Sanpo, north of the Himalyas and peopled Tibet. A few of these crossed the watershed and occupied the hills on the southern side of the Hymalayan range right along the east to the Punjab in the west. At the Assam end they met and mingled with others of the same family who had

wandered along the Lower Brahmaputra through the Assam Valley. Towards the great bend of the river, near the present town of Dhubri, the last wave moved to the south and occupied first the Garo hills and then what is now called the State of Hill Tippera.

Barkataki (1969) has reconstructed the movements and migration of the different waves of the Mongoloid people thus:

“All that we can say with certainty is that from about 2000 B.C. there was a movement of Mongoloid populations from the north to India through Assam and these people along with others who migrated from northern Burma formed in the remote past the bulk of the population of Assam... There were apparently wave after wave of these migrations and the invaders belonged to the Indo-Chinese linguistic family, of which the two most important sub-families are the Mon-Khmer and the Tibeto-Burman. The third, Siamese-Chinese, includes Shan, which was spoken by the Ahoms, the last of these invaders. The Mon-Khmer speakers appear to have come earlier than the others. They are apparently driven by subsequent Tibeto-Burman hordes into the Khasi hills, which is the only part of Assam in which the sub-family now exists. Of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family, there were three groups, viz., Naga, Kuki-Chin and Bodo. The Naga and Kuki speakers were driven to the hills and Bodo became the prominent language. It includes all the surviving non-Aryan languages of the Plains, the Garo Hills and the North Cachar Hills. Kachari, Mech, Garo, Dimasa, Tipra, Lulung and Chutiya are derivations of Bodo.”⁵

Both linguistically and ethnically the Reang are akin to the Tibeto-Burman Tribes of north-eastern India. Almost all the scholars in the field like Grierson, Guha, Chattopadhyaya, Taraporewala, Majumdar, Barkataki and many others have suggested that the original homeland of the speakers of Tibeto-Burman dialects of which the Reang is a branch, may be located in the south-west of China near the headwaters of Yangtse and the Hoangho. It was from that place that they in different batches in different times moved south-eastward and settled in greater Assam, Burma, Chittagong Hill Tract, Tripura and northern Bengal.

It may be assumed that leaving their original homeland in China, the Reang in search of food and fertile lands for shifting cultivation halted temporarily at different places; the north-western corner of Burma was one of those temporary abodes the memory of which is still faintly known. Here, probably, a division took place between the Tipra and the Reang. From that place the Reang gradually moved south-westward leaving the Naga Hills and the Manipur Hills to the left; while the Tipra moved

westward and entered Assam. The division and diversion took place long before the invasion and advent of the Ahoms in Assam. The Reang in course of their movement once might have temporarily settled in the Mayani Kanthlang hills-a place said to have been located in the southern fringe of the Mizo Hills from which the river Karnafuli originates. From Mayani Kanthlang onwards almost all hills and rivers crossed by them can be recollected even today by the older generation. Their memory, however, fails to go beyond that. There may be overlapping while memorising those places. Nevertheless, they actually exist. That this memory is not simply guesswork is evidenced by the fact that on the occasions of community worships they recollect those hills and rivers and pay homages to them through offerings. We may mention here the names of some of these rivers and stream, e.g., *Sankha*, *Matamari*, *Remphal*, *Katai*, *Rengtai*, *Kancha* i.e. *Karnaphuli*, *Cherengkha*, *Kangsari*, *Nakati*, *Tuiring*, *Tuichung*, *Tuika*, *Mayani*, etc.

The routes of the Reang-migration and movement can also be ascertained from their distribution in Triupra and the Hill Tracts of Chittagong. It has been pointed out (P. 7) that the Reang are largely concentrated mainly in two sub-divisions, namely, Kailashahar and Amarapur which have common borders with the Chittagong Hill Tracts. So we may presume that the Reang came from Burma through Arakan to the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Tripura.

6. Language

The language spoken by the Reang is called Reang or *Kak bru* or *Kak barak*. The appellation *Kak barak* is now used to include the dialects of the Tipra, Reang, Jamatia, Noatia, Uchai, etc., because all of them have a common base. *Kakbarak* belongs to the great Sino-Tibetan linguistic family. Of this family, languages like Chinese, Burmese, Tibetan and Tai are the famous. Languages and dialects of this family spread in different lands as their speakers had moved and migrated. Nevertheless, lands like China, Tibet, Burma, Assam, Nagaland, Arunachal Praedesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Chittagong Hill Tracts, northern Bengal have large concentrations of the speakers of these languages and dialects.

Of the Sino-Tibetan family, Bodo is a group or a branch. To this branch belong several dialects spoken by the Kacharis, Garos, Rabhas, Lalungs, Kochs, Dimasas, Chutiyas, Tipras, Reang, Jamatias, Noatias, Uchais and a few others. Their dialects are closely related to each other. Owing to distance and long isolation some differences have developed among them. They have also again absorbed many words from the Assamese and the Bengali.

Now coming to the Reang dialect, we have the following observations to be made:

1. Both simple and complex sentences are used.
2. All parts of speech-noun, pronoun, adjective, verb, adverb, preposition, conjunction and interjection occur in the dialect.
3. There are only three simple tenses-Past, Present and Future.
4. All types of Cases: Nominative, Possessive, Vocative, etc., are in use.
5. Gender is denoted by the use of such words as Chla for male and boorai for female.
6. Plural number is formed by suffixing 'rau'.
7. An adjective may sometimes be formed by prefixing 'Ka' to the root verb.
8. An adjective is usually used after the noun. In other words the adjective-term follows the noun qualified.
9. The dialect is agglutinative in Character. Prefix, infix and suffix may be added to denote different shades of meaning.
10. Generic Prefixes are used with numerals. For example-

One dog	=	<i>Sai ma-ha;</i>
A bull	=	<i>Kenda ma ha ;</i>
A cow	=	<i>Muchu ma ;</i>
One men	=	<i>Brouk Ke-ha ;</i>
A boy	=	<i>Cherai Ke-ha ;</i>
A girl	=	<i>Barai Ke-ha ;</i>
One house	=	<i>Nouk Khungha ;</i>
One tree	=	<i>Mfung fung-ha;</i>
One leaf	=	<i>Blai lai-ha ;</i>
11. Frequency of elision creates confusion. For example *Angni mfa* (My father) is reduced to *afa*: *Noungni Mfa* (Your father) is simply pronounced as *nfa*.
12. Some words carry more than one meaning on the basis of pronunciation.

The same word pronounced in low voice bears one meaning, while pronounced in high tone indicates a different meaning.

A list of standard words and sentences used in *Kak-bru* is added below:

English	Kak-bru
I	Ang.
Of me	Ainina.
Mine	Aingni.
We	Choong.
Of us	Ching nina.
Our	Chingni.
You	Noong.
Of you	Ning nina.
Your	Ningni.
He	Ba.
Of him	Bing nina.
His	Bingni.
They	Brao.
Of them	Braonina.
Their	Braoni.
Father	Mfa.
Mother	Mma.
Brother	Mta.
Sister	Mbi.
Wife	Bihi.
Child	Cherai.
Son	Mchela.
Daughter	Mchauk.
Man	Bru
Woman	Boorai
Hand	Yak
Nose	Nppmgtjao
Eye	Omkuik
Foot	Yanfa
Mouth	Makhu
Tooth	Booa
Ear	Khunju
Head	Bakharak
Tongue	Stai

Belly	Bahak
Back	Bakang
God	Matai, Ishwar Devil Sekal, Bhut
Sun	Sal
Moon	Tal
Star	Athuk Khrai
Fire	Har
Water	Tai
Sky	Naukha
Day	Sal
Night	Har
Winter	Masing
Rainy season	Varsa
Earth	Ha, Purthima
Deer	Mchhai
Cow	Machu
Dog	Chhai
Cat	Taula
Duck	Taukham Chla
Bird	Taupi
Goat	Pain
Go	Thang
Eat	Cha
Sit	Achauk
Come	Fai
Beat	Boo
Stand	Bancha
Die	Thai
Give	Ri
Run	Khaik
Near	Samfa
Far	Hakcha
Before	Biskang
Behind	Oklau
Who	Sab
What	Tama

And	Bai
But	Jef
It	Ba
Alas	Hamya, hamya
A father	Mfa Keha
Of a father	Mfa Kehani
To a father	Mfana Kehana
From a father	Mfa Kehan thingni
Two fathers	Mfa Kharak nai
Fathers	Mfa rav
A gcod man	Brauk mkha Kaham Keha
A good woman	Boorai mkha kaham keha
A bad boy	Cherai mkha hamkha keha
A bad girl	Boorai mkha hamkha keha
Good	Kaham
Better	...
Best	Kaham thak
High	Kchu
Higher	...
Highest	Kchu thak
I am	Ang
Thou art	Noong
He is	Ba
We are	Choong
You are	Noorau
They are	Barau
To beat	Booak nai
Beating	Booak tanga
Having beaten	Booak Paiha
I beat	Ang booa
He beats	Ba booa
They beat	Boorau booa
I shall beat	Ang boonai
He will beat	Ba boonai
I go	Ang thanga
We go	Choong thanga

They go	Boorau thanga
I went	Ang thangha
He went	Ba thangha
Go	Thang
Going	Thang ae
Gone, went	Thangha
House	Nouk
Door	Daka
Oven	Thapa
Cooking Pot	Tuok
Rice	Mai
Curry	Mui
Fish	A
Meat	Bahain

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CHAPTER III

ECONOMIC LIFE

The characteristic features of a primitive economy are also present in the economic system of the Reang. There is little specialisation. All do all works. Tools and techniques used are few, simple and indigenous but fitted to their environment. Wants and desires are almost common, similar, simple and easily satisfied. No intricate division of labour occurs. The only division is between men and women based on supernatural and magical beliefs. Their life is hard, simple and self-contained. Their economy is nearly self-subsistent. They have little tradition of trade, exchange of goods, ceremonial and reciprocal, is, however, an ancient pattern of distribution. The economic activities of the Reang mainly consist of food-gathering, food-producing, animal domestication basketry and weaving. Every family pursues every activity, not to sell at profit, but to meet its immediate demands. The labourer being the owner of production and consumer, there is hardly any marketable surplus. Any deficiency or surplus is regulated to exchange, gift, lending and feat. The non-machine and non-pecuniary economy of the non-literate Reang is now slowly moving towards complexity. An attempt is made here to describe their ancient economy along with the recent trends.

1. Food Gathering

The food-gathering activity of the Reang consists of the collection of vegetables, fishing and hunting. It is supplemented by food-production and domestication of animals and birds. As the forests are receding, dependent on food-gathering is decreasing.

The forests of Tripura offer ample scopes for food-gathering activity. There are many kinds of edible vegetables, leaves, fruits, roots and tubers. The vegetables, roots and tuber commonly collected by the Reang are: *Muia* (bamboo shoots), *Muikutu* (arum), *Mui Khande busa* (*Polypodium* Sp.), *Muifrai* (*Basella* Mubra), *Khangka* (wild brinjal), *Khuicang* (*Ficus* glumerrata), *Rai cak* (soft top of cane), *Thalik thampai* (wild banana), *Laifang* (wild banana), *Tharai* (*Alpina* allurghas), *Kantha* (*Lasia* heterophylla), *Ciciri* (*Monocharia* hastata), *Mai Khani* (mushroom), *Muicheng*, *Syamsata* (*Ceatella* asiatica), *Chamarang*, *Balang Bathema*, *Kerang Muithape*, *Bakhatai*, etc. They also gather various wild fruits such as *Mandu*, *Thaichua*, *Thaisbai*, *Samai*, *Akao*, *Changmbu*, *Thaicharem*, *Thaichu*, *Thaicher*, *Thaichak*, and many others.

Wild vegetables grow profusely during the rainy season (May-September). Some vegetables, stems and arums which grow in marshy lands and river-sides are available throughout the year. Roots and tubers are generally collected during autumn, winter and early summer. Bee-hive, if ever detected in a tree, is also collected by several men together.

The gathering of wild vegetables, roots, tubers and stems is generally done by grown-up girls and women who after taking the morning-meal set out in batches. Honey and fruits from long and big trees are gathered by men.

Tools and other implements required for the purpose are simple and few. An iron chopper is a must which is used in cutting, chopping, digging and for defense. Another essential thing is a basket.

Fishing in streams, rivers, marshy lands and lakes is done by all, the male and female, boy and girl, for home-consumption all throughout the year but more profitably during the rains. The usual methods of fishing are simple catching, poisoning, trapping and killing.

Simple catching requires no tool, but swift manoeuvring of hands. In poisoning, the juice of a particular creeper called *Ruo* is used. The creeper collected fresh from the forests is cut into short pieces, crushed, threshed and thrown into a lake, marsh or a pool in the course of a stream to stupefy the fishes. For trapping, various types of appliances are used such as *Bachai*, *Barai*, *Bambur*, *Caka*, *Du*, *Fakkoai*, *Palo*, *Selam*, hook-and-rod and net. For killing, chopper and spear are necessary. Big fishes can be caught by this method.

Bacai is a simple trap made of a piece of bamboo of about 3 in length. One of its end is split into uneven number of strips, say 9 or 11, which are spirally woven with a cane. It is set vertically where water is stagnant. A piece of cloth or leaf with bait is placed at its mouth.

Barai itself is not a trap. It is a fence that lets out water but not the fishes. It is made of a large number of thin bamboo-splits, each of equal length, say about 4' woven with canes. It is set vertically at river-bed against the current. It needs support of poles. It can be folded and spread according to necessity.

Bambur is a *madal-shaped* complicated trap made of several thin and fine bamboo strip, woven with canes. The two ends gradually get tapered and closed. An opening kept at a middle point is prepared in such a way that fish can go in but cannot go out. The mouth made of short bamboo-trips and cane is wide towards the front and narrow towards the back.

Caka is similar to *Bacai*. *Caka* is set horizontally in shallow water against the slow current at a break of embankment of fields.

Du is a bigger type of Caka, made of a long piece (about 7) of barak or Jai bamboo. It is set horizontally in deep water against strong current.

Fakkoai is an implement of the nature of a shovel used to scoop out water. It is wide at the mouth and tapering at the back. There are two types of *Fakkoai*. One can be handled by a single man; another requires two persons. Both of them are made of very thickly woven bamboo-strips.

Palo is cone shaped. Its base is circular, and the tapering top looks like the brim of a jar. Made of fine sticks of bamboo and cane, there are numerous creavices in it. It is about 2' in height.

Salem is a reangular shaped bamboo trap. The front is wide and open; the back is tapered and closed. It is porous and made of bamboo strips. A bamboo pole set at the top in a slanting position keeps the instrument steady and serves the purpose of a handle. *Salem* may be made of different size and shape.

Fishing is done individually or communally. Men, women and children participate. No taboo is attached to it. In communal fishing, the catch is either divided among the participants or each takes his respective catch. Scope for fishing is shrinking owing to the reclamation of marshes and use of insecticides in fields. Now, the trend is either to purchase from markets or to dig private tanks.

Hunting of animals and birds is not only an economic activity, but also a sport. Wild animals like swine, deer, elephant and birds like fowls, dove, hunting parrot, myna, teal, bulbul, cuckoo are abundantly available. Excepting a few, these are hunted and relished.

Their methods of hunting include tracking, stalking, snaring, trapping and shooting. For these they use various kinds of implement, trap and snare.

Tracking is a joint venture in which several persons armed with choppers, spears, clubs and guns, and accompanied by dogs approach the hunt of the wild animals from different sides, surround the area, go on reducing the circle, shout, make noise by shouting, beating the forests, and set the dogs on chase to startle the animals out of their hide-outs. In their alarm the game runs helter-skelter and fall within the range of the hunt-men's weapons.

Stalking is an individual effort in which a courageous hunter armed with weapons lies in ambush in the evening at the hunt of the game and strikes them at the opportune moment. To attract the game a *Kuki* hunter makes the peculiar sound of the animal and waits in disguise wrapping up an animal-skin over his body.

Traps and Snares used by the Reang are similar to those made by the Tipra and other tribes of Tripura. All the tribes are expert in this art. Some of the

common traps and snares are *Oarai*, *Bra*, *Takkhai*, *Neel Yefung*, *Slings*, *Bow-and-Arrow* and *Gun*.

Oarai is a round pitfall. An *oarai* to catch tortoise is called *Tuimui Oarai*, and that for elephant-catching is known as *Maiung Oarai* or *Kheda*. It is dug at a place where the games frequent or on the path they usually use. For tortoise hunting an *Oarai* of about 3 feet in depth and 2 feet in diameter serves the purpose. Short bamboo sticks about the height of the pit are erected inside the periphery of the pit so that the game fails to creep up. It is covered with twigs and leaves to give it a natural show.

Maiung Oarai is generally known as *Kheda*. It is a laborious job. For its preparation several persons are to work hard for few days. This type of *oarai* is about fifteen feet deep and has a diameter of about twelve feet. Pointed spikes of bamboo are planted at the bottom. Two long fences at two sides are erected. As usual the top of the pit is covered with twigs, bamboo and leaves.

Bra is a baited snare used to catch small birds. Two posts, each about two feet in length are planted keeping an intermediate distance of about 15". Two bars, one below another with a gap of about 6" are horizontally tied to the posts. A tread-board made of bamboo strips and canes is placed in a slanting position on the lower bar. A peg touching the tread-board and the upper bar is attached in such a way that when the tread-board is depressed the peg is released. Bait is placed below the board. Some birds merrily dance on the board, while others remain engaged in eating. As soon as the peg is released, the board falls flattening the birds underneath.

Takkhai is set on the same principle as that of the *Bra*, but on a little big scale. Here also two vertical posts and two horizontal bars are used as in *Bra*. A long rope is attached to a bent bough of a tree. The rope sets a peg in order and then ends in a running noose placed on a tread-board. Baits are placed on the board. When a big bird steps on the board and usually at the same time inside the circle of the noose, it depresses the board and causes the release of the peg. The bough springs back into its natural position suspending the bird with the noose which runs tight about its legs.

Yefung is a spear-trap. A bamboo-pole, about 10' in length, in parallel to the track used by the games, is horizontally set about 2' above the ground level. To act as a spear, a short and sharp bamboo-spike is fixed with the head of the pole. The back of the pole is held fixed by stakes and bars. The head of the pole is forcibly bent backward just to create a tension. On both sides of the path two stakes just opposite to each other are stuck. A long rope is extended across the path. The legs of the game while passing by, disturb

the rope. The disturbance breaks the balance and releases a key-stick. At once the spear shoots out and penetrates into the body of the animal.

Neel is a childish trap, an adhesive preparation. Gum or sticky juice obtainable from jackfruit tree, banian tree or bhadi tree is besmeared on the branches of an untrimmed bamboo which is taken to the field and erected near the embankment of the paddy field. It is set by the cowboys in September and October when small birds fly over the fields in search of insects. Legs get stuck when they sit on the bamboo for rest. The more they flutter their wings more closely get stuck.

Hunting is done individually, communally or by a small group of persons. Women, girls and children do not participate. Women are tabooed. It is believed that if women take part in hunting, the men will be lazy and unsuccessful in hunting. There are certain customary norms in respect of the distribution of the meat of the game hunted communally. Every household including those of the participants gets a share. The actual hunter, as well as the owner of the gun gets an extra share each. The village-chief is also given an extra share if the game is big enough. Even the hunting dog is not deprived of share. Prior to the distribution of the meat, the Priest-magician (*Akchai*) is required to drive out, through spells, any possible evil influence from the body of the game. He takes a piece, roasts it, utters some spells and throws it away.

To ensure success in hunting big games the Reang sometimes try through spells and offerings to win the favour of a deity called *Binkaraja* also known as *Buraha*. Not only that, the wife of the hunter is required to touch the hunted game with her ladle (*Phaikha*) so that all the rest of the animals' kith and kin fall prey to.

2. Domestication of animals and birds

The Reang domesticate a few species of animals and birds. Only four types, pig, fowl, cat and dog, are found in houses of the Reang, Tipra, Noatia, Jamatia, Halam, Kuki, Garo, etc. In the past when all these communities practised shifting cultivation they did not feel the necessity of cattle. Another cause lies in their aversion to milk, the smell of which appears to them nauseating.

With their taking to plough cultivation since the last quarters of the nineteenth century, buffalo and lately cow are being domesticated. More-over, there were practical difficulties in keeping cow, goat, sheep, duck, pigeon, etc, in the wild environs infested with ferocious animals like tiger, leopard, panther, elephant, wild dog and fox.

Swine called *Oak* is domesticated by all. In their rural environment pig fits well. Rearing that is inexpensive. From dawn to dusk they roam about the village and eat up paddy, gruel, husk, fermented rice, chaff, arum, worm and the likes. At night pigs are kept in a pig-sty made of stout pillars, posts and bamboos. The sty is almost square in shape: its size varies according to the number of the pigs. Formerly, it had to be erected below the platform of the house to save them against the depredations of tigers. Now the sty is built at a corner of the courtyard. Pork is served at all public dinners. Pig is also used as a sacrificial animal. The number of pigs a household possesses is held as a mark of prosperity and prestige.

Fowls and chickens called *Tao* are domesticated in large numbers. They find their own food from gardens and courtyards. They are kept either in baskets or in a raised, small shed. Their meats is very favourite dish. Chickens are sacrificed in all worships.

In almost every house, one or two dogs (*Sui*) and cats (*Amingsa* or *Bilai*) are found. These animals are domesticated, not for meat, but for other purposes like hunting, watching, guarding and killing rats.

3. Food Production

Jhum—

The Reang do not solely depend on food-gathering. They produce food. Their food-producing activity is called *Heo* or *Jhum*. It is carried on the hill slopes once in a year. Both men and women, boys and girls participate in the operations. Major activities like cutting jungles and weeding are done communally. *Jhum* operations include site selection, cutting jungles, firing, clearing the debris, sowing, weeding, watching and harvesting along with certain rituals. The detail of each operation need not be presented here. Certain cardinal points have been noted.

The necessary tools are very few in number, chopper, sickle and baskets. Long ago, before learning of the usage of iron, they would prepare the field, not by cutting the plants, but by setting fire to the bushes in the winter. And sticks and pointed stones were used for dibbling the seeds.

Site Selection—

In *Jhum* cultivation, the first duty is the selection of a site in the winter (November-December). In selecting a site, preference is given to a deep forest area or a bamboo-forest which yields rich harvest. Each family selects its own site for a year. The next year the cultivation is shifted elsewhere. So it may be called shifting cultivation. After a few years this plot may again be cultivated by anybody. In selecting a site some interesting magical practice

are performed. Early in the morning of an auspicious day a very small patch of the tentatively selected site is cleared. A piece of bamboo is split into two halves which are held and dropped from above. It is auspicious if one half falls obversely and the other reversely.

Rituals—

It is done thrice if the pieces do not fall in the desired manner. If anything contrary happens, it is left. This ritual is known as *Hook Oakha Kaimi*. Not only that, at that time it is omen to hear the call of a kite or a deer. Moreover, a lump of soil is taken to the home for revelation through dreams (*Imao Nanui*). The cultivator wears a clean cloth at night, sleeps alone and places the soil below his pillow. Cultivation would be profitable if he dreams of buffalo, cattle, marriage ceremony, clear water, fishing, etc. It is bad if a naked women, fire, police-man or a beggar is seen. Besides, places with deep and narrow holes or where once a black monkey or python died or where witches and spirits are supposed to live are dreaded and left. These beliefs and practices are common to the Tipra, Jamatia, Noatia, Garo, Halam and Kuki also. Beliefs of this kind are almost universal. The Naga, Purum and Lakher also depend on dream revelations. The Kogi Indians who inhabit the Sierra Nevada range of Colombia leave even a fertile field where there are supposed to be many spirits of the dead.

Preparation of field—

The selected site is prepared by cutting down the bushes, bamboos, shrubs and trees. The plants are laid on the spot for a month for drying. After that fire is set usually in the evening. After two or three days the unburnt logs, trunks, stalks and stems are collected, heaped and set to fire. All ashes remain as they are and serve as fertilisers. Certain interesting magical practices are observed while fire is set to the dry bushes and bamboos. Prior to the setting of fire a *Suai* seed (*Entada scandens*), a hand-fan, sesamum oil, cotton and a small basket-work called *Maicham* are taken to the field and thrown into the dry debris. Immediately after the setting of fire a few malignant deities namely *Haichuma*, *Buraha*, *Banirao* and *M ainokma* are worshipped. The ritual is called *Hatamalaimi*, in which two pigs, three chickens and four dishes are needed. Even the housewife is required to perform simultaneously a ritual. At the courtyard, she is to place a quantity of sesamum oil, cotton, a *suai* seed and a *Maicham*. This is to relieve the mother earth from the burning sensation.

Instead of ploughing or terracing the land, they dig hundreds of shallow and small holes with iron chopper. The holes are about 2" deep each and about

8" apart from one another. Digging and sowing go on simultaneously in the months of *Chaitra-Vaisaka* (March-April). At the time of sowing, the workers stand in a line. Every body has a small basket containing seeds and a chopper. The basket is tied to the left waist. The basket generally used by the women is smaller than that of the men. These are respectively known as *Kaisni* and *Chimpai*. While digging, putting a mixture of seeds and covering the hole, each batch of workers goes down from top to bottom and again climbs up the hill. The process continues until the entire field is covered. The seeds of *Khundrapai*, *Lela*, *Maisai*, *Usnai*, *Muilamanda*, *Hamcham* and *Khuncha* are spread broadcast. Monday, Wednesday, Thursday are supposed to be auspicious for starting the operation of sowing. A piece of green turmeric charged with some spells is dug at the south-east corner of the field, so as to prevent the evil spirits from entering and doing harm to the crops.

The seedlings grow up within three weeks. After a few showers of the monsoon, creepers and grasses also grow abundantly. They require weeding twice or thrice with intermediate gaps. Weeding for the first time is called *HagraTangmi*; the second one *MaiaguTangmi*, while weeding for the third and fourth times are respectively known as *Karami* and *Khulmaomi*. Weeding for the last time done in August-September is an occasion of great joy for the young boys and girls.

Weeding is not enough. Protective measures, magical and physical are also taken against wild animals, birds, evil eyes and evil spirits. A watch house called *Kaireng* is built up on a mount within the field. This rectangular shaped and two-roofed hut with raised platform is quite airy and convenient for looking around. Scarecrows are set. A number of half-split bamboos are erected hither and thither and connected with a long rope one end of which is tied to a post of the watch house. From time to time, a watchman by pulling the rope makes fluttering sound to scare the birds and animals. Deities like *Buraha*, *Haichuma*, *Mainooma*, *Khoonooma*, *Tuima*, etc, are also propitiated with spells, offerings and sacrifices. As the shifting cultivation on hills is almost entirely dependent on rainfall, in case of drought, the Reang resort to sympathetic magic. Water is dropped on a tray and spread in the courtyard; the goddess of water is worshipped; a lump of soil is thrown into the water; a particular insect called *Chechema* is buried alive with the head down ward, and also a sound in imitation of a rog is produced by rubbing a *laisrab* leaf (*Phrynium imbricatum*) against the bottom of a basket. Similar sound may be produced by rubbing a split against a scratched bamboo. All these rites are not performed at a time.

A variety of crops is raised in the *Jhum* field. To name some of them; paddy (*Mai*), cucumber (*Sasha*), brinjal (*Fantao*), broad bean (*Kachai*), long bean (*Sabai*), red bean (*Kachai*), jute (*Mesta*), roselle (*meshta*), cotton (*Khoo*), arum (*Yakchu*), gourd (*Muitao*), lady's finger (*Murisha*), maize (*Makanda*), chilli (*Thamas*), *Khaklu*, *buthai* or *Chindra*, *Marma*, and a king of sugarcane, *mazai* (ragi), *Bathema*, *Tharmu*, *Thalangi*, *Tharchang*, *Thapa*, *Chamarang*, *Karma*, *Manda*. All the varieties of crops do not mature at a time. They ripe one after another. So harvesting continues from *Ashada* (June-July) to *Aswina* (September-October).

No crop is eaten unless it is first offered to the deities. Fruits like cucumber, *chindra*, *marma* ripe in June. So the first offering is made of these fruits. Then again the new rice is offered to the deities. The offering of new rice to the deities and eating it assumes the character of a festival.

Storing—

Harvesting of paddy begins in September-October. The stalks of paddy, about two inches below the grains, are cut with a sickle and put into thickly woven baskets slung from the forehead on the back. These are temporarily stored in the watch house and then removed and stored in the granary. A series of granaries were formerly built by the Reang on piles a little away from the living houses at the outskirts of the village to protect against fire. The Tipra, Jamatia, Halam, Lushai, Laker, Sema Naga also used to construct granaries at a distance from the living quarters.

Through operations like cutting plants, sowing and weeding are generally done communally; the crops are not divided among the participants. The products belong to the individual family. The participants are neither served the mid-day meal nor money. Every body takes meal from his house. They may at best be served tobacco and betel leaf. The principle of distribution of reward is proportionate to the labour; in other words, the number of days the entire team would work in a family's field is equal to the number of worker participating from that family. Work is, however, mixed with recreation. The tedious operations are lightened through songs, jokes and tales which provide rhythm to the work.

It may be added here that the majority of the Reang of today do no longer depend on shifting cultivation, just as they formerly did not solely depend on gathering only. Now they have largely taken to plough cultivation. It implies that emphasis is being shifted from gathering through **Jhuming** to plough cultivation. Plough cultivation has been introduced in the hills of Tripura a little over 100 years back. Hunter (1875) in his account noted

aversion of the hills people of Tripura towards plough cultivation. The tribal people explain the cause behind their aversion to plough cultivation thus: in contrast to Jhuming, plough cultivation necessitates so many tools and complicated techniques; risk involved in domesticating the cattle in the forests infested with wild animals, a variety of crops can be grown in the same Jhum-field which is not possible under plough cultivation and above all workings during the rainy season in the marshy and muddy fields were a botheration and unhealthy at least in those days.

Nevertheless, the Reang are now expert plough cultivators. Initially they used to employ Bengali labourers and purchase tools from the Bengali carpenters. Now they themselves do all sorts of work and some of them can make tools. The common tools required in plough cultivation are plough, ladder, spade, axe, chopper, sickle and harrow.

Not only that they are now cultivating fruit and other valuable trees like pineapple, guava, mango, jackfruit, lemon, orange, tamarind, tapioca, Sal, date-plam, banana, coconut, lichi, betelnut, bamboo, wood apple, and the like. Previously the semi-nomadic Reang had a belief that the horticultural gardens were the vertiable resorts of witches and demons.

4. Crafts

The Reang have few crafts. Whatever they do, do for their domestic use. The important handicrafts of the Reang are basketry and textile-weaving. In addition, there are a few minor crafts.

Basketry—

Baskets of different shapes, sizes and names are woven. There is very little difference between the basketry of the Reang and that of the Tipra. Materials and tools used for basket-making consist of bamboo splits, cane, creeper and iron chopper. As a craft, basketry is probably older than textile-weaving, because of the fact that picking and gathering require container. Before the introduction of iron chopper, their baskets were not as fine as those of today. Baskets are woven by the men only. Women are prohibited. It is believed that if women prepare baskets, men will be lazy. Not only that, it is also believed that a young man should know the art before his marriage. He must at least know how to weave a cradle, otherwise his child may die. Moreover, proficiency in basketry enhances his position and prestige in marriage. Thus the art assumes the character of a ritual.

The Reang baskets are of various patterns, which are mainly variations of the checker and twill patterns. According to purpose, they have several categories of baskets, such as, carrying baskets, storing baskets, trays,

mattresses, cages, haversacks, vessels, and rain-shields. They have different names for different baskets e.g., *Tui-langa*, *Nouakhali*, *Dingra*; *Khau*, *Klang*, *Mainu*, *Bukhu*, *Chapa*, *Baileng Saseha*, *Maisimi*, *Yangkhau*, *Takhuk*; *Kaisna*, *Chimpai*, *Badakhu*, *Chakikhau*, *Lakhu*; *Oaieng*.

Tuilanga is a carrying basket. It is not closely woven. Its is circular in mouth, squared base, upper portion is swelling and the tapering the lower portion. Its height is 20", diameter 46", radius 17" and anyone side of the bottom is 8". It is used to carry articles of bigger size, such as vegetables, root, pieces of wood and bamboo for fueling and utensils. In other words, it is used for rough-work and thrown away after the work.

Naukhai is also a carrying basket. It is closely woven. Its shape is similar to that of *Tuilanga*; but a little smaller. It is used to carry grains, paddy, pulses and for shopping and marketing. Its height is 15", diameter 41", radius 15", and anyone side of the bottom 8".

Dingra is another carrying basket, bigger than *Nuakhai*. It is particularly used to carry ears of paddy from the field to the watch-house and afterwards to the granary. Its height is 20", diameter 52', radius 18, and anyone side of the bottom is 12".

Klang is bigger than *Dingra*. It is used for threshing out the paddy from the ears. The ears are put into it a pestled with a heavy stick. It is used also for carding cotton.

Khau is cylindrical shaped; but the bottom is square. Seeds of paddy are preserved in it.

Mainu is similar to *Khau* in shape but bigger than that. Maunds of paddy may be put into it.

Bukhu is a very thickly woven basket made of fine bamboo-splits. It is square at the base, and tapering towards the bottom. It has a rim which is pressed inward just to create a circular notch for holding a conical lid. Young married women especially, use it to keep their cloth and ornament and comb. Its height is 39", diameter 50", radius 15" and anyone side of the bottom is 11".

Chapa is a rectangular shaped basket that looks like a suitcase. If *Bukhu* is women's basket, *Chapa* is man's. Boys and son-in-laws generally use it to carry and store their cloth, ornament, comb and cosmetic.

Baileng is a very thickly woven, circular and flat trary with a raised rim. A standard *Baileng* is 68" in diameter and 21" in radius. Winnowing and sun-drying small quantities of chilli, rice, paddy are done with it.

Saseha is porous, circular and flat trary with raised rim used to separat rice from chaffs. It has a diameter of 60" and radius of 18".

Maisimi is also a tray for separating paddy from sweepings and rubbish.

Yangkhau is a thickly woven, rectangular mattress used for sundrying paddy, chilli, pulses, sesamum seeds, leaves of tabacoo, etc.

Takhuk is a cage, rectangular at the base, tapering and closed towards the top with an opening at a side for the passage of the chickens.

Both *Kaisni* and *Chimpai* are thickly woven mini-carrying baskets used during sowing; the former is used by women and the latter by men. *Chimpai* is bigger than *Kaisni*. A *Chimpai* is 7" in height, 19" in diameter, 6" in radius and 3" x 3" in base.

Badakhu is cylindrical shaped mini basket. It is even smaller than *Kaisni*. It is loosely woven meant for putting inside bottles and onions, garlic, etc. It is kept hanging.

Chakikhau is nearly socket-shaped with a tapering and pointed bottom used as a vessel for preparing alkaline water.

Lakhu is a rainshield that looks almost like a big shell of tortoise. The upper portion is so closed as to make a cavity so that it remains in a hanging position from the head of the person who uses it. It covers the head and the back.

Oaieng is a cradle. It is flat and rectangular at the base with raised rim. It is kept hanging from the ceiling with a pair of ropes.

The next important industry is the weaving of cloth. It is exclusively done by the girls and women. Men are not allowed. It is believed if men weave cloth he may be attacked by bear. Similar beliefs are to be found among other communities also. The Tipra belief is that a man engaged in weaving would be killed by lightning. The Halams believe that such a man may be attacked by a bear.

Materials and tools necessary for weaving consist of cotton, spindle, spinning machine, bow, and a simple tension loom which includes sword, shuttle, back-strap, shed-stick, heddle, beams, posts, breast-rods and lease-rods. The weaving of clothes might have been preceded by the use of fibres. Cotton is grown in the field. Cotton flowers are collected, sundried and stored in October-November. At convenient times shells and skins are peeled off, and the flowers are put to a ginning machine for separating the cotton from the seeds. The machine consists of two wooden rollers horizontally inserted into two posts which are erected on a short but heavy wooden plank. The rollers are geared in opposite directions with a crank.

After ginning, cotton is carded with a bow and a striker. The bow is made of a fine bamboo split which tapers towards the ends. The split is bent and its two ends tied with a rope or a skin.

Weaving—

Cotton is then rubbed against the thigh and made into several wicks as a preparatory process to spinning which is followed by dyeing. Mainly two colours are prepared: red colour from a tree called *Achu* and black colour from a plant known as *Lela*. Actual weaving starts after dyeing. It is done with a loom which is neither heavy nor fixed, but can be rolled and carried from one place to another. For weaving, the warp elements are first mounted length-wise and rolled round two rods kept at a distance in parallel. The weavers sits behind one of the rods which is a breast-rod. The weft element is made to pass, through a shuttle, over and below each alternate thread. For shedding the warp elements are divided into two alternate sets, each set being tied to a heddle. By drawing the heddles upward and downward, the shuttle is made to pass in between. With a sword the weft is compressed.

The women weave only a few kinds of cloth such as *Rinai*, *Risa*, *Basei*, *Pandri*, *Kutai*, *Rikatu*, *Baki* and *Kamchai*. *Rinai* is women's cloth worn round the waist. Sometimes it is raised to cover both the breast and the waist. *Risa* is narrow but long piece of beautifully decorated and thickly woven cloth used to cover the breast only. *Basei* is a narrow and long piece of ordinary cloth fastened diagonally above one shoulder and below one arm to carry babies. *Pandri* is a napkin used by men around the waist. What is *Pandri* to a man is *Rinai* to a woman. *Pandri* is shorter than *Rinai*. *Kutai* is shirt. The pattern of weaving and stitching being uniform, it can be used by both male and female. *Rikatu* is a wrapper rectangular in shape, and so also is *Baki*, which is, however, a little heavier than *Rikatu*. *Kamchi*, is a turban made of an ordinary piece of cloth.

Wood-work—

The Reang males themselves manufacture some utensils, furnitures and musical instruments. The necessary tools like chopper, chisel, axe are purchased from the markets. There are no professional carpenters. Persons expert in wood-work are honoured with country-liquor, betel-leave and tobacco.

For husking rice mortar and pestle constitute the alternative to the husking pedal (*Dhenki*) used in the plains. The mortar is made of a solid block of wooden stem. A cavity at the top is made by scooping out wood. It is either cylindrical or hyperboloid in shape. The pestle is a heavy, circular and polished pole.

Seats to sit on and planks for washing clothes, cowbells hung round the necks of cattle and troughs for giving food to the pigs are scooped out of

sections of trees. Wooden spade made of a crescent shaped plank and a pole inserted at the centre of the blade is used for spreading and heaping up paddy at the courtyard.

Bamboo pipes with nodes at the bottom are made for bringing, keeping and preserving water, liquor, oil, milk, curd, honey, liquid molasses, seeds and dry fishes. Ladle is also made of a bamboo section. Before the introduction of earthen and metal utensils green bamboo-pipes were used as cooking pots. Shells of gourd, coconut and molluse are also used as vessels and containers.

The Reang make use of leather for domestic purpose. The skins of tiger and deer are used as seat, the skin of goat for covering drums and that of buffalo as back-strap.

Fibres are used as head-band and ropes. The fibres of a particular tree called *lambak* (*Sterculia villosa*) are profusely used as head band for carrying heavy articles and baskets. Barks of different trees are used to stupefy fishes, to prepare yeast for liquor and for dyeing threads.

Salt-making is another cottage industry. Charcoal obtainable from bamboos, seamum mustard and rape plants is preserved and when needed a quantity of it is put into a socket-shaped basket (*Chakikhak*) along with water. Below is placed a bamboo pipe or an earthen vessel in which drops of alkaline water accumulates.

5. Weights and measures

The Reang are not businessmen like. They have very little tradition of trade and commerce. So the system of weights, measures and counting has not developed much among them.

	Cardinals.
1	Ha
2	Nai
3	Tham
4	Brai
5	Ba
6	Dou
7	Sni
8	Chai
9	Sku
10	Chi

For ordinals, they have only two terms; *Kuchu* which means higher, upper, better, first, etc.; and *Hache* which signifies lower, below, that follows, second and the like.

Height

1. Yathai Landrai	from ground to the ankle-joint
2. Yafa Tunijara	from ground to the Calf
3. Yaskuni Jara	from ground to the Knee-joint
4. Yafung Jara	from ground to the mid-thigh
5. Chang Jara	from ground to the waist
6. Khabang Jara	from ground to the Chest
7. Ganga Jara	from ground to the neck
8. Sak Landrai	from ground to the crown of the head
9. Yasku Suha	from ground to the raising of hands
10. Dak Suha	from ground to the raising of hands with a chopper.
11. Oak Suha	from ground to the raising of hands with a bamboo.

Length

Length is measured either by placing the fingers close to each other or by spreading them.

Height

1. Yakchai Khrangma	width of thumb finger
2. Yakchai Thainai	width of two fingers
3. Yakchai Thaitham	width of three fingers
4. Yakchai Thaibrai	width of four fingers
5. Yafa Khakcha	width of five fingers
6. Khut laha	distance between the tip of the thumb and tip of index finger when spread
7. Karaha	distance between the tip of the thumb and that of the little finger when spread
8. Mumucham	distance between the fist and the elbow
9. Muha	distance between the tip of the middle finger and the
10. pa Pungha	the distance of the entire hand.
11. Miaha	the distance of the two hands when horizontally spread.

Time

The day along with the following night is divided into several parts. Counting starts with cock-crow.

1. Taola Chiha	cock-crow
2. Aiha	dawn
3. Sakadrai	just sun-rise
4. Oak Chuha	about one bamboo length of sun rise
5. Saja Kaotai	before .midday
6. Saja Kaha	midday
7. Sakhuk Kheidrai	Just after midday
8. Mai Chubla	after noon, ti~e of husking
9. Sahadra	just before sun set
10. Sania	just sun set
11. M ukhang sam	after sun set, hair becomes, invisible, insuspicious time.
12. Mukhang sam laidri	beginning of night
13. Har thuha	mid night.

The whole year is simply divided into two parts: winter and rainy season. The former is called *Maseng* and the latter *Varsa* or *Sajlang* Eclipse is called *Rami*. Solar eclipse is known *Sal-rami* and lunar eclipse *Tal-rami*.

Observations

The economic activities of the Reang show all the characteristics of an economy for which various terms like primitive economy, marginal economy, subsistence economy, small economy and backward economy are generally used. We may briefly note down here the salient features of the Reang economy.

1. Simple technology: The tools used by the Reang are very few, crude and simple. *Dao*, spade, sickle and axe are the principal implements which are purchased from the local markets. Even, a few centuries back, they had to depend on natural objects like stones, sticks and clubs.

2. Dependance on forest: Their economy revolves round the forest they inhabit. They obtain from forests vegetables, roots, fruits, flowers, insects, crabs, birds, animals, firewood, and materials for building houses, weaving clothes, and preparing baskets, cages and traps.

3. Domestic mode of consumption: Family is the nuclear unit of production. All the members of a family-husband and wife, father and mother, brothers and sisters, children-are engaged in the same type of work. Family is the unit of production and consumption. For certain parts of the economy, the system of collective and cooperative endeavour is, however, well developed.

4. Little specialisation: Every Reang is a jack of all trades, but master of none. Every grown-up male knows the use of tools and techniques necessary for hunting, fishing, basketry and shifting cultivation. And all grown-up females know those for cooking, weaving, shifting cultivation and gathering roots and vegetables. So they have a variety of jobs. In other words, they perform heterogeneous works in monotonous environs.

5. Mixture of magic with economy: Economic activities of the Reang are invariably mixed up with magic. To ensure success in hunting, forest-deities are propitiated, and the game is touched with a ladle by the hunter's wife. Selection of Jhum-field is subject to dream revelation: field-deities are worshipped for a better harvest. The Reang firmly believe in the efficiency of magic. It supplements their economic effort and brings assurance where there is only hope. Agriculture is believed to be partly dependent on the whims of supernatural force. Supernatural belief often prevails over economic consideration.

6. Some economic operations assumes the character of a ritual, for instance, a boy must know the technique of making a cradle before his marriage; if a man learns the task after marriage and makes a cradle for his child, the child would be sure to die. Similarly if a woman learns to weave a long cloth called *Base*; which is used to tie the child over the back, only after her marriage, the child may die.

7. Division of labour in human society is not based on any rigid and universal principle. Sometimes, it is based on some superstitious belief and also belief in supernatural punishment. The Reang believe that if in textiles weaving which is a female job among them, a man participates in it, he may be attacked by a wild bear. And if a woman makes baskets, her husband would be unsuccessful in hunting.

8. Sometimes continance and sometimes licentiousness are taken as conditions for success in magico-economic activity. For example, it constitutes an essential prerequisite of the *Jhum* cultivation to bring a lump of soil from a hill and know in dream the past and future of the field. The head of the family must sleep alone on a clean bed for

revelations through dream. In another phase of work, say, during cutting bushes, sowing and weeding, it is good if young people sing, cut jokes and play on musical instruments.

9. Production and distribution involve very little of profit motive. There are exchanges mainly through gifts and ceremony. Reciprocity is an important principle of socio-economic relations. The surplus is disposed by means of feasts, worships, gifts, and hospitality. Naturally their system of measurement of time, figure, solid and liquid objects still remains primitive. Until recently they had no idea that land could be a property.

We must not, however, think that the Reang economy is absolutely static and the people conservative and reluctant to take to more efficient techniques and tools. Indeed, they have shifted to a great extent from their ancient economy. They are practical people. Majority of them are conversant with the present day system of exchange. They have developed a high level of confidence while transacting goods and services with other peoples through modern coins and weights and measures. The emergence of some new economic typologies among them, viz., labourer type and white-collar jobs type are quite evident. Dependence on forest is waning, while that on agricultural lands is waxing. They also practice plough cultivation. In fact, they have been attempting to obtain the best of both systems. The Reang economy has not completely changed from the old, primitive, activities, nor has it entered fully the white-collar and industrial economy.

Several factors and forces like the opening up of so many schools and colleges, improvement in the means of communication, various welfare activities by the Government, protective privilege, market, growth of urbanisation, establishment of hospital, post office, police station, block office, introduction of statutory *Panchayatiraj*, role of the merchant and money-lender and also the role of various political leaders and parties are bringing about a change in the economy and other aspects of culture.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL LIFE

Within the social life of the Reang there is much of compactness, cooperation, interdependence, exclusiveness, homogeneity and social control. The village and the family constitute the working socio-economic unit of the Reang. Now-a-days, however, their social life is in transition. A trend of disintegration, heterogeneity, indifference and individualism is manifesting itself in their community life. In the following pages is given an account of the Reang social life including its structure and institutions.

1. Village

The Reang generally live in separate hamlets at a distance from other castes and communities. They have a tendency of exclusively forming a hamlet of their own. A hamlet is called *Kami*. But the Bengali words *Pada* and *Badi* (meaning quarter and house) respectively are more commonly used. A village is, named after its founder or headman or the nearby river or the topographical feature.

In selecting a site, the Reang prefer the flat top of a hill of medium height out of the considerations of health and protection against wild animals, snakes, insects and enemies. Moreover, the fields of their economic activities being hills, hill tops are convenient sites. They, however, see that water from river or spring is always available down the settlement. A site near a much-frequented public road is avoided. No tribal settlement is close to one another. Each village requires hills and forests around for producing and gathering food. No boundary is strictly demarcated. Old trees, streams and hill-spurs constitute informal boundary marks. The Reang do not live in a village for a long period. It does not mean that they change site every year. *Jhum*-field is abandoned every year; but a village is left after a period of, say, ten years.

The size of a Reang village is neither too small nor too big, it is medium sized one. The number of households varies from one hamlet to another. Generally the number varies from fifty to one hundred. According to their tradition, a village having 126 families is a very big one. In contrast, an average Lamet hamlet of South-east Asia contains 38 households only¹; whereas a Lhota Naga village has as many as 350 families². Weak polity of the Lamets fails to maintain harmony and solidarity if the unit is big enough. But among the Lhota Nagas strong polity and utilisation of the Jhum fields

for two successive years enable a large number of families to live together. The Reang inspite of having an effective village council live in medium sized hamlets mainly, because every year they need a fresh forest for cultivation. Tipra, Naotia, Jamatia, Halam and Kuki also have villages of similar size.

The lay-out of a Reang village does not follow any specific plan. Much depends on the formation of the terrain. The houses are built apart from one another. Every family is at liberty to select its site. In a hamlet there are only three types of houses: *Nouk* (dwelling house) *Duai nouk* (bachelors' dormitory) and *Mai nouk* (granary). After the introduction of plough cultivation and receding horizon of forests, sheds for cattle, goats, pigs are separately built around a courtyard. Married brothers also now prefer to live under separate roofs. On the other hand, the tradition of bachelors' dormitory and granaries built away from the homesteads has fallen out of use.

The traditional Reang living-house is rectangular in ground-plan. The size is not uniform for all; it depends on means and number of members of a family. However, standard size is about 30 yards in length and 15 yards in breadth. The necessary materials consist of wooden posts, pillars, stakes, stringers, beams, bamboo poles, splits, leaves, canes, thatching grass, etc.

Selection of a site is associated with some rituals. In analogy to Jhuming, house-building is preceeded by dream revelation. A lump of soil is brought from a suitable spot and kept below the pillow of the head of the family who sleeps alone at the night. It is ominous to dream of thunder, lightning, fire, hailstorm, cyclone, crowd, break down of a tree or a house and the life. It is not bad not to see anything in dream. Sri Joramani Reang of Kanthali Chhara in November, 1979 left twice the sites he had tentatively selected.

Houses are generally built by the combined labour. Everybody is not equally adept. Those who are experienced cooperate. They are not paid in cash; but tobacco, betal-leaf, liquor and meal are offered.

The floor of the Reang house consists of a platform raised about 5 yards from the ground level and thatched with flattened bamboos which are supported by bearns, stakes and posts. It has also two verandahs, one at the front and another at the rear, which are nothing but extension of the floor. The rear verandah remains unroofed while the frontal one is partly roofed. Long posts are erected on the four sides. Wooden stringers are placed on and tied to, the notched top of the posts. Over the stringers cross-beams are laid. Several bamboo rafters placed in a slanting position at a regular distance of abuout one yard and tied between pairs of bamboo slivers with canes

constitute the roof trellis. Houses are generally two-sloped. Thatching done either with bamboo leaves or with thatching grasses goes upward from eaves. Each house has two openings with sliding doors made just below the ridge-pole. The door is of single panel. The sides are closed flattened with walls made of bamboo splits. With the front verandah a notched log of wood is placed in a slanting position to be used as a stair (*Yakli*).

The Reang do not lay their heads while sleeping towards the west, because the sun is believed to die in that very direction. Any direction to which the inmates commonly lay their heads is called *Kharoofang* and the opposite *Yakafang*. Inside the room, there is no compartment. The space between any two posts is called *Thanga*. All valuable articles are preserved at the side called *Kharoofang*. Usually the north-west corner is utilised for cooking and eating.

2. Food and drink

The Reang generally take three meals a day; first in the morning, the second at noon and the third in the evening. All the meals are not taken at home. When the *Jhum* cultivation goes on in its full swing, the mid-day meal is carried and taken in the field, while during the period of plough cultivation, the first meal is carried to the field and taken there.

The Reang are nearly omnivorous. Except certain species of animals and birds, like dog, cat, cow, crow, kite, monkey, owl, rat, tiger, vulture, they eat almost all types of grain, vegetable, fish, meat, mollusc, liquor, betel-leaf, tobacco which are gathered and cultivated. Slugs, snails, molluscs, crabs, frogs, toads, all kinds of fish, iguana, crickets, grasshopper, beetle, cock, deer, pig, buffalo, elephant, deer, porcupine, bison, mongoose, chameleon, pigeon, goat, duck, dove, jacana, myna, swallow, bulbul, babbler, tailor-bird, robin, wagtail, partridge, darter, teal, parrot, etc. are eaten by the Reang. Rice is, however, the staple food of the Reang. An able-bodied man can normally eat in each meal about 500 grams of rice along with different curries. Ears of paddy stored in the granary are brought to the courtyard, thrashed out either by trampling under feet or by pestling. For husking a quantity of paddy is put into the mortar, pestled and winnowed.

In the distant past, green bamboo pipes were used as cooking pots. After the introduction of earthen pots from the plains of Bengal, oven called *Thapha-thai* is made. At a corner of the floor of the dwelling house four thin logs (*Kalakhoong*) each about 4' in length, are tied to form a square and filled with earth so that fire cannot touch and burn the floor. Either three or five cone-shaped clods of sticky earth (*Thapha*) are so placed as to form one or

two triangular ovens. There is no pit inside the triangle. As the sides are not covered with mud, fuel can be fed from three sides.

The Reang prefer sun-dried rice to boiled rice. Rice is washed in a vessel and put into a pot with water over the oven. They like to eat rice with gruel. Curry is called *Mai*. In preparing curry, they apply such methods as boiling, roasting, broiling, frying, baking and grinding. The process of preparing puffed, fried and flattened rice (*Khai*, *Mudi* and *Chida*) was until recently unknown to them. Instead, rice-balls kept near the oven at night for baking are enjoyed by the children in the morning. Now-a-days the Reang are becoming experts in preparing delicious curries.

The Reang have been given to drinking from generations. Their favourite drink is fermented beer brewed from rice. All people, men and women, boys and girls drink profusely. Liquor is used as a stimulant to the cultivators, dancers and singers. Nothing pleases a guest more than a pipe of liquor. Without it, offering of delicious food of different varieties is considered incomplete and deficient. Weddings and funeral feasts are occasions of drinking liquor in large quantities. Even deities are offered liquor. Without it, festivals are dull.

It has bad effect also. It impoverishes many. A sizeable part of their paddy crop goes in making liquor causing scarcity of rice. Some get quarrel, some speak nonsense, loses control over their nerves and tongue, beat their wives and roll about half-naked on the floor under the influence of drink and many indulge in gambling and lose.

Liquor is brewed by the women folk. It is believed that if a man brews, the liquor would lose its proper taste. By fermentation and distillation, liquor is prepared. Yeast called *Choaing* necessary for fermentation is made of a variety of things. Barks, leaves and roots of some plants like *Ching Charangpa*, *Khoomtauktai*, *Lentuma* and *Sakbangm*, are minced, mixed with sun-dried rice, put into mortar for grinding and reduced to a lump of pulp or dough which is divided into several balls. The balls are pressed into cakes and dried in the sun.

Brewing liquor involves a lengthy process. Boiled hot rice mixed with yeast is dropped on a tray and covered with banana leaves. After a few hours, the rice is put into pot and covered air-tight. After a few days of fermentation, the juice that comes out is drunk. It is called *Cha*.

For distillation four earthen pots of unequal sizes are required. A big pot containing the fermented rice is placed on oven. Over it another empty pot is placed. A hole is made at its bottom and their joint is closed with mud. A third pot is kept at a little distance. A short bamboo pipe inserted in a slanting

position connects the second and the third pots. Steam produced from the rice of the first pot passes into the third one through the second pot and the pipe. The third pot is placed on a fourth pot full of cool water. Thus vapour turns into liquor. Liquor so obtained may be further distilled to make a stronger variety. Liquor is now prepared for commercial purposes too.

The Reang are not only addicted to drinking, they also smoke tobacco and chew betel-leaf in a great deal. Here also irrespective of age, all adults are habituated. The essential materials are partly produced and partly purchased. Most of the families grow tobacco plants. The leaves and stems of the plants are dried, preserved, minced and mixed with liquid molasses and pounded. For smoking pipes made of bamboo, coconut shell or metal and wood are used. The indigenous one is made of two bamboo pipes. The young, educated generation prefers *bidi* and cigarette to tobacco.

3. Social Structure

The Reang have been referred to as a clan or a sept by some earlier administrators and anthropologists while writing on the Hill Tracts or Chittagong and Tripura and the people thereof.

Lewin (1869) was one of them. He wrote, "There are four clans of the Tipperah tribe resident in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, as follows: the Pooran, the Nowuttea, the Osuie and the Reang. All come originally from Hill Tipperah."³ Lewin (1870) repeats the same comment in another book.⁴

Risley (1891) referred to a survey report by H. J. Reynolds and includes the Reang as one of the several septs of the Tipperah-tribe. Risley notes: The Tipperahs are described in a survey report by Mr. H. J. Reynolds as having strongly marked Mongolian features, with flat faces and thick lips. They are of much the same stature as Bengalis, but their frames are far more muscular and strongly made. Many of them have fair complexions scarcely darker than a swarthy European. The tribe is divided into a number of septs which are shown in the appendix 1 (P.139).⁵

Tipperah/Tripura/Mrung

Sub-tribes	Septs			
Nil	A'fang	Harbang	Keoya	Puran
	Aiatong	Husoi	Mising	Reang
	Fadung	Jumatiya	Mongbai	Tungbai
	Gaibing	Kakulu	Nowattia	
	Garjang	Kali	Osui	

Hutchinson's (1909) comment is on the same line as that of Lewin and Risley. Hutchinson remarked, "The Tipperahs in the Chittagong Hill Tracts number 23,341 and are scattered throughout the district. The tribe is also called Tripura and is divided into two classes, the pooran or Tippera proper and the Jamatias. The following sub-castes or septs are met with in the district; Hafang, Jamatia or Achlong-Phadong, Naitong, Husoi, Noatiya, Hakler, Kewar, Tombai, Daindak, Garbing and Reang. Reang are undoubtedly of Kuki origin."

Tribe—

It is difficult to understand why scholars like Lewin, Risley and Hutchinson referred to the Raing community as a clan. They do not possess the characteristics of a clan as laid down in the Notes and Queries on Anthropology. The social structure of the Reang is larger than that of a clan. Indeed, they have all the essential features of a tribe.

Clans—

The endogamous tribal unit of the Reang is divided into several clans or groups which are known as *Dapha* or *Panji*. Each group is divided into number of lineages. Each lineage is again divided into so many families. The names of the clans are; *Apeta*, *Changpreng*, *Charkhi*, *Malsoi*, *Meska*, *Musa*, *Noukham*, *Oairem*, *Raikchak*, *Tam-Yak-cha*, *Tooimo-iafa* and *Yakstam*. It may be mentioned here that Sri Mukherjee noted two more clans namely, *Dalbang* and *Saggarai*. But Reangs of Kanthali Chhara do not admit the existence of these *Panjis*. Not only that, to Sri Mukherjee the Reang-Clan structure seemingly assumes the form of bisection of the community having two segments of Molsoi⁸ and Meska Clans. But our observation does not tally with that of Sri Mukherjee. No clan-division of the type of Moiety has been found in our survey.

The Reang of today have no clear idea about the history of these clans. With a hazy knowledge they interpret the significance of the clan names. Sri Mukherjee too noted the meanings of names of the Reang clans.

Apeta : 'A' means fish : A Reang lady while crossing Karnaphuli river drank plenty of water. Her abdomen swelled like that of a fish. She gave birth to a child whose descendents are known as Apeta. This clan is expert in magic and spells.

Charkhi : *Charkhi* means spinning wheel. Persons of this clan are expert in weaving clothes.

Chang Preng : It means a guitar. Members of this clan are said to be well versed in guitar and other musical instruments.

Charkhi : *Charkhi* means spinning wheel. Persons of this clan are expert in weaving clothes.

Molsoi : An illicit relation between a Mag male and a Reang female, lies behind the origin of this clan. Dalbang and Sargai were two brothers of that clandestine union.

Meska : It is an old and big clan. An ancestor of this clan was attacked and killed by a tiger.

Musa : An ancestor of this clan was protected by a leopard. The ancestor while still a baby was left in the forest by his mother. The baby was found by a tigress which offered him all motherly protection.

Noukham : It means a burnt house. An ancestor while on a visit to the court of the King of Tripura, was careless and burnt the kitchen room while cooking.

Oairem : One peculiarity of this clan is that it has a comparatively large number of mads.

Rai Kachak : It is the clan named after a soldier of the past.

Tam-Yak-Chha : Literally means an injury to leg. An ancestor have suffered from a serious injury.

Tooimo-iafa : *Tooimo* means tortoise. Ordinarily it means off-springs of tortoise. There is an interesting story behind the origin of this clan. Two friends had deep and uncompromising passions for a beautiful girl. There was competition between them. They turned so much love-sick that they went to the extent of killing her and dividing her vagina. As such it served no purpose and so it was thrown into water. From that, a tortoise was born. The tortoise gave birth to a gourd plant from which in turn was born a wild bean called *Suai* or *Ghila* (*Entada acandens*). A beautiful lass came out of the bean. The descendents of the lady came to be known as *Tooimo-iafa*.

Yak stam : *Yak* means hand. *Yaks stam* means an ornament used in hand. The members of this clan are said to have fascination for using that ornament.

It is thus evident that the native explanation about the origins of the clans is incomplete and inadequate. However, it points to heterogeneous origins. In other words, each clan is a group of persons, all the members of which are held to be related to one another and bound together by a common tie. The tie may be a belief in common descent from an ancestor, real or mythical or a common experience or incident, habit, taste and temperament, disease and

distress or common habitation at a village or tract. The above narration also indicates that none of the clans is totemic in origin. The Reang do not worship any special totemic god or ancestor. The deities they worship have no distinctive connection with any clan. Nor do they observe any totemic taboos. Though certain clan-names like *Apeta*, *Changpreng*, *Meska*, apparently show connection with fish, musical instrument and tiger respectively, the Reang altogether rule out the possibility of any totemic relation with these objects. It is more probable that the *Apeta* clan once excelled in fishing, *Changpreng* clan in playing musical instruments and an unfortunate member of the *Meska* clan might have been killed by a tiger. Another reason behind the assumption that the clans are not totemic is that there is little solidarity among the members of the same clan. Moreover, these clans are not exogamous. Marriage within the same clan is neither objected to, nor prohibited by the customary laws. Indeed, the Reang may marry from any clan. In fact, in the social system of the Reang there is nothing which comes nearer to the concept of moiety and phratry. In this connection a reference has already been made to the contrary remark of Mukherjee (1970).

It is difficult to understand how Mukherjee came to this conclusion. *Molsoi* and *Meska* who were supposed to be brothers and from whom two minor lineages or sub-clans sprung up were probably mythical figures.

The social system which the Reang call *Panji* is understood by them as a relationship of persons who once inhabited the same hamlet. In the past the members of the same *Panji* had a tendency to live together and to resist others to settle with them. So we may assume that *Panji* is a regional unit and that even territorial exogamy might have developed in each *Panji*. Almost constant migration and movement of the people, dispersion of the members of the old groups, formation of new groups, population explosion were some of the factors behind the erosion of the old solidarity. So the rule of exogamy could not be maintained: it had to be relaxed and perhaps confined for some time to lineage. And now the rule is observed only in the case of brothers and sisters. Even parallel cousin and cross-cousin marriages are in vogue among them. The Reang of today have least prohibitions in marriage. They have the smallest circle of exogamy.

Lineages—

The next division is lineage. They call it *Sandai*. Lineage is an extension of the family unit. Whereas *Panji* is mainly but not exclusively a territorial unit, *Sandai* is a patriarchal and patrilineal group. *Panji* is heterogeneous

in composition, *Sandai* homogeneous. *Sandai* is smaller, than *Panji*. With the increase in number of members within a *Sandai* and their dispersion, *Sandai* too is no longer an exogamous unit.

Family—

Of all the Rang social units, family is the closest one. Family called *Noukhung* is the smallest of all groupings. It is the real working unit for all socio-economic activities. It is exogamous and partriarchal. But the size, structure and type vary from family to family. Traditionally and generally a family consists of a man and his wife, unmarried sons and daughters, married sons with their wives and children. Married daughters also continue to live in the parental home with their husbands for few years.

Such a big family is treated as a single unit for all mundane affairs. The members work and worship together, and share the same hearth and home. The father is the head of the family. Formally, he is the owner of all properties. He looks after all outdoor jobs. He distributes work among the members. He represents the family. All problems and prospects of the family concern him. All domestic chores are managed by his wife. When she grows old and brings in daughters-in-law, her duty undergoes a change. Her main task is now to aid and advise the daughters and daughters-in-law. She leaves all heavy works to the young women. Similarly when the father too grows old, feeble and incapable, the charges are gradually handed over to the eldest son who in consultation with his parents and brothers supervises the affairs. Brothers even after their marriage usually continue to live together so long as the father is alive. After his death, they seek their own way. The presence of the father thus acts as a binding force.

The traditional big family of the Reang has both advantages and disadvantages. It is as if a cooperative venture. The members of the joint families exert the strength of unity. It provides safety and security. In case of an accident or distress of any member, others come forward with helping hands. It is advantageous particularly to those who are aged, sick, unemployed, young, physically or mentally handicapped. Most of the people have that sense of gratitude to repay in terms of service to their grand parents, parents, elder brothers and sisters for what the latter had done for them while they were young and unable to earn.

The big family has demerits too. A joint family appears to be unbearable and burdensome as all the members are not equally frank and free, active and energetic, sympathetic to each other and similar in outlook, bold and broad-minded. Idles, intriguers, vagabonds, selfish and extravagants try

to exploit others. Disagreement, disintegration, distortion, deceitfulness, slander, filching, jealousy, enviousness, poisoning the ears of one against another, quarrel over the distribution of works and division of food and other articles constitute the seamy side. The situation sharply declines after the marriage of sons. Few daughters-in-law can tolerate each other. They have a tendency to separate their husbands by twisting and turning an incident and by pointing out others' actual or supposedly defects and ill-fellings to their husbands. They try to evade work when united, but work hard when separated. Secret counsel also comes from her parents, brothers and sisters. This is, indeed, a trying period for the parents. Not only that, a big family provides little scope for individualism, individual interest, initiative and incentive.

So the present trend is the breaking up of big families. In addition to the above psycho-social causes, spread of literacy, growing urbanisation, introduction of money-economy, increasing scope for employment elsewhere, dissemination of individualism are some of the objective and external factors responsible for the disintegration of the old family order.

Family size and type—

It has already been pointed out that the Reang families are not uniform in size and type. The following tables worked out of field survey carried out during December of 1979 to this regard by us among Reangs of Kanthalia Chhara in southern Tripura substantiate our hypothesis.

Table I

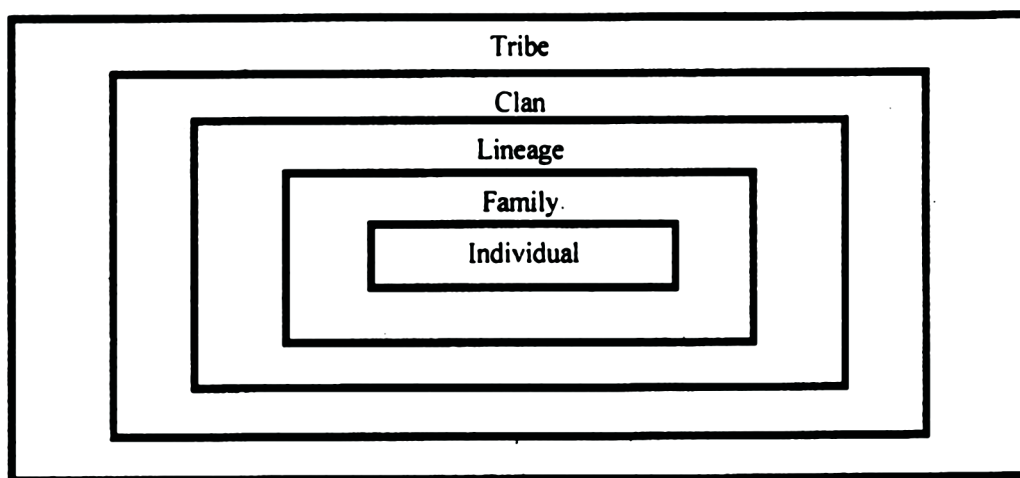
	Size	Number of members	Number of families	Percentage
1.	Very small	3 or less	18	18%
2.	Small	4 to 6	58	58%
3.	Medium	7 to 9	22	22 %
4.	Large	10 to 12	2	2%
5.	Very large	13 or more	00	...

From the above table it appears that small family occurs in the heighest frequency (58 %). Next comes the medium sized families (22 %). Thirdly, there are very small families (18 %). Large families are rare (2 %). But not a single very larged sized family has been found. It is, however, claimed that formerly majority of the families were either large or very large in size.

Table II

Type	Basis	Number of families	Percentage
1. Elementary	(a) H & W with unmarried issue	55	55%
	(b) H W & without issue	3	3%
	(c) Reduced by death/divorce/separation of one parent	8	8%
			66%
2. Intermediate	(a) F or M with married children with or without unmarried issue	5	5%
	(b) Married B with unmarried B/ S	1	1%
	(c) F/M with grand child	6	6%
	(d) F/ M with child & grand child	1	1%
	(e) H & W with issues and Parent-in-law/MB or S, FB or S	5	5%
			18%
3. Joint	(a) Parents with married son with or without other issue	14	14%
	(b) Married B living with married B with out parents	1	1%
	(c) F and/or M with married sons		
			15%
4. Compound	(a) A group consisting of a man and two or more wives with their children		
	(b) Do with unmarried B/S with or without a parent		
	(c) A group formed by the marriage of a widow or widower having children by a former marriage	1	1%
	(d) Do with unmarried B/S with or without a parent		
			1%
5. Joint-compound	(a) Combination of 4c & 3a		
	(b) Combination of 3b & 4a		
	(c) Combination of 3c & 4c		
			00

It is quite evident from the above table that elementary family has the highest frequency (66 %). Then, the intermediate family occurs in low percentage (18 %). Almost similar is the frequency of joint family (15 %). Only one compound family has been found and no joint-compound family has been met with. The Reang have a deep sense of responsibility, sociability along with love and affection not only towards their parents and children, but also towards their distant relatives. This is evident from the fact that many families have been found providing shelter to such relatives as the Parents-in-law, mothers' brother and sister, widowed sister, nephew, grand-child, father's widowed sister and the like. Polygynous families are not very common. He who marries and divorces frequently is looked down by the community. By way of recapitulation, we may say that the Reang social structure consists of five spheres: individuals-families-lineages-clans-and tribe i.e. individuals forming families, families forming lineages, lineages forming clans and clans forming the tribe. Individual is the smallest unit or nucleus. A number of individuals are joined in families, families in lineages, lineages in clans or local groups and clans in the tribe. Lewin, Risley and Hutchinson used a generic or arbitrary term to denote a group of tribes living in the Hill tracts of Chittagong and Tripura. The social structure of the Reang may be designed thus:



4. The Social Institutions : Marriage

The Reang marriage is known as *Kailai*. In contrast to the elaborate Tipra marriage ceremony which now contains many adopted elements, the Reang ceremony is simpler and more traditional. It is, however, to be noted that the traditional marriage-rites of Tipras, Reang, Jamatia, Noatia and Uchai are very much alike; they differ in minor details only.

Premarital chastity is not a matter of serious concern. Freedom in this respect is a recognised practice. Such relations are much more free before, than after marriage. Captain Lewin remarked that 'great freedom of intercourse is allowed' among the Puran Tipperahs, Noatias, Jamatias, Reangs and Uchais of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.¹⁰ Before marriage, a boy, Lewin further remarked, 'cohabits with lover whenever opportunity serves'. He illustrated this by narrating an incidence between a Reang boy and a girl.¹¹ As both in Tripura and in the Chittagong Hill Tracts the above noted tribes reside in similar socio-economic conditions. Hunter assumed the existence of that very practice among the hills-people of Tripura.¹² But this liberty has not been degenerated into the license of prostitution. Nor do these people practise the system of wife-lending as a mark for hospitality.

The scope for selecting a mate is much wider amongst the Reang than among the Tipra. The Reang have only a few limitations. Marriage between parent and child, uncle and niece, aunt and nephew, brother and sister is prohibited. Other than this, a Reang may marry any woman. Marriage within the same clan, lineage and even within an extended family is permissible.

Monogamy is the most prevalent type of marriage. But polygyny, sororate and levirate are not rare. Nor a single instance of Group-marriage and Polyandry has been found in course of our survey. The Rang-marriages are generally homogamous i.e. husbands and wives come from similar socio-economic background. The men, of course, tend to marry a little below their own level. Under the changing circumstances too in which the men enjoy greater accessibility to acculturating contacts, the old trend continues.

The following examples collected from southern Tripura would show the scope and types of marriage among the Reang :

1. Sri Rajprasad Chaudhury (Tooimoi Yafak) first married Pujaroong of Malsai Clan and secondly married Ramaiti of Meska clan.
2. Sri Ram Prasad Reang (Meska) married Rangthangti (Malsai).
3. Sri Chandramani Reang (Meska) married Asati (Meska)
4. Sri Maifiroy Reang (Tooimoi Yafak) married Debangti (Malsai).
5. Sri Barayha Reang (Musa) married Patlangti (Malsai).
6. Sri Ram Bahadur Reang (Tooimoi Yafak) married Doolti (Meska).
7. Sri Jagannath Reang (Meska) married Sabukti (Oaireng).
8. Sri Vishava Kumar Reang (Malsai) married Kabangti (Tooimoi Yafak).
9. Sri Sainya Ram Reang (Meska) married Tapiroong (Meska).
10. Sri Manmohan Reang (Tooimoi Yafak) married Chiatrati (Tooimoi Yafak)

11. Sri Sumanta Reang (Oaireng) married Achakti (Oaireng).
12. Sri Ramkeshab Reang (Tooimoi Yafak) married Panvati (Oaireng).
13. Sri Surya Kumar Reang (Tooimoi Yafak) married Lilavati (Meska)
14. Sri Dharmajay Reang (Apeta) has three wives: Ferakti (Meska), Chandrang (Meska) and Biparoong (Tooimoi Yafak).
15. Sri Satish Reang has two wives: Tabiroong (Charkhi) and Muktarooong (Meska)
16. Sri Vamajay Reang had two wives: Sunyati (Oaireng) and Sajyaro (Malsai). The former is dead and the latter divorced.
17. Sri Narendra Reang married his uncle's daughter Padmavati.
18. Srimati Karnavati Reang is married to Shri Marjin Sangma, a Garo boy.
19. Srimati Thakpaiti Reang is married to Sri Narendra Sangma-a Garo boy.
20. Sri Upendra Reang married Lalsangi Darlong-a Kuki girl.
21. Srimati Ripaiti Reang is married to Sri Mantu Sarkar who is a Bengalee.
22. Srimati Palaoti Reang is married to Sri Raimohan Ghosh who is a Bengalee.
23. Sri Man Chandra Reang married his mother's sister's daughter Anita.
24. Sri Nija Reang married his step mother's daughter Tare Reang who was born of the former wedlock of her mother.
25. Srimati Nackak Reang is married to Sri Sumanta Noatia.
26. Srimati Chaitrati Reang is married to Sri Manomohan Dev Barman
27. Srimati Malaiti Reang is married to Sri Rajmohan Dev Barman.
28. Sri Dusmanta Reang married Amalarani Barua.
29. Sri Chandra Keshab Reang married Kusum Dev Barman.
30. Srimati Khumbati Reang is married to and subsequently divorced by Sri Manindra Devnath.
31. Srimati Saisiroong Reang is married to and divorced by Sri Raimohan Das.
32. On the death of his father, Drau Kumar Reang's mother married his uncle.

Non-legal, customary sanctions against inter-tribal and inter-community marriage were once strong. Now-a-days, such objections are hardly raised provided the match is a suitable one. Racial inter-marriages are tolerated. Inter-tribal marriages are recently found mostly among the educated, Christian boys and girls. There is a preponderance of Bengalee-Reang (Bengalee groom, Reang bride) over Reang-Bengalee (Reang groom, Bengalee bride) marriages. Such a marriage, it is found, involves poor Bengalee boy and well-to-do Reang girl.

There is no fixed age of marriage. Child-marriage is not preferred. Adult-marriage is the usual practice. Generally, the groom remains senior to the bride by a few years. But a reverse age-relation, though rare, is not strictly forbidden. Old people, widow and widower often marry. Age is not literally taken into account. A girl who reached the age of puberty and who can carry two earthen pitchers full of water at a time is considered to have attained the marriageable age. Adolescence and capacity to weave baskets are the marks of the age of marriage of a boy.

As in many other tribal communities of Tripura and North-eastern India, in the Reang community too the common methods of acquiring mates are marriage by service (*Chamarai*), marriage by mutual consent (*Sanglaimi*), marriage by brideprice (*Dafabai Kaimi*), marriage by love (*Kachuk Khalai Lalaimi*), marriage by elopement (*Tooi Khaimi*), marriage by exchange (*Slailaimi*) and marriage by capture (*Faingke Kaimi*). Of all the methods, the most common one is marriage by service called *Chamarai Kami* in which the prospective groom is required to stay in and serve the house of the bride for a few years. This leads to temporary and sometime permanent matrilocal residence. Marriage either by elopement, exchange or by capture is not preferred by the society. Even the traditional means of marriage by rendering physical service is now looked down by the educated grooms. The alternative of marriage by service is marriage by the payment of bride-price. In the past when the society was mostly dependent on agriculture and women were its economic backbone, marriage either by service or by payment of bride-price was the most prevalent means of acquiring mate. The society is experiencing a change in the means and mode of production and livelihood. The relative position of brides and grooms is going to be altered. Until recently a Reang woman was the major contributor to family support by her manual labour. With the gradual reduction in the major economic functions of women, a substantial change in the marriage system is taking place. Instead of marriage by service and by bride-price, marriage by dowry or simply by explicit consent of both sides is gaining wider currency.

Remarriage of widow, widower (*Randa-randi Yaksa*) and divorce is freely permitted. Such a marriage often lacks pomp and grander, emotion and excitement.

Monogamy is the general type of marriage. Polygyny though not illegal, is hardly seen. Group marriage and Polyandry are not practised. Sororate and levirate are occasionally practised but not preferred.

When a boy attains marriageable age, his parents remain on the look for a bride of their choice. Friends, relatives, elderly persons of the village and match-makers are talked to and requested to find out a girl. In making the selection, bride's and groom's health, beauty, capacity to weave clothes and to make baskets and hereditary diseases and merits are taken into consideration.

In the very words of the old Reang, 'we have no *Kosthi* (Horoscope) but we verify *Gosthi* (Character of the Clan)'. Selection is a lengthy and time-taking process. Much bargaining takes place to decide the bride-price which includes a period of service by the groom to the family of the bride. For this, the match-maker is to move like a shuttle. When things are informally decided, the groom's father and mother go to the girl's house with a few bottles of rice-beer. After the exchange of greetings, the groom's father opens his mind, makes formal proposal, places two bottles of beer in front of the bride's parents, salutes them and requests them to drink. If the parents of the bride have no objection, they drink; otherwise they refuse. If they agree, other elders of the village are also called and invited to participate in the discussion and to make merry over the cups of beer. This is the occasion of betrothal called *Kao Sulai* or *Oakha Kaimi* when a small feast called *Khutuimi* is arranged at the cost of the groom's parents.

According to the terms of contract, the groom has to serve for a period, say three years, in the house of the bride to their satisfaction. During this period he is offered board and lodging. He is kept on close observation. If they are not satisfied, he may be asked to leave and the matter ends there.

When the period of service has passed off, the elders again sit together, fix a date for solemnisation and discuss in details all relevant points and problems. At this time, a second feast called *Sai Khelaimi* on a little bigger scale is arranged by the groom's parents at the house of the bride.

Among the Reang, the marriage is not an individual affair to be solemnised in solitude. Friends, relatives and the inhabitants of the two cheerfully participate and feel excited during the occasion. The ceremony is held very early in the morning before sun-rise at the house of the bride. On the day fixed for the ceremony the house wears a festive appearance. In the preceding afternoon the groom's guardians reach the bride's house, while the bridegroom accompanied by friends comes in a procession at the preceding evening, the sweet note of the flute announces his advent. On the way, a particular ritual called *Lampra Puja* is performed. Eggs are offered to the deities. Entertainment of the guests is taken to be the duty of the entire

village. So the groom's friends and relatives are 'distributed' among the households for the dinner. After the dinner while the groom and his friends enjoy the night in laughing, joking and chating with their contemporaries of the village in a separate room, his parents offer two pairs of bottles of beer to the parents of the bride, salute them and formally seek advice and suggestions for the performance of the ceremony in a befitting manner. Usually their first suggestion to the groom's parents is to call on every household of the village, to offer them rice beer and to make formal invitation to attend the ceremony. Accordingly elderly people assemble in the house of the bride and rejoice till mid-night. The womenfolk also sing, drink beer and chew betel leaves.

At dawn the groom, his friends and relatives and the villagers are called in. The groom's friends sing and play on flutes and other musical instruments. It is a moment of excitement and ecstasy. Amidst a delighted crowd, the groom is brought in and made to sit on a new cloth at the centre of the floor. It is important to point out that the bridegroom and the bride do neither stand, nor sit facing each other. Indeed, the bride remains away. In lieu, she is represented by her breast-cloth which is placed below the feet of the groom. The Reang have no such Vedic rites as seven circles, seven steps together, auspicious look, lighting of sacred fire, exchange of garlands, etc. Certain things like cotton, oil, salt, chilli, chopper, two bottles of beer, a stone and a jar of water are placed on a tray in front of the groom. The priest utters certain significant spells.

About the marriage-rites of the Reang, the Tipras and others of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Lewin remarked that 'at marriage there is no particular ceremony, but a great deal of drinking and dancing. A pig is killed as a sacrifice to the deities of the wood and stream, the crowning point of the affair being this, the girls' mother pours out a glass of liquor and gives it to her daughter, who goes and sits on her lover's knee, drinks half, and gives him the other half; they afterwards crook together their little fingers.¹³ He repeated the same remark in another of his work.¹⁴ Risley to made observation depending on Lewin.¹⁵

It is not known how Lewin and Risley came to this conclusion. Our observation, however, differs. The Reang are found to observe some rites which come nearer to the Vedic rituals for Hindu marriage.

The hymns recited in the ceremony have not yet been reduced to writing; these still lie in the memory of the priests. So in the absence of a written code, they vary according to the memory and individual faculty of speech

of the priests. Some priests recite more and some less. The following specimen hymn collected from southern part of Tripura shows that the Reang marriage is not merely a union of bodies but a union of two bodies and two souls. The partners bless for long life, happiness, conjugal fidelity and advised to have duty not only to each other but also to the parents, brothers, sisters and other relatives.

The priest opens the initial spell taking a chopper in his hand and invoking the presence and blessings of the deities.

Tini-ni mishing ya

Tini-ni baroa

Dini kachang

Dini Salbook Khlama

Musa Ramchandra bai

Musa Mileti

Saisni Saiami

Bausni Baoakmi.

(Oh God Chandi, you kindly remain as the witness to this happy occasion on this auspicious day of moderate temperature and shade. The present union between Ramchandra and Mileti is predestined long before by God Chitragupta who had written it seven times on their forehead.)

The Priest then addresses the groom and the bride taking a bottle of liquor in his hand and assures that all the misfortune of their past life is gone. He chants:

Chootai Saide

Kharik Saide

Dasa-danda haiya toongma

Kachai thanggi

Kapra thanggi.

(My dear boy and girl, just as the liquor vanishes or dries up as soon as it is dropped, similarly let all the misfortune of both of your past life be washed out) He now takes a pot of water, addresses the parents and spouses and makes similar blessings while dropping water.

Dau, tooibookle charaiya

Tooikahale charaiya

Tooibook saide
Tooi Kaha Kachaide
Haiya toongma
Chaiya toongma
Dau, Ramchandrani bai Miletini
Haiya toongma
Chaiya toongma
Kachai thanggi.

(My dear Parents, pouring of this water does not mean the abuse of water of a river or that of a pot. Actually it is to wash out all the calamities and sins of your past life. Oh Ramchandra and Milet, let your calamities and sins too be washed out.)

In presence of all elderly people, he blesses the groom and bride to live in peace and prosperity with the members of the family. He says:

Dau, Panchairog bakhna sradi
Tooibook Changde
Tooikaham chacgde
Aiyook changthu
Nookhoong changthu
Mairam Changthu

(Dear guardians, you listen to this. Let the family of the groom and bride be as cool as river-water; let their life be as beautiful as pure water, let them have a long and happy life; let them live in peace and prosperity with all the members of their family).

After that, the Priest puts a chilli into the mouth of the groom and allegorically advises him to cordially behave with parents, brothers and sisters, kith and kin. The spell runs:

Thamsade hiaoe
Takhukna hianai
Bukhukna hianai
Jatina hianai
Luluna hianai.

(You should behave with all like a chilli. Love your brothers. Love your sisters. Love your clansmen. Love your relatives).

A little quantity of salt is then put into the mouth of the groom and the priest allegorically advises him to draw closer all the relatives of both sides.

Samade Palaiye

Jatina Luluna hianai

Takhukna hianai

Bukhukna hianai.

(Let the taste of your behaviour be like that of salt. Love your clansmen, relatives of both sides, brothers and sisters.)

Taking cotton in his hand this time the priest blesses them to have a long life. The hymn goes:

Khanai tulke fuieye

Fiknai sampieye,

Oafungka ieye

Oakangka achaia

Khanai fuieye

Khanaia sampieye,

Kaklai mainaiya, dau.

(The hair of both of your heads will be, in course of time, as white as cotton, still you live on the mutual love. Your teeth will fall and grow again, your hair will be white and then again will be black, still you live in mutual affection. Don't divorce.)

Addressing the guardians to be witnesses to this ceremony and taking in hands a stone and a chopper as the symbols of longevity, the Priest blesses them again. The spell runs:

Dau, bara Panchairog Khnasraidi

Savni bu aiyo halong buthalo

Mur bachaiya, sa bachuiya

Halongde thalo raoieye

Savni bu aiyo

Dau, bara panchairog khna khadi.

(Oh elderly people! you remain witnesses to it. Let their life be as hard as a stone which neither breaks nor goes bent. Let their life be as strong as chopper. Oh elders! have you heard ?)

Finally, the Priest administers them the oath so that they remain faithful to each other by controlling passions and resisting temptations. The hymn symbolically reads:

Leingla thai kaham nufa
Leingla maiya tooibookthai
Nauk taiku mainai iaya.

(Take no rest in any other cool place, take no bath in wayside pond, don't look right and left.)

The chanting of the above hymns constitutes the vital part of the ritual. A leisurely mood sets in for a while. During this recess the groom is required to address his parents-in-law just like his own parents, salute them along with other elders and offer them liquor.

After a while, the Priest resumes his work and accompanied by the groom and others goes to a nearby stream to worship the goddess of water. For offerings and sacrifice he takes there flowers, rice, cotton and a chicken and chants the following spell:

A ou sai, Sri Kalakshi, Sri Kalaksha
Swarga toongba, raougsang toongnaima
Prithibi Klaie Jalabi Jalkama
Pashan Sura suri Phainema Ganga
Onsa Ramchandra bai Mileti Kailaiha.
Dasa Khemaia, mapa khemaia
Tooiboo laode, tooika laode
Ramchandra bai Mileti
Aio laonai, thalolaonai
Moorbu Chaia, Sabu Chaia
Sarba aio lang thalo.
Chandi basu Chandima Chaia
Prithima Klaie ma Chaia
Prithima Klaie ma Chaia
Ma Ganga rangja Khuri
Rufai bati yacha chadi.

(Oh Goddess Ganga! you are omnipotent and omnipresent; you control life and death; you have passed a long way across the hills and rocks. Marriage

between Ramchandra and Mileti is held today. Be pleased with them and kindly don't cause them to suffer from misfortune, illness. Bless them, protect them. Let them live a long life. Make them strong and strout, slow but steady. Don't cut and beat them. Let no drop of blood of this chicken fall on earth; let the entire quantity of blood fall in your mouth. You drink in golden vessel. You drink in a silver vessel.)

The priest and the groom then bathe in the river and all come back home. The last part of the worship is performed at this time at the courtyard. Two goddesses namely, *Sangrangma* and *Rajama*, are worshipped. Liquor, cotton, flower, rice are offered and a spell chanted which is similar to the above one. Here the friends of the groom joyfully dance, sing, drink, laugh, put flowers into the chignon of the bride and rally while the band plays.

The priest is shown much honour. He is offered liquor and a seat in the middle of the house. All sit around him, and the guardians want to know the future of the couple from the priest who explains what has been found from an examination of the entrails of the chicken sacrificed. The ceremony ends in a feast arranged at noon. The expenses are mostly borne by the groom's parents.

In spite of all oaths and worships, it is not unexpected that frustration, dissatisfaction, disruption, separation and divorce take place. The common causes are: lack of fidelity, faithlessness, bad treatment, idleness, maladjustment, impotence of husband, frigidity of wife, insanity, idiocy and the like. The grievances are not all on one side. Divorce is permissible in the society, and both can seek divorce and initiate the process. But here the husband has a customary privilege. No divorce can be legally valid unless the husband consents to it. That side which seeks separation must pay idemnity. Amount of indemnity is not equal. If the husband seeks, he must pay an amount of *Chhay Kuri*, *Chhay adhuli*, *Chhoy Siki*, *Chhoy Ana*, *Chhoy Paisa*', that means, Rs. 120.00+3.00+1.50+.37+.6 which comes to Rs. 124.93. In case, the wife seeks, she is to pay the wage of the entire period of service rendered by the husband and the cost of the marriage feast.

Like marriage, divorce too is not a concern of two individuals or of two families only. The villagers, particularly the village council have a say. Divorce is effected through them and they get a share of the indemnity. There are thus norms of collection and distribution of the indemnity. In either case, the affinal and consanguineal relatives and *Panchayat* get an amount. From the indemnity paid by the wife, the husband personally gets Rs. 30.00, his consanguineal relatives Rs. 10.00 and affinal relatives

Rs. 6.00. From the indemnity paid by the husband, the wife gets Rs. 30.00, her consanguineal relatives, Rs. 10.00 and affinal relatives Rs. 6.00.

5. Kinship

The kin relationship among the Reang is intimate. The Reang woman holds an honourable position in the society. She enjoys freedom. She is industrious and intelligent. She is practically the economic backbone of her family. Almost all the domestic chores are done by her. She is equally active and helpful in the *Jhum* field. So instead of dowry, there is the system of marriage by service in that a prospective bridegroom is required to serve the family of the bride for a period.

The relations between husband and wife, between parents and children are also very intimate and one of mutual love, affection and interdependence. Babies are very fondly reared up by the parents and others. Children and adolescents are informally trained in various arts of life. In case of disease, deformity and death they come to each other's service. This sort of intimacy and interdependence exist also among the other members of a joint family and village.

The relation between husband and wife's younger brother and sister is very close and friendly. Similar relation is to be found between wife and her husband's younger brother and sister. They joke with each other and may have physical relations. In case of death, wife may marry her husband's younger brother; and again if a wife dies, her husband may marry his wife's younger sister. In other words, both levirate and sororate are in practice in the Reang society. Not only that, cross-cousin marriage is also socially allowed.

But the relation is one of distance between son-in-law and parents-in-law, between daughter-in-law and parents-in-law, between wife and her husband's elder brother and sister, between wife and her husband's maternal uncle, between husband and his wife's elder brother and sister. There is a taboo in having even talking relations between a wife and her husband's elder brother and maternal uncle. They do not talk to each other, touch each other, take each other's clothes and see each other's face. With others there is talking relation. A husband has talking relation with his parents-in-law and elder brothers and sisters-in-law. But he usually talks less and that too in a guarded way.

Among the Reang, kin relationship is generally traced from family to lineage. Beyond lineage, all others are as if brothers and sisters. They seem to have few kinship terms and as a result of acculturation, they are found using

certain Bengali kinship terms. A list of the Reang kinship terms along with corresponding English and Bengali terms is given below.

English	Bengali	Reang
Father's father's father	Prapitamaha	Aiung
FFM, MMM	Prapitamahi Pramatamahi	Aiung burai
FM, MM	Pitamahi, matamahi thakurma, didima	Achui
FF, MF	Pitamaha, matamaha dada, dadu	Achu
Father	Pita, bap, baba	Apa
Mother	Mata, ma	Amau
FEB	Jetha	Aiung
MEB	Mama	Aiung
FESH	Pisha	Aiung
MESH	Mesho	Aiung
MEBW	Mami	Aiung burai
FEBW	Jethi	Aiung burai
FES	Pishi	Aiung burai
MES	Mashi	Aiung burai
FYS	Pishi	Atai
MYS	Mashi	Atai
FYBW	Kaki	Atai
FYB	Kaka	mama
MYB	Mama	mama
FYSH	Pisha	mama
MYSH	Mesho	mama
Faher-in-law	Svasur	Kra
Mother-in-law	Svasuri	Kraiuk
Step-mother	Satma, hatai	Amaktai
EB	Dada	Ta
YB	Bhai	Faiung
ES	Didi	Bi
YS	Bon	Hanak

EBW	Baudi	Bachai
YBW	Bauma	Oaijuk
ESH	Jamaibabu	Kumai
YSH	Bonjama	Boai
Wife	Stri, bau	Hi
WEB	Sambandhi	Oai
WEBW	Sambandhir stri	Oaiuk
WYB	Syalak, sala	Prang
WYBW	Syalaker stri	Prangiuk
WES	Jesty syalika	Oaijuk
WESH	Bhayra	Saru
WYS...	Syalika, sali	Prangiuk
WYSH	Bhayra	Saru
Husband	Swami	Sai
HEB	Bhasur	Oai
HEBW	Ja	Bachai
HYB	Devar	Prangrung,
ackak fa HYBW	Ja	Prangrungiuk
HES	Nanad, Nanas	Oaiuk, didi
HESH		Oaiuk, ddi
HYS	Nanad, thakurji	Prangrungiuk, Afuiti
HYSH		Prangrung
Son	Putra, poot, chele	Sala
Brother's son	Bhratusputra, Bhagina bhatija	
Younger sister's son	Bhagina	Aiung
Elder sister's son	Bhagina	Bhagina
Daughter	Kanya, meye	Saiuk
EBD	Bhatiji	Bhagini
YBD		Yank
ESD	Bhagini	Bhagini
YSD		
Child's father-in-law	Behai	Yank
Child's mother-in-law	Behain	Chamai
Son's wife	Bauma	Chamaiuk

Daughter's husband	Jamai	Chamarai
Grand child	Nati, Natin	Sauk
GGC	Panti	Bara
GGGC	Khanti	Ranchi
GGGCC	Janti	Rabe
GGGCCC		Rakai

It is quite evident from the above list of terminology that for a number of kins they use only one terms, for example, *Aiung* is only word used to denote FEB, MEB, FESH, MESH; again FYB, MYB, FYSH, MYSH are all addressed as *Mama*, a Bengali word. The literate Reang admit the shortage and feel that certain words need to be inducted.

6. Dress & Ornaments

The traditional dress of the Reang is simple but admirably suitable to their rural environment. The Reang women are expert weavers who until recently used to weave at home different types of clothes for all members of the family. Now-a-days, of course, mill-made clothes with beautiful designs and embroideries are entering into the Reang homes. Their ancient dress is still largely used in the hills and interior places. Recently, as a result of a cultural awakening even the school and college-going girls are sometimes found using the traditional dress in a little modified form.

The Reang babies and children generally go about naked. They start wearing cloth when they attain the age of five or six years. A boy of that age use a loin cloth called *Pundrai*. And a girl of the same age use a small napkin wound round her waist, it is known as *rituku*.

The adolescents, youths, adults and old males usually use a broader piece of napkin called *rituku richamare*, a shirt called *Kutai tabrak* and a turban known as *kamcai*.

The Reang girl's and women's dress consists of a napkin (*rinai* or *ranai*), a decorative piece of breast cloth (*rrsa*), a shirt (*kotai*) and a turban (*kamcai burai*). During winter all use a wrapper which is a big piece of cloth called *ritrag*.

Formerly, both men and women were fond of ornaments. Now only the women have been using various ornaments. In the distant part, ornaments were made of locally available materials like wood, bamboo, tooth, horn or bone of wild animals and seeds of wild banana. After the cultural contact with the Bengalees, modern ornaments made of brass, silver, bell metal and gold have almost replaced the traditional ones.

The ancient male ornaments consisted of earrings (*oakhum chela*), bracelet (*mathia chikan*), necklace (*Lokaik*) and ring (*yastham*).

The Reang women use three different pairs of earring: *oarik* at the upper portion of the ear, *oakham burai* at the middle and *nabak* at the bottom of the lobe. They also use three types of ornaments at the neck: a necklace (*lokaik*) made of black seeds of wild plantain or of beads, a necklace of coins (*rangbak batang*) and a wide, circular ring (*ganthi*) made of brass. Even in hands three types of ornaments are in use: an armlet (*tara*), bangle (*yakca*) bracelet (*tarah*). Their foot ornament is called *benki* made of brass. The women use a hairpin called *sangai* which was formerly nothing but a porcupine's thorn or spine.

The hair-style of the Reang was similar to that practised by other tribes of Tripura. Both males and females used to keep long hair lying it at the back of the head. The old practice is to be found even today in the interior villages among the old people. While the women folk have been continuing the traditional hair-style, the males, old and young, cut hair. In the hair-cutting also a change is noticed. Before the advent of the Bengalee barbers, the Reang themselves, used to cut each other's hair with an iron chopper. For hair-dressing, the ancient comb (*bethra*) made of fine and short bamboo splits is now replaced by combs available from markets. Tattooing is not popular among the Reang.

7. Reang at Leisure

It is a truism that man is not satisfied with bread alone. He needs something more besides mere food. This is eternal and universal. The Reang are no exception. So among them there are various games, stories, songs, dances, puzzles, riddles, and bachelors' dormitory.

A. Games & Sports

The Reang have a large variety of games and sport which provide not only pleasure and pastime but also call for certain qualities. There are some games which require physical strength and others either skill or patience. Certain games are invented in imitation of the nature of wild birds, animals and insects. There are also games played particularly by the children and girls in imitation of household chores like cooking, drawing water and husking paddy. The Reang children also find pleasure in mimicry. A pop-gun called *thanthama* made of a short and thin piece of bamboo is very popular with the boys. To the adolescent boys bow and arrow are no less popular. To the teen-agers, both boys and girls, swinging, in imitation of cradle at home, is a great favourite; it is called *doaiing*. To them, bull and

buffalo fighting and frog leaping are very popular. Stilts called *yakhrung* made of two pieces of thick and thin bamboo, each about six feet in height, with footrests fixed about two feet above the ground level, provide great joy to the young boys. Hide-and-seek game which is perhaps a universal game is also enjoyed by the Reang children. The Bean-shooting game called *suai* with a flat seeds of ghila (*Entada-scandens*) is a game played by the grown up boys and girls of almost all the tribes of north-east India. The particular games of the youth and middle aged peoples are pole-wrestling (*fah salaio*), stake-wrestling (*musta seglaio*), weight-lifting and top-spinning (*chur*).

B. Dormitory

Bachelors' dormitory was to be found at every tribal village. It is an old but now defunct institution. The Reang call it *duaing nak*, the Tipras *chhikla michip nak*, the Garos *nakfanti* the Malcham subtribe *noongiakiana kioaleng*, the Kaipeng sub-tribe *nongaina*, and the Jamaitias *thotai thulaia*.

The Reang dormitory was to be constructed at the middle of a village. In design it looked like a dwelling house. For the spinsters there was no dormitory, but they had an access into the bachelors' dormitory and no physical relation was allowed within the dormitory. All adolescent unmarried boys used to sleep here. It was under the supervision of an elderly bachelor. The *duaing nok* was a centre of socio-economic life-particularly with the young people. For the elders, the chief's house was an important meeting place. The *duaing nok* was a place where the young people were disciplined and trained. Gossiping, singing, story-telling and playing on musical instruments constituted a part of dormitory life. Through it, the Reang folklore was handed down from generation to generation. During the winter, summer and rainy seasons work in the *Jhum* field goes in full swing. The Reang and all other local tribes formerly had a tradition of co-operative labour. All the labour force of a village used to work together by turn and in rotation in the *Jhum* field of each household. Each worker arranged his or her own food and there was no employer-employee relation. Decision used to be taken in the dormitory on which date and on whose field they would work. The dormitory was not simply a club house, it was also like a camp or out-post for common defence of a village. It has great importance in the past when inter-tribal feuds and head-hunting were frequent. Now-a-days the institution has lost its importance.

C. Song

Songs are sung on various occasions-while cutting bushes for Jhuming, weeding the field, watching the Jhum crops, tending the cattle, when a person dies and a religious ceremony is celebrated. The Reang have various types of songs so as to match different occasions. Their songs may be classified thus: (a) love songs, (b) work songs, (c) ritual songs, (d) political songs, and (e) songs describing natural phenomena. The words, phrases, synonyms, styles and imagery used in different songs usually vary according to the occasion. One very important characteristic of the songs of the Reang, Tipras, Jamatias, Noatias, Halams and Kukis etc. is the use of vivid imagery from natural flora and fauna. An adolescent girl's bosom is compared with red hornet's body, her hair with bulbuls nest, her finger with red chilli and her tooth with some white flower. Musical instruments like flute, drum, tom tom, violin (*sumu*, *sarinda*, kham, chang preng, dangdu) are in use. As a result of acculturation, they have now learnt *Rabindra-sangeet*, *bhajan*, *kirtan* and film songs.

D. Dance

Dance is not a pervasive element of the Reang culture. There are dances; but it is not that dancing is a must on every occasion. However, the most famous occasion of dancing is the *Garia Puja*-a week-long religious festival during the first week of Vaisak (April). Recently while observing India's Republic Day, folk dances are arranged by the Tripura government at Agartala where the Reang and other tribal artists are invited to participate. On the same occasion they are sometimes sent to New Delhi.

The Reang generally dance in groups. Both males and females, young and aged may participate. For dance, there is no special dress, decoration and ornament. Dances are accompanied by instrumental and vocal songs. The dancers sometimes stand in a circle and sometimes in two parallel lines. While they form a circle, boys and girls stand alternatively and while they stand in two parallel lines, boys and girls stand separately. At the time of dance, they clap, change direction, bend forward and backward, kneel, sit, intersperse, make short and long strides, swing their bodies inward and outward, jump and skip. Their dances are quick, rhythmic, emotional and exciting. There are both ecstasy & elasticity. A particular type of dance evolved out of the other patterns, and more as a 'show business' has been perfected by the Rinags. Of late, almost all the shows of 'Reang dance' are constituted of this. It is an extremely skilful artistic composition-mostly, young girls in balancing feats with burning lamps held overhead in bottles, swinging metal dishes, standing on earthen pitchers.

Socio-economic activities are often depicted and animal behaviour imitated in their dance. Hunting, fishing, collecting wild vegetables, clearing Jhum fields, receiving injuries, planting, weeding, harvesting, husking, offering sacrifices to gods etc. are vividly represented. And at the same time, flight of the hornbill bird, sports of the young pigs and elephant's entrance into the paddy field are also shown.

E. Folktales

The Reang possess a great store of folklore in the forms of proverb, riddle, lullaby, legend, myth and folktale. As a result of cultural contact, many elements of Bengali folklore have entered into their traditions. Nevertheless, a great deal of ancient folklore is still preserved. Here only a few lines about their folktales are added.

In the Reang folktales there are stories about animals, plants, family life, love and romance, humour, jealousy, cruelty, wickedness, foolishness, unusual heroism, chance and fate etc. With little variation in motifs, characters and structures, the same stories are found among all the local tribes. The stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are known to them. The rural background of their culture has left a significant influence upon the tales. So the characters are generally animals, birds, snakes, gatherers, hunters, shifting cultivators, priests, chiefs, kings, deities, demons, ghosts and witches. It is important to note that the Chand Saodagar type of character is absent because the Reang have been living far away from sea and as such voyage and business abroad are alien to their ways of life. Pirs and Fakirs are also absent because the Muslim rule did never continue for a long time in Tripura. All the stories are not arranged on a uniform and common structure. But a number of tales have this Plan: a problem-its conditional solution-negligence towards the conditions at the height of joy-again a problem-fulfilment of the condition-permanent solution. Various motifs are used in the Reang tales such as abandoned children; abandoned wife; ascent to sky on feathers, ascent to heaven by a stretching tree; animals, birds and plants in service to man; cruel step-mother and co-wife, extraordinary castle in water, king accidentally meets and marries a maiden; magical power of ring; physical transformation of man into vulture, hornbill, flower, plant; reincarnation in plant; reward for service of God, revengeful monkey and serpent; successful younger son, daughter, deformed hero; talking bird, unequal marriage between a monkey and a maiden, between a python and a maiden, and the like.

Observation

When the economic base of a community's culture starts changing, the superstructure cannot remain static. In case of the Reang, the traditional economy of gathering, hunting and Jhuming has lost much of its scope and importance. Gradually they are getting dependent more on plough cultivation, salaried jobs in government offices and business than on the old economy. So, that diminishing economy-based social institutions are also vanishing day by day. The following is a brief account of the principal changes in the social life patterns of the Reang.

1. An ideal site for an ancient Reang village was a summit of a hill. It had not many approaches, but only one and that too was narrow, steep and rough. The fear of attack by either enemy or animal was in the minds of the villagers. Now that fear is gone, the Reang have come down the hills and settled on low hills and table lands. The approaches are more than one, wide, plain and clean.
2. Earlier, each hamlet was compact. There was not too much distance between two houses. In hamlet there were as many as 126 households. Members of other tribes, castes and communities were not allowed to settle within a Reang village. Each village had a boundary marked by trees, streams and hills. All the above features of isolation are nowhere to be found. Houses are seen dispersedly built and the Reang are living side by side with others.
3. Changes have come in the housing pattern also. Formerly each family had only one big house with raised platform. The number of such houses is decreasing. New patterns with different building materials are more popular now. Houses with mud-walls, corrugated tin roofs and pucca buildings are the fashion of the day. Not only that, each family now requires more houses and huts for cooking and cattle. The practice of raising granaries in a row at a little distance from living huts is abandoned.
4. The woman was the backbone of their economy and household life. Indeed she used to work harder than the man. But she was not a slave. She was an essential companion. Under the changed circumstances, it seems, her importance is getting reduced.
5. Formerly, parents having a number of daughters had a sense of complacency. To get the hand of a bride, a groom had to serve her family a number of years. Bride price in cash or kind was high. The bride price is now nominal. The custom of marriage by service

is back-dated. The position is getting reversed. An educated and employed groom gets dowry consisting or say, bicycle, radio, wrist-watch, utensils, furniture and pen.

6. The bride's parents had an upper-hand not only in the fixation of bride price but also in seeking divorce. Divorces were common and remarriages permissible. The frequency of divorce and remarriage is rather low at present.
7. To them, sex was as natural an instinct as food, drink, rest and sleep. It was a part of nature. A plant which bears fruits is supposed to be a female and which does not is a male. The sun and moon are like a couple and the stars children. The same relation is believed to exist among the deities. So the Reang were not over-conscious of it. The private parts of human body were like hands, foot and head. They used to enjoy it with no inhibition or preoccupation. And as such premarital relationship was a common and ordinary affairs. Their outlook in this respect has considerably changed.
8. In the days of yore, joint family was the smallest unit in a village, and all the married brothers along with parents used to live under the same roof. There were, of course, arrangements for separate apartments within. Now-a-days, joint family is breaking down and small, nuclear families are growing up followed by fragmentation of hearth, home and field. Formerly, social control was very much effective to suppress jealousy, selfishness and dissatisfaction among the co-wives of a family.
9. Long ago, the Reang had no or scanty clothing. The girls were experts in weaving. Experience in weaving was a qualification of a bride, and similarly adeptness in basketry was expected from a groom. Today such qualities are not highly prized. Clothes and ornaments made in mills, tailor's and goldsmith's shops are preferred.
10. The old means of recreation are being replaced by modern ones like balls, cinema, radio, drama and books. The bachelors' dormitory so pivotal an institution is giving way to urban clubs, associations, tea-stalls, educational institutions and administrative buildings.

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CHAPTER V

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS & PRACTICES

The religion of the Reang contains elements of animism, animatism, dream, divination, fertility cult, magic, polytheism, taboo, totemism and witchcraft. There are also certain adopted elements from the neighbouring Bengali Hindus. But it must be pointed out at the outset that animism and other related cults do not constitute the core of their religion. They believe that different deities are but local manifestations of one and the same Almighty God. They also believe that rituals and sacrifices are like bark of a tree. Gratitude to God, service to His creatures, humility, hospitality, respect for truth, hatred towards theft, belief in the law of *Karma* and in rebirth are the essence of their religion. Hinduism has left a modifying effect upon their ancient beliefs and practices. Majority of the Reang are Hindus, while a growing minority are Christians. An attempt is made here to describe their indigenous religious beliefs and practices.

1. Animism & Animatism

Animatism means attribution of life, spirit or personality to physical objects or phenomena. To the early men, there was little distinction between animate and inanimate objects. It is not that only livings move and non-living things do not. Life is supposed to exist in all objects from rocks and pools to seas and mountains. Animism is a later phase of animatism. Animism is a somewhat sophisticated concept according to which natural objects are believed to have no life in themselves but thought to be abodes of spirits, gods and deceased persons.

The Reang, Tipras, Jamatias, Noatias, Kukis and Halams believe in soul and in its separate existence. The Reang call it *fala*. It is believed that the while a person is asleep, his or her soul can leave the person's body, take the shape of a grasshopper (*leincha*) and roam about here and there, come back and re-enter into the body. So the Reang are careful about not killing a garass-hopper particularly after dusk lest a person may die. To the Reang, sleep implies temporary departure of soul and death means permanent departure.

Immediately after a death, the dead body is taken out of home and placed at the courtyard. A chicken is thrown near the foot of the dead body with all force that it dies then and there. The soul of the chicken is supposed to accompany and guard the human soul on the way to the next world.

At about the half way, it is believed, there is big log laid accross the path. The tree thus felled down is called *bufang bakbein* which marks a dividing line between the world of the dead and that of the living beings. Once the soul crosses, it never comes back and there remains no hope of resuscitation. After the great crossing, the soul reaches the peaceful abode of Larima in the east. She is an old woman ever busy in cooking food for the deceased people. The moist over hills in the distant east is nothing but smoke which rises from her oven. This kind-hearted woman offers rice and water. As soon as a person eats and drinks at Larima's place, he or she at once forgets all about this life.

After feeding, the affectionate lady sends the soul to the place of *Thunairao* for final trial and judgement. Thunairao may be identified as Yamadeva. Rebirth takes place on the seventh day according to the work in the previous life.

The dead-body is burnt usually near a river. On the next day the burning *ghat* is thoroughly washed. It is feared that if the place remains unclean, the family's *Jhum-field* will be full of weeds. A piece of burnt bone is taken out and preserved. On the seventh day on a newly constructed small platform cooked rice and curry are offered along with tools, utensils and various seeds of *Jhum* crops that will be required in the next life. On a leaf a handful of wet mud or sun-dried rice powder is spread with an expectation of seeing the foot-print of the kind of being he or she is reborn in the next life.

A jar of water is placed for seven days at that corner of the house where the person used to sleep while alive with this belief that the thirsty soul may return home. The collected piece of burnt bone is preserved near a tulsi tree and is offerd light food till it is duly thrown into the holy Gomati or the Ganga river on the coming day of *Poush sanckranti* (January).

So far as animatism is concerned, the Reang believe that certain stones and pebbles (*halangsa*) are lucky. Two of them are husband and wife and smaller ones their children. The stone-couple beget children near a banana tree or at a *Jhum-field*. This family of stones are kept with due honour and offerings in a pair of earthen pots (*Lakshmi patil*) full of rice. Any big river and tributaries are supposed to be mother and sisters. The Riama and the Sarma rivers are supposed to be lovers. High mountains are venerated.

2. Totem & Taboo

Totem may be anything and everything but mostly animal from which a community draws its ancestral relationship. The forefather from which a community has descended is its totem which is held in high esteem. The totem animal is not killed and a period of mourning is observed on its death. Prohibition to kill it and eat its meat is called taboo.

The aged Reang draw their ancestral relation from the famous couple of *Garur* birds (*Bihanga*). The term *Reang* is a corruption of the *Bihanga*. And the bird is respected by them. Not only that certain clans are named after animals, fish, musical instruments, tiger, tortoise etc. for instance, the Apeta clan (fish), Chang-preng clan (guitar), Charkhi clan (wheel), Meska clan (tiger), Musa clan (leopard) and Tooimo-iafa (tortoise). But at present they show no respect to these objects and animals and do not believe that such things can be man's ancestors. The weakening of belief may be due to acculturation, spread of literacy and advancement of science and technology.

3. Dream & Divination

The Reang have firm belief in dreams and divinations. The good dreams are kept secret while the bad dreams are disclosed so that they become ineffective. In selecting a site for *Jhum* cultivation, a lump of soil is brought home and placed below a pillow. At night the peasant wears a clean cloth and sleeps alone with an expectation of revelation through dreams. If he sees in dream fish, clean water, marriage ceremony, there will be bumper crop. If he sees buffalo or an elephant there will be too much of weeds, but good crops. It is bad to see a beggar, a naked women, a dead animal, fire etc. It is dangerous to dream of building a new house, it means the dreamer may die soon. The Tipras, Jamatias and Kukis also have similar beliefs.

Divination is a mystical means of knowing before hand the future of an attempt or of a marriage proposal or the cause of a danger, disease and the like. It is generally believed that wrath of some malignant deities and spirits is the cause of disease and only through propitiation to the deity the patient can be cured. Sharmans and sorcerers called akcai are experts in divinatory practices. The common practice is to sacrifice a chicken or a pig, cut it open and examine its entrails. Another way to make sure one falls into trance and gets possessed by some god who speaks through him.

4. Magic & Witchcraft

Magic is divided into two types: imitative and contagious. Imitative or Homoeopathic magic is based on the law of similarity; 'like produces' like. Contagious magic is based on the principle of contact: things which were once in contact with the person to be affected, if charged with some charms, become potent enough to harm or help the person targeted.

The Reang sorcerers practise both types of magic. Amulets and talisman are used to ward off evil spirits, cure disease, befriend a person, cause divorce or to unite a pair. To harm an enemy a magician is engaged and enemy's stool, hair, nail-pairings, urine, corner of clothe are collected.

The magician sometimes goes to forest and draws human figure on earth or bark of a tree and then shoots arrows to harm an enemy. It is claimed that the magician can cause a short bamboo spoke invisibly enter into an enemy's belly. Some items of food are made potent with spells and are let to be taken by the enemy cautiously, carefully, secretly and in the guise of friendly entertainment. It remains undigested for years together and ultimately he dies. Saturday, Tuesday, uneven numbers and black things are supposed to be effective and useful in magical practices.

The Reang have great belief in witches and ghosts. Witches happily move about at midnight particularly during the dark fortnight (*amavashya*). They assemble annually in the month of *Bhadra* (Aug-Sept) under a *Thaiplak* tree (*Dilienia indica*). They are capable of sucking human blood and possess an old, worn-out, ugly person. An unfortunate person when suspected for being permanently possessed by a witch (*sekal*) is often excommunicated, exiled or killed. In 1881 one Kapiray Reang of Sonamura was mercilessly put to death by the villagers.

5. Fertility Rites

The Reang perform certain rites to promote fertility of *Jhum* crops, domestic animals and human beings. For timely rainfall, the goddess of water and her attendants are propitiated with offerings and sacrifices. The names of these deities are *Toibuma matai*, *Toiskao yakma*, *Kangsari*, and *Nakari*. For a good crop of paddy *Mainokma* and for the of cotton *Khonaukma* are worshipped. It is believed that worship of *Songrongma* helps in the promotion of one's wealth, prestige and position. So the village chiefs in particular invariably worship this goddess. To cure barrenness *Naocuma matai*, and *Lampra* are worshipped. *Buraha* and *Haicuma* are worshipped for the welfare of domestic animals.

6. Polytheism

The Reang believe in a number of gods and goddesses. Most of the deities have wives, husbands and children. Some of them are mild and benevolent while others are hot-tempered and malevolent. They are worshipped for peace, prosperity and cure of illness. Their deities may be divided into the following two categories on the basis of their nature.

Malevolent deities

Buraha	:	a male god who presides over forest and causes illness in animals and hides them.
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Haicukma	:	Wife of Buraha.
Jampira	:	Son of Buraha.
&		
Kalpira	:	Son of Buraha.
Thunairao matai	:	A male god of death.
Suinairao matai	:	Messenger of death news, also called <i>Chitragupta</i> .
&		
Banirao matai	:	Messenger of death news.
Alotai kanya ma		
Asotai kanya ma		
Longlitai kanya ma		
Chunglitai kanya ma	:	Seven sisters who cause illness.
Bukli kanya ma		
Kukli kanya ma		
Abashya kanya ma		
Longdrai matai	:	A male god ruling over elephant.
Sankhatarini ma	:	Wife of Longdrai matai.
Sri Kalajivan	:	Son of Longdrai matai.
Bilaori matai	:	A male god ruling over tiger.
Binaigar matai	:	A male god ruling over bear.

Benevolent deities

Sibrai	:	A male god.
Taocing chaungma	:	Wife of Sibrai.
Devalakshmi	:	A daughter of Sibrai.
Devatarini	:	Daughter of Sibrai.
Toibuma matai	:	Goddess of water.
Kangsari		
Nakari	:	Attendants of Toibuma matai.
Toiskao yakma		
Mai nukma	:	Goddess of paddy.
Mai Kacham ma	:	Goddess of paddy-seeds.
Khunaukma	:	Goddess of cotton.
Noacuma matai	:	A female deity guarding homestead.
Sungrungma	:	Goddess of peace, prosperity and position.

**Akhitra
&
Bhikitra**

Jointly known as Lampra, gods of love and marriage.

The Reang dieties have no anthropomorphic forms and there is no established temple. Bathing ghats, Jhum field, juncture of paths, stair-case of a hut, granary, a low and narrow junction connecting two hills and a place beneath a big tree are supposed to be suitable places for worship. A seat for the invited god is made of bamboo poles; two pairs of short poles are erected at a little distance and then horizontally connected with another pair of poles. The common ingredients necessary for worship consist of flowers, leaves, fruits, liquor, alkali water, cotton, rice, mustard seeds, turmeric, eggs, pigs, chicken, duck, buffalo, he-goat etc.

A priest is called *Akcai* or *Ojhai*. In every village there is a priest who is their friend, philosopher and guide. But the post is not hereditary and there is no priestly caste. Anybody can learn the craft if he has intelligence, integrity and bent of mind. The priests are mostly males. In Reang society the following priests were once very popular and famous: Lankati ojhai, Sunta manta ojhai, Armania ojhai (c. 1837-1932), Birbhadur ojhai (c. 1901-1975) and Tanggrangrai ojhai (c. 1906-1981).

The worship of various deities is gradually getting institutionalised in so far as some *pujas* and festivals are organised in definite months and dates. For instance Maikhlum which is a worship of deities of crops is performed in the month of Asara (June-July); the *Ker puja* to protect the village from evil spirits is done in *Falguna-Chaitra* (Feb-March), the *Garia* festival in early *Vaisakh* (April), They also perform the *Kali-puja* in *Aswin-Kartick* (Sept-Oct), Mangal chandi on any Tuesday and the *Sani Puja* on any Saturday preferably in the month of *Bhadra* (Aug-Sept). A worship to cure a minor illness is called *Taodari puja*, while a costly worship in case of serious disease is known as *Dabikta puja*. At the famous *Tripura-sundari* temple established by Danya Manikya in 1501 A.D. from the Reang community some persons were appointed bamboo-torch bearers to illuminate the temple on the occasion of *Diwali* in Oct-Nov, at a time when there was no hydro-electricity project in Tripura, Their designation was *Joolai*. The system has been continuing even today.

Prayers and incantations are also necessary in their worship. The spells have not yet been written down, as such an eloquent priest enjoys liberty in making additions and alterations. He, however, learns those spells or mantras from

his guru. The mantras are not loudly uttered. The spells are in the form of verse consisting of several stanzas; each is logically followed by the other. Here is a common pattern of a Reang mantra: It is in their own dialect.

Ama Mainookma! utara toongba, dakhin toongba

Puba toongba, pachim toongba

Dhyan toongba, darbar toongba

Acuk jaidi, baca faidi.

(Oh my mother goddess of rice, in whatever direction or place-in the north, south, east, west or in meditation or in an assembly-you are. Please come and take your seat).

It has similarity with the invitation (*Avahan, Ihagachha, Ihatistha*) in Sanskrit. Then the priest points out the purpose of invitation which is similar to *Sankalpa* in Sanskrit.

Nusafana hamia toongba

Caiya toongba, masing kangrai

Varsa musa, bukar khuidi

Shikar khuidi.

(Oh God, your son Mr. so and so has been suffering from cough and cold, fever and other bodily troubles: he seeks your blessings).

Then the priest describes how the poor devotee has collected the objects of offerings:

Bukharak tukia faliye

Cangri matufaliye

Jogasnia jogaye

Agasni agaye

Noongna camoongriya, nomoongria.

(The devotee having disposed the turban of his head, clothes of his waist and chopper of his hand, has collected all necessary articles of sacrifice and offerings for you.)

So the god is again humbly invited to come, sit and wash hands. The priest chants

Acukfaidi, baca faidi

Mukhang takedi, kharam takedi

Acuk faidi, bacca faidi

Yak sudi, yakang sudi

Rangcakni khamplaiya acukdi

Rangcakni khuria rupaini, batiya cadi.

(Oh god, please come, sit, wash your mouth, put on wooden sandals, wash your hands and foot, and kindly take your food placed on golden dish and glass).

Bamaisale! ganjak sale

Taktai sema naia

Oauktai sema naia.

Akcai hale, khama hale

Kamala hale, kamta hale.

Par sema naio, tar sema naio.

(Brahmans and Pundits consult almanac and other sacred books and select auspicious days to worship you. We are illiterate people. We can not read and write. So from an observation of the dropping of a pair of leaves we come to know whether you have come or not).

The priest then directs to bring the sacrificial animal/bird and seeks apology thus

Ah anabakba raja noong ma kacenangma

Noong fa kacenangma

Noongna tan nai;

Abani ung daya kurai

Ana susao saimaia

Ana ye chao mai naiya

(Oh he-goat! you will be sacrificed today. Your mother promised and your father promised for this. I have no responsibility, my assistant has no responsibility. Do not curse us).

The animal is washed and sacrificed and its blood offered to the deity. The priest again addresses the deity -

Fainha claiba atur pungnai

Thaha claiba khuri pungnai

Yacak cadi, khumpak cadi

(Oh god, kindly consider only one piece as sufficient, only a single drop of blood as sufficient. According to my capacity your son has made these offerings. You kindly and gladly take them).

The priest again utters-

Purti claiba purtima canaiya

Deiga claiba dinga ma canaiya

Nini bukung khalaitha, umu khalaitha.

Yacak cadi khucag cadi.

(Let these humble and little offerings not fall on earth or drain out or dry out. Let it enter into the mouth of god).

The priest then seeks blessings from god-

Noong camoong maide, noomoong maide

Noomafalna hamie caiya

Chiklai khuidi, maolai khuidi.

(Oh god, we have entertained you. Now you please bless your devotee and cure him. Take all his sufferings).

The god is requested to go back home along with all ills-

Capaiha, noongphaiha

Nushafanana baikya capaiha

Nini hari, ha o, nakahao

Dasa danda tuinang thangdi.

Miklai thangdi, baklai thandi.

Ara ta thandai.

(Oh god, you have been offered food and drinks. You have also blessed your devotee. Now you go back to *Harihaonakhao*, i.e., the land of gods. While returning carry all misfortunes. Do not stay here. Leave this place).

Hazards of staying here are pointed out-

Ara tanghe cerai te busia

Burai te busia

Yakoong nangnai, ya nangnal

Hari hao naka hao

Capaiha noongpaiha

Dasa danda khechadi.

(If you continue to live here children may misbehave, unclean cloth of women may be touched over hands and feet; they may touch your holy body. So please go back. You have eaten offerings. Drive out all evils.)

Hao Satya toonga

Dharma toonga

Satya se dharmakurai.

(Where there is truth, there is religion. Religion without truth is no religion. The priest then draws three lines on earth with a chopper. The lines resemble the kundali drawn by Lakshmana to safeguard Sita. The lines mark the dividing line between the world of gods and that of human beings.

Ram kundri, lakshman kundri

Badiang ri riha

Noongang tangdi

Ang gang bai tangho

Noongba ta baidi. Tha.

(This is the circle drawn by Rama and Lakshmana. Oh god, you reside beyond this line and we shall reside this side).

7. The Core of the Reang Religion

What has been described above is the outer part of the Reang's religious beliefs and practices. The inner part remains unearthed. The rituals and sacrifices are, as if, a tree's bark which covers the hard and durable core. To a superficial and unsympathetic observer, the Reang religion is not a moral code but a series of sacrifices and ceremonies.

The Reang themselves admit that sacrifices and ceremonies are not the essence of religion and that one need not worship so many gods and godlings. They stress importance more on *bhakti* (devotion) than on *bali* (sacrifice). Sacrifices are made not only to propitiate a malignant deity for the cure of disease but also as a matter of gratefulness to god for giving crops. It is, in fact, a thanks giving ceremony. The Reang have great respect for truth. In one of their spells, it is said that there is no religion other than truth, and that the greatest sin is telling a lie. Humility and hospitality of the Reang are proverbial. Every visitor, high or low, official or non-official, used to get food, betel leaf, tobacco etc. from them. Stealing was unknown to them. They used to build their granaries at a distance from the living huts to protect from fire. There was no arrangement for watching. Belief in the law of Karma and rebirth also prevents them from doing anything bad and harmful.

Yet crores of dollars and petro-dollars are poured in to 'save' them and to show them the 'true' path of salvation.

Observations

The core of their religion is clothed with some superstitions. Advancement of the culture and civilisation of a people demands gradual elimination of superstitions, prejudices, errors and abuses. It is in this light that the following observations are made.

1. The cure of disease assumes a magico-religious character. A puja is supposed to be a must, and an ojhai, is engaged to make offerings and sacrifices and to utter spells. It is time to depend more on herbal or modern medicines than on such *pujas*.
2. When a woman suffers from irregular menstruation, simple offerings are made near the hole of a crab. When a person falls on a slippery soil, the soil is supposed to be bad. It needs a chicken. Such beliefs are superstitious, pure and simple.

3. Formerly, they would not resort to gardening. It is believed that when a garden of mango, jackfruit, blackberry etc. becomes mature enough and attains fruit-bearing age, it becomes the abode of evil spirits. Not only that, a tentatively selected *Jhum* field is abandoned if certain dreams supposed to be ominous are revealed at the first night of selection when the head of the family puts a lump of soil below his pillow. These are all harmful prejudices.
4. Worship of the guardian deities of elephant, tiger and bear had relevance when there was deep forest infested with animals. The Bangalees too worship the tiger-god in different names. In Tripura and eastern parts of Bangladesh the tiger-god is known as *Baghai*.
5. When a domestic animal suffers from a disease, when a boy or a domestic animal does not return in time and all attempts of searching fails, it is believed that the forest deities *Buraha* and *Haicuma* have caused the illness or concealed the boy or animal. It is only sacrifice of a chicken to the deities that can please them to cure the disease and send back the boy or animal.
6. The series of sacrifices of unfortunate domestic birds and animals constitute a heavy drainage on their meagre economy. Trust in God does not essentially require sacrifice and blood-shed. Theirs is a bottomless basket because of the habit of fuddling and endless offering.
7. The killing of a person on the simple suspicion of being a witch (*sekal, dani*) is most unkindly. The treagedy of Kapi-ray Reang (1881) is not the lone example.
8. In the wake of growing scarcity, population explosion, spread of literacy, availability of medical facilities and cultural contact the very faith in certain traditional beliefs and practices is getting eroded. The educated Reang often question the reasonableness of those traditions. It may be expected that in future the Reang society will get rid of many of its superstitions.
9. Christianity has been planted among the Reang. According to a survey taken by the Tripura Baptist Christian Union in 1981 there are as many as 20,024 Baptist Christians among different tribes and castes out of which 4,813 are Reang. The exact number of follower of other denominations is not available at this moment.

Christianity entered Tripura first during the reign of Amar Manikya (1577-85). During his time, there were frequent attacks from the south by the Mogs

of Arakan and Chittagong Hill Tracts. Prior to that, since a century back the Portuguese were committing piracy near the sea coast of Chittagong. To counteract the Mogs, Amar Manikya appointed in his army some Portuguese Christians who settled at Udaipur. Subsequently, when Samser Gazi attacked and ruled Tripura for a decade (1750-60), the then king Krishna Manikya wandered in hills and forests and after the fall of Samser, he shifted his capital north-ward at old Agartala in 1760. The Portuguese Christians too moved with the king and have been permanently living there. They have a big church at Mariamnagar.

The second wave came from the east in the name of Thadu Kuki Mission of Manipur (TKMM). Initially it concentrated its work among the Kukis. Due to bamboo-flowering which was an indication of coming famine, many Kukis moved westward and settled in Jampui hills in 1911-12. Meanwhile the TKMM got divided. Distance and division created confusion. There was none to render pastoral service. So one Sri Haia Rangkhel came to Brahmanbaria-a few Klm. to the west of Agartala in 1935 and contacted the Newzealand Baptist Mission (NZBM) which took the invitation as a great opportunity and responded gladly and readily. In 1935 Rev. Jones of NZBM visited Tripura and in 1938 got permission as well as a big plot of land at Agartala to preach and plant a church. Upto 1967 it established as many as 103 primary schools among different tribes and in strategically important places. In 1968 the Government of Tripura started opening schools in the nooks and corners of Tripura. The Mission handed over many of their schools to the government. So since 1968 the Mission's work took a different turn towards opening churches and directly evangelizing. Conversion and other activities assumed such a proportion that the Government in 1970 asked the foreign missionaries to quit Tripura.

At the hands of the natives, Christianity has been far more firmly planted and expanding fast. The donor countries like New Zealand, U.S.A., U.K., Canada, West Germany are continuing to help the local churches by lakhs of rupees every year. Several denominations like Baptist Christian Union, Anglican church, Free Church of India, Pentecostal Mission, Roman Catholic mission, Welsh Presbyterian, Lutheran World Mission, Seventh day Adventists, Zoram Baptist Mission are quite actively propagating and converting, particularly among the Tribals. It seems that religion and politics have at present welded into one consciousness of subnationalism and alienation.

CHAPTER VI

ADMINISTRATION & POLITICS

The Reang have now entered into the vortex of communal, regional, national and international politics. But this was not the state of affairs during the princely period. Things have been changing radically since the partition of India. The Reang had institutions of self-governance. Their traditional administrative patterns were mainly village-based and confined to the community itself.

The Reang had the traditions of an organically linked three-tier administrative set-up at the village, zone and state levels. At the village level there were the following persons:

1. *Kamifang* : Chief of a village, also called *Chaudhuri*.
2. *Kerpang* : Manager, store-keeper; also known as *Karbari*.
3. *Akcai* : Priest and magician.
4. *Kandal* : Peon and body-guard.
5. *Daoa* : Messenger.

Next comes the zonal council. For administrative convenience, they made an artificial division of the territory of Tripura on the basis of three famous rivers, namely the Muhuri river in the south, the Gomti in the centre and the Khowai in the north-east. Three chiefs used to be selected for these three zones. Such a chief would be called *Huklai Chaudhury*. This post was of later induction when the Reang got dispersed and distributed in different sub-divisions. Such chieftains were nominated by the Reang king to administer three arbitrarily fixed zones broadly demarcated by three major rivers as stated above. One of the assigned duties of such Chaudhuris was to perform an annual puja rite (*Hamui taimi*) in each of these rivers during the rains. He had no formal assistant. He would maintain inter-village communication and unity within his respective jurisdiction. He was the link between the central administration (i.e., the King in his court) and the village administration as he was a member of the central council. The village chief would receive instruction and information from him. Inter-village or inter-community disputes, if there were any, used to be settled by him. His court was the second appellate court.

The third and the highest administrative-cum-judicial body headed by *Kami-*

Kachkao consisted of a large number of members. The following were the designations of some of them-

1. Kami Kachkao : Chief or raja
2. Chapia khan : Prime Minister
3. Chapia : Minister
4. Huklai Chaudhuri : Zonal chief
5. Chheng Krak : Chief of the Army
6. Akcai : Priest
7. Vaidya : Physician
8. Yak sunga : Swordsman
9. Dalai : Helper to the assistant
10. Darkalai : Assistant to Priest
11. Bhandari : Treasurer & Store-Keeper
12. Khang Kalem : Tax-collector
13. Hazra : Administrator to a group of villages beneath Huklai Chaudhuri
14. De-hazra : Assistant to Hazra
15. Karma : Orderly
16. Dharia : Assistant to the Chief Priest for annual ceremony
17. Daoa : Messenger
18. Kandal : Body-guard to the Chief
19. Duguria : Band-party manager
20. Muria : Flute players during religious rituals
21. Musanai : Dance master
22. Rica-nai : Musician
23. Som-nai : Cook
24. Su-nai : Flute player
25. Bau-nai : Organiser of feasts

The exact meaning of some of the above words or designations could not be ascertained. Even the aged Reang failed to give a correct interpretation. As such, the designations have not been arranged according to protocols.

The members of all the councils are selected by the villagers themselves through discussion. There was no system of election, adult franchise, secret ballot, political party and competition. Only the males would participate in discussions, deliberations and decision. The posts were not hereditary. In selecting the office-bearers, emphasis was laid on the qualities of head and

heart. The term of their office was only one year corresponding to the cycle of *Jhum* cultivation generally from January to December. If the office-bearers were found faithful and dutiful, their term of office would be renewed. Besides efficiency, supernatural blessing was believed to be an important factor. If a chief was liked by the gods, no clash, quarrel, crop failure, disease, distress, draught etc. would occur; otherwise all those misfortunes would follow. In that case, another person would be selected. Moreover, the post of Chief-tainship involved heavy responsibility. He was the mouth-piece of the village, zone or community. All government officers and employees would visit his house, talked to him, took rest and food. His house was a meeting place. In the evening all elderly villagers would come, sit, gossip and smoke in his house. He would naturally get little time to look after his field, and as such he was entitled to certain privileges.

The main functions of the village council were the settlement of disputes, trial of cases, distribution of hill slopes for shifting cultivation, organisation of communal ceremonies and festivals for the peace and prosperity of the settlement, looking after the defence of the village, helping the poor and the sick of the village, collection of government tax and assisting the government officials on tour.

The council would be convened usually in the evening at the courtyard of the chief. Minor offences and torts were privately settled. But serious crimes and disputes could not be so compounded. In such cases, they had to be formally referred to the village chief. For deciding cases, there was no formal code of laws.

The problem of false witness and perjury would hardly arise before the council because of the simplicity, truthfulness and scrupulousness of the people and also because it was difficult in the compact village to hide anything. Yet there were persons who would deny the allegations against them, furnish false evidence and plead their innocence. In such cases, the council resorted to some oaths and ordeals. In any way, justice was cheap, quick, visible and on the spot.

At present, the Reang and other tribal village councils in Tripura have withered away. Here and there are found only faint remnants of the past. It has been replaced (1962) by a uniform pattern of statutory Panchayatiraj all over the state irrespective of caste or community. The administrative responsibility of the village has been shifted from the chief to such agencies as the statutory Panchayat, TTAADC, Police, BDO, SDO, SDJM, DM, and Ministers.

Due to dissolution of the traditional tribal administrative set-up resulting from their merging into the general stream of the government administration, a justifiable apprehension of loss of traditional tribal culture arose. To resolve such apprehension and to allow more freedom and autonomy to the tribes practising their traditional ways, the autonomous district council bill was introduced in 1979. Such council comprised of 164 villages of tribal population spread all over the state, particularly in the southern and eastern parts. The council is expected to have more villages included in it. Except in maintenance of law and order, the council will have autonomy in all matters of development and administration. The existing blocks for development will be further sub-divided and the administrative expenditure will be mainly drawn from the tribal welfare fund. The council consists of 28 elected members, elected on the basis of adult franchise, with a tenure of 5 years. In allocation of funds and also in its supervisory functions the Tribal Welfare Department of the government has a vital role to play in relation to the autonomous district council. The history of this Department for the last few decades leaves much more to be desired in matters of efficiency and integrity. The political history of the Reang had been always chequered and eventful and related to that of the neighbouring tribes particularly to the Tipras and the Mogs. The Tipra were once powerful in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. Owing to inter-tribal conflict they left Assam, moved south-west-ward and through Cachar-Karimgang-Sylhet entered, in course of time, into Tripura. That was probably in the 8th-9th centuries. Similarly, the Reang were once powerful in the Hill Tracts of Chittagong. Being defeated by the Mogs, they migrated north-westward and entered into Tripura probably by the 9th-10th centuries. Even today the Reang are found mostly in areas bordering the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Entering into Tripura they concentrated in and around the Mayani hills in the upper courses of the Gomti river. There they were sovereign rulers for some time.

Thus immigrating, the Tipra gradually moved towards south and the Reang towards north. They met each other near the present Udaipur and at a terrible fight the Reang were defeated and subdued. The legend of that fight runs as: the Kami Kachkao King in the territory about the Mayani hills grew in power and turned into a despot. Eight brothers namely Tui Lamlia, Tui Klaha, Yang Sika, Pai Sika, Sam Saha, Paim Saha and two others, among his subjects moved out to search for some other more powerful king under whom they could settle and ask for remedy of the exploitation of the Kami Kachkao. They moved along the Gomti river on bamboo floats (*Oani Bhur*) and reached a place (about the present Udaipur) which was a stronghold of the Tipra

king. The aliens were imprisoned on suspicion and were kept about to be sacrificed before the deity. While they were lamenting their lot, the polyglot Malsam darwan gathered their story and reported it to the queen. Their purpose being innocent they were acquitted and a contingent was sent with them to subdue the Kami Kachakao. The first contingent failed as a result of their indulgence in the amenities provided by the Kami Kachkao. The second contingent was dispersed and accomplished the mission. Thus the Kami Kachkao was reduced to a sub-tenant under the Tipra king. To forestall the probability of growth and despotism among the Reang kings, they were subordinated to the supervision of *Ray Kanchan*, who was like a regent of the Tipra king. The annual investiture of the *Ray Kanchan* was subject to approval by Tipra king and the office was to rotate among all twelve sects of the Reang. The legends of both the tribes and the *Rajmala* of Tripura admit those facts. In the *Rajmala* it is also stated that it was the ancient king *Subrai alias Trilochan* who defeated the Reang and other tribes (*Rajmala*, Vol. I; Agartala, 1926; Pp. 187, 267). Since then the Reang Raja was reduced to a feudal chief.

The *Rajmala* spoke very highly of the valour of the Reang heroes in defending Tripura against the Muslim attacks during the medieval period. Some of the Reang were even Ministers and Army-chiefs of the *Rajas*(Kings) of Tripura. In this respect particular mention may be made of Kala Khan and Chhamtham Khan under Dharma Manikya (c. 1431-62 A.D.) and Ray Kacham and Ray Kachag under Dhanya Manikya (c. 1463-1515 A.D.). They all fought bravely to defend and expand the kingdom and to suppress internal rebellions. When Chatra Manikya (1661-66) with the Mughal help usurped the throne of Tripura and dethroned Govinda Manikya who was then forced to roam about in the hills, the Reang did not cordially receive Govinda Mnanikya. Actually the Reang did not dare to incur the displeasure of the ruling king Chatra Manikya. It shocked Govinda Manikya. After Govinda Manikya's restoration in 1667, once during the Ganga Puja organised by the King, the Reang with their bamboo-floats inadvertently broke the sacred cordon in the river Gomti. As a result of the ensuing quarrel between the royal staff and the Reang leaders, many Reang were thrown into the prison. The whole Reang community rebelled on this issue. The rebels were apprehended, arrested and ordered to be beheaded. This might have been prompted by Govinda Manikya's unpleasant experience with the Reang during his exile. However, the queen Gunavati intervened and sought mercy on behalf of the Reang. The Queen mediated between the king and the Reang and forged a vow of permanent allegiance from the Reang. When Krishna

Manikya was attacked, defeated and dethroned by Samser Gazi (01750-60), the Reang treated him with due honour, offered shelter and made an unsuccessful attempt to recover the lost kingdom.

The twentieth century has opened the flood-gates of party politics and various movements. The Reang have not remained silent and passive spectators. But the old *spirit de corps* is gone and the community is now, as if, a divided house. Economically, there are rich, poor and middle classes: politically, there are supporters and workers of the C.P.I., C.P.I.(M), I.N.C., T.U.J.S. and from the standpoint of religion there are Hindus and Christians.

A major incidence in the community-life of the Reang was a movement led by one Ratanmani Noatia (c. 1892-1943), an immigrant from the Chittagong Hill Tracts. His movement lasted only a few years just during the Second World War. Ratanmani's antecedents and activities are shrouded in mystery. He is a controversial figure. In course of field survey, at least six lines of contradictory opinions have been noted. These are:

1. Ratanmani was an agent of Japan. The Maharaja of Tripura helped the British and sent army against Japan in the Burma front. So Japan secretly contacted and instigated Ratanmani to create a chaos in Tripura. Being thus inspired Ratanmani wanted to dethrone Bir Bikram and himself to become the next king.
2. Ratanmani was a freedom fighter. He participated in the Chittagong armoury raid of 1930. When warrant was issued against him by the British Government he took shelter in the hills of independent Tirpura.
3. Ratanmani fought against the oppressive rule of the Maharaja Bir Bikram and also against the feudal chiefs. There were differential rates of house-tax for each tribe. The Reang were required to pay at a higher rate. Khagendra Raychaudhury, Chief of the Reang Community and a stooge of the king supported the rate at a time of famine.
4. The Christian missionaries, particularly the NZBM which was given in 1938 land and permission to preach here, utilised Ratanmani through one Tikendra Ghagra, a Garo preacher. Tikendra settled at Lakshmi Chara, a village very much within the area of operation of Ratanmani. The present Church leaders of the Agartala TBCU admit their distant relations with Ratanmani.
5. Ratanmani was out and out a Hindu and a social reformer. In his neck there was a scared necklace of rudraksha and he would

frequently refer to the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Gita. He was against all traditional superstitions and prejudices. His preachings attracted many. Those who had become his disciples incurred the displeasure of the feudal chiefs who twisted and turned things, spoke ill against him, and reported to the king who suppressed the movement in 1943.

6. He wanted to carve out a separate kingdom or homeland for the Reang within the State of Tripura, with political sovereignty.

Whatever be the cause of the movement, it was fact that the movement had created a great commotion in the entire kingdom. The common Reang were in a dilemma. Those who accepted him as their *Guru* (Leader) were punished; their houses had been burnt and fines imposed. And there were counter attacks too. Ratanmani had his *Patra*, *Mitra* and *Mantri*. In an expedition sent by the king, a few disciples died and hundreds were arrested and put to jail. Being ill-treated Ratanmani died in the jail in 1943. All others were released.

But that is not the end of the story. Democratic institutions introduced in Tripura after its accession to the Indian Union in 1949 have also attracted the Reang. Various political parties too have been trying to establish rapport. Mention may be made here of a few well-known Reang leaders belonging to different parties: Khagendra, Jaladhar, Krishna Charan, Surendra, Kashiram, Chandrakumar of the I.N.C.; Kharagaray, Charanpai, Vinay Prasad, Durbajay, Briksharam of the C.P.I.; Bajuban, Lienprasad, Surendra, Suraja Kumar and Mandita of the C.P.I.(M); and Draukumar of the T.U.J.S. While the I.N.C. and the Communist Party were able to sprout their roots among the Reang in the early 1950's, the T.U.J.S. is of comparatively recent origin (1967), an avowedly tribal party, its membership is confined to the tribals only. Its principal demands have been introduction of autonomous district council, recognition of the Kakbarak language, use of the Roman script for that language, more reservation in government jobs, restoration of tribal lands and settlement of the *Jhum* cultivators. Its movement is strengthening the inter-tribal communication and consolidating the different tribes into a single cohesive nationality.

A small group of Reang youth along with some other tribal youth have taken an altogether different path. This undemocratic path may be termed as insurgency which is impossible without material assistance from abroad. What has been happening in Tripura is not isolated, endemic and sporadic incidences. Indeed, the whole of India's Northeast has been a cockpit of

international poiltics. It implies that the lot of the Reang are no longer left to them alone.

Observations

1. A self-subsistence economy can hardly afford to maintain an elaborate administrative structure. The traditional Reang economy also belongs to this category. As such its political institutions are small and simple.
2. But the Reang are practical people. Their village council was small but effective. Justice was cheap, quick and visible.
3. As in the case of economic activities, so in the field of administration, belief in the supernatural power plays a significant part. It is believed that *Sibrai* is the ancient law-giver. Without supernatural blessings no chief can rule peacefully. Death, drought, discord and distress may follow during the chieftainship of that particular chief who is disliked by the deities. Deities are worshipped for the enhancement of prestige, position and prosperity.
4. Formerly the chief used to get certain services and privileges from the villagers. One hind leg of a big game had to be offered to the chief; his house would be built and his *Jhum* field would be cultivated by the joint labour of the villagers. These free services are no longer rendered to him.
5. The old political institutions have been almost completely replaced by the statutory Panchayatiraj allover the state. But in matters relating to social customs and religious ceremonies, the remnants of the ancient administration survive even today.
6. The various hill-people who were at dagger's drawn to each other are now gradually getting fused into a melting pot to form a nationality. A conscious tendency to forget and forgive for what was done by their ancestors is clearly manifest with the new generation of the late 20th century. They feel the necessity of a stronger unity in a greater scale against the complex and engulfing culture of the plain-people.
7. The formation of a tribal political party, establishment of *Kakbarak* schools, introduction of the Tipura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council and the like are all engineered to safeguard the interests of different tribes.

8. The desire and efforts to preserve and protect the traditional culture and community-rights are natural and acceptable in all societies; but even the devotest lover of his country turns into a zealot when the elements of balance and proportion are overlooked. At the instance, if not instigation, of outside forces and powers, the feeling of nationality among tribals in N.E. Indian states tends to become peninsular communality with open hostile attitude towards the broad stream of Indian life. Responsibility for such developments cannot be precisely or squarely placed on any particular shoulder. The Bengalee community, mostly persons displaced not only from homestead, but from occupations as well, were indifferent towards everything else except procuring new footholds. The means adopted were often uncharitable even unethical. These factors also contributed towards alienation of the local tribals from them, which fermented into dislike, disbelief and even hostility. The Bengalee to the tribals, were the representatives of Indian nation, hence, the repulsion is towards even Devnagri script, let aside Bengali, for use as medium of *Kakbarak*. In spite of the inherent unsuitability, they have turned towards Roman script as they have turned towards the representatives of European Faith in preference to India and Indians.

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