

Sustainable Development of Reang Culture in Tripura: Role of Bru Socio-Cultural Organization (BSCO)

Dr. Lincoln Reang

Assistant Professor, Deptt. of History, Tripura University

1. INTRODUCTION

Tripura with an area of 10,486 sq.km has always been a multi-ethnic state like most other Northeastern state of India. There are 19 Scheduled tribes in Tripura, namely the Tipras/ Tripuri, Rieng (Bru), Jamatia, Noatia, Lushai, Uchoi, Mog, Kuki, Chakma, Khasi, Garos, Halam, Bhutia, Bhil, Munda, Orang, Lepcha, Santhal and Chaimal.

The Reangs (Bru) are basically a semi-nomadic tribe who practice *jhum* (slash and burn) or shifting method of cultivation on the hill sides. This makes them to move from one place to another place after a gap of few years. The possible causes of their migration and movement lay in their traditional life patterns characterized by shifting cultivation, primitive tools, semi-nomadic settlement, inter-tribal feuds, etc. The Reang (Bru) basically belonged to the Mongoloid group and speaks the Tibeto-Burmese language 'Kau Bru'. The Reang (Bru) inhabited almost in all the district of Tripura and with small populations in the neighbouring States of Mizoram and Assam.

The Reang usually call themselves as 'Bru', but the term 'Reang' is used as an appellation to denote the tribe. The term 'Reang' has been derived and used from the name of the last Kaskau (Community Chief) *i.e.*, Reang Kaskau. In the *Bru* or Rieng/Reang Community there are 12 Clans/*Panjis*, namely *Molsoi, Tuimui, Msha, Taumayakcho, Apeto, Wairem, Meska, Raikchak, Chorkhi, Chongpreng, Nouhkhram and Yakstam*. The Reang (Bru) has been identified as the "Primitive Group" by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India on the basis of their pre-agricultural level of technology, extremely low level of literacy, declining or stagnant population.

At present, the Reang (Bru) communities basically are found to reside in twenty-eight out of fifty-eight blocks in eight districts of Tripura. In North and Unakoti district, they reside in Kumarghat, Gournagar,

Dasda, Pecharthal, Laljuri, Damcherra, Jampui Hill, Yuvrajnagar and Kadamtala blocks. In Dhalai and Khowai district, they reside in Ambassa, Manu, Chawmanu, Dumburnagar, Ganganagar, Salema, Durga Chowmuni, Tulasikhar and Mungiakami blocks. In South and Gomati district, they reside in Matabari, Amarpur, Karbook, Ompi, Bokafa, Jolaibari, Hrishyamukh, Bharat Ch.Nagar, Kakraban and Rajnagar blocks.

2. CULTURAL SPECTRUM

Tripura encloses a rich cultural heritage of songs, dance and music. Due to its numerous and diverse ethno-linguistic groups, a composite culture has emerged on the whole in Tripura. Actually, Tripura has traditionally been the home of different cultures and people. The tribal culture and their traditions and practices pervade almost all of the aspects in the society. The distinctiveness of the tribes lays in their rituals, cultures, beliefs and above all the harmony in which they survive in unison with nature. The Reang (Bru) community has a rich and vibrant material culture. Their custom depicts their belief in simplicity. The diversity of culture across tribal groups is reflected in the diversity of songs, music, instruments and techniques.

2.1 DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

Simplicity and plainness are the twin characteristics of the dress of the Reang (Bru) people. The traditional dress of the Reang (Bru) community is simple and plain. Traditionally, the men wear a hand woven loin cloth and a piece of hand woven cloth '*Kutai ritrauh*' as a wrapper for upper portion. The women wear a long cloth called *Rnai*, a wraparound; from the waist to down to the knees. A *Rsa*, covering the chest, and *Rikatouh* for covering the whole upper half of the body. These are woven by the Reang (Bru) women, which are colourful and very beautiful. But nowadays the educated masses are wearing all the modern dresses like any other part of the world. The Reang (Bru) women are very fond of personal decoration and take much care for their makeup and hair-do. They love ornaments, flowers, and cosmetics. Silver ornaments especially the necklace of silver coins '*Rangbauh*' have a pride of place and status. Some of the important ornaments that the Reang (Bru) maiden adorns are *Sangai* (For Hair), *Srang* (For Hair), *Wareigh* (For Hair), *Wakhom* (For Ear), *Nabak* (For Ear), *Lukoigh* (For Neck), *Kanthi* (For hand), *Rangbak sanang* (For Neck), *Tar* (For hand), *Tro* (For hand), *Mathia* (For Hand-Male) and

Bengi (For Leg). Undoubtedly, the credit for the Tripura's traditional costumes act of being attractive while being simple at the same time goes to the much talented natives.

2.2 FOLK SONGS, MUSIC AND DANCE

Music plays a major role in Reang (Bru) societies and is intimately linked with a person's ancestry and country (the animals, plants and physical features of the landscape). It is traditionally connected with important events such as the bringing of rain, healing, harvesting, etc. Reang (Bru) music is learnt and carried on to later generations by performing it. It is not seen as fixed but rather is something that is varied or built upon in successive performances. There is usually a large number of participants and is performed communally. Narrative verse looms large in the traditional music of Reang (Bru) cultures. This encompasses such forms which were meant originally for oral performance, sometimes accompanied by instruments. Hymns and other forms of religious music are often of traditional origin. Work songs frequently feature on call and response structures, and are designed to enable the laborers' who sing them to coordinate their efforts in accordance with the rhythms of the songs. They are frequently, but not invariably, composed.

Music has been an integral part of the Reang (Bru) lifestyle. Some of the aboriginal instruments, developed in Tripura and with respect to Reang (Bru) community are *Dandu* (Musical instrument played by mouth), *Wathop* (bamboo musical instrument), *Srenda* (violen), *Kham* (Drum), *Chongpreng* (Guitar), and *Ksumu* (Flute). Be it the occasion of marriage, religious ceremony or other festival, songs and music are sung and played to commemorate each event among the community. Dance has also been a vital constituent of the Reang (Bru) way of life. The different varieties and style of dance forms like *Dailo*, *Hodaigri* or *Menpati*, *Goroia*, *Taoktuma*, etc are exclusive to one or the other occasions.

2.3 HODAIGRI DANCE

The Reang (Bru) songs and dances reflect their social lifestyle. Joy and sorrow are given a musical colour through their songs sung in style befitting the occasions. The *Hodaigri* dance amongst the Reang (Bru) was usually performed on the occasion of *Maikhlungmo* rituals i.e. worship of Goddess of food grains and

cotton especially during the month of September-October after the successful completion of *Huk* or Jhum harvesting. *Maikhlungmo* rituals consist of four varieties viz. *Mainokma*, *Khunokma*, *Maiktama* and *Maikchamma*. On the particular day of the rituals, i.e. in the morning some fowls (03 Nos.) would be sacrificed along with some other ingredients. Some well-to-do families sacrifice Pig and Buffalo, wherein all the villagers would be invited for the feast. During the earlier days the well-to-do families would usually be from the rank of village *Choudhry* (Head-Man), etc. The feast would continue throughout the day and as night approaches the *Hodaigri* dance would be performed, which continues throughout the night. It is believed that the dance originated on the occasion of the *Maikhlungmo* rituals so as to receive blessing from the mother goddess. *Hodaigri* basically indicates the ‘night of the feast or merry-making’ on the occasion of *Maikhlungmo* rituals. All the villagers would enjoy *Awaing thai* (A rice cake wrap with special kind of wild flower leaves) and drink *Arag* (locally made rice beer). In a *Hodaigri* dance, the Reang (Bru) maiden would expose their dance expertise and skills of various techniques. The dancer would start dancing by standing on the pitcher by balancing the plate and simultaneously balancing a round shaped bamboo tray in their hands and also keeping the local beer bottle attached with a burning lamp on top of their head, and simultaneously moving their body in a harmonious rhythm to the beats of musical instruments like drum, flute and folk songs. The equipments required for this dance are earthen pitcher, small oil lamps, bottle, handkerchiefs or flowers, *Baileing* (sort of a big plate made of bamboo), metal plates and different ornaments and colourful dresses. This is basically a female oriented dance but men assist the female artistes by providing musical beats for the dance. *Hodaigri* is also known by other names like *Medol Msamung* and *Menpati*.

3. THE BRU SOCIO-CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (BSCO)

The Bru Socio-Cultural Organization (BSCO) is one of the largest Non-Governmental Organization of the Reang (Bru) Community of Tripura. It was established in 1980 with an aim to develop and uplift the Reangs (Bru) Socio-Cultural, Economic and Education. The structure of the BSCO comprised the Central Executive Committee Members at the apex with ten regions namely Amarpur, Damcherra-Khedacherra, Kanchanpur, Belonia-Santirbazar-Udaipur-Sonamura, Manu-Mongang, Delwai-Tuiksama, Gandacherra, Unakoti, Karbook and Tuikchoma Region. Also, there comprised several Primary Committee based on different cluster of villages under the respective Regions.

The BSCO General Conference are held generally every year since 1981 but now it was held once in every three years to help motivate and entails more time for the upliftment of the Society. The BSCO also organized the popular *Hodaigri* festival since 1993 in association with different departments of the State Government and the Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council (TTAADC).

Apart from organizing the *Hodaigri* festival, the BSCO has been engaging with various social-cultural related awareness among the Reang (Bru) community of Tripura. The BSCO had been organizing various educational, health camp awareness, traditional games and sports events and making documentaries on the social-cultural life of the Reangs (Bru), on safe drinking water, malaria and education, religion, games & sports, marriage system, etc.

3.1 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

1. Protection, promotion and advancement of the cultural heritage and tradition that distinctly establishes our affinity to the membership of the Bru Tribe.
2. Protection and promotion of traditional folk dances, songs and music.
3. Protection and development of Bru language (Kau Bru) and literature by way of compilation of vocabularies, proverbs, folk tales, and their documentation and also of organizing seminars/ conventions on language and literature.
4. To restore dignity and sanctity to the customary laws and practices which are consistent with natural justice as well as modern concept of justice and to initiate reforms where necessary and approach the appropriate authority for codification of law.
5. To fight the harmful superstitious belief and practices wherever and in whatever form they are found in our society.
6. To advance and protect the all round interests of all sections of the Bru society in the field of education, employment and finance.
7. To build up a network of relationship for closer contact among the Brus in Tripura in particular and the Brus outside Tripura throughout India in general by mutual exchange of views and opinions on matters affecting their common interests.
8. To organize and extend relief for the victims of natural calamities of serious nature and for displaced families due to other reasons meriting relief of humanitarian grounds.

9. To bring to the notice of the appropriate authority any difficult problem, crisis or violation of human rights faced by the Brus as well as members of other communities and to seek from appropriate authority immediate redresses of such difficult problem, crisis or violation of human rights affecting the Brus in particular and other communities in general.
10. To organize awareness programme on sanitation and health.
11. To draw up action plan for tying up selling of traditional dress/ costumes, handicrafts etc. with observance of traditional festivals and festivals of the religious groups.
12. To initiate programme for skill development, capacity building and economic empowerment of the weaker sections of the society.
13. To acquire by purchase or lease or otherwise, land and buildings and establish offices of the society and cultural centers for pursuit and promotion of cultural activities.
14. To systematically and effectively contribute to the advancement of the Bru tribe to the nationality.
15. To collect subscriptions and donations from members and others and accept gift, bequeath and endowment for attainment of the objects of the society.

3.2 ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF THE BRU SOCIO-CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (BSCO), TRIPURA

CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Central Executive Committee (CEC) is at the apex. The CEC consist of 13 members. They are the President, Vice-President, General Secretary, Asstt. General Secretary (South), Asstt. General Secretary (North), Finance Secretary, Office-cum- Organizing Secretary, Secretary for Customary Law & Practices, Literary Affairs, Cultural Affairs, Educational Advancement, Economic Development, Youth Affairs & Traditional Games and Women Welfare. The tenure of the committee is three years.



REGIONAL COMMITTEE

There is ten Regional Committee spread all over Tripura. The members of the Regional Committee are formed from among the Primary Committee members.

1. Damcherra-Khedacherra Region, North Tripura North
2. Kanchanpur Region, North Tripura
3. Manu-Mongang Region, Dhalai Tripura
4. Delwai-Toiksama Region, Dhalai Tripura
5. Gandacherra Region, Dhalai Tripura
6. Amarpur Region, Gomoti Tripura
7. Udaipur-Santirbazar-Belonia Region, Gomoti-South Tripura
8. Unakoti Region, Unakoti Tripura
9. Tuikchoma Region, Khowai Tripura
10. Karbook Region, Gomoti Tripura



PRIMARY COMMITTEE

There are as many Primary Committees under each Region. The Primary Committees are usually formed from among a single or a group of village hamlets.

MAJOR PROGRAMMES/ACTIVITIES OF BSCO IN TRIPURA			
Sl. No.	Programmes/Activities	Collaboration/Sponsored	Period/Year
1	Hojagiri (<i>Hodaigri</i>) Festival	TRP & PTG, TWD, ICA, Govt. of Tripura, TTAADC, NZCC, etc.	Yearly since 1993
2	Health Awareness Camp	TRP & PTG, TRCI, Govt. of Tripura & Self	Yearly
3	Educational Awareness Camp/ Literacy Campaign	TRP & PTG, TRCI, Govt. of Tripura & Self	Yearly
4	Cultural Awareness Camp	TRCI, Govt. of Tripura & Self	Yearly
5	Traditional Games & Sports Events	TRP & PTG, TRCI, Govt. of Tripura.	2014-2016
6	Documentary on the Reangs on	TRP & PTG, Govt. of Tripura,	2012-2015

	subject relating to Health Awareness, Hygiene, Games & Sports, Marriage System, Religion and Culture.	TRCI, Govt. of Tripura & Self	
7	Merit Award	Self	Yearly
8	Village Awareness Camp	Self	Yearly
9	Organizing Cultural Programme	Self	Yearly
10	Organizing Workshop on Culture/Traditional Sports and Customary Laws.	TRCI, Govt. of Tripura & Self	Yearly, Customary Law (2003, 2008, 2016)
11	Printing of Calendar and Souvenir	Self	Yearly
12	Unique ID NGO partnership		
13	Website/ E-mail		
14	Research Project on Reang	TRCI, Govt. of Tripura	2014-15
15	Reang Feature Film & Video Album <i>Gregchungma</i>	TRCI, Govt. of Tripura & Self	2012 Onwards
16	Customary Law to TTAADC		
17	Reang/Riang to TRCI		
18	Hodaigri Academy at Tuikarmaw		
19	Bru Census 2015		

*TRP & PTG- Tribal Rehabilitation in Plantation and Primitive Tribal Group.

*TWD- Tribal Welfare Department.

*TRCI- Tribal Research & Cultural Institute.

4. EVALUATION FRAMEWORK AND APPROACH

The BSCO proposed to assess and document qualitative and quantitative evidence for achieving sustainable development. Major objectives of the BSCO are as follows:

- (i) End poverty in all its forms,
- (ii) Achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls,
- (iii) Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all,
- (iv) Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and
- (v) Provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.

5. CONCLUSION

The Bru Socio-Cultural Organization (BSCO), Tripura since its inception in 1980 had been working for the upliftment of the Bru community of Tripura. The activities area covered by the BSCO includes in the field of Socio-cultural, economic and literacy. The support from the community had been tremendous for the BSCO while delivering its duty of societal upliftment. The work of BSCO in collaboration with the Government of Tripura have being instrumental in bringing development in various field.

The BSCO, Tripura further plan to earnestly work for the development of the Bru society especially with regards to literacy. It tends to extend its work activities to the remotest of the Bru villages in Tripura through its regional and primary committee members. The BSCO, Tripura is therefore earnestly pursuing for the development of the society by taking various responsibility irrespective many difficulty prevailing on its path.

Reang (Bru) Population Status in Tripura						
No. of RD Blocks	No. of Gram Panchayat/ Village Council	No. of Hamlet/ Villages	Total Family	Male	Female	Total Population
28	189	935	50567	111635	109760	221395

Hojagiri (<i>Hodaigri</i>) Festival held in Tripura			
Sl. No.	Year	Venue	District
1	1993	Gachhirampara	North
2	1994	Bokafa	South
3	1995	Karbook	South
4	1996	Shikaribari	Dhalai
5	1997	Nepaltilla	North
6	1998	Lukhu	South
7	1999	Ananda Bazar	North
8	2000	Tuikormo	South
9	2001	Karbook	South
10	2002	Gachhirampara	North
11	2003	Bokafa	South
12	2004	Nepaltilla	North
13	2005	Tuikormo	South
14	2006	Khedacherra	North

15	2007	Lukhu	South
16	2008	Gandacherra	Dhalai
17	2009	Karbook	South
18	2010	Uricherra	North
19	2011	Nepaltilla	Dhalai
20	2012	Bokafa	South
21	2013	Upanagar	Dhalai
22	2014	Ananda Bazar	North
23	2015	Paharpur	Gomati
24	2016	Gandacherra	Dhalai
25	2017	Gachhirampara	North
26	2018	Bokafa	South
27	2019	Nepaltilla	Dhalai
28	2020	Karbook (<i>Proposed</i>)	Gomati

References:

1. Kumar, B.B.(1998). *The Tribal Societies of India*, New Delhi, Omsons Publication.
2. Reang, Lincoln (2012). *A Conceptual Analysis on the Tribal Religion of Tripura* in K.Jose, et.al., (ed.) *Concept of God and Religion: Traditional Thought and Contemporary Society*, New Delhi, Abhijeet Publications.
3. Bhattacharyya, N.N.,(1995). *Religious Culture of North-Eastern India*, New Delhi, Manohar Publishers.
4. Rao, Narayan Singh,(2006). *Tribal Culture, Faith, History and Literature*, New Delhi, Mittal Publications.
5. Reang, Lincoln.,(2009). *Perspective of Education among the Reang Community of Tripura: Dimension and Issues* in Tribal Development in Tripura (ed) Gautam Kumar Bera, Guwahati, EBH Publishers.
6. Summary,(2007). Tripura Human Development Report, Agartala, Government of Tripura.
7. Ray, Syamal Kumar.,(2003). *India's North-East and the Travails of Tripura*, Kolkata, Minerva Associates (Publications) Pvt. Ltd.