



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE COSTUME OF THE TRIPURI AND REANG TRIBES OF TRIPURA, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The tribal communities are known for its conformity in dressing. In absence of authentic documentation on the textile and costume of each tribe of Tripura, not much has been written on this subject. An ethnographic research is done on to study the traditional and contemporary textiles and costume of the tribal women of Tripura. The tribal women weave their traditional textiles on a loin loom and drape their costume in similar ways. There are about nineteen different tribes living in Tripura. The Tripuri and Reang is the most primitive tribe of Tripura and has the largest tribal population in the state (Govt. of Tripura, 2007). The uniqueness of the tribal community is expressed in the hand-woven textiles, woven on backstrap or loin looms. The costumes of different tribes may look similar to an outsider, but each tribe has their own unique motifs, stripes and colour combination, important for social interaction within the tribal community in which one tries to maintain standards set by the group. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations and photo-ethnography. The research paper focuses on a comparative study of the costume of the Tripuri and Reang Tribe of Tripura, in terms of yarns, looms, weaving, colour combination, motif and the choices of traditional and contemporary clothes of both the tribes are also discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Tripura is situated in the northeastern part of India. It is surrounded on the north, west, and south by Bangladesh and is accessible to the rest of India through Assam and Mizoram state (Tripura State Portal, 2012). The state has an area of 10,492 sq. km. Tripura was a Princely State until it merged into the Union of India on 15th October 1949. During the last phase of the princely rule by the Manikya dynasty, Tripura witnessed the emergence of a new culture, which was the outcome of the migration from the Colonial Bengal and from the adjoining territories. The flow of immigrants increased in the state during the 1950s' and reached its zenith during the Independence movement of Bangladesh in the year 1971 (De, N., 2012). Since, 14th century, Tripura has a name for itself in the field of handloom & bamboo handicrafts. Handloom is the single largest and one of the oldest industry in the state. The population of Tripura is approximately 32 lakhs of people among which 31.1% belong to the scheduled tribe category. There are about nineteen different tribes living in Tripura. The Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Noatia, Halam, Chakmah, Mog, Garo,

Munda, Lushai, Oraon, Santhal, Uchai, Khasi, Bhil, Lepcha, Bhutia, Chaimal and Kuki tribes have their own cultural heritage and identity which is reflected in their traditional costume. The Tripuri and Reang are the most primitive tribe of Tripura and have the largest tribal population in the state (Govt. of Tripura, 2007). The geographical barriers of Tripura on all sides were not insurmountable for migration and communication, particularly during peace-time. So people from all directions migrated to Tripura which continues even today. When in the sixth and seventh centuries A.D., various Mongolian tribes, one after another started immigrating from the east, south-east and northeast and occupied the hills in the east and west of Tripura, they were the first group of people to settle and establish themselves there in the State (Chaudhuri, 1985). It is believed that Tripuris or Kokborok speaking people, today better known as Boroks (also described as Tipperahs or Tipras), left China in 65 AD, long before the Sui dynasty (589- 618 A.D). The Boroks were animists at the time of their immigration. The common reference to the Mongoloid peoples as Kiratas and Cinas in the early Sanskrit texts of India undoubtedly indicates their arrival to the Assam hills and other North East India in the dawn of the Christian era (Chaudhuri, 1985). Regarding the original homeland of the Reangs, opinion differs. It is commonly believed that the Reangs migrated from

somewhere in the Chittagong Hill Tract (now in Bangladesh) to Tripura during the time of Ratnamanikya in the 15th century. As the Reang tribe is one of the important members of the great Tibeto-Burman family of tribes, the history of migrations and movements of these tribes are very wide and many of such movements remained unrecorded and no definite history is available to us. The movements of the Reangs through different territories in long past are also not easy to get (Bhattacharjee, 2009). The uniqueness of the Tripuri and Reang tribal community is expressed in the hand-woven textiles, woven on backstrap looms. The costumes of different tribes may look similar to an outsider, but each tribe has their own unique motifs, stripes and colour combination, important for social interaction within the tribal.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- To study the traditional textile and costume of the Tripuri and Reang tribal women of Tripura with reference to the yarns used, the weaving process, designs and motifs, colour and draping styles.
- Comparative study of between the two tribes Change in the raw material, Change in design and motif, Change in draping and styling of the traditional costume, Change in colour preference.

Table 1. A Comparative study on costume and Textiles of Tripuri and Reang Tribe

	TRIPURI	REANG
Traditional Tribal Costume	<p>Traditional Style</p> <p>i. Ria or Risha- Draped on upper abdomen. ii. Rignai--- Draped on lower abdomen. iii. The Tripuri women do not wear Shirt.</p> <p>Contemporary Styles</p> <p>i. Women wear rignai with a saree blouse and Ri- Kukur. ii. Younger women wear rigwnai with T-Shirts or western top</p> <p>Traditional rigwnai</p>	<p>Traditional Style</p> <p>i. Ria or Risha- Same as Tripuri Tribe ii. Rignai --- Same as Tripuri Tribe iii. Rignai is worn with a Shirt</p> <p>Contemporary Styles</p> <p>i. Same as the Tripuri Tribe ii. Same as the Tripuri Tribe</p> <p>Traditional rigwnai</p>
Types of rigwnai	<p>3 types---</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sada • Chamathia • Shikla <p>Modern rigwnai (6 Types identified)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single colour rigwnai with motifs woven on the border • Multicoloured stripes rigwnai • Brocade rigwnai • Machine embroideredrigwnai • Hand embroideredrigwnai • Rigwnai with 3D paints 	<p>2 types----</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All over striped rigwnai • Black coloured rigwnai with motifs on the hem. <p>Modern rigwnai (3 Types identified)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All over striped rigwnai set in contemporary colours • Single colour rigwnai with contrast colour temple motif (Influence of Manipuri community) • All over striped rigwnai set in contemporary colours, worn with printed ri- kukur.
Colours	<p>Traditional Colours</p> <p>i. Base of the fabric is in Red & White in colour. ii. Motifs are woven using yellow, green, blue colours.</p> <p>Contemporary Colours</p> <p>The modern Tripuri women wears a different shades of yellow, blue, pink, grey, green, red etc.</p>	<p>Traditional Colours</p> <p>i. Base of the fabric is in Black, brown & White in clour. ii. Motifs were woven using white colour.</p> <p>Contemporary Colours</p> <p>The modern reang women are experimenting with newcolours but compared to the Tripuri women.</p>
Traditional Motifs	Tripuri motifs are inspired from nature and are specific to the Tripuri culture.	Reang motifs are inspired from nature and are specific to the Reang culture.
Placement of motifs	Motifs can be placed on the body, panels or sides of the rigwnai and r- kukur	Motifs are only woven near the border or hem.
Draping	<p>Traditional way of Draping</p> <p>Traditional way of draping is same for both the Tribes.</p> <p>Modern way of Draping (5 types identified)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risha draped over blouse. • Rigwnai and Rikukur draped similar to a saree. • Rigwani wore with kurta/ kameez. • Rigwnai worn with western top and rishi carried as a stole. • Personalized ways of draping the rigwnai 	<p>Traditional way of Draping</p> <p>Same as Tripuri Tribe.</p> <p>Modern way of Draping (2 types identified)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigwnai and Rikukur draped similar to a saree. • Rigwnai worn with western top and rishi carried as a stole.
Raw Material	<p>Traditional Yarns</p> <p>Traditionally used cotton yarns (cotton cultivated from shifting cultivation).</p> <p>Contemporary Yarns</p> <p>i. From the beginning of the 21st century, the Tripuri tribal women only use only acrylic yarns for weaving the main costume. ii. Rayon or Doli yarns are used for making the extra warp and weft motifs. iii. The Tripuri Women sometimes use metallized polyester yarns in the warp</p>	<p>Traditional Yarns</p> <p>Same as Tripuri Tribe.</p> <p>Contemporary Yarns</p> <p>i. Same as Tripuri Tribe. ii. White acrylic yarns are used for making motifs iii. The Reang women are fond of using metallized polyester yarns aling with acrylic yarns.</p>
Back Strap Loom	Looms are smaller compared to the Reang tribe. Half of the rigwnai is made length wise and the the two halves are joined together by joined in the middle. Parts of Back Starp loom: Ghonta (Front Bar), Larima (Lease rod), Sarak (Circular bamboo bar), Nal (Heald Bar), Rwasami (Sword), Wasa, Bankha (Breast Bar), Sabam (Back Strap), Thuri (Shuttle).	Looms are bigger in size and the complete rigwnai can be woven on the loom. Parts of Back Starp loom: Rinkroh (Front Bar), Larima (Lease rod), Sroh (Circular, bamboo bar), Nah (Heald Bar), Risamphi (Sword), Wasa, Beskhe (Breast Bar), Sping (Back Strap), Thuri (Shuttle).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An ethnographic research study is done on the Tripuri and the "Reang" (also spelt as "Riang") tribe of Tripura to study the traditional and contemporary costume. Tripuri tribe has the highest population of 461531 and the Reang tribe has the second highest population of 111606. Statistical data was collected from the Government Census office of Agartala, Tripura on the regions and clusters occupied by the Reang community and Tripuri community prior to sample selection. The selection of the villages is based on factors like the concentration of the "Tripuri" and "Reang" tribe's population, the practice of weaving. The Tripuri Tribe is majorly settled in Khowai and the West Tripura District. The Reang tribe is densely populated in the North and South Tripura Districts. Considering accessibility, political stability, mobility and safety of the researcher. Two villages namely "ChakhiKho" and "Bogafa" of the South Tripura district and the state capital Agartala was selected for the study of the Reang tribe.



Fig. 1. Sarkar, P., 2013 Types of Tradional Tripuri Rignai, India [Photograph]

Champahowa from Khowai Districts and town Rajarhat, Shimna and the capital Agartala were selected to study the Tripuri Tribe. Short trips visit were made to Khumlung, Manu, Santirbazar, Mohanpur, Sepahijala and Bir Chandra Manu to study tribal culture. Snowball sampling method was used since most of the tribal villages' falls under Tribal Autonomous District Council, Which requires permission to enter the tribal villages. Few influential people and heads of village panchayat were approached to introduce to the villagers, as tribal's live within their closed community and are shy in sharing information with outsiders. Personal interviews and observation were used for the mode of data collection. Additionally, visual-ethnography was used. Regional weavers' centres were also visited for data collection. Further research was conducted using questionnaire surveys among 100 Tripuri and 100 Reang women.

FINDNGS AND DISCUSSION

Comparative study between costume of the Tripuri and Reang

There are many similarities in the costume of the Tripuri and Reang women, like the same names of the costumes and the

similar way of traditional draping style. Both the tribal women weave on loin looms. A comparative study was made of the -- Types of rignai, Colours, Traditional Motifs, Placement of motifs, Draping, Back Strap Loom, Parts of Back Starp loom of the Tripuri and Reang Tribe. The uniqueness of the costume of each tribe helps to maintain the identity of their community through their clothes. The result of the study is given in the following table.

Types of Tradional Rignai of the Tripuri and Reang Tribe.

Rignai of the Tripuriwomen: There are three types of tradioanl rignai worn by the Tripuri Tribe namely Sada, Chamathiya and Shikla. The colour combination of all the rigwnais are in red and white. Motifs are woven using green, blue, yellow and black motifs. At a glance, all the rigwani looked same. However, on a close look, the different types of rignai can be identified by the number of colour panels as mentioned on the table below.

Rigwnai of the Reang

The Reang Rigwnai is of two types, depending of the age of women wearing it. a. Rigwnai with all over stripes, b. Rigwnai with stripes in the borders. The young women of the Reang tribe wear a Rigwnai with all over striped on the body. This Rigwani can be worn daily or for special occasions. Young girls, married women and mother of family are eligible for wearing an allover stripe Rigwnai. This Rigwnai can be worn with Risha on top or with a blouse. The length of the Rignai can vary from knee length to full length. The Rignai with strips in the borders is only worn by elderly women. Once a Reang woman becomes a grandmother she is eligible for wearing this kind of Rignai. This kind of a Rignai is woven in black and in the border near the hem; there are simple stripes or motifs woven in form of stripes. The motif woven in form of stripes is geometric form and inspired from nature.

The preference of clothing among the Tripuri and Reang Tribe

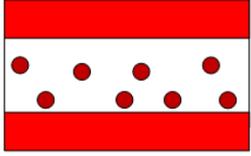
Women of the two tribes weave the ethnic textiles on back strap looms and drape around the body. From the study of old family photographs of Tripuri and Reang families it was observed that the complete Traditional costume, which is

carried by the tribal women consists of mainly two parts rigwnai and risha or ria. However there is significant difference between the two tribes in colour combination and motifs. In the 21st Century the transformation in the tribal costume is clearly witnesses. To understand the significance of tribal costume in both the tribes, women were asked if they prefer wearing the traditional dress. The result is shown in the following table. From the Table (1), it was found that 62.0% of tripuri tribal women from the tribal community and 90.0% of Reang Tribal women from the tribal community are using to wear their traditional dresses. The chi-square value obtained for the degrees of freedom (df=1) was 21.491 which is significant at 0.01 level. Hence it can be interpreted that there is a significant association between Tripuri and Reang tribal women regarding wearing the traditional dresses and significant association was found more among the Reang women with respect to Tripuri females. As 62% of the Tripuri women and 90% of Reang women answered that they wear

traditional costume, further the women were asked how often they wear the traditional costume. Three choices were given like The prefer to wear the traditional costume always, on special occasion like marriage or festivals.

Sometimes not clearly indicating the purpose of wearing for a purpose. The last option given was they do not prefer wearing the traditional costume at all. The result is shown in the following table. From the Table (2), it was found among the Tripuri women 12.0% always wear, 42% on occasion, 14% sometimes wear their traditional costume and 32% said they never wear the traditional costume. Among the Reang women 59% always wear, 12% on occasion, 22% sometimes wear their traditional costume and 7% never wear the traditional costume. The chi-square value obtained for the degrees of freedom (df=3) was 65.583 which is significant at 0.01 level. Hence it can be interpreted that there is a significant association between Tripuri and Reang tribal women regarding

Table 2. Comparison of Sada, Chamathia and Shikla

Age group wearing the rigwnai	Sada Worn by all age groups	Chamathia Worn by all age groups	ChamathiaShikla Worn only by younger girls.
Colour Panels	 Red colour border on top and bottom. White space in middle	 White colour border on top and bottom Red colour second border on top and bottom White space in middle	 Red colour border in bottom. White colour space from top till border.
Work on white space	 Small motifs all over white space Intricate motifs on red border	 All over stripes on white space Intricate motifs on red border	 No motifs or stripe on white space Intricate motifs on red border
Significance of the rigwnai	Worn on festivals, marriages, dance	Worn on festivals, marriages, dance.	Worn on many occasions especially when marriage is fixed.



Rigwnai with all over stripes

Rigwnai with stripes in the borders

Fig. 2. Sarkar, P., 2013 Types of Reang rigwnai, India [Photograph]

Table 3. Comparison of two types of rignai of the Reang Tribe

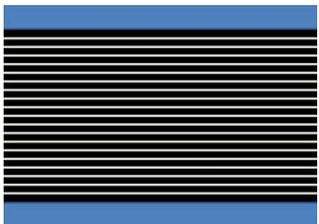
Age group wearing the rignai	All over striped rignai	Rignai with stripes in the borders
	Worn by teenagers and married women.	Worn elderly women above the age of 40 years.
Colour Panels	 Borders on top and near the hem can be in black, brown or blue. All over stripes in black and white.	 The body of the rignai is black in colour. 3 lines of motifs near the hem in white and brown colour.
Stripes	Allover stripes	Three line of motifs near the hem
Significance of the rignai	Worn on festivals, marriages, dance	Worn especially by elderly women, when they become a mother-in-law or grandmother.

Table 4. Statement 1 Do you wear your traditional dress

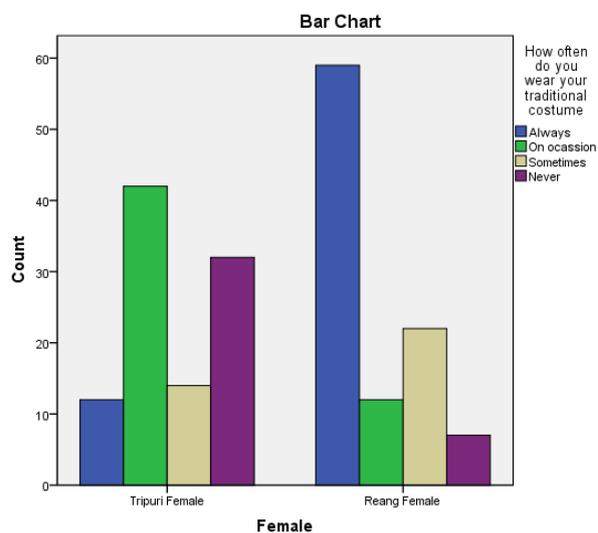
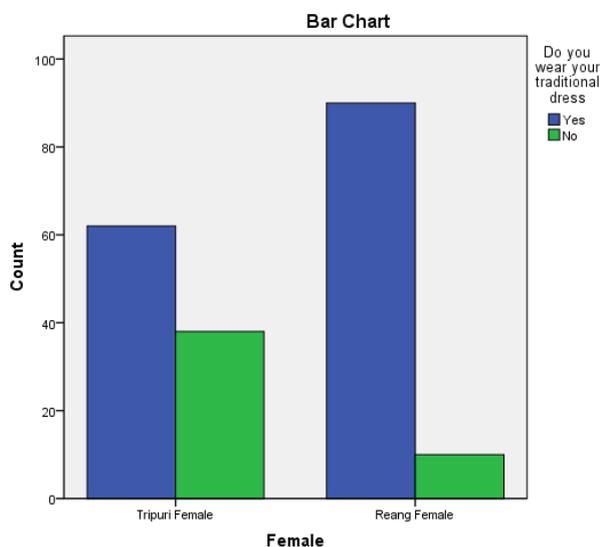
Community	Statement	Yes %	No%	df	Chi- Square value	Level of Significance
Tripuri Female	Do you wear your traditional dress	62.0%	38.0%	1	21.491	0.000*
Reang Female		90.0%	10.0%			

*significant at 0.01

Table 5. Statement 2 How often do you wear your traditional costume?

Sr. No.	Community	Statement	Always %	On occasion%	Sometimes %	Never %	df	Chi-square value (2-sided)	Level of Significance
1.	Tripuri Female	How often do you wear your traditional costume	12.0	42.0	14.0	32.0	3	65.583	.000*
2.	Reang Female		59.0	12.0	22.0	7.0			

{Chi-square value (2-sided) not significant at 0.05 level of significance} *significant at 0.01



how often they wear the traditional dresses and significant association was found more among the Reang women with respect to Tripuri females.

Conclusion

The tribal dress of both the Tripuri and Reang tribe is an unstitched garment. The women weave the ethnic textiles on backstrap looms and drape around the body. The dominant colours used in the original of the Tripuri community is a combination of Red and White and of the Reang tribe is Black and White. The elements of the costume are basically the basis structure of the Tripuri textile. The designs on the ethnic

textiles include plain weave, stripes and motifs. Traditionally the tribal costume of Tripura is a draped garment in two or three part. The rignai was wrapped around the waist to cover the lower abdomen, similar to a wraparound skirt. From the middle of the 20th century, the Women stated wearing a petticoat to secure the rignai. Similarly, they felt the need to cover the body more. Women started wearing risha over readymade blouse. The draping of rignai and risha has changed in the present. For example, now a days risha draped over blouse, rignai along with ri-kukur draped similar to a saree, rignai wore with kurta/ kameez, rignai worn with western top and risha carried as a stole. Women also create their own personalized ways of draping the rignai. With changing times,

new designs of rignai have evolved with new colours and new surface design techniques. The new version of rignai is both commercially available in the local markets and also custom made by the weaver for herself or for selling purpose. For example, Single colour rignai with motifs woven on the border, Multicoloured stripes rignai, Brocade rignai, Machine embroidered rignai and Hand embroidered. A survey was conducted among 100 Tripuri and 100 Reang women to study the preference of clothes they prefer to wear. The result showed that the modern Tripuri women prefer wearing new designs of rignai in contemporary colours. The new versions of rignai come in various colours and designs. They also prefer wearing other Indian dresses like saree and salwarkameez. The younger girls also prefer wearing western dresses. Transformations in the costume are found in both the tribes. Since very few Tripuri women have time to weave on loom it is seen that the number of Tripuri women weaving on loom clothes is reduced. Women prefer wearing mill made fabric along with loom fabric, both the fabric is available on the market. However, the Reang women still prefer to wear and weave traditional designs and compared to the Tripuri women.

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