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The origin of the Hrangkhols is the same as the other Kuki-Lushai-Chin group of tribes. They belong to the Tibeto Mongoloid race, who believed that their origin was in a great cave, the ‘Khurpuitabum’ or ‘singlung’ in Hrangkhol language. The Hrangkhol also display some similarities in languages, culture and religious beliefs with the Kuki-Lushai-Chin group of tribes. At the very beginning of the migration of these groups of tribes from there to India all were known as Chin and they lived in Burma. Since then, differences started in languages, customs, religious beliefs and other activities of day-to-day life. Internal quarrels for security, scarcity of food and shelter were the main causes for their differences. They started to engage in frequent war with each other forgetting their common origin and established their separate identities as earlier known as Hrangkhol, Lushai, Hmar, Biate, Kuki, Thado, etc. They left China as part of the waves of migration and moved from China to Burma and then to India under force of circumstances. As a part of that Kuki-Lushai-Chin group of tribes, the Hrangkhols also migrated to those places from Khurpuitabum or Singlung. Gradually the sentiment of separate identity and power was developed and intra clan quarrels occurred frequently. The Hrangkhols were less powerful than the others were, especially the Pawi clan who were most powerful and gradually pushed them out from their hamlets. The Hrangkhols, started to move from Mizoram to Manipur, Tripura and finally to Assam. Due to their common origin, there are some resemblances in socio-religious and linguistic activities among the branches of the Old-Kuki-Chin group of
tribes. However, just like the other allied tribes, the Hrangkhols also maintain separate culture, customs and rituals as a tribe.

This study was undertaken with two hypotheses that the Hrangkhols as a tribe possess their very own traditions, culture and beliefs, separate from other Kuki tribes and in recent times, there have been changes in the religious traditions and socio-cultural belief among a section of the Hrangkhols. The hypothesis was proved to be true by the data collected. The majority of the Hrangkhols have already been converted to the Christianity, while the other section who became minority still followed their traditional religious beliefs. The changes are still continuing. Along with the change of religion, cultural practices, rites and rituals as well as beliefs have undergone many changes among the Christian Hrangkhols. The process of acculturation and assimilation of culture and beliefs was also seen in the followers of the traditional religion. These changes started from the days of the British in this area while it has gained momentum during the last few decades. The influence of modern education and technology were seen to affect these changes in the Hrangkhol society and culture. The monogamous society started to convert to an exogamous one and exogamous clan had been liberated to permit intra clan marital relations.

The survey was concluded in all the twenty-four Hrangkhol villages of Dima Hasao District of Assam, some differences were observed regarding economic accessibility, education, and maintaining rites and rituals. The villages like Moulpong, Lungkhok, and Zion were on the way to being urbanised and their mode of living and beliefs have gained momentum in the direction of change. On the other hand, the villages situated in the remote area and far away from the Haflong town or any semi-urban areas were observed to be more successful in preserving their customs and rituals.
The composition of the Hrangkhol family is generally nuclear consisting of parent and their children. Society is strictly monogamous. The clans are exogamous, and no marriage was permitted within the clan without any exception, but it was observed that intra clan marital relation was finding changing social acceptance. It is also found that the joint family does exist though it is not a very common practice.

Inheritance of the property goes to the eldest son of a family and no female child had property rights over their parents’ property. The position of the head of the family was occupied by the eldest son of the family. After death of the father, the elder son (if he is adult) is required to take over the responsibility of the family including that of his widowed mother. In case of a minor son, the close relatives on the paternal side take the responsibility of the family until the child attains adulthood. The women were not allowed to be the head of the family by custom.

It was observed that marriage played a significant role in Hrangkhol society in religious and social aspects since the remote past. Regarding marriage, dowry was not observed while the bride occupied a high position in a formal marriage. *Samak* or marriage by service was practiced symbolically at present though it was practiced until the nineties of the last centuries. It was seen that the marriage ceremony had undergone several changes like *samak*, restriction in intra clan marriage and bride price etc., through the advent of Christianity and modernity. Another unique features regarding widow remarriage was observed that a widow was permitted to remarry if she sought to immediately after the death of her husband. Unlike the widow the widower had to wait minimum of three years to remarry according to custom. The popularity of love marriages along with elopement as well as inter community marriage was seen among the youth.
The Hrangkhols believe that after death, the *irtha* (soul or spirit) escapes from the human body and it hovers above the vicinity of the deceased person’s village for months, which is not believed by Hindu, Christian or Islam. After some months, the soul then goes to ‘*Mithikhua*’ (village of dead) where they (souls) live a similar kind of life as on earth. It was also observed that the Hrangkhols did not believe in Heaven but believed in an abode called Mithikhua where the souls takes rest for sometimes after death. Social stratification was believed to exist even after death and a separate abode was reserved for the Priest and *Deipu* etc.

They have their own language known as Hrangkhol with similarities in some extent with the language of Kuki- Lushai group of tribes such as Biate, Hmar, Halam, Thado, Lushai etc. Due to the lack of script, Hrangkhols have no written literature and history. However, the increasing popularity of English language was observed among the majority of the Hrangkhols and the process of written literature is starting with the use of Roman script and Hrangkhol Language. Education is the way to transform a civilization from darkness to enlightenment, but proper educational development was not seen among the Hrangkhols. The women literacy rate was poorer than that of the men. It was observed that the Christian Hrangkhols are quite advanced in education and economic status.

The traditional administrative system of the Hrangkhols known as *Halam* headed by *Kalim* was strictly maintained by them. All members of the community with great honour and faith maintained the customary rules and regulations of the Hrangkhols associated with the social life. The respect to the Kho Devan (village council) was a significant features of the Hrangkhols like majority of the tribes living in North-East India.
The dormitory system was not found in the Hrangkhool society, which is otherwise a common feature of the Kuki-Lushai-Chin group of tribes. This system plays an important role in the tribal way of life. Significantly, the Hrangkhol never practiced it. Belief in witchcraft was not seen in Hrangkhool society which is still a big problem in many part of Assam.

The economic activity can be divided into two divisions such as economy of the traditional religious followers and economic activities of the follower of the Christianity. The traditional religious followers spent maximum of their wealth in cash or kinds in the worshipping of their gods and for the various festivals and ceremonies. While in case of the followers of Christianity, they avoid the expenditure of performing traditional rituals and it has been observed that they are more interested to spend their earnings for education and purchase modern articles like electric fan, LPG, computer etc. It was also observed that the economy of the Christian Hrangkhol developed much faster than that of the traditional religious followers.

The economy of the Hrangkhols is mainly based on agriculture. Agriculture was practiced under two system- *Jhum* (shifting) and wet cultivation. The wet cultivation system occupies a less important role. The modern implements like power tiller spray machine etc. are available in the area but the Hrangkhol are not interested to use them. During the survey, only one power tiller was found in the Hrangkhool villages, but as mentioned earlier it was seldom used.

Rice, ginger, turmeric and various vegetables is the main agricultural product that contribute to their gross economy. Apart from the crops, fruits like pineapples, banana, jackfruit, pear etc. also help in the Hrangkhol economy. Animal husbandry

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played an important role in the Hrangkhol economy. They also domesticate the fowl and duck for household use and for the market.

Spinning and weaving play an important role in the Hrangkhol economy. Skill in spinning and weaving was observed among all Hrangkhol women. Both cotton and endi was used in spinning and weaving. The Hrangkhol also produce Cotton. During the study it was observed that the use of the machine made cloths like cotton, woollen, polyester and other synthetic clothes minimized the use of the their hand loom products.

The dresses of the Hrangkhol are very simple. It was observed that the poor and the people who lived in the remote area still maintained their traditional dresses. The men have generally discarded their traditional attire while the women were quite successful in preserving their traditional dresses. A vast change has occurred through the adoption of Christianity and modernity in their dresses irrespective of sex and religion was observed. Many have adopted the western style of dresses. Like the traditional dresses, the wearing of their traditional ornaments also have now became less important in their day-to-day life. During the time of rituals and festivals, the use of traditional dress and ornaments were seen.

The use of modern materials for construction houses like asbestos in roof, cement and bricks for building walls and for plastering and iron rod for post etc. proves the changing economy of the Hrangkhols. They are aware about the banking system and majority of them have at least one bank passbook at a nationalised bank.

The role of women in the Hrangkhol economy is found to be very significant. Their participation in the jhum right from the site selection of the land to the time of harvesting was seen. The Hrangkhol women were also actively involved in brewing of zu (rice beer), which is an essential part of traditional life. Selling of zu has now
improved the economic condition of the Hrangkhols. Earning from rearing of pig, goat, fowl, duck etc. were found to be common practices for the Hrangkhol women.

Modern technology and the government development schemes are still to have an effect in the majority of the Hrangkhol villages. It was limited to a few educated people among the Hrangkhols that were benefitted from the development programme; the rest still faces life's of hurdles. The poor road communication, insufficient medical facility, lack of sufficient and proper educational institutions and problem of drinking water are found to be the main problems of the Hrangkhols that has prevented them from stepping into modern society.

The sonong (Hrangkhols traditional religion) has no permanent images of deities and permanent place for worship. The Hrangkhols believe in the existence of one supreme god whom they called the Chungpathian (high god). Besides, Chung Pathian they recognise, the existence of several god and goddesses. The faith in rebirth called ‘irzirnok’ was existed in traditional Hrangkhol society.

The sonong or religion of the Hrangkhols is now under the threat, due to the shortage of Ochai and vast expenditure incurred in performing the religious rites and rituals. The conversion to Christianity is a phenomenon that was found to be affecting the continuation of their traditional socio-religious rituals and customs. The sense of humanity of the Christian Missionary, introduction of English education and medical facilities, and heavy expenditure in performing traditional religious rites etc., were cited as the reason for their conversion to Christianity. The Christians gradually abandoned all the traditional customs related to traditional religion like feast, festivals, music, dance etc. and especially the drinking of zu or rice beer.
One of the significant observations was that zu plays a significant role in the Hrangkhol traditional religion and social activities. The use of ‘zu’ is popular and regarded as the holy drink that can be used by any one, at any time, and it was necessary to offer to god. Sacrifice is another important feature of their religion. In every religious activity, sacrifice is necessary, even eggs are sacrificed. There was no instance of human sacrifice in the Hrangkhol religious history.

The status of the women was observed to be very low compared to their male counterpart in the traditional Hrangkhol society. The women stay aloof from the active participation in religious affairs as well as social activities. All the religious activities relating to the worshipping of the god and goddesses are closed to the traditional Hrangkhol women. They have no power to exercise in their life and the women have to remain submissive and dependent upon the male. The women do not have any property right to the property of their parents or even in the property of their husbands. The religious rights of the Hrangkhol women are very limited. ‘Bojol’ the holy place of worship of the Hrangkhol community is closed for the women. They are not allowed to officiate as the priest to perform worship, nor are they allowed to participate in the pujas (worship) celebrated in the Bojol.

A great change and transformation has take place with the advent of Christianity when women have been liberated to some extent from the low status in the religious and social sphere. Women are now working in different portfolios of Church and participate in prayers of the Church along with the men. However, their property right is still denied. In political life, women have no right to raise their voice. The women are not so conscious about the modern political exercise offered by the Indian constitution.
The feelings of solidarity and identity has also gradually developed among the Hrangkhols while they have been suffering from identity crisis in modern times due to influence of Christianity, acculturation and assimilation of culture. Solidarity now became the main problem among the Hrangkhols due to their small numbers in their different settlements.

The society of the Hrangkhols is under the process of acculturation and assimilation. Since the time of independence changes in the political institutions, educational institution and in religious institution the changes have taken place. However, the poor means of communication of the Hrangkhol settlements helped them to retain their traditional customs and rituals more or less intact among a certain section.