CHAPTER III

A Brief Social Profile of the Reangs of Mizoram
In this chapter, the historical background of the Reangs and their customary laws and practices are discussed.

Though, prima facie, the ordinary life of the Reangs do not have any physical connection with their present problem, a discussion is necessary as we understand the Reangs as a tribe and in which way they differ from the neighbouring tribes. In many ways, their distinct ethnicity came to focus as they are involved in struggles for their rights in Mizoram.¹

The Reangs have some customary laws which they obey in every aspects of their life like system of marriage, birth, death, inheritance of property, occupation, food habits, wearing of clothes, observance of festivals, ceremonies and sacrifices, village administration and economies.

The Reangs according to the anthropologists immigrated to the state of Mizoram in search of fertile lands in the hills which were then known as Lushei Hills. Broadly classified, this tribe is a member of the Tibeto-Burman family of tribes of the region. Further subdivided, they belong to the Bodo group of speeches belonging to that family. They are concentrated in the areas adjoining the hills and they are not found in the highly mountainous places and generally prefer lower elevations of hills unlike the Mizo people who occupy the higher elevations. Their habitations are spread along the Lengai
and Teirei or Toireng rivers, the latter in the Bru or Reang dialect means Yelling river. As the river hurtles down from the top of the hills, it makes shrill sounds as if it is angry with the oppositions it faces. They have a good concentration in Mamit district of Mizoram. They also live in the western part of Chimtuipui district bordering Bangladesh and in parts of the Lunglei district.

The tribe immigrated to the western part of the then Lushei Hills District when the area was a desolate and heavily forested. Only one thing can be assumed that they came to these hills in search of green pastures. In the past, lands were available in plenty. It might be for political or economic reasons or because of both, they discovered new lands and settled down in the new area. In the remote past, they started their journey and at different times, they dispersed in many directions, splinter groups identified with the situations they lived in. Where their dominant group settled, their identity was preserved. In many cases, the splinter groups lost the identity.

The Reang tribes are found in many places of Tripura and some of them are also found in the Hill Tracts of Chittagong, now in Bangladesh. Their migrations indicate that they could not live peacefully in many areas and were forced to vacate their lands and
they came to the safer places. They have not been living here from
time immemorial. It applies to many tribes of the region.

No tribe can claim to be autochthonous to a region and the
domicility in a region cannot go beyond a few hundreds of years.
Therefore, it is proper to seek the patterns of migration within the
periods where records are available. 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. In the opinion of Ramesh Ch.
Mazumdar, the coins of Ratnamanikya belonged to the period
between 1464 AD to 1467 AD and the Reangs might have migrated
to Tripura during that period.

The Reangs were recruited as soldiers in the royal army
during the reign of Dhanyamanikya who ruled Tripura from 1490
AD to 1515 AD. The clear mention of the Reangs as soldiers proves
that they existed as a tribe in Tripura in the 15th century. The tribe
travelled through different territories, the reference of their homes
for a certain period of time was traced to Mainitlang hills near
Rangamati in Chittagong Hill Tracts. All tribes travelled through
hazards of difficult terrains, the reference is available of the Shan
and the Arakan regions of the present day Myanmar. The exact
periodicity of their movements is very difficult to ascertain but it must be some centuries ago. Therefrom, they moved to Mainitlang, mentioned earlier. The Tripura Kingdom may boast of historical records and in the territories under the domains of the Tripura kings, the tribe had lived which are available in folk records. Their presence was noticed in some parts of the Chittagong Hills Tracts of Bangladesh. Kailas Chandra Singha in his authoritative book ‘Rajmala’ stated that the valley or the Maini river which had merged with the Karnafuli river in Chittagong was also once inhabited by the Reangs.

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.

In the western part of Mizoram, the river Karnafuli cascades down through the high mountain ranges and enters the Chittagong Hill Tracts and from there, the river meets the Bay of Bengal passing through some plain tracts. In its earlier course in Mizoram, it passes through Chimtuipui district which borders the Chittagong Hill tracts. The Reangs live on the banks of the tributaries of Karnafuli,
Lengai and Teirei as said earlier. The Relief Map of Mizoram shows that there is a chain of hills in the north-south direction which are densely forested and the streams are originated in the hills. During monsoon, heavy rains drench the area and the weather changes between warm and cold. It is very pleasant when the winter arrives here. Because of the weather and the terrain, the people are sturdy and painstaking.

The river Karnafuli is the indicator of the Reang migration as most of the Reangs live on the banks of the river in Mizoram. This river is an important waterway in the hill and plain parts of Chittagong. In 1971 Census, the Reang population in Mizoram was categorized as a Scheduled tribe.6

There are 13 clans of the Reangs and these are closely related to each other in language and the ways of life. They are an endogamous and a socially wellknit tribe having their own customs and traditions.7

The British had negotiated with the Lushei chiefs in the late nineteenth century and the territory remained cut off from the civilized world for a long time except for the slow introduction of Christianity in the early twentieth century. The tract got peace from the internecine inter tribal clashes which acquired deadly proportions shortly before the British annexation of the territory.
The colonial masters, at least established peace though the internal administration remained in the hands of the tribal chiefs who made peace with the Government and acknowledged allegiance to the Crown. The Reangs who had earlier occupied the vacant spaces near the jungle tracts and they did not face interferences in their social and economic activities. They had little cause for complain as their traditional system was not interfered with and they lived under the tribal chiefs. The old Lushei Hills continued to be locally governed by the tribal chiefs with their independent jurisdictions under the British superintendent. The whole terrain remained inaccessible and it was the paradise of flora and fauna. The impenetrable jungle covered the hills and the human habitations were few. Before the arrival of the British, the controls of the Lushei chiefs were nominal and the Reangs lived in the area, probably unchartered. Besides this, the thinly populated area (bordering areas of Tripura) has enabled the Reang population to have a vast stretch of lands for choosing their jhum lands, grazing spaces for their domesticated animals and also to build their own homesteads.

A good number of them are also settled in the valley of Karnafuli river in the south western part of Mizoram bordering Bangladesh (in Lunglei District). In the far eastern side of Mizoram
and in the south, the Reang villages are not found. The boundaries are drawn and redrawn always. The present boundaries of Mizoram, Tripura and the international boundary between India and Bangladesh were drawn at the time of the British rule. A vast area which is now included in the state of Mizoram was previously formed a part of the princely state of Tripura.\(^8\)

The Reangs are fond of fish, crab and snail for curry. Hence, in selection of the dwelling site, they are immediately drawn to the banks of rivers. The routes of migrations of the tribes of Mizoram show divergence. The Mizos came to the present habitat in the eighteenth century and the migration occurred due to deadly fights among the tribes for the possession of the Chin Hills. H.N.C. Stevenson in his book 'The Economics of the Central Chin Tribes'\(^9\) mentioned that the present Mizo tribes were once the inhabitants of Chin Hills.

The Reangs practice jhum cultivation and they select village sites with wide jhum lands nearby. Like other tribes, a Reang village is also a small hamlet, not having large population. The jhum practice among the Reangs is similar to the practices of other tribes. In the jhum land, at the time of seedling, cropping and harvesting, the work force involved nearly the whole community, men, women and children spend days in the fields and return when the
harvesting is over. They consider it as a part of their existence. The field of cultivation is the part of education for them and they enjoy it. They traditionally did not send their children to schools in the earlier times. The modern education was not known to them\textsuperscript{10}.

The Reangs live in territories known as the bamboo heartland and their houses are built on bamboo pillars and they use thatch and sungrass as the roof cover. In the village, the headman does not show his position by building a better house. All houses look alike. The headman is called Choudhuri. There was less human habitation and there were wide jungles of bamboos of different types. These are Warnal (Bambusa Tulda), Warmlih (Dendro calamus), Warthui (Melocanna Baccifera) and Wartlau (Teinestachyum Dull ova). The lands are available in plenty and they can choose plots for building their houses anywhere. They have no taste for urban living\textsuperscript{11}.

They traditionally built their houses having two parts, (a) Shangshi, the front house and (b) Noshing, the room at the interior. The front room Shangshi is open and it is without wall. The firewood collected is preserved here. Besides this, fowls and other useful birds are kept there. They slept on floors made of bamboo mats. There are some spaces inside, fenced off on all sides but without any roof which is used for exposing wet clothes and paddy in the sun and also for the toilet purposes.\textsuperscript{12}
They live in the hard environment which made them hardy and capable of sustained labour. They are adept in their mode of cultivation and on the onset of monsoon, they start their agricultural operations. Before the monsoon sets in, the hills remain dry and the weeds and shrubs are burnt out in the hills. This slash and burn method is well-known throughout the north east and this tribe is no exception. As it becomes a community exercise, they acquire great amount of efficiency in the pursuit. They produce rice in the hilly slopes. The seeds are broadcast after the plot is prepared. They are always at work during the cultivation time. They use traditional instruments, shovels, knife and sharo dao. In the terrain where they live, the trees, weeds and shrubs grow very fast as the region is heavily drenched by the monsoonic rain.

Physically, they are robust, sturdy and their muscles and bones are strong enough to carry loads which may frighten a town dweller. It is of course, the rugged terrains where they live taught them to be tough and uncomplaining. There is no other way to live except by the physical exertion which is a habit for them. They are as hardy as the tough sub Himalayan porters who are also equally adept in the job of load carrying. They carry loads on their back which is supported by a rope. They hold the whole weight by head and the rope which runs across the forehead. They move uphill with
great load without any discomfort. As the transport is never heard of in the interior, they learn the art of carrying heavy loads from the early age. As we see the Nepali porters in other parts of the north east and the Bihari labourers in the plains, the Reangs are engaged in the interiors as they are capable of taking strains. This type of activity is seen at the time of jhuming season. The majority Mizo tribes engaged them before the relation was strained for various reasons. The sturdy Reangs were accepted as the helping hands in a Mizo household for a year or so. This system is called ‘malda’.14

Art and Craft

Bamboos and canes are available in the interiors. Different types of baskets are made by them and their craftsmen tastefully decorate a basket to make it attractive. These baskets are used for carrying loads and they make them of different sizes. A tribal society generally needs baskets for carrying rice, vegetable and other small commodities. Their immediate customers are the Mizos to whom, they sell their products. Kinds of sieves, one with holes and the other without holes are also made by them. Their craftsmanship is found in mat making which are used as beds. These, too they sell to the Mizos. The present strained relationship between the Mizos and the Reangs forced large number of Reang craftsmen to leave homes and
take shelter in the neighbouring state, Tripura. Their excellent craftsmanship has suffered immensely.\footnote{15}

The normal economic principles do not guide their productions. The market forces do not decide their craving for earning. As their main pursuit is agriculture, which takes away the major part of their working time, they use the leisure time to make different types of bamboo products at home. The baskets, small bags and mats are prepared by them. Interestingly, they do not use clay for the pottery products. Yet, we can see earthen pots in a Reang house. These, they purchase from markets. These pots are necessary for keeping water and as tribals make liquor which they store in earthen pots. The womenfolk in the house prepare liquor, called in their language ‘aruauh’. They drink this product with relish. Like other tribes, the Reangs keep aside a part of rice for the production of liquor. The type of rice used by them for liquor production is called ‘miami’ in their language. The Mizos, as their neighbours, are fond of the liquor produced by them.

Though they produce liquor at home traditionally and rather habitually and their womenfolk take it as great pastime, the Reangs hardly suffer from the common addiction syndrome. They use their homemade liquor only on certain occasions for which they punctiliously preserve the liquor in earthen pots. It is hardly seen on
the road, a Reang drunkard. He does not exhibit his drunkenness in public places. The Reang men and women, young and old are socially disciplined and each one of them is aware of his responsibility in their society.

Customary Laws of the Reangs of Mizoram

The Reangs, like other tribes on earth, maintain a long list of unwritten laws followed by the generations verbally transferred from one to the next. The occasions which come to everybody’s life like birth, marriage and death, all are bound by the customary laws. The traditional administration which protects social practices, maintains a body of laws to try crimes committed in the society. It also decides the disputes on laws of inheritance of properties.

Choudhuris and Karbaris, the officers along with the elders of the society administer the customary laws of the Reangs. They normally do not seek the assistance of any outside authority and their customary laws are considered sufficient to maintain social peace. The officers and the elders reside in a village. Due to their economic backwardness, the Reang couple sometimes quarrel and are estranged. The adultery cases are also reported. In all these cases, the village body steps into, resolve the issue of estrangement. The cases of adultery are severely dealt with and a stringent punishment
is awarded. The village court is always busy in dealing with the cases.

The cases of sexual adultery are reported because men and women mix in the fields where they work. When a case is brought against a husband eloping with a girl even though his wife is with him, the usual question which is asked whether that man is willing to stay with the girl leaving his wife. If the answer is in affirmative, the husband is to pay Rs 30 and a pig. For a wife, eloping with a man and she is willing to stay with him, the fine is Rs 30. A widow or a widower marrying before the funeral of his or her spouse, commits a crime and the offender is to pay the penalty imposed by the traditional court.¹⁷

The Reangs call the illegal pregnancy ‘samatoth’. The case of a samatoth emanates only when there is a free mixing between a boy and a girl. When such a case really occurs, the society tries to arrange marriage between the two if they are really willing. If the boy who is usually more assertive, refuses to take the burden of a wedlock, he is fined a sum of Rs 60 and a pig. The amount of Rs 60 appears to be a small sum for the present time but it was a large amount in the earlier days which an individual could hardly cleared up. In addition to this amount, a pig is always imposed as a fine. Why a pig is always imposed as fine by their ruler is that almost all families of
the Reang rear or domesticate pig. If a man forcibly takes away the wife of another man and marry her, he is punished by imposing on him a fine of Rs 60 and a pig.¹⁸

The solemnity of sexual relations are strictly observed where a mere touch of a girl’s bed by an unknown man even though inadvertently, is an offence. It is called ‘thuiangkamaw’. It is also considered socially unethical in a Mizo society. When a man sleeps on the mat adjacent to the mat where an unmarried girl sleeps, it is a crime. The crime is called “khumpui tihbawlhlawh man”. It literally means the defilement of bed. The man seeking hands of a girl must be aware of the crime and keep aloof. The offender when caught in the action is punished with a fine of Rs 30 and a pig.¹⁹

The usual man woman relationship and the social rules observed are, rather universal with local as well as tribal variations. Moreover, tribes far removed from the usual stations of civilization are controlled by these norms traditionally. Normally, the man woman relationship runs on smoothly but in many cases, the relations become strained. If the case is merely a matter of emotional disagreement, the elders intervene and try to settle the matter. Sometimes, a woman herself comes forward with an accusation of a lack of faith or good behaviour against her husband, the social court decides the case. A man may also file a case against her unfaithful
spouse. There are cases where the man beats his wife and she is injured. The court decides the issue. If a woman deserts her husband as she feels that she cannot live with him, they are divorced and she cannot claim any compensation from the husband except the permission to take her belongings. Only in cases where the wife's action is considered wrong, she is fined Rs 60.20

Cotton, rice and sesamum are the products from fields and these are kept in a bamboo house. In the village, if the proper care is not taken, the thieves enter into the house and decamp with all or part of the products. This type of stealing among the Reangs is called 'Sikhau'. They live on bamboo houses raised few feet above the ground. Only a fortunate few can afford to construct a house made of woods. This makes their bamboo house vulnerable and the burglars take away easily the few belongings of the owner. When the harvested rice kept in the store house is burgled, the sadness of the owner knows no bounds. A theft case goes to the court of a Choudhuri and the offender, if caught is fined.21

System of Marriage

Like all other tribes, the Reangs are endogamous and marry within the tribe. As the tribe is divided into several clans, each clan is exogamous and a person seeks partner in marriage from the clans, other than his or her. In this way, the clan exogamy is strictly
followed. The isolation is a great uniting bond and the tribe grows within itself. But there are stray cases of Reang women marrying outside their own tribe. In a closed tribal society, the marriages occur only among the intimate relations. The progenies of the male line are preferred. Both the girl and the boy come from the close relations and their family positions are known. This closeness of relationship denotes a strong disfavour of outside influences creeping into their society who are surrounded by alien cultures. The marriage between the brother and sister is a taboo.

It has another manifestation, some Reang boys and girls, tend to ignore the social disapproval and they mix with the Mizos and the Chakmas who are their immediate neighbours. There are instances of a Reang entering into wedlock with a Mizo or a Chakma girl. The marriage within their own fold is an inclination, not exclusive to the Reangs.

It is seen that the social fabric of all human groups remain nearly the same so long the dynamics of changes do not occur to them. The social norms are forced on the individuals within the group. There was a time, the marriages were arranged for the girl and the boy and they had to accept the decision of the family elders. Some tribes have the good fortune to come in contact with the modern trends much earlier than the others. The Reangs who are the
neighbours of the Mizo people imbibed that free spirit and in seeking his or her life partner, the decision often is the individual's own. The parents do not oppose their choice. In the earlier times, the refusal to oblige the choice of parents invited punishment. Nobody dared to refuse the parents choice. The society was all important. Now the things have changed and the boy often goes to the house of the girl and indulges in open courtship. The Reangs and the Tripuris, in historical period, lived together and there are plenty of similarities in their social systems. The marriage system of the Reangs is having similarities with them.

1. **Moiseng**: It is a type of marriage which accompanied bride price.

2. **Chamarui**: In this system, a boy at a younger age goes to a family of the girl where he grows up to a marriageable age. It is called a system of probationary marriage. It is for a fixed period. In the Reang society, there is a marriage facilitator called Andra. The moment one boy attains the marriageable age, the Andra is engaged. He formally offers the proposal to the girl's parents or the guardians and it is negotiated. The Andra is the go between in this crucial stage of life. When the formal visit takes place, the Andra goes with bottles of rice beer and exchanges pleasantries with the prospective bride's parents. Sometimes, some gifts are also offered to them depending
on the monetary position of the boy’s family. One need not be surprised if they find the traditional marriage negotiations in the plains and a hill dwelling tribe. The negotiation ends with the fixation of date and other formalities. Pigs, goats and fowls are offered as a token of settlement.

The whole expenditure in the marriage ceremony except the bride price are paid by the boy and after the marriage is over he has to live with the bride’s house as a member of the family for a period of 3 years or 7 years according to the agreement during the time of negotiation. Generally, the parents of the girl demand five years stay. The bride price is paid as the boy served already as the probationer in the bride’s house. It is not a stay with leisure but he works hard there to please in laws. Sometimes, the parents are more demanding and put the boy into harder schedule. If the girl is impressive, the demands on the boy are more. The boy may opt for the permanent stay in the in laws’ house. In that case, after the marriage, the groom is to kill pigs, fowls and goats to satisfy him.23

The bride price is offered in the system of marriage, called moiseng. In this case, the boy is not required to stay in the house of the in-laws. The bride price ranges from Rs. 40 onwards and it is settled through negotiations. Chamarui system of marriage is
preferred to the moiseng system as the latter requires the payment of money.

The Reangs now prefer monogamy and the polygamy is unknown. But many generations back, there were many men who followed polygamy. In rare cases, some women maintain many husbands (polyandrous). Curiously, they follow some of the peculiar aspects of Austric culture like the probational duty performed by an would be bridegroom in his in laws' house. It is a sign of matriarchal culture. The divorce is common among them. But a divorcee man can marry again. Women after her second divorce can not claim bride price.  

The 'hainyeilami' ceremony among the Reangs is performed after a marriage is solemnized accompanied with a grand feast. The conversion to Christianity of the half of the portion of the population hardly has any affect on the social system, wine preparation and drinking. A marriage is held in the Church which is fixed atleast three weeks before the ceremony but the social ceremonies follow. It is to be mentioned here that the indigenous or traditional system still exists to some extent amongst the Mios relating to marriage and divorce even after their conversion to Christianity.

There is a combination of both traditional and Christian elements in the marriage system of the Mizos. The Mizos perform
church marriage but to some extent, traditional marriage customs are also followed. The traditional customs are courting before marriage, activity of intermediary in the process of marriage, marriage price etc.

Birth

The priest engaged for the purpose, predicts after performing ritual, the sex of the baby and when the pregnancy is matured, a midwife, 'kumaiuh' is called and she is offered Rs. 5 to help the safe delivery of the baby. A ceremony called Bakahchamaw is performed after the umbilical cord is detached. The mother does not undertake normal works until she recovers and takes only the easily digestible food.26

Amongst the Christian Reangs, there is a 'tungtaimi' (prayer) for the welfare of the baby and a pastor of the Christian Church comes to the house. The baby is given a Christian name after his baptism. In naming of a child, the influence of the neighbours is noticed. When the main body of the tribe lived in Tripura, their names ended with Chandra or Rai. In Mizoram, the Mizo influence is more pronounced. Generally, the name of the male child ends with 'a' and for the female, it is 'i', e.g. Zoulama for the male and Zoulami for female. Sometimes a mixture of Mizo and Reang style of naming is adopted.27
Disposal of the dead

The Reangs cremate their deads. There is an elaborate system of rites when a death occurs. It is a long process and the rites continue till the disposal of the bones which are not reducible by fire. It is customary and logically so, all relatives and acquaintances assemble at that house when the news spread of the death of a person. The dead body is given a bath and it is draped with a new cloth. The hair is combed properly and oil is applied. A Reang man wears dhoti and a woman wears risa. Hence, in the event of a death of a male person, the body is draped with a dhoti and in case of a woman, with a risa. The mourners assemble near the body of the deceased and they place coins and food in memory of him. A new mat is spread on the floor and the body is placed there. The body remains there so long the near and dear ones come to offer their last respects. Like the Khasis, they offer food to the deceased. Such offerings are placed by many persons and they think that the dead partakes of foods offered to his soul. What he liked during his life time, he would take these after his death. The food offered are the common ones which the tribal people eat always.

The body is then ceremonially taken to the cremation ground in a procession and throughout the route to the cremation ground, the persons accompanying the body throw rice, salt and cotton and
they believe that the journey to the other world would be smooth for the dead. The priest (bawlpu) ascertains the possible cause of death and offers courses of actions. A funeral pyre is made in the cremation ground and the corpse is laid on it. For a male body, five folds of woods are placed, for a female body, it is seven folds and for a child, it is three folds. From the house, the procession continues, the close relation leads the procession. Two youngmen, with fire lit on the bamboo poles circumambulate the body, the each in the direction opposite to the other. The ordinary villagers take precaution to see that the body is properly burnt. If the accompanying party does not perform the task of burning properly, they are fined Rs. 30 the day after cremation takes place.

The bereaved family and their relatives visit the spot and confirm that the fire is extinguished altogether and collect the bones (uncalcined) left out after burning. Then they make a small house called smungnoh is raised near the cremation spot. The unburnt bones are collected and kept inside that house after the cremation. For three days, food is offered to the departed soul near the spot in the form of rice, homemade cakes and meat. On the last day, the fish item is offered. The female acquaintances of the deceased go to the spot. Such custom is found among many other tribes like the Dimasas. A white flag is hoisted and it is kept hanging. The
temporary house raised cannot be disturbed during the mourning
days and it is raised as a token of grief. If anybody tries to disturb,
the matter is reported to the Choudhuri. Some unmarried youngmen
sleep in the erected house and keep vigil for seven days. Any visible
sign of a footprint to the cremation ground is interpreted as the
reincarnation of the soul.\textsuperscript{28}

There is a custom among the Reangs that the irreducible parts
of bones kept in the small house are not allowed to be disposed of
before one week. One ceremony is observed during the time of
disposal of the bones in which all villagers including friends and
relatives from other villages are invited by the members of the
bereaved family to attend the ceremony. In this occasion, a lot of rice
beer and cakes are prepared and consumed. The bank of a river is
selected to perform rites. Old women assemble with bottles of rice
beer and they distribute these among people gathered there.

There is an interesting correlationship between the customs
practiced in the plains and those performed in the hills. A pious man
in the plains would take the irreducible parts of bones to the sacred
river Phalgu in Gaya and performs rituals there. A tribal man takes
the bones to a ritual attended by all of his relatives and true to the
tribal spirit, offers rice beer and all take part in dancing. The near
ones cry in memory of the dead. After, this exhibition of reverence
for the dead and the entertainment, the priest takes into his hands, a
fowl and kills it by his own hands, its intestines are taken out. The
priest then turns a soothsayer and predicts the future of the family of
the dead.29

When the priest’s job is over, it is the turn of the assembly of
persons who take bones to the bank of a river. The bones are taken to
the midstream and then thrown into the river. How similar is the
tribal ritual with the customs in the plains! Another round of
feasting takes place with chicken, pork and rice beer served with
homemade cakes to all. In midst of such feasting, the near relatives
of the dead and the priest sit and go on chanting prayers for the
departed soul. In the whole ceremony, a good quantity of rice beer is
consumed by all people. It is seen that the consumption of rice beer
in the social and religious ceremonies is common among all the
tribes and the Reangs follow it with great relish. The ceremony is
over and the party returns home leaving behind a group of people,
called ‘Taukha’.30

When the husband dies, the widow is not allowed to wear
ornaments, rings and bangles and she cannot sing within the
mourning period. The defiance of this social stricture means the
payment of a monetary fine for the widow. In case of a man losing
his wife, he cannot marry again within the mourning period and he
cannot sing also during this period. The courtship is disallowed for the widow and the widower during the prohibition period. The ‘prohibition’ period is over, the courtship for them is allowed.\textsuperscript{31}

**Free mixing of boys and girls**

The free mixing between the boy and the girl in a very primitive tribe is considered unlawful. Any crime leading to molestation of a girl is severely punished by the society. The usual love making following the western fashion was not known and they obeyed the dictates of the elders in this regard. The boys and girls, too, following the mood of the society refrained from indulging in free love making. Now, the Mizo society is advanced enough to have their own political institutions, strong educational and a social system with modern outlooks. Some of the Reangs of Mizoram, coming into much closer contacts with the Mizos, do not now object to free mixing.

The Andra, as mentioned earlier, plays the role of a middle man when a boy really loves a girl from a distance. The girl comes to know about the liking and vice versa. The parents or guardians may know through the middle man about the mutual liking. In case of mutual acceptance, the boy offers a ‘nawkhai’ (comb) as an appreciation of genuine preference. An Andra may help the
blossoming of two hearts leading to their marriage approved by the society.

As it is considered inevitable, the pre-marital pregnancy leads to, first the punishment in the form of pecuniary fine and then the solemnization of marriage. The boy and the girl do not stay outside the society for a long time. The society tries to regulate their behaviour through the solemnisation of marriage.\textsuperscript{32}

**Inheritance of Property**

In general, the Reangs are poor and an ordinary family has a very few disposable assets left when a father dies. The inheritance proceeds through the boys and not girls. A father may have a few utensils, fowls and cattles. The youngest son takes the lion's share when the lands and properties are divided among the sons. The father lives separately when sons attain maturity. The sons, then, live independently with their own families. It is a staunchly patriarchal society. The daughters are denied of inheritance but when the parents have only daughters, not sons, then the properties are distributed among them equally. When the person dies leaving no issue of his own, the property go to the person's brother or to his near relatives. An wife, not liked by her husband forfeits any right over the property.\textsuperscript{33}
**Occupation**

The wet cultivation is not practiced by the Reangs as water is not retained on the hill slope. The practice of jhum cultivation is traditionally followed by all the tribes living on the hills. In Tripura, the plain lands are available and the neighbouring plainsmen cultivate with bullocks and ploughs. This came to the Reangs as an innovation and they practice it. The jhum cultivation is a ‘once in a year’ job and the rest of the year, they do other works and there is no activities in the field.

The land is abundant in the hills from which a cultivator may choose his farm land. There is jhum cycle. More a particular plot is cultivated, the fertility would decline, less it is cultivated, fertility would increase. All the lands around the village therefore, come under the spell of the jhum cycle. The yields from the jhum lands are not much, hardly beyond their subsistence level. In the territory of Mizoram, flat lands are hardly available and only the stiff hill slopes are available to them. They do not have any choice.

The land is prepared before the seeds are thrown on it. They have the peculiar way of deciding which land is good and which one is bad. A long bamboo split into two parts and one man throws it into the plot. If the inside white of the bamboo is on the upper side, when the bamboo falls on the ground, the land is considered good.
for cultivation. The trees, bamboos, herbs, shrubs, climbers and creepers are removed from the soil and the lands are allowed to dry and then dried weeds are burnt out and these turn into ashes, producing fertility in the soil.

In the month of April, the seeds are sown. They use dao, shovel and knife for the task. Throughout the coming months, they watch the things to grow from the jhum house erected in the jhum land. Due to the life long engagement in the jhum soils during the monsoon months, they are experts in sowing seeds particularly the Reang males are very swift in the job.34

The tract is located in the monsoon affected area and the moment the cultivation is over, the plot is covered by the fresh vegetation and within months, the plots are not traceable easily. A dao which is having a bending edge at the top is used for cutting. The work of clearing the field is called ‘Huh’ and they have to take care of the fact that weeds do not disturb the crop on the field. The beauty of their community work is the sense of comraderie that is grown. Many persons are involved in the work as the field is located a little away from the village and there is the fear of wild animals and reptiles invading the field. A drummer is engaged to prop up the work and anybody found to be slow, the drummer beats his drum to hasten him into the work. The harvesting work is called
'mai ra'. They use sickle for cutting the ripened crop. Then the crop is allowed to dry and later on, the bundles are thrashed and the rice is collected and sent on head load. Ultimately, the whole product is stored in a place specially meant for grains. This ends their nearly six month long work in the field. There is a close similarity between the methods of cultivation of the Mizos and those of the Reangs. The Mizos thrash the paddy in the similar fashion.

The Reangs use terms for various crops they grow in their backyard, rice (mai), maize (mawkonda), millet (maisu), cotton (khul), chili (thansawh) and jute (paih). The Reangs sell the excess of their products in the market. Besides the usual crops, they grow vegetables, brinjals (phanthau), pumpkin (chakumra), cucumber (dramai), melon (bathai), bean (kawhsawi). These are grown for home consumption.35

The law of diminishing returns works on lands and in the olden times, the availability of lands was nearly endless. Now, it is not so. They cannot move to new pastures because they fear of clashes with other tribal groups who jealously guard their lands. They are forced to work on the same plots for a long time, facing the decreasing fertility in lands. The low returns from the land means the impoverishment of the tribe. The Reangs, deprived of new avenues in life, are now the poorest tribal group in Mizoram. They
consume wild roots of the plants in substantial part of the year. This type of deprivation spells disaster in their community life. While their menfolk work in other people’s fields, women go to the jungles to collect wild roots and leaves.

The Reang economy is also depended on fishing and hunting. The recreation in fishing and hunting provide them two folds of involvements, they maintain their livelihood and these are sports for them. They enjoy these activities and they join in a group. The fish which are caught and the animals they hunt are either sold or consumed by themselves. The excess of the catches are given to the community. They catch fishes in streams and all aquatic animals like crabs, snails, tadpoles, prawns are delicacies for them. They catch crabs with the help of baskets made of bamboos. A Reang man goes to the stream with the basket held fixed under water. The crab enters into it and cannot go out. They spend days on the stream.36

There are three methods of fishing, simple catching, poisoning, killing and trapping. In simple catching, they simply catch fishes by their bare hands and in this way they can catch a lot. When they intend to poison fishes, they put a blockade on the running stream and apply a homemade poison made from a creeper called Ruo. It is wildly grown in the hills of Mizoram. The Mizos call it Ankasa. The water of the stream when comes into contact with this
poison, it is deadly for the free running fishes. This type of water poisoning for fishing purposes is widely practiced in the hills. When the fishes come into contact with the poison, slowly, are benumbed totally and the men, who are near, catch them easily. They also use iron hook and net.

The people apply primitive methods and implements for catching fishes. Other kind of creeper, called entadae, pursathae and a climber called militia pachycarpa and these are also used for poisoning purposes. Killing is a simple method but requires skill and swift handling of dao or spear. Various kinds of homemade implements are used for trapping.37

They use implements, mostly made of bamboo and one such implement is called Dul. It is used for catching fishes in shallow water. Fishes can enter into that bamboo basket where bait is kept to allure fishes. Once, the fishes enter, the exit is blocked. Choka is made of a piece of bamboo, one end of which is split and tied with canes and an opening is made at the mouth for entry of the fishes. It is dipped into the flowing water with the open end facing the current. There is another big trap called Bangbu, made from bamboo and cane, oblong in shape. Two openings are narrow with the facility to shut its mouths quickly, the moment the fishes enter it but cannot go out. This type of trap is used when the stream is having
little water and the fishes are caught without much difficulty. When they decide to throw out all water from the pool, they use a basket called phahkuai\textsuperscript{38}.

Tracking, another type of hunting, is carried out with a plan. The hunting team is divided into two, one is armed with guns and the other with spears and daos. A denser part of the forest is marked out. The party with spear and dao force the animals to come out of the deep jungle. Some make wild noise scaring away the animals into trap. To save themselves from one danger, they enter into the greater danger and come within the shooting ranges of the shooters who fire on the hapless animals. Many animals are killed and the meats are distributed among the hunters. A hunter armed with a gun seats on a tree top aiming his gun at the running animal which, unfortunately comes into the gunner's range. Generally, a good spot is selected which attracts deer, wild pig and elephants. It is mostly done in the jhum field where animals like deer, wild pig, and elephant always come to devour their crops. Bows and pellets are used for bird hunting. Their traditional weapons are made of bamboo and cane. Only small birds are killed with bows and pellets. Snares and traps are used for killing animals and birds. However, these weapons, snares and traps are same for both the Mizos and the Reangs\textsuperscript{39}.  

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When they decide to capture wild pigs, goats, deer, they dig out a pit somewhere in the jungle and cover that pit with bamboo pieces and over which palm fibre rope is placed. One end of the fibre rope is tied to a pole on the side of the pit. The moment an animal steps into the pit, it collapses and the animal is trapped by the rope. The animal falling into the pit cannot disentangle itself in spite of its struggle for life.

A tribal home away from the din and bustle of the urban life is another world. It is a nice accommodation of man and animal. Different types of animals and birds make a small Reang cottage wholesome. The pigs are reared in the ground portion of the raised platform where they live. These pigs are considered as precious economic commodity in the Reang household. They relish taking pork on occasions. A Reang is not an avid beef eater and he takes to beef eating, only after many of them are converted to the Christianity.

For eating at the family level and to entertain guests, pork is an essential food item. This animal is the acknowledged scavenger of the house and eats up all rubbishes thrown at them. In the day time, the pigs are found to loiter in the courtyard eating up all they find. Fowls roam in the courtyard of a Reang house. There is a particular portion in the house to keep fowls. The eggs of fowls are eaten and
the surplus quantities are sold in the market. The cattle are also reared in their house.\textsuperscript{41}

**Wearing of clothes**

Man's wear is known as pondri (loin cloth) which covers private parts. The Reangs are not the inhabitants of high hills and prefer the river valleys where the temperature is generally high. The menfolk are not required to cover up the whole body always. In the winter, their cloths are limited. At that time, they put on homemade chador.

Rinai is the woman's cloth which are black, yellow and coloured, covers her breast to the knee. It is a little longish looking cloth which helps woman to keep her modesty. Like women of other communities, the Reang women are the preservers of their cloth culture and wearing. As they are the good weavers of cloths, they make their own cloths, except the pondri. The menfolk may abandon their traditional cloths for the western wears, women remain faithful to their traditional cloths. Today, the new generations of Reang men and women take to modern dress.

The traditional ornaments for women are necklaces, bangles and rings. The necklaces are known by different names, chandroha, rangbauhsanag, masa, duli, sorbu-thuh, dana, chaima and tabul.
They have colourful earrings, nabauh, wakhawn and wareih. The Reang woman beautifies her two hands with bangles which run from her wrist to the elbow point. The concept of beauty, of course, varies from tribal to tribal. The Reang women maintain their culture and they are identifiable easily. The ornaments are made of bronze generally. The woman adds to her elegance by putting another ornament tied to her ankle which is called baing. When she moves on the road, the ornament makes a sound. As an imitation of modernity, they put on clips on hair now-a-days. The Reang man is fond of rings on the fingers. The flowers are used as decoration.

Religion

In the religious front, a sea change occurred among the Reangs in the recent times. In the states of Mizoram and Tripura, they came under direct influence of the neighbouring powerful cultures. The Christian missionaries entered the hills after the incorporation of this wild territory and gave the tribes, the Gospel of the Christ. It smoothened the hard exteriors of the tribes and they settled down as the faithful subjects of the Crown.

Mizoram is nearly totally a Christian state with all tribes within the Mizo groups came under the shelter of churches of different denominations. The different protestant church groups are active in the state and there is a tacit government support in their
activities. Half of the Reangs became Christians even though they have still strong animistic leanings. It is to be remembered that the Reangs of Tripura came under the influence of many beliefs. In their working rituals, the fear of the evil spirits who have the capacity to inflict injuries to any person is always in their mind. It is interesting to see that their very own pantheon of gods and goddesses are joined by the well-known Hindu deities worshipped in this part of the country. The Reangs worship Matai Kawtawr, is the chief of all evil. Buraha is the evil spirit aligned to Matai Kawtawr. They worship Kali, the consort of Buraha. Kali is the principal deity. Some well-known gods and goddesses from the Hindu pantheon entered into their rituals. There are 108 evil spirits who work under Durga. From the Hindu mythology, they got Lord Mahadev as another deity who is very powerful. If the propitiation of all other Gods and Goddesses fail, then Mahadev is remembered. The priest conducts the rituals to propitiate these spirits.

The animism is the continuation of absolute ignorance of rationality. They suffer from many diseases, the reason behind their occurrence is unknown to them and they attribute it to the machinations of evil spirits. In the hills of Tripura, the absolute fear of the evil spirits and the dependence on the propitiation of such evil
spirits, is less as their religious behaviour is punctuated by the religious beliefs of the people of the plains.

They have a belief of soul travelling to the heaven after death. Like many organized religion, their belief is also that a good person who does good things in life goes to heaven and a bad person goes to hell. A bad person comes back as goat, fowl or dog, never as a man. The soul enters the body of a person when he is alive but it leaves the body when the person dies and moves to heaven, its real abode.43

Observance of festivals

The Buisu is a harvest festival celebrated throughout the region and the same festival is named variously. In Assam, this festival is known as Bihu. Among the Dimasa tribe, it is Busu. The Bihu is celebrated throughout the Brahmaputra valley and it is celebrated as a community festival. It indicates the presence of the strains of tribal culture that permeate into the culture of the state. In south Assam and Tripura, the festival is known as Pous Sankranti, nobanya among the plains dwelling Bengalis. The association with the crop ripening and bringing home of the harvest heralds community merry making. It is an ageold practice for all people. The same type of festival is performed with enthusiasm among all tribes in far flung areas. This festival is current among the Tripuris also,
who are the immediate neighbours of the Reangs for a long time. Though the references of the Mizos come very often for discussion, the Reangs cultural connection with the Tripuris is older and still it is vigorous. But it is observed that as an animistic tribe, fearing evil spirits and psychologically fighting and propitiating them always, do not have much time left for festivals. However, the exuberance the plains people show over the harvest festival in January every year (Bengali month of Pous-Magh) attracts the Reang people too and they prepare homemade delicacies and enter into community entertainment. The timing of the festival corresponds to the Bengali New Year’s Day (April, 14 or 15). The Ahoms in upper Assam go ecstatic in those days preparing food for special occasion and the young men and women dance in groups.

The Basi puja among the Reangs needs lots of animal sacrifices. The Reangs embracing Christianity do not abandon the Buisu festival, the Christian Reangs join in the ecstasy of the Buisu festival. Some writers consider the Buisu festival as an imitation of the corresponding Bengali function of Pous Sankranti. But the title of the festival suggests that it is of much older origin. All such functions relate to the end of harvesting and therefore, it is the time of rejoicing. It corresponds to the Sanskrit word Bishuva. The words Buisu, Bihu and Busu came from the same origin.44
Ceremonies and Sacrifices

The Reangs perform with great enthusiasm their festival, Basi on a river bank where nearly all members of the village community are present. It is done during the cropping time to pray to God to have good crops. Two buffaloes and two goats are sacrificed and the meat is communally eaten. Those who can afford, they contribute in cash and kind towards the festival. Some hundreds of people attend the puja and this is the occasion of settling their own disputes and establishes comraderie among themselves. To offer prayers to God is common to all people, civilized or primitive. Fourteen gods are remembered with due solemnity with lots of rice beer consumed by them.

Village Administration

Before the Choudhuriship, there existed Raiship in the Reang society. The names of the office bearers in the administration bear the similar names, we find in the plains. Among them, there was the Rai, the chief who ruled over the community. His immediate attendants were the chatradari (the one keeps umbrella over the head of the Rai). A flute player is called basi badak who accompanies him as his entertainer. The store keeper is called bandari who supplies the essential needs of the Rai. Being the Chief, he was respected by all people. All cases of crimes committed and the disputes were referred to the Rai. The priest, the head of the religious rituals under the Rai conducted his functions. The people living in the isolated areas look towards the Chief for the solution of all of their problems. He was advised by an advisory board headed by the Rai Kachak. We may easily understand the limited needs of the administration from the employment of hewers of woods and the drawers of water. For all small things, the persons are recruited to serve the Rai. From the names of the officers under the Rai, it is clear that the tribe spent a good amount of time under the hegemony of the Tripuri King. When they migrated to the present territory within the state of Mizoram, they carried their past with them and tried to protect it under the challenging circumstances. But the
Raiship had disappeared into history and the tribe had another administration called Choudhuriship. In the process, remnants of the past are forgotten, some are retained. The religion plays a role in it. The Raiship which emanated under the patronage of the Tripuri king was not hereditarily chosen and a Rai was selected for his quality and drive. He was the king among the tribe and drew obedience automatically.

The present day constitutional system made the traditional system comparatively powerless as the constitution only knows the current system, not the traditional one. The important cases are only referred to the Choudhuri. In the domain under the Tripuri King, in the initial periods, the Raiship flourished but the conflict with the monarchy was regular and the king applied force to curb the powers of the Reang chiefs as their position carried immense prestige among the people.

During the time of the Tripuri king Dhanyamanikya (1490-1515), two Reang generals held high positions in the army and the Reangs were freely recruited in the army. A part of the Reang population sought shelter in Mizoram, then a desolate corner in the province, not visited by the provincial administrators, unchartered and also ungoverned. Now, their presence is substantial in the state of Tripura, particularly in Amarpur and Belonia. As said earlier, the
Raiship is superseded by the Choudhuriship and reference of Raiship can only be found in a book of history. However, the petty chieftain, Choudhuri is current, both in Tripura and in Mizoram. The Choudhuri, it seems came in the transitional period. At the village level, he had wide control over his kinsmen but gradually there was decline in powers, as the Choudhuriship is not recognized by the government. Now, the position and the respects he draws from his kinsmen are only traditional. A tradition breaks down under the strong outside influences and the effects of the constitution and their practice is no less important.

It seems that this system too is on way out. In Mizoram, the District Councils are established and the Mizos are empowered further when they achieved statehood in 1987. But the Reangs continued with the Choudhuriship as it helped them to regulate their shifting cultivation and settlement. They carried the institution along with their movement. The formation of the village council under the constitution was made effective in the Reang village and the Government recognised it only.

The nomadic nature of the Reangs movement came into direct conflict with the settled propositions of the village council established in 1953 under the sixth schedule of the constitution. The president of the village council partially took over the functions of
the Choudhuri. All village councils are affiliated to the District Council at the district headquarters wherefrom all the financial grants come. The role of the traditional institution is overlooked and thus it is allowed to rot. The Choudhuriship which came after the decline of the Raiship, inherited many of the features of it and survived in the desolate territories. The Choudhuri ruled with his assistant Karbari and he gained office because of his personality and position among the people. A Karbari is often called the vice Choudhuri as he had also wielded great powers. He settled small cases without referring them to the Choudhuri. The position of the office of Karbari is supreme where there is no Choudhuri. Whoever is there as the village chief, he is assisted by a council of elders. The office is not hereditary and the unique feature is that the Choudhuri is elected by the system of adult franchise. The village elders may remove him if they are dissatisfied with his performance and may replace him by another person.46

As elsewhere in the north eastern region, the Reangs in the far corner of Mizoram, do face the question, the centralization versus isolation. All tribal institutions thrive in isolation. The centralization has the sanction of the constitution and the administration, this takes away the inherent autonomy of the institutions they have. The Choudhuriship is perfectly in tune with their land settlement
system. So long, the provisions of the sixth schedule did not interfere with their system, they lived happily. The headquarters in Aizawl is dominated by the ethnic group other than the Reangs. The nomadic nature of the tribe is not suitable for any institution which demands settled existence. The Reangs are closely attached to their customs and traditions which they do not like to lose because of the conflict with the political and social environment they encounter in Mizoram.47

The control from the headquarter means the control of their own traditional system by an outside group who cannot be responsive to their aspirations. Such unresponsiveness on the part of the headquarter towards a small tribe may not be attended with a long drawn process of coercion but it hurts their feelings.48

Rules, followed in the Reang family

Father is called ‘umpha’ and his eldest son ‘ghelamisha’ are respected as they are elders in the family. The daughter, ‘bruimisha’ assists her mother in all household works. In that process, a young girl learns how to manage the house. The young women in a tribal house have two traditional functions, one is weaving and the other is country liquor preparation. The elder brothers in the family are called ‘umphaiyong’ and the elder sisters are called ‘hahanang’. The society follows a traditional system where elders are respected and
the young ones obey them and take their guidance. The in-laws maintain a relation among themselves which breaks the barrier of sobriety. The jokes are shared among them. As we often find in the non-tribal society, the elder brother of husband is respected by the wife and she does not generally interact with him in the family and keeps a distance.49

Relation between Reangs and other Tribes

The Reangs are nearer to the Tripuris in language and culture and from the history of their migrations, it is noticed that they lived together in the same territory in the past. The linguistic and phonetical studies indicate the nearness to each other besides their socio-political closeness. The rituals performed by them bear similarity. In the hilly region of Tripura and Chittagong Hill Tract, another tribe, the Moghs lives in strength. But they are not similar to the Tripuris and the Reangs. In the Tripura state today, the Reang population are more than one hundred thousands.

The Lusheis, the Panghs, the Bawns and the Chakmas are the neighbours of the Reangs with whom they live in the desolate corners of Mizoram. The British annexation did not change much of the Reangs living with these tribes who were not similar to them in ethnicity and culture. The wide territory and the sparseness of
population allowed them only proximity with these tribes but no cultural mixing.

The Christianity entered the state of Mizoram as the rear guard action of the British imperialism. There is no denying the fact that the new religion has given the tribes a new cultural orientation besides providing outlet to the outside world. It came slowly during the colonial period. The Christianity was accepted by all the tribes in this hills but the bulk of the Chakmas and the Reangs still adhere to their own indigenous faith though, particularly among the Reangs, the Christianity has made great inroads only through the Mizo preachers.

The Christian section of the Reangs have developed linkages with the Lushei and the Pang through their common religious activities. But at heart, the Reangs feel strong affinities towards the Chakmas and other ethnic brethren. Due to long isolation, the Reangs are strongly attached to the ageold traditions and the Christian Reangs retained the cultural affinity with the traditional system.

With little physical communication available with the outside world, the Reangs lived in Mizoram in a world of their own. Their habitats are located in the isolated hills. In Chawngte and Dintharveng, the Reangs are exposed to external interactions and
they are in communication with other tribes because of small economic contacts. But that was also partial and not intimate.

Some Reang villages are located within the Chakma District Council. The inter-tribal marriages also occur because of the long cohabitation. The inter-tribal relationships are reflected in the social and economic fields, such cooperation is observed in the jhuming exercises.

The children receive education in schools from the teachers, who are either the Mizos or the Chakmas or the Bengalees. The instruction in class rooms are provided in the Mizo and the English languages. Some Reang youngmen are employed as labourers in different Government departments.50

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