CHAPTER -3

ABOUT THE TRIBES
3.1 : THE RONGMAI NAGA :

Rongmei is one of the oldest major tribes of Nagas inhabited in the North-Eastern Region of India, from time immorial. The homeland of Rongmei Nagas is in the Western Hill-ranges of Manipur lying between imphal Valley on the east and the North-Cachar Hills of Assam on the West. Earlier it was a sub-division of civil administration of Manipur known as Tamenglong sub-division, then it was upgrated to the level of a district and was renamed as Tamenglong district of Manipur.

Rongmei is the short form of old name ‘MARUONGMEI’ called by Lyengmeis and Angamis since time immorial and this original name was mentioned in the ceremonial rites of Rongmei Nagas. Some of the relevant rites are: (1) Namshu-Dhisu soi, means rite recited at the ceremony offered before entering the new village for settlement; (2) Duikhum Khupui soi- means the rite recited at the opening ceremony of a new drinking water pond; (3) Raangteng Khunpui soi-means the rite recited at the ceremony offered before erecting the main posts of the village gate; etc.

The name Rongmei is derived out of MARUONGMEI, here ‘RONG’ literally means ‘the South Direction’ and ‘MEI’ means ‘People’. So the etymological term of Rongmei means the People of the South Country or Southeners. According to the Legend of their forefathers,

Rongmeis are the descendants of DHICHLAALEN, the 3rd son of the first Man and first Woman called DHIRANNANG and DHICHAALU, who led the Cavemen from the underground to the outside world of the Earth through a hollow tunnel cave of RAMTIN KABIN.

The Origin of Rongmei :

Gong phungring alias Chagong phungning is the place of origin of Rongmei Nagas according to the legends of their forefathers. This place of origin was located at a village site called MAKUI LONGDI alias Makhel or Maikel situated somewhere near the UILONG now called as OKLONG village, under Mao sub-division of North district of Manipur. According to Rongmei legends men in the beginning lived inside
the Earth, and in course of time men emerged out of the Earth through a hollow hole (tunnel) of the cave called RAMTING KABIN which was probably located at Chagong Phungring.

**Source of origin according to modern view:**

It is believed that the three Kindred su-tribes of ZELIANGRONG NAGA tribe, viz. Rongmai, Zeme Liangmei, such as Ao, Angami, Sema, Lotha Rengma, Tangkhul, Mao etc. perhaps might have migrated from Burma and followed the advanced Naga tribes through Burail southerly route terversing through the impassable hill tracts along the Barak river in order to avoid the conflict with other advanced tribes. It appears that these three sub-tribes migrated almost at the same time, one of the groups, i.e. Liangmei followed the Angami tribe towards the north, whereas the second group consisting of Zemi turned towards the north-west hills and the third group consisting of Rongmeis followed the first and second groups up tp the West hill tracts of Manipur where Rongmei Nagas made their homeland and settled there permanently as they had no choice to move further.

The Nagas of these three sub-tribes bore the eminent Mongloid features like dark skin, curly hairs, short stature etc. and from the beginning these three sub-tribes socially, traditionally, customarily and culturally have a close link and affinity because they possessed the similar behaviour of talking, dealing with way of living, dancing, singing etc. Since the people of these three groups have been living together for centuries in the same tracts or areas the unity of these three groups have been developed and integrated into one big tribal group in the North-Eastern region of India. Through such prolong habitation in a compact and contiguous hills and constant social intercourse and intermarriages the eminent leaders of these akin sub-tribes of Zemi, Liangmei and Rongmei mutually agreed to form a common social body with a view to protect and maintain the common interests and unity. Thus a combination of these three Zemi, Liangmei and Rongmei known as ZELIANGRONG was formed and thereby the common body of these three sub-tribes is called ZELIANGRONG COUNCIL and this was constituted in the meeting held on the 15th February, 1947, at Keishamthong village of Imphal in Manipur.
The Society of Rongmeis:

The house-hold is the social unit of Rongmei Naga society whereas a village is the natural unit of social organization according to the prevailing system of Rongmei society. Here ‘House-hold’ means the family including the joint family. In this context Dr. Sebastan Karotemprel once wrote in his article ‘The Rongmeis of Manipur’ appeared in a monthly of North-Eastern region of India called Spectrum as :- Unlike the other Naga tribes the Rongmeis live in a joint family. In some villages the average number of the joint members is found between 10 to 15. This was partly due to the common practice and tradition of closed intermarriage between kinship families followed from time immorial i.e, a kind of successive marriage. This is a kind of marriage prevailing in the Rongmei society with a view to look after the wife and children of the deceased man by the surviving own brother by marrying the wife of his own deceased brother as his wife after the death, although Polygamy is not known among the Rongmei Nagas.

The society of Rongmei Nagas is Patrilineal as the male ascendancy is completed with male members only. The essential features of Rongmei Naga family law is that in the house of a family its members are descended from the eldest male resident and not from the mother since she is under the rule of exogamy from another clan.

The Head of each family holds the supreme power as well as the unique responsibility in the maintenance and administration of the family. He is not only responsible for looking after the welfare of his wife and children, he is also having a great responsibility for performing family worship, religious duties like village-genna, house-genna and all social and customary duties observed in the village from time to time. As a custom of Rongmei society, the sons and daughters use to live with their parents even after their marriage till they are asked to set up a separate house. In the early days the boys during their boyhood after attaining an age of twelve years used to sleep in the KHANGCHU KAI i.e, Dormitory, the Bachelors' house and the young girls also used to sleep in their LUCHU KAI i.e, dormitory house till their marriage. The structure of the family is dismembered by the marriage of the
daughters into another clan under the law of exogamy and by setting up a separate household of their sons themselves after their marriage. (Pl.-1 to 9).

Principal Clans:

The Rongmei Nagas followed the law of exogamy by marrying only from the outside of one’s own clan or kindred blood relationship and not the homogenous (endogenous system) that is the practice of marriage within the same clan. Thus all the Rongmei villages consist of a number of clans which are the groups of agnatic kindred who must marry outside the clan. In the Rongmei society the kinship is reckoned and determined through the males only and not through the females. Hence the rights of inheritance and succession both to the moveable and immoveable properties of the family are vested in the male line only.

In the beginning, according the Rongmei Nagas forethers, the society of Rongmei Nagas was originally divided into three principal clans, viz. (1) Kamei (2) Gaangmei and (3) Gonmei. The inter-marriage is within the three clans from one clan to another, but the marriage within the same clan itself is strictly prohibited and it is regarded as social abomination and excommunicated from the society and expelled from the village in the olden days.

The Principal clans together with sub-clans divided under each principal clan are given below:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Clan</th>
<th>Sub-Clans</th>
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<td>1. Gonmei</td>
<td>(i) Gonthangmei</td>
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<td>(ii) Gondaimei</td>
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<td>(iii) Dahaangmei</td>
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<td>(iv) Paalmei</td>
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<td>(v) Maringmei</td>
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<td>(vi) Thaimei</td>
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<td>(vii) Longmei</td>
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<td>(viii) Remmei and so on.</td>
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Physical Appearance:

**General characteristics:** Both Rongmei men and women are hard working and industrious at fields as well as at home. However, women normally work harder than the men because, the women take active part in the work of cultivation, besides her overall domestic duties at home which keep women busy all the time. Both men and women are used to carry heavy loads by means of a browband (made of plaited cane) called ‘Potru’ in Rngmei tied to the male basket (Kaah) in case of man and female basket (Kalong) in case of female, and some time men used to carry their loads by means of ‘Yoke’ (Gangkhaang) by placing over their shoulders.

**Language:**

J.H. Hutton wrote as the Nagas have no written language, however, their language of signs has reached a high state of development without the art of writing a development, no doubt fostered and maintained by the recurrent necessity of communication between members of neighbouring villages speaking dialect, or language totally incomprehensible to one another.

The father tongue of Rongmei Nagas is called RONGLAT. According to the ancient Anthropologists, Rongmei Nagas belong to the Tibeto-Burman family of the Mongoloid race.

**Religion:**
According to the belief of Rongmei people the supreme God created many subordinate Gods and assigned different duties and functions under his direction. Some of the few Gods are:

- **Daampaapui**: Goddess of creation, who created all living beings of the Universe.
- **Karampou & Karampei**: Goddess in charge of an area or region on the surface of the Earth guarding and looking after men, animals, birds, all beings living within his/her jurisdiction.
  1. **Chaampei**: The goddess in charge of all animals, birds, fowls, fishes etc. of an area or region to provide to the needy persons, say hunters for their food or enjoyment.
  2. **Napsinmei Raa**: The goddess in charge of food grains for distribution to all.
  3. **Laosinmei Raa**: The goddess in charge of crop fields and blessings.
  4. **Dui Raa**: The deity (evil spirit) lived in water/flood.
  5. **Lansinmei Raa**: The goddess in charge of riches and wealth.
  6. **Kaikhun Raa**: (a) **Kai rung Raa**: God of family inside the house.
   (b) **Kaijaang Raa**: God of the outside house.
  7. **Kairao-Keirik**: Evil spirits or departed souls of the ancestors of the family who influenced the lives of the younger generations.
  8. **Bamboo**: The deity of village gates kaipi Bamboo and keiba Bamboo, who guard and protect the villagers.
  9. **Theimei Raa**: The god of death who takes the life of all living beings and so on.

**Rongmei Naga Customary prohibitions**:

Prohibition is known as Numei or Neimei. Many kinds of taboos or Genas were observed by the primitive Rongmei people in the early days. A few important taboos/Genas generally observed by the Rongmei Nagas from time immemorial till today among the Non-christian Rongmeis who deeply embraced the cult of Animism are given below:—
Family prohibitions:

Kainumei: Persons other than members of the family or close relatives i.e., outsiders/strangers are prohibited from entering the house of the family during the birth of a new child including puppy, pig, calf, chicks etc. or illness of a member of the family for whom certain worship or sacrifice has been performed for recovery and so on.

Village prohibitions:

1. Ting nei: Rain prohibition on the day of first raining of the year.
2. Mai nei: Fire prohibition on the day of fire broke out.
4. Rihthai nei: On the day of first hail-stroms of the year.
5. Poljing nei: On the first occasion of cyclone of the year.
7. Dihkap nei: Prohibiting villagers from tilling (cutting) the ground/earth on the day of dihkap worship
8. Napful keipui nei: On the first day of sowing seeds to the ground (field) of the year.
9. Raapen-Ripen sipui nei: On the day fixed by the village Priest (Taku) to observe the events of epidemics or calamities. (i.e. Famine, flood, communal raids etc.) drowning, suicide by hanging, burning etc.
10. Rihdang nei: Observed on the day of victory by killing a person or persons in fighting.
11. Kamang kaipui nei: Observed on the occasion of a person killed by tiger or any other ferocious animal.
13. Raacham dinkasokpui nei: Observed on the prediction of some Omnious omen or signs of destructions.
14. Laokei nei: On the 1st day of tilling of the ground (Laiphumei) of the year.
15. Napthan nei: On the first tasting day of new crops of the year; and so on.
Custom and Culture:
Among the Nagas, Rongmei has a very rich heritage of custom and culture.

Rongmei people have two classes of customary ornament:
One for male and the other for female, and further there are different varieties of dresses and customs of both male and female according to social status and age of a man or woman in the society.

Males garments: (1) Sinei pheipong – Young boys shawl.
(2) Inthemphei – Young man’s shawl.
(3) Pheingao – for both youth/adult man.
(4) Koukhram pheinhao – for old man.
Pl.-1: Traditional Rongmai Naga House

Pl.-2: Rongmai Naga woman busy in weaving

Pl.-3: Religious symbol of indigenous Rongmai Naga

Pl.-4: Rongmai Naga man with their traditional dress

Pl.-5: Rongmai Naga woman with their traditional dress

Pl.-6: Traditional musical instrument of Rongmai Nagas

Pl.-7: Rongmai Naga boys and girls dancing in their annual festival

Pl.-8: Annual festival of Rongmai Nagas

Pl.-9: Rongmai Naga woman making local wine by traditional way
3.2 : JAINTIA TRIBE :

History & Origin :

According to the historians and on the basis of records available the Jaintias are stock of Mon-Khmer people of Indo-China. They resemble Mon-Khmer people in some basic points of language, festivities and erecting stone monoliths. Therefore, it could be said that Jaintias may have come from the south east, first to the splendid valleys of Assam and then to beautiful Meghalaya.

The exact time of their migration is not known but it is assumed that the final migration might have arisen out of the rivalry of religion and culture followed by the conquest of Assam by Naraka of Mithila between 200-500 AD. The Jaintias first entered into the present hills known as Jaintia Hills through the south of the river Kupli.

Jaintia people of Barak Valley in the foothills of K&J Hills mainly came from Trangblang in Jowai district of Meghalaya about 100 years ago. Their migration seems to be mainly due to the infertility of soil in the jhum field, transport problem, business interaction problems etc. Therefore, due to these reasons, some of the Jaintia people migrated to the foothills in Barak Valley as at that point of time the area was found to be very much favourable for Jhum cultivation.

The Jaintia kingdom consisted of a tract of plains area lying between the towns of Sylhet and the Cachar border and also the territory stretching from the foothills overlooking the Surma Valley to the kalang river in Nogaon district. The kingdom was governed by the Jaintia Rajas who were then very powerful and maintained diplomatic relations with the Ahom and Kachari kings of Assam. They ruled over the Kingdom Jaintiapur for a long time upto 1835. Now a days Jaintias are spreaded in different parts of Southern Assam for Jhum cultivation.

There is a confusion in the mind of the people regarding the ‘Pnar’s and Jaintia, but according to S. Barkakati, ‘Pnars’ are Jaintias & ‘Jaintias’ are ‘Pnars’. The language spoken by Jaintias are ‘Pnar’. Jaintia Tribe, also known as Pnar or Synteng, are the inhabitants of Meghalaya. The Jaintia belongs to the Hynniewtrep branch of the Austric race. Their kingdom was the oldest one and the most widely spread over the hilly areas of the Jaintia Hills District.
Dialect:
Jaintia dialect has 12 spoken forms: Jowai, Shangpung, Batau, Raliang, Sutnga, Sumer, Martiang, Barato, Rymbai, Lakadong, Mynso and Nongtalang. Jowai is the standard spoken form among all these.

Sociocultural activities:
Jaintia community is culturally very rich. They have their own cultural heritage. Their culture reflects on the traditions, music, dances, art and crafts of Jaintia tribe. The tribe is famous for artistic weaving, wood-carving and cane and bamboo work. These are also the main crafts of the tribe. Minor crafts include weaving of carpet and silk and the making of musical instruments, jewelry and pineapple fiber articles. They are also famous for weaving of carpet and silk and the making of musical instruments, jewelry and pineapple fiber articles.

Dresses and Ornaments:
The traditional dress of Jaintia male consists of Jymphong (a sleeveless coat), Dhoti and Pagri while the women wrap several pieces of clothes so as to give a cylindrical shape. They also wear another piece of cloth called Kajainkup which is tied around the neck. Beside ear-rings, they also put on necklaces made of round silver balls and these necklaces generally used in festive occasions, for the performance of dance.

Marriage systems:
In marriage system there is no provision of marrying a girl or a boy of the same clan rather Jaintia’s strictly maintain exogamy. Marriage through acquaintance is the most common system prevalent among the Jaintia’s. The marriage ceremony of Jaintia tribe is very interesting. The boy’s party comes in the house of the girl ceremonially on the day of marriage. In the occasion of the marriage ceremony, they use Piper betle L., Areca catechu L. Both the parties offer rice-beer to the priest, who puts it in a gourd pot after mixing and pour it on Beiraymmaw (mother earth) thrice.
and prays for the permanent happy married life, fertility and wealth of the couple followed by a feast

**Festivals:**

The two most important festivals celebrated by the Jaintias are the Behdiengkhlam festival and Laho Dance festival. Behdiengkhlam festival is held generally in the rainy season of July or August. This festival is also regarded as the most colorful festival of the Jaintias. Laho dance is a part of the festivities of Behdiengkhlam festival. Laho is performed for sheer entertainment.

Rong Khla is the most important festival of the Jaintia tribes. Most of the people in this village are still in their traditional religion. Among their festivals include Rong Beh Dein Khlam, a festival to drive away evils. Another festival the Rong Pyrtuh is also an important one and the Phur, which is connected with the bone collection ceremony of the dead. Rong means festival and Khla means tiger, in the local dialect, so Rong Khla means the Tiger Festival. (Pl.-10 to 18).
PI.-10: Jaintia women with their traditional dress

Pl.-11: A traditional tool to pluck *Piper betle* L.

Pl.-12: A Jaintia kitchen with some traditional weapons

Pl.-13: A Jaintia man with their traditional basket and weapon

Pl.-14: A Traditional Jaintia house...

Pl.-15: A Jaintia man making their traditional basket

Pl.-16: Jaintia men gathered in their community hall

Pl.-17: Jaintia man selling Pan in the Market.

Pl.-18: A Jaintia woman carrying handloom basket