AN ABSTRACT

THE RIANG OF TRIPURA: A STUDY IN SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION is a study undertaken to understand the nature and trend of change that has been taking place among the Riang of Tripura. The Riangs are at different stages of adopting and absorbing different components of modern era like that of education, economic activities, dress patterns, recreation, food habits, well-being and the ethos of a wider world. The study focused on two villages, one from the remotest Riang inhabitation and another from the urban setting of the state. In addition, almost all Riang inhabited areas in the state were explored for the purpose of gathering a comprehensive understanding of the changes taking place in this community.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study has been to understand Riang life and ethos through a comprehensive understanding of their socio-cultural life, religion, political and economic activities. It seeks to gauge the present situation of the Riang and to understand the changes brought about by education. The study also focused on the influence of major religions on this community.

Significance of the Study

This work documents the influence of Christianity, Hinduism and the impact of developmental programme from a close range. It contributes to a better understanding of the Riang in the emergent context of education, change and development. It offers information to inform policy makers, educationists and other service providers to create, evaluate and provide relevant programmes for this vulnerable tribal group.
Sample and Methodology

This is a study of the community *per se*. The universe of the present study is Riang tribe. Hence the focus is on the Riangs who are scattered all across Tripura. Yet, it is impossible to study the total population. Accordingly, two villages were carefully selected; one representing an interior village which has less exposure to modern changes; and the second nearer to the urban periphery with the view that this village is much exposed to on-going changes. To study these two Riang villages, a mixed method approach was employed. The first village Kalyansing is in the district of Dhalai and has six hundred and ninety eight households; while the second village Bagafa is in the district of South Tripura, which has three hundred and sixty one households. Samples of 200 households each from both the villages were selected. The research tools deployed to elicit data were observation, interview, oral histories, case studies, document analysis, recurrent and extensive field visits.

Presentation of the study

A total of seven chapters are categorized to render the entire data relevant. They are as follows: Introduction (Chapter I); Riang Habitat: Land and the People (Chapter II); Kinship, Marriage and Family (Chapter III); Economic Profile (Chapter IV); Political Organization (Chapter V); Religious Profile (Chapter VI); Summary and Conclusion (Chapter VII).

Major findings

In current times in a Riang village, one will encounter members from different clans, tribes and non-tribal living side by side. Today most of the houses are built at the plinth level using mud, concrete and GI roofs. Most of the current Riang houses have separate rooms for different purposes and are rather well ventilated. The Riang who have moved to urban areas are comfortable staying in apartments and government quarters; it affords them an opportunity to intermingle with a cosmopolitan world.
In earlier times Riangs had only boiled food, where as now, they use spices. They are adapting to modern foods and food habits. Riangs are purchasing modern cutlery for daily use. One-time-use cups and plates are replacing the traditional bamboo cups and leafy plates. They are at home with modern electronic and electric gadgets for their daily use. Riangs measured time according to the movement of the sun and the moon but today, many Riangs wear wrist watches.

*Passara* and *risa*, the traditional dresses of women were mostly made at home and the raw materials were from the *jhum* sites. Currently many purchase their dresses from the market. Dress pattern has undergone significant change; whether educated or uneducated, all wear dresses like pant, shirt, T-shirt, *salwar kurta*, wrist watch, and all forms of ornaments. The old men and women wear traditional dress. The traditional ornament *rangbutang* is a rare commodity and those wanting to procure them must be satisfied with replicas made by Bengali goldsmiths.

Riangs are accustomed to joint families, these days however they prefer nuclear families. The traditional marriage patterns have changed. Marriages now take place at the churches, temples and wedding halls. The traditional dress of the bride and bridegroom is replaced with dresses of neighborhood non-tribals. Kinship bond has weakened with migration of the Riang to cities. Traditionally Riangs had the customs of bride price; it is now being replaced by the dowry system. It has been reported that even in rural villages dowry in the form of car, bikes, fridge, television, cupboards, sofa sets and household utensils are given as gift from the bride’s family to the groom.

Many of the Riangs have moved from *jhum* based economy to government employment, settled farming, cash crops, animal husbandry, and even value addition of their tradition handlooms and handicrafts. At the rural setting many of the Riang have adopted to cash crops like pineapple and rubber plantation. In the field of agriculture, chemical fertilizers are replacing organic manures. They have started using a few modern implements such as tractor and tiller. In the urban villages the Riang have acres of land with rubber plantation. The introduction of rubber cultivation has brought better economic viability resulting in increased standard of life and education. Many of the youth do not want to follow the path of their ancestors especially in the area of *jhum* cultivation.
Traditionally the Riangs were governed by a system of administration that includes Choudhuri and the Rai (king). He administered through the customary laws which are based on oral traditions. In the urban villages there are no Choudhuris, instead there are democratically elected representatives based on Panchayat raj system. Riangs are involved in party politics that in earlier times remained within the boundaries of villages, they started to exercise their franchise and even bargain for benefits and power. Riangs of the villages are aware of the existence and role of different political parties like the Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party and Communist Party of India (Marxist). There is a lot of interest shown by Riangs in the affairs of the state and national politics especially during the general elections.

The jhumias who are considered backward are eager to send their children to the hostels for study. They make great sacrifices to educate their children from the meager income they receive from the jhum. This process has been accelerated by the provision of stipend by the tribal welfare for school going girls and boys. The efforts of Non-Government Organizations and Government agencies are yielding fruit in the life of Riangs. Extension of educational facilities has enabled Riangs to be geographically mobile. Educated Riangs show higher achievement and motivation and aspire for better social and economic positions like good job, good education, health and sanitation.

Vaidya (medicine man) played a major role in maintaining the physical health of the villagers. Modern medicine and the health education provided by Christian missionaries have reduced the role of vaidya in a village. Death due to malaria, viral infection and infant mortality is reduced due to education in health and hygiene.

Riangs have embraced Hinduism or Christianity. The religious festival Songruma was eagerly looked forward as sacrosanct. Animal sacrifices are reducing and ineffective because those who have embraced Christianity are not willing to be part of the animal sacrifice or share the sacrificial meal. Today in a Riang house one can witness the presence of statues of various Hindu Gods and Christian saints.

Constant living with Non-Tribals in the village, the growth of township in the interior regions, the work of Christian Missionaries especially in the field of education and health as well as the growth of political consciousness have brought about a great deal of changes in the life of the Reang.
Suggestions

- The Riangs who engage in shifting cultivation do not have any permanent ownership of land. Permanent strategy should be devised for their sustainability for which ownership of land may be granted by the government.
- Education needs to be highly emphasized. More tribal residential schools and industrial training schools need to be opened for improved participation.
- The Government must design employment opportunity according to their traditionally inherited skills and talents. The traditional knowledge of medicines needs to be popularized and commercialized so that there can be economic development.
- In terms of health, there is a great need for health services and awareness programmes among them.
- Valuable and unique cultural traditions of the Riang need to be protected and promoted. If not, it might vanish over a passage of time.