

Linguistic and Cultural Aspects of Reang

**Y. Arunima Singha, M.A. in Linguistics and M.A. in English, NET,
Ph.D. Research Scholar.
Dr. K. Kalpi Singha, M.A. in Manipuri, SLET, Ph.D.**

=====

Abstract

Culture and language are like the two sides of the same coin. The development of a group of people or an ethnic group depends on how developed its language and culture is. Keeping this in view, an attempt is being made here to describe some of the linguistic and cultural aspects of Reang. Ethnically, they are mongoloid. Reang is the name of the people and as well as the language. It is mainly spoken in the three districts of Tripura namely, West, South and North Tripura. They are also found in Northern part of Mizoram and Southern part of Assam and Bangladesh as well. It is the second largest majority among the tribes in the state of Tripura. Not much work has been done on Reang language and culture. Therefore, the main objective of the paper is to bring out the main linguistic and cultural aspect of the same people.

Keywords: Reang, Culture, Linguistic, Ethnic, Mongoloid.

Introduction

The present paper will provide the cultural and structural description of Reang spoken in the North Tripura district of Tripura. The Reang language falls under the Bodo-Garo subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman language family. The Reang tribes are different from other different Indian tribes. They can be distinguished from other tribes by their attire and dialect. This paper will be divided into two sections. The first part will discuss the main linguistic features of Reang. The second section will deal with the cultural aspects found in the language.

1.1. Language and People

The Reang language is one of the tribal languages spoken by the same people in different parts of Northeast India and Chittagong Hill tracts of Bangladesh. They are also found in Northern part of Mizoram and Southern part of Assam. Ethnically, Reangs are Mongoloid and their language may fall under the Bodo-Garo sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman sub family of languages. Reang or Rieng, as it may be spelt, is one of the nineteen recognised Scheduled Tribes of the state of Tripura. As per 2001 census report of India, the total population of Reang was about 76,450. Reang is the second largest majority among the tribes in the state of Tripura. The speakers of Reang are mainly found in three districts of Tripura namely, West, South and North Tripura. They are also found in Northern parts of Mizoram, Southern part of Assam. Reang is the second largest majority among the tribes in the state of Tripura. The traditional name that the Reang people have been using to recognise themselves with is Bru. The Reangs prefer to call their language as Kau Bru which is of Tibeto-Burmese origin. Here Kau stands for language and Bru stands for men. Their dressing style of Reang people is quite simple, the hand-woven cloths for men, and for women they use rinai (wraparound for covering the lower portion of the body) and risa (covering the upper portion of the body). They are open minded, allowing for inter-caste marriage, prohibiting polygamy. They also allow widow remarriage after a mourning period of one year.

1.2. Clans of Reang

The Reang clans are divided into Meska and Molsoi Groups. Meska group is further divided into seven sub groups or dopha, i.e., meska, umsa, chorkhy, raikchaoh, waiem, taumayakcho and tuimuiyaphaoh. On the other hand, the Molsoi group is sub-divided into six groups known as molsoi, apeto, nouhkham, chongpreng, yaohstam and reangkachko. These 13 dophas or groups have two chiefs each. However, there are in total 26 chiefs. These 26 chiefs are known as kotor-dopha in Reang. Here kotor means head and dopha means clan or group. The chiefs in Reang are further sub-divided into two categories known as Rai and Kaskau. Rai means Raja and Kaskau means the Chief Minister. Their main means of livelihood is Agriculture.

Reang has a large number of population. However, they still lack economic and educational independence. The Reangs are believed to be inhabiting the land of Tripura since the early fifteenth century.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:7 July 2017

Y. Arunima Singha, M.A. in Linguistics and M.A. in English, NET, Ph.D. Research Scholar
K. Kalpi Singha, M.A. in Manipuri, SLET, Ph.D.

1.3. Geographical and Demographic distribution

The speakers of Reang are mainly found in the North Eastern state of Tripura. It is also spoken mainly in two districts of Tripura namely south and north Tripura. The table given below illustrates the tribal population of Tripura from 1951-1971.

Sl no.	Tribe	Population		
		1951	1961	1971
1.	Tripuri	150,91	189,799	250,382
2.	Reang	8,471	56,597	64,722
3.	Jamatia	2,764	24,359	34,192
4..	Chakma	7,277	22,386	28,622
5.	Halam	1,644	16,298	19,076
6.	Noatia	1,916	16,010	10,297
7.	Mogh	3,789	10,524	13,273
8.	Kuki	2,721	5,531	7,775
9.	Garo	7,362	5,484	5,559
10.	Munda	51	4,409	5,347
11.	Lushai	1,947	2,998	3,672
12.	Oroan	-	2,875	3,428
13.	Santhal	736	1,562	2,222
14.	Uchai	-	766	1,061
15.	Khasi	151	349	491
16.	Bhil	41	69	169
17.	Others	24	64	180

1.4. Dialectal Variation

Some of the scholars have considered Reang as one of the dialects of Kokborok. Binoy Debbarma (2003), pointed out that there are eight distinct dialects of Kokborok, namely, Bru, Debbarma, Jamatia, Kaloi, Mursing, Rupini, Tripura and Uchoi. It is worth mentioning here that the phonological variation is one of the significant features of distinction between Reang and other dialects of Kokborok. However, it has always been a

controversy regarding Reang being a dialect of Kokborok or not as Reang has enough distinct features to consider itself as a different language.

1.5. Linguistic Affiliation

According to Benedict's 'Sino-Tibetan: A Conspectus (1972), Reang can be classified under Bodo-Garo within Tibeto-Burman (See Figure 1).

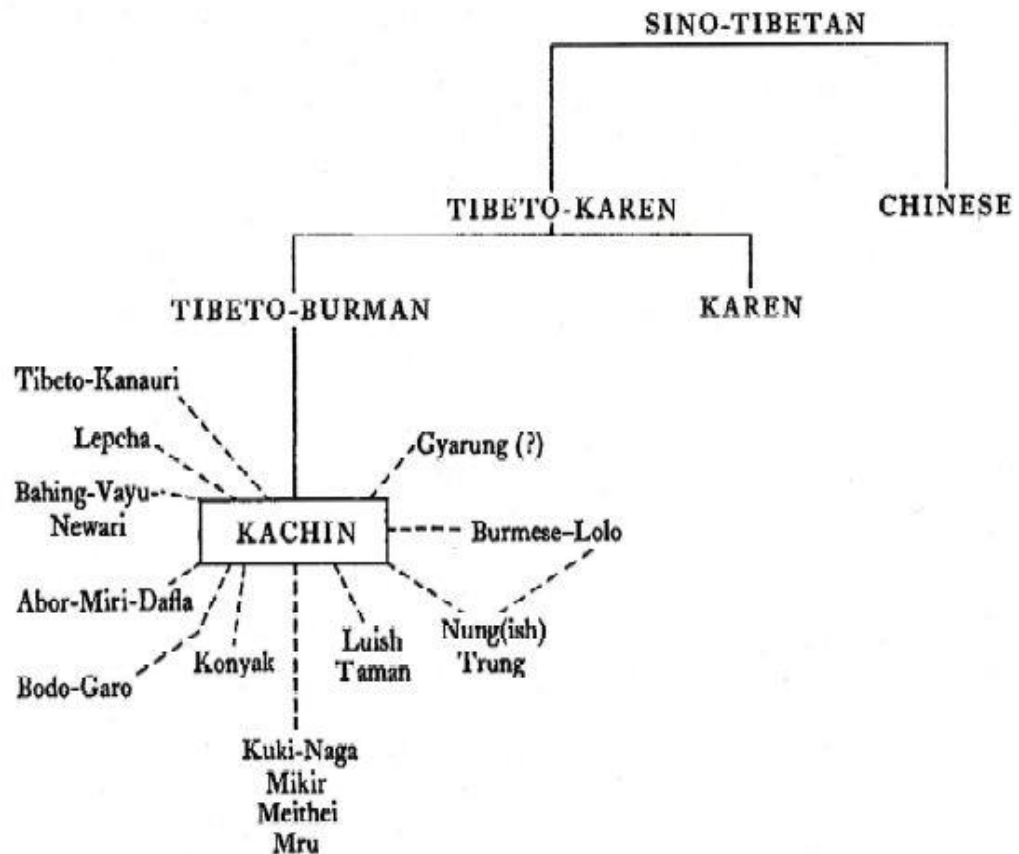


Figure 1 Schematic chart of Sino-Tibetan Groups, from Benedict (1972: 6)

1.6. Script and Literature

It is well known fact that most of the Tribal languages of North-East India do not have their own script. Reang being a language of the same group do not have their own script to write their language. They adopted Roman script for writing their language. Their language is not being taught in the schools as a subject. This may be the reason that the Reang students have their schooling in English medium schools.

Reang language is very rich in folk literature which includes folk-tales, folk-dances, folk-songs, riddles and crafts. However, some scholars have already worked on the socio-economic, cultural and historical aspects of the Reang but no linguistics work has been done on Reang so far.

1.7. Languages spoken in Tripura

A few generations ago, Tripura state was predominantly Tibeto-Burman speaking state, but there are so many Bengali invaders have now settled in Tripura that, the indigenous Tibeto-Burman speakers of Tripura have been reduced to a minority in their own homeland.

Reang is the second dominant language of Tripura after the Tripuri. The languages spoken in Tripura belong to three different language families viz., Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic. Languages spoken in Tripura includes: Bengali, Nepali, Kokborok, Garo, Durlong, Hrangkhoh, Korbong, Ranglong, Bongcher, Bhumij, Mogh, Khasi, Santali, Oroan, etc.

1.8. Marriage System

The marriage system prevalent among the Reang is similar to other Tripuri tribes of Tripura. Reangs have little contact with Bengali or other sub tribes. However, some inter-caste marriages have taken place at the recent time. A Reang groom has to spend two years at father-in-laws house before marriage. Dowry system and child marriage is not prevalent in Reang. Widow re-marriage, however, is permitted but after one year of the death of their spouses. During this one year, widow or a widower is not permitted to have any kind of entertainment. Marriage is arranged through a matchmaker. Monogamy is the present-day practice of the society. However, there is a lot of change in the system of marriage at the present time as fifty per cent of the Reang people are Christians.



1.9. Dance and Music

Reangs are very fond of dance and music. Dance is an integral part of their life. One of the well-known dance form of Reang is Hojagiri Dance. The Hojagiri festival of Reang is celebrated every year in Tripura. However, Bihu is also popular among the Reang tribes of Tripura. Hojagiri dance is one of the most beautiful dance forms performed by them. Reang community, the second largest tribe of the state of Tripura are noted for their Hojagiri dance performed by young girls balancing on earthen pitchers.

The Hojagiri Dance of the Reang people is performed on the festival of Lakshmi Puja. It is used to exhibit the entire Jhum cultivation. Males are restricted to singing and playing the music, while the women and girls in dancing. The hojagiri dance is quite an artistic performance, because it involves only slow hip and waist movement. The upper body does not need to move at all, for the dancers balance bottles or earthen lamps on their heads.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:7 July 2017

Y. Arunima Singha, M.A. in Linguistics and M.A. in English, NET, Ph.D. Research Scholar

K. Kalpi Singha, M.A. in Manipuri, SLET, Ph.D.

Linguistic and Cultural Aspects of Reang

The Reang community have their own distinct dance forms. Most of these folk dances are performed during festivals or on festive occasions. The dances of Reang are performed by both men and women. They generally wear traditional dresses while performing the dances and are accompanied by musical instruments like khamb (drum), kshumuk (flute made of bamboo), etc. The traditional essence of these dances is maintained even today.



1.10. Birth and Death Ceremonies

After the birth of the baby pujas like abu sumo, bachaokamo, maitumo, etc., are observed for the well-being of the new born baby. Fowl, prawns and several other leaves of trees are also needed for performing such rituals. When the child grows up special forms of worship are performed.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:7 July 2017

Y. Arunima Singha, M.A. in Linguistics and M.A. in English, NET, Ph.D. Research Scholar

K. Kalpi Singha, M.A. in Manipuri, SLET, Ph.D.

Linguistic and Cultural Aspects of Reang

The Reang people use cremation to dispose of the mortal remains of the dead. First of all, the corpse is bathed with water. After that, the corpse is dressed using a new clean rikatouh, the head is dressed with another rikatouh and wrapped. Rinai and risa are used for the female corpse. Prior to cremation, a fowl is sacrificed at the foot of the dead person, after which a pot filled with rice and fish is placed at the feet of the deceased. The night is spent by performing dancing rituals. Rice beer is distributed among all the mourners except the family members of the deceased. After that the body is placed on a pyre and cremated. The religious culture prevalent among the Reang is similar to that of other Tripuri tribes of Tripura. The Reangs believe in many god and goddesses. Their festivals are same as those prevailing among other tribes of Tripura. However, most of these traditions has changed and those who are Christians among the Reangs follow the Christian tradition of burying the corpse.

1.11. Economy and Crafts

Like other tribal communities of the North-Eastern States, Reangs still practice Jhum cultivation. In course of time, this practice has decreased much than earlier due to deforestation and plantation

The Reang handicrafts are famous in Tripura. Rich varieties of handicraft items are made by these people. The items are mostly made up of bamboo and cane. The arts and crafts of Reang are well known in Tripura, especially the traditional bamboo craft and cane craft items. The rich tradition of the Reang handicraft not only enriches their culture. But it also contributes to the economy of the state. The crafts of Reang includes of women weaving the clothes for men and for themselves. The cloth is of multiple colours.

1.12. Cultural and Religious Beliefs of Reang

The cultural domain of Reang is rich with different multi-dimensional features. Folk dances, festivals and music are the prime elements of the Reang culture. The Reang festivals comprise both of religious and cultural.

Rituals play an important role in the life of Reang people. They perform various rituals to enjoy good health and serene mental and spiritual life. The Reangs were primarily Vaishnavis, but there are many Christians among them as well. They are similar

Language in Indiawww.languageinindia.comISSN 1930-294017:7 July 2017

Y. Arunima Singha, M.A. in Linguistics and M.A. in English, NET, Ph.D. Research Scholar

K. Kalpi Singha, M.A. in Manipuri, SLET, Ph.D.

Linguistic and Cultural Aspects of Reang

to Tripuris in being polytheists. Worshipping style of the Reang is also similar to Tripuris, with a priest or okchai performing the rituals. A green bamboo pole serves the purpose of the idol. The offering to the deities are made to the bamboo pole. There are customs for celebration of different types of pujas among the Reangs.

1.13. Social Organization

The society of Reang community is patriarchal. The man is the head of the family and he has the supreme power of making decisions concerning family matters. However, women are also respected in the society. The elder members of the society and married couples are higher on the social hierarchy than unmarried boys and girls in Reang. Strict village institution or administration is prevalent among the Reang people which their ancestors had once practiced since time immemorial. The Reangs are non-vegetarians. They take meat and fish and rice beer is indispensable in most of the ceremonies in Reang.

1.14. Typological Overview

The various typological features found in Reang are:

- (i) Reang is a tonal language. It has two tones, high and low.
- (ii) Reang exhibits a six-vowel system found in most of the Tibeto-Burman languages and twenty consonantal phonemes.
- (iii) There are more suffixes than prefixes in Reang.
- (iv) Verbs are marked for tense/aspect and mood.
- (v) Like many other Bodo-Garo languages, Reang has a rich set of classifiers.
- (vi) Like many other South Asian languages, affixation, compounding and reduplication are the three main word formation processes in the language.
- (vii) In Reang, there is no grammatical gender. The gender in Reang is natural.
- (viii) Case relation in Reang is expressed by postposing the case markers to the nouns or pronouns.
- (ix) The adjectives in Reang are functioning as nominal modifier in a noun phrase. The adjectives, numerals and numeral classifiers usually follow the head noun.
- (x) Reang is a verb final language, with dominant SOV word order.

Conclusion

On the basis of above findings, we can draw the following conclusions:

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:7 July 2017

Y. Arunima Singha, M.A. in Linguistics and M.A. in English, NET, Ph.D. Research Scholar

K. Kalpi Singha, M.A. in Manipuri, SLET, Ph.D.

Linguistic and Cultural Aspects of Reang

1. Reang language falls under the Bodo-Garo subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman language family.
2. The Reang clans are divided into Meska and Molsoi groups.
3. Phonological variation is one of the significant features of distinction between Reang and other dialects of Kokborok.
4. Reangsdonot have their own script.
5. It is the second dominant language of Tripura.
6. The marriage system prevalent among the Reang is similar to other Tripuri tribes of Tripura.
7. Dance and music are an integral part of Reang life.
8. Reang people use cremation to dispose of the mortal remains of the dead.
9. The society of Reang is patriarchal.
10. Folk dances, festivals and music are the prime elements of Reang culture.

Select Bibliography

- Benedict, Paul K. 1972. *Sino-Tibetan: A Conspectus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Census of India, 2001, Series 1-India: Language, Office of the Registrar General, India, 2A Mansingh Road, New Delhi-11.
- Singha, Arunima.Y. 2017. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Assam University, Silchar.



Y. Arunima Singha, M.A. in Linguistics, M.A. in English, NET, Ph.D. Research Scholar
 Department of Linguistics
 Assam University
 Silchar788011

Language in Indiawww.languageinindia.comISSN 1930-2940**17:7 July 2017**

Y. Arunima Singha, M.A. in Linguistics and M.A. in English, NET, Ph.D. Research Scholar
 K. Kalpi Singha, M.A. in Manipuri, SLET, Ph.D.
 Linguistic and Cultural Aspects of Reang

Assam
India
yendrebam.arunima@gmail.com



Dr. K. Kalpi Singha, M.A. in Manipuri, SLET, Ph.D.
Department of Manipuri
Assam University
Silchar 788011
Assam
India
kalpikonsam@gmail.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 **17:7 July 2017**

Y. Arunima Singha, M.A. in Linguistics and M.A. in English, NET, Ph.D. Research Scholar

K. Kalpi Singha, M.A. in Manipuri, SLET, Ph.D.

Linguistic and Cultural Aspects of Reang