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LANGUAGE AND SOCIO-CULTURAL IDENTITY: A STUDY ON RONGMEI (KABUI) TRIBE

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Abstracts

The Kabui (Rongmei) belongs to one of the ethnic groups of North-Eastern India who live mostly in Manipur, Nagaland and North Cachar hills of Assam. They are recognised as a scheduled tribe in the constitution of India. Culture is the 'Complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, custom, any other capabilities and habits required by a man or a member of the society. The socio-cultural aspects of the people, dresses, festivals, dances, rituals and ceremonies. Language is a way to communicate cultural values, beliefs, customs, and traditions. It also helps to preserve and convey culture. Language can also be used to learn about a culture's behaviour and customs. Language is one of the most important elements of any culture. Language and culture are so interconnected that it's hard to understand one without the other. Language is a symbolic system that allows people to share their beliefs, experiences, and knowledge, which are the building blocks of culture. People have often tried to bring the world closer to the life through language, The transferring and passing of life style is happening through language and it's the language which shows the deviation of cultures.

• Keywords: Culture, language, Kabui Tribe, Beliefs, Customs.

1. Introduction

The Kabui (Rongmei) belongs to one of the ethnic groups of North-Eastern India who live mostly in Manipur, Nagaland and North Cachar hills of Assam. They are recognised as a scheduled tribe in the constitution of India. The term 'Rongmei' has indeed, a very strong bearing on geographical direction. Thus 'Rong' means 'south' or southern direction man of the south or southern direction or 'southerner' (Aphun, 2022, p. 74). Rongmei Naga (Kabui) tribes have their distinctive tradition, sociocultural and linguistic variants and with native religion, economic, kinship and marriage institutions, which had remained almost intact. They are of

Mongoloid racial groups and speaks Tibet-Burman language with patrilineal and patriarchal social norms. The Rongmei Naga tribe also has their individual endogamous groups. Like other tribes, they have a long history as well as the rich socio-cultural heritage their own. But, the history of the Rongmei Naga can be constructed based on the available folk sources and other oral traditions myths, legends etc (Gangmei, 2020, p. 19). Rongmei naga tribe still follow the indigenous faith and culture. They worship the supreme God which they called 'Ragwang'. The still preserve and practices their indigenous religion and culture as they believe that it is important to keep their identity intact as religion and culture are inseparable.

2. Objectives

(1) To explore how the Rongmeis (Kabui) have migrated to Manipur Valley.

(2) The paper will attempt to rich in culture, tradition, costume in Rongmei (Kabui) tribe.

(3) The paper analyse to Rongmei (Kabui) socio-cultural identity and their language.

3. Methodology

Methods used to write this paper include both cultural methods, village chief, as well as the use of primary sources. Apart from from secondary sources like articles, books, historical sources have also been used in this paper.

4. The Rongmei Migration to the Valley

The Rongmei means the people of the fallow lands and the southern region (also referred as Maruongmei). The Rongmei further to the East and west in Imphal valley and Cachar valley in the historical times. With regard to the puttee, N.B. Pamei writes, 'A total of nine Puimei village are grouped together between the Liangmei and the Rongmei. However, the villages are quite small (a part from one in the south) by Naga standard more keeping with some of the newer Naga groups dotting across Manipur valley. It is of course reasonable to speculate that this group was a mixture of Liangmai, Rongmei and others.' They are found in the village of Haochong, Oktan, Yeilong, Nungtek, Tamenglong, Lonjang, Puichi in Tamenglong hills between the Orang River and Iyei River. A couple of settlements are also found in the Manipur valley. Thus, migration of the Rongmeis from the hills to the Manipur valley was due partly to the comparative economic advantages of the valley and partly to the lack of security for life in the Manipur hills. It is a fact that those who had once come down from the hills, and had the real taste of the life in the valley better economic advantages and security had ceased to entertain any more thought of going back to the hills to face the real rigours of life there as before. It is a fact that migration of the Rongmei people from the hills to the valley as well as from the villages to the towns, becomes increasing in the present days because of better amenities of life available in those places (Aphun, 2022, p. 43).

5. Rongmei Culture

E. B. Tylor's concept of culture refers to 'the complex whole, which include knowledge, belief, art, moral, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' is adopted in the present study. To him, it express two aspects material and non-material. Tylor deals with the letter. Likewise, the term

culture in the context of the Kabui Nagas (Rongmei) refers to the non material aspects of their cultural expressions.

Culture includes, technology, economic organisation, Social system, polity, mode of worship, food habits, and so on. The non-material culture covers the thought patterns, institutions, the behaviour and love of beauty expressed in dress, costumes, ornaments, system of beliefs, moral laws, various expressions in the form of festivals, songs, dances and music.

The Kabui Naga (Rongmei) are very rich in culture. They are deeply religious people who are proud of their cultural heritage, which has been handed down from many generations. Throughout the history, the people are known for great festivals, colourful ornaments and costumes, religious ceremonies, beautiful dances and meaningful hymn and songs. Ursula Graham described them as, 'honest, stubborn, conservative, excitable and credulous. Their conservatism comes out of their sense of pride in the superiority of their culture in relation to others and their village based world view. The Cultural life of the people operates around the village community and the family households (Aphun, 2022, p. 94).

6. Rongmei Costume

The Rongmei people are known for their rich and colourful costumes. They are very fond of traditional art of weaving. They use different kinds of dresses on the basis of gender, age and occasions. Distinct patterns are made for both sexes. It is believed that the colour of the costumes was taken from the colours of cows and oxen. According to myth, one day, Amhang, a culture hero and an orphan informed his villagers (who were exposing and weaving their cloths on the village road and courtyard of the village) that he would bring a herd of cattle in the village) that the would bring a herd of cattle in the village. Further, he told the villagers not to expose firewood nor weave their clothes on the heart of the village on this particular day. But the villagers remained unheaded and continued to prepare, weave and expose their clothes. The villagers were thinking and saying that how he could bring a large number of cattle as her never reared even a cow. As a poor person, it was beyond his capacity to bring such a big number of cattle. Actually Amhang led by a herd of cattle (of having different colours) which jumped over the exposing weaving clothes and the colour of the cattle reflected on the clothes thus producing varieties of colours on the weaving clothes. It is also believed that the colours of traditional costumes were taken from the seven colours pf Rainbow. The dresses worn by children, teenager, adults, married men, elders, olden and minor girls, major girls, married women and old women are classified and given below according to their age gradation. The costumes given below are worn and attired by the TRC people on different occasions

Male costume dress (Name of Fabric)

i. Shinei Pheipong - Shwal used by adolescents
ii. Themphei - Shawl used by adolescents
iii. Mareipan- Shawl used by adolescents and youth
iv. Pheingao -Shawl used by youth and married man
v. Chingkhongphei - Shawl used by old men
vi. Kharamphei - Shawl worn by old men
vii. Mashin Pheipong - Shawl used by old men

viii. Renglan - lower garment used in dance for all ages including the deceased.
ix. Songnai - lower garment used in dance by adolescents
x. Khimchatphei - Shawl used by youth age between 18 to 35 years old
xi. Langthuphei - Shawl used by married men
xii. Phaikam - used at legs in dance
xiii. Phaisang - used at legs in dance
xiv. Phaidom - used at legs in dance

Female costume dress

i. Lengli pheisoi - girls garment used in dance
ii. Langlum Pheisoi - black lower garment used by all ages in dance marriage and death
iii. Langjin Pheisoi - lower garment worn by all ages in marriage and other social occasions
iv. Khim pheisoi - lower garment used by all ages in funeral service
v. Talamdui pheisoi - lower garment used by all ages in worship
vi. Nai pheisoi - lower garment used by girls only
vii. Pheilak - both women and girls use in waist in dance
viii. Puileo Pheisoi - lower garment of young women
ix. Pheimu pheisoi - garment of girls used at home
x. Pheikinna - garment used in field work
xi. Phaangphei - garment covering chest used in dance by girls and women (kamson, 2015, p. 11).

7. Social Costume

The custom is a social phenomena of traditional practices and usages constantly followed by a group of society from time to time of immemorial and transmitted from generation to generation. To be a valid custom, the custom of a society must possess of a) ancient practice and usages b)The natural justices and equity c) The continuous historical truth d) Adoption and obligation e) Up-holding public morality.

The custom of Rongmei society is a along established social habits and usages followed from generation to generation which regulates the social life and control social activities. In fact the custom of Rongmei is the repository of our social heritage (Makuga, 20007, p. 3).

8. Religious belief

The Rongmeis are animist and polytheistic in their religious belief ‘Ragwang’ king of the Gods who created the earth and all things in the universe is considered the Parton God. Keipa Bamboo (male God) and kepi Bamboo (Female God) who are believed to have protected the villagers from physical sufferings are important deities. A boulder generally portrays the image of the God. They generally warship gods and goddesses either in the form of prayer or sacrifices with a strong belief that the deity will help them and fulfil their wishes. The sacrifices consists of offerings vegetables, grains, cocks, animals like pig, cattle, meat etc.

At present, many of the Rongmeis specially residing in the interior hilly region have converted into Christianity. As a result, many of them have abandoned most of those traditional belief and practices (Devi, 2021, p. 76).

9. Festivals

(i) Gaan Ngai: Gain Ngai is the biggest festival of the Rongmei Nagas. It is generally celebrated in the month of December or January which is the season when all the crops and paddy had been gathered. Literally the term Gaan Ngai means farewell festival of the old year. As such this festival is also considered as the festival of dead and leaving. As the festival itself falls in the winter season it marks too the end of the old year and the other heralds the arrival of New year.

(ii) Ringai: It is a merry making festival of the youths, which fall in the month of February.

(iii) Nanu: It is in this day the Rongmei children's seek blessing from their parents, as a result elder and parents too made a feast for them

(iv) Naphun-Ngai: This a seedling and sowing festival. On this day made their appeasement to the deity of the crops Napsinmai

(v) Dekap-Ngai: The ritual sanctification day is called Dekap-Ngai

(vi) Tunna-Ngai: It is a baking day of the youths. The whole day is enjoyed in merry making, especially in baking traditional cake by the young boys and girls and made presentation to the other families

(vii) Napkau-Ngai: This is celebrated in the month of October when the paddy become yellow and ripe.

(viii) Mate: It is prosperity festival of the young boys and young girls

(ix) Banru: A feast of wealth is called 'Banru'. A villager who is blessed with prosper and would like to give a feast to his villagers as a kind of thanks to his god. He would give a feast called Banru. The performer of Banru is usually given a high esteem in the village. It is even honoured in his death. During the whole hour or days of his funeral time the drum would be beaten without any storage. The very mark of the beating drum is called 'khuang-ka-Chuang' (Lalsim, 2005, p. 240)

10. Language and cultural identity

Language is a fundamental part of cultural identity, as it is a means of expressing and preserving culture and it is way to connect with others. Language is integral to cultural identity. It is how humans communicate, express themselves, convey meaning, and get their messages across. It is the medium through which people express their cultures and values. Language and culture are interrelated, with culture forming language while language reflects culture. In addition, culture is affected by the shared experiences of individuals, their civilization, and history, while the varying needs of a particular culture shape language (Kaddum, D. M., & Kacar. D. H. I., 2023, p. 51)

Language as a mode of human expression through speech communicating the intention of one person to another. The mother tongue of Rongmei nagas (Kabui) is called as 'Ronglat' means Rongmei (Kabui) dialect. According to the ancient anthropologist Rongmei Nagas (Kabui) belong to the Tibet-o-Barman family of the Mongolian race. Accordingly Dr. Grierson had assessed the Rongmei (Kabui) language as naga Bodo sub

family of Tibeto Barman in his report of linguistic survey of India (Makuga, 1994, p. 87). According to the story of Rongmei Nagas forefather in the beginning the God gave the scripts for reading and writing to the Nagas too in a book skins. But out of ignorance the nagas ate up the book of skins by roasting in the fire instead of using it for the knowledge of reading and writing. Hence, the Nagas have no book of written languages. However, the Nagas possessed the knowledge and means of communicating language by signs or signals and that signal language was used to communicate the intention or decision of a village or a tribe from one Naga to another although they couldn't understand the language each other. A few example of the signal language adopted by the Rongmei Nagas (Kabui) in the early days are recorded here for the information of the present generation. Rongmei (Kabui) language is an essential element of cultural identity (Makuga, 1994, p. 85)

11. Conclusion

All the socio-cultural events and facts has a close relationship with the society and it always participate in all the affairs of the people. The study of the language and cultural identity relation clearly shows the intricate and complex equation which is shared between the two. Language help people to express their believes, ideas and life-style. When there is a language among people, there is an identity that people hold to show their culture. Language and culture are highly dependent on each other and are intricately connected. As languages disappear, cultures die, and the world loses raw knowledge and intellectual achievements. Language is the principal device through which human beings communicate, but it is also the tool used to transmit one's culture from one gener-

ation to another. Language is, hence, a medium of learning values and norms of society and then the vehicle we use to transfer or pass on different cultural elements to younger members of Rongmei Naga (Kabui) society.

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