

MAPPING TRADITION AND MODERNIZATION: A STUDY ON THE EVOLUTION OF COSTUMES OF THE TRIPURI AND REANG WOMEN IN TRIPURA

Gitanjali Roy ¹  

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of English, & Coordinator, Faculty of Liberal Arts, ICFAI University, Tripura, India



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Corresponding Author

Gitanjali Roy, itzgitz@gmail.com,
gitanjaliroy@iutripura.edu.in

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ABSTRACT

Tripura is a land-locked state in Northeast India that comprises of multiple communities. Majorly dominated by the Tribal and Bengali communities, this state has witnessed drastic changes in its culture and heritage. Since partition, a huge demographic and ethnographic change has ushered in major challenges for the tribal communities. One such major change was witnessed in the evolution of Tripuri and Reang costumes. The traditional dresses of the communities faced historic challenges that questioned their personal and collective identity. The impact of westernization and modernization on Tripuri dressing culture shall be analysed in this paper. This paper shall also try to study how patterns of cloth and style of dressing have evolved due to the impact of global culture over the local culture. The reasons for the evolution shall be mapped through qualitative data collected from different people (of different communities) belonging to different parts of the state.

Keywords: Tripuri, Reang, Tradition, Evolution, Costumes

1. INTRODUCTION

Clothes as signifiers codify cultural values that people make, exchange, produce and consume within the community. The exchange of this value system attains a symbolic value that becomes a sign of tradition and heritage for a particular group of people. Dress becomes a marker of cultural identity. Dress embodies a personal and collective identity that is passed down from one generation to the other. The codes of a community's dressing style are transmitted by means of memory that constructs the notion of traditional beliefs, rituals, practices, ideologies that are integral to that group [Iuga \(2016\)](#). The fashion industry has influenced the

traditional ethnic cultural markers. Westernization has influenced the young generations' style of wearing clothes. Modernization has made the young one experiment with different fabrics and traditional garments. Cloth is a symbol of not only a community's tradition but is a signifier of a person's identity in relation to one's gender, continuity, and discontinuity with traditional value [Disele et al. \(2011\)](#). The women of the Tripuri¹ and Reang² community for ages wore their traditional dress known as rigna (also known as *rignai*) and risa (also known as *risha, riha, ria*). The evolution of the clothes worn by the womenfolk of the Tripuri and Reang communities will be the focus of this paper.

The study is based on the material culture of the women belonging to the Tripuri and Reang communities. Out of 19 tribes (Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Halam, Noatia, Mog, Garo, Munda, Chakma, Lushai, Santhal, Uchai, Khasi, Bhil, Lepcha, Bhutia, Chaimal, Kuki), Tripuri and Reang are considered the most primitive ones. This paper is largely based on secondary data collection. The papers that are referred to, had an ethnographic research study. The locality chosen by the researchers was- Khowai and West Tripura district where the Tripuri tribes are densely populated; North and South Tripura districts where the Reang tribes are majorly settled. Agartala, the capital city of Tripura was also selected for the study. Data was also collected from friends and students virtually and physically. Besides that, a qualitative questionnaire was collected from a group of respondents belonging to different communities (Debbarma, Tripuri, Meitei, Bengali, Darlong, Chakma) who are residents from all over Tripura (Agartala, Jamirghat, Teliamura, Sepahijala, Khowai, Champahour, Kanchancherra). Before moving into the contemporary scenario, a look into the past and a reading of the myths shall give an overview of the traditional culture rooted with the costumes of the Tripuri and Reang communities.

King Trilochan who attained the 'Rajsuya'³ sacrificed by the Pandava king Yudhistir is believed to have developed Tripura in the field of arts and culture, textile design, and knitting during his rule, according to Dipali Debbarma, an expert traditional weaver. Colonel Mahim Chandra Thakur, a general of Tripura in his book *Riha* mentioned that the Subrai king (Trilochan) introduced the process of cotton plantation through jhumming⁴ to his people. According to a myth, the Subrai king once declared that he would marry the woman who would impress him with textile designs. One day, a woman designed a new pattern in *ria* (wrapper used to cover the upper abdomen). The design was of sun rays falling on the wings of flies. As flies were not static, imitating the design, according to the king was a difficult task. The king was inquisitive about how the design was made. The king went to her home and was shocked to discover a dead snake that was very dear to him. The snake used to live in a shelter built by the king. The snake was killed by the father of the woman who has impressed the king with the new design. The king disclosed that the snake was cursed. The snake was the gandharva⁵ of heaven. The snake once promised to present him with 360 forms of textile designs through different women. Out of 360 designs, 240 were presented to the king. As per the king's promise, he married them. It is also believed that in the valley where the snake died, the *khumpui*⁶ flower is found. Since then, the women knew to weave the traditional *ria* using traditional method.

The indigenous community is self-sufficient in nature. Two variety of cotton is produced- one white in color and the other slightly reddish. Seeds of the cotton are separated in a wooden hand-made machine called *moath*. The cotton is shredded by a bow made of bamboo called *pathzar*.

Figure 1



Figure 1 Moath TUI Editorial Board. (2019, July 24)

Figure 2



Figure 2 Pathzar TUI Editorial Board. (2019, July 24)

The cotton is then made into a thread that is used for weaving. The color of the thread is also made naturally. From *ramua* plant, leaves are collected and boiled in the afternoon. At night, the leaves are left to get soaked. The next morning, *changal* or *kharpani* is added to the leaves. *Kharpani* is an immersion of alkali and water that is extracted from banana leaves in a traditional method. Then the white threads are dipped in the solution. Different other colors are also added using shrubs, roots, barks, leaves, etc. Loin looms⁷ are used for weaving. Different types of sticks are used for the purpose.

Figure 3

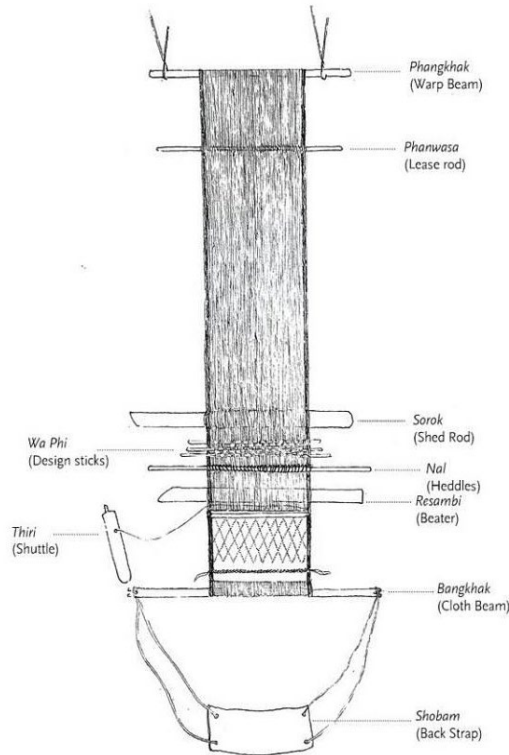


Figure 3 Loin loom [Unnikrishnan \(2011\)](#)

It is traditionally made of *swmal* wood. *Bangkhak* is placed in the back of a woman during knitting. It is traditionally made of leather. Some other apparatuses are *nal* and *sorak*. The threads are tied in a base called *besko*. The rope that connects the *besko* with a pillar is called *takduk*. The pillar is called *thong*. The weaver sits with a loom fixed at the back-strap. Her legs rest on the footrest that is adjustable to keep the loom stretched. The weaving requires shredding motion, picking motion, and beating motion. Commenting on the importance of *risha*, Jishnu Dev Varma⁸ writes,

The fourteen deities or Chaudha Devta, as they are collectively called was the ancient deity that the Manikya kings of Tripura worshipped, from times immemorial. After the death of the tyrannical king Tripur (many say the state got its name from him) there was anarchy all over the kingdom. His widowed queen Heerabati, prayed to Lord Shiva for the welfare of the people and to restore the kingdom to its glory. With the blessings of Lord Siva, she gave birth to a son Trilochan, under his reign Tripura flourished and his people referred to him as Subrai.

One day as Heerabati was bathing in the tank, she heard voices calling out to her; she traced them to a huge banyan tree nearby. She went closer to find out who was calling her. On top of the tree, she saw the heads of fourteen gods and goddesses all crying out for help,

“We cannot come down, to bless your land as there is an angry bull under the tree”. On hearing this, the queen immediately threw her *Risha* (a narrow piece of handwoven cloth worn by indigenous womenfolk) on the bull, which then became calm. Then she ordered her people to bring down the fourteen heads of the gods and goddesses. The worship of Chaudha Devta thus began. This was

perhaps a legend, in which the *Risha* symbolised prayer and respect that brings inner peace. It became an age-old custom, even during worship of “Goria” the deity of prosperity, the queen’s *Risha* was placed before the throne. Without the *Risha*, the rituals remained incomplete. [Varma \(2021\)](#).

He added-

The ‘*Risha*’ later found a mention in a letter written by Mr. Ralph Leake (11th March, 1783AD), who was the British Resident of Tripura during the reign of Maharani Janhabi Devi. In this letter, he described his farewell ceremony and stated that the Queen had presented him with a ‘*Risha*’ as a token of honour. Mr. Leake was touched by this gesture and the beauty of the fabric. He gifted it to the Art Collection Department of the British Museum in London. It was said that ‘to give a *Risha* is to give from the heart’. This saying reflected the feelings the indigenous people had towards the objects that were made by them. They believed that these were endowed with their spirit. It was held that the spirit of the weaver and the wearer met in the object. It was for this reason; earlier these articles were never put up for sale. [Varma \(2021\)](#).

One of the respondents belonging to Tripuri community observes that Tripuris were always worshipper of mother Nature. During Goria puja, they decorate a bamboo and the topmost part of the bamboo is tied with the traditional *risha* that signifies love and respect. The Tripuri goddesses’ idols are also made wearing traditional attire. *Khuluma* is the goddess of cotton and knowledge; *Mailuma*, goddess of rice and wealth; *Oshama*, goddess of war and power. Respondents belonging to Bengali, Tripuri communities made parallelism between the goddesses. The respondents of the different communities identified *Mailuma* as Maa Laxmi, *Khuluma* as Maa Saraswati, *Oshama* as Maa Durga. Another respondent belonging to Meitei community, observes that of late, one of two Durga / Saraswati idols are made to wear Tripuri *rignai*/ Manipuri *fanek* (the latest being at Mohanpur, in October 2023) in the Puja pandals of Agartala and outskirts. Since Bengalis form the major ethnolinguistic community in the state, this shift to traditional costume might be an effort to restore harmony and balance in the society as well as to portray inclusiveness. Interestingly, according to the respondent, only the attire belongs to the indigenous communities, the facial features do not.

Figure 4



Figure 4 Goddesses of the Tripuri Community [Culture of Tiprasa Debbarma. \(2020, February 12\)](#).

The traditional dress of the Tripuri and Reang women has the same name and same draping style. The upper abdomen is covered by *risha* and the lower abdomen is covered by *rignai*. Tripuri women wear their costumes with a base of red and white color whereas Reang wears only black and white. The colors and motifs of the costume help one to identify the women of the tribe. Since the partition of India, Tripura has undergone drastic political, social, cultural, and economic development. With demographic and ethnographic changes, the heritage of the communities witnessed cross-cultural influences.

Traditional *rignai* of Tripuri tribes are of three types- *sada*, *chamathiya*, and *shikla*.

Figure 5



Figure 5 The Three Types of *Rignai* Sarkar & Nilanjana (2018).

The base color combination of all the three types is in red and white however the color panels are different as seen in Figure 5.

Figure 6



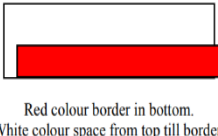
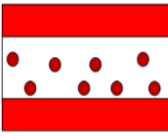
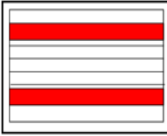

	Sada	Chamathia	ChamathiaShikla
Age group wearing the rignai	Worn by all age groups	Worn by all age groups	Worn only by younger girls.
Colour Panels	 <p>Red colour border on top and bottom. White space in middle</p>	 <p>White colour border on top and bottom Red colour second border on top and bottom White space in middle</p>	 <p>Red colour border in bottom. White colour space from top till border.</p>
Work on white space	 <p>Small motifs all over white space Intricate motifs on red border</p>	 <p>All over stripes on white space Intricate motifs on red border</p>	 <p>No motifs or stripe on white space Intricate motifs on red border</p>
Significance of the rignai	Worn on festivals, marriages, dance	Worn on festivals, marriages, dance.	Worn on many occasions especially when marriage is fixed.

Figure 6 Detailed Description of Tripuri *Rignai* Sarkar & Nilanjana (2018).

A respondent from Debbarma community commented that she wore the ‘Chamathia’ *rignai* during special occasion. Her mother wore it during the inauguration of the Tripura Legislative Assembly. She too wore it on her convocation day. This shows that the present generation takes pride in wearing their traditional attire on special events of their life. In marriage ceremonies, mother-in-law(s) gift *rignai* to their daughter-in-law(s) to show love and respect (Geographical Indications Journal, 2023). Adolescent girls are first gifted *rignai* when she becomes 12-14 years of age. In an occasion called *Risa Sormani*, the adolescent girl celebrates herself as a grown-up girl. The event centres around the well-being of the girl where elder women worships god Lampra to bestow His blessings upon the adolescent girl. *rignai* (s) are even used by mothers as baby-carrier on the mother’s back. On the other hand, the Reang *rignai* is of two types that are worn depending on the age of the women. A black and white *rignai* with stripes all over the dress is worn by young females. Young girls and married women wear this *rignai*. Usually, the married women wear the *rignai* with a blouse and the younger ones wear the *rignai* with tops. The *rignai* with stripes on the borders is worn only by elderly women like grandmothers. With time the designs, patterns, colors have evolved. One of the respondents belonging to Debbarma community identifies *rignai* and *risha* not as a piece of clothing but a representative device that shares their “cultural identity and heritage of the wearer”. Its significance goes beyond aesthetics, embodying tradition, spirituality, and a connection to the rich heritage of the community.

Figure 7

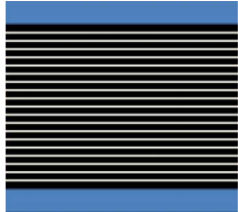

	All over striped rignai	Rignai with stripes in the borders
Age group wearing the rignai	Worn by teenagers and married women.	Worn elderly women above the age of 40 years.
Colour Panels	 <p>Borders on top and near the hem can be in black, brown or blue. All over stripes in black and white.</p>	 <p>The body of the rignai is black in colour. 3 lines of motifs near the hem in white and brown colour.</p>
Stripes	Allover stripes	Three line of motifs near the hem
Significance of the rignai	Worn on festivals, marriages, dance	Worn especially by elderly women, when they become a mother-in-law or grandmother.

Figure 7 Detailed Description of Reang *Rignai* Sarkar & Nilanjana (2018).

The tribal women traditionally weave geometric motifs that are unique to their community. In an interview conducted by Paramita Sarkar, Dipali Debbarma emphasized making motifs inspired by nature and commonplace objects. The motifs are specific to their community. For instance- the Tripuri community weave *larima* (butterfly), *bang* (spider); Reang community makes *malim mhba* (jasmine flower), *wah mul* (bamboo flower) and *thakumtum* (duck’s egg). The design of butterfly is said to be knitted by queens. Lord Macaulay has preserved a sample in London Museum. There are many other designs such as *lakkhipati* (main traditional design) in which different colored threads are used, *anji* (local flower), leaves of bet (cane) plants, rainbow design, *tongla khandai* (imitated from the cockscomb), etc. Many other designs are made in contemporary times. Designs made on small pieces of

cloth are known as *rikari* that are preserved so that women can imitate the motifs. Some of the traditional *rikari* are *anji*, *khumpang*, *khumtakma*, *khumanthala*, *khowplasa*, etc. The motifs of the Tripuri are woven using yellow, green, blue colors. The Reang motifs are woven in white color. The motifs are now experimented using different colors. Now-a-days, *risha* is worn with a blouse or carried as a stole. *Rignai* is draped like a saree or worn with a western top or short *kurti*. One of the respondents belonging to Tripuri community narrated her grandmother's tale that certain patterns like the flower or the butterfly are weaved only for the royal queens. Those *rignais* were considered as a symbol of royalty and status. The weavers who used to weave the *rignai* for the royals were not allowed to weave these patterns for the commoners.

Figure 8



Figure 8 Three Generations Wearing the *Risha* and *Rignai* Based on their Choice [Sarkar & Nilanjana \(2013\)](#).

Traditionally, cotton yarns were used for weaving clothes. Now acrylic, rayon, polyester yarns are also used. It is believed, according to Jishu Dev Varma that the indigenous women learned the art of weaving from the spiders. The royal house *rishas* were woven out of silk. The threads were of gold and silver bought from distant lands.

Figure 9



Figure 9 Queen Manmohoni, Wife of Maharaj Bir Chandra Manikya Debbarma in Traditional Attire [Culture of Tripura Debbarma. \(2020\)](#)

Traditional clothes within a community are worn during occasions too. The pattern or style of the cloth is associated with particular event. This also adds meaning and value to traditional clothing. For instance, the wedding dress has specifications in every community but it had radical changes over years due to socio-economic reasons. The Tripuris wear *kamchuli borok*, a traditional top made after weaving and then cut with a traditional knife called *da borok*. The measurement is made with hand and fingers. Traditional waistcoats are also made that have designs (inherited from grandmothers). *Rignai chatwui* is also a traditional top that has a lot of design. These are also worn during special and festive occasions. The workplace tops are usually full-sleeved as for jhumming, one needs to work under scorching sunlight. *Ringai chatwui* and *risha tokha* are worn by women during Garia and *Lebang* dance. *Ringai borook* and *rikutu borok* are bridal *rignai* worn specially by Debbarma brides. In *osha mwfai* (Durga puja), married women also wear this *rignai* to worship the goddess *ama osha*. Respondent-2 notes that wearing traditional dresses are a mark of respect for the occasion emphasising a sense of sanctity and respect that fosters a sense of community bonding. During cultural gathering it involves a collective participation and the attire becomes a unifying element strengthening communal ties. *Ringai takborok* is like a *benerasi rignai* worn by the Tripuri women now-a-days during their wedding. [Figure 10](#) shows a bride wearing the *ringai takborok* that is a blend of the Christian gown designed with the traditional patterns of the community. On the other hand, gifting *risha* has become a marker of respect.

Figure 10



Figure 10 Contemporary *Ringai Takborok Rignai Takborok*. (2020).

The reasons for the evolution of traditional dresses are numerous as per the responses of the interviewers. With change in time, women have become educated. They started working and got engaged with activities that did not allow them to devote time for weaving. The urban women as a result became dependent on rural

women and industrial clothes. For easy availability and cheaper materials, they even compromised with their age-old conformity of traditional dresses. Again, countercultural interaction made them copy designs and motifs from sarees worn by women of other communities. The educated tribal women gradually lost interest to learn weaving as a result they were not skilled weavers like their ancestors. Due to less time, they even prefer making simpler motifs. It is also believed that the length of traditional *rignai* was from waist to mid-calf that made it easy for the women to climb hilly terrain and to cultivate. As they shifted to the plains, the length was increased till the ankle. The Bengali women wore a blouse with a saree. The tribal woman learned to wear the blouse with their traditional attire. With this, the style of draping *risha* and *rignai* also got changed. With the traditional dress, the women used to wear beaded ornaments and coin necklaces. This helped them to cover the exposed upper abdomen above *risha*. The women gradually stopped wearing their traditional ornaments. The tribes who were identified by their traditional color and motif preferred wearing contemporary costumes easily available in their local markets. Now-a-days, there are many online pages on social networking sites that sell *rignai* not only at a cheaper price but also with contemporary motifs and finesse.

Figure 11



Figure 11 Online *Rignai* Advertised in 'Tripura *Rignai* and Fashion Hunt', a Facebook Page [Tripuri Rignai and Fashion Hunt](#). (2017)

A major concern of the online *risha* and *rignai* products focusses on saleability factor and they have target-based customers. As the online market exposes traditional attire to the world, it must compete with the global fashion industry. The pressure to keep in pace with the global trend, creates fusion of styles. Some online platforms focus on promoting handmade artisanal products. This emphasis on craftsmanship may contribute to the availability of unique and intricately designed *rignai*(s). One of the respondents from Tripuri community observes that the amalgamation and modification in the traditional attire changes the aesthetics of the costumes. *Rignai*, for instance, is worn primarily as a lower garment. However, modification in forms of gown, skirt, shirt and even shoes has been incorporated in the contemporary times. According to the respondent, the traditional patterns found in shoes is a marker of disrespect and sets wrong example against traditional values. Criticising this, the respondent devalues the modification and comments that experimentation should be done not by hurting the sentiment of the community. Cultural sensitivity and respect are an essential factor that will help to preserve the tradition of the communities.

Respondents believe that earlier generation emphasized on maintaining cultural authenticity and thus they wore the traditional attire to preserve the heritage of their families that got passed from one generation to the other. One of the respondents observed that in the rural areas, people still try to uphold to their traditional attire. He adds that communities are making efforts to align with contemporary styles, either to stay in line with current trends or to prevent being overshadowed by the increasing popularity of modern wedding dresses from foreign countries. The influence of modernization is not solely a reflection of fashion preferences. It is also a response to changes in religious practices. For instance—many people have adopted Christianity and therefore there has been modification in traditional attire with brides and grooms tailoring their clothes to suit personal preferences. Apart from this, the influence of Bollywood fashion and style statement is also an influencing factor that makes the people keep themselves trendy and fashionable. One of the respondents observed that if modification is not done thoughtfully, the promotion of traditional dresses in the fashion industry can perpetuate stereotypes and can lead to misrepresentation. It is crucial to avoid exoticizing or tokenizing traditional attire for the sake of trends. A Meitei respondent notes that her mother worked at a government office for thirty plus years and she never saw her mother wear a *phanek inaphi* to her workplace ever. She would always be draped in a saree. She vaguely remembers her mother saying that she was kind of mocked or teased by her colleagues for not wearing a saree. Hence, when she started working, she made sure to wear her traditional attire (along with saree, kurtis etc.) to her workplace. She emphasises more about preserving her own identity and culture, of course without belittling other cultures. Another Tripuri respondent shared a similar experience of her previous generation. She narrated that the dominance of the Bengali culture between 1950- 1999 was at its peak. Thus, the Tripuri women felt the pressure of draping the Bengali traditional wear i.e. saree. During 1960s, the government distributed a saree named 'Janata saree' which the women were bound to wear in office, school, and marketplace. When her mother was in class-X, she had to wear *rignai* in her village but outside the village she felt compelled to drape saree. During 1969, a Tripuri girl seems to have undergone molestation just because she worn *rignai* in her college. This incident has hurt the sentiment of the Tripuris and thus inside their villages, they never allowed anyone to wear anything except *rignai*. Since 1900s, it seems the TSF and Tripuris protested in their own ways and thus in the contemporary times, the traditional wear of the Tripuris are well-accepted and well-appreciated. She proudly narrates how they are free to wear *risha* and *rignai* anywhere now.

On-stage folk performances also influence traditional values. The look of the performers is standardized to create a uniformity in the outward appearance. The lead performers sometimes wear a different color. This reflects the influence of Bollywood on the local culture. Social and political changes in the state have changed the communities culturally too. The indigenous people are population-wise less in their native space since the partition has demographically changed the population of Tripura. Land ownership also changed. To adapt to the fast development, the indigenous people located themselves in cities thus moving away from their roots. This had an impact on their culture immensely. Now, they are trying to revive their culture by also displaying their folk dances and songs on different platforms inside the state, outside the state, and even internationally. The opportunity to travel to other regions has broadened their perspective though they carry and represent their ancestral culture through their dress, language, look, etc. One of the respondent's comments that marketing strategies can either contribute to the preservation of traditional dance forms or commercialize them for broader appeal.

Though he is critical about the fact that a striking balance is essential to ensure that the authenticity and cultural significance of the dance forms are maintained. He adds that introducing Tripura's traditional dance forms to the global audience can bring exposure to the local artists creating opportunities for cultural exchange and collaboration. This initiative may educate the global audience to be sensitive towards the history and culture of Tripura. At the same time, the local craftsman will be empowered and can revitalize that traditional craftsmanship. One of the Meitei respondents scornfully draws attention to a folk festival conducted in Bangladesh where a group of dancers from Tripura (non-Tripuris) performed the traditional 'Mamita' dance of Tripura wearing jeans and kurta, but flaunted the *risha*. Such marketing strategies are condemnable, as per the respondent. Misrepresentation of one's culture only hints at cultural appropriation. She also adds that promoting traditional dresses (*rignai/phaneak*) is all about inclusivity and diversity. Several Bengali women, according to her, now wear *rignai/phaneak* in different events. Even regular fashion shows are held in Agartala where Bengali/Indigenous models walk the ramp in these attires. Also, in such fashion shows, one gets to see a lot of fusion in terms of the traditional attire.

Figure 12



Figure 12 Right- Reang Girls Performing Hojagori Dance in Traditional Attire.

Left- The Back Dancers are Wearing their Traditional Attire Whereas the Lead Dancers Have Modified their Traditional Attire [Alamy. \(2021\)](#).

A shift in the production of homemade traditional clothes to industry-based mass textile production also contributed to the changes in traditional patterns. This change was brought in by the young generation who want to keep in pace with contemporary fashion by amalgamating the old values. The costumes have undergone changes in terms of color, pattern, fabric, and even draping style. The designs are not only made in dresses but are also used for the covers of the sofa, bedsheets, bags, or other decorating objects. Exhibitions are displayed in Kolkata, Bombay, Delhi, etc. that are gradually spreading in other states too. Government promotes the cultural practices and traditions of different communities. One such initiative was the Tribal Cultural Festival held in Astabol, Agartala, Tripura on 11th-14th March 2020, where dresses, food, dances, etc. of all the communities were promoted. Besides the dresses (*risha* and *rignai*), masks, shoes, blouses were made in traditional designs.

Fashion shows are a medium these days to display traditional attires. Interestingly, as per a newspaper cutting from *The North East Age*, it shows that in a fashion show organized in Agartala, Tripura's traditional costumes were displayed way back in 1996.

Figure 13



Figure 13 Newspaper Cutting from *The North East Age* Kiching (2020).

Now-a-days, the modelling industry has made drastic changes in the styles of draping the *risha* and *rignai*. The costumes have become a part of the Bollywood fashion industry too.

Figure 14



Figure 14 Models in Tripuri Attire Wansukma (2021)

Figure 15



Figure 15 Models in Reang Attire Wansukma (2021).

In Delhi, a fashion show was organized at Delhi Haat for the celebration of Tripura Day in 2012. The patterns, styles, draping of *risha* and *rignai* got experimented in multiple ways that attracted the audience. In 2018, Madhuri Debbarma wore the *rignai rikutu* in the Miss India competition.

Figure 16



Figure 16 Young Girls Wearing *Risha* and *Rignai* in a Wedding Ceremony

These styles are adopted by the younger generation as can be seen in [Figure 16](#) where a group of young girls are wearing *risha* and *rignai* in a wedding ceremony. Interestingly, all of them have adopted their own style statement of draping their traditional attire.

The cost of the traditional *risha* and *rignai* is comparatively very high as the attire is handwoven. A sociologist wrote,

Wearing a traditional *rinai/rignai* in Tripura is a luxury. It cost around Rs. 6000 (Rs. 1000 for threads and Rs. 5000 for weaving charges) for one set of *rinai/rignai*. And yes, this is the minimum price in villages of Tripura, not even in the city. How can we expect a poor girl/woman could afford to buy such a costly stuff? And we are expecting to revive our culture when we can't even make it affordable for all. If this sort of price continues to dominate in the market, I think people would look for alternatives like wearing jeans, saree, etc. especially amongst the younger generation, and eventually a threat to Tiprasa culture. Because we can't expect everyone to learn weaving, especially a school going child (both girls and boys). If we want to revive and sustain our culture, we have to make it affordable for all. In doing so, it would encourage the girls/boys to wear a traditional attire, as well as enable the weavers to earn a living. If fail to do so, I think the future of our culture is dark. [Jamatia \(2019\)](#).

Perhaps due to this reason, instead of hand weaved *risha* and *rignai*, people prefer industry based printed *risha* and *rignai*.

The present generation, due to the countercultural exchange with different communities, adopted new social and cultural values that get reflected in their dressing style. Previously, the variety of artifacts and dresses worn by a community were specified in such a manner that their patterns used to differ from their neighbour's community. The specifications are used to create the identity of

communities. When outsiders now try to include the community's identity into a platform, in the process of heritage making, often community culture undergoes partial loss of tradition. To conserve the community's heritage, the museum plays an important role in the preservation of traditional clothing. Tripura state museum, Ujjayanta Palace, Agartala has 22 display galleries that exhibit 102 textile items and 197 ornaments. The Tribal Research and Cultural Institute has space for showcasing the indigenous tradition in the Tripura State Tribal Museum located in Lake Chowmuhani. The virtual tour of the museum is also available on their webpage.

The traditional dress worn by the Tripuris and Reangs reflect how innate the relationship is between the communities and mother Nature. However, with time, tradition and heritage of the communities faced major challenges that resulted in the evolution of their dressing style. The cross-cultural exchange of the communities has mainly been the result of evolution in the dressing styles of the Tripuri and Reang women. The fashion industry has also influenced the mindset of the young generation. However, they still stick to their roots and they are trying to keep in pace with the contemporary culture. The women are conscious of their heritage and they are still concerned to pass on their traditions to the next generation. Different generation and different groups of women have their own ways of either sticking to their traditional values or adopting western culture. Their choice, their taste has resulted in the evolution of the traditional costumes.

NOTES

- 1) Indigenous community of Tripura who speaks Kokborok (Tibeto-Burman) language.
- 2) One of the Tripuri clans who speak Reang dialect of Kokborok language.
- 3) Imperial Sacrifice or the king's inauguration sacrifice that is practiced following Vedic religion.
- 4) Traditional slash-and-burn cultivation in hilly areas.
- 5) Celestial beings whose males are divine singers and females are divine dancers, according to Hinduism.
- 6) Local state flower of Tripura that has mythological significance.
- 7) Indigenous simple devices where traditional dresses are made especially by women.
- 8) A member of the royal Manikya family. Currently, the Deputy Chief Minister of Tripura.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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