

Research Paper



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THE CHANGING FACE OF THE TRIBAL LIFE: A STUDY ON SOCIO-CULTURAL PRACTICES OF THE TANGKHUL NAGAS OF JESSAMI VILLAGE IN UKHRUL DISTRICT OF MANIPUR

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ABSTRACT

The tribal communities represent an important social category of Indian social structure. The tribals are said to be the original inhabitants of India. India is a country of multiracial stock. Different types of groups occupy different parts of India, having their own cultural characteristics and level of development. After independence, lots of changes have taken place in the tribal society at large. Today, most of these tribes have come into contact with the advanced community and have learnt cultural traits of their neighbours. They have borrowed the patterns of their dress and developed an intricate material economy. Some of these tribes have progressed at a tremendous speed, effecting in a few years, changes which have taken centuries to achieve in other areas. Hence, this study mainly focused on Socio-cultural Change among Tangkhul Nagas of Jessami Village in Ukhrul District of Manipur.

KEYWORDS: Tangkhul Naga, Jessami village, Society, Tradition, Cultural diversity, Modernization, Industrialization, Westernization.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'socio-cultural' embraces two concepts: society and culture. A society is a number of interdependent organisms of the same species. A culture is the learned behavior that is shared by the members of a society, together with the material products of such behaviors. The word 'society' and 'cultural' are fused together to form the word 'socio-cultural'. The socio-cultural is an approach to understand why humans behave the way they do and also it seeks to understand human behavior and personality development by examining the rules of the social groups and subgroups in which the individual is a member. Socio-cultural is something that evolves the social and cultural aspects. It is a set of beliefs, customs, practice and behavior that

exists within a population. The culture contact has given rise to so many types of tribes and has created a set of different types of tribes on acculturation level. A tribe is a group of people living under primitive condition and still not popularly known to be more modern culture. There are numbers of tribes living all over the world. Tribes as a social group with popular association endogamous with not any particular of functions governed by tribal ruler to otherwise, united in language or dialect recognizing social distance with other tribals or caste. L.M. Lewis believes that tribal societies are small in scale and are restricted in the spatial and temporal range of their social, legal and political relations and possess a morality, a religion and world view of



corresponding dimensions. 'Tribe' and 'culture' are among the key concepts of anthropological instruction and research. Tribe is an organization of people along ethnic lines. It is a community of peoples claiming common descent and generally practicing endogamy. Tribe is a more or less homogeneous society having a common government, a common language/dialect and a common culture. Culture is those learned values practice by the tribals. The area of study mainly consisted on Tanghul Naga tribe of Jessami village in Manipur state. After independence various social and cultural changes have been taking place among the Tangkhul Naga in Jessami village.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Materials, books, journals and periodicals on classical-theoretical issues and problems of Scheduled Tribes are available from different sources. B. Malinowski (1922), A.R Radcliffe-Brown (1952), E.E Evans-Pritchard (1937,1956), A. L Kroeber (1963), H. Risely (1915), Verrier Elwin (1944,1960), C. Haimendorf (1977), J.P Mills (1922), J.H Hutton (1921), G.S Ghurye (1963), J.N Nehru (2001) Grigson (1946), F.G Bailey (1957,1961), N.K Bose (1941,1971), S. Sinha (1958), A. Aiyappan (1977), S. Fuchus (1977), D.N Majumdar (1937, 1950), L.P Vidyarthi (1970,1976), S.C Dube (1977) and A.R Desai (1977) laid the foundation for tribal studies. Their works are referred for development of concepts, methods and theories of tribal studies.

Virginus Xaxa (2009) revisits the concepts of tribe and tribal society, situating the existing body of knowledge in the context of state policy and socio cultural developments witnessed in India after independence. The author has focused on transformation of tribes and causes that has led to the transformation after independence while elaborating upon the awareness and consciousness of the people living in tribes. This study also dealt with tribal movements that further results in awaking of people pertaining to various developmental factors.

Anita Srivastava Majhi (2010) mentioned that the modernization of tribal communities in India consists of a number of inter related items, to begin with implementation of the special provisions of the constitution in respect of the tribal communities, expansion of communication and transport and breaking down of physical isolation, establishment of modern amenities of life.

Devendra Thakur and D.N. Thakur (1996) emphasis the tribal people being the original inhabitants of India constitute a significant of this vast nation. They

have been dwelling in the forests surrounding by hills for a long period. Their social structure, culture and language are quite different from the general people. In the post independence age, a lot of changes have taken place in the tribal areas due to large endeavors of government for their social-economic development. In spite of all endeavors, they are still poor as well as illiterate and are far from the mainstream of Indian society. *S.C. Daniel (1991)* highlights the problems of language and culture of Santhals of Chotanagpur since their migration to Assam. To him, Santhals in Assam constitute an ethnic group since they fulfill core or necessary factors of concept of ethnicity. They share certain aspirations of which language and culture are very crucial. In term of their religion many Santhals of Assam have become Christians. Christian Santhals are facing criticism that Christianity and modernism has destroyed their culture.

George Pfeffer and Deepak Kumar Behera (2004) examine the current literature on tribals India and view that tribe of middle India should be viewed within the framework of their constitutive ideas as well as their behavioral expectation which are essential for a social anthropology or comparative sociology. This study also addressed the issues pertaining to the development, transition and change in the contemporary society.

Thomas Pullopillil (1999) says that North-East is a mosaic of various cultures and people. It is situated in one of the greatest routes of migration of mankind. The migration process began with Bodo tribes in the 4th century B.C. is not finished phenomenon. The tribes of Chotanagpur unlike the rest were unwilling migrants to this land of blue hills and green valleys. Among the sixty one tribe and forty caste in the tea plantation in Assam as tea garden labour, the Oraons, the Mundas, the Santhals, the Kharias and other Chotanagpurtribals are the recruits.

Anil Kumar Singh (1993) view that the tribe and tribal life is as evergreen and fascinating as the customs, manners, mores, material and cultural life of the people. Indian approach accepts the validity of the different traditions. Every tradition helps man to understand his environment, which assists him to live in freedom and friendship with his neighbor, which helps him to lift his heart to the divine, is worthy of acceptance.

Lachan M. Khubchandani (1992) analysis that in the wake of democratization of economic mobility and mass media exposure many tribal communities from an isolated and inaccessible areas are gradually opening up for intense interaction with the non-tribal world.

M.K. Rana and P.C. Commer (1989) say that tribe in India usually encounter problems in their day-to-day life. The policies adopted by the government, both at the centre and states to promote their socio-economic conditions and also the educational standards have some positive influence among of the schedule tribes.

M. Horam (1999) in his study 'Social cultural life of the Nagas (the Tangkhul Nagas)' draws the extensive field study, observation and experience depicting Tangkhul science in totality. It highlights several aspects of traditional, social and cultural life and also the recent changes in the norms and customs. The work includes the Tangkhul myths and ballad. This monograph is the first to offer an intimate study of the Tangkhuls.

RESEARCH GAP

From these reviews, it is apparent that tribal studies, conducted in large-scale, have far-reaching effects. The scholars have taken immense interests and pains to study and unearth many notable points. Almost all kinds of approaches have been developed about tribal studies. But studies relating to the problems of a tribe in a regional setting and the effects of the socio-cultural processes in which they live in are rather rare.

GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY AREA

Jessami village originally known as 'Yessami' before the Britishers changed it into its current name 'Jessami' is one of the village belonging to the Chakhesang Kheza tribe, it is located in the Northern most part of Manipur. Jessami is a town in Chingai tehsil in Ukhrul district, Manipur, India. It is located 68km towards north from the district head quarters Ukhrul, Imphal. Jessami is a border town in the extreme north of Manipur state and is surrounded by Meluri Tehsil towards east, Sekruzu Tehsil towards west, Pfutsero Tehsil towards west, Setimi Tehsil towards north. Zunheboto, Kohima, Wokha, Tuensang, are the nearby towns of Jessami. According to 2011 census, the population of Jessami village was 1522 are males and 1243 are females.

ECONOMIC LIFE OF JESSAMI VILLAGERS

Like any other tribal society, the people of Jessami also depend on land, forest and forest products as its main source of economy. Agriculture is the main

source of occupation, forest products like timber, fire woods etc. also serves as a means of additional income. Though there are communities lands under the village authority, the rest of the lands are owned either by private individuals or clans. Land and property are inherited by the male members of the family; therefore it follows a hereditary form of ownership. Industrialization and urbanization have brought about revolutionary changes among the tribe of Jessami village. Especially after the launching of the Five Year Plans, the process of industrialization started taking a new momentum. Industries were established even near of the village and people of the village started making use of this new economic opportunity.

ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM OF JESSAMI VILLAGE

Jessami is governed by traditions and customary laws. The guardianship falls under the responsibility of the village authority or village council. During the ancient times, Jessami followed the chieftainship form of administration where the chief of the village acts as the supreme authority, however, with the passage of time the chief of the village now enjoys only the privilege of being a permanent member of the village authority. The members of the village authority are elected democratically through election which is conducted after every five years. There is the assembly of speakers and secretary who oversee the conduct of the election which can vary or change depending on the opinion of the people.

Education

In regard to education, significant changes or improvement has been observed. Prior to independence no systematic efforts were made to promote literacy among the tribes. This situation changed after independence with the introduction of many measures for tribal uplift. In the Five Year Plans due to attention was paid to the establishment of schools in the tribal areas. Residential schools also came in. free ships and free tuition classes and such other facilities were provided to the tribal children to promote education among them. Though these efforts have not brought about the desired results, they have definitely created an educational awareness among the tribals. The educational qualification of the respondent is shown in table no: 1

Table no. 1 Educational level of the respondents

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	6	15%
Primary	3	7.5%
High school	19	47.5%
Higher secondary	5	12.5%
Degree	3	7.5%
Above degree	4	10%
Total	40	100%

Source: Field Study

Above data reflect that most of the respondents (47%) have completed high school, 15% illiterate, 12.5% higher secondary, 10% above degree, 7.5% primary and 7.5% have completed degree. Thus, we can say that majority of the tribe in Jessami Village are literate.

Family, Marriage and Kinship

Family is the basic unit of society, which assigns social status, roles and social responsibilities to every individual. Family is the most powerful medium through which value system develops and the type of family to which an individual belong has an important bearing on the individual behavior and attitudes. On the other hand, marriage is also one of the universal social institutions. It is the deepest and most complex

involvements of human relationship. Marriage is a corner stone of a society and very necessary part of Indian Social system. Family is the most significant unit of the society and marriage is the foundation of it. Marriage and family, the two social institutions with biological foundations, are supportive of each other. Hence, information gathered here is about the family, marriage and kinship of the respondents.

Types of Family: Accordingly the family system among the Jessami villagers has undergone significant changes during the recent times. Traditionally joint family was common among the tribe of Jessami village. But now day's joint family taking the form of dependent nuclear family. Large joint family with 10-15 people rarely found today.

Table no.2 Types of family

Family	Frequency	Percentage
Nuclear	36	90
Joint	4	10
Total	40	100

Source: Field Study

Above table indicate that majority of the respondents 90% have nuclear family and only a few numbers of respondent 10% have joint family.

Monthly family income: Monthly family income of the respondent is shown in table no: 3

Table no.3 Monthly family income

Income	Frequency	Percentage
Below Rs.3,000	2	5%
Rs. 3000-5,000	4	10%
Rs. 5000-7,000	13	32.5%
Above 8,000	21	52.5%
TOTAL	40	100%

Source: Field Study

Data show that 5% of the respondent monthly income is very low, from range below Rs. 3,000, 10% of the respondent monthly income is low with Rs 3000-5000, and 32.5% of the respondent have medium with Rs 5000-7000. Remaining 52.5% of the respondents' monthly income is relatively high with Rs 8,000 per month.

Marital status of the respondents: Marriage is an institution, which exists in every part of society.

Marriage is not only a biological need but, also a social contract and a bond contributing towards happiness and contentment in one's life. Marriage bond between male and female in Indian society is considered sacred and significant for the individual. It is important to understand the marital status of the respondents at this stage. Status of individual is also recognized through social mobility. Marriage confers upon the individual a new status, which affects his/her, performance in every sphere of life.

Table no: 4 Marital status of the respondent

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	32	80%
Unmarried	4	10%
Divorce	1	2.5%
Widow	3	7.5%
Total	40	100%

Source: Field Study

The above table shows that majority of the respondents 80% are married while 10% are unmarried. Beside these 7.5% are widow and 2.5% are divorce.

Changes in the marriage system: It is a patriarchal society based on clans. There are three dominant clans i.e. Mekrisuh, Wezah and Lohe apart from the minority clan such as Chido and Lasuh and the common belief is that all of these clans have got the status of having fallen under a single tribal identity. Monogamy as a social norm is widely prevalent in the society. Endogamy is the directive practice by the tribe of Jessami village, however, exogamy is also practiced. The society strictly prohibits clan endogamy, hence such a marriage, even if it takes place is punishable and

marriage is considered as a null and void. All members of the clan are considered as brothers and sisters and therefore, marriage within the same clan is considered as a taboo. Now day's marriage is taking place not very much for the performance of religious duties, but for obtaining "lifelong companionship" of the individual of the opposite sex. Earlier in Jessami village inter-tribe marriage was strictly prohibited. They think that if they get married by inter-tribe they have lost their own identity because they think that other tribal groups do not understand their culture. But in present age, the tribe of Jessami village is getting marriage with other tribe. So it is essential to know their opinion about inter-tribe marriage. Respondent's opinion about inter-tribe marriage is shown in table: 5

Table no: 5 Inter-tribe marriage

Whether Favour of Inter-Tribe Marriage	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	20	50%
No	20	50%
Total	40	100%

Source: Field Study

The data reveal that 50% of the respondent favour of inter-tribe marriage and 50% of the respondent does not support inter-tribe marriage.

Principal Earning Member of Family: Principal earner is person who takes entire responsibilities of family. Principal earning member of family shown in table no: 6

Table no: 6 Main earner of family

Main Earner	Frequency	Percentage
Self	20	50%
Father	4	10%
Husband	5	12.5%
Brother	1	2.5%
Sister	1	2.5%
Son	5	12.5%
Daughter	4	10%
Total	40	100%

Source: Field Study

Data show that half of the respondent 50% are the sole earner in their family. Beside these 12.5 % each of the respondent's family depend on husband or son and 10% each of the respondent family based on father or daughter. And only a few 2.5% each of the respondent family depend on brother or sister.

CULTURAL LIFE OF TANGKHUL NAGAS IN JESSAMI VILLAGE

Religion of Jessami Village: Traditionally, the religious systems of Jessami tribe were confined within the belief in a number of spirits and supernatural forces associated within the cycle of life. Animate and inanimate

object may be regarded as embodied spirit and there is a distinction drawn between the God's and the soul of dead humans. Supernatural are believe to posses both benevolent and malicious qualities and when occasion demands, Jessami people believes that a prayer must be made to them in the form of offerings i.e. by cooking the best meal, wrapped with banana leaves and buried under the earth. It also include killing of birds and small animals, hang them in a big bamboo and left to rot for the embodied spirit. In addition to this, it is said that the people of Jessami worshipped any objects like trees, stones etc which they find extra ordinary (size, shape etc) then the normal ones and considered them sacred.

Though the ancestors of Jessami people followed animism, traditional beliefs and practices with the intrusion of the British and the arrival of Christian missionaries the people were introduced to Christianity and they embraced it as their religion. Now the people of Jessami follows and believes only one religion i.e. Christianity. Jessami has now been declared as a Christian village on 25th January 2005.

Festivals of the Jessami village: Traditional festivals, symbols and meanings of the nature have an important place in Jessami village. In fact, the importance and awareness of such festivals appears to be increasing and almost on every occasion and function people are ask to wear traditional dresses, perform traditional dances and traditional songs. In the ancient period, animism was practiced following many festivals related to animistic worship. Some of the festivals are:-
Tekru-nge- Tekru-nge is one of the most important festivals and is celebrated in the month of January every year. Tekru-nge is a festival of sanctification of youths. During this festival the boys and girls are sanctified through religious ceremonies and rituals. The festival is celebrated for three days. In the first day, both the men folk and women folk perform folk dance and folk songs accompanied by some traditional games and sports. The second day is meant for the boys, where in the olden days, it signifies sanctification of young, innocent and unspoiled boys for this ritualistic ceremony. The third day is meant for the girls only. Here, the mother performs this ceremony ritual to sanctify her young innocent daughters. But with the coming of Christianity, Tekru-nge's religious and traditional ceremonies and rituals are minimized.

Bukhe-nge-Bukhe-nge is another important festival, a festival to mark the vigor of skills and talents. It is celebrated in the month of February. This festival is usually celebrated a day before young men and maiden

folks begin their task of skills in work and handicrafts such as traditional basket making, wood carving pots, basketry, etc .

Mewu-nge- This festival is celebrated in the month of April, the season when the wild flower 'Mewupa' blooms. It is celebrated in the name of the village chief, seeking blessing and long and prosperous life of the chief as well.

Ekhuloshekekri-nge- Ekhuloshekekri-nge is a festival which marks the beginning of the first plantation or sowing of the paddy and is welcome every year during the month of June. In the course of this festival, young men and maiden prepare themselves with wine and set out to sow a couple of new siblings of paddy in the field and return to their home by noon. It is a half day task so as to hold out their hands to mark their first plantation.

Erunkhu kike-nge-Erunkhu kike-nge is a festival centered by the belief that all natural things have a soul. It is a course of festivals where rituals and ceremonies are prepared to delight evil spirit. Young men and women folks attract by offering traditional wine and cooked meat to the evil spirit so as to seek its blessings. This practice has been considered as a good omen.

Buhchiketo-nge-Buhchiketo-nge is a festival which falls during the month of December. It marks the end of old storing of paddy of the previous year to be replaced by the new cultivated paddy. It is a festival which symbolized the sources of livelihood and the first fruit of cultivation.

Eru-nge-Eru-nge is a festival which usually falls in the month of December. This festival takes place to mark the end of cultivation. It is course of festival where every men and women folks finally sets in for a rest to see the fruits of their long time labour.

But now days most of these festivals are not practiced among the villagers. However, 'tekru-nge' is still celebrating with great significance and enthusiasms keeping in view the Christian spirit. On the other hand 'Ekhuloshekekri-nge' is not celebrated now but on this auspicious day the people goes to church for blessings to start their fieldworks. As Christianity prevails in Jessami, the people of the village give more importance to the celebration of Christmas which is celebrated in the month of December to remember the birth of Jesus Christ. In spite of changing their faith and embracing a new religion one cannot deny the continuity that persists in the area which is permitted by the new religion.

Traditional Dress and Ornament

A peep into the vibrant broad road of our traditional attires is an asset of our unique identity, our image and aesthetic appeal which brings us closer to cultural roots. The journey of traditional dresses and traditional ornaments back then has a very great impact in our community. Every man, young and old, young maiden and women folk present themselves with the unchanging cultural norms. Love for cultural dresses has been a taste of dignity. It has been design in creative range, colours and weaving styles. Traditional attire presents itself a place of self-identification especially during festivals and cultural ceremonies and it has been a practice to wear traditional attires in some festivals. However, the whirling movement of modernization has given a golden touch to the community at large. With its modern trends, styling and designing and now the whole idea of clothing no longer share its thread with the traditional attires and ornaments. It is observed that entire respondents (100%) of the Jessami village now wear their traditional attires only occasionally, especially during festivals. Now days they prefer Western dresses. This rapid change has change the wardrobe of the community extensively. People started learning the taste of modern trends and thereafter established themselves in the profession as designers so as to show cast and enrich the ethnic dress, giving it a modern look, which is more desirable for betterment, uplifting the enthusiasm towards the growth of western trends and an underlying traditional roots.

Traditional Ornament: The tribe of Jessami has very rich and colourful traditional attires and ornaments that both male and female wore during festive occasions. For male it includes:

Pfuyo- Pfuyo is the traditional ornament of the tribe. It is made up of bamboo twigs and decorated by colourful threads and feathers of the Hornbill and is worn on the head.

Phizu mina- This is worn on the earlobe and is made up of the blue feather of a rare bird Phizu.

Baluthu- This is worn around the arm on both sides, it is made of the tusk of elephant.

Phekha- This is worn between the knee and the ankle, it is woven out of polythene thread in red and blue colour.

The females also adorned themselves with different varieties of ornaments which include:

Tsupha- This is specially designed indigenously made necklace and is proudly displayed round the neck the women folks.

Zithu- This is the female version of baluthu, it is made of aluminum or silver.

Lapi- It is made out of copper and is worn only by the married female on the head round both sides of the ears.

Tekhu- This is a pair of sea shell worn by the women behind their backs.

In recent years it is observed that entire respondents are using their traditional ornaments occasionally. Tanghul Nagas in the village think that they are more comfortable to using modern ornament instead of their traditional ornament. Hence, it can be said that is Tangkhul Nagas do not use their traditional ornament regularly.

Socio-cultural similarities with Other Tribal groups

There are many socio-cultural similarities sharing with other tribe in respect of marriage, language and religious activity. Under marriage there is mate selection and dresses. The people of Jessami have their omen perspective of choosing a bride. Usually the groom along with his family members approaches the bride's family in order to persuade the bride's family which is very similar with the tribals of Nagaland and some tribes of Manipur. There is similarity in the dresses too both in the past and the present. For a long time they mostly wear traditional outfits which are similar with the Angami tribe of Nagaland. But now a days due to influence of modernization and introduction of Christianity their socio- cultural life have changed, people preferred western dresses more or modified traditional attires. At the time of wedding, the bride wears a white gown or anything that is white in colour as a symbol of purity while the groom wears a suit of tuxedo. In terms of language, the dialect is similar with the Angami and Sumi tribe of Nagaland. The dialect spoken in Jessami does not have a written script of its own but the native people speak with a broad accent that is similar with almost all the tribals of Nagaland. Even in respect of religion, the ancient religion i.e. animism is like a common religion for the tribals of many states but with the coming of Christian missionaries many tribals of Jessami village has converted into Christianity.

Methodology

The study is based on both primary and sources secondary. The secondary data related to various journals, books, periodicals etc related to the topic has been consulted with a view to develop present study in right perspective. Necessary primary data have been collected through sample survey with the help of a well-

designed survey schedule from Jessami village. Total sample size was 40. Both male and female was given equal chance for interview (20 male and 20 female). The data obtained from both primary and secondary sources have been processed and analyzed using simple but meaningful statistical techniques for objective and logical interpretation. The quantitative techniques adopted for the analysis are simple ratios or percentages, and certain statistical measures. The data so processed and analyzed have been represented in the forms of tabulation for proper illustration of the patterns. Conclusions on the study area are drawn on the basis of the results derived from the data analysis and personal experience gathered through the observations during field study.

CONCLUSION

According to the objectives, the study is mainly concern with the socio-cultural life i.e. their beliefs, rituals and ceremonies of the past and the present and also their economic conditions in brief. The study reveals that Jessami is a village belonging to the Chakhesang Kheza tribe located in the northern most part of Manipur. It is a highly patriarchal society based on the clan. Though the different clans maintain a cordial and harmonious relationship among themselves, inter-clan marriage is strictly prohibited. Tribal endogamy and clan exogamy is the directive adopted by the people of the village. Presently, exogamy is also found in the village. Jessami is governed by traditions and customary laws. During the ancient times, Jessami followed the chieftainships form of administration; however, with the passage of time, the chief of the village now enjoys only the privilege of being a permanent member of the village authority. The people of Jessami are mostly agriculturist, forest products like timber, fire woods also serves as a means of additional income. The land and property are inherited by the male members of the family. The study also deals with the festivals, religion, traditional ornaments and dresses of Jessami people.

As far as religion is concerned, the people of Jessami practiced animism in the past followed by Christianity in the present. Objects like stones and trees are considered sacred in the past. But with the intrusion of the British and the arrival of Christian missionaries the people were introduced to Christianity. The depth study reveals some of the festivals practice in the ancient period, viz. Tekru-nge, Bukhe-nge, Mewu-nge, Ekhuloshekekhri-nge, Erunkhu kike-nge, Buchiketo-nge, Eru-nge, etc. Tekru-nge is still practiced even today keeping in view with the Christian spirit. In the present life, the people of the village give more importance to the celebration of Christmas. It also reveals that the journey of traditional ornaments and traditional dresses back then has a very great impact on the community, but the whirling movement of modernization has given a golden touch to the community at large. People of Jessami village now wear the traditional attires occasionally only, especially during festivals. The entire respondent wear their traditional dresses and traditional ornaments only occasionally.

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