

# CULTURAL MATERIALS AND INNOVATION POSSIBILITIES AMONG THE KABUI (RONGMEI) TRIBE

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## ABSTRACT

*The present study explores the innovation possibilities in cultural materials among the Kabui (Rongmei) tribe of Manipur. Autoethnography was used in this study to systematically understand, reflect, and write the cultural phenomena from an insider's perspective. Through semi-structured interview, fifty participants were interviewed in the local dialect and transcribed into English. Thematic analysis was used for analyzing the transcribed data. The outcome of the study alludes that despite of the challenges in the innovation process, cultural materials could create a huge opportunity in creating a cultural market and economy for the Kabui (Rongmei) entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurial endeavours could also create jobs and employment opportunities among the youths. The theme of preserving and promoting cultural materials through entrepreneurship could also be seen among the youths. Self-reliance, financial independence and promoting cultural identity were also reflected as prominent themes in the study. Contemporary western education based on books was seen as a departure from oral traditions which hampers cultural materials production and everyday engagements. Lack of skilled labours were also seen as the most challenging aspects in entrepreneurial endeavours.*

**Keyword:** - *Cultural materials, innovation, entrepreneurship, cultural identity, oral traditions*

Cultural materials are integral part of life which reflects the psyche and collective consciousness of the community. Material and immaterial aspects of a community collectively bind the cultural fabrics which in turn gives cultural identity of a community. The present study focuses on the material aspects of culture among the Kabui (Rongmei) tribe of Manipur and the innovation possibilities in cultural materials production through entrepreneurship. The Kabui tribe is recognized as a tribe under (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 (Part III - Rules and Orders under the Constitution of India). It is also known as the Rongmei tribe which is recognized by the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Act, 2011. The Kabui (Rongmei) tribe are mostly inhabited in the three North-Eastern states of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland. From time immemorial, the Kabui (Rongmei) tribe had been closely engaged in the cultural materials production such as weaving traditional clothes, knitting ornaments, basketry crafts, preparing traditional medicines etc. This cultural production is still practicing in many villages among the Kabui (Rongmei) tribe of Manipur both in hills and valleys.

Kamei (2004) reflected the importance of "culture consciousness" as a unique character of the Zeliangrong people and includes technology, economic organization, social system, religious beliefs, language, literature etc. within the ambit of culture. The culture consciousness among the Kabui (Rongmei) tribe could also be seen through its rich festivals such as *Gaan-Ngai*, *Rih-Ngai*, *Gudui-Ngai* etc. It is also reflected in its traditional dresses, folk songs, folk dances, folk tales etc practiced by males, females and children among the Kabui (Rongmei) tribe. Kamson (2015)

acknowledges the beauty and fondness of ornaments among the womenfolk. The traditional knowledge of weaving and the art of ornaments were taught to children by mother and it was considered the responsibility of a mother to teach her daughter the art of weaving from tender age. Women's engagement in the cultural materials production and consumption is an integral part of the Kabui (Rongmei) tribe. Rongmei (1994) highlights the importance of customary ornaments and weaving traditions amongst the male and female which were used in different occasions and festivals.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

The primary focus of the study is to explore the possibilities of innovation process in the Kabui (Rongmei) cultural materials. Since cultural materials forms the basis for cultural identity and reflections of the community's psyche, following objectives were identified for the study.

1. To explore the different cultural materials and innovative processes for cultural materials production,
2. To study the entrepreneurial opportunities in cultural materials, and
3. To study the role of women and men in entrepreneurship.

Based on the objectives, following research questions were formulated:

- a) What are the different cultural materials which could be innovated creatively?
- b) What are the opportunities and limitations of cultural materials productions?
- c) How could women and men contribute in entrepreneurship developments in cultural materials?

### **METHOD:**

Autoethnography method was used in this study to systematically explore, understand, analyze and write the cultural phenomena on cultural materials production among the Kabui (Rongmei) tribe of Manipur. Reflecting from insider's perspective on the cultural materials production was the main reason for employing the autoethnographic method in this study. Stratified random sampling was used for identifying the participants from both the hill and valley districts of Manipur. A total of 50 (fifty) participants (25 male and 25 female) were identified and interviewed using semi-structured interview. The participants were between the age group of 20 to 60 years. All the interviews were conducted in the local Kabui (Rongmei) dialect as all the participants preferred it over other languages including English, Hindi and Manipuri. The interviews were transcribed into English for the final analysis of the data. Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis (TA) was used as an analytical tool to identify the codes, subthemes and themes for this study. Since many local words do not have the exact English translations, nearest English meaning/translations were used for the purpose of analysis and interpretations.

### **ANALYSIS:**

A total of 50 (fifty) interviews which was transcribed from the Kabui (Rongmei) dialect to English were systematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis (TA).

#### **Analysis 1:**

Based on the first objective i.e., to explore the different cultural materials and innovative processes for cultural materials production, one of the participants narrates –

*“Innovation is very much possible in our Kabui (Rongmei) cultural materials. It could be weaving, basketry, ornaments, musical instruments, lifesaving medicines, decorative items etc. But we need creative and innovative ideas to make it happen. Once if it is made possible, then there could be lots of economic opportunities for our people. Not just economic opportunity but it is a cultural opportunity for our people as well because it will provide jobs for those who are unemployed as well as for cultural development. We also need skilled labours in order to make those cultural products”.*

The participant's response clearly indicates that there are cultural materials such as weaving, basketry, ornaments etc which could be creatively and innovatively produced with contemporary designs so that it could be marketed. It has both economic and cultural opportunities for the people as it will generate employment opportunities and help in cultural development.

#### **Analysis 2:**

Based on the second objective i.e., to study the entrepreneurial opportunities in cultural materials, a participant reflected –

*“Entrepreneurship in cultural materials is a less known area in our community. Some young entrepreneurs have started such endeavours but so far full-scale entrepreneurship has not yet materialized. Since many of our cultural materials could be marketable and has its economic values, entrepreneurship is very much possible. One also need to remember the cultural beliefs, norms, restrictions etc. while starting any entrepreneurial endeavours in our cultural materials. Innovation and entrepreneurship should empower people and help in the developmental process”.*

The response from the participant alludes that entrepreneurial opportunities in cultural materials is possible and should help in empowering people and in the developmental process. It needs to be noted that economic and entrepreneurship endeavours should follow and reflect the cultural beliefs, norms, restrictions etc. of the community.

### Analysis 3:

Based on the third objective i.e., to study the role of women and men in entrepreneurship, a women participant observed –

*“In our Kabui (Rongmei) community, women play a very important role in the family, community and society. Many of the cultural materials are produced by women. Take for example – weaving, ornaments, food etc.... all these are produced by women. Though men help in the process, it is primarily the women who are actively engaged in the entrepreneurial activities. The positive side of women entrepreneurship is that they can be financially independent, self-reliant, and most importantly women empowerment”.*

The response captures the crucial role played by the womenfolk in the entrepreneurial activities from family to the larger society. Women entrepreneurship helped in financial independence, self-reliant and women empowerment. It also highlights that many of the cultural materials productions were engaged by women as compared to men.

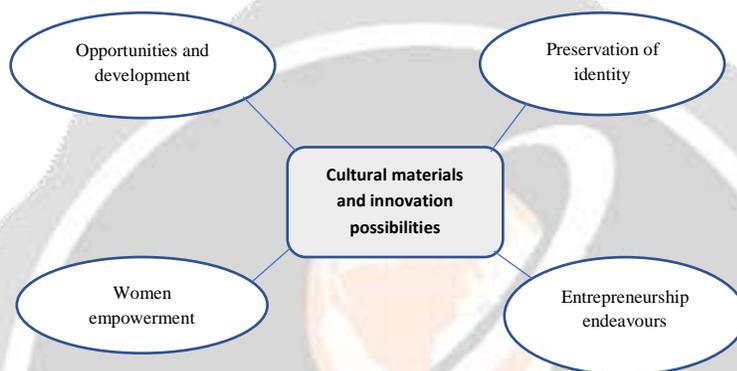
Following are the themes, subthemes, and codes from the data analysis.

**Table -1:** Themes, subthemes and codes for thematic analysis

Sl.no.	Themes	Subthemes	Codes
1	Opportunities and development	a) Economic opportunity b) Cultural opportunity c) Individual opportunity	Economy, money, income, bread earner, culture, opportunities, individual, group, community, religion, upliftment, skills, labour, improvement, male & female, resources, barter, employment, job, education, literate, knowledge, peer, technical know-how etc.
2	Preservation of identity	a) Identity conflict b) Identity loss c) Identity preservation	I vs you vs them, loss of meaning, conflict, ideas, problems, meaning-making, thread, unity, person, group, community, identity, formation, preservation, conservation, limitations, values, norms, beliefs, systems, religion etc.
3	Women empowerment	a) Self-reliance b) Financial inclusion c) Role of women	Women, finance, income, independence, self-reliance, empowerment, less power, less opportunities, male vs female, roles in society, dos and don'ts, family, bonding, love, rich, poor, inclusion, exclusion, power dynamics, role of women etc.

4	Entrepreneurship endeavours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Local entrepreneur</li> <li>b) Source of income</li> <li>c) Creativity and Innovation</li> </ul>	Indigenous, local, traditional, entrepreneur, environment, sustainable, raw materials, skills, labour, income generation, security, finance, economy, money, good opportunity, innovation, creativity, new ideas, potential, market value, motivation, leadership, village authority etc.
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Based on the thematic analysis, following figure shows the thematic map highlighting the various themes and subthemes of the study.



**Fig -1:** Thematic map highlighting the themes and subthemes of the study.

**DISCUSSIONS:**

The innovation and entrepreneurship in cultural materials production could be a possibility and opportunity for the Kabui (Rongmei) artisans. The challenges could range from traditional belief systems to the lack of skilled labours for the successful implementation of creative ideas. Despite of the challenges, there are economic, cultural and individual opportunities for the artisans if cultural materials are produced creatively which could be environmentally and economically sustainable for livelihood. Preservation of identity through cultural entrepreneurship reflects the importance of cultural materials among the Kabui (Rongmei) tribe in binding the identity fabrics. Conflict and differences of ideas could hinder the entrepreneurial endeavours amongst the artisans due to traditional belief systems, norms and restrictions which are followed by the members of the tribe from time immemorial.

Women could be seen actively participating and engaging in the cultural materials productions such as weaving clothes, ornaments, food, beverages etc. Such participation in large numbers helps women in financial independence, self-reliance and most importantly women empowerment. Engaging in entrepreneurship further helps in creating job opportunities for those women who are unemployed and achieve financial goals of the family. Entrepreneurship in cultural materials could help both men and women to collectively participate in the creation, preservation and promotion of cultural materials which in turns help in preserving the cultural identity of the Kabui (Rongmei) tribe. Entrepreneurship is seen by the local artisans as alternative source of income and livelihood. Though traditional methods of productions are still actively engaged by the artisans, search for better technology, designs, materials etc. is still a challenge for the local artisans. Nevertheless, entrepreneurship in cultural materials production is still an art and skills that could drive the cultural economy and sustainable development among the Kabui (Rongmei) tribe.

## CONCLUSIONS:

The present study explores the various innovation possibilities in cultural materials production among the Kabui (Rongmei) tribe in Manipur. The study alludes that entrepreneurship in cultural materials production is a new area and needs more creative and innovative ideas to make into practice. Though there are many challenges for the local artisans, the economic and cultural opportunities outweigh the limitations. Preservation of cultural identity through entrepreneurship could also be seen reflected in many of the participants response. Women empowerment and engaging in entrepreneurial endeavours is encouraging as it helps the womenfolk for financial freedom, self-reliance and inclusive in the family and societal development. Creative and innovative ideas in cultural material productions could generate jobs and helps in financial independence among the entrepreneurs.

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