

Cultural Transformation among the Maram Tribe: A Study in Senapati District, Manipur

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ABSTRACT

Culture is a set of practices and values that are perceived by the people living in a specific community and is a legacy which is passed on from one generation to the next. Several changes and evolutions have taken place in the culture due to numerous factors. When men began to rise high and conquer the world unearthing its secrets and analyzing the marvels one after another, culture underwent a rapid transformation. This change had a deep and direct influence on culture and is believed to be the root cause of cultural transformation in the modern era. People have begun migrating to other parts of the world expecting a better lifestyle, better job, better educational facilities as well as for exposure and experiences. So, western cultures got gradual acceptance in our land and like manner with the Marams too. Subsequently, there emerged new ways and accommodation of new patterns in our culture. In fact, culture seems to flow effortlessly from one place to another. The objective of this paper is to study the cultural transformation among the Maram tribe in Manipur. A field study of Maram tribe was conducted in Maram area under Senapati district, Manipur. This study reveals that the waves of cultural transformation came with the advent of education and Christianity among the Marams. The rise of education with the mushrooming of educational institutions around the study area is a significant factor causing the rapid changes in culture. In the recent past, there has been awareness for the need to revive the traditional culture and different traditions which are losing its foothold.

Keywords: cultural, transformation, Maram tribe, community,

INTRODUCTION

Culture is regarded as the totality of human behaviour, a 'way of life' and 'a system of communication' and as a 'human phenomenon' and therefore, change is witnessed across every culture. Culture includes learned behaviour and beliefs, patterns and elements as well as traditional knowledge handed down from one generation to the next. Anthropologists like Tyler, Frazer, and Malinowski have studied man and culture, and have attempted to explain origin of culture and the nature of the process of culture change. According to these authors culture change is any modification in the way of life, material and non-material culture through exposure, invention or acculturation. Culture change has remained an area where scholarships across discipline up to this day trying to find a convincing explanation for the growth and decline. However, culture is also a continuous process of addition and subtraction of traits, patterns and behaviour resulting into culture change. In this context cultural transition may be perceived in terms of the change in pattern, economy, dress, food habits, rituals, religions etc. In addition, each culture can be understood as a process of historical growth, human reactions and responses to existence.

Moreover, culture is dynamic and is rapidly changing. It is said that no culture is static in nature. Thus, modification or changes in the life of the people, material and non-materials in consequent with acculturation and influences can be termed as cultural change. Yet, the factors leading to the culture change differs from one culture to another. The present study is an anthropological perspective on the cultural transformation of the Maram tribe in Manipur. It tries to explore the factors that impacted and influenced and continues to influence the Maram culture.

With the rapid influence of modernization among the Marams, the tribe's cultural and traditional life is also changing. The life in the present context could be seen as the result of a series of changes that took place in the past. For culture is regarded as a historical growth determined by the social, political and environment aspects of life. One important moment

was the political intervention of the British administration that also facilitated the entry of Christian missionaries who did not hesitate to intervene with the traditional institutions of the tribe. They brought great changes to the indigenous religious belief systems and practices and as well as other aspects in the life of people in the field of education, personal life and other aspects of life. The change of culture begins from the time the tribe came in contact the British administration and the missionaries who initiated various developments, resulting in economic opportunities in the post-independence period. With Christianity, formal education was introduced among the Maram which became a major factor of change in the culture. Thus, the impact of modernization on the tribe and culture had tremendous impact on the religion, education, socio-economic and cultural life of the people. It also led to the decline of the indigenous arts, culture and tradition, crafts, traditional system of administration, customary law and justice. One could also notice a phase of socio-cultural change after the post-independence period. In addition, the various developmental programmes of the Government in the country began to impact the life of the people. Thus, the process of culture change began with the introduction of western cultural elements into the traditional ways of life.

Manipur

Manipur is a land with diverse culture, with an area of 22, 327 sq.km which constitute 0.7 percent of the entire land of India. The population of Manipur (Census, 2011) was 28,55,794 lakhs comprising 14,38,586 lakhs of males and 14,17,208 lakhs of females. The density of population was 128 persons per Sq Km. compared to India's density of 368 per km (Census 2011). Manipur comprises two different topographical zones, hills and valleys. The hill area consists of five districts, namely, Senapati, Churachandpur, Tamenglong, Ukhrul, and Chandel. Bishnupur, Imphal East, Thoubal and Imphal West districts constituted the valley region. Manipur state is divided into 60 Developmental blocks with 2,515 inhabited villages, belonging to 33 different ethnic groups. The valley is thickly populated with a density of 730 persons per sq. km, and in contrast with a very low density in the hills of just 61 persons per km in the hills. Manipur comes under the Eastern Himalayan agro-climatic zone (Preethi, 2017). Agriculture continues to be the mainstay of the State's economy and contribute 47.89 per cent to the State Domestic Product. In Manipur, the majority of people are agricultural labourers engaged in the various agricultural-related domains.

Maram Tribe

Maram tribe inhabits in Senapati and Kangpokpi district of Manipur. It has six assembly constituencies, namely, Kangpokpi, Mao, Karong, Saikul, Tadubi, and Saitu. Maram tribe falls under Tadubi sub-division and occupying the western hills of the state. According to the 2011 census, Maram has a population of about 43,577 which are spread across the thirty-eight villages. Though their origin and migration are shrouded in oral history because of no written script, the tribe has rich culture and tradition. The word 'Maram' indicates a tribe, language spoken among them and the name of a place with Maram population. History of Marams is interlaced with frictions and resentments, chivalry and heroism, and is marked by episodes of bloodshed and exploitation just like many other Naga tribes (Robert, 2013). Their main occupation is agriculture with rice being their staple food. They practice both shifting and terrace farming.

Every society undergoes changes, so too Maram society. Most of these are pertaining to social, economic, political, religious, and cultural changes. In all these one of the factors that brought the onset of modernization is necessarily education (George, 2012). In the recent past, there has been awareness for the need to revive the culture and traditions which are losing its foothold. Apart from the few works of the research scholars in various disciplines, and the reports on the tribe by the Government of India in 1982 that declared Maram as one of the Primitive tribal Groups. The cultural transformation of the Maram tribe has also come about as a result of experiences and adaptations of new religions and impact of modernisation and education. By 1970s major villages of the tribe embraced Christianity with established churches within their largely independent villages. With economic development, new religion, availability of transport, communication, and more educational opportunities, apart from the close contact with people from other cultural groups, there is greater awareness for proper understanding of the process of culture within the Maram tribe and has become more relevant, essential and appropriate.

METHODOLOGY

The research study is located within Senapati District. The Marams are more closely bounded to other culture because of its geographical advantage. However, in the recent past there have been a lot of social changes taking place precisely because of this factor. Moreover, the traditional and cultural ways of life is losing its foothold and are being slowly replaced by the new bureaucratic and religious ways of life. The gradual process of this change is referred to as transformation in this research study. The study here is concerned about the factors leading to the culture transformation among the Maram tribe.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the demographic profiles of the respondents

2. To study the cultural transformation among the Maram tribe in Senapati district.
3. To study and examine the factors affecting the cultural transformation of the Maram tribe.
4. To suggest suitable measures based on the findings and conclusion

Analysis and Interpretation

The Socio-demographic profile of the respondents of the Maram tribe is presented in terms of the variables, such as age, religion, marital and educational status. The respondents for the study were 50 men and 70 women (total 120) from Maram tribe of Senapati district Manipur.

Table: 1.Socio-demographic profile of the Maram tribe

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	50-59	30	25%
	60-69	43	35.8%
	70-79	29	24.1%
	80 above	18	15%
	Total	120	100%
Gender	Male	50	41.6%
	Female	70	58.3%
	Total	120	100
Educational Qualification	Illiterate	63	52.5%
	Primary	23	19.1%
	Secondary	19	15.8%
	Graduate	4	3.3%
	Others	11	9.1%
	Total	120	100
Marital status	Married	78	65%
	Unmarried	3	2.5%
	Widow	23	19.6%
	Widower	16	13.3%
	Total	120	100%

Distribution of the respondents by age is presented in Table-1. It is observed from the table that the study consists of respondents from all the age groups. Majority of the respondents 35.8 per cent belong to 60-69 years age group, followed by 25 per cent of the respondents belong to 50-59 years age group. The age group of 70-79 years are 24.1 per cent and 15 per cent are of the age group are above 80 years. The proportion of the sample respondents in the age can be seen in the above table.

The gender-wise distribution of the respondents depicts that a vast majority of 58.3% are females. The males constitute only 41.6% of the sample.

Educational status shows that 52.5 per cent are illiterate, followed by 19.1 per cent are of primary education. Furthermore, 15.8 per cent completed secondary, only 3.3 per cent are graduates, and 9.1 per cent are others which mean they do not belong to any group.

In tribal communities, the level of education is extremely low due to lack of awareness about values and usefulness of education, added to this is the prevalence of early marriages. Besides, tribal populations are often isolated from the mainstream of society due to cultural and geographical reasons.

Marital status reveals that 65 per cent of the sample respondents are married, 2.5 per cent are unmarried and 19.6 per cent are widows or separated or divorced. Another 13.3 per cent of the respondents are widowers. A vast Majority of the respondents of the study area are married.

Table: 2Economic aspects of Maram community

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Civil Status	Farmer	74	61.6%

	Private Employed	19	15.8%
	Govt. Employed	5	4.1%
	Business	10	8.3%
	Others	12	10 %
	Total	120	100%
Yearly Income	20000-29000	15	12.5%
	30000-39000	21	17.5%
	40000-49000	37	30.8%
	50000-59000	38	31.6%
	60000 above	9	7.5%
	Total	120	100%
Type of House	RCC	22	18.3%
	Assam Type	86	71.6%
	Bamboo House	9	7.5%
	Others	3	2.5%
	Total	120	100%

Data in the above table shows that out of the total 120 respondents, 61.6 per cent, the vast majority of respondents were farmers, 15.8 per cent respondents were engaged in private sector, 4.1 per cent respondents were members of Government employed family, 8.3 per cent respondents belonged to members of small farmer family undertaking small business, and 10 per cent respondents are of others category.

Table no. 2 classifies the respondents based on household annual income. It is observed from the table that majority of the respondents' family annual income ranges between Rs.50,000-59,000. Further, it is striking to note that nearly 30 per cent of the respondent's income ranges from Rs.40,000-49,000, while 17.5 per cent respondent's income is between Rs. 30,000-39,000. A less percentage 12.5 of the respondents, whose annual income is Rs. 20,000-29,000, 7.5 per cent ranges above 60,000. Hence, it can be concluded that the respondents' annual income is normal as seen in the table above.

The type of house is a parameter regarding the economic status of the people. If the family has a concrete house (RCC), it can be considered as rich because it shows the economic status of the respondents.

The type of house shows majority 71.6 per cent respondents resides in popularly known as Assam type houses which are normally found in northeast India. Assam type houses are made of wooden pillars, a bamboo wall with mud plaster, and roof (with galvanized iron sheet roof). A good number 18.3 per cent lived in RCC (reinforced cement concrete) houses containing steel bars, fibres with brick walls, floor with cement and roof with iron sheets, 7.5 per cent resides in Bamboo houses (wall with bamboo mat and roof with thatch or galvanized iron sheet). Only 2.5 per cent lived in other types of houses.

Table: 3 Family patterns of Maram tribe

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Type of family	Nuclear	88	73.3%
	Joint Family	30	25%
	Extended	2	1.6%
	Total	120	100%
Head of the family	Father	68	56.6%
	Mother	42	35%
	Others	10	8.3%
	Total	120	100%

In the study area, out of 120 respondents, 88 (73.3 per cent) respondents are nuclear families and 30 (25 per cent) respondents are joint families, only 2 (1.6 per cent) are from the extended family. It is a tradition among the Marams that a man will have a nuclear family soon after his marriage. The joint family system is contemptuously viewed because of the poor economic conditions and low literacy level. The data regarding head of the family show the majority 56.6% said father was the head while 35 per cent stated it was the mother and only 8.3 per cent revealed others are head of the family.

Table: 4 Perceptions regarding the cultural transformation

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>
Influence of Modernisation	Yes	95	79.1
	No	25	20.8
	Total	120	100
Adoption of Western culture	Yes	101	84.1
	No	19	15.8
	Total	120	100
Due to Christianity	Yes	118	98.3
	No	2	1.6
	Total	120	100
Influence of Education	Yes	86	71.6
	No	34	28.3
	Total	120	100
Migration	Yes	74	61.6
	No	46	38.3
	Total	120	100

Community and social life play a large role in the lives of Maram tribe. Culture has a large role to play in day today life of the people. The tribe has been exposed to various cultural groups, tribal and non-tribal communities. Therefore, the different spheres of their culture has been influenced in different ways. Horam (1992) claims that in the face of changes, young people tried to partly awaken the traditional values of various forms of culture to vilify the almost vanishing traditions and cultural heritage. Every society across the world has a history of change. Internal stress and strains within the culture can be one of the factors leading to change (Dube, 1992). He viewed that changes originated in the society are promoted by innovators from within the culture and inspired directly or indirectly by outside agencies. The continuity of the traditional culture is disrupted due to various forces of Christianity and modernisation among the Maram Naga tribe. As depicted in the above table 79.1 per cent of the respondents have strongly admitted that influence of modernization has led to cultural transformation, and only 20.8 per cent held the opinion that influence of modernisation has nothing to do with cultural transformation. A good number 84.1 per cent revealed that western culture has transformed the old tradition of the Marams, while 15.8 per cent stated that western culture had not influenced the traditional culture. A vast majority 98.3 per cent stated that with the advent of Christianity the culture has changed as the people began to adopt the Christian practices and only 1.6 per cent opined that Christianity did not influenced culture change. With regard to the influence of education, 71.6 per cent stated that with modern education and educational institutions set up in the community is a major factor that led to the decline of cultural practices. 28.3 per cent observed that it was not due to education. In terms of migration or migrating taking place within the tribe like going out of the state for higher studies and for job, more than half 61.6 per cent reveals that migration definitely influence the cultural transformation, while 38.3 per cent of the respondents said migration has not influenced the culture at all.

Results of Focused Group Discussion (FGD)

A Focused Group Discussion was carried out to understand the cultural transformation of the Maram tribe, factors affecting the culture, various influences of culture, challenges of traditional practices and means to preserve cultural practices. Three sessions were conducted with 30 elders consisting of both men and women (15 each). The leading questions for the group discussion were the following.

1. Do you see any change in the cultural practices of the Maram in the last few years?
2. Is it the education that is bringing changes among the Marams or Christianity?
3. What is the impact of Christianity on the Maram culture?
4. What are the factors that influenced the cultural transformation?
5. What are the reasons for declining the culture at large among the Maram Tribe?
6. What are the cultural challenges among the Maram traditional practices?
7. What could be the best ways to preserve Maram culture?
8. What are your suggestions and measures to preserve or bring back the good element of Maram culture to make the new generation understand the richness of the Maram culture?

The participants were very interactive and most of them participated in the group discussion and expressed their views on the above questions. The information sought from the respondents was enriching, as their tone and expressions revealed their interaction with the group and involvement in its activities. The summary of the discussion is presented below.

Change in the cultural practices of the Maram in the last few years

Cultural changes and transformation has taken place among the Maram at large. To state a few, the norms and practices especially *Maliim*, one of the ritual practice before the traditional *Kanghi*, a wrestling festival. Of course, even now the same rituals are carried out but only for the sake of doing it. The difference is that in the olden days all the menfolk went to the water pond before sunrise, and took bath naked as a sign of purification. Another ritual is of *Marui Manii* when women are not to move out or do any work as a sign of respect for the men. On the *Marui Manii* for those children who are small and not able to go for the purification in the pond, the elders will bring water to the village and bathe them. The water is to be taken or carried early in the dawn before anyone else touches the water. All the clothes will be cleaned with water; all the spears and guns will be wiped with water in the pond itself. However, people are not observing all these rites and rituals today as earlier.

Education that is bringing changes among the Marams due to Christianity

The participants strongly opined that the transformation that has taken place among the *Marams* is very visible. Majority strongly stated that education has brought changes among the *Marams*. They admitted the vital role of Christianity and how the culture of the *Marams* in the meantime, became more prominent in the society. They expressed the view that after accepting Christianity *Marams* became more educated and lived a more faithful life because of the church teachings. Now many of the participants feel fortunate to practice the real teachings of the church. A few participants expressed that the clothing, dressing style, and living style of *Marams* have changed. According to them, the present generation once they see anything on social media they immediately pick up and imitate the same in their daily life. The songs they sing are all from the movies and latest film as the youngsters go crazy with the modern style. Even the dances the young generation performs are all of the western culture as they are highly influenced by westernization. They felt that the changes are taking place mainly after the coming of modern education among the people and particularly among the *Marams*.

Impact of western Christianity on Maram culture

- a. Religious impact: Replacement of animism with Christianity.
- b. Social Impact: Drastic change in living standards, change in the style of ornamentation, change of food habits, change in the system of various festivals and social gatherings, loss of the importance of traditional dance and music replaced by modern and western music and dance. These days more and more people desire western education.
- c. Economic Impact: loss of traditional work culture, replacement of traditional tools by modern technology, change in the means of income and expenditure, entering into different types of business.

Factors that influenced the cultural Transformation

- Majority of people accepting Christianity and very few people practise customary traditional religious practices and rituals
- Less superstitious belief
- Less practices of tradition and customs
- Better mutual understanding and relationship among the people
- Broad minded attitudes
- Education leading to change the old beliefs
- Availability and easy access to modern technology and competitive environment
- Change of food habits
- Imitating the modern life style in daily events

The culture of the Marams is declining and particularly with the present generation

In the first place, no proper documentation was maintained as the forefathers were illiterate.

The second reason is lack of research and scarcity of written documents, slowly resulting people to forget this culture and traditions.

Thirdly, the late arrival of education among the *Marams* have led to the decline of the culture of the *Marams*.

Fourthly, lack of visit of scholarly people to the *Maram* villages to record the history and events have caused the decline of the *Maram* culture. In the olden days the only way history and culture preserved was through oral traditions, hence the absence of recorded history caused traditions to slowly fade away as people stopped practicing them.

Although most of the villages under Willong circle are away from the highways and towns and expected to preserve culture, they did not practice the culture as much as the *Maram* *Khullen* village. Therefore, there are changes in the cultural practices among the *Maram* themselves.

Cultural challenges among the Maram traditional practices

- a) **Belief in superstition:** There are many who continue to believe even now in superstitious practices even though there are no records of evidence.
- b) **Rigidity of practices:** There are many rituals to be observed and these practices are very rigid. It is held that anyone who fails to observe ritual obligation is bound to become blind.
- c) **Lack of communication:** Before accepting Christianity, people lived a life in fear of constant conflict and warlike situation between villages and often on land issues. Hence, people lived in a compact area and had little or no means to communicate with others. As a result, they did not know what was happening in nearby villages or states. They got stuck in the ancestral way of living with no advancement in any field.
- d) **Lack of education:** Since people had little access to communication, they also were deprived of literacy. Their mindset were very narrow that they could only see what was happening in front of their eyes, and did not notice the impact of education on all aspects of life. In the area of education much was contributed by the missionaries and recognizing the need for education many people accepted Christianity as their religion.

Means to preserve Maram culture

The majority of the participants said that the best way to preserve Maram culture would be to organize, establish or observe a day once a year jointly for all Marams. Although village level cultural celebration like *punghi*, *kajoi* etc., were held, not all Marams celebrated them on the same day or date. Majority felt the need to make these celebrations more attractive and common that all Marams irrespective of age and profession would be longing for the day to participate in the celebration as one group. As one of the most vulnerable tribes of Manipur they want the government to recognize the *Pung nghi* as a state celebration just like the *Gangai* celebration of the Kabuis.

Few expressed that *Mangkang* could be the perfect Maram festival for a State level celebration. A particular day in April (that does not collide with any other State festival) could be agreed upon by all the Marams with the blessing of the Chief of Maram. *Mangkang* is unique, and is known by many people in the state. Few participants suggested to have a common Cultural Festival of the entire *Maralui*, particularly *Pung'nghi Hang'ngi* (post rice transplantation) which is yet to start-off, due to lack of common agreement.

Some expressed the view that Post-plantation, or post-harvest festivals could be conducted for a state level celebrations. However, a few expressed that no other tribe has a festival like *Mangkang* that is dedicated exclusively for the women folk, and could be a state level celebration.

Another suggestion was to form a department/body under Maram Union known as the Department of Maram Cultural Promotion. They can encourage activities throughout the year to promote Maram. The members of the department be only luminaries where minimum qualification to be master's degree (persons involved in academic work/lecturers be given preference to be members of this body).

A Few expressed the view that the organization could conduct half day/one day seminar on Maram history/culture/language/folk songs etc. to the students. This will give them awareness of the rich cultural history of Maram which they can explore more if they are interested during their stay in Maram. Cultural tours to historical places like Maram Khullen, Willong etc. could be organized. The students could help promote the Maram culture through social media and also tell about their experiences when they go back to their hometown or to metro cities where they go for higher studies/work.

The elders expressed their willingness to bring back the lost culture and teach the young Marams especially on the importance of culture. They desired to share the knowledge on culture with the youth in many ways to enable them to keep up the culture alive. Majority of participants could notice that the present generation has begun the process of forgetting the rich culture of the forefathers. If given a chance they would like to gather the youth and spend time to share the importance of preserving their culture.

Suggestions and measures to preserve Maram culture

In this regard, 50% of the respondents pointed out that the present generation of youth and the middle age group is too late to learn about the Maram culture. They felt that the influence of education has taken a strong root on the Maram youngsters and that it is difficult for the elders to make the culture alive with this present generation.

Participants believe that the elders can emphasize and catch hold of the children of 6 to 10 years and teach them the culture in its entirety. This will have a great and lasting impact on the preservation of Maram culture. They stressed the need set up a common place for the children to come together and learn the culture just like the children at present are taught to go for

Sunday class or catechism on every Sunday. The king exhorted the people to practice both the Christian teaching as well as the cultural practices to keep the culture alive.

It is pointed out that in the present context even the youth are unable to sing a folk song because they are not familiar with the tone as they are influenced by the modern music and lifestyle. At present, some churches are even restricting the congregation not to wear traditional shawls during church service or sing folk songs because of being a Christian. All these incidents are experienced by the king himself during the past years.

CONCLUSION

It is generally understood that not only culture but every aspect of life is prone to transformation. These shifts give people an altogether different experience. Now that modernism has taken hold of the world, people feel independent and unrestrained from the myths and superstitions that once ruled the world. The approach towards life is undergoing tremendous transformation and new modes of living are finding its way to every culture day after day. The investigation clearly revealed that factors like Christianity, education and westernization mainly influenced the culture of Marams to its transformation. The result of Focused Group Discussion gave an appraisal on the various factors that impacted the culture on a large scale.

Today, although the tribe has adopted Christianity, their attitude and ways of life are still influenced by the traditional and cultural belief system. The data collected from the respondents reflected the characteristic features of Maram culture. The main intention of the study is to present a holistic view of the culture transformation of the Maram tribe and to bring out the factors of changes that influenced the various aspects of life.

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