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## Maring Tribe Women: Original History and Impacts of Modern Development among the Maring Women in Manipur

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### ABSTRACT

*Tracing back to its origin, Maring tribe women are fully dedicated to their husband. Women behavior, character, and dress are strictly followed according to the tradition. They were engaged only in cultivation. Education was far away from them. Women were living with low income. But traditional and cultures were highly preserved. They follow oral literature. But at present modern education and culture hit the women society of this tribe. There is a huge gap between traditional and modern culture. Their tradition and customs were left behind and adapting to the modern culture. Therefore, most of their ancestral history had been gone into the darkness. There is no written historical record of this tribe to date. Moreover, modern education has given support to their lives too. Women were seen most influence by the western culture. Most of the time, women related crimes arouse in present days too.*

**Keywords:** *Origin, Settlement, Traditional Attires, Evolution, Impact, Issues.*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Manipur is a land of diversity. More than 32 (Thirty-two) tribes are found in Manipur. All these tribes have a different culture, custom, and rituals. Cultural attires are not must concerned by men in day to day life. But women are in touch with their own cultural attires of the tribe they belong to. A person inhabited in the state can easily identify the tribe by observing at the dress of the women in general. Moreover, these tribes have their own language for communication. Manipuri or Meiteilon is the major dialects of the state. English is the official language of the state. "Maringa lhou" is the language of the Meirings or Marings. Maring women are hard workers from their origin. Most of them are engaged in cultivation. Few of them are literate. The economy of Maring women is below the margin. Their Culture and language seem to deviate from their origins. Lack of writers and historians make unable to explore this tribe's women around the world.

### OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

- ✓ To explore the culture, custom, and history of the women.
- ✓ To explore their living standard and western culture impact at present.
- ✓ To suggest the policies to protect their culture and history.

### HYPOTHESIS

The tradition, culture and customary laws of Maring women got a tremendous change.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study seeks to analyze about the identity of women of Maring tribe and it would contribute to explore that there is a tribe called “Maring” in North Eastern part on the border of India and Myanmar. Tracing origin and history of the Marings, it discusses at length their origin, migration, culture, social structure, religious and village policy. Moreover, the socio-economic condition of women reflects the development of a society.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

T.C. Hudson (2007). The Naga Tribes of Manipur, in this book Dr. Brown, described the dress of Maring Women very clearly. The study also gives a vivid account of the origin of Maring tribe, its clans, the difference between man and women. The book was written by going directly to the Maring Villages and his Eye witness history.

B.B. Kumar (2005), Naga Identity, this book laid down the origin of Maring tribe and the garments of women. The study of this book will enable to identify the identity of Maring women and their traditions.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

The study is mainly based on primary and secondary sources;

Primary sources; by examining their behaviors, dresses, culture and their way of communication in festivals and annual gatherings, etc

Secondary sources; the data is collected from books and other related documents.

## **IV. SELECTION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEMS**

Lack of education in women of this tribe is the most hindrance to development. Literacy rate among the women is below margin even at present century. Most of the women are engaged in cultivation. Their culture and customs seem to be floating in the sea of darkness. Geographically, this tribe is divided into two regions - Northern side and southern side. Therefore, there is a huge communication gap between them. Most of the villages are on the topmost of different hills which are very far away from each other. Most of them are converted into Christianity thereby their own ancestral religion seems faded away.

## **V. CONDITIONS OF THE STUDY**

Maring women are mainly engaged in day-to-day works and hand-to-mouth system of living. Most of them are not aware to find out their original history, culture, and folklores, etc. Everything was replaced by the newly arriving religion called Christianity. Therefore, conflicts occur frequently between grandparents and sons, daughters and grandsons. Because of the adoption of western culture, it's very difficult to trace back their original. Moreover, there were no written records of this tribe. They follow oral literature.

Modern development give must impact on cultures and customs of this tribe. Their traditional behavior and character were very strict in the past. But at present, the way they dress, speak and behave are completely different from their ancestral. Therefore, a crime against women in this tribe too increases. But modern education gives more chances to women in getting salaried jobs.

## **VI. FINDING OF THE STUDY**

Although not all the women of the villages can be met personally, most of the studies are based on group discussion and conversations during yearly gatherings, marriage ceremonies, funeral services and religious gatherings. The study came to find out that the traditional life of women has been found a drastic change in women society of this tribe. Education among women will be the only device to bridge a gap between tradition and modern differences.

## **VII. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

**Origin of Maring tribe:** Maring or Meiring is one of the oldest tribe in Manipur found in the written history of Manipur during the reign of King Meeting Thangpi Lanthapa in 1302 A.D. The word “Meiring” has two meanings- “Mei” means “Fire” and “ring” means “alive”. It denotes that Maring is a tribe who keeps the fire alive. It is believed and claimed by Marings that they came out from the earth in the vicinity of Angoching range called “Kulvi song-song”, which was their original home. It is located on the border of India and Myanmar. The place called Mungsa, Wasaphai, Angoching, Yangoupokpi and Kabow valley are the origin areas of this tribe.

When this tribe came out from the earth, there were seven men and seven women. These seven pairs make seven clans that exist still today. The seven clans are – Charanga, Khulpuwa, Makunga, Dangsawa, Kansouwa, Tangtanga, and Khleya Marings have a systematic way of naming title to sons and daughters. The titles given to daughters are- Ate (1<sup>st</sup> daughter), Ato (2<sup>nd</sup> daughter), Ape (3<sup>rd</sup> daughter), Akhu (4<sup>th</sup> daughter), Akham/Leibi (5<sup>th</sup> daughter onwards) and for sons- Amo (1<sup>st</sup> son), Ako (2<sup>nd</sup> son), Anga (3<sup>rd</sup> son), Ame (4<sup>th</sup> son), Leiba (5<sup>th</sup> son onwards). These titles are the prefix of their names. So, one can easily

identify the position of a man or woman in this tribe. But according to the clan in which they belong to, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> positions of both man and woman are interchanged.

**Geographical Locations:** Maring tribe is divided into North Eastern region and South Eastern region base on geographical location. Most of the Marings are confined near their original place in Chandel district. They belong to the South Eastern side of Manipur. All the villages are confined on the top of the hills. This is because in the ancient period, valleys covered with water and there were so many mosquitoes. It is said that Marings build their houses on the top of the hills because of they afraid the mosquitoes attack them. Moreover, they can easily observe the movements of the enemy during the war period as they are on the top of the hill. Konaitong village is also an important place during the biggest war of Manipur fought between Manipuris and Britishers. The road between Laiphrok Maring Village and Sandang Senba village was made by the Japanese during Second World War period and is still now. There are some villages located in the Senapati district and Imphal East district. They belong to North Eastern regions.

**Traditional attires and ornaments of Maring Women:** It was very difficult to identify between man and woman of this tribe in their origin. Both men and women have long hairs. Only the difference was man made his hair into a knot called "Museum" in the front like a horn and woman made the knot called "Samphan" behind. The dress of both man and woman seems to be very similar. The difference is on both the ending part of the cloth. The woman wore "Yaruilak Phikham" and the man wears "Phi Langphai". Both these clothes are white in colour and are very simple. Both side borders of the length of Yaruilak Phikham have seven small different colorful strips indicating seven clans. And for man, the Phi Langphai has also seven small strips of black colour on both ends along the breadth indicating seven clans of the tribe. Women dye their teeth with black colour vegetable extracts.

Women wrap their head with a simple clothing of white, red or orange colors as dhoti. This clothing that covers the whole head of the woman is called "Lu-Khoom" and for a man it has a slight horny type erecting upwards above the forehead. It is called "Mur-Sum".

In the ears, women use to wear shells and insect wings instead of ear rings in the past. A rounded white hard shell called "Kho" was made a small hole at the center and made to pass a small bamboo bar on one end called "Kho Chei" and the other side was made to pass through the ear ring hole. Just in front of the white shell, three strings of thread are tiding at the small bar which was at the center of the white shell. Then the threads were hanging downside with colorful shells. The down ends of these threads were tiding with insect wings of three pairs in one thread called "Lum-Ler saa". These insects are called "Lum-ler" and are found in local jungles rarely. Their colours are bluest green and shinny. These insect wings make noisy sounds while dancing accompanies with drums.

Ancient Maring women do not wear shirts. They wear trousers above the breast making both shirt and petticoat. A small rope made of thread crafted with white sea-shells called "Holcham" tie around the waist. Holchams are also tied to the ankle of both legs while dancing.

In both the upper arms women used to wear bracelet coils made of brass. They used to wear the same bracelet round the wrist called "Hutsin" in Maring dialect.

**Marriage:** There are two types of marriage in Maring tribe; Lu-Hong (marriage) and Truk (elope). **Lu-Hong (Marriage):** - If a man and a woman fall in love than the parents of the man will go to the family of the woman and beg to give consent for marriage. This is the first step and is called "Tul-sor" or "Moor wah" in Maring language. After the family of the woman accepted the request, the next step is to fix a day for final consent called "Lampu-kham". Then both, the families will sit together and fix a day for the marriage. The marriage will be held both at the residence of the bride and the bridegroom. The ceremony starts from the residence of the bride in the morning with lunch. And in the evening again at the residence of the groom and followed by dance and songs at night. All the expenditures were borne by the groom. **Truk (elope):** If a man and a woman fall in love, and eloped themselves, then marriage ceremony will not be performed. In this case, the traditional way of confirming the marriage will be done. The groom's family has to negotiate with the bride's family. Sometimes, the family of the bride will ask for a grand feast for her village or sometimes they ask for money. But the family of the groom has to offer a pig and a wine jar as a fine to the bride's village.

**Role of woman in the family:** Women took a big role in their own families. They are mostly engaged in cultivation than a man in general. Men will look after the construction part and heavy jobs where women could not be performed. Women are also engaged in daily household chores like washing, cooking, cleaning and looking after children too. There was no family planning of giving birth in the past. They can give birth as must as they could. They thought that many children will be a benefit for working in the field when they grew up. But nowadays, only two to three children are fixed by themselves even no rules were made.

**The economy of Women:** The economy of women sections of Maring tribe is below the margin till now. There were no salaried women till the early part of the 1980s. Because of late in education, women could not get salaried jobs in Private or Public sectors. Vegetables, fruits, forest products and handicraft products of bamboo are their only source of income. Maring women are famous for making bamboo products in the state. They used to sale these products in the market. Some of the bamboo products that are sold on the market are;

Sai luk:- Smallest basket to measure the quantity of rice in the rice pot with the persons to be eaten accordingly. This basket is also known as “Meruk”.

Saicham luk: This basket is used to wash the rice before cooking.

Laitang luk: It is the half of Likhai Luk mainly used to measure rice.

Likhai luk:-it is the half of Sangphai and is mainly used to measure rice.

**Sangphai:** It is the most important basket not only for Maring tribe but for the state Manipur too. Its size is double of Likhai luk. This basket is used as a **standard measurement** of rice in the state. Buying and selling of rice are measured in this basket. Moreover, the famous proverb “Maring na saaba Sangphai di naama ho dey hainei do” is known to every citizen of the state.

**Bilkhu:** It is the biggest basket of Maring tribe. Its diameter extents even three to five metres. It is mainly used to store or preserve rice from the paddy fields for the whole year of the family. Sometimes, it is used to store food for the invitees who were attaining the ceremonies of the village. Since the size of Bilkhu is so big, it is used only for a household purpose.

Bungka, Yenskap, Yentai are used to wash and clean vegetables only as they are less dense than luks. So, water escaped easily after washing the vegetables.

Lei-khu and Wang-kho are the two types of bamboo product made by Maring tribe. Lei-khu is a flat type of basket but smaller in size than wang-kho and it is used to clean rice that contains stones, small woods, and other unwanted particles. Wang-kho is bigger much bigger than Lei-khu and it is used to expose covered rice in the sunlight before crushing at the rice mill. This made the rice good quality. Wang-kho is sold rarely in the market. This is mainly for the household used purpose.

All of the Maring family members are gifted to craft these bamboo products by nature. This system of earning continued in the whole year. Women used to work in the field during seed sowing and harvesting seasons. But at night they will engage in making a basket before they slept. And in the morning, they will go to the market to sale these products.

**Honor and Title:** “Min-Phook” which means “Naming” or “Giving title” to some rich and wealthy person in a village is the greatest honor given to a Maring man and woman. It is a customary function where messengers were sent to all the Maring villages of Manipur. In the past, all the invitees were to hold three to five days in that family. All the day and night meals and lodging expenditures were borne by the host. In this ceremony, the “Mithun” is compulsory for the meal of the invitees. This animal is tied with long and big ropes on both sides of the horn. The long ropes are held by many strongest men among the invitees on both sides. The ropes were not allowed to tie in the tree. Than the host man or woman will pour local wine at the head of the Mithun and pierce the animal at the heart with a spear. Than the Mithun will jump up and down and tried to escape from them. It makes very interesting festival until the animal dies. Then the meat will be prepared for the meal by a number of men and women of the host village. The invitees will sing traditional songs in praise of the name of the host. The songs are of different tunes and themes, accompanied by traditional drum called “Phung” and “Dar”. The sound of these instruments can be heard from nearby villages too.

**Religion:** In ancient times, Maring women devout and worship their husband as the only living god. They pray for their husband when he went out of the family. Assisting her husband and prepare the needs for offerings to god were done by her. Weaving traditional clothes for her husband for his traditional way of worship was done by her. She will not perform any task which was not allowed by her husband. Women were not allowed to enter in alter of traditional gods. But in present days, there are so many changes occur. Traditional weaving system was decreased tremendously.

**Festivals:** There are numbers of festivals of Maring tribe. These festivals were organized at every village where women will take responsibility for cooking and dancing parts. Women will serve wine for the participants. Traditional songs and dances are done in most of the festivals. But at present, all these festivals are hardly organized for name shakes only. It is because most of them were converted into Christians. Some of the festivals of this tribe are; Lam-lai (Road cleaning festival), Nung-nui (Rain festival), Khung kap, Thrai-ka or Kum-tin (Prediction or seed sowing festival), Pol-sa (Village gate repairing festival), Min-phook (Naming the person, Paar-yao (Festival of gods and goddess), etc.

**Education among women:** Those women who went to school were given punishment by not giving lunch or dinner by their parents in the past. Sometimes they were beaten up severely. The parents thought that going to school by passing two or three villages and coming back in the evening is wasting time. These are the works to be done by lazy people. No work, no meal system was imposed by the parents to their children in the past. But at present, this mindset was left behind and started educating their daughters to schools and colleges. But still, the number of students studying in college level is very low.

Learning traditional songs and folklores were encouraged by parents. Parents used to carry their children to far off villages to attend ceremonies and rituals. But all the songs and folklores were narrating orally. Since there was no literate person to note down these songs and stories among them, oral literature creates often conflict and forgotten. There were leaders of women group singers of every village. There were different songs on different occasions and ceremonies. But all are traditional songs only. Men and women will be seated left and right, men on the right and women on the left. Then they sing the whole night in the form of questions and answers. Local wine extract from rice will be offered by the host village sufficiently for the whole days and nights. Intestines of cow, buffalo, pig or yaks were also served. They will sing and dance in the rhythm of slowly but continue the whole day and night. There will be one leader from both men and women group singers. They are called “Laa-rung”.

**Role of women in politics:** In the past, women were not allowed to take part as a leader in any political issues. They were suppressed by men. The women of Maring tribe never emerge as an intending candidate of Rajya Sabha, Lok Sabha or Members of Legislative till now. But only one woman was elected as a Zila Parishad from Chanam Sandrok Gram Panchayat of Imphal East district so far. There were few numbers of women who were elected in local self-government systems.

**Communication and Language system:** The name of the language spoken by this tribe is called “Maringa Lhou”. There is always a difference in the tone of language among the Maring tribe. It is because of the geographical reasons. The people in the south eastern region speak softly and in rhythmic voice. But the extreme end of the region speaks in a hard voice. The North Eastern region people speak in hard tones. Their languages are same but the tone is completely different from South Eastern region. Every village has their own style of speaking, tone accent, and commonly used words. They can easily identify the person by the way he or she speaks. Oral means of communication is the only means of communication in the past. To give news, and invitations they have to send a person to every village. During war and emergency broke out, they used to beat drums and iron post in unusual sounds. The village nearby can be heard the sounds easily as all of them were on the top of the hill. Drums will beat in a slow and steadily so that they can assume and understand that someone in the village is dead.

**Impacts of Western culture to Maring Women:** The western culture and modern development give a good impact and uplift living standard to women. Women are mostly based on the salaried type of living today. The ancient traditional system of working in the field as their main job deviated. But modern development and western culture give bad impacts also. The traditional way of dressing was left far behind. The dressing which covers the whole body of women in ancient time was outdated. A new style of wearing cloth appears today. Most of the women expose their body which was strictly forbidden in the past. Nowadays, men are trapped by women by making them attract through their body exposing dresses. This way of dressing styles increase women related crimes in this tribe too.

### **VIII. CONCLUSIONS**

In the past, Maring woman can be easily identified by looking at her physical appearance. She will cover her head as a turban with red or white clothes. No women will be seen with pants. She colors her teeth with vegetable extracts. But nowadays, it is very difficult to identify a Maring woman. Modern development and western culture influenced their dress and living styles. It's very hard to trace their original history. To protect and preserve their culture, it needs to establish a museum and to keep their cultural weapons, ornaments, ancestral things for future generations. Moreover, Cultural Halls should also be constructed and to teach and learn traditional dance, songs, and folklores. Scholars and Writers need to do research and write the books about their history and cultures. The state should take up proper actions to protect all the indigenous tribes of Manipur. If proper measures are not taken up, many tribes will lose their cultures and histories.

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