SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG MARING TRIBES OF A MANIPUR: A CASE STUDY OF SANDANGSHENBA VILLAGE

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ABSTRACT

Manipur is home to diverse tribal groups. Maring is one such community which is agreed to be under Naga tribe on broad categorization of tribes. As it is true with other tribal communities, Maring tribe of Manipur has its own set of unique traditional social systems. The tribe has its own set of traditional social, cultural, religious and economic institutions. The paper attempts to understand the nature, characteristics, factors and consequences of social change in Maring community. It deals with social institutions that prevail among the Maring tribe and thereafter examine the transformation taking place. The paper further attempts to explore and understand the process of social change. In order to generalize, a case study of Sandangshenba Maring village in south eastern part of Imphal East district is considered for the study.

KEY WORDS: Change, Institutions, Tribes, Social systems, Transformation, Tribes

INTRODUCTION

Maring is one of the oldest tribes of Manipur. The elderly people of Marings are of the view that they first settled underneath the earth literally known to them as Kulvi Shongsong and then moved to the empty vast valley- the Washaphai. They then gradually spread along the Ningthee Basin in the Angkoching range and Yoomadung Hills in Myanmar. They travelled as a nomadic tribe and inhabited different areas on due course of epoch making. The main areas inhabited by Maring tribe are -Langol, Machi, Khunbi, and Karungthel. They mostly inhabit in Chandel district of the present day Manipur. The population of Maring is also scattered in other districts like Senapati, Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Thoubal and Imphal East.

LANGUAGE

Maring language belongs to Tibeto- Burman group. Their dialect is not exactly similar to the Naga dialect. It has closer resemblance with Kuki-Chin-Lushai group of languages. Maring language has influences of Naga and more particularly the influence of Tangkhul dialect. Manipuri Meitei dialects has also influence on it. It is said that Maring script was preserved in tree barks and latter transferred on to paper in the form of manuscripts. However, due to
the absence of printing books and due to the dominance of the scripts like Bengali and Roman, the Maring script could not be put into use any more. Now Maring people are uses Roman scripts. Among themselves we also can find dialects Sometimes they find difficulty to communicate and understand each other’s dialect. In such cases they use Manipuri language to communicate.

ORIGIN AND SETTLEMENT OF THE VILLAGE
The Sandangshenba Maring village came into existence about 80 years ago. They were said to have migrated from Uran Maring village of Chiru Ngarian hill track in the year 1933. They bought this village from Kabui tribe before their settlement. They belong to different clans (Phung), namely; Dangsawa (Khulakpa), Kansawa (clan taking care of Thembunglai), Khulpuwa (Ningthouja- clan of king’s kin), Hewa (clan looking after unmarried ladies), Koninga and Lamthaka (chief of animal catching). The village is located at the top of Ngarian hills track. It is under Keirao Assembly constituency of Imphal East district but comes under Senapati Sardar Hill Autonomous District Council. It comprises of approximately 155 households. The population of the village is 660 (census 2001). The villages show asymmetrical arrangement of houses. Most of the houses have two or three rooms, which are partitioned by mud and bamboo wall.

FAMILY AND MARRIAGE
Traditionally, Maring society is a male dominant society i.e., Patriarchal. In any family of Maring, the matters related to a family materialize only after the decision of male head of the family. In the early period, joint family was the order of the social system of the village but today joint family has become minimal. Eldest male child of a family is called as "Moba". Such a name is immediately given after birth. The second male child as Koba, the third Meba, the fourth, Angba and the fifth khamba. In case of female child, the first daughter is called as Tebi second Tobi, third Tungbi, fourth Samku, fifth Khambi. Majority of the villagers names are based on this system but the younger generations are not following this system strictly.
Marriage is popularly addressed as Nurui in Maring. Marriage among in Marings may take place through love, capture, elopement and engagement. Traditionally, Maring practiced endogamy but clan endogamy is strictly prohibited. Monogamy is a predominant feature in the village but sometimes Polygny also takes place. The most preferential and predominant
form of marriage is love marriage. Marriage system involved "Bride Price" as a payment to the family of bride which can be either cash or kind like gold, clothes, eatables etc. The expenditure for the marriage is borne by the bridegroom's family with expenses ranging from one family to other. On the onset of marriage, the groom party along with the elder members of the clan would visit the bride’s residence. Then negotiations are made between the bride and grooms party. When such an agreement is reached, a marriage feast was organized which was followed by a wine party known as Waroi Yu (decision wine). In this occasion the eldest member from amongst will declare that the wine signifies the union of the groom and bride. It was significant because from that moment onward their day begins as husband and wife. In the bygone days marriage continues for two to three consecutive days. Feast are arranged both at grooms and brides residence. A bull (Sandang) deer, pig, goat etc. are used for the feast. The bride brings along with her household materials like bed, utensils, chairs, clothes etc. In the present days the bride carry heavy household equipments and ornaments. With the advent of Christianity the institution of marriage among the Marings is found to have changed.

**DRESS AND FOOD HABIT**

Maring tribes have their own distinctive customary dress and ornaments different for men and women. However, now-a-days, traditional dresses are worn during customary rites and festival only. Still traditional dress can be seen with old folks of the village. As a result of urban contact, they wear up-to-date dresses similar to those worn by the educated people of the town. With all the modern market facilities around, they are going for synthetic fabrics. The men folk wear trousers and shirts. For women, "Phanek' is common lower wear, while upper wear is shawl and both are made of handloom. But, the younger generations prefer to wear trousers, shirts, frocks etc. During the winter they start wearing woolen clothes, jacket etc. The jewelry of Maring women consist of silver anklets, bangles, and ear studs. Some of the affluent tribal women wear gold ornaments also. Among new generation girls, the ornaments made out of cheap metals have become popular.

Rice is the staple food and meat forms their main diet of the residents of Sandangshenba village. Wine was a flavor in every household but not to disclose. The villagers grow different types of vegetables which include radish, pumpkin, pea, bean, tomato etc. They consume food in gruel forms. Non vegetarian foods are consumed during some festivals and marriage ceremonies. They were use to eating deer, bull (Sandang), cow, goat, chicken etc.
RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Religion forms one of the most important aspects of culture. In its broadest sense, religion encompasses all specific beliefs about the ultimate nature of reality, and the origin, meaning and destiny of life as well as the myths and rituals that symbolically express them. So religion is basic to each and every human society.

The traditional God of Maring is known as Thembung Lai. But the performance the rituals and festivals related to their Gods is reduced to a large extent due to mass conversion of population to Christianity. There are 50 elder villagers who still believe in their local deities in Sandangshenba Maring village. Due to decrease in the traditional faith, it was difficult for those non-Christian elders to perform rituals or festivals in the village. "Thenbung lai is maintained by an elder member in a temple at the hill top. The temple has special features of heads of animals. This shows the lifestyle of the Maring in the earlier period. They used to sacrifice deer or wild pig as part of ritual. Later on, due to scarcity of deer and wild pig, it was replaced by the sacrifice of cattle available in the village. There were different festive occasions such as Sangkaba (inauguration of home), Sahongba, Thelhongba. Festivals such as Khonloi, Wiring and Roirou which were celebrated as part of inauguration of home during the month of March (Lamta) are found to reduce its flavor in the village. They also worshiped the local deity called "Panthong lai. It is kept at the village gate to protect the villagers from outside evil spirits and others. In the past, this ritual was performed once in a year in the form of sacrificing one cow or ox. The younger people used to sing and dance during this ritual.

Apart from the traditional religion, the belief in Christianity is another prominent feature. Churches were well established in the village. In Sandangshenba Maring village, two denominations of Christianity were found – the Baptism Roman Catholic (Archbishops). The Christian population collects funds in cash and in kind to help the poor, sick and the needy. In this regard, the steps taken by the Christian women societies of the individual Churches are remarkable. In spite of limited funds, they give financial help to the poor, sick and orphans. With the coming of Christian missionaries, there is a general feeling of security and development among the tribes.

EDUCATION

Education plays an important role in handing down tradition, culture, skill and knowledge from one generation to another. Its object is to awaken and develop the personality of an individual. In Sandang Shenba village, most of the parents are aware of educational values
and wanted to send their child to school and colleges. They send their children to private schools or colleges at Imphal, Pallel, Chandel etc. Parents who cannot afford private school send their children to government school in the village. Few economically sound families are sending their children for further studies in the urban areas. Absence of high school and colleges near to the village is primary reason for having low literacy rate.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION
The Sandangshenba Maring has a village chief known as khulakpa. He is the authority of ownership of the village land. The village follow hereditary system, on the selection of village chief Khullakpa. The post of Khullakpa remains unchanged until he retired. If the khullakpa post is vacant, the post will be given to his son or brother. He also act as the chairman of the another political organization known as Village Authority council. Its main duty was to look after the development of the village. There are different designations for all the members, ie., Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and other four members. The role of village authority is to look after the villagers' problems and other development activities in the villages. The village authority acts as the supreme legal, social and political body in the villages. Chairman enjoys social prestige. Generally the village authority discusses the matters relating to the village. It takes the decisions, but the final decision-maker is chairman who makes the decision based on the collective opinion of the village. The main duties of the village authority are to maintain the social values prescribed by the society and the maintenance of law and order. In order to organize functions such as Christmas festival, Good Friday, New Year etc, the village authority holds meeting of the villagers. Decisions will be taken with the consent of villagers. Apart from these activities, the authority also deals with inter-tribal and intra-tribal disputes and settles them. It takes up issues like adultery, elopement, divorce, family quarrels and other incidents that would degrade the prestige of the whole tribe and village. If any individual violates the social norms or the decisions of the village authority, it is considered as a serious offence and is punished accordingly. Generally, in the village authority's meeting everyone is free to express their views and urge for the justice. The village authority takes the decision or passes its judgment after hearing the complaint and explanation from both the parties. The decision of the village authority will be ultimate one and cannot be questioned. Besides, the villagers take an active part in the modern political system.
ECONOMY

Family is the unit of economic production in the Sandangshenba Village. The family is directly engaged in various processes of agricultural activities. Though the technology and individual skills are relatively simple, not everybody is engaged in all kinds of economic activities. The Maring way of life still continues to be traditional, have organized their socio-cultural as well as economic activities on the basis of patrilineal clan (Phung, Saring) groups. It was obligatory on the part of the clan members to participate in family ceremonies like marriage, baptism, death etc. During a marriage ceremony all clan members extend cooperation for making it a success. Important economic activities like agriculture are performed with the cooperation of the clan (Phung, Saring) members and villagers. They also help one another in various other pursuits. Hunting, agricultural operations like ploughing, threshing and forest cutting are exclusively male activities. The females collect vegetables, forest products like roots, timbers, leaves, etc. besides undertaking domestic chores, cattle tending etc. A man, however, helps his wife in the collection of forest products and woman helps her husband in the agricultural activities. Tasks and activities are allotted to different individuals on the basis of sex and age.

During harvest men are always assisted by women. Jhum cultivation was the main form of agriculture. Besides, women gather edible leaves, roots, fruits and firewood from the nearby forest. Wooden plough, yoke, bamboo leveler cum-clod crusher, spade, hoe and dao, digging implements, doe Sickle, wooden forks, flat large bamboo mat winnowing fan made of bamboo, slices, are used as agricultural implements. Paddy, Potato, Ginger, Banana, spices are the crops produced by the Sandang shenba Maring Villages. Villagers engage themselves in a number of household industries such as, basketry, weaving, blacksmith, carpentry, etc, primarily for supplementing their subsistence economy. There are great basket makers. They make baskets of different shapes and sizes from the locally available bamboo and cane for different domestic purpose. They also make various kinds of fishing implements such as automatic valve trap, cage trap, plunge basket made out of the bamboo. Weaving is a part of life for the tribal women in Manipur. Almost every Maring household has a loin loom. The girls start to learn the art of weaving from their early childhood. Girls and women weave their traditional clothes in their loin loom so that their families may not face any shortage of traditional clothes for domestic as well as ceremonial use. They do not practice weaving as a means of earning cash income.
The animals reared are poultry, pigs, oxen, buffaloes and others such as cats, dogs etc. Livestock rearing is part and parcel of the Maring agricultural economy because it not only assists them in various agricultural operations such as, tilling of soil, transportation of agricultural produce etc., but also become a means for earning cash income for villagers. The young men of the tribe go out for hunting with guns, while spear and bow and arrow are the important implements for the old folk.

CONCLUSION

Sandangsenba Maring village is on the process of social change. The social, economic and political institutions are changing from their traditional set up. The traditional religion and culture is more prone to change with the advent of Christianity. The next generations of people are more akin to Christianity. The Institutions of marriage and family have changed a lot. More family is prone to nuclear family and most of the younger generation prefers marriages in the church. Education is an important agent of social change among the Maring’s. It gives ample employment opportunities in government and private sector too. The economic institutions have also changed. They village market has been shifted to the town say at kongba bazaar or Imphal city. Village today have more urban contact. There are migrations from the villages to Imphal city and elsewhere. Modernization trend have affected the institutions at all level be it social, economy, polity and cultural life of the villagers. Youth are more prone to the use of English language rather than Maring languages. Old traditions and cultures are found to be preserved by only few elder generations. There are apprehension of loss of traditional religion and culture among the Maring tribes in general. There are changes in every aspects of social system among the Sandangsenba Maring which can be generalized to all the Maring tribes.

References

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