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Socio-Cultural Set-up Of The Maring Tribe

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ABSTRACT:

The present study finds out and explores the nature of social and cultural set up of the Maring Tribe. It explains the action of how the relationship of mankind and nature was built up and interprets the meaning of life and nature through socio-cultural set up. Thus, the main objective of this study is to interpret the tenets of philosophy and theory of socio-cultural and religious set up of life. The study of the research work is conducted based on information collected from both primary and secondary sources. The key component of the study is based on myths and folk literature which give ample significance of evolution of human society and its history. The Maring myths and folk literatures are the important vehicle for communicating the norms, values and beliefs of the society from one generation to other generation. The present findings highlight the importance of social relationship amongst the people which helps in making a meaningful and cemented socio-cultural set up.

KEY WORDS:

Stone gate, material social facts, non material social facts, village gate, village shrine.

INTRODUCTION:

The Maring Tribe is one of the oldest tribes settling in the South Eastern part of the Manipur state of India, bordering Myanmar. They settle mainly in the Chandel District and Tengnoupal District of Manipur state and there are packets of Maring settlements in Senapati District, Kamjong District, Imphal East District, Thoubal District and Kakching District of Manipur state. *"The Marings live on the Manipur side of the present Indo-Burma Border... after their migration from the Kabaw Valley, they lived for some time in Imphal at Moirangkhom (quite near the Manipur Secretariat). From there, they migrated to their present place. Some of the Marings migrated from Ango-Ching near the Kabaw Valleys"* (R.K. Jhalajit Singh: A short History of Manipur, 1965, P-12). Their population is estimated about forty thousand. Mythological story about the origin of the Maring Tribe is based on oral tradition pointing to cave origin. It is firmly believed that the Maring Tribe was settling underneath the earth by setting up full fledged and permanent villages probably in different locations. It is said that Maring people had well-established social structure since they were living underneath the earth. *"Marings were settling in East land or the world of underneath the earth at the following listed places: Kulwi Shongshong, Washaphai or Wanshangphai, Mongrengphai and Mongsha"* (The Maring Tribe: A Historical profile, published by Maring Uparap Assembly – 2016, P-3). It is written that *"According to Myanmar traditions, Marings came from a region in Western China between the sources of the Yang-tse-kiang and Hwang-Ho rivers and reached upper Myanmar through the Ango-Range, they settled around the Irrawady River-Ningthi basin and from there reached Maringphai"* (Roland – 1998, P- 57) Brown R. in his book *"Statistical Account of the Native State of Manipur and the Hill Territory under its rule- P-70"* mentioned *"Some Murrings say that the place of the origin of a portion of their tribe was part of the Manipur capital at present called "Haubam Maruk", and that another portion took their origin at "Laisangkhong"*.

The life beneath the earth was terribly difficult and hardship. So, they decided to come out of the cave. But, unfortunately, in spite of repeated attempts to come out from the world of the cave, they could not emerge from the cave because of its gate was sealed with a large and heavy stone which is called 'Thlung-Thoong' (Stone gate). The people made several attempts to push out or open the gate by exerting all efforts and means; but every effort yielded in vain. They sent up domestic animals one after another to push out the gate, and ultimately, a male Mithun splendidly pushed the stone out and opened the gate.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE:

Social structure is the base of social solidarity which is the result of social integration. And social integration is the result of the cementing social relations among a collection of people. Social integration is necessary for the maintenance of the social order and for the happiness of individuals, and that happiness depends on individuals finding a sense of meaning outside themselves that occurs within the context of group involvement.

In early agrarian societies the social structure was relatively simple with little division of labour. People were knitted together by their engagement in similar tasks. Emile Durkheim terms it as mechanical solidarity.

Social structure is constructed on social facts: (1) Material Social facts (2) Non-material Social facts. The material social facts include society itself and its major institutions like the state religions, family education etc. and the various forms that underlie society like housing patterns, community institutions etc. The non-material social facts are the social rules and principles of morality, meaning of symbols and the shared consciousness that results from these.

It is evidently clear that the Maring Social Structure is simple and their social solidarity and integration is built on singular agrarian culture. In this simple Agrarian social structure and social order for the happiness and welfare of the individual as well as for the society depends on traditional and customary rules and codes of conducts which can be disobeyed. Relations such as individual relationship in a family, interpersonal relationship in a group and the social relationship amongst the people are the essential component in the setting up of a defined structure of the society.

In Maring society, the following patterns of relationship are strictly observed:

1. The interpersonal relationship is firmly built up from within a family. The relationship between parents and children are well regulated through family code of conduct with mutual understanding and respect.
2. The interpersonal relationship in a peer groups or different age groups is maintained in the parameters of customary ethics by traditional respect and propriety that builds the disciplined etiquette of the society.

The interpersonal relationship in social set-up is based on practical customary code of conduct and those who defy these codes of conducts of the society are summarily punished. So, everybody intends to achieve his or her status in the society to a respectable position and everyone extends his or her service for the welfare of the society.

The nature of their social set up clearly indicated that the Marings are socially and culturally well organized community. Their social structure is horizontal in the sense that everybody enjoys the right of social equality.

VILLAGE SETTLEMENT:

A group of persons those who are to settle a new village separating from one parent village are usually led by at least two persons having possessed the privilege to be Khulpu and Khullak (the two posts are the highest post of a village). Usually Khulpu is from Charanga clan and Khullak is from Dangasawa clan.

The persons are to halt at least three nights at the very spot chosen to settle. They spend all through the three days and nights at the chosen spot for village settlement looking for ritual good sign.

PROCESS OF VILLAGE SETTLEMENT:

- 1) They search the location having a spring or stream for public water resource. If and when the spring of water is traced out and if the spring of water is a perennial type, the place or location is decided as a good sign for settlement.

2) On the night of the second day one unspoiled and pure egg each is kept into the dugout holes of ground at the upper side and lower side of the spot. In the next morning, the sign on the egg is read. If no mark of crack or damage is found on any of the two eggs, the spot is considered as a good destined place to settle.

3) The third and last event of process in testing the spot for village settlement is the most significant day. One mature cock each is kept covered at the upper side and lower side of the spot. The rooster at the upper side is kept covered by the would-be Khullakpa and another rooster at the lower side of the spot is kept covered by the would-be Khulpu. At the early dawn of the next morning, all the persons halted together listen to the crowing of the two roosters. If the rooster being kept at the upper side crows first and the other one being kept at the lower side of the spot reciprocally responds to the crow of the upper one, the place is decided forthwith as a destined place for village settlement.

VILLAGE POND:

The first and foremost duty of people of the newly settled village is digging out a well or pond at the foot of a stream which is called 'Yooiso' in Maring. The Yooiso of the Village is meant for general use of the public. The area of the well or pond is sanctified by both the Khullakpa and Khulpu with ritual ceremony of exorcism. The Khullakpa appeals the God to supply enough quantity of water that shall be sufficient for all villagers; and the Khulpu appeals the God to block the water not to leak out from the wells/pond. This event is done with full ceremonial performance by offering all necessary requisite materials and things to God. The Marings give great importance to the availability of good perennial water resources for village settlement. That is why they earnestly appeal or pray the God for supply of enough good water for the village. Thus public pond is very important for this settlement of village.

VILLAGE GATE:

This is a traditional compulsion for every Maring Village to keep village gates. Each village is necessary to have village gates at both sides on the upper edge and the lower edge of the village following the range of the mountain or hill on which the village is situated. The village gate is called 'Polthung' in Maring language. The Polthung on the upper edge is erected by the Khullakpa and another Polthung on the lower edge of the village is erected by the Khulpu. This act of protocol can never be altered at all. It is very significant that Maring villages are administered on a semi democratic along with some subordinate dignitaries voted to the posts such as Khang shillak, Meilampu, Ruklak, Lhoushillak, Laarung, Sheirung, Phungrui, Kheelampu and Chaangrui etc.

All the dignitaries of the village take and share full responsibility in building village gates. In Maring tradition it is mandatory that all able male persons of each and every house of the village should join the work for building village gate.

Generally, the Polthungs (Village Gates) are known as Eastern gate or upper gate and Western gate or lower gates which are built on the direction as per the range of the hill or mountain thereupon the village is situated. The polthung is built in square shape at both the left and the right side of the main road. The main woods used in building the village gate are 'Mashou' (Needlewood tree) as main posts erected at four corners of the square shape gate and 'Khungma hing' (Sumac tree, a kind of wood having white colour stem under its bark) fencing the four posts or pillars. It is significantly observed that the wood is used for this purpose as the main post is a symbol of strength and evergreen; prosperous and long life etc. On the other hand, Khungma hing is considered as unclean or unused tree by both man and evils. In another concept, the white colour of the wood can show apparent view. So, the Khungma hing is symbolic of two aspects; it is a symbol of protection from evils and defense of the villagers; it is also a symbol of village settlement.

Maring Villages, like other tribal villages in the hill are just like mini separate and independent political units. There were constant feuds, wars and raids among these hill villages. So, the villages defense has always been of utmost importance to these village. So, the Marings like others usually chose a secure and strategic place for settlement which can easily be defended well. All the Maring villagers require two defensive village gates which are meant to defend the people well from enemy's raids and attacks. The village is well fortified with the eastern gate and western gate. The two gates are built with a particular kind of tree called (Khungma) which is considered as repulsive to the evil spirit and the enemy. In fact, Khungma is a symbol of protection from evils and enemies.

KHO-LAMAL:

Traditionally, in Maring village, Polthung and Kho-Lamal can be called as twinned sacred places. The meaning of Kho-Lamal; Kho literally means village and Lamal means shrine. The compound word bears the meaning of village shrine which is built at the heart of the village. The Lamal is the center for worship and ritual ceremonies. At the altar of the Lamal Tung Hing is erected. The Tung Hing is made of one particular tree or wood, which in local dialect is called Wao-Hing (a species of Hazel Tree). One log of Wao hing is smoothed and both ends of the log are covered with six pieces of Samna (local name of a typical plant leaf), six pieces of wild grown banana leaf and six pieces of Arna (local name of wild plant leaf). When Tung hing is erected, it is accompanied by another wood which is called Mashou-hing as supporter of the Tung Hing. All the processes from the beginning to the end of erection of Tung Hing, the priest of the Village, under the guidance of the Khullakpa and Khulpu, performs ritual act. The Lamal is sacred and holy place of the village. No entry into the sanctum and area of the shrine is allowed and the spot is strongly fenced off. However, they have access into shrine when ritual performance or practice is done. Even at the time of ritual performance those people who are deformed or disfigured, consanguinity married men and those having incestuous relationship and polygamists are strictly prohibited from entering into the shrine. No woman is allowed to enter at any circumstances. In times of ritualistic concept, Lamun (the centre altar of the shrine) is considered sacrosanct. So to the Marings “Lamal” is considered sacrosanct and nobody dares to commit any sacrilege of the shrine in the middle of the village.

VILLAGE JURISDICTION:

‘Yul or Yullai’ in Maring means the village. The village is the local territorial unit as well as a political unit. A village has its full autonomy in the sense that each has its limited jurisdiction within the defined boundary and the jurisdiction wherein the village has its full rights of control. No individual has his/her private ownership of land except the ancestral inheritance of it which is not permanent to his/her ownership. The whole boundary of land is under the jurisdiction of the village in the name of the Khullakpa (Chief or headman). The Khullakpa also does not have a plenary but all together have equal public ownership.

VILLAGE ADMINISTRATIVE SET-UP:

The head of the Maring Village administration is Khullakpa. The Khullakpa is the Chief or headman of the village. The cultural peculiarity of the Maring administration is that the post of Khullakpa is by the Dangsawa clan only; no other clan except Dangsawa clan, can be Khullakpa. On the same status, khulpu is the head of the priest in the village. His responsibility in village administration is in parallel with the Khullakpa. Khulpu is also from one particular clan that is from Charanga or its sub clan. In Maring village, Khulpu and Khullak are inseparable administrators. It is worthy to mention that Khulpu and Khullakpa are the parents of the Village. *“Among the Maring there are two hereditary officers, Khulpu and Khullakpa, within some villages, a Meithei Lambu, who is the villager possessing the best knowledge of Manipuri.”* (Hodson T.C: Naga Tribes of Manipur, P-48)

It is worthwhile to say that the system of administration in Maring village is a type of gerontocracy. All the dignitaries of the village are traditionally selected based on their age old experiences. Each village is ruled by the Khulpu and Khullak with the support of other dignitaries as their designations and functions are given below:

KHULPU:

Khulpu is regarded as the Chief priest as he leads all the ritualistic functions and ceremonies. He performs all the ritual ceremonies pertaining to the village establishment, chasing out evil spirit and outbreak of epidemic etc. Khulpu is from the Charanga clan. It is a hereditary post. After he expires, his post is succeeded by his son. In case he happens to have no son, one of his nearest of kin is eligible to be appointed as Khulpu.

KHULLAK:

Khullak is the Chief of administration of the Village. His responsibilities are administration, political affairs, warfare, external affairs, social welfare and justice. He has absolute power in making decision as Chief justice of the village. Khullak is from the Dangsawa clan. It is a hereditary post. After he expires, his son succeeds him. In case he left no son, his nearest of kin is eligible to succeed the post.

MANTRI:

The post of Mantri is on appointment basis by the Khulpu and Khullak. His duty is an orator of the village. So, for this post, the person must have certain innate quality of trustworthiness high moral principles and good oration.

MEILAMPU:

This post is on appointment by the Khulpu and Khullak. He is the in-charge of natural calamities mainly for wildfire control. He also acts as the negotiator for reconciliation in times of inter-village crisis or in any case arising from a dispute between different villages or individuals.

RUPRAK:

Ruprak is the chief of Army. Frequently in wars against one another villages make the Maring people highly honed in warfare. Persons of such highly honed warriors are under the command of Ruprak. He is the in-charge of decision making whether to wage war or not against any potential enemies.

SHELLUNG:

Shellung is the Village treasurer. He is the custodian of the Village treasury.

CHAANGRUI:

Chaangrui is the usher of the Village who assists the village council. On the directives of the Khulpu-Khullak, the Chaangrui acts as a collector and announcer of the village.

KHAANGSHILLAK:

There are two divisions of Rakhaang (Youths' Dormitory), one for boys and another for girls. Each dormitory has its warden appointed by the village elders. The wardens or dormitory masters are responsible in taking care of the Rakhaang inmates. They are the training masters for youths in moulding good moral citizens of the society. All the youths are strictly controlled in the Rakhaang.

LAARUNG:

Laarung is one of the highly honoured dignitaries of the Maring community. He is the song master who leads the folk songs in cultural programme. He teaches folk songs and leads in song practices.

THEEM:

Theem is the physician in treating illnesses and diseases. There are no limits to the number of Theems in a village. They are also the sorcerers or witches who can foretell the future happening. They do the work of driving out evil spirits or demons from sick persons and village.

PHOONGRUI:

Phoongrui is a group of drummers in the village. From amongst the group, there may have a master of the group. They beat drum in sequential order in any traditional or cultural events. They are master in different tunes of drum beating for different occasions.

LAANGLHA:

They are the experts of blacksmith in the village. They are highly valued people in the village because of the fact that they made weapons and tools which are essential for their survival.

YOUTH DORMITORY:

The most important social institute in Maring society is youth dormitory. Dormitory is Rakhaang in Maring. The Rakhaang is an institution of social education. In the primitive society, there was no formal education system that we have in modern civilized society. The then education was focused on moral ethics such as good behavior, good discipline and moral sanctity. The type of then education system was mainly in the realm of both informal and non formal education.

The village "Khaangshillak" (Controller of the dormitory) controls the youth under his full authority. Every matter or case relating to the youth whether it is within the dormitory or outside of it is at the discretion of the Khaangshillak. The mode of speech and attitude of the Khaangshillak is implicit to moral education.

There are traditionally, two separate houses of dormitory meant for boys dormitory and girls dormitory. Head controller of both dormitories is Khaangshillak. But, one lady controls the girls' dormitory as a subordinate to the Khaangshillak. Traditionally the dormitories are situated in the centre of the village. Girls' dormitory may be attached to any house of the village. But boys' dormitory is not attached to any house in any case. The age of membership of dormitory is from soon after he or she attained puberty i.e. early adolescence to early adulthood and extendable to his/her adulthood of forty years. But, if and when he/she gets married his/her membership to dormitory is automatically dissolved.

The youths in the dormitory are bound to follow certain traditions and customs which are invariable observed by all the members. Every day, in the evening the youths gather at the Khaang after taking their dinner at their homes. They make fire, sit around it tell stories, learn mandatory advices from the Khaangshillak, learn to sing and practice it, learn to dance and practice it then sleep in time.

The members of the dormitory carry out several functions together in house construction, on the occasions of marriage, in the work of harvesting the crop and helping and assisting the village folk in the work of village development.

In this way, in Maring society, Rakhang (dormitory) is the centre for cultural set up. It is thus, the centre of the maintenance of social ideas and development of culture.

AGRARIAN CULTURE:

The mainstream educations of culture in Maring social setting is mostly based on agrarian culture. Ethics is strictly maintained from individual level to social advancement level. So, social scale in Maring society is based on agrarian culture in the sense that agriculture is the main and sole centre for social set up. Hence, their society is egalitarian.

Agriculture is the main occupation of Maring people. The pattern of working is seasonal. In the month of April, seeds are sown and planted. First of all, one man belonging to the Dangsawa clan, opens the event of seed sowing representing the all villagers which is called 'Chaada'. He observes genna for a week-long taboo. Within the very week he does not touch any impure things; does not take or eat any food of living or non living kinds which would harm or damage the crops.

After the ceremonial seed sowing is started by the village representative, every person of family can begin their work to sow seeds in their respective field.

DIVISION OF LABOUR:

There are three broad categories in the division of labour, namely family members, peer groups and all villagers. Family members of a single family work together for the sake of the family itself. If the family consists of extended family, it includes in the collection of labours which is a type of peer grouping. Peer grouping (division) consists of three persons at the minimum belonging to the same age group which is called 'Inglam'. This mode of working is reciprocal by lending and returning labour to one another of the group. The mode of lending labour of all the villagers is a type of well organized pattern. In this pattern, no return of labour is called for. The hosted owner of the field provides sufficient food such as rice beer, cooked rice, meats, etc.

It is to be noted that there is no division of labour in modern sense. By division of labour in modern sense means sections or classes of people engaging in different occupations with the sole objective of diversification of earning means to supply all commodities or services the society demands. The division of labour in Maring society simply means assigning responsibility of the same occupation, in cultivation, for example to different age groups of family members or members of the society.

It reflects the simple and undiversified tribal domain of labour. This is because their needs and wants are few and their lifestyle is minimally self sustaining beyond this they have no other to acquire for.

CONCLUSION:

As a social being we are born into a social environment. Such a social environment necessarily gives rise to speculative aspects of culture and tradition for an orderly and meaningful social environment. The Marings have a mythical story that they came out from the hole deep of a cave. When these people came to settle life of agriculturists, they became aware of the need of a social arrangement for orderly and harmonious

life. Thus, the social arrangement or making of their social structure was based on agrarian life. The villages were run and governed by the village chiefs with their village councillors.

The village is well fortified with defensive gates to protect from enemies and devils. The village has 'Lamal' which is Shrine in the middle of the village. They have village pond which is commonly used for day to day life. There are dormitories of boys and girls for inculcating the education of good moral and sense of good citizenship. They have well regulated rules and norms in social and cultural set up by maintaining cultural hierarchy of the community.

In this way, the socio-cultural set up of the Maring Tribe is based on the deeply ingrained principles of culture, tradition and system of beliefs. The social structure is built up through mutual understanding and due respect amongst the people. So, the development of Maring people is closely related with the traditional tenet of socio-cultural set up.

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