

A MITTAL PUBLICATION

Customary Laws
and
Practices
of the
Maram Nagas

Th. R. Tiba

THE AUTHOR

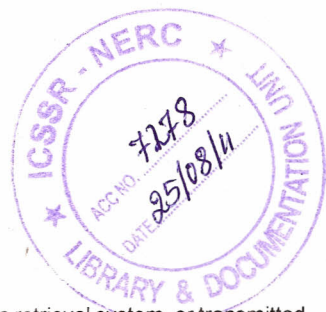
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**CUSTOMARY LAWS
AND
PRACTICES
OF
THE MARAM NAGAS**

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CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Glossary</i>	xi
<i>Map</i>	xv
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Habitation	1
The People	6
Origin	8
The Nagas	10
Early Settlements	13
Social Organisation	14
Ancient Village Administration	15
2. CUSTOMARY LAWS IN THE SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS	19
Moral Laws	19
Fornication	19
Adultery	22
Rape	23
Seducement	24
House Pollution	24
Elopement	25
Touching of Breast by Force	26
House Pollution	26
Truce Making	27
Accusation	27
Social Prohibition or Taboo	28
3. CIVIL, CRIMINAL AND NON-CRIMINAL LAWS	31
Civil	31
Ridicule	31
Insult	32
Dispute	33

Slander or Columny	34
Tease	35
Taunt	35
Criminal	36
Assault	36
Exception	37
Beating or Thrashing	37
Physical Assault	38
Attempt to Kill	39
Physical Assault of Person Inside the House	39
To Kill	40
Warfare	41
Cases Considered Non-criminal in	
Customary Laws	42
Defending a Person who Tries to Enter	
One's House	42
Killing a Person who Enters a House to Steal	42
Resisting an Enemy	43
Killing an Enemy	43
Curse	44
Mutual Agreement to Kill Other	45
Stealing	45
Arson	46
Payment of Debts	47
Demand for Restitution	47
Public Works	49
Telling Lie	49
Threat	50
To Threaten to Kill a Person with Poison	50
Accusation of Witchcraft	51
To Kill in Exchange	51
4. LAWS OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE	53
Pre-Marital Contract for Son-in-Law	59
Giving Consent to go as Daughter-in-Law	60
Forms of Marriage	61
Noukatchu	61
Marriage Ceremony	64
Staying in her Lover's House	66

Sleep by Entering	67
Baiting for a Life Partner	68
Providing an Additional Life Partner	69
Second Wife	69
Marriage through Elopement	70
Formal Negotiation	70
Laws of Monogamy	72
Polygamous Marriage	72
Exogamous Marriage	72
Polyandry	73
Adoption	73
Divorce	75
Shüneibam-Katou	78
Marriage within the Forbidden Degree of Affinity	80
5. LAWS OF INHERITANCE	83
Origin of Patrilineal System	85
The Right of Elders and Clan Members	86
Duties and Responsibilities of Elders and Clan Members	86
Ownership of Property	87
Rights of Inheritance	88
Disinheritance	91
Position of Wife in a Maram Family	92
Right of Possession of Property by the Woman	93
Wills	93
The Rights of Parents in the Choice of Heir	94
Landed Property and Movable Property	94
Landed Property	94
(a) Clan	95
(b) Community	95
(c) Rent-paying Land	95
(d) Movable Property	96
(e) Sale or Mortgage of Property	96
6. LAWS GOVERNING BIRTH AND DEATH	99
Birth	99
Rejoicing Accompanying the Birth	102
Means of Having Children	102

The Naming	103
Miscarriage	104
Misfortune of Dying	104
Death	104
Death and Obsequies	105
Moment of Death	105
Announcing of Death	106
Sequel to Funeral	106
Grave	108
Burial	108
Taboos in Death Ceremony	110
7. EPILOGUE	113
<i>Appendices</i>	117
<i>Bibliography</i>	123
<i>Index</i>	129

PREFACE

The customary laws and practices of the Maram Nagas has been less often studied if not altogether forgotten among the various Naga tribes. Till date very few tribal customary laws and practices are being codified. The work studies the customary laws and practices then and now. It starts with the introduction of the tribe, and compares with the various laws of different Naga Tribes. Then it delves into the various aspects of the age-old customs and practices of the Maram Nagas.

A review of the rich cultural heritage leads to a summary outline of the various aspects of customs and practices practiced. The work presents a comprehensive and critical analysis of the Maram customary laws, traditions and practices. Mainly based on the field work, the study closes with reflections on the customary laws and practices of the legal government laws of the state an impact on which could be felt in the intrusion that lead to emergence of new idea of codification of the Maram Nagas Laws and Customs.

Design to provide elements for discussion, *Customary Laws and Practices of the Maram Nagas* is intended as contribution to wider debate on the customs and practices of the Nagas in general and the Maram Nagas in particular.

TH. R. TIBA

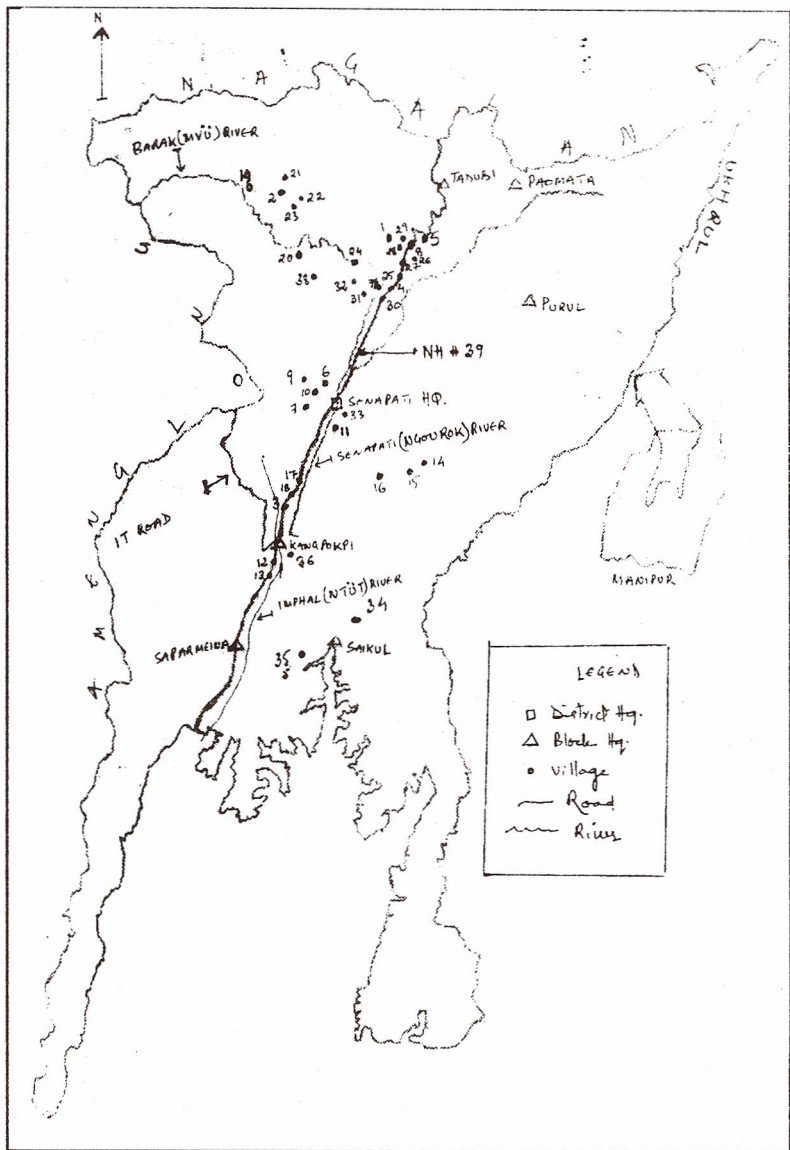
GLOSSARY

Affine	A relation especially by marriage.
Agglutinative	That combine simple words into compounds.
Aninuism	Belief that all objects (trees, stones, the wind, etc.) have souls.
Apocalyptic	Revelation.
Aperture	Opening, fissure, gap, etc.
Autochthon	One of the primitive inhabitants of a country.
Bangpü	Earthly god as called in Maram.
Bough	A branch , limb, arm, etc.
Caricature	Picture of sb. or sth. imitation of a person's voice, behaviour, etc. to cause amusement or ridicule.
Coalesce	Come together and unite into one substance, group, etc.
Dao	A large chopping-knife used by the Asom hill-tribes for jungle cutting, as weapon, and for every other conceivable purpose.
Diachronic	The study of a subject (esp. language through its historical development).
Dialect	Form of spoken language, way of speaking, which have little variation either pronunciation, intonation or accent but unintelligible to more than one group of people.
Dirge	Song sung at a burial or for a dead person.
Décor	All that makes up the general appearance (esp. of the stage of a theatre).
Dorsal	Of or near the back.
Exogamy	The practice of marrying only outside one's own group.

Fillet	Band (often ornamental) worn to keep the hair in place.
Forge	Workshop.
Genna	Commonly used to denote any Naga holy day or religious festival. Probably derived from Angami Naga word <i>kenna</i> .
Girdle	Cord or belt fasten round the waist.
Ingenious	Clever and skillful (at making or inventory).
Ingenuous	Frank, open, innocent, natural.
Jhum	Slash and burn method of cultivation. It is also called shifting cultivation practice mostly on the slope of the hill or mountain range.
Khel	A term used for clan system by earlier writer. Probably an Assamese term.
Khezakho-noma	The name of one of the villages of Chakesang Naga (<i>Chukri</i>), where the Nagas are believed to have originated and migrated to different parts.
Kilt	Pleated skirt, waist to knee worn as part of male dress.
Kuki	Chin-one of the many Mongoloid tribal groups found in Manipur and neighbouring states.
Loin	The part of the back between the ribs and the hipbones.
Makhel	The name of one of the villages of Shüpfomei Naga (Mao) where the Nagas are believed to have originated and migrated to different parts.
Mao	One of the Naga tribes in Manipur state.
Maram	The tribe on study here.
Meitei	The Hinduised valley dwellers of Manipur state.
Mekela	Long cloth worn by women, waist to foot as part of female dress quite popular with Maram women. In all probability it is an Ahomia (Asome) term.
Moity	One of two parts into which sth. is divided (esp. in legal sense).

Morung	A term used for youth dormitory by earlier writer. Probably an Asomese term.
Motif	Main idea or design in a work of art.
Naga	The different Naga tribes are called by the generic term 'Nagas'.
Necromancy	Art or practice of communication with the dead in order to learn about the future.
Oral	Using the spoken, not written, word.
Paddles	An oar like instrument for stirring or mixing things.
Prognostication	Foretell; predict.
Pümpü	The Almighty God in Maram usage.
Purlin	A piece of timber stretching across the principal rafter to support the common or subsidiary rafters.
Recrudescence	(of disease, violence, etc.) new outburst.
Rengma	One of the Naga tribes in Asom and Nagaland states.
Rupee	The Indian unit of currency. At the time to which this work refers it is worth i.e US \$ 1 = Rs. 44.69, UK £ 1 = Rs. 78.15 or Euro \$ 1 = Rs. 54.45.
Sapling	young man; young and vigorous.
Sheath	cover for the blade of a weapon or tool.
Shüpfomei	It is the other name or rather nomenclature for the tribes <i>Chüleve</i> , <i>Ememei</i> , <i>Lepaona</i> and <i>Paomata</i> now called Mao (<i>Ememei</i>) and Poumei (<i>Chüleve</i> , <i>Lepaona</i> , <i>Paomata</i>).
Strand	Any of the thread, hair, wire, etc., twisted together into a rope.
Skewer	Pointed stick of wood or metal for holding meat together while cooking.
Strut	Piece of wood or metal inserted in a framework and intended to strengthen it by bearing weight or pressure in the direction of its length.

- Taboo** Act or thing which religion or custom regards as forbidden.
- Tassel** Bunch of threads tied together at one end and hanging.
- Terraced** Level (led) area of sloping ground, one of two or more such areas, separated by a sloping bank or banks in paddy fields.



Map: Courtesy: Manipur Remote Sensing Applications Centre (MARSAC)

1

INTRODUCTION

The study shall look into the customary laws and practices of the Maram Nagas. Thus the present study shall not delve into giving detail ethnographic account of the Maram Nagas. However, it is felt that giving some idea of the overall situation of the Marams would be necessary for the present study is all about the Maram society essentially customary, though. Thus, some questions on; who are the Marams?, Is it a tribe?, etc. are being dealt with. Their origin, migration and settlement among others are being dealt and discussed in this chapter. Chapter two deals with the social offences, crimes and its penalties. Chapter three deals with the civil, criminal and non-criminal laws. Chapter four deals with the laws governing marriage and divorce. Chapter five deals with the laws of inheritance. Chapter six deals with the laws governing birth and death, and the last chapter is the conclusion summing-up all the discussion.

HABITATION

The Marams inhabit the northern part of Manipur, a state lying to the northeast of India. There are 9 districts in Manipur five of which are hill districts and four valley or plain districts. The Maram Nagas areas and habitats fall under the Senapati district of Manipur state. The Senapati district in the state of Manipur occupies the northern part of the state, having an area of 3271 sq. km. It is mainly hilly with varying attitude from 1061 to 1788 above MSL in most of the areas. The District Headquarters Senapati is 1043 above MSL. The District Senapati lies between 23.56° and 25.41° North

2 / Customary Laws and Practices of the Maram Nagas

Latitude, and between 92.59° and 94.45° East Latitude. It is bounded in the north by Kohima and Phek districts of Nagaland state, on the east by Ukhrul district, Manipur, on the south by Thoubal, Imphal East, Imphal West and Bishenpur districts and on the western side by Tamenglong district and Peren district of Nagaland state. The district thus bordered with all the districts except Chandel in Manipur. The district is the smallest in size among all the hill districts but the largest in terms of population in Manipur.

The District Senapati was earlier known as Manipur North District with district headquarters at Karong. Karong is some 6 km north of the present district headquarters by the side of the National Highway no. 39. It is situated nearby the bank of the river Barak (Mbvü in Maram) where it took a 'U' turn. The District comes into existence on 16th November 1969 when it was inaugurated. The District Headquarters was shifted to Senapati on the 15th July, 1983 and was renamed after the name of the District Headquarters.

The total population of the district was 3,79,214 as per 2001 census.¹ Earlier there were five hill districts and one valley district in the state but now there are nine districts. They are as follows.

District /Sub-Division	Population			Literacy (P.C.)		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1. Bishenpur District	2,05,907	1,02,772	1,03,135	71.59	82.25	61.09
(a) Nambol Sub-Division	52,295	26,001	26,294			
(b) Bishenpur Sub-Division	53,198	27,021	26,177			
(c) Moirang Sub-Division	10,041	49,750	50,664			
2. Chandel District	122,714	61,778	60,936	57.38	66.12	48.57
(a) Machi Sub-Division	17,076	8,706	8,370			
(b) Tangnoupal Sub-Div.	32,513	16,510	16,003			
(c) Chandel Sub-Division	26,127	13,003	13,124			
(d) Chakpikarong Sub-Div.	46,998	23,559	23,439			
3. Churachanpur District	2,28,707	1,14,740	1,13,967	74.67	84.98	64.40
(a) Tipaimukh Sub-Division	25,374	13,063	12,311			
(b) Thanlon Sub-Division	22,947	11,711	11,236			

(Contd...)

Table 1.1: (Contd...)

District /Sub-Division	Population			Literacy (P.C.)		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
(c) Churachanpur North S/D	26,401	13,873	12,528			
(d) Churachanpur North S/D	1,34,147	66,245	67,902			
(e) Singhat North S/D	19,838	9,848	9,990			
4. Imphal West District	4,39,532	2,18,947	2,20,585	80.61	89.40	72.24
(a) Lamsang Sub-Division	57,202	28,844	28,358			
(b) Patsoi Sub-Division	71,306	35,543	35,763			
(c) Lamphelpat Sub-Division	1,91,108	94,425	96,683			
(d) Wangoi Sub-Division	1,19,916	60,135	59,781			
5. Imphal East	3,93,780	1,97,710	1,96,070	76.38	86.44	66.30
(a) Jiribam Sub Division	37,792	18,998	18,794			
(b) Sawombung Sub Division	73,565	37,923	35,642			
(c) Porompat Sub-Division	2,12,297	1,05,709	1,06,588			
(d) Kierao Bitra Sub-Division	70,126	35,080	35,046			
6. Senapati District	3,79,214	1,96,646	1,82,568	50.47	56.39	44.44
(a) Mao-Maram Sub-Div.	1,20,774	63,231	57,543			
(b) Paomata Sub-Div	43,299	22,156	21,143			
(c) Purul Sub-Div	59,705	31,632	28,073			
(d) Sadar Hill West S-D	60,851	30,839	30,012			
(e) Saitu-Gamphazol S-D	43,612	23,001	20,611			
(f) Sadar Hill East Sub-Div.	50,973	25,787	25,186			
7. Tamenglong District	1,11,493	57,994	53,499	58.46	67.04	49.11
(a) Tamenglong N.Sub-Div.	21,829	11,200	10,629			
(b) Tamenglong Sub-Div.	21,805	11,006	10,799			
(c) Tamenglong Sub-Div.	37,189	19,823	17,366			
(d) Nungba Sub-Div.	30,670	15,965	14,705			
8. Thoubal District	3,66,341	1,83,338	1,83,003	67.90	80.50	55.34
(a) Lilong Sub-Div.	72,649	36,478	36,171			
(b) Thoubal Sub-Div.	1,75,873	88,238	87,635			
(c) Kakching Sub-Div.	1,17,819	58,622	59,197			
9. Ukhrul District	1,40,946	73,413	67,533	68.96	75.40	61.91
(a) Ukhrul N.Sub-Div.	25,121	12,765	12,356			
(b) Ukhrul Central	79,125	41,589	37,536			
(c) Kamjong Chassad	12,994	7,062	5,932			
(d) Phungyar Phaisat	13,280	6,728	6,552			
(e) Ukhrul South	10,426	5,269	5,157			
Total	23,88,634	12,07,338	11,81,296	68.87	77.87	59.70

Earlier there were four Sub-Divisions. But now there are six Sub-Divisions. They are in the Table 1.2 as follows:

4 / Customary Laws and Practices of the Maram Nagas

Table 1.2: Sub-Divisional Offices

<i>Name of the Block</i>	<i>Headquarters</i>	<i>Distance from District Headquarters</i>
1. Mao-Maram –	Tadubi	40 km
2. Paomata –	Paomata	60 km
3. Purul –	Purul	38 km
4. Sadar Hill West –	Kangpokpi	15 km
5. Sadar Hill East –	Saikul	95 km
6. Saitu Gamphazol –	Saparmeina	31 km

The table below (Table 1.3) indicates the number of Houses, Population, Taxable Houses, etc. of the Senapati District.²

Table 1.3: Administrative Divisions of Senapati

<i>District/Sub-Division Senapati District</i>	<i>Population</i>			<i>Number of Houses</i>	
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total House No.</i>	<i>Tax paid (Houses)</i>
(a) Mao-Maram S/D	1,53,719	78,609	75,110	18,103	2,54,520
(b) Paomata Sub-Div.	80,428	40,841	39,587	8,875	1,33,125
(c) Purul Sub-Div.	84,919	42,484	42,435	9,541	1,43,115
(d) Sadar Hill West S/D	63,146	31,332	31,814	9,389	1,40,835
(e) Saitu-Gamphazol S/D	66,964	33,523	33,441	9,535	1,48,025
(f) Sadar Hill East S/D	63,758	31,712	32,046	10,884	1,63,250
Total	5,12,934	2,58,501	2,54,433	66,327	9,82,870

There are six Assembly Constituencies in the district viz., Kangpokpi, Karong, Mao, Saikal, Saitu and Tadubi. Unlike other hill districts, in Senapati district there are two Autonomous District Councils viz., North Autonomous District Council at Senapati and Sadar Hills District Council at Kangpokpi. Both the Councils have 20 members each.

Many of the Maram villages fall under Mao-Maram, Purul, Sadar Hill East, Sadar Hill West and Saitu-Gamphazol Sub-Division of Senapati District. There are about 56,659 souls in about 6745 households as per the 2003 report.³ The Maram Nagas area lies between 93.15° and 94.0° E Latitude and 24.0° and 24.3° N latitude.

The main Maram area falls under Tadubi and Kangpokpi Sub-Divisions. The list below in the Table 1.4 indicates the

Table 1.4: Maram Nagas Revenued Villages

Name of Village	Head	No. of Houses	Male	Female	Total
1. Angkailongdi	K. Yangding	89	430	410	840
2. Kamalong	D. Luihing	94	420	410	830
3. Katomai	Hinlenton	135	610	602	1212
4. Katomai Centre	Hinglenton	98	400	380	780
5. Katomai Makeng	Raouba	50	230	220	450
6. Kazanga	Kairamba	66	243	212	455
7. Khongnem	K. Phuba	125	502	510	1012
8. Lairouching	P. Pungdi	300	1300	1250	2550
9. Maram Bazaar	T. Hingba	272	1000	950	1950
10. Maram Centre	K. Taruba	295	1205	1220	2425
11. Maram Kavanam	H. Rapingsiba	169	751	750	15
12. Maram Khulakpa	K. Namba	450	2101	2100	4201
13. Maram Khunou	B. Kamba	85	350	350	700
14. Maram Makha Sagai	Karang	285	1250	1251	2501
15. Maram Mathak Sagai	K. Karang	340	1300	2250	3550
16. Maram Ramlung	Th. Khamba	160	550	570	1120
17. Maram Sagongbam	T. Ngouniba	164	750	752	1502
18. Mayangkhang	S. Hingba	210	570	545	1115
19. Mayangkhang Khunou	Ch. Nili Mao	132	518	617	1135
20. M. Ningithoupham	Khangba	212	630	697	1327
21. New Magaimai	T. Luikang	80	350	350	700
22. New Maram	K. Phuba	102	440	460	900
23. Ngatan	Kavin Kampa	92	355	345	700
24. N. Teiramphung (Tumnoupokpi)	S. Johnson	177	670	682	1352
25. Oklong	Ng. Ramba	350	2000	1905	3905
26. Oklong Khunou	R. Ngatuba	88	330	330	660
27. Oklong Mariram	Taruba	120	450	440	890
28. Pungdunglung	S. Hinglung	128	500	490	990
29. Rajaimai	S. Ngoulong	168	720	630	1350
30. Sadim Naga	Ph. John	110	710	610	1320
31. Sangkhunglung	Paiji	98	425	425	850
32. Shangkhumai	Ng. Kaba	120	503	505	1008
33. Tagaramphung (Yaikongpao)	Aping	128	444	425	869
34. Taklung	Paiji	81	340	330	670
35. Taphou Naga	Kh. Tailo	90	400	400	800
36. T. Khullen	Aping	305	740	816	1556
37. Willong Khunou	Z. Rahingba	137	593	695	1288
38. Willong Khullen	Rangba	570	2480	2500	4980
Total		6705	27560	28384	55,944

Maram speaking revenue villages with number of household, head or Chairman and population sex-wise and the total population.⁴

In the Table 1.5 are the Maram Nagas inhabited non-revenue villages.⁵

Name of Village	Head	No. of Houses	Male	Female	Total
1. Dui bang		34	92	90	182
2. Kabinam		26	187	185	372
3. Kabinam(New)		15	62	58	120
4. Kamalung		91	400	339	799
5. Maraknam		21	72	75	147
6. Ntaning		35	145	135	280
7. Sagongbam		192	743	744	1487
8. Takeimei		47	152	150	302
Total		461	1853	1836	3689

In the Table 1.6 are the revenue-villages of non-tribals settled side by side with the Maram Nagas.⁶

THE PEOPLE

Heterogenous tribes and races now inhabit the Senapati district. Each maintains their district languages cultures, manners and cultures and practices. Besides the Nagas i.e. the Mao, Maram, Pomei, Thangal, Kharam, Chiru and Zeliangrong, there are also other tribes such as the Kukis, Hmars, Paites and Vaipheis, etc. There are also good numbers of Nepali settlers in the district. According to 1991 census the population was 2,08,406 and by 2001 the population was 3,79,214.⁷ By 2006 the population was 5,12,934.⁸ Of these the Maram Nagas constitutes about 55,944 in about 6705 households.⁹ However these are only the revenue villages i.e. recognized. Besides these villages there are a few non-revenue villages. The population of these villages is being shown in Table 1.5.

In the present study we are now primarily concern with

<i>Name of Village</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>No. of Houses</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
1. Angkailongdi Gorkha	Jai Bahadur Rai	35	130	107	237
2. Bhaga Bosti	Mon Bahadur	22	89	85	174
3. Gupe Nala (A)	Bham Rai	08	33	23	56
4. Ishing Chaibi – III (B)	Chandra Bhadur Rai	13	31	45	76
5. Ishing Chaibi (C)	Dhan Raj	19	69	50	119
6. Kathikho Nepali	Madar Kumar	27	104	69	173
7. Katomai Part II		22	81	83	164
8. Katomai Part III	Jaget Bhadur Basnet	16	56	44	100
9. K.Makeng Nepali		17	48	40	88
10. Makaipati	Budhimar Sharma	19	93	62	155
11. Makhaibari Sadim (C)	Ambahadur Chetry	48	154	104	258
12. Maram Khunou		06	17	12	29
13. M.Khunou III Juke Nala	Chetra Bahadur	18	52	48	100
14. M.Khunou III Tapailung	Ram Bahadur Gurung	19	71	60	131
15. Oklong Part I		14	64	52	11
16. Oklong Part II		13	54	35	89
17. Oklong Part III		31	108	85	193
18. Rai Bosti	Jai Prasad Lama	23	68	76	144
19. Raisung Lairouching	Kusum Lal Gautam	15	55	49	94
20. Sadim Chandrathari – I, II	Nanda Lalnirda	26	88	86	174
21. Sadim Kher	Man Bahadur	32	119	80	199
22. Sadim Saragari	Kali Bahadur	14	56	48	104
23. Sadim Sunathari	Tikaram Limbu	18	66	58	124
24. Taphou Nepali Part III	Sher Bahadur	24	89	85	174
25. Voll Gauthali		08	26	25	51
Total		507	1819	1503	3322

the Maram Nagas who are one of the major tribes in the district. It may be stated that the British in their earlier works called them as quasi-Angami Nagas or Murrans.¹⁰ These people today form distinct tribe by themselves with distinct language and culture of their own though regional differences occur amongst themselves to some extent both in language, customs and practices.

The Maram Nagas though grouped, as Indo-Mongoloids are not typical Mongols for Caucasian elements are present among them in a remarkable degree. The Mongolian facial and other features are softens down in the Maram Nagas.

Like many of the various Naga tribes, the Maram Nagas too have sharper features than many of the non-Naga Mongoloids tribes of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo, and Meities. Though distinct in physical appearance have many commonalities- not only with the neighbouring tribes but also down to south East Asia.

ORIGIN

The Maram Nagas did have history and have rich cultural heritage of their own. They have their own version of the origin. However it is still a speculative and assumptive reconstruction from the scarce sources. Following oral tradition the origin of the tribe is traced to Makhel. The legends of the Marams claim their origin from this place.

One of the most interesting theories is the mythical origin. The Marams are believed to have migrated from Makhel and set up a village at Maram.¹¹ There were three brothers who parted at Makhel. It was one of the brothers after parting at Makhel reached Maram, and established village there. It was one of the brothers that set up the village at Murram, planted his walking stick, which sprouted and grew into big tree. And hence the descendents of this brother came to be known as the Marams now.

There are interesting folk tales regarding the creation of the village and hence the origin of the tribe. The Almighty God, called *Pümpü Pramha* created the universe and all the living creatures. The myth posits the birth of the same from the union involving the 1st couple in the universe. Unlike many of the Hindu mythical origins, where it dwell not only on the issue of asexual or incestuous reproduction but also autochthonous reproduction, this myth delved on the creation of all creatures of the Almighty God and how the creation of the 1st man called *Madungkashi* and the woman *Peitingrangpui* led to the birth of three sons. One of which became the ancestor of the Marams.

After the creation of the universe, *Pümpü Pramha* was not quite satisfied. Thus after contemplating for sometime he created a creature in his likeness. He called it *Madungkashi* after the name of a tree where he picks up a stem borer,

called *n'chet* out of which he created the man. Not satisfied with his creation *Pümpü Pramha* walk down and pull up water from a pond. He felt something on his hand while pulling up the water. It was a small water insect, called *samongpui*. Out of the water insect he created a women called *Tingrangpui*. After creating *Pümpü Pramha* made them live in a place called 'Teikong Rajeimie'. They were the 1st couple in their universe. The couple had three sons. They were *Dipa* the eldest, the man, *Raipa*, the 2nd, the tiger and *Bompa*, the 3rd. *Dipa* begets *Maram Roukang*, *Kala Sanglong* and *Maki Kangba*. When they grew up they decided to part at a place now called Makhel and look for suitable place to settle. *Maram Roukang* begets Marams. Today the Marams claim to be the descendants of the eldest son called *Maram Roukang* who set up a village called Maram. Before departure the three brothers prepared food package called *takla* consisting of dry meat and other edible items. They found the meat of the eldest missing. In the dream the eldest was walking with the help of walking stick, called *koktui* for he was blind and was told that his descendants were not to consume pork. The Marams even to this day, who are non-Christians, does not eat pork. Pigs are not allowed to rear in the village even to this day at Maramei Namdi. Otherwise there is no other belief that pork should not be taken. The village is now called Maram Khullen. The British writers like Verrier Elwin, Hodson, T.C. and others used the word 'Murrām' to designate this village.

The next story is the only example in this collection of unreported Naga genre, the historical legend. In this particular legend of the Nagas, the juxtaposition of a bawdy and burlesques is still artfully wrapped in oral tradition. Also note worthy is the fact that for the man, importance of dream is placed above all others.

There were a couple by the name *Madungkashi* and *Samütingdungpui*.¹² They migrated from the west. They were the only living known beings that survived the great flood. Since they doubt their geneology they did not know whether they could marry or not. But one day when they went out to the jungle together they dream that they could marry on the

condition that none of their descendant should eat pork. Thereafter they got married considering it as a define intervention.

The couple had three sons—*Marambungsa* the eldest, *Makikangba* the middle and *Kala Sanglung* the youngest. When they grew up, they parted at Makhel to find suitable place to live. The Marams who traced their earliest ancestor to this eldest son to this day does not eat pork. The village he established came to be known after his name, Maram in short else the name was Marambungsa. The descendants of the villagers who migrated to different areas to found new villages came to be known as Marams. Marambungsa had four sons who were the head of the earliest clans were — *Mageinahmei*, *Bungnahmei*, *Lamkanahmei* and *Nkügaamnahmei*.

The above myths indicate that the Marams are firmly rooted in dreams. The practices, which were mentioned and practiced, are still being practiced now. All these indicate that the folk tales cannot be just discounted as myths that has no reality.

THE NAGAS

Besides the mythical origin there are many theories about the origin of the Marams. Despite its reputation for the static or indigenous character the Marams had undergone lot of shifting till they migrated to the present habitat. Before proceeding further let us try to explain what is a Naga? Who are the Nagas? The origin and meaning of the etymon "Naga".

The Nagas are one of the tribal groups inhabiting the southeast Himalayan region spread into India and Burma. There are more than 200 spoken Nagas languages or dialects. Therefore Nagamese is being used as their link language. There are about 66 odd tribes. There are many theories that the Nagas might have migrated to the present habitat from south east Asia over long period of time. But when one queried like who are the Nagas? Where did they come from? Many fumbled and even the Nagas themselves are unable to answer. Though it would not be necessary to go into detail

about these questions, I shall try to answer in this chapter though in brief.

Some scholars tried to link the origin of the etythemon 'Naga' to ancient Sanskrit literature. In Sanskrit the terms 'Naga' means serpent and by implication snake worshipers or '*nanga*' meaning naked. Thus the word Naga is derived from Sanskrit word Naga, or *nag* or *nanga* applied in derision to the people from the paucity of their clothings. However there seems to be little truth in this theory as snakes were rather a delicacy than reverence or worshiper like those in central India where the snake worshiper are known by this appetete.

There are some British writers¹³ who believe that the word Nagas is derived from Bengali word "*Nangta*" meaning naked. But there seem to be little foundation to this, as the term has not been applied to Khasias or Garos whom the Bengalies were more acquainted and living side by side. Further, the Garos were habitually accustomed to a greater degree of nudity than any of the Naga tribes.

However the theory acceptable especially to the Naga scholars¹⁴ is that the term is derived from '*nok*' or '*nog*' meaning 'people' or 'man' or folk in some Tibeto-Burman language. This theory seems to be quite popular with western writers.¹⁵ The Assamese their immediate neighbour called the Nagas as '*Noga*'. Another equally acceptable theory is that it is derived from the Burmese word 'Naka' meaning 'pierced ears' as the Nagas had the tradition of making holes in the ears. This is more plausible because the Nagas might have stayed in Burma or a while migrating from south East Asia to the present habitat. Thus the word '*Naka*' and the refined '*Naga*'.

From these one can easily draw the conclusion that the term 'Naga' is given by non-Nagas. Earlier the Nagas were not known by the generic term 'Nagas'.

Having cleared with the term 'Naga' let us look into the origin. Since the Marams are one of the various Naga tribes, they might have been part of the group in their migration or origin. Though no detail word on the Maram Nagas on the

origin or migration has been made there are many theories on the origin and migration of the Nagas.

There were four possible roads of migration to the present habitat north or the monarchical kingdoms of Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim, West through Ganges and Brahmaputra valley, sea or Bay of Bengal and lastly through Burma over Patkai hill ranges were the Ahoms in the 13th Century came or south east through Manipur. Of all their theories the most plausible place of origin is the southeast Asia-the route via South East of Manipur. This can be substantiated by the similarity in cultural traits.¹⁶ There were lots of similarities in the practice of agriculture in terraced and jhum cultivation, used of sea-shells as neckless and other jewelry. Else the Nagas might be unaware of the jewellery.

The practice of tree burial of the dead due to unnatural death among some of the Nagas or the practice of expression of the dead were similar to some of the practices of the people living nearby ocean in some of the Indonesian Island, Sulawesi, Philippines and other parts of South East Asia.

Thus due to this some hypothesized that in all probability the Nagas might have migrated from this place via Burma because the people having pierced ears were called by the Burmese as 'Noka' and hence the name 'Naga'. Many opines that the Aos went ahead in course of the Nagas migration and after crossing Dikhu River on their westward journey settled at Soyin which later changed to Ungma.¹⁷ It is accepted by the Nagas that it was the first Naga village and as such 2nd Naga Peoples' Convention of 1958 took place in this village. And by then 32 generations had passed as per the Ungma village people. As per the international standard 25 years is taken as one generation. Maram Nagas give 30 years for a generation.¹⁸ Thus it is likely that the Nagas might have migrated to their present habited as early as 1156 A.D. based on this calculation or 800 years for 30 generations. And since the Aos claimed to have settled first at Chungliyimti before they crossed Dikhu river it is reasonable to give 100 years for their antecendental stay at Chungliyimti. Therefore it is

likely that the Aos might have reached Chungliyimti in A.D. 1056. Thus in all probability the Nagas might have come to the present habitat by 10th or 11th century or even before that. However this is only a probability till now as no concrete and serious studies has been made.

The above date and century can also be substantiated by the fact as stated in Buranji that when the Ahoms came in 1228. A.D. to Brahmaputra valley via Patkia Hills the Nagas were found to have settled in the present Naga Hills. They have established a sort of new domain in their present habitat as they offered stiff resistance to the new migrants who encroached their land. When the Ahoms came to the Brahmaputra valley from the ancient kingdom of Pong or Maulung as per Buranjis, great numbers of them who followed Sukhapa was a male elder. The Ahoms who were genuine Shans were Buddhist by faith when they 1st came in 1228 A.D. but came under Brahmanical influence only during the reign of Sudangpha who ruled Ahom kingdom from 1397 to 1407 A.D.¹⁹ However the Nagas were neither Buddhist nor came under Hindu influence. This fact testified that the Nagas might have migrated to the present habited much before the spread of Buddhism and were an independent people till the annexation of their areas by the British in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Thus in all probability the Maram Nagas also might have migrated along with various other Naga tribes. And in course of the migration might have settled in the present areas who now borders with the Moas in the North, Poumeis in the East, Zeliangrong in the West and Meiteis in the South.

EARLY SETTLEMENTS

As regards the early settlement of the people in North East India or the South East Himalayan mountain range there are many scholars who suggest that the Indo-Mongoloid people before descending on the plains of Brahmaputra valley settled along the foothills of the Himalayas where many principalities emerged from early references to a group of Mongoloid people under the name *Kirata*. There were some scholars²⁰ who

introduced the *Kiratas* as the frontier dwellers of the Himalayas and the North Eastern India where the tracts were exactly the land of early settlement of the Mongoloids in India. There are also some scholars who gave the name 'Kirata' to the people living along the foothills of the Himalayas after they had descended from their original homeland.²¹ There are also some scholars who held that a section of the Tibeto-Burmans occupied the hills on the southern side of the Himalayan range.²² Linguistically and ethnically the Nagas are clubbed in the Tibeto-Burman group.

In the light of the above views, a conclusion can be drawn that the tribes who are all Mongoloids in North East India at the earliest stage of their migration in quest of lands settled down on the foothills of the Himalayan Mountain range. Some subsequently settled down in the hills and some descended on the fertile lands of the Brahmaputra. However, many scholars identified this 'Kiratas' with the Bodo Kachari tribes.²³

There are some scholars who believe as mentioned above that the Nagas lived or settled in Burma for sometime in course of their migration to the present habitat holds some true. This is supported by certain facts-the Nagas had the tradition of making holes in the ears. The Burmese called that group of people with holes in ears as 'NAKA' meaning pierced ears.²⁴ The Anglicised word became Naga. Thus it is obvious that the Nagas had tracked through Burma in their migration to the present habitat.

In the light of the above theory one can draw conclusion that the Nagas though claim to have traced their earliest settlement to Makhel and Khezakhenoma were part of the migratory group of people at different waves of migrations however definitely earlier than the Ahomias and Kuki-Chin groups. The Ahoms came in 11th century led by Sukapha. The Kukis came in the 19th century. However the exact date or year or century could not be ascertained due to absence of scripts or any artifact.

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

The Maram Nagas had partilineal system in their society.

Though man was the head of the family, the woman too had very important role in the managerial and custodial authority in the family. The women would generally look after the whole family affairs relating to the welfare of the children and other family matters except in the judiciary cases where it would be decided by male only.

The family among the Maram Nagas consists of the father, the mother and the children – together this forms the household, but they share the common house only during the meal hours. The children by 10 years of age or even less slept in the dormitory house and never at the parental house during the pre-Christian period. The little circle is broken by marriage when the children entered into exogamous marriage the son establishes their own houses and the daughter by the law of exogamy, go to other sib or clan. The family, however, is not the prime importance, because the social organization is based on the exogamous clan system. The Maram Nagas are divided into many clans.

ANCIENT VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION

For the Maram Nagas, custom is the law of the land, that is observed by the people whether Christians or non-Christians from time immemorial and which has been handed down from generation to generation. It has the originality, certainty, antiquity, continuity and it has the force of law governing the whole Maram Nagas. However, all the villages of the Maram Nagas were independent. There was no chief or king governing certain area or villages since time immemorial as such that the social customs and practices of the village was not applicable to the other. Thus the law and custom vary from village to village and region to region. The Maram Nagas governed themselves by social customs and tradition prior to their contact with the British. Even when the areas came under the British paramountcy, the Marams governed by themselves under the Regulating Act passed in 1822 by the British first in Garo Hills and then extended to the whole of tribal areas after the British brought all the tribal areas under their control. After independence, under Article 13(3)(a) of the Constitution of India, Law includes Customs or Usage.

Prior to the Independence of India, the indigeneous tribal council like the clan elders in their respective village settled all the civil and criminal cases. The proceedings of cases were not recorded. The village elders called *külong katingmei* took part in the meeting and gave decisions according to the customary laws and practices. The judgement passed by the village elders were respected and accepted by the people. There was no court of appeal, as there was no higher or subordinate court. The judgement or the verdict pronounced by the village elders was final and binding. Any breach or disrespect shown to the verdict might increase severe penalty. However the law varied from place to place and region to region. Since each village was independent had their own unique customs and practices.

In the pre-Chistian era, the Maram Nagas took pride in taking revenge mostly in the form of head collection popularly known as head hunting. People who did not take revenge were taken to be coward. In olden days the village council headed by *sügong* tried the cases. This was known as *sam katchü*. All the cases were tried as per the custom and tradition. Both the parties without much noise accepted the cases thus decided. At present cases were generally taken to the village courts that dispose off all the local cases and settle minor disputes within its jurisdiction. However if the village could not decide the case, the area elders generally would jointly take up the case. If this failed the tribe's apex body would take up the matters. This forms the highest court.

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18 / *Customary Laws and Practices of the Maram Nagas*

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The task of better understanding among people is a difficult one. A vital part of the task is to provide accurate, interesting, readable information about every land, its people and its way of life. Persisting ignorance about other peoples and other lands keeps alive the embers of fear and prejudice that often leads to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. The basic objective of this book is to provide facts and not opinion.

The book is written after travelling to various parts of the Maram Naga inhabited areas and a lot of interactions with different age groups—young and old, and of both sexes. The author toured almost all the villages. Many of the facts collected were reviewed, cross examined and checked by a group of young Maram Naga scholars and any disagreement was not left unresolved. All the facts have been collected to illustrate the reality of the lives of the people.

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