

Komol Singha



**Economy of a Primitive  
Tribal Village in  
MANIPUR**

This book explores economic structure of a hill village so called the lone Primitive Tribal village in Manipur elaborating the basic concept of village, tribe and tribal, determinants of Primitive Tribe, land ownership system, the role of women in agriculture followed by studies pertaining to health, education, population and consumption pattern with its comparison to village income. It also deals with market and globalisation in village economy formation besides covering some fundamental infrastructures for economic development like Social Capital, Physical Infrastructure and Human Capital.

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# Economy of a Primitive Tribal Village in Manipur

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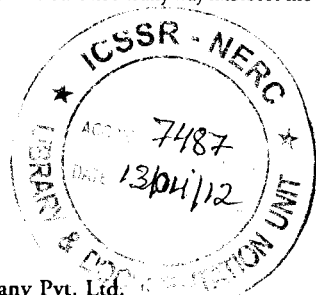
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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

The tribal all-over the world generally live in the hilly and inaccessible areas. All the communities, including the most developed one in the world at present, were tribal at one stage or another in their development trajectory. Economic life, which has a system of mutual dependence, and the influence of social forces compel them to live as a unified force in a demarcated area. This process led to village life in the human history. Village communities all over the world have a number of common features. The village settlement being an independent unit, community life therein is characterised by the interaction among social, economic, political and cultural institutions. Notwithstanding the existence of class and groups inside the village, people of the village can, and often do, face the outside world as an organised, compact whole. However, they vary greatly in their internal structure and organization, in their ethos and world-view, in their life-ways and thought-ways, on account of a variety of factors. Among others, the factors of size - population, land area, ethnic composition, pattern of land ownership, the structure of authority and power-hierarchy, the degree of isolation from or contact with urban areas, and local traditions account for this diversity in their structures (Dube 1978). The physical character of a village is influenced

by its dynamic interaction with the principle and pattern of settlement (Madan 2004:13). In the case of tribal communities, they live mainly on the hill tops due to various factors.<sup>1</sup> In Manipur the majority of the tribal population live in the villages particularly in the hills.

Topographically, the State of Manipur has an area of 22,327 sq. km., of which 20,089 sq. km. are of the hills and the remaining 2,238 sq. km in the valley. In other words, about nine-tenth of the total geographical area of the State is hilly. These hill areas are inhabited by 29 tribes. Five out of nine districts in the State — Chandel, Churachandpur, Tamenglong, Senapati and Ukhrul — are in the hills. As of 2001, the number of villages in Manipur is 2,391 of which 1,901 are in hills and 940 are in valley.<sup>2</sup>

Although, people in the hill broadly share a common socio-economic and cultural environment within a given region, no two villages are the same. As Yumnam (2002) observes, despite having variations among the institutions from village to village, they are generally grouped into two on the basis of commonality of features and groupings of the communities on the basis of origins. They are institutions of the Naga group of the communities and those of the Kuki group of communities.

Manipur became a full-fledged State of India on the 21st January, 1972 but the condition of village economy has not undergone much change. This relative lack of dynamism is particularly true in the context of the tribal villages in the uplands of Manipur. So, the understanding of the problems and study of hills/tribal villages becomes need of the hour.

The colonial period particularly from 1855 till 1940s witnessed the transformation of forest dwellers into tribes and the process of transformation of tribes into castes. Ethnographers earlier described all communities as tribes. And the distinction between tribe and caste did not fully emerge until 1901 population Census of India (Singh 2006 : 90).

### Concept of a Village

In the opinion of Haq (1973), giving a precise definition of a village is not so easy. The village in America or in India or in Africa must have different connotations. It is because of their social, physical and economic structure. And even in the same State, there are so many differences among the villages. Some are big and others are small, some are poor and others are rich and some are hilly and others lie on the valley. So, there is no single yardstick to determine a village. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, village is a small settlement in a country area. Still, there are some common features to characterizing a village. They are as follows (Chaudhari and Chaudhari 2005; Standing Committee on Labour and Welfare 2002) :

1. Remoteness in character.
2. Settled together in a particular area.
3. Settled by the people of same origin or indigenous people.
4. Their main occupation is agriculture or related primary activities.
5. Low rate of literacy.
6. Prevalence of traditional culture, belief, orthodoxy and conservativeness.
7. Backwardness of infrastructure.
8. Mainly consisting of only one caste/community.
9. Commonality of some economic fundamentals.
10. Lack of communication and isolation from the urban centre.

There are few related features common among the villages all-over the world. As a proverb says, "One needs to test one grain in a pot of rice to know whether the rice in

the pot has been properly boiled or not.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, one needs to cast a close look in a village of a country to understand rural socio-economic conditions of that country.

### Concept of a Tribe and Tribal

As Sikidar (1990) says, the word 'tribe' is a noun and 'tribal' is an adjective. It is erroneous to identify any individual say Mr. X as a tribal. He is a tribe, which he belongs to. Tribal is their abstract value they pursue since time immemorial. Tribe is a clan while tribal is a living system. Hence, our constitution's Article 342 has enlisted certain tribes in the schedule. Those people of specified clan so enlisted are known as scheduled tribe.

Misra (2005) observes that the very word 'Tribe' in Indian context is of a very recent origin and a colonial construct. The literature on tribe clearly indicates that there was no term equivalent to tribe in any of the Indian languages. The groups were known by their specific names in the group of their existence and there they had specific roles and status. A tribe officially notified as a scheduled tribe today lives in deserts, river belts, the islands, in relatively isolated habitats but mostly in forests. In Hindi, the term '*Adi-Vashi*' or '*Jana-Jati*' (*Adi*- Old or Original, *Vashi*- People, which means original people) appears in place of the English term 'tribe'. In Manipuri (*Meitei-lon*), it is termed as '*Hao*' from time immemorial (see e.g., McCulloch 1859). It connotes the people from hill and slightly backward in all respects.

According to 2001 population census, proportion of tribal population in the total population of the country was 8.2 per cent. The largest concentration of tribal population anywhere in the world except perhaps Africa is in India. It means that more than half (say around 60 per cent) of world's tribal population are citizens of India. The tribal groups in India can be broadly classified into three areal zones namely, North-eastern, Central and Southern. There are more than

500 tribal groups in India; out of these 75 are identified as Primitives (Chaudhari and Chaudhari 2005; Standing Committee on Labour and Welfare 2002), and one (Primitive tribe) is from Manipur.

### **Scheduled Tribe and its Determinants**

The tribes variously or successively were described in the census and ethnographic literature as hill tribes, primitive tribes, forest tribes and backward tribes. It was under the Government of India Act, 1935 and the Constitution of India that the nomenclature of the scheduled tribes emerged. The Constitution of India, however, gives no definition of tribe. The notion of the scheduled tribe has two aspects : Firstly, it is administratively determined by the criteria of backwardness and remoteness and it is a political decision. Secondly, all tribes are not scheduled, the presumption being that there are still some communities similar to the tribes, which are outside the ambit of the schedule. This understanding gains support from the fact that the listing of communities notified as the tribe under Article 342 of the constitution is an ongoing process (Ramamani 1988).

Though, the all Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) of the country are tribes, all tribes are not as primitive. A committee was set up by the Central Government in 1965 to look into the question of the definition of the tribes. According to the committee, primitiveness and backwardness were the criteria applied in framing the 1950 and 1965 lists of the scheduled tribes. It opined that tribes whose members have by and large mixed with the general population were not eligible to be in the schedule of tribes (Singh, 2006 : 90).

### **Primitive Tribe and its Determinants**

According to Chaudhari and Chaudhari (2005), in this age of globalization, there are still people living far away from

the main current of development, in forests ill-served by modern communication facilities. There are no schools and hospitals. These people live naked in small huts, eating root crops, fruits, leaves and coarse grains. They have not heard of the computer, air-conditioner, cell phone, internet, refrigerator, etc. They communicate by producing different types of vocal sounds, beating the drums, brass plate and so on to announce the happenings of their routine life. Very few of them are acquainted with postal services and letter writings. These people are known as tribal or primitive tribe. Robert Redfield, an American Anthropologist, defined 'Primitivism' on the basis of small, self-sufficient, homogeneous and non-literate society.

According to Deogaonkar (2005), usually when a tribal group is classified as a Primitive group, the following characteristics are observed :

1. The habitat of Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) is in inaccessible forest or mountainous areas, valleys, etc.,
2. They live a scheduled life<sup>4</sup>, i.e. a backward life,
3. They are either in a hunting or food gathering stage,
4. They practice primitive agriculture mostly described as shifting cultivation,
5. They speak their dialect and the oral folk-literature inherited through oral tradition is still alive, and
6. The community adheres strictly to their traditional customs, traditions and social norms and is thus strongly ethnocentric, etc.

According to Gupta (2005), the then Census Commissioner of India J.H. Hutton, was the first of all who conceived the word 'Primitive Tribe' in Indian setting in 1931. Later, W. V. Grigson joined him in the framing of the guidelines for the welfare of the tribes. According to them,

for identification of Primitive Tribal Groups, States (identification of PTGs is a State subject) generally have to follow three norms.

Those are as follows :

1. Pre-agricultural level of technology,
2. Low level of literacy, and
3. A stagnant or diminishing population.

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government of India, the government has adopted the following criteria for the identification of Primitive Tribal Group.

Those are as follows :

1. Population growth rate is very low compared to the rest of the population. They therefore exist as small communities.
2. The level of technological development is still in pre-agricultural stage.
3. The level of literacy is extremely low and is lagging far behind the average tribal. There is practically little or no progress of literacy among such groups.

Any tribe qualifying at least one of such criteria were stated as Primitive Tribe and on the basis of these criteria, 52 communities have been identified as 'Primitive' till the end of Fifth Five-Year Plan, 72 in Sixth Five-Year Plan, 74 in Seventh Five-Year Plan. Now, it has been raised to 75 tribal communities in the last identification of PTGs in the country. The last PTG identified was the Maram tribe of Manipur in the year 1993-94. But no PTG has been identified based on figures of 2001 census (Chaudhari and Chaudhari 2005; Standing Committee on Labour and Welfare 2002).

### **Tribal Development Initiatives during the Plan Periods**

Tribal development is concerned; in the post-Independence era, the philosophy of tribal development can be best summed up in the *Panchsheel*, five principles, enunciated by Nehru in 1958 in collaboration with Verrier Elwin, Anthropological Advisor to the Government (Dube 1998; Saran 1997).

Those are as follows :

1. People should develop along the lines of their own genius and should have nothing imposed upon them. We should try to encourage in every way of their own traditional arts and culture.
2. Tribal rights to land forests should be respected.
3. We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will no doubt be needed, especially in the beginning but we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.
4. We should not over-administer the tribal areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should work rather through and not in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institutions.
5. We should judge results not by statistics or by the amount of money spent but the quality of human character that is evolved.

In 1960, under the Chairmanship of U. N. Dhebar, the Scheduled areas and Scheduled Tribe Commission were set up, which uphold the first principle of "*Panchsheel*" (Saran 1997). It may be recalled that, the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) strategy was formulated on the eve of the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-79). As a part of the ground work, it was decided

that special programmes for the extremely backward tribal groups known as primitive groups should be taken up on the basis of proper identification on the lines suggested by the Shilu Ao Team. Complete funding of the programme by the Government of India was envisaged (see, Singh 1998). With the emergence of Tribal Sub-Plan, major development programmes of tribal people in India were initiated from the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-79).

Coming to Manipur<sup>5</sup>, the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-79), embodied a larger programme with the total outlay of Rs. 139.70 lakh for the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes in the State of which Rs. 137.94 lakh were actually spent on this purpose. In this plan, in the centre, a Directorate of Scheduled Tribes was set up in January 1976 and to give a better impact and to ensure proper allocation of the plan provisions, Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) was adopted at the end of the plan.

The Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-85), out of the total outlay of Rs. 246 crores, a total of Rs. 231.85 lakhs were allocated for the development schemes relating to Scheduled Tribes in Manipur. During this plan, the infrastructure development for the tribes has shown an improvement as compared to the previous plan. But a lot has to be done for the basic requirement of the overall development of the areas, i.e. road and communication development and the infrastructure, etc., this is the primary need for the socio-economic upliftment of the people, which is not yet achieved.

During the Seventh Five-Year Plan (1985-90), both the Central and State Governments have been taking care of proper implementation of the programmes by introducing tribal sub-plan with sub-heads under the main budget heads in respect to the given outlays. The total outlay of the State in this plan was Rs. 430 crores and relative allotted share for tribal development was Rs. 400 lakhs. In addition to the State fund, Rs. 1,251 lakhs of Central assistance was given for the development of tribal areas. In fact, maximum share of the

assistance was given to the education, art and culture followed by agriculture, horticulture, and water supply.

The Eighth Five-Year Plan (1992-97), was to accelerate the socio-economic development of the tribal people by taking into account the existing socio-economic conditions. During this plan period, the total State plan outlay was agreed to Rs. 979 crores, of this allocation the fund flow to Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) was 42.25 per cent. In addition to the expenditure for the State Plan, there was also the Special Central Assistance to the TSP areas for the Eighth Five-Year Plan period. The agreed outlay for the said period was Rs. 227.50 crores but the actual expenditure spent for the same was Rs. 239.10 crores. It indicates that the expenditure exceeded the outlay by Rs. 11.60 crores.

The Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-02), gave due regard to the general strategies adopted during the Eighth Plan period. The basic objective to the plan remains the acceleration of the socio-economic development for the tribal people taking into account the existing environment and socio-economic conditions prevalent in the area. The strategy adopted in this plan period is creation of amenities through infrastructure development schemes, poverty alleviation through family oriented income-generated schemes and improvement of tribal talent through the implementation of research oriented schemes/programmes. The State plan outlay of the plan was agreed to Rs. 2424.39 crores and against this allocation of funds for the TSP areas was Rs. 1022.75 crores, which is 42.15 per cent of the total State plan outlay. The outlay under the special Central assistance to TSP was made at Rs. 28.75 crores.

The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-07) became a turning point for the development of Tribal communities in India in general and North-East India in particular. Fortunately, the Government of India when P. R. Kyndiah<sup>6</sup> was Minister of Tribal Affairs had announced number of Tribal welfare

programmes on the eve of 60th Independence Day of the country. Some of those are :

- Development of Forest Villages has taken up for the first time since Independence. Rs. 450 crores provided for basic infrastructure facilities in 2474 forest villages, including Maram Khullen of Manipur.
- Enactment of the Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 aims at to improve the lives of the tribal and other traditional forest dwellers living in forests by vesting the right to self-cultivation of forest land for livelihood, right of ownership, collection, use and disposal of minor forest produce, traditional and customary rights; Rules of carrying out the provisions of the Act are being framed and shall be notified shortly.
- National Tribal Policy is being finalised.
- New Scheme of top class education for Scheduled Tribe students' (ST students) to be introduced from 2007-08 to encourage meritorious ST students for pursuing studies at degree and post-degree level in any selected government or private institutes covering fields of Management, Medicine, Engineering, Law and Commercial courses. A total of 635 scholarships per year to be awarded to cover full tuition fee and other non-refundable dues in respect of government/government funded institutions, for private institution with a ceiling of Rs. 2 lakh per annum per student and Rs. 3.72 lakh per student for the private sector flying clubs for commercial pilot training.

Coming to the area of study, the Maram Primitive Tribe

Project was first set-up during the year 1981-82 with a token sanction amount of Rs. 1 lakh by the Government of India, under the Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub-Plan. Since then, an amount of Rs. 132.41 lakhs was earmarked for the development of this tribal group till the year 1999-2000. Against this allocation, an amount of Rs. 124.94 lakhs was spent during the same period (Mohanty 2002). Despite all these initiatives, socio-economic development of tribal villages in the State remains more or less same till date.

### **Description of the Study Village**

Maram Khullen is the original village of the Marams, the lone primitive tribe (Singh 1998; Sahu 2002)<sup>7</sup> in the State. The name of this village 'Maram Khullen' is of Manipuri (*Meitei-lon*) origin, which means biggest and original village of Maram tribe (*Maram* — name of a hill tribe in Manipur, *Khullen*— biggest and original village). Sahu (2002 : 128) found that this village is the oldest village of Marams, covers approximately an area of 6 sq. km. including the adjoining forest, waste land and vegetable fields.

The village is situated on the top of the Maram Khullen Hill mainly as a defensive strategy since inter-tribe clashes were orders of the day in the past. It is one of the biggest villages in the State and the biggest amongst the villages of Maram with 432 households and about 2400 population at the time of survey of this research work. It is about 94 km away towards north from the capital city, Imphal and 25 km from the district headquarter, Senapati. It lies approximately 5 km from the National Highway 39 (NH 39 or Imphal-Dimapur road) in the west. In the south and just below the foothill of Maram Khullen, a tar road runs from the Maram Centre, which is on the NH 39 to Willong, another Maram village. *New Magaimai*, a Maram village and *Mao Pungdong*, a Mao<sup>8</sup> village lies in the west and north respectively.

It is believed that, all the members of the Maram tribe

inhabiting in different villages/towns today were migrants or descendents from this mother village, Maram Khullen. Almost all the historical monuments, relics, traditions, cultures, and customs of the Maram tribe are still alive in Maram Khullen. They speak Maram dialect and topographically, its altitude is about 3000 m (approximately) above the mean sea level (msl). Maram Khullen receives an average annual rainfall of 1467.5 mm. The relative humidity varies from 36 per cent to 100 per cent and temperature from 0.5°C to 36°C. The nearest market place of this village is Maram centre, which is on the NH 39 in the east and 5 kms by road<sup>9</sup> from the village.

**Table 1.1** : Number of households and population

<i>No. of Households</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Sex ratio/1000</i>	<i>Average Family Size</i>
432	2374	925	5.49

*Source* : Survey

### Formation of a New Tribal Village

Unlike the system in the primitive stage described above, for the formation of a new village in the Maram community, two basic criteria are to be fulfilled. Those are as follows : ( 1) Traditional or customary norms; and (2) Legal procedures.

*First*, in accordance with the customary law of the Maram tribe, for the formation of a new village, there has to be, a village Chairman and a Committee for the new village. Along with the members of the new village should organise an inaugural function of the new village. Representatives of the neighbouring villages<sup>10</sup> are invited to participate in the inaugural ritual ceremony, followed by a grand meal. The ceremony is celebrated by killing a cow or a buffalo and

graced over by the priest of the mother village (the village from where they are migrating). The boundary of the new village is demarcated by cow dung of the killed cow for the ceremony, followed by laying foundation stone of the new village.

*Second*, under the legal procedure, for formation of a new village, a document of No Objection Certificate (NOC) is to be obtained from the neighbouring villages, where new village is to be formed. A written approval document is to be obtained from the mother village. Then, an application for recognition of the village along with the NOCs has to be forwarded by the King/Chairman of the new village to the Deputy Commissioner through the Sub-Divisional Officer, Civil (SDO) of the concerned district.

### *Selection of the Study Area*

The present study deals with the 'Economy of a Tribal Village', a village of Maram tribe in Manipur. The effort has been made to select a village, which has the characteristics of backwardness, poor and traditional in nature. In order to understand a village economy, it is necessary to understand the institutions, activities and day-to-day life of the villagers. This is particularly so in the case of a tribal and not so highly commercialised or advanced village.

With an objective to understand a tribal village economy and keeping the notions of the characteristics of a tribal village in mind, the Maram Khullen of Manipur is selected for the present study. It is one of the biggest tribal villages in Manipur with 432 households and a population of more than 2300. This village is large enough to represent a typical hill village economy and other institutional characteristics for the analysis being envisaged in the thesis.

Besides the reasons mentioned above, due to the closeness to the highway, there is the convenience of visiting the village for survey. Moreover, Maram Tribe is the lone primi-

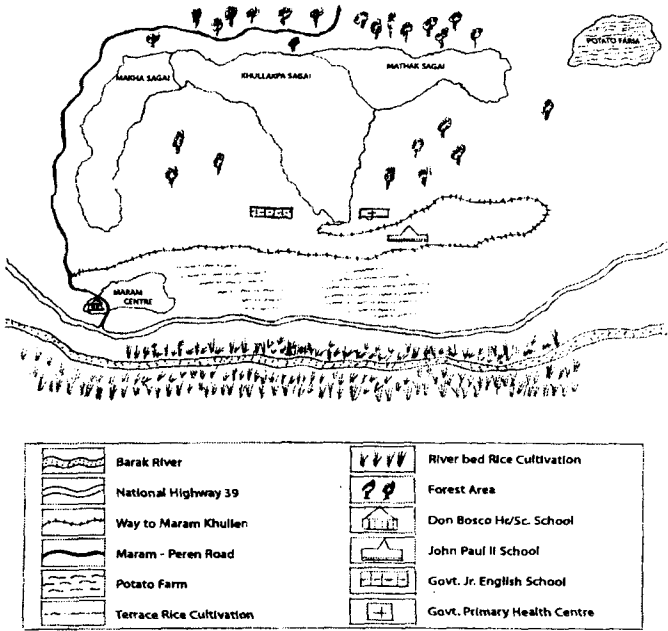


Fig.1.1 : Rough Sketch of the Village (Not to be scaled)

tive tribe " in the State and it is believed that this village is the origin of Maram tribe. Most of the known traditional activities of the tribe are found in this village.

### Objectives of the Study

The overwhelming majority of the population of our country's poor live in the villages. The development of the State lies on the development of the villages. And the majority of the people of the State's poor live in the hill villages. So, the basic objective of the present study is focused on the economic conditions of hill tribal villages in Manipur particularly the Maram Khullen.

More specifically, the objectives of the study are as follows :

1. The present study tries to identify the economic and social institutions, like agriculture, trade and business, market, village council, other social and economic institutions, which the village lives on. And, how do these institutions work and influence in framing economic system in the village.
2. Secondly, this study is the modest attempt to understand the main difficulties faced by the village in economic front and its possible solutions.
3. Finally, the present study tries to know the role of external institutions, like government intervention in the development activities in the village, Missionaries in education, and globalization forces, etc. in economic development in the village.

### **Methodology and Chapter Scheme**

The present study concerns with the economy of a tribal village, Maram Khullen. For the analysis of the economic system of this village, 200 households were surveyed on the random basis. Primary data were collected through scheduled questionnaires on land, forest, agriculture, marketing system, service sector, consumption pattern, physical infrastructure, health and education and community and social activities, etc. This field survey was conducted in the month of September 2006 followed by constant personal interaction and interview with the village leaders including nominated King of the village. Apart from these primary data and personal observation, the present study adopts secondary data published in the books, journals and other related publications of the government.

Chapter 1 discusses the basic concept of village, tribe and

tribal, determinants of Primitive Tribe, village and study area etc. Chapter 2, the following chapter discusses mainly primary sector. It includes agriculture, land ownership system, the role of women in agriculture. It is followed by analysis of the data collected from the field and possible recommendations. Chapter 3 deals with the forest, environment and water stress in the village. It is followed by the analysis of the data collected from the field and possible recommendations. Chapter 4 studies health, education and population etc. and followed by the possible recommendations. Chapter 5 deals with the institutions like, Market and Globalization in the village economy formation. Chapter 6 studies the consumption pattern and its comparison with the village income. Chapter 7 covers some basic infrastructures for economic development like Social Capital, Physical Infrastructure, and Human Capital, etc. Finally, the Chapter 8 wraps up with the concluding remarks and bibliography.

### NOTES & REFERENCES

1. The reasons for selecting hill-top as their habitat will be elaborated in the later part of this study.
2. Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Manipur, Imphal 2004
3. As mentioned by Haq (1973).
4. The policy of giving special protection to tribes was continued also in the Government of India Act, 1935, which created the Excluded and Partially Excluded areas. Thus these areas were enlisted in the Fifth and Sixth Schedule.
5. For tribal development in Manipur during the plan period, see in detail in Singh, M. R. (2006) 'Tribal Development in 21st Century : An Experience from Manipur' Mittal Publications, New Delhi, pp. 36-39.
6. He is also a tribe from Meghalaya, a veteran Congress M. P.
7. As on 30th June 1993, as recommended by State government, Minister of Tribal Affairs, Government of India identified Maram tribe as lone Primitive Tribal Group in Manipur.

8. Mao is a name of a tribe of Manipur.
9. The village is 5 km from the Maram Centre by road otherwise it is hardly 2-3 km. Because, the road that reaches to village is very curve as shown in the Figure 1.1.
10. Leaders of the neighbouring villages of the new village are invited on the occasion of the new village inaugural ceremony to witness the demarcation of the new village boundary, to avoid future boundary disputes.
11. Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India has identified that 'Maram tribe' of Manipur is one of the primitive tribes among 75 identified communities in India and it is the lone Primitive tribe of the State.