

**TRIBAL
SOCIAL
STRUCTURE :**



A STUDY OF THE MARING SOCIETY OF

MANIPUR

Rajat Kanti Das

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Manipur, the land of hills and valleys, has attracted the attention of outsiders from time immemorial resulting in the migration of tribal communities from Burma and inducing them to settle down all along the southern and south-eastern hills extending upto the fringes where the hills meet the valley. The ethnographic account of these tribes has aroused considerable interest in Indian scholars after Independence.

Rajat Kanti Das's book makes an attempt to analyse the Maring society (a little known tribe of a Frontier State, Manipur) with some degree of precision. It unfolds the internal cohesiveness of the Maring society in a refreshingly clear and lucid manner. The author has made a searching analysis on the origin of the Marings and highlighted how kinship and marriage, descent and residence, age and seniority, economic and ritual ties have shaped the social structure of the Maring. In addition, Rajat Kanti Das has reflected analytically on the trends of change in the Maring society due to ongoing changes in social, political and economic ties. Lastly, he concludes that the basic structure of the Maring society still remains unaltered though structural changes affecting the forms of social re-alignment are taking place. Whether Marings would be able to function in some degree of 'isolation' despite their historical connections with neighbouring tribes would depend on the enduring capacity of their social structure.

This book, an important contribution to the anthropology and sociology of North East India, would be invaluable to concerned researchers and scholars.

Rajat Kanti Das (b. 1941) is M.Sc., Ph.D. in Anthropology from Calcutta University. He has worked as Senior Lecturer in Anthropology in D.M. College of Science in Imphal from 1965 to April 1987.

An untiring researcher, he has contributed research papers to scholarly anthropological journals. He has to his credit a book entitled "Manipur Tribal Scene".

Rajat Kanti Das is a Member of Indian Anthropological Society, Calcutta; Council of Social and Cultural Research, Ranchi; Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology, Calcutta; and North-East India Council for Social Science Research, Shillong (Meghalaya).

Currently, he is Reader in the Department of Anthropology with Tribal Culture, Vidyasagar University in West Bengal.

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THE MARING SOCIETY
OF MANIPUR**

Rajat Kanti Das



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"If society is in anthropology, anthropology
is itself in society, for anthropology has been
able to enlarge progressively the object of
its study as far as to include therein the totality
of human societies - despite the fact that
it has appeared at a late period in their history
and in a little sector of the inhabited world."

Claude Levi-Strauss

FOREWORD

FOR more than half a century ethnography of North-East India has been dominated by British Scholars and Administrators. True to the tradition of studying "other cultures", the studies of those scholars provided oversimple cultural details of the area which largely became misinformation because they designated ethnic groups with some terms which are either obsolete or derogatory. North-East India came to be looked upon as a multilinguistic, multicultural and multiethnic area fitted well into the British policy of "divide and rule". During the post-Independence time, introduction of anthropology and sociology as distinctive disciplines in Indian Universities opened a new era of dialogue or multilogues between the Indian scholars and tribal informants. The analytical study of the Maring society of Manipur is an outcome of such a dialogue between an Indian scholar, and his autochthonous informants. Dr. Rajat Kanti Das, currently Reader, in the Department of Anthropology, Vidyasagar University spent more than fourteen years among the people and he studied them, and the result is a reliable account of a little known tribe of one of the Indian Frontier States, namely, Manipur.

Manipur is a land of valleys, lakes and dales

and attracted the attention of outsiders from time immemorial. It is referred to ancient literature of India. Many legends and myths have added bright colours to its rich cultural landscape. A State with a mosaic of tribal groups having a Hindu king, showed admirable and inter-ethnic tolerance and allegiance. Detailed ethnographic account of many of the groups are still lacking. After McCulloch's initial attempt, some Indian scholars have been showing considerable interest in the study of the Tribal backdrops of Manipur. Dr. Das is a prominent scholar of this group. He has attempted to depict the Maring society in great details which cover six chapters of the book. He lays emphasis on the elaborate nature of social relationship among the Maring social groups. A comparison of the Maring with the neighbouring Tarao adds extra importance to the book. It is an useful exercise in ethnography and is a welcome addition to the anthropology and sociology of North-East India.

P.K. BHOWMICK
University Professor of Anthropology &
Dean, Faculty of Science
Calcutta University
Calcutta

20.12.1987

PREFACE

THE subject of social structure is complex and can be approached from any community. This work was originally prepared as a doctoral dissertation in the Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta. It has been partly expanded to its present form. The ethnographic coverage made in this book has one moot point, that at the tribal level of cultural manifestation with its reliance on special integrative mechanisms only one type of social structure is discernible. The manner in which it will operate, of course, depends on the prevailing situation. However, the variations are all a part of one social structure. With this standpoint, the social structure of the Maring tribe of Manipur has been described in this book.

The field work on which this dissertation on the Maring Tribe of Manipur is primarily based was made possible by a research grant from the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi. I, therefore, remain indebted to the Indian Council of Social Science Research for enabling me to undertake the research work.

It is a pleasure to record my indebtedness to Prof. P.K. Bhowmik, Ph. D., D. Sc., of the Department of Anthropology and Dean of Science,

Calcutta University, for his guidance and valuable advice. It is no exaggeration to say that I have learnt much from him.

I gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of many persons in carrying out the research. For the field work I depended mostly on Sarvasree L. Gyaneshore Singh, Md. Latif Shah and R.K. Ranjit Singh. But for their cooperation it would not have been possible for me to work in the face of heavy odds. I thankfully acknowledge the assistance rendered by my colleagues in the Department of Anthropology, D.M. College of Science, Imphal. The photographic coverage by Sri H. Sarat Singh of the Department of Botany, D.M. College of Science, deserves appreciation. I am also thankful to Sri N. Ningomba of the Department of Manipuri, Manipur University, for his assistance. Sri O. Kumar Singh, Superintendent, Department of Archaeology, Government of Manipur, deserves a special word of appreciation. It was his initial briefings which aroused in me sufficient interest to work on the Maring.

I am indeed indebted to the villagers of Machi, Khunbi, Karongthel, Khoibu, Khudei, Khullen, Kharou Khunou, Kharou Khullen, Phunal Maring, Sandangsenba, without whose participation and help the study would not have been at all possible. My greatest debt is to my young Maring friends, particularly to Sri Homi Saaka, Secretary, "the Maring Naga Students' Union" and Sri L. Morung, now a school teacher at Machi village and a politician in the making.

A word of appreciation goes to Sri Khelchandra Singh, Librarian of the Manipur Secretariat Library, for allowing me to go through all relevant written materials. I am thankful to Sri Swapan Saha of Anthropological Survey of India for preparation of maps. I wish to

thank Sri Kumar Singh, Laboratory Assistant of the Department of Anthropology, D.M. College of Science, Imphal, for the services rendered by him. He was simply indispensable to me.

To my friends Dr. Guru Charan Ghosh, Anthropologist, Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta and Dr. Atul Bhowmick, Reader, Department of Museology, Calcutta University, I extend my feelings of gratitude for their constructive suggestions and criticism. Prof. Kanti Pakrasi of Indian Statistical Institute deserves special mention. The book owes a great deal to his useful advice.

Lastly, I acknowledge the aid of my wife Sutapa Das who has contributed immensely towards my research.

RAJAT KANTI DAS

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ONE INTRODUCTION

ONE of the important educational experiences is to know a strange people, whose ways are quite different from our own.

In the field of anthropology a study of an unexplored or a little explored people would be more useful than a restudy of an explored one. If research in some sense means the gathering of new information by which established theoretical propositions are tested and refined then, the present study might claim some relevance. The Maring, a tribe of Manipur, stand out as a distinct group in more than one sense. They just do not fit in the old scheme of classifying into Naga and Kuki group of tribes. They may be regarded as an 'independent' tribe in the sense that they reveal some distinctive features in the social realm.

It is legitimate to think of Maring society as being organized according to a set of principles. In respect of conceptualisation of society, the investigator prefers to follow Nadel's definition. Nadel states:

"Societies are made up of people; societies have boundaries, people either belonging to them or not; and people belong to a society in virtue of rules, under which

they stand and which impose on them regular determinate ways of acting towards and in regard to one another".[1]

In the ultimate analysis society may be reduced to the 'web of social relationships'.[2] The primary task of this investigator is to look for the structural features of Maring social life. Needless to say, a certain group of people use a certain structure for the organization of a set of tasks or activities. While structure refers to arrangement of persons in relation to each other, organization refers to the arrangement of activities.

It may be a useful idea

"to look first for the existence of social groups of all kinds and examine also the internal structure of these groups we find".[3]

At the end a social structure emerges either in interactions between groups or more correctly, in interactions between individuals forming groups. These groups affect the interactions of persons at different levels at varied degrees. Social structure here is seen as a manifestation of a particular social system. The term 'system' implies that the relationships and activities are organized in a definite structured way. They are integrated sufficiently to be conceptualised as 'parts of some larger whole'.[4] Moreover, structure with 'determinate organizational potentials' is the outcome of institutional principles. The interactions of persons are accomplished within the persistent framework of the given social structure. The present study strives at identifying the structural component units or social groups in the Maring society and the structural factors or institutional principles

that go with them. Of course, one must assume that the system that marks the total structural pattern has a stability of its own. Leach also points out :

". . . that in order to describe this totality it is necessary to represent the system as if it were stable and coherent".[5]

Fortes (1953) has referred to the 'structural frame of reference', which, according to him, 'gives us the procedures for investigation and analysis by which a social system can be apprehended as a unity made up of parts and processes that are linked to one another by a limited number of principles of wide validity in homogeneous and relatively stable societies'. This, in essence, is the concept of social structure.

There are 'social groups'[6] within a society ('sub-groups', according to Nadel). They fit into the overall structure of the society. So the study of social groups seems to be quite meaningful. One may examine not only 'the bounded unity of groups', but also the inter-relations of groups. Evans-Pritchard, in his account of the Nuer, has preferred to restrict the term 'social structure' to those relatively enduring relationships which unite persisting social groups into wider units. He has excluded inter-personal relations. In the present study the author has discussed 'social structure' only in terms of social groups - the way they are united as parts of the whole system and the principles of organization or the institutional principles that go along with them. He has dealt with what may be termed as 'part-whole relationship'.[7] It is futile to go into such controversies as whether structure is an explanatory construct meant to provide the key to

the observed facts of social existence, the logic behind social reality (Levi-Strauss, 1949; Leach, 1952), or whether it is the social reality itself, not the logic behind it (Nadel, 1957). What the author has done is to examine the Maring social system as an 'analytical system', which may be expressed

'in a limited series of propositions about the way in which the social groups are established and about the relations between them and between their members'.[8]

Obviously, such an analysis of social structure cannot present the 'whole' society. But can any society be said to form a coherent whole today? It is difficult to find an 'integral community',[9] in the real sense of the term. For instance, the Tarao, of whom the author has made a special reference because of their supposed link with the Maring, is a small community in every respect but they cannot be said to be structurally self-contained. A glimpse into the Tarao society would reveal that. There are conflicting behaviours, which owe their origin not only to relationships based on residential groupings but also to their wider geo-ethnic setting.

II

The Maring, a frontier tribe of Manipur with their villages distributed all along the northern part of the Tengnoupal district right upto the Burmese border on the east, provide some striking contrast to other tribes of Manipur, who usually belong to the Naga or the Kuki group of tribes. The Mizo and the Hmar are the two other exceptions. They may be regarded as an 'independent' tribes not because the principles

underlying the organizing basis for social life are totally different, but because they are a product of different types of historical relationships and upheavals resulting in a distinct form of social organizational pattern. About the Maring, Brown writes,

". . .the origin of the various tribes of Nagas, Kukis and Marings, which last is considered to be a separate race (?) differing in origin from either of the above . . . Looking simply at the geographical position of the tribes, their facial characteristics, customs and culture, it may be said that the Naga came originally from the north, the Kuki from the south, and the Maring, who closely resemble the Burmese in appearance, from the east".[10]

Dun also writes,

"They (the Marings) are distinguished from both Kukis and others by wearing their hair long and combined in a bunch like a horn arising from the front of the head".[11]

Though there has been a recent tendency on the part of some of the Marings to align themselves with the Naga group of tribes, which has its origin mainly from the influence of the Tangkhul Naga church leaders, to link them with either the Naga or the Kuki group of tribes would have little practical bearing.

The Maring number 9,825 persons according to 1971 census. In 1981 the number has gone up by another five thousand or so. Brown has put the figure at about three thousand distributed in approximately twenty villages about a century back. The villages were distributed

in the Heirok range of hills. McCulloch writes about them,

"The Murring (Maring) was not long ago a numerous tribe. It is now represented by nine small villages".[12]

Significantly, Dun has mentioned about the sudden increase in Maring population towards the end of the nineteenth century. According to him,

"When Nursing was Raja, they (Marings) were oppressed and ill-treated by the Manipuris, which caused them to leave their country and take refuge in Burma, but lately (i.e. the later part of nineteenth century) they are returning, the policy of the Manipur government having changed in regard to them and the Kubo valley, towards which the majority had fled, being to them unhealthy, and the measures of the Burman being also oppressive they are coming back in numbers."[13]

No doubt, the Maring population during the nineteenth century constantly fluctuated. Dun has put the figure around five hundred only. In Table 1.1, a comparison has been made between population figures of 1881 as provided by Dun and 1971 census of important Maring villages, which may give some idea about the rise in Maring population.

Table 1.1 depicts that in ninety years the Maring population has recorded an increase of almost twenty times. The population of Machi, the biggest of Maring villages, has increased almost eightfold. The increase would be greater if the population of those villages

TABLE 1.1 : Population of Selected Maring Villages

Village	1881		1971	
	No. of Houses	Total Population	No. of residential houses	Total Population
Machi	20	100	112	772
Khurpi (Khunbi)	40	200	65	316
Leibi	6	30	45	144
Kangoi	2	10	26	121
Yangkhul	10	50	33	220
Laiching Khunou	5	25	16	80
Laiching Khullen	10	50	15	91
Wabaching	6	30	18	101
Langol	30	150	110	584
Lamlong Khullen	10	50	116	672
Lamlong Khunou	7	35	30	316
Thamlai	10	50	21	150
Narum	6	30	32	191
Kolongten (Karongthel)	5	25	80	525
*Khateh (?) (Khudei Khullen)	40	200	38	244

* Khateh is in all probability the Khudei Khullen village. Khudei Khunou, which was formed out of Khudei Khullen, was non-existent in 1881. There was only one village by the term

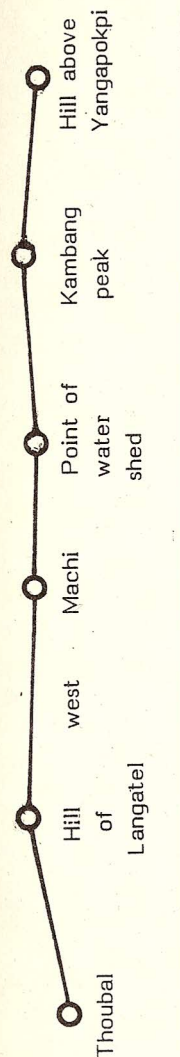
formed out of Machi is taken into account. At least one feature generally attracts the attention of even a casual observer, i.e. even during that period the concentration of the Marings was towards the north-western part of the Tengnoupal District close to the valley. Langol with a population of 150, Khunbi with 200, Lamlong Khullan with 50, Laiching Khullen with 50, Thamlai with 50, Wabaching with 30 and Machi with 100 amply justify this observation. It may be pointed out that there was a route along Machi going up to the Burmese border which was used by the kings of Manipur during raids on the Burmese. The Burmese also used the same route while invading Manipur. Even during the British period the route was used for setting up signal stations up to the southern Kabaw valley.

Incidentally, most of the Maring villages lie along or at some distance away from the route. Dun has gone as far as to suggest that the term Maring generally refers to the western branch of the tribe, while the oldest branch is referred to as Saibu. There is reason to believe that to avoid conflict with the Burmese and other powerful tribes like Tangkhul, Thadou, the Marings sought the protection of the Manipur kings and later of the British Government. Dun writes,

"The Kambuis (Kabuis) and Marings were then (before the Burmese War), as now, the most under control".[14]

It needs to be mentioned that the Maring villages close to the Burmese border are of later origin. Kharou Khunou, a satellite village of Machi, was formed mainly with the intention of evading taxes imposed by the king of Manipur.

FIG. 1.1 : Machi - Yangapokpi Route (After Lt. Dun)



Note : Yangapokpi is a village bordering the Kabaw valley.

There is, however, no denying the fact that the Marings had a very close contact with the kings of Manipur. Besides paying taxes regularly to the king of Manipur, they used to pay tributes to him in various ways. For instance, the Marings of Khoibu used to supply *Khoi*, i.e. honey, hence the name Khoibu. There is a Maring song lamenting the death of *Khoirakpa*, who must have been the same person as the grandson of the king Marjit Singh of the eighteenth century. *Khoirakpa* means tax-collector suggesting that he was collecting revenues from them. The Marings used to participate in a celebration called *Mera haochongba* at the palace at Imphal. This is a dancing festival used to be performed by the tribals, mainly Marings and Kabuis, at the palace in the month of *Mera* (October - November).

A part of the song sung on the occasion reads,

*nongpok thongak'pa haone, foiruna panth-
bangne,
pambomma ponngakke Maring moiringbode,*

meaning thereby that the Marings, who kindled fire and the tribals (like them) who kept a watch on the eastern gate, would obstruct the enemy with all their might.

It is quite obvious that the Marings had joined hands with the kings of Manipur during war with the Burmese and other powerful tribes from across the eastern border. All the hill tribes were, by and large, unfriendly to the Burmese. There are evidences that the Marings enjoyed special favour and confidence of the king. The following story collected from Khudei Khullen bears testimony to that :

"Long ago, before the Burmese war, there was a man Chaiba Mothil at Khudei Khullen, who had a very big *sandeng* (mithun) in his possession. Meanwhile, the Maharaja of Manipur was in search of a big mithun. Ultimately he came to know about the big mithun owned by Chaiba Mothil. He wanted Mothil to give that to him and asked what he would like to have in return. Mothil replied that he did not want any money and would be glad to own some land for wet cultivation at the foothills. The Maharaja gave him about 80 *parees* (about 200 acres) of cultivable land near Pallel at the foot of Khebu hills."

The growth of Maring settlements near the foothills must have the tacit support of the king.

The Maring settlement history in Manipur seems to have been much influenced by Thadou raids, which on occasions had assumed serious proportions. The Maring national heroes Kothilan and Angtisan are remembered because they could successfully fight the Khonjais (Thadous). In their endeavour they probably joined hands with the Tangkhul Nagas. It may not be difficult to understand why a section of the Marings consider themselves to be Nagas. In the Maring tradition some places like Moirangkhom, Haubum Marak, Leisangkong, Tuidam in and around Imphal are referred. These were supposed to have been occupied by the Marings for some time. It may be possible that in order to avoid

* *Sandeng* is the Meitei term frequently used by the Marings. The Maring term for mithun is *Sareeni*.

powerful Thadou thrusts and Burmese invasion, a section of them moved in a northward direction coming as far as the centre of the valley before withdrawing once again towards the Heirok range of hills of the Mapithel range. There might have been population shifts with the prospect of Maharaja's protection.

No authentic historical account could be formed about the origin of the Maring. However, there is complete agreement at least on one point, i.e. their supposed migration from Burma. Maring tradition speaks of Kuli-song song or Kulbi-song song as the first village. Gimson has identified Mongsa or Mangsa in the Kabaw valley as the first Maring village.[15] From there they settled in the hills between the Kabaw and Manipur valley and then a section of them moved further to Moirengkhom including Haubum in Imphal and to Leisangkhong, a village some seven or eight miles south of Imphal. Kulbi-song song was a village in the Kabaw valley near Mangsa. Today, Mangsa is known to be a Shan village and no Maring could be found there. However, it has irregular trade relations with Maring villages bordering the Kabaw valley on the Indian side, such as, Kharou Khunou, Kharou Khullen, Lamlong Khunou. Another village from the Kabaw valley which finds a place in the Maring tradition is Wasafai. It is believed to be non-existent now. In the Kabaw valley, besides Mangsa, there is another village called Lichik, where there are at least two Maring houses now. Other villages mentioned in the Maring tradition are, Mulbi-mulchom, Chaptamlamal, Oklepaneng, Lapifal, Lukil-Leikil bung, Kinneibung, Kang-Koubung, Khung-war-bung, Sikbung, Sharjibung, Ransikbung, Sik-khon-gril, Chalom, Sangathel, Khobanthra, Yangtrumtri, Shipyul, Phungyul, Saiyul, Khambikathel, Tuini

or Tikni, Khumanching, Chilliching, Mokokching, etc. Chaptamlamal has an added significance in that it is supposed to be the first producer of crops and vegetables. Yangtrumtri was a village below the present Kambang village. Tuini or Tikni is supposed to be the parental village of Khunbi, Lamlong, Langol, Machi, Khudei Khullen, Karongthel. According to Lamlong Khullen tradition, there were six brothers at Tikni, village near the Burmese border. Their forefathers came to Tikni from Wasafai. From Tikni six brothers migrated to six different villages. They are considered to be the originators of these six villages. The names of six brothers and the villages formed by them are as follows :

S.No.	Name of the person	Name of the village
1.	Moba	Khudei Khullen
2.	Koba	Khunbi
3.	Meba	Lamlong Khullen
4.	Angba	Karongthel
5.	Khamba	Machi
6.	Tomba	Tangkhang (now extinct)

There is, however, no unanimity about the above serialisation because there is a tendency with them to manipulate the genealogical tradition at the slightest pretext.

A special mention should be made about the Maring village of Khoibu. The Marings of Khoibu would trace their descent from Mongrenphai, where they had first settled after coming out of the cave. They believe that their origin was contemporary with the Meiteis. According to them, Khoibu Mothangaon, Tarao

Yaimaba and Naothingkhong Atomba were brothers. Khoibu Mothangaon was the ancestor of the Maring; Tarao Yaimaba became the progenitor of the Taraos, whereas Naothingkhong Atomba was a Meitei king. There was one Naothingkhong in the list of Meitei kings sometime in the 7th century A.D. Tarao legend speaks of their migration from Haobiching on the south Tengnoupal to a number of villages on the western border of the Kabaw valley near the Maring village of Narum before arriving at Wangkhupi near Tengnoupal town. It was possible that they had a special type of relationship with the Marings, at least a section of them, although they would not agree to any such suggestion now. Gimson has made a special reference of Khoibu Marings, particularly with regard to their supposed link with the Pois of Burma, He writes,

"In January 1921 when I was President of the Manipur State Darbar it (Khoibu) filed the petition for permission to go to 'Poi' village in Phalam (Vawnung chief) in order to learn the proper way in which to worship their God, which they have forgotten. Its emissaries never reached Poi, do not yet know how to worship properly. They say that no other Maring is of the same 'jat' as themselves." [16]

Regarding their origin he states,

"They originally came from Angoching near the Kabaw valley and the Poi people left there first and went to Phalam. Later Khoibu people came to Manipur. They used to be of the same *jat* as 'Poi', but it is so long since they have had communica-

tion that they are rather uncertain about it now." [17]

The belief in their supposed common link with the Poi is also current among Marings of nearby villages. Like the Marings, the Pois keep turbans and make a knot with the help of long frontal hair. Incidentally, the Maring people could be distinguished from all other tribes of Manipur by the way they keep their hair. A tuft of frontal hair is made into a knot (*routang*). A white turban serves as the headgear (*lingkhang*). As Dun writes,

". . . their hair (is) long and combined in a bunch like a horn rising from the front of the head." [18]

The process of making the knot (*tolok-chinba*) is an elaborate one and every traditional-minded Maring attaches great importance to it. The name 'Maring' has been used in different ways in different context, i.e. Maringa, Meiringa, Meiring, Murring, etc. It is said to have been derived from two words, namely, *mei* meaning 'fire' and *ring* meaning 'to kindle'. On the basis of the colour of the border of the cloth they wear, the Marings may broadly be sub-divided into three sections :

- (i) those who wear red-bordered clothes,
- (ii) those who wear black-bordered clothes, and
- (iii) those wearing red and black-bordered clothes.

The last-named one is a recent addition and it has been done with the intention of projecting the central village of this group as the traditio-

nal Maring centre. If anything, this type of classification only reflects affinity and link between some villages. Obviously, the establishment of a new type of link is possible only after the separation of lineal ties, which is but natural in a basically segmentary type of society. This type of differentiation exists among some of the Burmese tribes. To cite at least one example, the Karans of lower Burma are clearly differentiated into Red Karens (Karen-ni), Black Karens (Karen-net) and White Karens (Karen-byu).

Let us examine some of the traditional tales connected with the question of formation of these groups. The people of Khunbi, who belonged to the Black Maring group, had this story to tell :

"The ancestral Maring family consisted of a father, a mother and two sons. After covering a number of villages they finally came towards Khunbi and settled down at a place near Khunbi. Sometime later the father fell seriously ill. At that time the elder brother Moba was away. He was busy catching a python near the confluence of the Wangjing and Sekmai rivers. The younger brother (*Kobe*) was sent by the father to bring *Moba* back home. But he came back disappointed as the elder brother had refused to leave the place at a crucial stage. Since then the elder brother remained away from home and was called *Mogalthe* (run-away). The younger brother who stayed at home, was called *Kosamdadrung*. The elder brother by staying away from home, forfeited his right to claim his father's property. It was the younger brother who inherited the property left behind by his father."

Now the people of Khunbi firmly believed that they were the descendants of *Kosamdadrung* and hence had a natural claim over the ancestral property. Those wearing red-bordered clothes were, according to them, the descendants of *Mogalthe*. Even without questioning the authenticity of this tale two points are significant. Firstly, on the basis of age, the Red Marings are considered senior. Secondly, adherence to the principle of descent is not strictly followed signifying a change in the political authority system. It means greater conflict between villages on the issue of exercising political control. And this is exactly what is going on between Machi and Khudei Khullen, two important Maring villages. The former is the centre of the Red and Black group, which had broken away from the Black group on the question of seniority. The latter belongs to the Red group. Machi version of the story runs like this :

"The father had two wives. But it was the younger wife who had given birth to a son first followed by the elder wife. The Marings of Machi asserted that the people of Khudei Khullen, which incidentally was the centre of the Red Maring group, were the descendants of the younger wife's son, whereas they represented the descendants of the elder wife's son."

It must be remembered that in Maring theory rank is specified by the lines of affinity to the senior kin group. In the above story also it was conceded that in age Khudei Khullen was senior. But its affinity to the senior kin group has been questioned. There is a long-drawn dispute between Machi and Khudei Khullen

over the seniority (*Piba*) question. In the story told by the Khudei Khullen people there was no ambiguity about their claim for seniority. This type of manipulation and re-interpretation of genealogical tradition marks the pattern of socio-political development of a frontier tribe.

The Marings, like some other tribes of this region, believe in a cave origin. The cave from which they seek their origin is believed to be located at Wasafai, near the Angaung hills in Burma. The following story, collected from Khudei Khullen, may be able to throw some light on the nature of differentiation within the tribe :

"Once Dangsa and Lamthakka* (a sub-clan of Charanga), the two brothers-in-law, went after the porcupine (*serrkhou*) inside the cave. As they were about to capture it, the porcupine came out of the cave through a hole made by the rats. The two brothers-in-law also followed the same path and after coming out of the cave sat on a branch of *uningthou* (a kind of tree of *Phoebe* sps.). That was the first occasion they came out of the underworld. They crushed a few branches of the tree first with the left hand with the belief that it would destroy the bad elements and then with the right hand so as to bring prosperity and betterment in life. After that they went back to the original cave *Sanajing*. There they collected fellow beings and planned for a joint march together

* At Khudei Khullen Lamthakka has assumed the status of a major clan.

to the open world outside. At first they sent a pig (*ok*) to open the main entrance to the cave but this met with no success. Then they sent a buffalo (*na looce*) and it also failed to open the cave door. The cave was finally opened by a mithun (*sareeni*). Then the mithun came out of the cave, a dog (*wee*) also followed it. Outside a tiger (*loomee*) killed both the animals and ate them up. An attempt was made by the cave-dwellers to kill the tiger by rolling down the *sendung* (bell) covered in a piece of cloth (*phi-langphai*) from the edge of the cave. Though the tiger jumped and escaped, almost at the very next moment Dangsa hurled a *leinungta* (a kind of spear) at the tiger and this time it could not escape and fell a victim. However, the claim of Dangsa to be the killer of the tiger has been outright rejected by others. It was actually Charanga, they argue, who had killed the tiger. By projecting Dangsa as the killer, an attempt has been made to upgrade his status. After killing the tiger, Dangsa and Charanga led others out of the cave into the open world. The first animal thus killed by Dangsa (or Charanga) is called *sobiya*. The men came out of the cave, some carrying a few articles with them. For example, Kansouwa carried a type of spear (*rangmei*) and Dangsa brought a statue of man (*khung*). The implication is that Dangsa being the seniormost of all, had the right to carry the statue of man; Charanga would be his associate and Kansouwa would defend. Dangsa cut his little finger and produced *vai* (equivalent to *mana* or supernatural power) from it. He made gong, mortar and pestle by means of iron slag and pure

earth and worshipped *Pui Tang**, the supreme God. After some time *Pui Tang* himself came out of the cave with all the vegetables and edible crops on his head. He was satisfied with them and gave away all his vegetables and crops. Fire was also produced. The place where fire was first produced and crops and vegetables were raised was known as Chatamlamal."

Incidentally, Chaptamlamal finds a place in the list of original Maring villages.

It must be emphasised that to set up independent domains on the part of the Marings without infringing upon the domains of bigger tribes or at least disregarding their authority and power was impossible. They had to take a somewhat compromising, if not appeasing, attitude towards them. Contact with other powerful tribes has brought about dialectical changes also. For example, the dialect spoken by the villagers of Narum, Saivol and Yangkhul is not quite intelligible to other Marings. Dialect-wise, even these three villages differ from each other. It is possible that these villages represent three different sub-tribes, all concentrated in the same area. Then there is the example of Khoibu, which also speaks a different dialect. It appears that Narum and its adjacent areas have assumed an important role in the Maring settlement history. The villages like Kharou Khunou, Kharou Khullen, Lamlong Khunou were set up in the previously held Narum areas. In the Tarao, Moyon-Monsang tradition also this area finds a place. Tentatively one may

* *Pui Tang* was considered equivalent to the Meitei supreme god *Pakhangba*. As a matter of fact, the name of *Pakhangba* was frequently mentioned.

suggest that there was a heavy concentration of a number of smaller tribes and sub-tribes in the Kabaw valley, wherefrom they spread in different directions because of various kinds of pressures. A general movement of tribes and sub-tribes would seem to take place in the Kabaw valley and the adjoining hills in the form of swarms being thrown off from the centre to the periphery. There is no denying that culture trait distribution pattern in some cases cuts across the tribal distribution pattern. Besides the Pois, the Taraos of Manipur and the Chin tribes of Burma keep their frontal hair in more or less the same fashion. In the past, the Meiteis are also said to have kept the frontal knot of hair. Dun indicates at the possibility of absorption of a section of the Marings among the Tangkhuls. He writes,

"There are few villages on the north-east corner of the Manipur valley who wear their hair in this fashion (wearing them long and confined in a bunch like a horn rising from the front of the head) and call themselves Tankuls (Tangkhuls) - possibly Maring emigrant or captives." [19]

In any case, migration was an important aspect of Maring life, which would explain fluctuations in Maring village population from time to time.

III

The author has made it amply clear that he does not like to go into the controversy as to whether structures as such exist in models or in reality. The basic problem is to identify the 'most relevant' social units or social groups,

as found in the tribe. But clearly this is not enough. One must explore the 'social reality' of the groups, which affect the interactions of persons. It is one way of describing the 'social system', which is nothing but describing 'a model of the social reality'. A social system differs from other in the way it controls the behaviour of the personnel. A social system cannot maintain its boundaries once its goals have lost their hold upon the personnel.[20] Goals and values are culturally formulated and are integral parts of all patterns associated with the system. Author's first assumption is that the social system exists either in the form of 'real' or 'model' pattern, i.e. the actual performances with its variations or in the form of 'ideal' pattern representing general consensus of the participants concerning the best mode of performance.[21] The next step is to see how the social system works in its specific context. And here one cannot help following an 'idealised model'. As Leach states,

"Any structural description of a social system should have an idealised model which states the correct status between groups within the total system and between the social persons who make up particular groups." [22]

Society as a manifestation of social system and social structure as a structure of social groups are sufficient indicators of an explanatory model. With the help of such a model, a brief outline of the social morphology could be worked out.

Initially, a study was undertaken into a number of Maring villages during 1976-77, while working on a research project sponsored and financed by the Indian Council of Social Science Research,

New Delhi. During the period a total of approximately seven months were spent at various stages in the field. The main methods, followed to obtain data on various aspects of Maring life were (i) village survey, (ii) interviewing, (iii) collection of genealogies, (iv) case studies, (v) limited participant observation. First consideration to the author was the problem of sampling. Leaving aside the question of mathematical precision, which is hard to achieve in a study like this, one must see that

'the unit of general survey and the unit of personal observation tend to coincide.' [23]

From the methodological point of view the width of the gap between the unit of general survey and the unit of personal observation is important, since if the investigator is to apply his generalisations over the larger community, he must be sure that the unit he selects for intensive study is sufficiently representative. For my purpose, the unit of actual study is the unit of personal observation. The selection of villages for actual study has been done with an eye to their representative character. In this task due consideration has been given to their demographic character.

As Firth observes,

"Demographic factors are important in the organisation of community affairs. Mere size tends to govern the quality as well as the quantity of social relations." [24]

My study at Machi, the biggest of Maring villages, has confirmed the above view. Almost all the important Maring associations are located

at Machi. Naturally, Machi had to be studied in details. Other parental villages like Khudei Khullen, Lamlong Khullen, Khunbi also provided an important insight into the working of the Maring society. Data from Kharou Khunou, a satellite village on the Burmese border, and Sandangsenba, a village at a short distance from Imphal, were collected with a view to see the range of variation. For the same purpose Khoibu, representing a different dialect group, was studied in details. The particulars of the villages studied are given in Table 1.2. No doubt, the study of a village as a unit of study involves a degree of 'analytical isolation' but it is unlikely to create a methodological problem of an altogether new dimension. The village here is a part of a wider system of social relations.

Once the problem was identified, the author began to collect more qualitative details of group relationships. The two-fold approach of Furer-Haimendorf in his Konyak study, which involves vertical analysis in terms of villages, clans and households and horizontal analysis in terms of ranks of prestige and status, had been an important guideline.[25] Biographies of selected individuals were obtained to throw light on roles, social activities and inter-kin behaviour. Analysis of cases in their social context could help in understanding the social process better. Genealogies, which chart personal relations and which relate groups by reference to a series of ancestors, were of much value. Some of the genealogies reflected claims to property, political allegiance and the exercise of authority by men of senior line of descent. Due emphasis has been given on the events and developmental changes which affect the structural alignment' at different stages. Social

groups are not always described in static terms. They are seen in the light of,

'the dialectic between the concrete behaviour of persons, groups and categories on the one hand, and the collective institutions of culture and society that persist regardless of changing personnel'.[26]

Gluckman's notion of individuals' conflicting loyalties to different groups, based on different principles of organization is equally significant.

The present study cannot be categorised wholly a socio-centric analysis in terms of kin groups. Here, the author has tried to combine it with ego-oriented analysis in terms of kin roles. Probably Goody (1973) is right when he says, ". . . Combination would give a better understanding".[27]

At the end a coherent picture would emerge. When it comes to the question of describing social process, the emphasis should be not only on the integration of materials but also on the integration of approaches.

Lastly, a word or two may be said about the problem of field work in a sensitive area and among an impassive people. The problem is not a new one and there have been discussions on this from time to time. Field work among the Marings is not an easy job. The ordinary Marings are interested in their customs and traditions, but do not quite like to discuss them in a rather academic way. There were occasions when the author felt he was failing in his duties as an anthropologist, for his questions would be met by a rather incredulous expression. At least on one occasion some of them refused to part with their information unless paid properly. 'Doesn't a pleader or

TABLE 1.2 : Particulars of the Maring Villages Studied

Village	Classification	Location	Population (1971 Census)			Special Features
			Male	Female	Total	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Machi	Black Maring	North-Western Tengnoupal District	403	369	772	One of the biggest Maring villages, has two well-defined parts-Christian and non-Christian. One of the parental villages, the centre of the Maring Naga Baptists Association, the head office of the Maring - Naga Students' Union.
Khudei	Red Maring	Central part of Northern Tengnoupal	132	117	249	Considered to be an important centre of Maring culture; a parental village; has retained many features of traditional Maring society.
Khoibu	Black Maring	Central part of	175	164	339	A multi-clan village with marked clan organization pattern; reveals a close identity with the Meiteis in some respect; dialectically different; primarily dependent on shifting cultivation.
Khunbi	Black Maring	Northern Tengnoupal	150	166	316	Reflects the new emerging political values in no uncertain manner.
Kharou Khunou	Black & Red Maring	North-Eastern Tengnoupal	66	70	136	Located along the Indo-Burmese border; involved in trade across the international boundary; a strong Christian centre; formed out of Machi.
Sandang-senba	Red Maring	Central District of Manipur	127	126	253	Situated within a short distance from Imphal town; an ideal village for observing the change phenomenon; formed out of Khudei Khullen.

a teacher make use of the information and earn a good deal out of it?' - quipped one person. Obviously, the intimacy of contact was not easy to achieve. It must be admitted that the generalisations arrived at were not always based strictly on an analysis of observed behaviours. These sometimes reflect the people's own views and value-based judgements on their customary behaviour. What is actually important to note here is the sense of informants involvement in their own affairs. Moreover, when the informants themselves are actors, they stand out in bold relief in the field of observed behaviour. In order to discover the Maring tradition in a relatively purer form, the inquiries had to be made through the knowledgeable informants. Here, the scope of quantification was rather limited. Even otherwise, not all aspects of social structure are quantifiable in a systematic way.

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