

# Modernisation and its impact on socio-economic life of the Thangal tribe

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## ABSTRACT

The Thangal tribe is one of the indigenous Naga tribes of Manipur with a distinct social organization, tradition, and economy. Traditionally, the community depended on agriculture for its livelihood, and its social life was based on customary institutions and kinship networks. The spread of education, Christianity, government welfare programs, the development of communication, and growing contact with the wider society has resulted in noticeable changes over time in aspects of life. Changes are evident in family structure, marriage practices, traditional leadership, occupation, agricultural activities and the role of women. Although many traditional values have continued to be maintained, the community has adapted to changing social and economic conditions. This paper explores the factors of modernization and their impact on the socio-economic life of the Thangal tribe, focusing on both continuity and change within the community.

**Keywords:** Thangal Tribe, Modernisation, Education, Social life, Economic life, Manipur.

## INTRODUCTION

The Thangal tribe is one of the recognised Naga tribes in Manipur and is considered one of the indigenous tribes of the state. The population of the Thangal tribe is 4,524 (2023), as reported by the Thangal Union, and they reside in 12 villages in Senapati and Kangpokpi districts of Manipur, with a small section residing in parts of Imphal, Manipur. The oral tradition of the community suggests that they originated from Makhel, the ancestral homeland of several Naga tribes. It is believed that they first settled in Angkaipang, then moved to Angkailongdi, and finally dispersed to different villages in their present areas of habitation. The community has its own language, traditional laws, and clan structure, and has preserved its cultural heritage over the years, which has contributed to its unique identity (Anth, 2019).

The social organisation of the Thangal society is patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal, and kinship and clan relationships are at the core of social organisation. The village was traditionally governed by the Khullakpa (village chief) who used to oversee the affairs of the village and was assisted by elders in keeping the peace, settling matters and carrying out social and religious duties. Traditionally, agriculture was the main livelihood of the community, with shifting cultivation and wet-rice farming served as the primary means of living (Devi, 2002). The family economy was supplemented by animal husbandry, hunting, fishing, weaving and collecting forest resources (Athparia, 1998). Agriculture, weaving and household activities were the domains where women were engaged alongside with social and cultural life being governed by the traditional practices, festivals, indigenous knowledge and traditional beliefs.

The Thangal tribe have undergone many changes since the advent of education, Christianity, better transport and communication, and government welfare programmes. These changes are part of the larger modernization process, which can be defined as the shift from traditional social, economic and cultural life patterns to more advanced ones, through the broadening of education, technology, communication and institutional development (Lerner, 1958).

Modernization is a process of social change involving economic development, technological advancement and increasing institutional differentiation. It also results in values and attitudes changes, increased exposure to education, employment opportunities, and increased exposure to wider social interaction (Inkeles & Smith, 1974). These things have affected family structure, marriage, traditional leadership, occupation and agricultural activities, and many traditional values and cultural practices have retained their significance in community life. The present study in this context concentrates on how family, marriage, clan organisation, the institution of Khullakpa and the predominant occupation of Thangal tribe have changed due to the process of modernization and how the community has tried to keep its cultural identity intact while adjusting to the process of modernization.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a mixed-method approach, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Primary data were collected through field observation, interview schedules and personal interactions with respondents from the Thangal community. Information relating to family structure, marriage practices, traditional institutions, education, occupation, agricultural activities and the role of women was collected during the field survey.

The study was carried out in five villages out of the twelve Thangal-inhabited villages of the State of Manipur. A total of 632 respondents, aged between 15 and 70 years, were selected from the study area using a purposive sampling method. The respondents included men and women from the community. Secondary data were retrieved from the books, journals and research articles, census reports, dissertations and other published and unpublished sources. Descriptive statistical techniques namely frequency and percentage were employed for classification, tabulation and analysis of the collected data.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of the study have shown that the process of modernization has brought considerable changes in the social and economic life of the Thangal tribe. The spread of education, Christianity, government welfare schemes, improved communication, and technological advancement has contributed to the social and economic development of the community. These factors have influenced various aspects of community life and are discussed below.

### **1. Education**

Education has emerged as one of the major factors of change. Traditionally, knowledge and skills were passed on to the younger generation through oral tradition and the youth dormitory system. With the introduction of formal education by Christian missionaries, and its expansion after Independence, educational opportunities in the community gradually improved. To understand the current educational status of the Thangal community, information was collected from the respondents in the study area and is presented in the table below:

Table 1: Educational Attainment of Respondents

| Educational Qualification Status | Illiterate | Primary up to Class V | High school  | Higher secondary | Graduate     | Post-Graduate |
|----------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|
| M Ningthoupham                   | 5          | 5                     | 18           | 36               | 65           | 5             |
| Thangal Surung                   | 2          | 10                    | 12           | 22               | 15           | 3             |
| Tumnoupokpi                      | 6          | 17                    | 19           | 38               | 93           | 7             |
| Yaikongpao                       | 3          | 11                    | 22           | 31               | 36           | 4             |
| Mayangkhang                      | 9          | 16                    | 36           | 35               | 48           | 3             |
| <b>Total Percentage</b>          | 25 (3.95%) | 59 (9.33%)            | 107 (16.93%) | 162 (25.63%)     | 257 (40.66%) | 22 (3.48%)    |

Source: Field Survey

The above table presents the educational profile of the respondents. Among them, 40.66 per cent are graduates, followed by 25.63 per cent with higher secondary education and 16.93 per cent with high school education. Further, 9.33 per cent have primary education, while 3.48 per cent are post-graduates. Only 0.95 per cent of the respondents are illiterate.

The selected villages have different levels of education. The percentage of graduates, higher secondary education people are higher in Tumnoupokpi and M. Ningthoupham while comparatively lower number of people are having lower education in Thangal Surung. From the field survey, over 98 per cent of the respondents said that education has improved their quality of life and all the parents in the villages urged their children both boys and girls to go for higher education. These results corroborate with Helen (2019) who noted that education has not just improved the literacy rates among Thangals, but also their economic stance by making the youth more inclined towards stable employment and cash earnings.

## 2. Technology and modern communication

Technology and modern communication are an important part of the process of modernization among the Thangal tribe.

Table 2: Opinion on Technology Improving Life (N=632)

| Village                 | Yes        | No        | Percentage Yes |
|-------------------------|------------|-----------|----------------|
| M Ningthoupham          | 130        | 3         | 97.74          |
| Thangal Surung          | 59         | 5         | 92.18          |
| Tumnoupokpi             | 179        | 2         | 98.90          |
| Yaikongpao              | 107        | 0         | 100.00         |
| Mayangkhang             | 147        | 0         | 100.00         |
| <b>Total Percentage</b> | <b>622</b> | <b>10</b> | <b>98.41</b>   |

Source: Field Survey

From the field report, it was found that 99.20 per cent of the respondents had experienced an improvement in their lives due to technology. Nearly all respondents are using mobile phones and digital platforms to communicate and share information. As mobile phones and television and Internet services have become more readily available, access to information on educational, health, employment, and governance-related matters have improved. Mobile phones are used to circulate information to village meetings and church announcements, and women receive information on health, nutrition and household management via digital media. Digital communication has also helped youth in gaining employment and moving to other places, as it has made information and opportunities more accessible

### 3. Government welfare scheme

Government welfare programmes have also contributed to the process of modernisation by improving access to education, housing, livelihood opportunities and public services.

**Table 3: Distribution of Government Welfare Schemes (N=632)**

| Villages       | benefited % | Not benefited % |
|----------------|-------------|-----------------|
| M.Ningthoupham | 81.95       | 18.05           |
| Thangal surung | 64.10       | 35.90           |
| Tumnoupokpi    | 84.53       | 15.47           |
| Yaikongpao     | 90.65       | 9.35            |
| Mayangkhang    | 89.79       | 10.21           |
| Total          | 84.17       | 15.83           |

Source: *Field Survey*

From the above table, 84.17 per cent of households have received the help from the government through welfare schemes, and 15.83 per cent have not. Yaikongpao recorded the highest proportion of beneficiaries (90.65%), followed by Mayangkhang (89.79%) and Tumnoupokpi (84.53%). During the field survey, it was also reported that the schemes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Act (MGNREGA), Pradhan Mantra Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) and Pradhan Mantra Awaas Yojana (PMAY) have improved household infrastructure, household income and housing. It has thus been instrumental in enhancing the socio-economic status of the Thangal community through these programmes.

However, differences across villages suggest that access and exposure remain important factors influencing households' access to government welfare programmes. This finding is consistent with Rangannavar et al. (2024), who argue that government schemes play a significant role in integrating tribal communities into the mainstream by improving livelihoods and infrastructure. However, they also note that lack of awareness, administrative delays and uneven implementation of these schemes can limit access. Similarly, the present study found that the availability of welfare benefits was relatively lower in the more remote villages.

### 4. Religion

Religion has also played an important role in the changing social life of the Thangal tribe. Although Christianity has become the predominant religion, traditional cultural practices continue to remain an important part of community life. The table below presents the responses from the five selected villages regarding the practice of traditional religion and cultural practices.

**Table 4: Religion and Traditional Cultural Practices among the Thangal Tribe (N=632)**

| Religion and Cultural Practices            | Percentages (%) |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Christianity                               | 100.00          |
| Celebrate Traditional Festivals            | 99.05           |
| Youth Participation in Cultural Activities | 98.25           |
| Wear Traditional Dress on Occasions        | 98.89           |

Source: *Field Survey*

It can be seen from the above table that all respondents (100%) Christians belonging to the Baptist denomination. Meanwhile, 99.05 percent of the respondents celebrated traditional festivals, 98.25 percent reported youth actively involvement in cultural activities and 98.89 percent said they still continue to wear traditional dress during important occasions. This indicates that there has been a religious shift while the traditional culture has been maintained. Through field observations, it was also revealed that despite the influence of social and religious change, the tradition of festivals, dances and customary dress is still encouraged by families, village elders and community groups, who are dedicated to maintaining the cultural identity of the community. A similar observation was made by Joy (2014), who reported that, even though the Tangkhul Naga converted to Christianity, they still maintained their festivals, customs and cultural practices

## 5. Family and Marriage

**Table 5: Distribution of Family Structure and Marriage Pattern (N=632)**

| Family structure | Percentage (%) | Marriage | Percentage (%) |
|------------------|----------------|----------|----------------|
| Nuclear          | 50.32          | Love     | 95.75          |
| Joint            | 40.68          | Arranged | 4.25           |
| total            | 100            | Total    | 100            |

Source: *Field Survey*

The findings show some changes in the family and marriage system of the Thangal tribe. The nuclear family type is more in number (50.32 per cent) than joint families (49.68 per cent), which shows the trend of decreasing size of families. The nuclear family rate is relatively high in the villages of Mayangkhang, M. Ningthoupham and Tumnoupokpi which could be linked to the relatively better access to education, paid employment and housing facilities. However, the percentage of joint families remains relatively high in Thangal Surung and Yaikongpao, indicating that traditional family structures are still prevalent. Through the field interactions, it was also found that many young couples get accommodated in separate households for education or work reasons, but at the same time they have strong family bonds as they are actively involved in the village, clan and family activities.

There have been changes in marriage practices as well. From the findings, 95.75 per cent of the respondents preferred love marriage, while 4.25 per cent mentioned arranged marriage. The current acceptance of love marriage is a result of education, greater socialization and changes in attitudes toward the freedom of choice of individuals. Although marriages still seem to be approved and supported by both families, individual choice seems to have grown along with the centrality of family and community values.

**Table 6: Clan System and Changing role of Khullakpa (N=632)**

| Villages       | Clan system % | Changing role of khullakpa % |
|----------------|---------------|------------------------------|
| M.Ningthoupham | 100           | 77.27                        |
| Thangal surung | 100           | 75                           |
| Tumnoupokpi    | 100           | 71.27                        |
| Yaikongpao     | 100           | 89.71                        |
| Mayangkhang    | 100           | 79.59                        |
| Total          | 100           | 77.84                        |

Source: *Field Survey*

The findings indicate that clan system is still an important social structure among the Thangal tribe, with all respondents (100%) reporting clan affiliation. However, 77.84 percent of the respondents reported that some changes in the role of the Khullakpa. This change is due to the introduction of modern administrative systems in particular, the Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956, which introduced elected village authorities and reduced the traditional authority of village chiefs. The role of the Khullakpa has also evolved with the spread of formal education, government welfare programmes and formal governance institutions in the villages. Nevertheless, the Khullakpa continues to be respected and remains influential in village administration, customary practices, and community affairs.

**Table 7: Distribution of Occupation among the Thangal Tribe (N=632)**

| Villages       | Agriculture | Business | Service sector | Others (students and unemployed) |
|----------------|-------------|----------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| M.Ningthoupham | 37.59       | 18.80    | 22.56          | 21.05                            |
| Thangal surung | 51.56       | 15.62    | 18.75          | 14.06                            |
| Tumnoupokpi    | 39.77       | 16.57    | 24.30          | 19.33                            |
| Yaikongpao     | 36.32       | 15.55    | 26.16          | 21.49                            |
| Mayangkhang    | 46.25       | 17.00    | 20.40          | 16.32                            |
| total          | 41.45       | 16.93    | 22.78          | 18.84                            |

Source: *Field Survey*

The table indicates that agriculture is the main occupation of the Thangal tribe with 41.45 per cent of the respondents. The service sector is the largest at 22.78 percent of the total and other category (students and unemployed) at 18.84 percent and business activities at 16.93 percent. The findings show that agriculture remains the primary livelihood activity, new job opportunities have emerged in the service sector and business with modernization.

The Thangal people rely heavily on agriculture, highlighting the significance of land and farming practices in their traditional way of life. Simultaneously, the growing involvement in the service sector and business signify a gradual diversification of livelihood opportunities. Better education, access to government jobs, and growing exposure to cities has allowed for many responses, especially the younger generation, to work outside of agriculture. This indicates that agriculture still forms the basis of the community economy, but that modernisation has increased the number of available occupations and minimized dependency on traditional agriculture. A similar trend was reported by Thangmi (2002), who observed a gradual shift from subsistence agriculture to diversified livelihood activities among hill tribes.

**Table 8: Weaving Practice and Women's Participation in the Service Sector among the Thangal Tribe (N=632)**

| Villages       | Women Engaged in Weaving (%) | Women in Service Sector (%) |
|----------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| M.Ningthoupham | 90.23                        | 95.48                       |
| Thangal surung | 48.44                        | 65.63                       |
| Tumnoupokpi    | 93.96                        | 97.78                       |
| Yaikongpao     | 97.20                        | 100.00                      |
| Mayangkhang    | 93.20                        | 99.32                       |
| Total          | 88.92                        | 94.78                       |

Source: *Field Survey*

As shown in the table, 88.92 percent of the 632 respondents agreed that today, the weaving process is still carried out by Thangal women, and that it is still considered an important traditional job and a source of supplementary income. Weaving participation was reported to be highest in Village – Yaikongpao (97.20%) followed by Tumnoupokpi (93.96%), Mayangkhang (93.20%) and M. Ningthoupham (90.23%). The comparatively lower proportion in Thangal Surung (48.44%) may be linked with higher reliance on agriculture and lesser number of women engaged in weaving regularly as economic activity.

Likewise, 94.78 percent of respondents reported that women in the Thangal community have taken up employment in the service sector, including salaried and income-generating occupations such as government service, private employment, teaching and small business activities. Yaikongpao recorded the highest proportion (100 percent), where all respondents reported women's involvement in paid and service-related work. This may be due to increased awareness of employment opportunities and relatively increased exposure to modern occupations in the village. On the other hand, Thangal Surung reported the smallest percentage (65.63 percent) which may be related to relatively lesser opportunities for such work. The results demonstrate that women are involved in the traditional and modern economic activities, and play a significant role in the welfare of the household and their communities.

## CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that modernisation has brought noticeable changes to the social and economic life of the Thangal tribe. The spread of education, Christianity, government welfare programmes, improved communication, technological development, and increasing interaction with the wider society have influenced traditional institutions, livelihood systems, and social relations. At the same time, many cultural practices and community values continue to be maintained.

The process of modernisation among the Thangal tribe is gradual and adaptive rather than disruptive. Changes are evident in family structure, marriage practices, traditional leadership, and occupational patterns. The shift from joint to nuclear families, improved educational attainment, better employment opportunities, and the increasing participation of women and youth in socio-economic activities reflect these changes.

The study also found that education has expanded opportunities for higher education and alternative occupations, while government welfare programmes have improved access to basic services and contributed to a better standard of living. Christianity has influenced religious beliefs and social values, and improved communication and technological development have strengthened the community's

interaction with the wider society. Despite these changes, kinship, clan structure, and cultural values continue to play an important role in preserving the identity of the Thangal tribe.

These findings are consistent with earlier studies. Devi (2002) observed that the introduction of Christianity and formal education among the Thangal tribe brought changes in social attitudes, family life, and marriage practices. Similarly, Joy (2014) reported that education and Christianity influenced marriage values among the Tangkhul tribe while preserving respect for clan organisation and collective identity. The study shows that, although modernisation has brought significant changes to the social and economic life of the Thangal tribe, many traditional cultural practices and community values continue to be maintained.

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