

# The Silent Half: Analysing the Exclusion of Maram Women from Traditional Governance and Pathways to Inclusive Decision-Making

Bikila R Sagongdui<sup>1</sup>, T Tarula Ngiimei<sup>2</sup>, M Pavan Kumar<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>M.A. English, Department of Studies in English, University of Mysore.

<sup>2</sup>Psychology Lab Assistant, Department of Education, Regional Institute of Education, NCERT, Mysuru.

<sup>3</sup>Senior Research Fellow, Regional Institute of Education, NCERT, Mysuru.

## Abstract

The Maram Naga tribe, indigenous to the Senapati district of Manipur, possesses a rich socio-cultural heritage heavily defined by agrarian traditions and deep-rooted customary laws. Despite women serving as the indispensable backbone of the community's economic and domestic sustenance, they face systemic political disenfranchisement, most notably through their explicit exclusion from traditional village councils and the critical half-yearly and annual community discussions. This research paper explores the dichotomy between the high economic participation and low political agency of Maram women. Utilizing a qualitative, exploratory approach that synthesizes primary focus group discussions with secondary literature, such as *The Place of Women in Naga Society*. This study examines the traditional justifications for this exclusion, which are deeply rooted in patriarchal hegemony, patrilineal land ownership, and customary taboos. The findings reveal that the exclusion of women from formal decision-making severely impacts community welfare, manifesting in unaddressed socio-economic crises such as the rampant rise in alcoholism, gender-based violence, and stark disparities in health and educational investments. Furthermore, the psychological toll of this political exclusion stifles female agency and creates bottlenecks in sustainable community development. To rectify this imbalance, the paper proposes actionable pathways to inclusive governance. By leveraging the rising influence of women's collectives like the Maram Women Union, celebrating female-centric cultural institutions such as the *Mangkang* festival, and capitalizing on the economic independence fostered by Self-Help Groups (SHGs), women are increasingly challenging the status quo. The study concludes by recommending a hybrid governance model that respects indigenous customary laws while integrating modern, democratic mandates for female representation, ensuring that the "silent half" becomes an active, institutionalized voice in the sustainable development of the tribe.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the Study

The Maram Naga tribe represents one of the oldest and most culturally distinct indigenous communities

residing primarily in the Senapati district of the state of Manipur in Northeast India (Dishung, 2018). Comprising a population of approximately 37,000 individuals distributed across 42 recognized villages, the Maram people have historically maintained a robust, self-reliant, and highly structured agrarian society (Dishung, 2018). The socio-political and cultural fabric of the Maram tribe is deeply anchored in its original and most prominent village, Maram Khullen. This traditional capital is structurally divided into three major administrative and social sectors: Lamkanamai (Khulakpa Sagei), Magaibungnamai (Mathak Sagei), and Kagamnamai (Makha Sagei) (Dishung, 2018). All other Maram villages function as historical offshoots of this central settlement, retaining its core administrative blueprints and cultural paradigms. Historically, the Maram tribe has operated under a unique dual system of governance that combines a hereditary monarchical system with a highly structured, consensus-based traditional village council (The Sangai Express, 2010). The community is fundamentally patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal, establishing a social order wherein descent, identity, and property are traced exclusively through the male line, and post-marital residence is established in the husband's community (Naga Women's Union, 2018). Within this rigid framework, Maram women are culturally celebrated as the custodians of tradition and the primary engines of the domestic economy. They are expected to manage the household, undertake rigorous agricultural labour, weave traditional textiles, and serve as the primary caregivers (Lungbila & Joseph, 2021). Yet this immense cultural reverence and economic reliance do not translate into political parity or institutional decision-making power.

## 1.2. The Core Problem

The central problem addressed in this study is the explicit, systemic, and culturally enforced exclusion of Maram women from traditional governance structures, specifically their barring from the formal village councils and the pivotal half-yearly and annual community discussions. Traditional village governance in Naga societies operates on the principle of consensus among clan elders; however, this democratic ideal is strictly limited to male citizens (Inclusive Security, 2012; Naga Women's Union, 2018).

The half-yearly and annual community discussions are critical institutional mechanisms within the Maram governance architecture. During these assemblies, the village authority reviews compliance reports, evaluates developmental frameworks, allocates community funds, plans agricultural cycles, and adjudicates inter-clan disputes (World Bank, n.d.). Because women are categorically excluded from attending, addressing, or voting in these forums, policies regarding land use, public health, educational investments, and community welfare are formulated entirely without the input of half the population. This exclusion not only constitutes a violation of fundamental human rights but also results in deeply flawed policy outcomes that consistently fail to address the specific vulnerabilities, needs, and systemic challenges faced by women and children in the community.

## 1.3. Research Objectives

To systematically unpack this phenomenon and offer viable solutions, this research is guided by three primary objectives:

To examine the traditional, cultural, and ideological justifications utilized to perpetuate the exclusion of Maram women from formal governance and decision-making spaces.

To assess the multifaceted impact of this political exclusion on the holistic welfare of Maram women, with

specific attention to health disparities, educational deficits, and the management of social crises such as rampant alcoholism.

To propose culturally sensitive, viable pathways for integrating women into community decision-making, specifically exploring the potential of a hybrid governance model that merges customary legitimacy with modern democratic inclusivity.

#### 1.4. Significance of the Study

This study contributes significantly to the broader academic and policy discourse on women-led development, indigenous rights, and the creation of gender-responsive institutions in Northeast India. By analysing the Maram tribe's unique socio-political structure, the research highlights the acute paradox of a society that reveres women economically and culturally but marginalizes them politically (Lungbila, n.d.). The findings underscore a critical developmental reality: community progress cannot be sustainable, equitable, or resilient as long as patriarchal hegemony dictates local governance (Lungbila & Joseph, 2021). Furthermore, the study offers actionable strategies for structural reform, demonstrating how grassroots mobilization such as the transformative efforts of the Maram Women Union and the strategic utilization of cultural festivals can interface with traditional structures to forge a more inclusive future.

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1. The Status of Women in Naga Societies

The literature surrounding the status of women in Naga societies frequently highlights a complex socio-economic paradox: high economic and social participation juxtaposed against severe political and economic disenfranchisement. According to the foundational text *The Place of Women in Naga Society*, published by the Naga Women's Union (NWU), Naga women function as the fundamental support base for social stability and the continuity of life within the tribe (Naga Women's Union, 2018). They are the primary agents of the care economy and the agricultural workforce, performing the vast majority of the unpaid, invisible labour that sustains the community's survival. The NWU explicitly views women as the "custodians of the vibrant Naga life, culture, and identity," attributing to them the preservation of intrinsic communal values (Naga Women's Union, 2018).

However, this high degree of social visibility and economic utility does not equate to structural power. As detailed in the literature, gender discrimination in Naga societies is systematically practiced and "strongly legalized" by unwritten customary laws (Naga Women's Union, 2018). Because the society is patrilineal, women are systematically denied the right to inherit ancestral property or land (Scroll.in, 2016). This lack of economic asset ownership severely curtails their independence and forms the foundation of their political exclusion. While women from some Naga tribes may enjoy more social mobility and physical freedom compared to women in rigid, caste-based societies in mainland India, they remain fundamentally subjugated by the patriarchal dictates of their own traditional institutions (Lungbila, n.d.). Consequently, women often have little to no rights in voicing their opinions at the household level, and their political agency is frequently reduced to casting votes for candidates chosen by their husbands (Naga Women's Union, 2018).

## 2.2. Traditional Governance and Customary Law

Traditional governance in tribal societies has historically functioned as an exclusive, tightly guarded male domain. The village council, which serves as the highest executive, legislative, and judicial body in a Naga village, comprises male elders representing various clans (Inclusive Security, 2012). Literature on indigenous governance illustrates that these institutions control all aspects of village life, from the adjudication of customary law and dispute resolution to resource management and community defense. Women are culturally barred from these spaces due to entrenched patriarchal norms that dictate strict, biologically deterministic gender roles (Naga Women's Union, 2018). Men are viewed as the natural protectors, warriors, and decision-makers, while women are relegated to the domestic sphere and agricultural maintenance. The literature notes that even when women's issues are discussed within the village council, or when women are called to the village court as witnesses or aggrieved parties, their voices are marginalized, and binding decisions are ultimately made by men on their behalf (Inclusive Security, 2012). The explicit exclusion of women from half-yearly and annual planning meetings—where critical evaluations of community progress, environmental management, and regulatory compliance are conducted—ensures that the strategic direction of the village remains entirely male-centric (World Bank, n.d.).

## 2.3. Gender, Agency, and Inclusive Development

Modern academic perspectives argue emphatically that the exclusion of women from local governance is detrimental not only to the women themselves but to the sustainable development of the entire community. Research indicates that when women are permitted to participate in local decision-making, communities witness marked improvements in health outcomes, educational attainment, child welfare, and poverty alleviation (Lungbila & Joseph, 2021). Conversely, the lack of female representation in governance structures means that policies fail to address the lived realities and specific vulnerabilities of women. Scholars emphasize that customary laws, which are predominantly oral and interpreted exclusively by male elders, are frequently manipulated to maintain patriarchal hegemony under the guise of cultural preservation (Lungbila, n.d.). The blind upholding of these traditions often violates international human rights standards and modern constitutional principles of gender equality (Naga Women's Union, 2018). Consequently, there is a growing consensus in the literature advocating for hybrid governance structures that integrate the cultural legitimacy of traditional institutions with the egalitarian principles of modern democratic statecraft to ensure mandatory women's representation (Janata Weekly, 2024).

## 3. Research Design and Empirical Approach

### 3.1. Research Framework

This study employs a qualitative, exploratory research design aimed at uncovering the nuanced socio-cultural dynamics that drive the exclusion of Maram women from traditional governance. Given that customary laws and traditional practices are deeply embedded in the unwritten social fabric of the community, a qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of lived experiences, underlying cultural beliefs, and historical precedents that quantitative data alone cannot capture.

### 3.2. Data Collection Mechanisms

The research synthesizes both primary and secondary data streams to build a comprehensive, evidence-based narrative.

**Primary Data:** The primary data is derived from semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted with Maram women across varying socio-economic strata. Key demographics targeted for the FGDs included members of women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs), executive representatives of the Maram Women Union (MWU), and female community elders. These discussions were specifically designed to solicit narratives regarding their participation in household decision-making, their historical and contemporary experiences with village councils, and the direct impact of community policy—particularly concerning health, education, and alcoholism—on their welfare. Participant observation was also utilized during community gatherings, such as the *Mangkang* festival, to contextualize the gendered spatial dynamics of the village.

**Secondary Data:** Secondary data was meticulously gathered from sociological texts, ethnographic reports, and organizational documents. A foundational text utilized was *The Place of Women in Naga Society*, which provided the baseline understanding of Naga customary laws and gender roles (Naga Women's Union, 2018; Dishung, 2018). Additional sources included contemporary analyses of tribal land rights, human rights evaluations regarding political representation (Janata Weekly, 2024; Scroll.in, 2016), and documented historical accounts of the Maram monarchy and the formation of the Maram Women Union.

### 3.3. Ethical Considerations

Engaging with marginalized groups within tightly knit indigenous communities requires strict adherence to ethical research protocols. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews and FGDs, with the purpose of the study clearly articulated in the local dialect. To protect the identities of the women, especially those sharing highly sensitive narratives related to domestic violence, the psychological toll of alcoholism, and disputes with the male-dominated village authority, strict anonymity and confidentiality were maintained. The research was conducted with profound cultural sensitivity, ensuring that the analysis critiques structures of inequality without disparaging the broader cultural heritage of the Maram people.

## 4. The Gendered Space of Maram Governance (Contextual Analysis)

### 4.1. The Structure of Community Discussions

The traditional governance of the Maram tribe is characterized by a hierarchical yet consensus-based village council system, historically operating alongside a unique monarchical structure centered in Maram Khullen (The Sangai Express, 2010). The village administration is managed by the hereditary chief and a council of clan elders representing the various traditional divisions, such as the Lamkanamai, Magaibungnamai, and Kagamnamai (Dishung, 2018).

At the core of this governance are the periodic community assemblies, notably the half-yearly and annual meetings. These gatherings serve as the primary legislative, judicial, and executive forums for the village. During these meetings, the council reviews compliance with customary laws, manages developmental

funds, adjudicates complex land and boundary disputes, coordinates large-scale community projects (such as megalith construction), and sets the socio-economic agenda for the coming agricultural year (Singh, 2025; World Bank, n.d.). Attendance and participation in these critical decision-making arenas are strictly limited to adult male members, typically the heads of households and clan leaders. Women are explicitly and unequivocally excluded from these spaces; they are not permitted to address the assembly, debate public policies, or cast votes on community matters (Inclusive Security, 2012; Naga Women's Union, 2018). Their involvement is restricted entirely to peripheral, supportive roles, such as preparing food and rice beer for the gatherings or occasionally appearing as summoned witnesses in specific judicial cases.

#### 4.2. Cultural and Traditional Justifications

The exclusion of Maram women from political spaces is rationalized through a complex web of cultural myths, biological stereotypes, and patriarchal norms. Traditional society views the public sphere, governance, diplomacy, and warfare as the exclusive and sacred domain of men, while women are relegated to the private sphere of the home and the agricultural fields.

Several deeply ingrained justifications perpetuate this political divide:

**Patrilineal Identity and Exogamy:** Because Maram women marry outside their natal clans (exogamy) and integrate into their husband's clan, they are perceived by patriarchal structures as transient members of their birth families (Naga Women's Union, 2018). Consequently, male elders argue that giving women a voice in the village council could compromise clan secrets or lead to the misallocation of resources to "outsiders."

**Intellectual and Emotional Stereotyping:** There is a pervasive, culturally constructed belief that women lack the intellectual fortitude, emotional stability, and strategic vision required for the rigors of governance. They are often stereotyped as naturally subordinate or solely suited for domestic management, rendering them "unfit" for serious political deliberation (Lungbila, n.d.).

**Purity and Ritual Taboos:** Customary governance in Maram society is often intricately intertwined with animistic rituals and indigenous religious practices. Historical taboos surrounding female biology, particularly menstruation and childbirth, have been utilized to label women as ritually "unclean" during certain periods. This perceived impurity disqualifies them from entering sacred political spaces or performing public administrative rituals (Dishung, 2018).

#### 4.3. Contrast with Economic and Domestic Roles

A striking paradox exists at the heart of Maram society: the complete political disenfranchisement of women stands in stark contrast to their immense economic, agricultural, and domestic responsibilities.

Domain	Role of Maram Men	Role of Maram Women
Economic & Labor	Heavy manual labour, ploughing, hunting, logging, community defense.	Seed sowing, weeding, harvesting, fetching firewood and water, weaving, managing domestic animals, selling produce in markets (Dishung,

		2018; Lungbila & Joseph, 2021).
<b>Household Management</b>	Head of the family; final decision-maker on major financial investments and family trajectories (Naga Women's Union, 2018).	Primary caregivers, food preparation, daily financial management, child-rearing, domestic maintenance (Dishung, 2018).
<b>Property &amp; Asset Rights</b>	Inherit ancestral land and immovable property; hold customary titles (Scroll.in, 2016).	Denied inheritance of ancestral property; generally limited to owning acquired movable assets or traditional textiles (Scroll.in, 2016).
<b>Political Power &amp; Governance</b>	Exclusive members of the village council; participate in half-yearly/annual decision-making meetings (Inclusive Security, 2012).	Excluded from the village council; politically muted; expected to vote according to husband's dictates (Naga Women's Union, 2018).

Women bear the "double burden" of reproductive care work and productive agricultural labour. Despite functioning as the primary economic engines that sustain the household and, by extension, the village economy, they are denied the agency to shape the policies that govern their labour, security, and lives.

### The Anomaly and Legacy of Queen Apei Hinga:

Historically, the most significant disruption to this patriarchal norm in Maram society was the unprecedented reign of Queen Apei Hinga. Born in 1924, Apei Hinga assumed the mantle of leadership for the Maram Khullen following the death of her husband, King Sagong Karang, in 1965 (The Sangai Express, 2010). She ruled for 45 years until her death in 2010, demonstrating exceptional political acumen and shattering the deeply held stereotype that women were incapable of governance (Dishung, 2018; The Sangai Express, 2010).

Queen Apei Hinga utilized her executive authority to introduce profound socio-cultural reforms that directly benefited women and modernized the tribe. Most notably, she abolished the cruel and dehumanizing traditional practice of *M'bungkatai*—a taboo wherein women who died during childbirth were considered cursed, their bodies removed through broken sidewalls rather than doors, and denied proper, dignified burial rites (Dishung, 2018). Furthermore, she reformed rigid agricultural calendars to ease the burden on cultivators and democratized the female-centric *Mangkang* festival, allowing it to be celebrated freely across all villages rather than being restricted to a single locale (Dishung, 2018). Her legacy proves definitively that female leadership is not only viable within the traditional framework but is essential for humane, progressive, and equitable community development.

## 5. The Cost of Exclusion: Impact on Women's Welfare

The systematic exclusion of women from half-yearly and annual community discussions is not merely a theoretical deficit of participatory democracy; it has severe, tangible, and often devastating consequences on the welfare of Maram women. When women are denied a seat at the table, macro-level policies surrounding health, education, and resource allocation are formulated with a massive blind spot toward female vulnerabilities.

### 5.1. Unheard Voices in Community Welfare

Primary data collected through FGDs with Maram women highlights exactly how their absence from governance directly harms their day-to-day well-being. A critical and urgent example of this is the escalating crisis of alcoholism within the community.

Traditionally, Maram women brewed a specific, culturally significant rice beer known as *Jousang*. This beverage was consumed moderately as a food supplement, a festive drink, and a ritualistic item deeply embedded in social bonding and conflict resolution (Dishung, 2018). However, with rapid modernization, unemployment, and shifting social dynamics, the introduction of cheaper, highly potent alternatives like *Rosii* and Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) has led to rampant alcohol abuse among the male population (Dishung, 2018).

The impact of this epidemic falls disproportionately and violently on women. While men squander critical family income on alcohol, women are forced to shoulder the entire economic burden of the household, often engaging in grueling manual labour to ensure their children are fed (Dishung, 2018). Furthermore, intoxication has led to a sharp increase in domestic violence and fractured family structures.

Because women are excluded from the village councils, their desperate attempts to combat this crisis face massive institutional hurdles. The Maram Women Union initiated a strong anti-alcohol campaign, conducting risky door-to-door checks, destroying seized liquor, and attempting to publicly shame vendors (Dishung, 2018). However, these grassroots efforts are frequently undermined by the patriarchal establishment. Male leaders and public figures often view themselves as exempt from the women's prohibition efforts, and without the formal backing of the male-dominated village authority, the women's directives lack enforceable legal weight (Dishung, 2018). The inability of women to formally legislate against alcohol abuse in the annual community meetings leaves them trapped in a cycle of poverty and abuse fuelled by addiction.

Similarly, decisions regarding healthcare and education suffer from this exclusion. FGD participants noted that male-dominated councils rarely prioritize maternal health infrastructure, sanitation facilities tailored to women's needs, or reproductive health education. In terms of education, families operating under patriarchal norms often divert scarce financial resources toward the education of male children, pulling girls out of school to assist with domestic labour or to compensate for funds lost to the father's alcoholism. If women had a formalized voice in the annual resource allocation meetings, community funds could be systematically directed toward female scholarships, maternal health initiatives, and addiction rehabilitation centres.

### 5.2. Psychological and Social Impact

The continuous exclusion from the public sphere exacts a heavy psychological toll on Maram women.

Socialized from a young age to believe that they are inherently subordinate to men and intellectually unsuited for leadership, many women internalize this stigma. This lack of self-worth is compounded by traditional myths that associate female biology with impurity, limiting their freedom of movement and participation in socio-religious life (Lungbila, n.d.).

The historical trauma of practices like *M'bungkatai*—while thankfully abolished by Queen Apei Hinga—leaves a lingering psychological scar, reminding women that their lives and reproductive struggles were traditionally viewed with contempt and fear rather than care and medical support (Dishung, 2018). In the contemporary setting, the burden of managing a household against the backdrop of an alcoholic spouse, while simultaneously being silenced and dismissed in the public domain, leads to feelings of profound hopelessness, severe anxiety, and social isolation. Women are rendered passive recipients of governance rather than active, empowered citizens, severely diminishing their social capital and individual identity within the tribe.

### **5.3. The Stagnation of Community Development**

A community cannot achieve true, sustainable growth when half of its population is excluded from the dialogue. Global development paradigms unequivocally assert that gender equality is a fundamental prerequisite for poverty alleviation, economic resilience, and social harmony. By excluding Maram women from the half-yearly and annual meetings, the village councils deprive themselves of critical on-the-ground intelligence. Women, who manage the water collection, firewood gathering, agricultural micro-management, and household budgets, possess the most accurate, granular understanding of the community's infrastructural and ecological needs (Lungbila & Joseph, 2021). Ignoring their vital input leads to inefficient resource allocation, the failure of community development projects, and the perpetuation of cycles of poverty that hinder the entire Maram tribe.

## **6. Pathways to Inclusion: Strategies for Gender-Responsive Governance**

To dismantle the entrenched patriarchal structures and foster genuine, inclusive decision-making, a multi-pronged approach is required. This involves leveraging grassroots economic empowerment, institutionalizing women's collectives, and formally redesigning the governance architecture to mandate inclusion.

### **6.1. Leveraging Education and Modern Agency**

Education serves as the most potent catalyst for altering rigid gender dynamics. As more Maram women access higher education and enter professional fields, the traditional justification that women lack the intellect or worldly understanding for governance entirely crumbles. Educated women act as vital bridge-builders, articulating the grievances of the grassroots to higher state authorities and navigating the complexities of modern bureaucratic systems to bring resources back to the village.

Furthermore, economic empowerment through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) has fundamentally begun to shift the balance of power within the Maram community. Facilitated by NGOs and government schemes, SHGs provide microfinance opportunities that enable tribal women to start small businesses, run vegetable vending operations, and achieve financial independence (Lungbila & Joseph, 2021).

Impact Domain of SHGs on Maram Women	Resulting Empowerment and Agency
<b>Financial Independence</b>	Reduced reliance on husbands for basic survival needs; enhanced ability to fund children's education and healthcare independently (Lungbila & Joseph, 2021).
<b>Household Decision-Making</b>	Women report increased consultation by their husbands on financial and familial matters, shifting from dictation to negotiation (Lungbila & Joseph, 2021).
<b>Social Capital &amp; Leadership</b>	Regular SHG meetings foster solidarity, public speaking confidence, and collective problem-solving skills, preparing women for broader civic engagement.

As women gain economic leverage and prove their financial acumen, their demand for political representation naturally follows. SHGs serve as informal political incubators, equipping women with the confidence, financial literacy, and organizational skills necessary to eventually participate effectively in the village assembly.

## 6.2. The Role of Women's Collectives

Formal women's organizations are the primary vehicles for advocating gender justice in tribal societies. The **Maram Women Union (MWU)**, established in 1994 by visionary leaders such as Ms. Rn. Hannah and Mrs. P. Kina Lucy has been instrumental in organizing women across all 42 Maram villages (Dishung, 2018). The MWU has bravely tackled severe social crises, most notably leading the charge against alcohol abuse, advocating for victims of domestic violence, and promoting cultural heritage (Dishung, 2018).

Culturally, women's collectives have successfully reclaimed and elevated indigenous traditions to foster solidarity and assert their presence in the public sphere. A prime example is the **Mangkang Festival**. Originally a localized celebration restricted to a specific sector, the festival was democratized by Queen Apei Hinga and subsequently institutionalized by the MWU and the Northern Maram Women Organisation (Dishung, 2018; Roy & Sebastian, n.d.). Celebrated annually in April, the *Mangkang* festival is uniquely and exclusively dedicated to women. It provides a rare public space where women are honoured, relieved of all domestic duties, and allowed to showcase their talents, traditional dances, and handicrafts (Roy & Sebastian, n.d.). Beyond cultural exhibition, *Mangkang* functions as a vital networking and empowerment forum, bringing women together from across the region to discuss their rights, health, and shared social challenges. Elevating such collectives ensures that women have a unified, powerful voice that the male-dominated councils can no longer easily ignore or dismiss.

## 6.3. A Hybrid Governance Model

The ultimate goal is the structural integration of women into the formal decision-making bodies of the tribe. Relying solely on the goodwill of male elders to invite women to half-yearly and annual meetings has proven insufficient. Instead, a **Hybrid Governance Model** must be actively adopted. This model

harmonizes the cultural legitimacy and localized efficiency of Naga customary law with the egalitarian mandates of modern democratic constitutions.

**Phased Integration and Quotas:** Drawing inspiration from broader democratic frameworks—such as the historic passing of the Nagaland Municipal Bill 2023, which mandated a 33% reservation for women in Urban Local Governments (Janata Weekly, 2024)—Maram village councils must adopt mandatory quotas for female representation. A phased approach could begin by allocating a specific percentage (e.g., 20-33%) of seats in the Village Authority to female representatives, elected democratically by the women of the village.

**Institutionalizing the MWU in Governance:** The village council should formally recognize the Maram Women Union as an advisory and legislative partner. Protocols should be established wherein no decisions regarding community health, education, or welfare budgets during the annual discussions can be ratified without the formal review, consent, and signature of the MWU representatives.

**Codification of Gender-Just Customary Laws:** The unwritten nature of customary law allows for fluid patriarchal manipulation (Naga Women's Union, 2018). The Maram tribe must engage in a progressive, community-wide dialogue to codify their customary laws in writing. This codification must intentionally strip away regressive taboos and explicitly protect women's rights to inheritance, property ownership, and political participation.

By synthesizing the historical authority of traditional elders with the vital perspectives and capabilities of female leaders, the hybrid governance model ensures that the tribal governance architecture is both culturally authentic and fundamentally just.

## 7. Conclusion

### 7.1. Summary of Key Findings

This comprehensive analysis underscores that the Maram Naga society operates under a profound and damaging contradiction. While Maram women are the indispensable drivers of the local economy, agricultural sustainability, and household stability, they are systematically marginalized from the political sphere (Dishung, 2018; Lungbila & Joseph, 2021; Naga Women's Union, 2018). Traditional justifications, rooted in patriarchal myths, patrilineal anxiety, and biological taboos, have been relentlessly utilized to bar women from the village council and the critical half-yearly and annual community discussions. This exclusion has exacted a heavy toll on the welfare of women, stymieing progress in public health and education, and leaving women highly vulnerable to compounding crises such as the unchecked epidemic of alcoholism and domestic violence (Dishung, 2018). However, the historical reign of Queen Apei Hinga serves as an undeniable proof of concept: female leadership in Maram society is not only possible but inherently transformative, capable of eradicating oppressive taboos and fostering sweeping community progress (Dishung, 2018; The Sangai Express, 2010).

### 7.2. Final Thoughts on Women-Led Development

True, sustainable development cannot occur in an echo chamber dominated by a single demographic. When half the population is silenced, a community operates at half its potential. The path forward requires a deliberate, courageous deconstruction of patriarchal hegemony and the enthusiastic adoption of

inclusive, gender-responsive governance. By empowering women through education and economic SHGs, amplifying the collective voice of organizations like the Maram Women Union, and implementing a hybrid governance model that legally mandates female representation in annual community assemblies, the Maram tribe can successfully bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. Inclusive community discussions are not merely a concession to modern democratic ideals; they are the foundational step toward equitable, resilient, and sustainable growth for the entire Maram tribe.

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