PREFACE

The present thesis is an attempt to understand in depth the customary laws and administrative system of the Maram Tribe. The Maram community retains its own customs and traditions and takes recourse in bringing about change and development.

In spite of various waves of development into the society, be it political, social, religious and economic incursions, the Marams have absorbed at times rather reluctantly and at times with open arms these developments and yet held on to their traditions that helped them survive the centuries.

The book of Joseph Athickal, “Maram Nagas, A Socio-Cultural Study” have been very helpful as this has been the very first effort towards a scientific study about the Marams. This work helped to go further and do research on the customary laws and traditional administrative system of the Marams.

Codification of customary laws of various tribes in the Northeast India has been gaining popularity over the years. Many tribal groups have gone into the process of codification of their customary laws and administrative practices. Codification is seen as an attempt to preserve one’s culture and tradition. There is no intention to codify the customary laws of the Maram tribe as codification among other things stratifies the law and remove its inner dynamism. Every effort is made to present the various customary laws and traditional administrative practices as practised in the past and its evolution into the present times on the wheels of change and modernity. Advent of Christianity, spread of education and emerging gender perspectives have influenced the study of customary law. Efforts have been made to see what more has to be achieved so that the good elements of customary laws and administrative system are not lost as winds of change sweep the tribal psyche.

Marams are still considered a primitive tribe by the government of India. Although their socio-cultural and economic status has been steadily improving due to the spread of the education and developmental programmes of the government, they still lag behind other tribes.
Being a pioneering work, most of the data had to be collected through interviews. Travelling to almost all the Maram villages and to the neighbouring tribes, which were in one way or other linked with the Marams, has helped in the deeper understanding of tribal values and customs. It has been a very enriching experience to sit with the elders of the village and discuss the traditional practices and customary laws. As a methodology, group interview was adopted as that helped to bring about the best in the group and it often proved to be a boon in supplementing what was missed out by one or the other. However, long and frequent interviews were made with certain eminent personalities of Marams like Sagong Gongdi Namba, Apao Truba, Apao Dishung Talu of Maram Centre, Late Ng. Luikang, Ex- Minister and Social Worker, Maram Bazar, Late Kohingba who was the judge for customary law of Marams, Mr. Th. Thumbu Maram of T. Khullen who gave me all his books and audio visual materials on the Maram tribe and encouraged me to complete my work.

This study provides in Chapters 1 and 2, a bird's eye view of the history of the Nagas in general and of the Maram in particular in respect of their origin and dispersion and the present habitat. It is not possible to trace the chronological history due to absence of data and any written records. Chapters 3 and 4 deal in detail with the Administrative system and the customary Laws. In chapter 5 studies the customary laws and administrative practices in comparison with those of the neighbouring tribes especially, the Mao, Poumai, Zeliangrong, Angami and Chakhesang tribes. Chapter 6 deals with the customary laws and administrative practices in the present day context, how the various waves of modernisation like the coming of the British, education and Christianity have influenced them. I have also tried to see the position of women in the customary law and in changing times.

In chapter 7, the last chapter of the thesis, certain practical conclusions are made and some ways and means are suggested to make a synthesis between the traditional laws and laws enacted by the government. In particular, the importance of gender equality, the need for unity among the Naga tribes because of common origin, similarity of language, traditions and customs are stressed. The Marams accepted Christianity and they were able to make a clear distinction between religion and culture. Hence, the
factors that helped this process are also examined. In this chapter, emphasis is made on the need to preserve traditional tribal values such as community feeling, honesty, uprightness, openness, courage and hard-work. Some suggestions are also made in order to make the customary laws move with the changing times and not to remain static. While holding on to the traditional customary laws and practices, one has also to accept the legislation of the state and of the country.