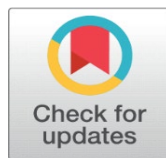
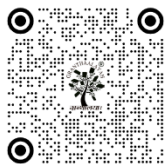


FROM DOMESTIC ORAL TRADITION TO DIGITAL CULTURAL FORM: A STUDY OF PHUNGA WARI AMONG OLDER AND YOUNGER GENERATIONS IN IMPHAL, MANIPUR

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1. INTRODUCTION

Manipur lies in the north-eastern part of India. Nagaland is to its north, Mizoram to its south, Assam to its west, and Myanmar to its east. This location has made Manipur a meeting point of communities, languages, beliefs, and cultural practices. The Meitei people mainly live in the Imphal valley. The hills around the valley are home to different tribal communities. This valley-hill setting has shaped social life, cultural contact, and everyday ways of living in Manipur.

In earlier times, Manipur was known as Kangleipak. The Meitei kingdom shaped much of the political and cultural life of the valley. Meitei society later came under several religious and cultural influences. Older Meitei beliefs continued

ABSTRACT

Phunga Wari is a Meitei storytelling practice rooted in the household, the hearth, and the everyday bond between elders and children. In its older form, it was more than a way to pass time. It carried moral lessons, memory, humour, discipline, and practical wisdom through ordinary family moments. This study looks at its changing place in Imphal today, using field evidence from 30 elder focus groups and 788 younger respondents. Phunga Wari is moving away from an elder-centred household setting into a wider mediated field. The stories remain available, but the older social setting that gave storytelling its force has become weaker. The paper argues that Phunga Wari now stands between continuity and change in Meitei cultural life.

Keywords: Phunga Wari, Meitei Oral Tradition, Digital Folklore, Cultural Transmission, Manipur, Intergenerational Change

to remain meaningful, while Hindu Vaishnavism gained strength from around the eighteenth century. Vaishnavism, colonial administration, modern education/schools, towns, and government offices changed the valley in different ways. Even so, many family customs and stories remained inside everyday life. The result was not a clean break with the past. It was a situation where older practices continued beside newer religious, educational, and urban habits.

The Meitei are one of the major communities of Manipur, with a strong presence in the Imphal valley. Their social life has been shaped over a long period by household worship, kinship, work, ritual, storytelling, and rules of conduct. These areas were not kept apart in everyday life. A ritual could also teach discipline. A story could carry memory. A household practice could show care and authority at the same time. This mixed character of Meitei culture is important for understanding Phunga Wari.

Storytelling has long been part of Meitei family life. Before books, television, mobile phones, and other entertainments became common, stories, songs; proverbs, myths, and advice were shared inside the household. Much of this took place near the hearth or while waiting dinner. Elders had an important role here. They were not only passing information. They were teaching manners, judgement, respect for family, discipline, and awareness of the cultural world. The Meitei household, in this sense, was also a place of learning.

Phunga Wari belongs to this household world. It refers to oral storytelling connected with the phunga, or hearth, and with the wider domestic space around it. Elders, especially grandparents, often told these stories in the evening or during shared family time. Children listened in a relaxed setting. The stories carried moral lessons, humour, memory, warning, and cultural knowledge. Phunga Wari was therefore not just entertainment. It worked as informal education within the family.

The value of Phunga Wari comes from the way it passed knowledge across generations. The elder told the story, and the child listened. But the child learned more than the plot. The child learned tone, emotion, fear, humour, respect, and the authority attached to elder speech. Voice, memory, family closeness, and the situation of telling shaped the story. For this reason, Phunga Wari was different from reading a printed story or watching a video. It was a lived household practice.

In present-day Manipur, especially in urban Imphal, the older social and cultural setting is no longer as stable as in the earlier decades. Children have school work, tuition, mobile phones, television, and many forms of online entertainment. They may still know Phunga Wari, but they may not receive it through the older habit of sitting with elders and listening at home. Many stories now travel through books, YouTube, and social media, keeping the stories visible, but altered the mechanisms through which children access them.

This paper studies Phunga Wari as a Meitei oral tradition that is moving from domestic storytelling into a more mediated cultural form. The concern is not to call the practice lost. The paper asks how its value, meaning, and transmission are being reshaped between elders and younger respondents. By reading the elder focus groups' inputs with the younger respondents' answers, the paper shows that Phunga Wari still matters, although the way it reaches children has changed.

2. RESEARCH GAP

Studies on Meitei and Manipuri oral tradition already make one point clear: folklore is not just amusement. Caesar and Sanasam (2018) describe Meitei oral literature as a store of values, social norms, and community knowledge. Singh et al. (2021) connect Meitei oral narrative genres with belief, kinship, social structure, and moral ideas. Thingnam and Agrawal (2024) also discuss Manipuri folktales as material for psychological and sociological reading. These works are important for this paper. Still, Phunga Wari needs closer attention as a household practice through which elders and children meet across generations.

This paper addresses three gaps. First, Phunga Wari is often placed inside the broader category of folklore, instead of being studied as a separate household practice with its own setting. A story may be written down or recorded, but storytelling as practice involves more than content. It involves presence, elder authority, family time, and moral explanation. Second, discussions of decline are often too broad. They may say that oral tradition is fading, without showing which parts are weakening and which parts are still valued. Third, digital media is often treated either as a threat or as a simple tool of preservation. The field data gives a more mixed picture. Digital access can keep stories alive, while also weakening the older relationship between elder and child.

The study responds to these gaps by focusing on Phunga Wari and by reading elder and younger data together. This helps separate cultural value from practical transmission. It also separates access from experience. A young person may watch Phunga Wari on YouTube or read it in a book, but that is not the same as listening to a grandparent inside the household. In the same way, the weakening of elder-led storytelling does not mean that younger respondents no longer value the tradition. The evidence points to a more uneven situation, where loss, continuity, and adaptation exist together.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this paper is to examine how Phunga Wari is changing from a family-centred oral storytelling practice into a digitally accessible cultural form among younger generations in Imphal, Manipur. The specific objectives are:

- To describe how elder focus groups understand the older setting, meaning, and present change of Phunga Wari.
- To examine how younger respondents encounter Phunga Wari through childhood experience, moral evaluation, preservation support, and modern sources.
- To analyse the role of technology in shifting the transmission of Phunga Wari from household storytelling to mediated access.
- To interpret the findings through oral performance, cultural memory, reflexive modernity, and cultural lag.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Phunga Wari can be placed within the study of oral tradition, performance, folklore, and cultural transmission. Finnegan (2012) argues that oral literature has to be read as a social act, not only as text. Voice, audience, occasion, repetition, and response all shape meaning. A story is not separate from the situation in which it is told. Children learn by listening, asking, laughing, remembering, and being corrected by elders.

Bascom's discussion is useful because it treats folklore as something that can entertain, educate, support social values, and maintain discipline (Bascom, 1954). Dundes also reminds us that folklore should be taken seriously as cultural expression. It is one of the ways ordinary people carry knowledge, memory, and social meaning (Dundes, 1965). These ideas are useful for Phunga Wari because the practice worked through everyday family life, not through formal schooling.

Bauman (1977) treats verbal art as performance. His approach helps in reading storytelling as more than the transfer of information. The teller speaks before an audience and gives shape to the story through voice, pace, humour, suspense, and moral emphasis. In Phunga Wari, elders carried authority not only because they were older, but because they knew how to tell the story. When the same story moves into a digital video, the plot may remain but the relation between teller and listener changes. A listener can pause, skip, repeat, or watch alone, thus, changing the structure of social relations associated with Phunga Wari and social meaning of the story.

Ong (2012) explains that oral cultures rely on sound, memory, repetition, and shared presence. Oral expression is not just speech before writing. It is a way of arranging knowledge through listening and repetition. Vansina (1985) also treats oral tradition as knowledge passed across generations. In this view, stories carry values, social experience, and practical wisdom because people hear them again and again in settings that matter to them.

In the Manipuri context, Caesar and Sanasam (2018) show that Meitei oral forms keep cultural memory and community values alive. Singh et al. (2021) link Meitei oral narrative genres with religious understanding, kinship ideas, and moral codes. Thingnam and Agrawal (2024) read Manipuri folktales, including forms related to Phunga Wari, as useful material for psychological and sociological interpretation. These studies support an important point for the present paper: oral stories are not minor cultural items. They help a community explain itself.

Technological change brings a different question. Blank (2009) argues that the internet does not put an end to folklore. It gives folklore new places to appear, circulate, and be recorded. Lourembam (2022), writing on Phunga-Wari and new media in Manipur, makes a similar point. Digital formats can help preserve and circulate a storytelling tradition whose older domestic form may be weakening. This moves the discussion away from a simple story of loss. Digital media can keep stories available, but it can also change the relationship between storyteller and listener.

Giddens (1991) is useful for reading how tradition is handled in modern life. People often talk about, select, justify, or revive inherited practices instead of following them only as routine. This can be seen in the younger data on Phunga Wari. Many young respondents support preservation, but they usually imagine preservation through revival, schools, recordings, or other mediated routes, not only through a full return to the older household setting. Ogburn's (1922) idea of cultural lag is also useful here. Kumari (2026)

The literature places Phunga Wari between oral performance and changing cultural form. The older practice depended on shared presence, memory, family rhythm, and elder authority. The present practice depends more on books, videos, mobile phones, and conscious preservation. The task is to understand this shift without calling it only decline or only preservation. The stories still carry meaning, but the conditions through which they are received are no longer the same.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper uses an exploratory sequential mixed-method design. Elder focus group findings are examined first, so that the meanings, remembered practices, and perceived changes around Phunga Wari can be understood. The younger interview schedule is then used to examine childhood experience, cultural attitude, support for preservation, modern access, and views on technological replacement. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) describe exploratory sequential mixed methods as useful when qualitative findings guide the meaning of later quantitative analysis. This suits the present paper because Phunga Wari is not only a measurable item. Its meaning has to be understood before the survey responses are read carefully.

The elder phase consists of 30 focus group discussions. The number of elder respondents in a focus group ranged from 6 to 12 participants, adding up to a total of 197 elder participants aged 60 and above. These findings were organised around two main issues: whether children today have the same experience of Phunga Wari and whether Phunga Wari transmits cultural values. The younger phase consists of responses from 788 respondents aged below 20 and examined their childhood experience of hearing Phunga Wari from elders, views on moral and cultural value, support for preservation and revival, access through modern sources, attitudes toward technology replacing elders, and views on technology as a factor in the erosion of indigenous knowledge and practice.

The elder focus group tables are treated as qualitative-coded group evidence. The younger tables are treated as frequency and percentage distributions. The elder material explains how the practice is remembered. The younger material shows how far those meanings are still recognised, changed, or questioned among younger respondents.

Table 1

Table 1 Profile of the Study Data				
Phase	Data source	Unit of analysis	n	Main variables used in this paper
Phase 1	Elder focus group evidence	Focus groups	30	Older meaning, remembered experience, and cultural valuation
Phase 2	Younger interview schedule	Younger respondents	788	Present experience, attitudes, access, and views on technology

Source: Present Study Field Data

6. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

6.1. ELDER FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS: CULTURAL VALUE WITH WEAKENED DOMESTIC EXPERIENCE

The elder focus group findings show that Phunga Wari is still culturally respected, but its older household experience has become weaker. All elder focus groups recognised the value of the practice. They did not speak of it as entertainment alone. They described it as moral learning, family memory, cultural knowledge, and social instruction. The concern among elders is not about whether Phunga Wari has cultural significance or not, their concern is that children no longer experience it under the same household conditions.

The table no. 2 shows that only 5 (16.7%) out of 30 elder focus groups said that children today have the same experience of listening to Phunga Wari from the elders while a majority of 16 (53.3%) elder focus groups said that children do not have such experience. Another 9 focus groups (30%) gave a partial response, stating that they preferred both listening it from elders and modern sources of Phunga Wari. Many of these partial responses connected continuity

with modern sources or changed forms of access. The pattern does not show total disappearance. It shows that elders recognise some continuity, while also seeing a clear weakening of the older domestic setting.

Table 2

Table 2. Elder Focus Group Findings on Phunga Wari Experience			
Theme	Responses & No. of focus groups		Total
Whether children today have the same experience of listening Phunga Wari from elders	Yes	No	21 (70%)
	5 (16.7%)	16 (53.3%)	
Whether children today have preferred partially/modern sources of Phunga Wari	9 (30%)	-	9 (30%)
Total	14 (46.7%)	16 (53.3%)	30 (100)

This study finds all 30 elder focus groups stating that Phunga Wari transmits cultural values. No group denied its cultural role. This creates a clear difference between value and experience. The practice remains meaningful, but the older experience of listening to elders inside the household is no longer equally available to children. Phunga Wari still holds symbolic value, while the social conditions that reproduced it have weakened.

The elder personal communications add life to these figures. Elders described Phunga Wari as stories told by grandparents, especially grandmothers, before dinner or during relaxed household time. They also said that such stories made children wiser and more interested in the history of their culture (personal communication, 2023-2024). These accounts show that the older practice was relational. The elder was not only giving content. The elder carried tone, authority, humour, correction, and memory. The child learned by being present with the storyteller.

Elders also linked the weakening of Phunga Wari to mobile phones, television, music, media entertainment, and time constraint (the shortage of time for sitting together) (personal communication, 2023-2024). This matters because cultural transmission depends on household routine. A child may be physically at home, but the child's attention may already be with the screen. In that situation, the home is still the same place, but the interaction inside it is different. The elder concern should not be dismissed as nostalgia. It points to a real change in family time and intergenerational attention.

Phunga Wari, thus, is not rejected by elders. It is remembered with respect and valued as cultural teaching. Yet elders also see that children now receive it differently. Some children may know the same stories through mediated sources, but the domestic relation between elder and child has weakened.

6.2. YOUNGER RESPONDENTS: STRONG VALUE, STRONG DIGITAL ACCESS

The younger interview schedule results show continuity, but a shift in source. A large majority of younger respondents have encountered Phunga Wari through elders. Oral transmission, therefore, has not ended. At the same time, an even larger majority reported access through books, YouTube, or social media. The younger generation stands in two locations at once. It carries some memory of elder-centred storytelling, while also living in a media environment where stories are searchable and individually consumed.

The table no. 3 and figure no. 1 are concerned with childhood experience of the younger respondents. Out of 788 respondents, 596 (75.6%) opined that they had heard Phunga Wari from elders during childhood while 192 (24.4%) respondents said they had not. This is a strong sign of continuity. Elder storytelling still reached many younger people. Yet the 24.4% who did not hear Phunga Wari from elders also marks a serious gap. For a cultural practice based on direct oral relation, the absence of elder narration for nearly one-fourth of respondents cannot be ignored.

The second finding concerns modern access to Phunga Wari in which a very large number of respondents, i.e. 738 (93.7%) reported access to Phunga Wari through books, YouTube, or social media while only 50 (6.3%) respondents reported no such access. Mediated access is now wider than elder-based childhood experience. This is why Phunga Wari cannot be described as simply disappearing. The stories are visible through modern channels, but visibility is not the same as the older household experience.

Table 3

Table 2. Elder Focus Group Findings on Phunga Wari Experience			
Variables	Response & no. of respondents	Column1	Total
Heard Phunga Wari from elders during childhood	Yes	No	788(100%)
	596 (75.6%)	192(24.4%)	
Access Phunga Wari through books, YouTube, or social media	738 (93.7%)	50 (6.3%)	788(100%)

Source: Present Study Field Data

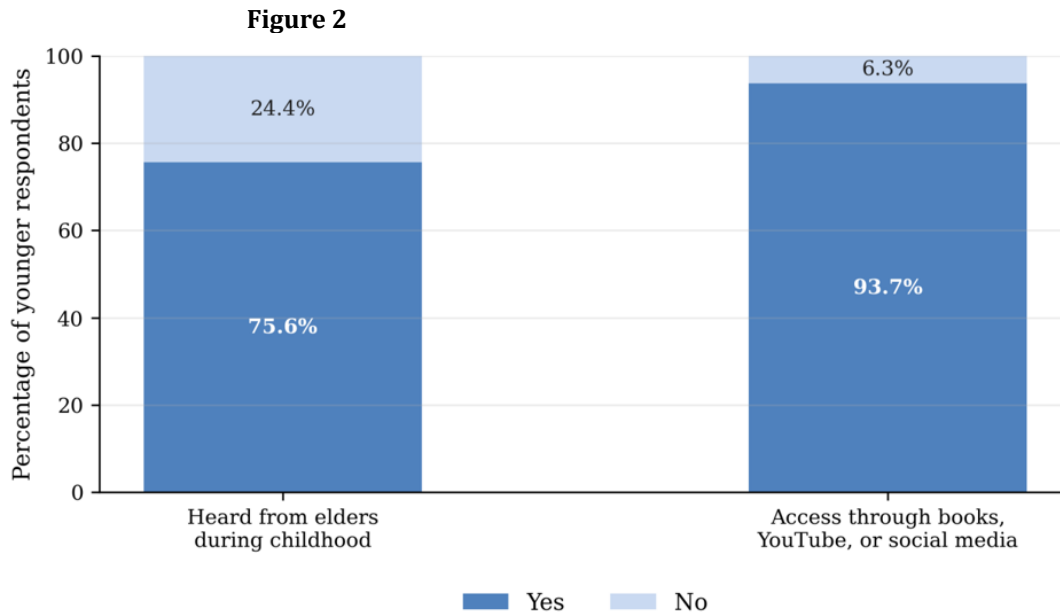


Figure 1 Childhood Experience of Phunga Wari and Modern Access to It.

Source: Present Study Field Data.

The table no. 4 given below clearly indicates that many younger respondents still give Phunga Wari moral and cultural importance stating Phunga Wari as a means of transmitting moral and cultural values. It is found that a total of 724 (91.8%) respondents (473[60%] and 251[31.8%] respondents) strongly agree or agree that Phunga Wari transmits moral and cultural values respectively. On the other hand, only 27 (3.5%) respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 37(4.7%) respondents remained neutral. This is a strong finding. It shows that younger respondents do not treat Phunga Wari as useless or merely old-fashioned.

The same table also indicates that support for preservation and revival of Punga Wari is also high. A total of 371 (47.1%) respondents strongly agreed and 304(38.6%) respondents agreed that Phunga Wari should be preserved and revived as a way of transmitting cultural values across generations. Together, 675 (85.7%) respondents were in agreement or strong agreement. Only 14(1.7%) respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 99(12.6%) respondents stayed neutral. These findings show that younger respondents not only value the stories. Many also want some efforts to keep Phunga Wari alive.

The younger generation is not abandoning inherited culture. The change lies in the form of contact. Younger respondents can support preservation while still depending heavily on modern sources. They can value elder storytelling even when they no longer experience it regularly. The data therefore points to a difference between attitude and practice, not a collapse of cultural attachment.

Table 4

Table 4. Younger Respondents' Responses on Various Variables						
Variables	Reponses and no. of respondents					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Phunga Wari transmits moral and cultural values	473 (60%)	251(31.8%)	37 (4.7%)	17(2.2%)	10(1.3%)	788(100%)
Support preserving and reviving of Phunga Wari	371(47.1%)	304(38.6%)	99(12.6%)	5(0.5%)	9(1.1%)	788(100%)
Technology replacing elders as transmitters	427(54.2%)	288(36.5%)	37(4.7%)	28(3.6%)	8(1%)	788(100%)
Technology as a factor in erosion of indigenous knowledge and practice	233(29.6%)	321(40.7%)	120(15.2%)	98(12.5%)	16(2%)	788(100%)

Source: Present Study Field Data.

Figure 2

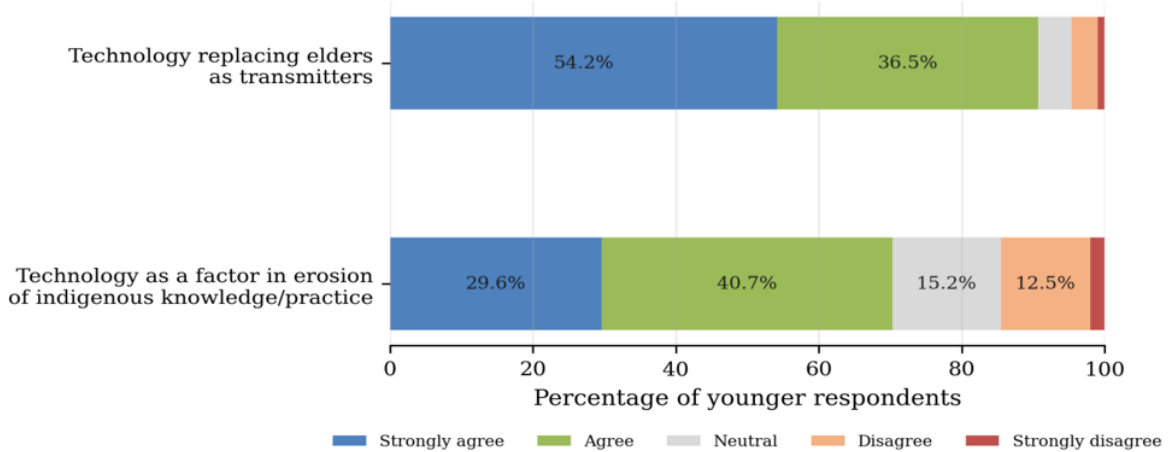


Figure 2 Younger Respondents' Views on Technology, Replacement, and Erosion

Source: Present Study Field Data.

As shown in table no. 4 and figure no. 2, the strongest evidence of change appears in the technology-related responses. On the statement that technology is replacing elders as transmitters of Phunga Wari, 427 (54.2%) respondents strongly agreed, and 288 (36.5%) respondents agreed. Thus, a total of 715 (90.7%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, followed by 36 (4.6%) respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed while 37 (4.7%) respondents were neutral. Thus, younger respondents themselves recognise the shift in medium. They see in their own lives that the source of stories has changed.

The query on technology as a factor in the erosion of indigenous knowledge and practice gives a slightly more mixed response. It is found that a total of 233 (29.6%) respondents strongly agreed, and 321 (40.7%) respondents agreed, i.e. together, 554 (70.3%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that technology contributes to erosion. At the same time, 120 (15.2%) respondents were neutral while 114 (14.5%) respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. Many younger respondents see technology as the cause of erosion, but some also seem to recognise digital media as a means of preservation.

The combined pattern is not simply anti-technology. Technology has become the major route through which Phunga Wari is accessed, and it is widely seen as replacing elders. Yet the same technology also keeps stories available for children who may not sit regularly with elder storytellers. The problem is not digital access by itself. The real issue is whether digital access can carry the relational, moral, and performative qualities that belonged to the household storytelling event.

6.3. INTEGRATED DISCUSSION: FROM HOUSEHOLD PERFORMANCE TO MEDIATED CULTURAL FORM

When the elder and younger findings are read together, the argument becomes clearer. Phunga Wari has not disappeared from Meitei cultural life. Its content and cultural value continues to matter. What has changed is the social setting through which it is passed on. Elders remember it as a household practice tied to grandparents, dinner time, waiting time, and family closeness. Younger respondents still value it, and many have heard it from elders. But modern sources are now even more widespread. The tradition is moving from domestic oral performance toward mediated cultural circulation. In the older setting, Phunga Wari was performed by elders before children within a shared domestic frame. The meaning came not only from the plot but also from the event of narration. The elder could change the voice of a character, add humour, explain a moral point, or connect the story to the child's behaviour. The audience was not anonymous. It consisted of children, kin, or neighbours known to the teller. In digital form, this relation changes - the narrator may be unknown, the audience may be dispersed, and the story may be watched alone. The performance may remain, but the social relation around it becomes different.

Oral storytelling depends on memory, repetition, and face-to-face listening. In the household, children learn through repeated exposure and participation. The story is remembered because it belongs to the rhythm of life. Digital access changes that rhythm. A video can be replayed, searched, saved, and shared, but it does not automatically create the same intergenerational setting. It may preserve the narrative, but it cannot fully replace elder authority unless families and communities connect digital forms back to living storytelling.

It is necessary to separate cultural value from cultural practice. If the analysis looked only at younger respondents' perception, Phunga Wari appears very strong, because 91.8% of them agree or strongly agree that it transmits moral and cultural values. If the analysis looked only at technological replacement, the traditional practice of Phunga Wari appears weak, because 90.7% of respondents agree or strongly agree that technology is replacing elders. Thus, value and transmission are moving at different speeds. The value remains strong, while the older mode of transmission has weakened.

The value attached to a practice can continue even after the material and social conditions supporting it have changed. In the case of Phunga Wari, the value of storytelling is still widely recognised. But household schedules, the place of the hearth, the availability of elders, and the attention of children have all changed. The result is a gap between respect and regular practice. People may say that Phunga Wari is important but the medium of accessing it has changed, depending on books, YouTube or social media.

. In modern social life, people often relate to tradition more consciously. They discuss it, preserve it, revive it, and sometimes present it as cultural identity. They do not always inherit it as unquestioned routine. The high support for preservation and revival among younger respondents reflects this kind of relation. Phunga Wari is increasingly seen as something that should be protected because it represents cultural heritage. That is valuable, but it differs from the older situation, where the practice survived through ordinary household rhythm without needing to be named as preservation. Technology therefore has a double role. On one side, it displaces elder authority. When children turn to screens, the elder is no longer the main source of stories. The household loses a regular moment of shared listening. The child may receive the content without the same moral correction, emotional closeness, or intergenerational relation. On the other side, technology expands access. It allows stories to reach young people who do not live with grandparents, children in urban nuclear households, and even people outside Manipur. It also makes documentation, archiving, animation, and educational use possible. The data shows both effects at the same time.

Digital media can become a space where folklore survives in new form. But survival through media is not the same as survival through domestic practice. In the case of Phunga Wari, digital circulation can preserve story content, titles, characters, and language. It may also attract younger listeners through audio-visual forms. Still, the cultural task is not only to upload stories. The interpretive community around storytelling also has to be kept alive. Without that community, the story may remain available but become detached from the everyday moral world that once gave it force. Phunga Wari is not rejected because it is traditional. It is valued because it carries moral and cultural knowledge. The change happens because the conditions of transmission have shifted. This is different from practices that became weak because belief declines or because modern education directly challenges the explanation. In the case of Phunga Wari, the main pressure is not disbelief in the story. It is the reorganisation of time, attention, technology, and family interaction.

The domestic setting remains central to the older meaning of Phunga Wari. The phunga, or hearth, was not only a physical place. It suggested warmth, food, waiting, rest, and family gathering. A story told near this setting belonged to the moral life of the household. Children listened while food was being prepared or while family members gathered in the evening. The story fitted into ordinary life. When modern housing, cooking arrangements, education schedules, and entertainment habits change, the symbolic role of the hearth also changes. The story may continue, but it no longer grows naturally from the same spatial arrangement. This has direct implications for preservation. If preservation only records stories, it may protect content without protecting practice. If preservation only asks elders to continue storytelling, it may ignore the real changes in children's routines and media habits. A more useful approach would combine both. Elder narrators can be recorded, but the recordings should be used in schools, community events, family storytelling evenings, and local cultural programmes where children can still ask questions and hear explanations. Digital media should support intergenerational contact, not replace it completely.

Phunga Wari is becoming a mediated tradition. It remains culturally meaningful, but its authority is now shaped through digital access as well as family memory. The tradition survives because the stories are still valued and widely available. It changes because the elder-centred household event is no longer the dominant form of transmission. This is not only a technological change. It is a change in social relation, cultural authority, and the rhythm of domestic life.

6.4. IMPLICATIONS FOR CULTURAL PRESERVATION

Cultural preservation is of paramount importance that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2003) stated that oral traditions and living practices are protected through community participation rather than storage alone. Both the elder and younger respondents strongly recognise the moral and cultural value of Phunga Wari and a large majority of younger respondents support its preservation and revival. The challenge is to turn support into practice. Young people may agree that the tradition is important, but they may not have regular spaces where elder-led storytelling still happens.

One practical implication is the need for community-based storytelling sessions. Local clubs, schools, libraries, cultural organisations, and locality-based groups can organise regular Phunga Wari sessions where elders narrate stories to children and youth. These sessions should not become too formal. The older strength of Phunga Wari came from intimacy, easy speech, and a relaxed domestic atmosphere. Still, organised spaces may now be needed because everyday household routines no longer provide enough time for storytelling.

A second implication is careful digital preservation. Digital media should not be treated only as a cause of erosion. Since 93.7 percent of younger respondents' report access through modern sources, digital circulation is already part of the life of Phunga Wari. The question is how to improve its quality. Recordings should preserve the voice of elder narrators, include explanations of meaning, use Meiteilon (local language/dialect) where possible, and provide child-friendly forms. Videos can be useful, but they should not reduce the stories to entertainment alone. The moral and cultural frame should remain visible.

A third implication relates to education. Phunga Wari can be used in schools for language learning, moral discussion, local history, and cultural identity. This should not mean turning every story into a fixed lesson. The better approach is to treat oral tradition as a recognised form of knowledge. Students can collect stories from elders, compare different versions, write short reflections, and discuss the values found in the stories. Such activities can connect digital familiarity with family memory.

Finally, preservation must keep elders at the centre. If elders are removed from the process, Phunga Wari may survive as content but lose much of its depth. Elders are not only sources of information. They interpret tone, context, humour, and moral meaning. Any preservation strategy should therefore treat elders as active cultural teachers, not as passive people to be recorded.

7. CONCLUSION

The study shows that Phunga Wari remains meaningful in Meitei cultural life, although its mode of transmission has changed. It has not vanished. Younger respondents still value it strongly, and modern sources have expanded access. The findings also do not support a simple preservation argument. The older domestic setting of storytelling has weakened,

and digital access does not automatically reproduce the same elder-child relationship. The tradition is better understood as moving from the hearth-centred domestic setting to a wider mediated field.

The importance of this case lies in the difference between content and social setting. Stories can survive as titles, recordings, printed texts, or online videos. But storytelling also depends on who tells the story, where it is heard, how it is explained, and how children are drawn into the moral world of the narrative. Phunga Wari continues to carry cultural force, but the conditions that once gave it everyday authority have changed.

For this reason, preservation should combine elder participation and digital adaptation. The aim should not be to reject technology or to romanticise the past. The aim should be to use technology without allowing it to erase the intergenerational relation at the centre of Phunga Wari. The hearth and the screen should not be treated as complete opposites. The task is to carry the values of the hearth into the age of the screen while keeping elders, families, and communities active in transmission.

Phunga Wari shows that cultural change among the Meitei is uneven. A cultural practice may remain deeply valued while changing its form. It may be preserved through new media while losing part of its older social setting. It may become more accessible but less intimate. This complexity is the main finding of the paper. Phunga Wari today is neither dead nor unchanged. It is a living tradition being reworked under the pressures and possibilities of contemporary life in Manipur.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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