THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE MARAS

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "**The Institution of Marriage: Social and Cultural History of the Maras**" submitted to Mizoram University for the award of the Degree of Philosophy in History is a research work carried out by Mr. K Lalrinchhana, Research Scholar in the Department of History and Ethnography, Mizoram University, under my supervision and it has not been previously submitted for the award of any research degree in any other University/institute.

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DECLARATION

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I K Lalrinchhana, hereby declare that the thesis is the record of the work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

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Statement on Anti-Plagiarism

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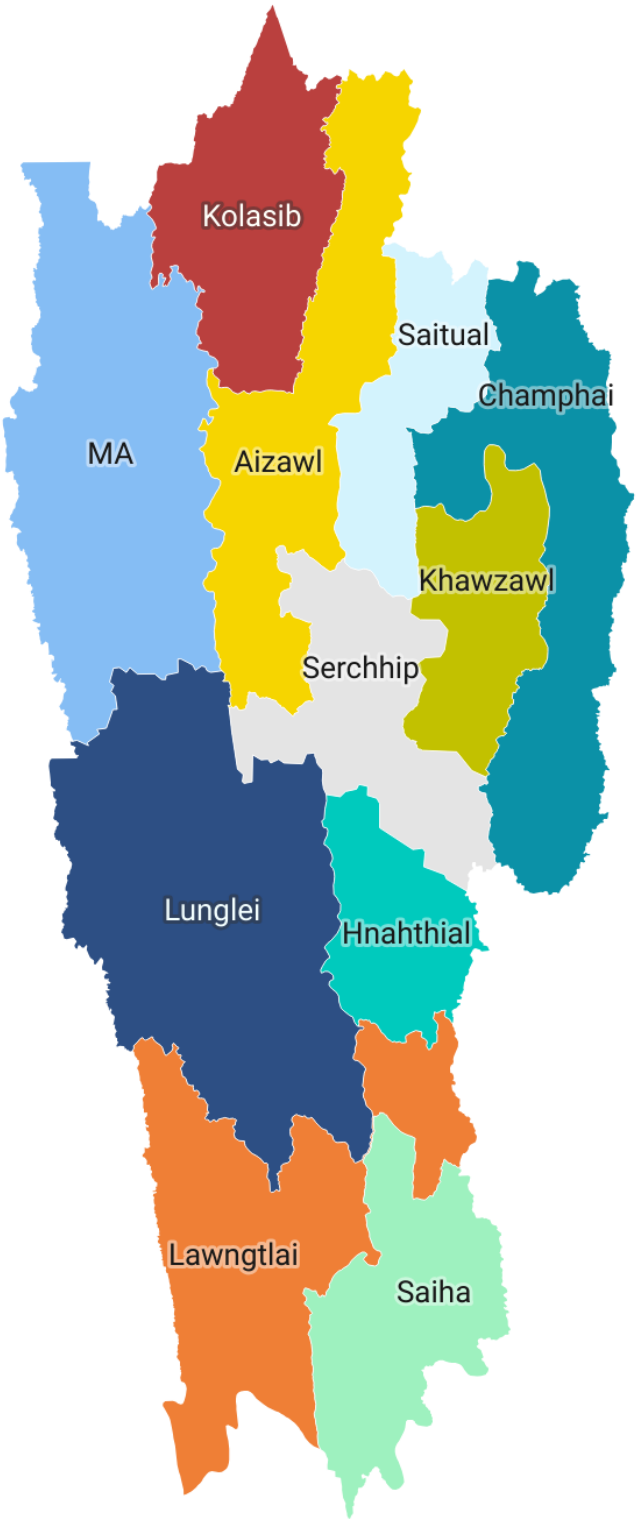
CLOSSARY

Abeipho	: a chiefly clan
Ah-ma	: a minor bride price, claimed by the bride's father who killed ten pigs for the wedding feast on the wedding day
Akeipa	: a form of marriage between a widower and unmarried sister of his deceased wife
Amakia	: traditional wedding ceremony
Aphei	: adultery
Arei-raoh	: divorce by mutual agreement
Athikhi	: abode of the dead
Athitly	: preliminary marriage proposal through a female relative
Awraubawna	: wedding feast
Azila	: main prices of the bride-price that only the bride's male paternal relatives are entitled to claim
Chawchyu	: main price payable to the bride's eldest brother
Chhipo	: a form of divorce that took place on the ground of barrenness of a wife
Dawchhy	: lowest clan who were naturally slaves and war captives
Hlasiba	: subsidiary prices attached to the main price
Hmiatla	: an atonement price paid by a young man to the girl's parents after eloping with their daughter
Hrupathei	: a form of divorce that took place on the ground of madness
Khazopa	: a supreme being whom the Maras esteemed as the source of life and blessings
Khazopiena	: a sacred ritual performed by the family invoking the blessing of *Khazopa*
Khuthi	: a form of divorce on the ground of impotence of a husband
Laikhohpa	: unmarried woman
Laithiapa	: a lifelong bachelor
Laipho	: a traditional social institution wherein a group of young men sleep together in the house of selected girl

Laisacharei	: pre-marital courtship
Loakhyu	: essential preliminary payment of the bride price to the maternal uncle, *pupa*
Lopinoma	*:* a form of divorce initiated by the husband
Lapinokhu	: a form of marriage between the widow and her deceased husband's brother
Loto	: a stone monument built to commemorate the marriage of the chief's daughter
Lyuchapa	: mediator sent to propose marriage to the girl's parents
lyuchapa-sehnai	: junior mediator
lyuchapa-uthei	: senior mediator
Macha	: most trusted elder of the chief
Machhie	: commoners' clan
Makhotho	: main prices of the bride that the bride's maternal and paternal relatives, regardless of gender, are entitled to claim
Maluso	: a widow who had outlived three husbands
Miapali	: an individual household sacrifice, performed by the bridegroom
Mochyu	: a special minor price payable to the bride's grandparents on her father's side
No-apahaw	: child marriage
Nobei	: principle wife
Nochyu	: significant bride price payable to the bride's mother's sister.
Nochyu	: literally meaning "aunt's price," taken by the bride's eldest paternal aunt
Nohmei	: a widow
Norihra	: significant bride price payable to the youngest married sister of the bride's mother
Notho	: concubine
Okia	: the most significant bride price payable to the father.
Phoso	: high clan
Pupa	: maternal uncle

Puma	: bride price payable to *pupa*
Riasaw	: illegitimate child
Sahma	: a rice beer
Sahrophia	: a term used to refer the expensive nature of bride price. It literally translates 'complete surrender of all family possessions'
Sano-sa	: a she-mithun and its calf
Sapi	: a full grown mithun
Sataw	: a full grown cow or a pig
Satlia	: a young bachelor
Sawleipa	: barren woman
Seicheihra	: main price payable to any of the male relatives on father's side
Seihra	: another major price, claimed independently by the bride's father who belonged to the chiefly clan
Seipawchyu	: special bride price for the most favoured slave of the bride's family
Seipihra	: main price payable to any of the male relatives on father's side
Soh pakua	*:* a form of divorce initiated by the wife
Thuaso	: engagement gift
Thuaso hmiakhuti	: special meat in honour of the engagement gift
Tipanie	: an actual marriage ceremony
Tinitheuna	: a ceremony in which an aunt claims numerous small dues from grooms' family
Vaopia	: a fine inflicted on violation of marriage engagement
Veiseina	: a quality of virtues a girl is expected to display towards her suitors
Zatlaso	: ceremony of payment of the bride price

Map of Mizoram



Map of Saiha District

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Marriage has historically been regarded as one of the most fundamental and universal social institutions, existing in nearly every known society. It is widely recognized as a socially sanctioned mechanism for regulating sexual relations, legitimizing procreation, and providing an organized framework for family life. Through marriage, individuals' sexual and procreative needs are satisfied within a system that is legally, socially, and culturally endorsed.

Conceptualizing Marriage:

The question "What is marriage?" has elicited multiple interpretations across disciplines, time periods, and cultural contexts. Scholars have offered varying definitions, each reflecting different emphases:

Harry M. Johnson had defined marriage as a stable relationship which society allows to man and woman in the community without losing its existence. This stable relationship had two conditions, namely sexual gratification and procreation.[1]

Stephanie Coontz argues that marriage has historically provided stability and structured family life, serving as a foundation for the upbringing of children and the continuity of cultural values. Coontz emphasizes that the institution helps maintain social order by reinforcing bonds between individuals and across generations.[2] Furthermore, sociologist Andrew Cherlin describes marriage as a "symbolic institution," wherein it is not just a private relationship but a social marker of adulthood and status.[3] Cherlin explains that despite changes in its form and meaning, marriage continues to be a central element of identity and social respectability in modern society.

G.P Murdock emphasizes marriage as living together of man and woman as husband and wife with regular sexual relationship and economic co-operation.

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[1] H.M. Johnson, "The structural-functional theory of family and kinship," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, vol 2, no. 2 (1971), 133-144.
[2] Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 10-12.
[3] Andrew J. Cherlin, *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 5.

Procreation, bringing up children, mutual love and economic co-operation are other necessary elements of marriage.[4]

Edward Westermarck defines marriage as a relation of one or more men and one or more women which is recognized by custom or law, and involves certain rights and duties both in the case of the parties entering the union and in the case of the children born of it".[5] According to Malinowski, marriage is a contract for the production and maintenance of children.[6] Robert Lowie describes marriage as a relatively permanent bond between permissible mates.[7]

H.M. Stone and A.S. Stone defined fundamental basis of marriage as a personal association between a man and a woman and a biological relationship for mating and reproduction. As a social, legal and religious institution, marriage has undergone a number of modifications and changes, nevertheless, its basic realities remain the same. The permanent, indissoluble, sacramental union of the orthodox differ strikingly from the free, easily served and not often officially registered marriage, let us say, of a modern Russian and yet both of these marriages have certain underlying element in common. In both instances, the couple seeks to make their union stable. They assumed the freedom and privilege of sexual relationship, and normally have as their ultimate aim the establishment of the family. Biologically, the object of marriage is not to legalize a sexual union, rather to ensure the survival of species and of the race. From this point of view, marriage is not merely a sexual relation but a permanent association. It is the union of male and a female for production and care of offspring and reproduction is, therefore, another fundamental object or purpose of marriages.[8]

According to William Stephen, "Marriage is a socially legitimate sexual union begun within a public announcement and undertaken with some idea of

[4] G.P. Murdock, *Social structure* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 260.
[5] E. Westermarck, *The Future of Marriage* (New York: Events Publishing Company, 1928), 26.
[6] B. Malinowski, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 63.
[7] R.H. Lowie, *Primitive Society* (London: George Routledge & Sons Ltd., 1921), 30.
[8] H.M. Stone and A.S. Stone, *Marriage Manual: A Practical Guide to Sex and Marriage* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1952), 18.

permanency; it is assumed with a more or less explicit marriage contact, which spell out reciprocal rights and obligation between spouses, and their future children."[9]

According to Winch, "Marriage is culturally approved relationship of one man and one woman or one man and two or more women or one woman or two or more men in which there is cultural endorsement of sexual intercourse between the marital partners of opposite sex and, generally, the expectation that children will be born out of a relationship."[10] In the words of Bogardus, "Marriage is an institution in which men and women admitted to family life, to live in intimate personal relationship primarily for the purpose of begetting and rearing children".[11]

Despite differences in emphasis, these definitions converge on the understanding that marriage is not merely a private relationship between two individuals but a socially and culturally sanctioned institution that regulates sexuality, legitimizes procreation, and organizes kinship.

The Multidimensional Significance of Marriage:

Marriage must be understood as a multidimensional institution, intersecting with social, political, economic, and religious domains:

Socially, marriage creates stable family units and fosters the transmission of cultural values. Economically, it serves as an efficient unit for organizing labour and resources, contributing to both individual and societal well-being. Religiously, it represents a sacred bond that upholds moral values and provides spiritual guidance. Through these diverse lenses, marriage remains a central institution that influences human behaviour and societal organization at multiple levels.

As a legally and socially endorsed union, marriage provides a structured framework for family life, procreation, and child rearing. Its significance goes beyond fostering emotional and social connections between individuals; it also plays a crucial role in maintaining societal order. Marriage facilitates the transfer of

[9] W. N. Stephen, *The Family in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Holt, Renehar and Winston, 1963), 5.
[10] Robert F. Winch, *The Modern Family* (New York: Holt, Renehar and Winston, 1952), 2.
[11] E.S. Borgardus, *Sociology*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), 75.

property, social status, and cultural values from one generation to the next, contributing to social stability and continuity.[12]

For much of history, marriage was also a tool for establishing alliances between families, tribes, and nations, extending its relevance beyond individual relationships to the larger social and political order. In many cultures, it was not primarily about personal affection but a way to regulate inheritance, wealth, and power. For example, in medieval Europe, marriage often represented a means of consolidating power between noble families, and the marriages of children were arranged by parents to enhance family prestige. In such contexts, marriage functioned as a transaction with both personal and public significance.[13] In modern societies, although the forms and meanings of marriage have evolved, it remains a critical institution for forging and strengthening kinship ties in the society.

Beyond social and political aspects, marriage has long been intertwined with religious and moral frameworks. Many religious traditions view marriage as sacred, often depicting it as a covenant blessed by the divine. This religious significance adds to social importance of marriage by encouraging fidelity, responsibility, and a sense of duty among spouses. Religious and moral codes have shaped the expectations surrounding marriage, defining gender roles, family structures, and even the acceptable reasons for divorce.[14] For instance, in many Christian traditions, marriage was historically viewed as indissoluble, with divorce either heavily discouraged or outright prohibited, reinforcing its permanence in social life. According to the traditional Hindu concept, marriage is regarded as a religious sacrament which enables one to fulfill religious as well as social obligations. The traditional Hindu concept of life held the view that it is necessary for a man to marry in order to achieve the four *parusharthus*: *Dharma, Artha, Kama* and *Moksha.*[15] Similarly, in Islam, marriage is considered a contract that fulfils religious duties, creating a framework for lawful relations and protection of family values.

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[12] Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 4-6.
[13] Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 15-17.
[14] John Witte Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 32-33.
[15] Promilla Kapur, *Love, Marriage and Sex* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1970), 86.

The economic dimension of marriage has been explored by various scholars who recognize its role in organizing and sustaining economic life. Historian John R. Gillis points out that in many traditional societies, marriages were not merely personal unions but also economic alliances between families.[16] Property, wealth, and economic resources were often consolidated through marriage, ensuring the survival and prosperity of family lineages. Gillis explains that marriage was a key institution for managing land, labour, and inheritance, making it central to economic life in pre-modern societies. Economist Gary S. Becker takes this analysis further by applying economic theory to the institution of marriage. In his work, Becker argues that marriage creates a "household production unit" in which labour is divided to maximize efficiency, with each spouse contributing specialized tasks- often with one partner managing the home and the other engaging in paid labour. This division of labour, according to Becker, helps to increase economic productivity and overall well-being for the family unit.[17]

More recently, sociologists like E.J. Graff have observed the economic advantages that marriage offers in contemporary society. Graff notes that marriage often provides financial stability, as couples benefit from pooled resources, tax breaks, and shared insurance. She points out that married couples are more likely to accumulate wealth and economic security, as marriage offers legal and financial protections not always available to unmarried couples.[18]

In modern times, the nature and purpose of marriage have shifted in many societies. Whereas arranged marriages were once the norm, individual choice and romantic love now play a larger role in selection of partners for matrimonial entry, particularly in Western cultures.[19] Despite this shift towards personal fulfilment and emotional connection, marriage remains essential for its legal and social benefits. Married couples often have access to specific legal rights, such as joint tax benefits,

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[16] John R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 23-25.
[17] Gary S. Becker, *A Treatise on the Family* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 45-46.
[18] E.J. Graff, *What is Marriage For? The Strange Social History of Our Most Intimate Institution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 77.
[19] Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 45-48.

inheritance rights, spousal medical decision-making power, and custody of children.[20] These rights underscore the institutional nature of marriage, even in its more modern, individual-focused forms.

Marriage also continues to serve a critical function in family dynamics, providing a stable environment for raising children. Sociologically, it has been shown that children raised in households with two married parents often experience more stability, emotional support, and economic security compared to those in other family structures.[21] While not without challenges, given increasing divorce rates and evolving definitions of marriage, the institution still provides a foundation for nurturing the next generation.

The transformations in marriage, such as the recognition of same-sex unions and the growing acceptance of cohabitation without marriage, reflect broader shifts in societal values around love, family, and individual rights. However, despite these changes, the institution of marriage remains one of the most powerful ways societies organize interpersonal relationships, distribute resources, and uphold cultural values. It continues to be a vital institution that influences social behaviour and relationships at multiple levels of human experience.

Typologies of Marriage:

Although marriage is a universal social institution that influences human behavior and relationships in multiple ways, it takes on different forms depending on the cultural and social context across the globe. On the basis of internality and externality, marriage is classified into two types - endogamy and exogamy. Endogamous marriage refers to a form of marriage in which individuals marry within a specific social group, caste, ethnicity, or class to preserve cultural or social homogeneity. This practice ensures that both partners share the same social, religious, or ethnic background, which helps maintain the integrity of the group and its traditions. Such marriages are often preferred in many cultures because they

[20] Graff, *What is Marriage For?*, 74.
[21] Sara Mc Lanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 53-55.

reinforce internal unity and prevent the dilution of social, cultural, or religious values.

Endogamous marriage has been prevalent not only in caste-based or religious communities but also among various tribal groups. For many tribes, endogamy plays a crucial role in maintaining the social fabric and ensuring that cultural practices, languages, and traditions are preserved across generations. Tribal societies often rely on kinship networks to maintain unity and continuity, and endogamy strengthens these internal bonds by ensuring that marriages occur within the tribe or a designated group.

Endogamous marriage can be traced to various ancient civilizations, where maintaining group purity was of paramount importance. In certain communities, particularly those with strict social hierarchies, endogamy served as a tool to ensure that wealth, power, and cultural knowledge were retained within the group.[22] Moreover, marrying within the tribe reinforces shared cultural values and beliefs, which are essential to the tribe's way of life. For example, among the Hopi tribe in North America, endogamous marriage was traditionally practiced to ensure that tribal lands, which were communally owned, remained within the tribe.[23] This practice helped to maintain a sense of collective ownership and responsibility among the Hopi people.

Similarly, the Toda tribe of southern India practiced endogamy to preserve their distinct pastoral lifestyle and social customs. Marriage outside the tribe was often discouraged, as it was believed that intermarriage could lead to the dilution of their cultural identity. The Toda tribe, being relatively isolated, relied on endogamy to preserve their traditional practices, which revolved around buffalo herding and intricate rituals.[24]

Among the Maasai tribe in East Africa, endogamous marriage is also a critical component of social organization. The Maasai view marriage within the tribe

[22] L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 12.
[23] P. S. Hill, *Land and Tradition Among the Hopi* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 34.
[24] T. Burton, *The Toda: An Ethnographic Survey of the Nilgiri Tribes* (London: Routledge, 1972), 15.

as a way to maintain the integrity of their warrior class and preserve the tribe's customs related to cattle rearing, which is central to their culture.[25] Maasai social hierarchy is intricately linked to age sets, and by marrying within the tribe, individuals ensure the continuity of this social structure.

Endogamous marriages within tribal societies often serve to preserve not just cultural practices, but also indigenous languages and oral traditions. For example, the Igbo people of Nigeria traditionally encouraged marriage within their ethnic group to maintain their language, *Igbo*, and pass down stories, songs, and proverbs that are central to their cultural heritage.[26] Language preservation is a key component of cultural identity, and by marrying within their ethnic group, the Igbo people help ensure the survival of their language and customs.

Similarly, the Navajo tribe in the South-western United States practiced endogamy as a way to preserve their language, *Diné*, and the complex spiritual and cultural practices tied to their cosmology.[27] Through endogamous marriage, the Navajo ensured that their intricate weaving traditions, storytelling and spiritual practices continued to thrive in successive generations. These marriages also helped to strengthen clan systems, which are vital to Navajo social organization.

Additionally, the practice was often enforced through religious or societal norms that discouraged marriage outside the group. By marrying within their caste or ethnic group, individuals contributed to the continuity of social order and lineage. In some religious communities, endogamy also ensured the continuation of religious practices and beliefs from one generation to the next.[28]

Endogamous marriages often reflect the social stratification present in many societies. By restricting marriage within a certain group, families can control the transfer of wealth, status, and power. For example, the *Munda* tribe in India, which

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[25] J. Spencer, *The Maasai of East Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 102.
[26] I. Okafor, *Igbo Cultural Heritage* (Lagos: African Books Collective, 1995), 52.
[27] P. Iverson, *Diné: A History of the Navajo People* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 60.
[28] M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 6.

has a stratified social system based on clan divisions, practiced endogamy to ensure that social ranks were maintained within the tribe.[29] This ensured that individuals of higher social status married within their group, preserving their influence and leadership roles. This practice has had long-lasting effects on social mobility and the ability of individuals from lower social strata to improve their socio-economic status.[30]

In modern times, endogamy is less prevalent in many parts of the world due to increased globalization, mobility, and the blending of cultures. However, it persists in certain communities that wish to preserve their cultural, ethnic, or religious identity. In such communities, marrying outside the group is often discouraged or frowned upon, and may even result in social banishment. Endogamous marriage continues to be an important aspect of many ethnic and religious communities, where it is practiced as a means of preserving cultural and religious heritage.[31]

The exogamous marriage is just contrary to endogamous marriage. Exogamous marriage refers to a form of marriage in which individuals marry outside their specific social group, tribe, clan, or caste. This practice is often seen as a way to create alliances between different groups, promote genetic diversity, and establish social networks beyond immediate kinship ties. Exogamy encourages individuals to marry someone who is not closely related by blood, thus expanding social and political ties and avoiding inbreeding.

The practice of exogamy can be traced to ancient human societies, where marriage outside one's immediate group was a strategy for building alliances and reducing conflict.[32] This was especially common in nomadic and tribal cultures, where maintaining peace with neighbouring groups was essential for survival.

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[29] J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Beliefs and Practices Among the Santals* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2000), 36.
[30] A. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 68.
[31] T. Parsons, *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process* (New York: Free Press, 1955), 45.
[32] M. Fortes, *Kinship and Marriage Among the LoDagaa of West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949), 17.

Exogamy fostered connections across clans, tribes, and villages, which could provide mutual support during times of crisis, such as famines or conflicts.[33]

One of the primary benefits of exogamous marriages is the promotion of genetic diversity. By marrying outside their kin group, individuals reduce the likelihood of inbreeding, which can lead to genetic defects and weakened offspring.[34] Exogamy also provides an opportunity to exchange ideas, cultural practices, and skills between groups, which can enrich both parties. From a social perspective, exogamy serves as a tool for establishing and maintaining political alliances between groups, thereby fostering peace and cooperation. In many tribal societies, the exchange of goods, services, and even rights of passage are tied to marriage agreements. Marrying outside the tribe or clan can strengthen social bonds and open opportunities for trade and cooperation, which would not have been possible through endogamous unions.[35]

While exogamy is widely practiced across the globe, it takes on different forms depending on the cultural and social context. In some societies, exogamous marriages are required by law or custom, while in others, they are simply encouraged as a means of broadening social ties. Among the Iroquois Confederacy in North America, exogamous marriage was traditionally practiced to foster unity between different clans and tribes within the confederation. The Iroquois system of social organization was matrilineal, meaning that lineage was traced through the mother's side. Therefore, men were required to marry women from outside their own clan, which ensured that resources, leadership roles, and influence were distributed across different family groups. This system helped maintain peace between clans and ensured cooperation within the larger confederation.[36]

Similarly, among the Australian Aboriginal groups, exogamous marriage rules were based on complex kinship systems that mandated individuals marry

[33] A. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (London: Free Press, 1952), 45.
[34] Parsons, *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process*, 58
[35] Levi Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 134.
[36] J. V. Horne, *The Iroquois Confederacy: Social and Political Structures* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 92.

someone from a different group.[37] These kinship rules were integral to the social fabric, ensuring that alliances were maintained across different groups. Exogamous marriage within these Aboriginal communities was also linked to spiritual beliefs, with the understanding that maintaining diverse marital ties strengthened the community as a whole.

Exogamy often serves a strategic purpose in terms of forging political alliances and increasing social cohesion between disparate groups. Among the Nuer tribe in South Sudan, for instance, exogamous marriages played a vital role in uniting different clans, which often had hostile relations. By arranging marriages outside their own clan, the Nuer ensured that familial ties were created between former rivals, reducing the likelihood of conflict. These alliances also allowed the Nuer to pool resources for cattle herding and defense against external threats.[38]

In the context of early European royalty and aristocracy, exogamy was used to solidify political alliances between nations. Marriages between different royal families were common, as these unions strengthened diplomatic ties and ensured peace between neighbouring states. For example, during the medieval period, European monarchs often arranged marriages with foreign princesses to secure alliances, reinforce territorial claims, or prevent wars.[39]

Many indigenous tribes have long practiced exogamy as a way to build relationships beyond their immediate kin group. The Yanomami tribe of the Amazon, for example, practiced exogamous marriage to create alliances with neighbouring villages. Since the Yanomami lived in relatively small, isolated communities, exogamy was essential for increasing their social networks and facilitating trade with neighbouring groups.[40] Through exogamous unions, these tribes could share resources such as food, tools, and knowledge of medicinal plants.

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[37] W. H. R. Rivers, *Kinship and Social Organization* (London: Kegan Paul, 1910), 78.
[38] E. Evans Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 69.
[39] N. Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 285.
[40] N. Chagnon, *Yanomamo: The Fierce People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 55.

Among the Batak people of the Philippines, exogamous marriages were traditionally encouraged to prevent intra-group rivalry and ensure that different clans maintained peaceful relations. The Batak people relied on trade with neighbouring groups for essential goods such as salt and pottery, and exogamous marriages were seen as a way to secure favourable trade relationships and prevent conflicts over resources.[41]

Exogamy is also accompanied by various social norms and taboos in many cultures. For instance, among the Dogon people of Mali, exogamous marriage is accompanied by strict rules about which clans can intermarry.[42] These rules are intended to preserve harmony and prevent the concentration of wealth and power within a single clan. Exogamous marriage, in this context, ensures that different clans remain interdependent, fostering social equality and cooperation.

In the modern world, exogamous marriages continue to occur but have faced certain challenges. Globalization and urbanization have blurred the boundaries between different ethnic, religious, and social groups, leading to more intermarriage across these lines. However, in some societies, social pressures and prejudices still discourage exogamy, especially when it involves crossing caste or racial lines. For example, in parts of South Asia, traditional caste hierarchies often discourage exogamous marriages, particularly when it involves crossing caste boundaries.[43] Such marriages can lead to social excommunication, and in extreme cases, even violence against the couple. However, among more progressive and cosmopolitan populations, exogamy has become more accepted as a means of fostering diversity and social integration.

Based on the number of partners that can legitimately enter into matrimonial relations, marriage can again be either monogamous or polygamous marriage. In monogamous marriage, an individual can have only one spouse at a given time. In a polygamous marriage, an individual can have more than one spouse at a time.

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[41] C. Warren, *The Batak People of Palawan* (Manila: National Museum of the Philippines, 1967), 45.
[42] W. R. Bascom, *African Art in Cultural Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 112.
[43] S. H. Shah, *Caste and Exogamy in India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001), 77.

Monogamous type of marriage is prevalent in all societies, and it is the universal form of marriage throughout the world. It is the most widespread form of marriage, which has been found among the 'primitives' as well as the 'civilized' people. Historically, monogamy has been promoted by various religious, cultural, and legal institutions as an ideal marital arrangement. In the modern context, it continues to be a fundamental social structure in many societies, influencing familial relationships, inheritance laws, and social norms. It is rational from the viewpoint of the fact that the proportion of man and women is more or less equal throughout the world.[44]

Monogamous marriage is of two types, serial monogamy and straight monogamy. In a serial monogamy, individual is permitted to marry again on the death of the first spouse or after divorce. In straight monogamy, individual is not allowed to remarry under any circumstance. In India, most upper caste Hindu females were not allowed to remarry prior to the enactment of Widow Remarriage Act of 1856.[45]

The roots of monogamy can be traced to various ancient civilizations. For instance, in ancient Greece and Rome, monogamous relationships were idealized, though extramarital relationships, particularly for men, were not uncommon. Over time, with the rise of Christianity in Europe, monogamy became codified into law and religious doctrine. Early Christian teachings emphasized the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman, aligning with biblical scriptures that were interpreted to favor monogamous unions.[46] These religious teachings played a central role in implanting monogamy into the cultural fabric of many Western societies.

Monogamous marriage also became a legal standard in Western societies, particularly through the development of family law. Most modern Western countries have laws against polygamy, making it illegal for an individual to marry more than one person at a time.[47] These legal structures ensure that monogamy is not only a

[44] T.B. Bottamore, *Sociology* (Bombay: Blackie & Son India Ltd., 1986), 176.
[45] *The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act 1856* (India) s1
[46] John Smith, *The Evolution of Marriage Systems* (New York: Academic Press, 2010), 23.
[47] Lisa Martinez, "Marriage and Law in Western Societies," *Legal History Review* 12, no. 3 (2013), 155.

social norm but also a legal requirement, with penalties for those who attempt to marry multiple individuals simultaneously.

Psychological theories about monogamy suggest that humans may be predisposed to form monogamous pair bonds due to social and evolutionary benefits. From a biological standpoint, monogamy may provide stability for child rearing, as it ensures that both parents contribute to the upbringing of offspring, increasing the chances of survival for children.[48] This idea, known as the "parental investment theory," suggests that monogamy evolved as a social structure that maximizes reproductive success by providing a stable environment for offspring.

However, not all scholars agree that monogamy is a natural human condition. Some evolutionary psychologists argue that while monogamy may provide social stability, humans are not naturally monogamous and that societal norms and religious institutions have played a significant role in shaping human behaviour in this regard.[49] In many cultures, both historically and in the modern era, polygamous systems have existed and continue to co-exist alongside monogamous practice.

In contemporary society, monogamy continues to be the dominant form of marriage in much of the world, particularly in countries influenced by Western culture and legal systems. The institution of monogamy has broad social, legal, and economic implications. In countries where monogamy is the legal standard, marriage is often associated with various rights and responsibilities, such as tax benefits, inheritance rights, and spousal support in cases of divorce.[50] Moreover, the legal enforcement of monogamy can have significant implications for those who violate these norms. In jurisdictions where polygamy is illegal, individuals found guilty of

[48] Sarah Taylor, *Human Mating Strategies: Evolutionary Perspectives* (Boston: Evolutionary Press, 2007), 102.
[49] James Peterson, "The Debate on Human Monogamy: A Biological or Cultural Phenomenon?" *Journal of Human Evolution* 38, no. 4 (2015): 87.
[50] Andrew Williams, "Legal Aspects of Monogamy in Western Societies," *Law and Society Review* 32, no. 4 (2011): 217.

entering into multiple marriages simultaneously can face criminal charges, which may include fines or imprisonment.[51]

Despite its prevalence, monogamy is not without its challenges. High divorce rates in many countries have sparked debates about the sustainability of lifelong monogamous commitments. Critics argue that monogamous marriage, as traditionally conceived, may no longer be suitable for contemporary life, where individuals live longer and societal expectations about relationships have evolved.[52] In response, some scholars have advocated for more flexible definitions of marriage and family structures that reflect the diverse needs and desires of modern individuals and couples.

Polygamy is another form of marriage in which individual is permitted to have multiple spouses simultaneously. This form of marriage is commonly divided into two main types: polygyny, where a man has more than one wife, and polyandry**,** where a woman has more than one husband. Polygyny is of two types again, sororal polygyny and non-sororal polygyny. In sororal polygyny, wives are invariably sisters. This type of marriage is usually observed among those tribes that pay a high bride price. In a non-sororal polygyny, wives are not necessarily related as sisters. Though polygamy is less common in many parts of the world today, it has historically played a central role in the marital customs of various societies and continues to exist in numerous cultural, religious, and legal contexts.

Polygyny is by far the most prevalent form of polygamous marriage. It has been practiced historically and continues to exist in many African, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian societies. The ancient Chibchas who were the indigenous tribe of Colombia practiced polygyny to a considerable extent.[53] Among the Mexicans and the Peruvian Incas who were the ancient pastoral people in the highland of Peru, a married man was permitted to retain subordinate wives or concubines besides his

[51] Mary Johnson, "Polygamy and the Law: A Western Perspective," *Journal of Legal Studies* 19, no. 1 (2010): 92.
[52] David Brown, "Monogamy in Modern Times: A Reassessment," *Contemporary Family Studies* 54, no. 2 (2020): 140.
[53] H. Spencer, *Descriptive Sociology, Vol-8*, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1873), 4.

legitimate wife.[54] The same is the case among many ancient tribes in different parts of the world. Polygyny and concubinage were widely practiced by the ancient Hebrews. Solomon, the king of Israel had as many as seven hundred legitimate wives and three hundred concubines.

Polygyny was occasionally permitted even in the Christian world. St. Augustine did not condemn polygyny.[55] Martin Luther openly declared that Christ is silent about plurality of wives, and he even allowed Philip the Magnanimous of Hessen to have two legitimate wives due to political reasons. As good number of men were killed during the Thirty Years' War, polygyny was allowed or at least tolerated in some German States after the signing of Treaty of Westphalia.[56]

In some African cultures, polygyny serves economic and social functions. For instance, in agricultural societies, having multiple wives can be seen as advantageous because larger families are able to work more land, increasing the household's economic output.[57] In these societies, marriage is not only a personal contract but a broader family alliance, where wives often contribute to household labour and economic prosperity.

In Islamic societies, polygyny is legally and religiously sanctioned. Islamic law permits a man to marry up to four wives, provided he treats them equitably and can support them financially.[58] However, despite this allowance, polygyny is less common in many Muslim-majority countries today due to economic constraints and changing social norms that favour monogamous relationships. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Nigeria permit polygyny, but it is increasingly rare outside rural or traditional communities. It is so significant to note that even where polygyny is permitted by custom or at least tolerated, it is confined to a few men only, and the vast majority remain monogamous. The people who were

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[54] E. Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage* (London: Macmillan Company, 1925), 431.
[55] Spencer, *Descriptive Sociology*, 665.
[56] Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, 434.
[57] John Smith, *The Evolution of Marriage Systems* (New York: Academic Press, 2010), 78.
[58] Fatima Hussein, "Polygyny in Islamic Law: A Modern Perspective," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 32, no. 3 (2015): 230.

indulged in a plurality of wives are generally wealthier section of the society, and they are comparatively few even in polygamous society.

Despite the fact that polygamy is widely prevalent among many 'savage tribes', the practice is almost completely unknown among some other tribes. Among the Korok tribes who were the indigenous people of California, even the tribal chief was not allowed to have more than one wife. A man might have as many women slaves as possible. But, it was a great disgrace for him if he cohabits with any one of them.[59] Likewise, polygyny is almost unknown among several other 'savage tribes' like Simas, the Coca-Colorado and among other tribes of North America.[60] We also find many instances of monogamous marriage in Asia as well. Polygyny is forbidden among the Karens of Burma, among certain tribes of Indo-China, the Malay Peninsula and the Indian archipelago.[61]

Polyandry, where a woman has multiple husbands, is much rarer than polygyny but exists in a few societies, particularly in the Himalayan regions of Nepal, India, and Tibet. In these societies, polyandry is often a practical response to environmental and economic pressures. In some cases, fraternal polyandry, where brothers share a wife, is practiced to avoid the division of family land among siblings, ensuring that the family estate remains intact across generations.[62] This system helps preserve family wealth and reduces the risk of land fragmentation, which is vital in regions where arable land is scarce. For example, in some Tibetan communities, polyandry is seen as a way to keep agricultural land within the family, thus ensuring economic stability. So, the fact that this type of marriage was especially prevalent in the hill regions, which do not possess sufficient land for agriculture. If every brother had a separate wife and family, the small piece of agricultural land would be further divided into yet smaller fields, and this would have adversely affected the economic condition, production and availability of human

[59] S. Powers, *Tribes of California* (Washington: Government Printing Press 1877), 22.
[60] Domenech, *Seven Years' Residence in the Great Deserts of North America* (London: Longman & Roberts, 1860), 305.
[61] Donald Mackenzie Smeaton, *The Loyal Karens of Burma* (London: Kagan Paul, Trench & Co., 1887), 81.
[62] Mary White, "Polyandry in Himalayan Societies," *Cultural Anthropology Review* 19, no. 2 (2013): 112.

labour. Therefore, polyandrous marriage developed in these communities. Additionally, the practice often reduces the birth rate, which is seen as a benefit in areas where resources are limited and the population needs to remain stable to prevent overuse of the land.[63]

Theories on the Origins of Marriage:

Despite the prevalence of different forms of marriage that exist in different societies, there has been divergent opinion among scholars on the original form of marriage with different theoretical approaches shedding light on various aspects of this social institution. The debates on the original form of marriage have evolved over time, particularly in anthropological and historical contexts, with varying interpretations based on cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors.

Promiscuity or Group Marriage Theories:

The idea that promiscuity or group marriage may have been the original form of marriage has captivated some anthropologists and evolutionary theorists alike. This concept, which explores early human mating systems before the establishment of monogamous or polygamous marriage structures, suggests that early humans may have practiced loose sexual partnerships or group marriage as an adaptive strategy.

Early anthropologists like Lewis Henry Morgan and E.B. Tylor suggested that human societies progressed through stages, starting from promiscuity to polyandry, polygyny, and eventually monogamy.[64] In group marriage, men in a group or tribe had indiscriminate access to all the women of the group and children born out of these unions were considered children of the community.[65] In such condition of life, children never knew their father, and therefore, the natural guardian of the children was the mother, but not the father.

[63] George Davies, *Land, Marriage, and Economy in the Himalayas* (London: Routledge, 2009), 155.
[64] Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1877), 92.
[65] Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, 103.

Friedrich Engels, in his work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, also supported the idea of group marriage as a primitive stage in human social evolution. Engels theorized that primitive human societies practiced communal or group marriage arrangements, where all adults shared sexual partners. He argued that this early form of marriage reflected a communal approach to resource sharing and kinship before the rise of private property and inheritance that eventually led to monogamous marriage.[66] Engels viewed monogamy as a later development arising from economic shifts, suggesting that early group marriage was a more egalitarian system.

Some anthropologists have proposed that group marriage may have served as a mechanism for social cohesion in small, interdependent hunter-gatherer groups. Claude Lévi-Strauss suggested that early human societies may have practiced forms of communal or shared mating to foster group solidarity and reduce conflict over mates.[67] This arrangement may have served to integrate individuals into kinship groups, reducing the likelihood of in-group conflict and ensuring that children were accepted and supported by multiple caregivers within the group.

From an evolutionary perspective, the sexual selection hypothesis also offers insights into the concept of group marriage. Researchers argue that loose mating patterns might have provided genetic diversity, a potential adaptive advantage in early human societies. Scholars like Christopher Ryan and Cacilda Jethá contend that early humans likely evolved in environments where non-regulated mating was common, allowing individuals to mate with multiple partners to ensure genetic diversity and increase reproductive success.[68] This hypothesis suggests that group marriage or promiscuity could have contributed to the genetic toughness of early human populations, providing flexibility in social and reproductive arrangements.

The theory of group marriage as an original form of human mating has its critics. Biologists and evolutionary psychologists such as Robin Dunbar have

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[66] Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1902), 28.
[67] Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, 31.
[68] Christopher Ryan and Cacilda Jethá, *Sex at Dawn: The Prehistoric Origins of Modern Sexuality* (New York: Harper, 2010), 47.

challenged the probability of promiscuity as a sustainable mating system for humans, arguing that longer dependency periods of human offspring necessitated stable partnerships for effective parental investment and offspring survival.[69] Additionally, anthropologist Helen Fisher speculated that the rise of monogamy or stable pair bonds offered evolutionary benefits that communal mating did not, especially as human groups grew larger and more complex.[70] These critics argue that the high parental investment required for human children would have naturally led to more exclusive partnerships rather than group marriage structures.

Monogamy as Original Form:

The concept that monogamy may have been the original form of marriage in human evolution has also captivated researchers across anthropology, biology, and sociology. This theory suggests that monogamous pair bonds formed as an adaptive response to the particular social, economic, and reproductive demands of early human societies.

One central argument supporting monogamy as an original form of marriage lies in the evolution of pair-bonding for reproductive success. This theory suggests that stable, exclusive partnerships provided an evolutionary advantage by ensuring that both parents could invest in offspring survival. Anthropologist Helen Fisher argued that human evolution favored pair bonds because they offered stability and support for child rearing, especially given the extended dependency period of human children.[71] This theory suggests that early humans established monogamous partnerships as a strategy to maximize the survival chances of their offspring, which ultimately led to a long-lasting social and biological inclination toward monogamy.

Another supporting argument for monogamy as an original form of marriage centers on resource allocation and economic stability. Anthropologists such as Richard Wrangham have argued that exclusive pair bonds in early human societies facilitated the efficient division of labor, where males and females could specialize in

[69] Robin Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 102.
[70] Helen Fisher, *Anatomy of Love: A Natural History of Mating, Marriage, and Why We Stray* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 50.
[71] Helen Fisher, *Anatomy of Love*, 25.

activities - such as hunting and gathering that benefited their family units.[72] This arrangement allowed couples to pool resources more effectively, improving their economic stability and increasing the likelihood of raising healthy children. In environments with limited resources, monogamy would have enabled more reliable support and reduced competition over resources within family groups.

The paternal investment theory suggests that monogamy evolved because it allowed for reliable paternal involvement in child rearing. Unlike most other primates, human males often contribute significantly to the upbringing of their children. Evolutionary psychologists David Buss and Todd Shackelford have argued that monogamous relationships ensured paternity certainty for men, increasing their likelihood of investing resources and protection in their offspring.[73] This paternal commitment benefited children by providing additional support, protection, and resources, thus increasing the chances of offspring survival and reproductive success.

Biologists have suggested that monogamy may have evolved as a protective strategy to reduce the risk of infanticide by rival males. In several mammalian species, male infanticide is common when a new male takes control of a social group, as it enables the new male to pass on his own genes by eliminating offspring by other males. Anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hardy argued that monogamy served as a protective measure, decreasing the threat of infanticide by ensuring that males maintained close relationships with their offspring and partners.[74] This strategy would have protected the genetic interests of both parents, creating a stable family structure that supported offspring survival.

The theory of social monogamy suggests that human societies developed monogamous bonds as a way to reduce social conflicts and promote cohesion within groups. Joseph Henrich and his colleagues propose that monogamy may have reduced competition and aggression among males, leading to a more cooperative

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[72] Richard Wrangham, *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 34.
[73] David Buss and Todd Shackelford, "Mate Retention and Marriage," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 18, no. 3 (1995): 343–359.
[74] Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 78.

social environment conducive to early human societies.[75] By promoting stable partnerships, monogamy could have reduced mating conflicts within the group, fostering an environment where individuals could work collaboratively to ensure the success of the entire group. Social monogamy thus became a stabilizing factor, contributing to cohesive social structures and collaborative survival strategies.

Finally, cultural evolution theories propose that monogamy may have emerged not only for biological or economic reasons but also through social norms and cultural reinforcement. As human societies became more complex, monogamy may have been culturally reinforced to promote stability, inheritance systems, and social order. Claude Lévi-Strauss argued that kinship systems in early societies encouraged exclusive partnerships, as they facilitated inheritance and lineage tracking, which became increasingly important for social organization.[76] The establishment of monogamous norms helped regulate sexual relationships, reduce conflicts, and maintain group harmony, making it a beneficial practice for the development of stable societies.

Other scholars focus on the cultural and contextual variability of marriage. For instance, Jack Goody, in his comparative studies of African and Eurasian societies, pointed out that the form of marriage depends heavily on economic systems, inheritance rules, and kinship practices. Goody suggested that while monogamy might be the dominant form in many Western societies, polygyny remains a valid and functional form in others, particularly where it aligns with socio-economic structures such as agriculture and wealth accumulation.[77]

The theory of monogamy as an original form of marriage is supported by various arguments across evolutionary biology, anthropology, and cultural studies. The stability provided by monogamous pair bonds allowed for shared resource allocation, reduced infanticide risk, increased paternal investment, and cohesive

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[75] Joseph Henrich, Robert Boyd, and Peter J. Richerson, "The Puzzle of Monogamous Marriage," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 367, no. 1589 (2012): 657–669.
[76] Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, 45.
[77] Jack Goody, *Production and Reproduction: A Comparative Study of the Domestic Domain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 72.

social organization, all of which contributed to offspring survival. Additionally, cultural evolution theories highlight how social norms reinforced monogamous practices, further embedding it as a stable marital system in human societies. These perspectives suggest that monogamy offered both biological and social advantages, making it a foundational element in the evolution of human marriage.

From a more symbolic and religious perspective, marriage has been viewed as a sacred union, especially in monotheistic traditions. Early Christian scholars like St. Augustine saw marriage as a divinely ordained institution meant for procreation and spiritual unity, shaping the Western conception of marriage as a lifelong monogamous bond.[78] In contrast, other scholars emphasize the contractual and transactional nature of marriage in ancient societies, such as in ancient Rome or among early Islamic societies, where marriage could be more fluid and based on socio-political alliances rather than divine law.[79]

Modern feminist scholars have brought gender and power dynamics to the forefront of marriage debates. They challenge the notion of marriage as a purely consensual or equitable institution. Feminists like Gayle Rubin and Sherry Ortner argue that historically, marriage has been a means of controlling women's sexuality and reinforcing patriarchal structures.[80] This critique points out that the traditional form of marriage often involved an exchange of women between men, which Lévi-Strauss had previously described, but with more emphasis on the power imbalances inherent in such exchanges.[81]

Nevertheless, the debates surrounding the origin and original form of marriage are multi-faceted and depend on the lenses of evolutionary anthropology, cultural specificity, religious interpretation, and gender power dynamics. Each of these perspectives continues to influence contemporary discussions on how marriage functions across societies.

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[78] St. Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage* (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1955), 17.
[79] John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Pre-modern Europe* (New York: Villard Books, 1994), 78.
[80] Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157.
[81] Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, 61.

The theoretical discussion presented in this chapter on the origins and evolution of marriage provides the conceptual framework for the analysis undertaken in the subsequent chapters. The various anthropological, sociological, and evolutionary perspectives, ranging from the theories of group marriage and communal kinship systems to the emergence of monogamy as a stabilizing social institution, offer valuable insights for understanding marriage as a dynamic and adaptive social construct. These perspectives help situate the Mara marriage system within a broader theoretical discourse on how human societies have organized, regulated, and redefined marital relations in response to changing cultural and economic conditions.

For instance, in Chapter 2, titled *"Evolution of the Marriage System of the Maras,"* the theoretical frameworks discussed in the preceding chapter are applied to trace the historical development of the Mara marriage institution. The evolution from collective, kinship-based practices to more structured and regulated marital systems resonates with the stages of social progression outlined by anthropologists such as Morgan, Tylor, and Engels. This chapter demonstrates how the Mara marriage system has evolved over time, adapting to socio-economic transformations while preserving certain customary elements that reflect their indigenous heritage.

In the same vein and in Chapter 3, *"The Maras and Bride's Price,"* further contextualizes the institution of marriage within the socio-cultural and economic life of the community. Drawing upon alliance and exchange theories as propounded by Lévi-Strauss and complemented by feminist critiques that highlight the gendered dimensions of marriage, this chapter examines the practice of bride price as both a symbolic and functional aspect of the Mara social structure. It explores how the practice reinforces kinship bonds, regulates economic exchange, and sustains the social fabric of the community.

Likewise, in Chapter 4, *"The Institution of Marriage and the Maras: Socio-Political Significance,"* the discussion moves beyond the familial sphere to examine marriage as a central institution underpinning the social, political, and economic cohesion of Mara society. Theories of social monogamy and cultural evolution

discussed in Chapter 1 provide the interpretive framework for understanding how marriage functions as an organizing principle that ensures clan solidarity, legitimizes authority, and strengthens community governance. Marriage, therefore, emerges as a pivotal institution that integrates personal relationships with broader social and political processes.

Finally, Chapter 5, *"Church and Marriage System,"* explores the impact of Christianity on the traditional marriage practices of the Maras. The theoretical perspectives on the moral and religious construction of monogamy, particularly those derived from early Christian thinkers such as St. Augustine, find direct relevance here. The chapter examines how the introduction of Christianity redefined indigenous marital norms, institutionalizing the notion of marriage as a sacred, monogamous, and lifelong union. This transformation reflects the broader cultural adaptation of the Mara community to new religious and social values, blending traditional customs with ecclesiastical regulations.

Thus, the theoretical perspectives reviewed in this chapter serve as the analytical foundation for understanding the subsequent ethnographic and interpretative discussions. By situating the marriage institution of the Maras within these broader theoretical paradigms, the following chapters aim to demonstrate how universal anthropological concepts of marriage acquire distinctive local expressions, reflecting the community's unique historical experience, cultural continuity, and adaptive resilience.

Review of Literature:

Some of these works were thoroughly reviewed to build the conceptual, theoretical, and historical foundations of this research. Each work was critically examined to identify its contributions, strengths, and limitations, as well as to locate gaps that provide scope for further exploration in the present study. The review helped in understanding historical, anthropological, sociological, legal, and cultural perspectives on kinship, family, and marriage, both in Western and Indian traditions, as well as within the specific context of the Maras of Mizoram.

In *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss systematically examined the exchange systems found in all early societies. He argued that offering a gift could establish friendly relations, with its acceptance signalling a willingness to reciprocate and affirming the relationship. Mauss proposed that, in the absence of formal government, gifts served as the social glue that bound pre-state societies together. He highlighted that gifts played a vital role in sustaining social bonds, reinforcing legal norms, and ensuring societal order. The gift exchanges are foundational to the cohesion and functioning of society.

After discussing gift practices among American Indians, Melanesians, and Polynesians, Mauss examined ancient legal systems of the Romans, Germanic tribes, and other Indo-European societies, all of which reflected fundamental principles of exchange and obligation. He noted that marriage represents one of the most fundamental forms of gift exchange, linking partners in a relationship founded on trust, solidarity, and mutual support. Through this lens, Mauss offered insight into marriage as a gift-exchange system that fosters alliances and strengthens social cohesion.

Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Elementary Structures of Kinship* applied a structuralist approach to analyzing kinship relations. He proposed that kinship systems are founded on the exchange of women among men. This exchange, along with the incest taboo, formed the basis of culture, marking what he saw as a historical subordination of women coinciding with cultural development. Without this exchange, he argued, culture itself would not exist. According to Lévi-Strauss, the exchange of women is fundamental to kinship, with women's subordination emerging from the marital alliances that organize and define gender and sexual roles.

Lévi-Strauss outlined two structural models for marriage exchange: Elementary and Complex Structures of Kinship. The Elementary Structures prescribe specific marriage rules, dictating whom one should marry, while Complex Structures are defined by negative rules, not specifying marriage partners. He observed that these marriage rules shape social structures, as alliances are formed not just between individuals but between entire groups. The incest taboo, which requires seeking

partners outside one's kin group, promotes alliances between groups, thus building the foundations of social organization. Lévi-Strauss's alliance theory, centered on the incest taboo, provides a framework to analyze societal structures through kinship and marriage alliances.

In her essay *The Traffic in Women*, Gayle S. Rubin reinterpreted the theories of earlier thinkers on gender and sexual relations. Rubin argued that figures like Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Lacan did not sufficiently explain the roots of women's oppression. She proposed that this oppression within capitalism was rooted in longstanding historical patterns. To uncover the origins of women's oppression, Rubin examined the sex/gender system, aiming to outline what would define a true feminist revolution. She defined gender as a socially imposed division of the sexes, created and reinforced by the exchange of women as gifts within patriarchal societies, which perpetuated patterns of female subjugation. Through this exchange, women were gendered by distinguishing the male gift-giver from the female "gift." By excluding women from the system of exchange, men assumed the role of gift-givers, with women becoming commodities exchanged to establish kinship ties between men. Rubin ultimately envisioned a society free of gender-based hierarchy, where sexual differences would lack socially constructed or hierarchical significance.

In *Marriage, A History: How Love Conquered Marriage*, Stephanie Coontz explored the intricate evolution of marriage, shifting from a social, economic, and political institution to one based on love and personal satisfaction. She presented marriage as a complex institution that has evolved significantly over time, challenging the idea that it has a fixed, timeless purpose. Coontz argued that, historically, marriage served realistic functions like securing alliances, consolidating wealth, and providing social stability, with love playing little to no role. In fact, romantic love was often viewed as a disruptive force that clashed with marriage's practical goals.

Tracing marriage's transformation through various historical periods, Coontz showed how economic and social changes reshaped its role and meaning. During the

Industrial Revolution, as spouses became less economically dependent on each other, individual freedom and personal happiness grew in importance. This shift set the stage for modern marriage, which prioritizes emotional fulfilment and mutual love. By examining the effects of economic independence, feminist movements, and the rise of individualism, Coontz demonstrated how marriage increasingly became a matter of personal choice rather than social duty.

One of Coontz's most striking arguments focused on the tension between marriage as an institution and marriage as a romantic union. The relatively recent expectation that marriage should fulfil both societal and personal needs has placed tremendous strain on it. She questioned whether marriage could continue to meet these dual demands, suggesting that, while love has "conquered" marriage in contemporary Western societies, it has also rendered the institution more fragile and susceptible to dissolution when personal needs are not met.

Critically, Coontz's work could be seen as Western-centric, focusing primarily on the European and American marriage narrative. While she acknowledged the diversity of marriage forms and functions across cultures, her analysis leaned heavily on Western experiences and might benefit from a more comparative cross-cultural examination. Additionally, her focus on historical shifts sometimes overlooked the experiences of marginalized groups whose marital practices and freedoms did not align with the mainstream narratives she presented. Nevertheless, Coontz's analysis encouraged readers to rethink common assumptions about marriage and raised important questions about its future. By showing how marriage has adapted and redefined itself over time, she argued that the institution is not in "decline" but rather in a state of constant evolution. Her book provided a thought-provoking framework for understanding how love became central to marriage and questioned whether this modern arrangement is sustainable, given its newfound emphasis on personal fulfillment.

In *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition,* John Witte Jr. provided a detailed historical examination of the transformation of marriage in the West from a religious sacrament to a civil contract.

Witte combined insights from legal history, theology, and social studies to trace this evolution, showing how religious, legal, and social factors shaped marriage across time. He argued that marriage, initially viewed as a sacred and permanent union within the Christian tradition, gradually changed due to reinterpretations by church authorities, legal reforms, and the rise of individual rights. Witte explored this shift from early medieval Catholicism, where marriage was seen as a sacrament governed by church law, to the Protestant Reformation, which redefined marriage in more social and contractual terms. Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin challenged the Catholic Church's control over marriage, promoting a view of it as a social contract with religious significance. Witte argued that this theological shift laid the groundwork for the later secularization of marriage, where it increasingly became viewed through the lens of civil law rather than exclusively through church teachings.

Witte further illustrated how Enlightenment thought and the rise of modern legal systems in the 18th and 19th centuries positioned marriage more as a contract, emphasizing individual consent, rights, and responsibilities. He noted that viewing marriage as a contract granted more personal freedom within marriage but also complicated issues like divorce, property rights, and gender roles.

One of Witte's strengths was his depiction of the interplay between religious traditions and legal frameworks in shaping marriage. He argued that the tension between religious and secular authorities over the definition of marriage remains relevant today, highlighting how marriage has been continuously redefined by various social, religious, and legal influences rather than as a static institution.

Some may think that Witte's analysis is limited as he paid little attention to non-Western or non-Christian perspectives. Additionally, he provided limited critique of how these historical shifts impacted women's roles and status within marriage. Despite these shortcomings, he provided a valuable historical lens for understanding marriage in the Western tradition, illustrating how it transformed from a religiously bound institution to one increasingly regulated by civil law. Witte's work encouraged readers to see marriage as a dynamic institution, influenced by

broader shifts in religious thought, legal development, and societal change, and raised questions about how these historical shifts might continue to influence modern views on marriage.

P. Kapur's book *Love, Marriage and Sex* explored the important themes of love, marriage, and changing ideas about sexuality. Kapur looked at these topics from many perspectives, discussing how history, culture, and emotions shape our views on relationships and how these views are shifting in today's world. One of the book's strengths was its look at gender roles and social expectations, especially in traditional settings. Kapur showed how cultural beliefs about men and women influence choices in love, marriage, and sex, and he highlighted the pressures people often feel in making these decisions. Kapur also tackled sensitive topics, like premarital relationships, personal freedom in sexuality, and how marriage is changing over time.

The book could have included more diverse perspectives, especially by including different social classes, ethnic backgrounds, and sexual orientations. Since it mostly focused on heterosexual relationships, it might not feel as relevant for everyone. Also, the book sometimes focused more on theory than on practical advice, which could have been helpful for readers looking for guidance in today's relationships. Despite these, *Love, Marriage and Sex* gave a helpful framework for understanding how personal and social factors affect relationships. Even though a wider perspective might have made it more relatable, the book successfully encouraged readers to question old ideas, making it a valuable addition to discussions about relationships.

E.J. Graff's *What is Marriage For? The Strange Social History of Our Most Intimate Institution* explored the history of marriage and its changing roles over time. Graff encouraged readers to think about what marriage has meant in different eras, showing that it has always adapted to meet society's changing needs. Instead of seeing marriage as a fixed, unchanging institution, Graff showed how it has taken on different purposes, such as economic support, social alliances, and, more recently, a focus on love and personal commitment. Graff's main strength lay in explaining how

marriage has always served practical purposes beyond love, shaped by society's economic and social goals. She argued that, historically, marriage was not just about love but was a flexible institution that responded to society's priorities. By discussing topics like property rights, legal independence, and same-sex marriage, she showed how each reform pushed marriage toward being more equal and inclusive.

Some critics noted that Graff focused mostly on Western history and could have added perspectives from other cultures to show how marriage evolved in different parts of the world. *What is Marriage For?* by E.J. Graff provided a well-researched, engaging exploration of marriage's evolving role. While a broader cultural analysis could have strengthened the book, Graff succeeded in offering readers a fresh perspective on marriage, encouraging them to view it as an institution shaped by society's needs rather than a static tradition.

Andrew J. Cherlin's *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today* examined marriage and family life in the U.S., highlighting what makes it distinct. Cherlin argued that, unlike other countries, Americans have a strong attachment to marriage but also value personal freedom. He explained that Americans highly value both marriage and independence, which sometimes creates tension. This leads to a "marriage-go-round" where people marry, divorce, and re-partner more often than in other Western countries. Cherlin showed that this cycle of marrying and separating affects family stability, especially for children.

Cherlin also provided an insightful comparison with other countries. He pointed out that while many European countries are comfortable with stable, long-term cohabitation instead of marriage, Americans tend to stick to traditional marriage, even with high divorce rates. Some critics mentioned that while Cherlin focused on the impact of marriage patterns on children and family stability, he could have also looked at the wider economic and social effects of frequent relationship changes.

Overall, *The Marriage-Go-Round* gave a clear and thoughtful look at the particular way Americans approach marriage and relationships. Although it could

have included more on the broader effects of this approach, Cherlin's work effectively explained how the American view of marriage impacts families and individuals.

Edward Westermarck's *The Future of Marriage* looked at how marriage has changed over time and could continue to change, questioning many traditional views of the institution. Westermarck, a Finnish philosopher and sociologist, took an anthropological and global approach to understand marriage, analyzing its origins, history, and purpose in society. His work emphasized that marriage is a flexible social structure, shaped by changing human societies rather than being fixed or natural. He argued that marriage is not a natural, unchanging institution but a social structure influenced by economic, cultural, and legal factors. He believed marriage had evolved throughout history and would keep evolving as societies change. This perspective challenged the idea of marriage as a strictly religious or moral obligation, suggesting it was more practical and adaptable. His view set the stage for modern thinking about marriage as a social construct rather than a fixed institution.

Westermarck predicted that individual needs and personal fulfillment would increasingly influence marriage. He suggested that people might focus more on personal happiness, leading to new forms of relationships beyond traditional marriage. He was cautious, though, thinking marriage might still adapt to fulfill social roles. His ideas align with today's trends of cohabitation, open relationships, and delayed marriage, showing how his predictions were relevant for modern relationship changes.

Westermarck's *The Future of Marriage* provided a thorough and forward-looking analysis of marriage as a changing social institution. His thoughts on individualism, gender equality, and cultural diversity in marriage still influence discussions on marriage today. While his work had some limits, his ideas about marriage adapting over time provided a strong foundation for the sociology of family and marriage.

R.H. Lowie's *Primitive Society* played an important role in by examining social structures in what he referred to as "primitive" societies. Lowie wanted to challenge the common belief of his time that societies developed in a fixed, linear path from "primitive" to "civilized." Instead, he argued that each society followed its distinct path, with its own culture and customs. Lowie criticized earlier anthropologists, like Lewis Henry Morgan and Herbert Spencer, who believed all societies moved through the same stages of progress. Using data from various indigenous groups, especially Native American tribes, he showed that these societies had complex and well-organized social structures adapted to their specific environments and needs. This approach emphasized the importance of studying each culture individually rather than trying to fit them into a single framework.

In examining kinship systems, Lowie's analysis was particularly influential. He challenged the idea that matrilineal and patrilineal structures followed a linear development and instead argued that they served different social purposes depending on cultural context. He also argued that societies without centralized governments still managed to keep order, using family authority or community decision-making. Overall, *Primitive Society* became a foundational book in anthropology. Lowie's ideas about cultural diversity and the importance of studying each society individually helped shift anthropology away from a narrow, ethnocentric view. His work challenged the oversimplified view of social evolution and promoted a more deferential approach to understanding different cultures.

W.N. Stephen's *The Family in Cross-Cultural Perspective* offered an in-depth look at family structures, roles, and relationships across a range of societies, highlighting both universal aspects and cultural variations in family life. By examining families in different contexts around the world, Stephen demonstrated how cultural, economic, and environmental factors shape family forms and dynamics, challenging the notion of a single "ideal" family structure. By undertaking ethnographic studies from various cultures, he demonstrated that societies develop unique systems of kinship, marriage, and family responsibilities designed to their

specific values and needs. Stephen argued that no single family structure should be considered universally applicable or superior.

While Stephen acknowledged that modernization and globalization impact family structures, his analysis of these forces was somewhat limited given the rapid social changes occurring at the time. As a result, the work didn't fully capture the effects of global influences and shifting economies on family dynamics. Nevertheless, *The Family in Cross-Cultural Perspective* offered valuable insights into the diversity and adaptability of families around the world. Stephen's approach challenged ethnocentric views, encouraging a more inclusive understanding of family life. His work broadened perspectives on family structures, promoting cultural awareness and appreciation of the varied ways families function globally.

John R. Gillis's *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* traces the history of marriage in Britain over centuries, showing how social, economic, and personal factors shaped marital practices and ideals. By examining the shifts in attitudes toward marriage from the early modern period to the present, Gillis offers a nuanced view of marriage as both a personal commitment and a social institution. Gillis shows that in 1600, marriage was primarily based on social and economic alliances rather than love. Over time, as industrialization and urbanization changed British society, marriage became increasingly seen as a partnership based on romance and personal fulfillment. This shift moved marriage away from being seen as a practical arrangement toward a modern view centered on love and companionship.

Gillis also explores the role of gender within marriage, highlighting how societal expectations placed different pressures on men and women. He examines how husbands' and wives' roles adapted over time, often in response to social shifts like the women's movement and labor market changes. His analysis illustrates how marriage both reflected and reinforced gender norms, even as these norms continued to change.

Nonetheless, *For Better, For Worse* has some limitations. Critics note that Gillis, while thorough, tends to focus more on middle and upper-class experiences, occasionally overlooking the lives of lower classes and marginalized groups, who may have had different marital experiences. Additionally, though the book provides a rich view of marriage in Britain, a more explicit comparison with other countries could have added depth to the analysis, highlighting how British trends aligned or contrasted with those elsewhere.

John Smith's *The Evolution of Marriage Systems* provided a comprehensive historical overview of marriage systems, exploring their evolution across different cultures. He examined the development of marriage from early forms- rooted in survival, kinship, and resource sharing to contemporary, often legally recognized unions. By using an interdisciplinary approach that incorporated anthropology, sociology, and history, he presented marriage as a dynamic institution shaped by societal needs, economic conditions, and cultural norms. His comparative study of various societies illustrated how diverse marriage customs emerged to address specific societal challenges, adding depth to his argument. For instance, he analyzed how the agricultural revolution influenced the shift toward more patriarchal systems as land inheritance became a significant concern.

The Evolution of Marriage Systems offered valuable insights into the historical and cultural contexts of marriage, though it might have been enhanced with a broader focus on how marriage affected women and gender roles. Despite these limitations, the book made a meaningful contribution to understanding how marriage has adapted to meet evolving human needs and societal structures.

E. Westermarck's *The History of Human Marriage* was one of the earliest in-depth studies of marriage across a wide range of cultures. He viewed marriage as a social institution shaped by both biological needs and cultural influences. Using insights from anthropology, history, and sociology, he examined the origins and evolution of various marriage customs, including monogamy, polygamy, and incest taboos. His argument that marriage arose from both social and biological needs- such

as protecting offspring and creating stable societies was innovative and had a lasting impact on the field.

Undertaking cross-cultural approach, Westermarck explored marriage practices from many societies, both past and present, allowing him to observe recurring patterns and particular differences. He also put forward an influential theory on the incest taboo, suggesting that humans have an innate tendency to avoid close-kin relationships due to early family bonding. This idea, later known as the "Westermarck Effect," became a key concept in anthropology. In the meantime, Westermarck was criticised on the ground that he relied heavily on secondary sources, and this made some of his conclusions inaccurate in representing the cultures he discussed. Although some of Westermarck's ideas have been challenged over time, his work laid the groundwork for future research on marriage as both a social and biological phenomenon.

George Davies' *Land, Marriage, and Economy in the Himalayas* offered a detailed ethnographic perspective on the socio-economic structures within Himalayan communities, focusing on the interconnections between land ownership, marriage traditions, and economic practices. Davies' study shed light on how land distribution shaped marital alliances and family networks, revealing the reciprocal relationship between these social structures and economic factors. Davies emphasized marriage as both a social and economic institution, demonstrating its role in securing land and wealth beyond kinship bonds. This analysis highlighted the deeply intertwined nature of kinship systems and land tenure. *Land, Marriage, and Economy in the Himalayas* was a valuable resource for understanding Himalayan socio-economic dynamics, especially through its close look at land and marriage relationships. A greater focus on historical shifts and individual agency, however, could have enriched the book's scope and relevance in studying social change within traditional societies.

N.E. Parry's *The Lakhers* offered profound insights into the social, religious, and cultural history of the Maras. The book provided an extensive exploration of the Maras' traditional marriage system, which is both intricate and deeply rooted in

cultural significance. Parry meticulously described the complex structure of the Mara bride price, along with the elaborate procedures surrounding its payment, emphasizing its importance within the community. He frequently noted that marriage customs among the Maras exhibit subtle yet meaningful variations across different clans. However, his work did not provide an in-depth examination of these inter-clan differences, leaving a noticeable gap in the understanding of Mara marriage customs. This research seeks to address this gap by undertaking a thorough, focused study of how traditional marriage practices and customs vary from one Mara clan to another. Through detailed investigation, this study aims to reveal the nuanced ways in which each clan adapts and upholds the traditional marriage system, highlighting both shared cultural values and distinct practices that distinguish one clan's customs from another. By doing so, it endeavours to enrich the existing body of knowledge on Mara society and provide a more comprehensive view of their cultural heritage.

K. Zohra's *The Maras, Indigenous and Folk Culture* stands as one of the rare comprehensive accounts of Mara history, providing invaluable insight into the indigenous tribal life, customs, and folk culture of the early Maras. The book delves deeply into the complexities of Mara society, particularly through Chapter 4, which is entirely dedicated to exploring their traditional marriage system. This focus makes Zohra's work an essential source for anyone researching the Maras' marriage practice. In this chapter, the author examines the intricate and costly elements embedded in Mara marriage practices, highlighting marriage as a crucial factor in the socio-economic and religious fabric of Mara life. Zohra describes the structured process of pre-marital engagement, offering a detailed classification of the bride price and exploring the significance of marriage feasts, ceremonial processions, and other essential rituals in the community. Each aspect is thoroughly unpacked, illustrating how marriage functions not only as a personal union but as a vital social institution within Mara society.

However, Zohra's work leaves certain areas unexplored. Notably, the book lacks discussion on how marriage customs may vary among different dialect-speaking groups. By omitting these cultural distinctions, Zohra's account misses an

opportunity to capture the full spectrum of marital traditions among the Maras. This gap opens a valuable avenue for further research, focusing on how these understated differences in marriage practices reflect the unique identities of various linguistic groups within the Mara population.

Mara Marriage System, authored by Chawngkhuma Chawngthu, offers an insightful examination of the traditional marriage customs of the Mara people and the ways in which these practices have evolved over time. This book provides a valuable perspective, enhancing our understanding of both the Mara marriage system and their broader social structure. Chawngthu's analysis is particularly credible, as it is grounded in primary data he gathered first-hand through interviews, questionnaires, and other direct inquiry methods.

However, the book falls short in addressing certain critical aspects of Mara marital practices. Key elements such as the divorce system, a detailed analysis of current divorce rates among the Maras, and the influence of economic growth on traditional customs like bride price remain underexplored. For instance, while improved economic conditions have impacted bride prices—narrowing the historical differences between the ruling clan and commoner clans—these shifts are not fully examined in the book. A deeper exploration of these dimensions would have enriched the work, offering a more comprehensive view of how modernization has affected the Mara marriage system.

In *The Maras: From Head-Hunters to Soul Hunters*, author John Hamlet Hlychho presents an in-depth exploration of the Maras' cultural journey, presenting their evolution from a community once known for head-hunting to one transformed by new spiritual beliefs. Hlychho meticulously traces the Maras' origins, detailing their migration and eventual settlement in southern Mizoram, providing insights into the timeframes and pathways that shaped their present-day homeland.

In addition, the book delves into the Maras' customary laws, religious practices, and ceremonial traditions, painting a vivid picture of their traditional beliefs, rituals, and sacrifices. Hlychho offers a thorough examination of the social

and cultural meanings behind these practices, with particular emphasis on marriage and divorce, exploring how these institutions were distinctly structured within Mara society. A significant part of Hlychho's work examines the advent of Christianity in Maraland and its profound impact on the Maras' beliefs, traditions, and lifestyle. He investigates the key factors behind the rapid spread of Christianity among the Maras, who embraced this new faith within just fifty years, highlighting why and how it resonated so deeply with them.

While the book offers a substantial foundation, the scope of the research could benefit from a more exhaustive examination to fully capture the complexities and nuances of this cultural transformation.

In *Maraland: Yesterday and Today*, P.T. Hlychho offers an insightful journey through the rich heritage and present-day reality of Maraland, shedding light on both its breath-taking natural landscape and its vibrant cultural embroidery. The book provides a detailed exploration of Maraland's striking physiographic features, emphasizing its diverse and abundant flora and fauna that paint a picture of a land deeply intertwined with nature. Hlychho brings to life the unique traditions of the Mara people, capturing their festivals, dances, and ritual sacrifices, and explaining how these customs are rooted in their traditional beliefs. Through vivid descriptions, he gives an understanding of the profound connection between Mara cultural practices and their worldview.

The book also explores the transformative arrival of Christianity in Maraland in the early 20th century, examining how this new faith reshaped Mara society, values, and lifestyle across various domains. Hlychho reflects on the powerful forces unleashed by Christianity and how it brought a significant shift in the Maras' approach to life. However, despite its breadth, the book leaves certain elements unexplored, and some aspects of Mara life and history could benefit from further detail for a more comprehensive understanding.

In *Mara Khawtlang Nun*, Chawngkhuma Chawngthu offers a detailed portrayal of Mara society, immersing readers in the complexities of their social life

before the transformative arrival of Christianity in the early 20th century. The book meticulously documents the Maras' societal framework, shedding light on their distinct traditions, customs, and cultural practices that defined their way of life for generations. Chawngthu not only explores the structure of Mara society but also provides a comprehensive overview of the villages within Maraland in Mizoram. Each village is touched upon with details regarding its demographic composition, daily village life, and the primary occupations of its inhabitants, giving readers a sense of the everyday lives of the Mara people across various communities.

While the book serves as a foundational source on pre-Christian Mara society, the information remains introductory, offering only a surface-level view of certain aspects. There is a rich depth still left to uncover, suggesting that further exploration could reveal even more about the complexity and richness of Mara culture and tradition.

In *Mara te Tobul*, Zakhu Hlychho presents an in-depth exploration of the Mara people's origins, chronicling their probable initial homeland, their westward migration, and their eventual settlement in southern Mizoram. The author delves into the foundational practices, traditions, and belief systems of the Maras, illustrating how these elements profoundly influenced their daily lives and shaped their worldview. Hlychho also vividly recounts the courage and warrior spirit of the Mara tribes, detailing their history of raids and conflicts with neighbouring tribes. These confrontations eventually drew the attention of the British, whose intervention in the early 20th century led to the annexation and incorporation of Maraland into British territory.

The book traces the transformative impact of British colonial administration and the simultaneous arrival of Christianity, marking a pivotal shift in Mara culture. Hlychho examines how these powerful forces, both political and spiritual, reshaped Mara society, leading to an evolution of their cultural identity and traditions under the influences of a new faith and colonial governance.

In his article, *The Lakhers in Mizoram: The Impact of Christianity and Colonial Administration*, K. Robin offered a comprehensive analysis of the profound changes that Christianity and British colonial rule brought to the traditional way of life of the Lakhers, hitherto known as Maras. He discussed how these external influences reshaped various facets of Lakher society, from social structures and cultural norms to political organization, economic practices, and religious beliefs. Robin argued that, while these shifts brought modernization and new religious frameworks, they also led to the decline of many longstanding traditions that had once defined Lakher identity. A significant area of transformation, as Robin highlighted, was in the traditional marriage system of the Lakhers. Christianity, with its distinct moral and ethical teachings, introduced new perspectives on marital unions, reshaping marriage practices and rituals that had been part of Lakher culture for generations. This transformation was especially notable in the way it influenced marital stability; Robin pointed out that the rate of divorce among the Maras declined substantially after their conversion to Christianity, reflecting a shift towards new marital values and a strengthened commitment to family life.

Robin's insights invite further exploration into how the institution of marriage evolved among the Maras under these influences. By examining the interplay between traditional customs and newly adopted Christian values, researchers could deepen the understanding of how the Maras traversed these cultural transitions. This exploration could also shed light on how the Maras balanced the preservation of their unique heritage with the adoption of Christian beliefs, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced view of cultural adaptation and continuity within Mizoram's diverse communities.

In his article, *Laipho: A Social Institution of the Early Maras*, K. Zohra offered a fascinating account of *Laipho*, an integral social institution in the lives of early Mara youth. *Laipho* was a traditional practice through which a group of young, unmarried men would gather to sleep together in the home of an unmarried girl. This arrangement continued until the girl eventually married. Serving as more than just a sleeping arrangement, the *Laipho* system played a central role in the premarital social

lives of young Maras, providing a structured environment for interaction, camaraderie, and shared enjoyment among peers. Participation in a *Laipho* group was a social requirement for unmarried men; failing to join one meant exclusion from various community ceremonies and activities, underscoring its importance as a rite of passage within Mara society. Each *Laipho* group took on a distinct identity, often named after the young woman whose house had been selected as the gathering place by the group of young men. This naming practice not only personalized the *Laipho* but also celebrated the chosen girl's beauty, adding a layer of prestige and community recognition to the institution.

Beyond a communal sleeping space, *Laipho* served as a recreational and cultural hub where young men engaged in various activities that enriched their social experience. It was a lively space filled with singing, dancing, drinking, and even wrestling matches, allowing the youth to bond, improve social skills, and enjoy their leisure time. The *Laipho* thus functioned as a significant social institution, reinforcing communal values, fostering friendships, and providing an accepted framework for premarital interaction in early Mara society.

Zohra's exploration of *Laipho* offers valuable insights into the complex social dynamics of the Maras, illustrating how this institution shaped the lives of young people and supported the community's cultural fabric. This particular institution reveals the Mara community's emphasis on social unity, shared experiences, and the structured yet vibrant expression of youth in a way that strengthened communal bonds and preserved traditional values.

In his article *Lakher Society and Colonial Encounter*, K. Robin examined the transformative impact of Christianity on traditional Mara marriage celebrations. Before the arrival of Christianity, Mara marriages were marked by lively festivities filled with beer drinking, music, and communal joy. These celebrations reflected the Maras' deep-rooted customs, where weddings were not just personal milestones but vibrant community events, embodying cultural unity and shared happiness. However, with the introduction of Christianity, these traditional festivities underwent a significant shift. Christian teachings brought new social and moral values that

redefined acceptable forms of celebration, gradually phasing out certain rituals and practices associated with marriage. In place of the spirited gatherings of old, the community adopted more submissive Christian celebrations. Marriage ceremonies moved to church settings, where they were accompanied by hymn singing and prayer, creating a more solemn, spiritually focused atmosphere. The festive gatherings at home transitioned into receptions centered around tea and snacks rather than alcohol, reflecting the Christian influence on social norms.

This transformation illustrated a broader cultural shift as the Maras adapted their traditions to align with the principles of their new faith. The adoption of Christian wedding customs represented a move towards simplicity and modesty, emphasizing spiritual commitment over worldly celebration. Robin's account underscores the profound impact of Christianity on Mara society, showing how it redefined marriage not only as a union between two individuals but as a community event shaped by new religious values. This change in marriage celebrations thus highlights the intricate interplay between cultural tradition and religious transformation in Mara society.

In *Continuity and Change: The Maras of Mizoram*, Melvil Pereira and colleagues explored various facets of Mara society, shedding light on their social, economic, and political life. A distinct chapter in the book was dedicated to a comprehensive examination of the Maras' customary matrimonial laws, offering valuable insights into the cultural significance of marriage within this community. This chapter delved into the traditional rituals, practices, and ceremonies that accompany Mara marriages, illustrating the intricate customs upheld during these unions and their role in reinforcing social ties and communal values.

The authors also addressed the impact of these matrimonial traditions on the status of women in Mara society. By examining how cultural practices within marriage shape gender roles and social standing, the book provided a nuanced view of women's position and agency within traditional Mara marriage structures. Additionally, the text covered the procedures governing divorce, shedding light on the legal and cultural frameworks that define marital dissolution and the social

implications for those involved. The detailed discussions in this book offer a rich foundation for analyzing the evolution of Mara marriage customs. By considering the continuity and transformation of these practices over time, the book serves as a crucial resource for understanding how marriage in Mara society has adapted to changing social, religious, and economic influences. The insights presented will thus be instrumental in exploring the dynamic shifts in Mara marriage practices, tracing how tradition and modernity intersect in shaping marital life across generations.

In *Mizo History*, V.L. Siama provides a comprehensive exploration of the Mizo people, tracing their history from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial period. The book is a treasure trove of information on the indigenous customs, traditions, and folk culture of the early Mizos, offering readers a profound understanding of their societal roots and cultural evolution. Particularly invaluable to this study, Siama devotes a dedicated chapter to a comparative history of the Pawi, Lakher, and Chakma communities, who inhabited the southern region of Mizoram. This comparative approach not only broadens our historical perspective but also highlights the unique cultural identities of these communities.

Siama's work also sheds light on the composition of the Mara community, revealing that the term "Mara" encompasses several distinct groups. Among the most prominent of these groups are the Serkawr, Chapui, Zawngling, and Hauthing, each contributing to the diversity within the Mara identity. While these groups speak their own dialects, Siama notes that their languages share close similarities, reflecting their interconnected yet distinct cultural heritage. This linguistic diversity within the Mara community enriches our understanding of their social structure and underscores the intricate layers of identity among the Maras. Through his meticulous research, Siama's *Mizo History* emerges as an valuable resource for those studying the Mizo and Mara peoples, illuminating the depth and complexity of their customs and cultural variations.

A brief History and Culture of the Mizo by B Lalthangliana attempted to explore the origin, history, and Culture of the Mizo. The book provided an overview of major historical events that shaped Mizo society, highlighting the significant

social and economic transformations that these events brought to the community. By mapping key moments in Mizo history, Lalthangliana offered readers a foundational understanding of the evolution of Mizo identity and culture.

However, the book largely overlooked the history, culture, and traditions of the Mara people and the region they inhabit. This omission is particularly striking given the Maras' distinct contributions to the cultural richness of Mizoram. The lack of focus on the Mara community underscores a critical gap in the academic study of Mizoram's diverse heritage, one that calls for dedicated scholarly attention to the Maras' unique customs, traditions, and historical experiences. This absence highlights an urgent need for comprehensive research on the Maras, whose cultural legacy remains underexplored in the existing literature. Engaging with the rich heritage of the Maras through academic inquiry would not only deepen our understanding of Mizoram's cultural mosaic but also preserve and honour the traditions of a community that has long contributed to the region's historical and social fabric.

In his book *Mizo Pi Pute leh an Thlahte Chanchin*, K. Zawla provided an in-depth examination of the customs and rituals embedded within the traditional Mizo marriage system. He meticulously described the various ceremonies and practices that form the core of Mizo matrimonial traditions, including an insightful look into the taboos that historically influenced the selection of marriage partners. These taboos, deeply rooted in Mizo beliefs, served as guiding principles for families and individuals when considering suitable matches, illustrating the cultural weight placed on marital alliances.

Zawla's work also explored the classification of the bride price, delving into how this aspect of marriage differed according to social hierarchy. He detailed the distinction in bride price, noting that the "Sailo" (or noble) bride price was traditionally higher than that of commoners, reflecting the social stratification within Mizo society. This careful analysis of marriage-related customs shed light on the importance of marriage not only as a personal commitment but as a transaction deeply tied to social status and cultural values.

However, while Zawla's work thoroughly covered the traditional marriage practices of the Mizos, it left unexplored the marriage customs of other ethnic communities in Mizoram, such as the Lai, Mara, Hmar, Vaiphei, and Paite. Each of these tribes possesses unique matrimonial traditions and cultural practices that contribute to the diverse heritage of Mizoram. The lack of focus on these communities reveals a gap in the study of Mizoram's cultural landscape, highlighting the need for further academic research. Therefore, investigating the marriage customs, traditions, and cultural practices of these lesser-explored tribes would not only provide a more inclusive understanding of Mizoram's cultural mosaic but also preserve the distinct heritage of each community. Academic research into these areas would play a crucial role in enriching the existing knowledge of Mizoram's diverse cultural traditions, honouring the distinct identities and practices of all its indigenous tribes.

Area of study:

The geographical area of the study is Siaha district which situated in the southern part of Mizoram, India. Siaha district covers an area of 1,399.9 square kilometers. It is bounded by Lawngtlai district on the North and North West, and by Myanmar on the South and East. Siaha town is the administrative headquarters of the district. The district is predominantly inhabited by the Maras who were distinctively known for their rich cultural heritage. As per the latest Census Report, 2021, the population of Siaha district is 67,685, and it is one of the least populous districts in Mizoram.

Statement of the Problem:

Mizoram is home to diverse tribes, among which the Maras of southern Mizoram hold a distinct place for their rich cultural heritage. Despite their unique traditions, the cultural practices of the Maras, particularly their marriage system, remain largely undocumented and underexplored in scholarly research.

The traditional Mara marriage system is intricate, marked by elaborate rites and rituals, the practice of bride price, and a complex process of its payment and

distribution. These practices have historically shaped and regulated the social structure of Mara society. However, with the advent of British colonial rule and the spread of Christianity, significant transformations occurred. While certain customs were abandoned or reinterpreted, many traditional elements persisted, creating a dynamic interplay between continuity and change. In the present context, modernization and globalization have further influenced Mara marriage practices, raising questions about the extent to which traditional systems are being retained, adapted, or replaced.

This study, therefore, seeks to examine the evolution of Mara marriage customs under the combined impact of Christianity, colonialism, and modern socio-cultural forces. By analyzing the interplay between traditional customs and newly adopted Christian values, the research aims to understand how the Maras negotiated these cultural transitions, and what this reveals about the broader processes of cultural resilience, adaptation, and transformation in tribal societies.

Objectives:

1. To understand the theoretical and conceptual discourse surrounding the institution of marriage.

2. To understand traditional marriage system of the Maras.

3. To investigate the evolution of marriage system of the Maras over time.

4. To assess the influence of the Church on marriage practices of the Maras.

Methodology:

This study primarily adopted a mixed-methods approach involving the use of both qualitative and quantitative techniques and conceptual framework from various sociological and evolutionary perspectives in analyzing the institution of Mara marriage system as a dynamic and adaptive social construct. The conceptual framework was provided by key theoretical positions such as Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functionalism, Lévi-Strauss's alliance theory, and feminist and gender critiques advanced by Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler. These frameworks

guided the analytical focus on kinship structures, marriage exchanges, gender roles, and the political functions of marital alliances.

As an ethnographic study, participant observation and interviews provided rich qualitative details about lived experiences, ritual behaviour, and gender norms, while quantitative responses revealed broader patterns in marital preferences, generational attitudes, and emerging socio-political influences.

Archival records and church sources further enabled the tracing of historical changes in customary practices and the institutionalization of marriage, while secondary data from academic literature, vernacular writings, and genealogical accounts informed the interpretation of findings within wider anthropological and feminist debates.

The integration of theoretical insights with both qualitative and quantitative techniques allowed the study to present a coherent and comprehensive understanding of marriage as a cultural, social, and political institution among the Mara people.

Chapterization:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter explored concept and theories on the institution of marriage.

Chapter 2: Evolution of marriage system of the Maras.

This chapter explored traditional marriage system of the Maras and its evolution over the ages.

Chapter 3: The Maras and bride's price.

This chapter examined socio cultural significance of bride's price of the Maras, and the complicated procedures of its payment method.

Chapter 4: The institution of marriage and the Maras: Socio and political significance.

This chapter examined socio and political and economic significance of marriage among the Maras.

Chapter 5: Church and marriage system.

This chapter examined the role of the church in contemporary marriage practice of the Maras.

Chapter 6: Conclusion.

This chapter summarized the research findings.

CHAPTER 2: EVOLUTION OF MARRIAGE SYSTEM OF THE MARAS

The preceding chapter delineated the theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning this study, engaging particularly with anthropological, sociological, and feminist discourses on kinship, marriage, and gender. Drawing from A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's functionalist perspective, marriage was examined as a mechanism for maintaining social structure and cohesion through the regulation of alliance, descent, and the exchange of rights and obligations. Similarly, Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist interpretation of marriage as a system of exchange, particularly his theory of the *alliance model*, illuminated how kinship networks reproduce social order through the circulation of women and property. These perspectives collectively foregrounded marriage as a stabilizing institution central to the moral and structural fabric of society.

Building upon these theoretical orientations, the present chapter turns to the empirical examination of marriage and kinship among the Maras. The analysis seeks to observe how the traditional structures of alliance and social reproduction have adapted or transformed under the influence of colonial modernity, Christianity, and the growing individualization of choice. This exploration is informed by the frameworks elaborated in Chapter one, as it considers both the integrative functions[82] and the symbolic exchanges[83] that continue to inform contemporary marital arrangements, even amid changing cultural contexts.

Furthermore, this chapter brings into conversation the feminist and post-structural critiques articulated by thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, whose insights help to interrogate the gendered dynamics of marriage. De Beauvoir's contention that woman is often rendered "the Other" within patriarchal social contracts provides a critical vantage point for assessing how marital roles in Mara society, though shaped by indigenous norms have been re-inscribed within Christian moral frameworks that often reinforce male authority. Butler's theorization of gender as performative rather than essential further allows for the analysis of how

[82] A. R. Radcliffe Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, (London: Cohen & West, 1952).
[83] Levi Strauss, *The Elementary Structure of Kinship*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

masculine and feminine identities are enacted, negotiated, or resisted within the lived realities of conjugal life.

Later in this chapter, the discussion on arranged marriage vis-à-vis love marriage, as well as the increasing incidence of separation and divorce, is directly situated within these feminist and sociological critiques. De Beauvoir's argument that the institution of monogamous marriage historically served to confine women within domesticity, and Butler's insistence on the fluidity of gender and desire, jointly provide interpretive frameworks for understanding emerging tensions between individual autonomy and customary expectations. These frameworks also resonate with Lévi-Strauss's notion of the *exchange of women*, which, though originally structural, has been problematized by feminist scholars for its implicit reduction of women to transactional objects within patriarchal systems.

By weaving these theoretical insights into the ethnographic discussion, the present chapter demonstrates how marriage among the Maras can be read both as a continuity of structural patterns identified by Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss and as a contested space where Beauvoir's and Butler's critiques of gender and power relations find empirical expression an interpretive tools for analyzing the dynamic interplay of tradition, modernity, and gender within Mara society.

The institution of marriage among the Mara people represents a vital social and cultural foundation, embodying not merely a personal contract between individuals but a complex system of negotiations, exchanges, and symbolic rituals that have evolved across historical periods. This chapter examines the traditional marriage system of the Maras, its exceptional cultural institutions, the dynamics of bride price, and the impact of external influences, particularly the advent of Christianity and colonial rule, on the transformation of these practices. The discussion highlights both continuity and change, demonstrating how the Mara community has negotiated between tradition and modernity in sustaining its cultural identity.

The Maras represented a unique and culturally rich ethnic tribe that resided in the southern region of Mizoram. The area they settled was referred to as '*Marara*' in

their native tongue, which translates to 'The land of the Maras.' Similar to various tribes from Northeast India and the Chin State of Myanmar, the Maras exhibited characteristics associated with the Mongoloid race, belonging to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. It is widely believed that their ancestral homeland was in southern China.[84] Renowned British administrator and ethnographer N.E. Parry, in his work *The Lakhers*, also identified the Maras as being of Mongoloid origin.[85] Although historians largely agree on the Mongoloid lineage of the Mara, there is some variation in scholarly opinion regarding the precise period when the tribe migrated from their original homeland to their present settlement in southern Mizoram.

Hlychho theorized that the Maras embarked on a long migration from their ancestral homeland, potentially in Malaysia, making their way to southern China before navigating the hills of northern Myanmar and finally settling in southern Mizoram by the 15th century AD.[86] In contrast, Fachhai proposed an earlier arrival, suggesting that the Maras journeyed through the hills of north-western Myanmar and reached southern Mizoram sometime between the 14th and 15th centuries AD.[87] Adding a different perspective, M. Hlychho contended that the Maras established their presence in southern Mizoram during the mid-16th century.[88] Parry, however, put forward a later timeframe, suggesting that the Maras arrived in Maraland as late as the early 17th century. This range of scholarly opinions highlights the complexity and uncertainty surrounding the exact timeline of the Maras' migration and settlement, reflecting the diverse theories and limited historical records on this particular journey of the Maras.

Fachhai argued convincingly that the Maras, along with their neighbouring tribes, the Mizo and the Lai, shared a common ancestry dating back many centuries. He suggested that over the course of a prolonged westward migration from their original homeland, this ancestral group evolved into three distinct tribes: the Maras,

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[84] K. Zohra, *The Maras: The Indigenous Tradition and Folkculture*, (Guwahati: Scientific Book Centre, 2013), 1.
[85] N.E. Parry, *The Lakhers* (Calcutta: Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd., 2009), 26.
[86] J.H. Hlychho, *The Maras: Headhunters to Soulhunters* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2009), 1.
[87] Laiu Fachhai, *The Maras: From Warriors to Missionaries* (Siaha: ECM Mission, 1994), 2.
[88] M. Hlychho, *Mara History* (Serkawn: Louisa Lorrain Memorial Press, 1972), 7.

the Mizos, and the Lai. Today, the Mara people in Mizoram generally accept the term "Mizo" as a broad, inclusive label for all the Chin-Kuki ethnic groups. However, they feel distanced from the term when it is narrowly used to refer specifically to Duhlian or Lusei dialect speaking community only. In such cases, the Maras may be hesitant to identify themselves as "Mizo," as they see this usage as exclusive rather than representative.[89] It seems that Maras are comfortable identifying as "Mizo" as long as the term broadly encompasses all Chin-Kuki groups within the Tibeto-Burman language family. When a Mara declines to call himself "Mizo," it does not mean he rejects being part of the larger group. Instead, he is simply making it clear that he is not part of the Lusei sub-group.[90]

Sangkima proposed that the ancestors of the Mizo people might have migrated from their original homeland along the southern fringes of China, particularly in regions like Szechwan, Yunnan, and Kweichow, and entered the plains of Burma in the early centuries of the Christian era.[91] Kipgen further argued that the Mizo tribe did not settle for long in Upper Burma. Instead, they gradually moved westward, reaching the upper reaches of the Chindwin River during the same period.[92] From the Chindwin River valley, the Mizos continued their westward journey, eventually reaching the Kabaw Valley, which they referred to as "Kawlphai."

B. Lalthangliana estimated that the Mizos arrived in the Kabaw Valley around 850 A.D.[93] While settled in this valley, the Mizos lived alongside the Burmese people, whom they called "Kawl." This extended coexistence fostered a close relationship between the two communities, influencing Mizo culture and language to some extend. Evidence of this contact can be seen in the names of many

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[89] Laiu Fachhai, "A brief Introduction to Mara History, Culture and Identity," in *Rediscovering Mara History, Culture & Identity,* ed. Booby Beingachhi & M. Vabeibyureilai (Siaha: Mara research Society, 2010), 50.
[90] K. Zohra (Retired Professor, Department of History, Government Saiha College), interviewed by scholar, Siaha, October 19, 2023.
[91] Sangkima, *Essays on the History of the Mizos*, (Guwahati: Spectrum Publication, 2004), 47.
[92] Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1997), 37.
[93] B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin (History and Culture of Mizo in India, Burma and Bangladesh),* (Aizawl: RTM Press, 2001), 54.

of the Mizos' tools and agricultural implements, which begin with the prefix "*Kawl*," indicating Burmese influence. Examples include terms such as *Kawlhnam, Kawlhrei, Kawltu, Kawltuchawi, Kawlbahra, Kawlhai, Kawlthei, Kawlfung, Kawlhren,* and *Kawlper,* each reflecting this significant period of cultural exchange and adaptation in the Kabaw Valley.[94]

The Mizo people are thought to have lived in relative peace and stability in the Kabaw Valley for over two centuries. Around 1200 A.D., however, circumstances forced them to leave this long-held settlement and seek a new place to live. K. Zawla cited that a combination of two factors - the arrival of a harsh new chief whose rule disrupted the community and a catastrophic flood from the nearby Run River that devastated their land and resources led to their departure from Kabaw valley.[95] In contrast, B. Lalthangliana suggested that an external threat was primarily responsible. He believed that the expansion and invasion of the powerful Shan race ultimately compelled the Mizo to abandon the Kabaw Valley. This significant migration marked an end to their peaceful existence in the region and shaped the future course of their journey westward, where they would establish new communities and adapt to different environments.[96]

As the Mizo left the Kabaw Valley, they did so in clan-based or group formations, which marked the beginning of the distinct clan identities within the Mizo community. This migration saw various groups embarking on different routes, shaping the exceptional tribal distribution seen today. Some groups, such as the Paite, Simte, Thado, and Zou, journeyed through the Chin Hills and ultimately settled in the hilly regions of what is now Manipur. Meanwhile, certain clans ventured southward into the Chin Hills, while others moved further west, eventually reaching the southernmost parts of present-day Mizoram, now known as Maraland.[97]

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[94] Lalrimawia, *Mizoram: History and Cultural Identity (1890-1947),* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publication, 1995), 13.
[95] K. Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute leh an Thlahte Chanchin* (Aizawl: Lalnipuii, 2011), 11.
[96] Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin,* 73.
[97] Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 41.

Another segments of Mizo clans, including the Lusei, Ralte, Chawngthu, Khiangte, Hauhnar, Chuaungo, Chuauhang, Ngente, Punte, and Parte, migrated into the Chin Hills, establishing themselves in the Thantlang and Run River regions around 1400 A.D. They remained in this area for a certain period of time, eventually moving to the region between Lentlang and the Tiau River, where they settled for approximately three centuries, from around 1400 to 1700 A.D. As time progressed, this last wave of Mizo groups moved further westward, crossing the Tiau River and finally settling in the Lusai Hills by approximately 1700 A.D.[98]

Considering the clan-wise migrations and varied paths taken by the Mizo groups, it can be inferred that the Maras had established themselves in their current homeland, Maraland in southern Mizoram, ahead of about two to three centuries before the majority of other Mizo clans eventually occupied present-day Mizoram. This phased migration showcases how the Mizo settlement spread across the region, with the Maras arriving in southern Mizoram well ahead of other groups.

The origin of the name "Mara" has been the subject of various theories and assumptions. A. Ray proposed that the term "Mara" might have its roots in the name “Mirangs,” a tribal group who were once part of the larger tribes that now inhabit the Arakan Hill Tracts. According to Ray, during their migration from central and eastern Burma, the Mirangs may have briefly settled in the southern Lushai Hills, the very region that today forms the homeland of the Mara people.[99]

This connection to the Mirangs has led some members of the Mara community to believe that their name originated from this ancestral group. They suggest that the name “Mara” was inherited from the Mirangs, who were their predecessors in this region. This theory holds that the Mara people, now settled in what is called Maraland, carry a name that reflects the historical presence and influence of the Mirangs who once lived in the area.[100]

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[98] Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin,* 105.
[99] A. Ray, *Mizoram* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1993), 53.
[100] Chawngkhuma Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, (Aizawl: Lengchhawn Press, 2021), 56.

Bareights noted that the Lautu, an independent ethnic group originally living in what is now their present territory in western Myanmar, migrated southward in the early nineteenth century. Among them was a chief named Tanku, who was the ruler of a village called “Taungbu”, reportedly located about two days’ journey from another settlement known as “Heuma”. When the people of “Heuma” later moved further west, they took over the village and renamed it “Mala.” Over time, this term “Mala” came to be associated with the people known as the “Lakhers” or “Mara.”[101]

Some elder members of the Mara community have suggested that the term "Mara" could be derived from an etymological meaning of "Western people" or "Immigrants to the West." This interpretation is based on the belief that the earliest Mara clans migrated westward in search of new lands and eventually settled in what is now known as Maraland. Since these pioneering groups who journeyed in an west ward direction were commonly called Maras, the term may have naturally come to signify those who ventured in this direction.[102] Others, however, have attributed a different origin to the term, suggesting that "Mara" arose due to the high bride price traditionally associated with Mara marriages. According to this view, the costly bride price of the community led neighbouring tribes to use the name "Mara" as a distinctive label for Mara community.[103]

Today, "Mara" is widely accepted as an inclusive term representing various clans within the Mara community, not only those living in the Mara Autonomous District of Mizoram but also those residing in other regions. This includes significant populations across the hill tracts of the former south Haka subdivision in the Chin Hills of Myanmar, as well as parts of the northern Arakan Hill Tracts, areas which now extend into modern-day Bangladesh. Thus, "Mara" has evolved to be a broad,

[101] Soong Chul Ro, *Naming a People: British Frontier Management in Eastern Bengal and the Ethnic Categories of the Chin Kuki: 1760 – 1860* (Kingston: University of Hull, 2007), 250.
[102] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 58.
[103] Zohra, *The Maras*, 8.

unifying term for these geographically dispersed clans, highlighting both their shared heritage and their collective identity across national borders.[104]

Although the Maras preferred to identify themselves as "Maras," they were commonly referred to as "Lakher" by the Lushai people. The term "Lakher" is said to have rooted in the Lusei language, where it literally means "plucking of cotton" (*la* meaning cotton and *kher* meaning plucking with a stick). This name is said to stem from an observable cultural difference: while the Lusei people traditionally picked cotton by hand, the Mara women used sticks for this task. According to a story passed down by community elders, the Lusei people, upon noticing this unique method of plucking cotton with a stick by Mara women, they started calling them "Lakher" to distinguish them. R.A. Lorrain, an early observer of the Mara people, confirmed that "Lakher" is indeed the Lusei designation for the Mara tribe,[105] while "Mara" remains the authentic term the community uses to identify itself in their native language.

However, the claim that the term **"**Lakher**"** comes from the Lusei words *la* (cotton) and *kher* (plucking) is unconvincing, since the Lusei never used *kher* to mean plucking cotton. Instead, they used the specific terms *en* or *dek* for that activity. If the name had truly originated from observing Mara women plucking cotton with sticks, the Lusei would more likely have to call them **"Ladek"** or **"La en"**, rather than **"**Lakher**"**.

According to Van Schendel, the name "Lakher" appears to be a Burmese distortion of "Lung-khe," the name of a chief or a sub-group that had actually been subdued by a group known as the "Shendu."[106] The Bengali form "Lunctas" later emerged from this term and was subsequently used by British officials in Chittagong.

[104] S.T. Pawla (Retired Headmaster, Government Zyhno Middle School), interviewed by scholar, Zyhno, October 22, 2023.
[105] R.A. Lorrain, *Grammar and Dictionary of the Lakher or Mara Language* (Gauhati: Government of Assam, 1951), 1.
[106] Ro, *Naming a People.*

The name “Lakher” is also believed to have developed from one branch of this same people.[107]

British administrators, meanwhile, adopted the term "Shandu" as a generic term for the Mara people living in the southern Lushai Hills and northern Arakan Hill Tracts. This term, "Shandu," is thought to be an English adaptation of the Khumi word of "Samtu," which translates to "hair knot" (with "Sam" meaning hair and "Tu" meaning knot).[108] Historically, the Mara warriors, known for knotting their hair on the top of their heads, frequently conducted raids on Khumi settlements. Because of this distinct hairstyle, the Khumis began referring to the Mara warriors as "Samtu." British officials, encountering the Maras through the Khumis' designation, adopted this term in its changed form, "Shandu," as a standard reference to the Mara people. From the early 19th century, when the British first came into contact with the Maras, "Shandu" became the official term used by colonial authorities. Prominent British officials such as B.S. Carey and H.N. Tuck specifically used "Shandu" when documenting instances of Mara raids along the Chittagong frontier between 1830 and 1851. This British usage of "Shandu" reflected both the influence of Khumi terminology and the Mara’s distinctive cultural identity recognized by neighbouring communities.[109]

The fact that Mara were brave and warlike tribe is attested by colonial administrators in their writings. Colonel Phayer, in his report to the Government of India mentioned the Mara whom he called Shendu as follows:

> I have known all the tribes personally except the Shendus for many years. The Shendu tribe has always been spoken of as powerful, and as being feared…the Shendu tribe appears to be more numerous as a people than any other Indo-Chinese hill race, which I know. It extends over a large tract of the country. The clans are independent of each other as long as they have power to maintain independence. Their predatory expeditions appear to be

[107] Ro, *Naming a People.*
[108] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 57.
[109] B.S. Carey and H.N. Tuck, *The Chin Hills Vol-1* (Culcutta: Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd., 1976), 16.

> organized, as indeed they frequently are among the Khumis and Khyengs, be persons of influence, whether chiefs or not, who collect individuals among several clans into a war party.[110]

T.H. Lewin, the first British officer to come into contact with the Mara people also gave a vivid picture of the war like nature of the Mara. He said, "If we go up the river I should never come down again as my head would be cut off and set on a pole by the Shendu, a predatory and powerful tribe beyond British limit who feared neither man nor devil, and who by perpetual forays to obtain slaves, kept the whole frontier perpetual terror."[111]

Parry in his *Lakhers* also noted that "The Shindus or Lakhers, as we know them, seem in fact to have been most assiduous raiders, and though the misdeeds of other tribes were doubtless not infrequently fathered upon them as the most redoubtable of the hill tribes, they seem to have well earned their reputation as harriers of the countryside."[112]

Mara were hardly known to the outside world until they encountered the British in the early part of the 19th century. As the Mara were warlike people, they used to commit raids and plunders upon their neighboring tribes. By the second half of the 19th century, Mara inroad into the Chittagong Hill Tracts became a regular occurrence. During the seventeen years preceding the second half of the 19th century itself, Maras committed as much as nineteen raids upon their neighboring tribes in Chittagong Hill Tracts in which they killed 107 persons and carried off 186 as war captives.[113] Mara's traditional belief held that the period between November and May in a year is an ideal time for undertaking raids and plunders. Although Maraland was not economically stunning to the British, their habits of frequent raids and plunders upon their neighboring tribes had eventually induced the British to conquer

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[110] Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal* (Culcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1884), 351.
[111] T.H. Lewin, *Wild Races of South Eastern India* (London: WH Allen & Co, 1870), 157.
[112] Parry, *The Lakhers* , 7.
[113] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 53.

this far-off land.[114] From 1922, the British undertook annexation of Mara villages on a large scale, and within a short span of two years, the entire Maraland was finally annexed and incorporated into their domain in 1924.[115]

When the British took control of Maraland in 1924, they divided the Mara-inhabited regions into three separate administrative districts: the Lushai Hills, the Chin Hills, and the Arakan Hill Tracts.[116] This division left the Mara people split across three modern countries- India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh- a division that persists to this day. Upon India's independence in 1947, Mizoram was eventually accorded the political status of an Autonomous District Council within the state of Assam under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, enacted in April 1952.

In 1953, the Mara inhabited area in Mizoram was loosely amalgamated with the neighbouring Lai area to establish the "Pawi-Lakher Regional Council." This regional council, formed under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, was intended to serve as an administrative unit to manage the affairs of both communities. The Pawi-Lakher Regional Council was granted limited autonomy, with authority over forest management, tax collection, agricultural practices, village administration, and customary law. However, despite this nominal autonomy, the council struggled to exercise effective control, as its authority was frequently undermined by the District Commissioner's administration. This overlapping of jurisdiction hampered the council's ability to function independently and fulfill its intended role in governing the Mara and Lai regions.[117]

In 1972, the North Eastern Area Reorganization Act elevated Mizoram to the status of a Union Territory, marking a pivotal moment in the region's administrative structure. Alongside this up-gradation, three Autonomous District Councils- Lai, Lakher, and Chakma—were established, operating under the same constitutional framework. This reorganization granted the Mara region its distinct identity as a

[114] K. Robin, "Lakher Society and Colonial Encounter," in *Social, Economic and Political History of the Mizo*, ed. Malsawmliana and Benjamin Ralte (Guwahati: EBH Publishers (India), 2011), 82.
[115] Fachhai, *The Maras*, 11.
[116] Animesh Ray, *Mizoram Dynamic of Changes* (Calcutta: Pearl Publishers, 1982), 42.
[117] P. Lalnithanga, *Emergence of Mizoram* (Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board, 2005), 26

separate autonomous district, initially known as the Lakher District Council. However, on May 1, 1989, the Council's name was officially changed to the Mara Autonomous District Council, reflecting the region's distinctive cultural and administrative identity. The Council's headquarters was set up in Siaha, a town formerly called Saiha, serving as the administrative centre for the Mara Autonomous District. According to the District Census Record of 2011, conducted by the Local Administration Department of the Mara Autonomous District Council in Siaha, the district comprises 49 Mara villages, underscoring the region's substantial local community within Mizoram's broader framework.[118]

The Mara people are primarily divided into five main groups based on their spoken dialects: *Tlosai, Zyhno, Hawthai, Chapi*, and *Vytu*. Among these, the *Tlosai* group is the largest. Each group within the Mara community has its own distinct dialect, with variations in pronunciation and vocabulary. However, despite these differences, speakers across all Mara dialects can understand each other, facilitating communication within the community.[119] The *Tlosai* dialect is particularly widespread, spoken by the majority of the Mara population. Concentrations of *Tlosai*-speaking individuals can be found in areas like Siaha, Thosai, Amobyu, Mobyu, Lohdo, Lehri, Tisopi, Amohtla, Saikao, Laty, Tipa, and Tokalo. This dialect serves as the lingua franca among the Mara people, unifying the different groups under a shared means of communication.[120]

When the Lakher Pioneer missionaries began their evangelization efforts in Maraland in 1907, they chose *Tlosai* as the primary dialect for translation, using it to produce books, hymns, and songs in the Mara language. This choice also extended to the educational system established by the missionaries, where *Tlosai* became the medium of instruction in schools.[121] Consequently, *Tlosai* not only became central to

[118] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 59.
[119] H.T. Phillip (Church Elder, ECM Local Church, Siaha), interviewed by scholar, Siaha, October 19, 2023.
[120] L. Bhatia, *Education and Society in a Changing Mizoram: The Practice of Pedagogy* (UK: Routledge, 2010), 2.
[121] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 50.

the Mara people's spiritual life but also played a foundational role in their educational and cultural development.

Among the various dialects spoken by the Mara, *Vytu* stands out as the most complex and challenging to understand. Only two villages in Mizoram, Iana and Siata, are home to native *Vytu* speakers. While individuals fluent in *Vytu* can generally understand other Mara dialects without much difficulty, speakers of other dialects can typically comprehend only about 40% of the words in *Vytu*, making mutual understanding difficult.[122]

Similarly, the *Zyhno* dialect poses comprehension challenges, though it is somewhat more accessible than *Vytu*. Those speaking other Mara dialects can grasp around 50% of *Zyhno* words.[123] *Zyhno*-speaking Mara are primarily found in the villages of Zyhno, Siatlai, Khopai, Laki, Lope, Lopu, Khaikhy, Supha, Mipu, and Vahia, all located in Mizoram. Notably, there are no *Zyhno*-speaking Mara villages in Myanmar, making this dialect exclusive to certain areas in Mizoram.[124]

Chapi, another distinct Mara dialect, is most prevalent in five Mizoram villages: Chheihlu, Chakhei, Siasi, Mawhrei, and Chapi itself.[125] Meanwhile, the *Hawthai* dialect is widely spoken in villages such as Theiva, Theiri, Tisi, Chhaolo, Lobo, and Noaotlah. These *Hawthai*-speaking communities are mainly located in the northern region of Maraland within Mizoram.[126] Together, these dialectal distinctions highlight the cultural and linguistic diversity within the Mara community, each group contributing to the richness of Mara heritage through their distinct linguistic identity.

Each village of the Mara is inhabited by multiple clans, and it is rare to find a village occupied by a single clan. A clan is a close-knit community of interrelated families, whose identity and unity are rooted primarily in shared genealogical ties.

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[122] V. Makhai (Secretary, ECM Local Church, Theiva), interviewed by scholar, Theiva, October 21, 2023.
[123] Makhai, interview.
[124] C. Thahe (retired SDO, P&E Department), interviewed by scholar, New Siaha, October 19, 2023.
[125] F.C. Madau (Chiarman, ECM Local Church, New Chapi), interviewed by scholar, New Chapi, October 22, 2023.
[126] A.C. Laima (Headmaster, Government Tisi Middle School), interviewed by scholar, Tisi, October 20, 2023.

Clanship forms a fundamental aspect of Mara life, establishing an organizational framework for cooperative activities among members. Each clan derives its name from an early ancestor, symbolizing a shared lineage that is deeply respected.[127]

Clanship holds significant importance in the legal, political, and economic aspects of Mara society. A clansman facing hardship can rely on his fellow clan members for support. For instance, clansmen assist one another in meeting substantial bride prices requested by the family of a prospective wife, emphasizing their unity. Clanship is a critical social fabric that strengthens interpersonal bonds among the Mara, fostering a sense of loyalty and mutual assistance.

Marriage within the same clan, while not forbidden, is uncommon in Mara society.[128] Individuals often aspire to marry into a clan of higher social standing to elevate their status within the community. For example, a man whose family has a history of marrying into higher-ranking clans can request a higher bride price for his daughter, reflecting his elevated social position. This practice underscores the cultural and social value that the Mara place on clanship, using these alliances to reinforce their social structure and collective identity.[129] The Mara society in each village is composed of four major clans such as- the ruling clans, the high class clans, the middle clans and the lower clans.[130]

One of the most distinctive features of the Mara culture is its intricate marriage system, where the bride's price is carefully negotiated, paid, and distributed through a complex process. Marriage holds a central place in Mara society, forming the foundation of social relationships and bonding within the community. The Maras regard marriage as a vital duty for both men and women, necessary not only to legitimize procreation but also to establish broad social connections.[131]

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[127] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 68.
[128] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 69.
[129] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 311.
[130] Lorrain, *Grammar and Dictionary of the Lakher*, 65.
[131] K. Khila (Resident of Mawhrei), interviewed by scholar, Mawhrei, October 23, 2023.

An unmarried older woman is called "*laikhohpa*," while a lifelong bachelor is known as "*laithiapa*." Chawngthu noted that individuals who remained unmarried were often viewed with a degree of social disapproval and were not fully accepted until they entered a marital union.[132] However, there is no conclusive evidence that lifelong singleness led to enduring social disregard within the community. Given that the bride's price and its settlement are indispensable in Mara's traditional marriage customs, marriages could not proceed until this aspect was fully resolved. It is because of this reason that Chawngkhuma classified traditional marriage system of the Mara as "purchase system"[133]

The arrival of Christianity and the establishment of British rule at the beginning of the 20th century brought sweeping changes to the Mara people, having had a profound impact on their social, cultural, political, economic, and religious lives. With the spread of Christianity and the forces of modernization, the Mara gradually abandoned many traditional customs and superstitious beliefs embedded within their cultural practices. Traditional marriage customs were no exception to this transformation. As the Mara embraced the Christian faith, their marriage practices evolved, and blending elements of their longstanding customs with the influences of the westernized Christian marriage system.[134]

In particular, long-standing traditions, such as offering sacrifices to both benevolent and malevolent spirits, performing a series of elaborate rites and ceremonies, consuming substantial amounts of local rice beer, and slaughtering animals for grand community feasts, were gradually set aside. Once, these complex marriage celebrations could extend for as long as three days, but under the influences of Christianity and British administration, these customs began to fade. Yet, despite these shifts, a number of traditional elements have been preserved and continue to be reflected in contemporary Mara marriage practices, embodying a balance between tradition and modern faith-driven values.

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[132] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 131.
[133] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 131
[134] K. Robin, "The Lakher in Mizoram: The impact of Christianity and Colonial Administration," in *Mizoram: Dimension and Perspectives*, ed. Jagadish J Patnaik (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company (India), 2008), 332.

In the traditional Mara marriage system, courtship marked the initial step, reflecting the society's permissive attitude towards the social interactions of young men and women. Known for its tolerance, the Mara community encouraged free intermingling among young boys and girls, facilitated by a exceptional social institution called *Laipho*. This tradition provided a communal setting where young men could gather and connect with young women in a respectful, culturally sanctioned way.[135]

As part of this custom, a group of young men would select the home of an unmarried girl as their common sleeping place, where they would spend the night together. This arrangement continued until the young woman entered into wedlock with any boy. Additionally, Mara culture held specific rites of passage for young men; when a boy grew his hair long enough to tie in a knot over his forehead, he gained the title of *satlia*. Achieving this status signified his readiness to leave his family home at night and join other young men in participating in the courtship gatherings at the girl's house, known as *laisacharei*.[136] Through these gatherings, the *Laipho* system reinforced community bonds and allowed young people to interact openly while adhering to cultural values and practices. It underscored the importance of communal approval and respect within courtship, making it an essential element of the Mara marriage tradition.

In Mara society, there were no restrictions on the number of *Laipho* groups that could be formed within a village. The number of *Laipho* groups formed depended entirely on the number of unmarried girls admired by the young men in the community. Each *Laipho* was identified by the name of the girl hosting it, lending a personal touch to the group's identity. For instance, if a girl named *Nasai* was chosen, the group of young men spending their nights at her home would be known as *Nasai Laipho*.[137]

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[135] Hlychho, *Mara-te Tobul*, 140.
[136] K. Zohra, "The Marriage Customs of the Maras before the Advent of the British in the Maraland" in *History and Ethnic Identity Formation in North-East*, ed. J.V. Hluna (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company (India), 2013), 283.
[137] Zohra, *The Maras*, 20.

The choice of a particular girl's home as a *Laipho* was influenced by several factors. The girl's personality, beauty, friendliness, and even her family's economic standing were all carefully considered by young bachelors. These attributes made certain girls more desirable hosts for the *Laipho* gatherings, as they were expected to represent themselves with good manners, graceful behaviour, and politeness toward their *Laipho* members. Fairness and respectful treatment, or *veiseina*, were highly valued qualities, and a girl hosting a *Laipho* was expected to embody these virtues in all her interactions.[138]

For young men, joining a *Laipho* group after attaining *satlia* status was a vital social obligation. Those who chose not to participate faced societal disdain and were looked down upon in the society. A young man without attachment to any particular *Laipho* group was effectively marginalized, excluded from essential social events and ceremonies within the village. This social expectation underlined the significance of *Laipho* institution in the Mara community, where they served as a rite of passage, a platform for social engagement, and a respected institution within the traditional courtship and marriage customs.[139]

The *Laipho* institution played a crucial role in fostering premarital social relationships between young men and women within Mara society. It provided a unique space for young men not only to gather and sleep in the home of an unmarried girl but also to build deeper connections with her through shared activities and mutual support. During their time together, the young men would often assist the girl with her daily tasks, creating a bond through cooperation and teamwork. Additionally, they would engage in the cultural practice of sharing tobacco and nicotine water, a gesture that reinforced friendship and social bonding among the group. For the girl, this arrangement presented a valuable opportunity to observe and interact with her suitors closely, allowing her to assess their qualities and determine who might be a suitable life partner. By witnessing each young man's character,

[138] P.T. Hlychho, *Maraland, Yesterday and Today* (Shillong: Rhino Printers, 2007), 90
[139] H.T. Phillip (Church Elder, ECM Local Church, Council Veng, Saiha), interviewed by scholar, October 19, 2023.

work ethic, and attitude, she could gain insights into which suitor would make a dependable and supportive husband.[140]

Despite this close interaction, the Mara people maintained a strong cultural value of discretion regarding romantic feelings. Love affairs were typically kept secret, and expressions of affection were rarely vocalized.[141] Instead, mutual understanding and silent acknowledgment were preferred, preserving the modesty and subtlety that characterized Mara courtship traditions. This emphasis on quiet admiration and respect underscored the depth and seriousness with which relationships were approached within the *Laipho* institution.

In both function and structure, the *Laipho* differed significantly from the traditional bachelor dormitories or designated buildings found among various tribes within the Chin-Kuki groups of Northeast India.[142] Unlike these permanent and fixed structures, the *Laipho* was a flexible, temporary arrangement that could easily be dissolved or relocated. When a girl who hosted a *Laipho* either passed away or became engaged, the young men would respectfully leave her house and seek out a new gathering place, choosing another suitable unmarried girl's home for their *Laipho*.[143]

If a *Laipho* host married someone from another village, a exceptional tradition honored the long-standing relationship between the young men and the girl's household. Known as *chhikhawvia*, this custom required the husband, or "wife-taker," to compensate the *Laipho* members for the years they spent in the girl's home. He would do this by hosting a farewell feast called *laipho pathliena*, typically marked by the ceremonial killing of a pig. This feast served as both a gesture of respect to the *Laipho* members and a formal farewell, celebrating the bond they had shared within the girl's household and marking the end of her participation in the *Laipho* tradition. This adaptable nature of the *Laipho* and its customs highlighted the

[140] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 142.
[141] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 291.
[142] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 291.
[143] K. Zohra, *A Study of the Mara Customary Law and Justice in the Mara Autonomous District of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 2004), 160.

Mara community's emphasis on respect, tradition, and fluid social organization in premarital relationships.[144]

With the incorporation of Maraland into British rule in the early 20th century, the social institution of *Laipho* began to decline. However, this decline did not occur simultaneously across all villages. In some areas, *Laipho* disappeared soon after British influence took hold, while in others, it persisted till early 1970s. K. Zohra, who spent his youthful days in Zyhno village in the early 1970s, reflected on this transition, suggesting that his generation may have been among the last to practice the *Laipho* tradition.[145]

In traditional marriages, when parents found a young woman they believed to be a suitable match for their son, they would discreetly send a trusted female relative to visit the girl's family. This relative would present a preliminary marriage proposal, faintly exploring whether the girl's family might be open to such a union. This preliminary step, known as "*athitly*," served as a respectful, non-intrusive way to investigate interest and prevent any potential embarrassment for either family. Today, however, the practice of *athitly* has largely fallen out of favour in most villages. Yet, in a few places like Theiva, Theiri, and Tisi, the tradition endures, with some families continuing this age-old custom as part of their marriage proposal process.[146] This practice reflects a lingering respect for traditional values, allowing families to honour customs that promote dignity and mutual respect in the matchmaking process.

If the response to the preliminary proposal was positive, the boy's parents would proceed promptly by sending two mediators, known as *lyuchapa*, to formally propose the marriage to the girl's parents. The lead mediator, called *lyuchapa-uthei*, was typically the more experienced and senior figure, while the assistant mediator was known as *lyuchapa-sehnai*. These intermediaries were carefully chosen for their conduct and were expected to embody politeness, kindness, simplicity, and humility,

[144] Zohra, *The Maras*, 25.
[145] Zohra, interview.
[146] V. Makhai, interview.

qualities essential for gaining the trust and goodwill of the girl's family. As part of the formal engagement process, the mediators would present the girl's parents with a meaningful gift- often one of several traditional items such as a *dao* (a large knife), a smaller knife, a pot, a gong, or a spear. This symbolic offering, called *thuaso*, represented the initial engagement and setting a respectful tone for the union that would follow.[147]

To this day, the tradition of presenting an engagement gift to the girl's family remains prevalent in many areas of Maraland. In the village of Chapi and its neighbouring communities, where the *Chapi* dialect is widely spoken, the customary engagement gift, or *thuaso*, is often a pot. The size of this pot holds symbolic significance and is determined by the social standing or clan status of the girl. For instance, if the girl belongs to a chiefly clan, a pot measuring ten spans in circumference is presented as engagement gift *thuaso*. For a girl from a middle clan, a nine-span pot is given, reflecting her family's position. Meanwhile, for those from a lower clan, the engagement gift is traditionally an eight-span pot.[148]

Upon receiving the engagement gift, or *thuaso*, the girl's family customarily slaughtered a pig, known as *thuaso awrua*, as a gesture of honour and gratitude to the boy's family for valuing their daughter. This offering, referred to as *thuaso-tiha*, symbolized the family's appreciation of the engagement and the respect shown through the gift of *thuaso*. The pig, specially designated for this occasion and sometimes called *thuaso hmiakhuti*, meaning "special meat in honour of the engagement gift," was traditionally divided into quarters. In most cases, the two forequarters and one hind quarter were presented raw to the boy's family, while the remaining hind quarter was retained by the girl's family. However, customs could vary slightly by region. In some areas, instead of dividing the pig, the entire animal

[147] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 143
[148] Neikhu Solo (President, Village Council, New Chapi), interviewed by scholar, New Chapi, October 23, 2023.

was gifted to the boy's family, reinforcing the significance of the occasion and the high regard for the marriage alliance.[149]

This particular custom continues to be observed in certain communities to this day. Among the Chapi speaking community, it remained a mandatory practice for the girl's family to slaughter a pig, known as *thuaso awrua*, in honour of their daughter and to present it to the boy's family as a gesture of respect once the marriage proposal was accepted.[150]

In Theiva village where *Hawthai* is widely spoken, the practice of giving engagement gift *thuaso* still continues, and a pot of eight to ten spans is customarily given as engagement gift. When the engagement gift *thuaso* is presented, it is obligatory on the part of the girl's parents to kill a pig *thuaso awrua* and give it in full to the wife taker's party.[151]

In the village of Zyhno and its adjoining places where *Zyhno* is the most common dialect, however, the tradition varied slightly. It was not obligatory for the girl's parents to kill a pig upon receiving the engagement gift *thuaso*. Yet, if the boy belonged to another village, the girl's parents were required to follow the custom. In such cases, they had to divide the pig in half and present one half to the boy's family.[152] This regional distinction highlighted the importance placed on inter-village marriages, where offering the pig symbolized goodwill and respect for the marriage alliance across village boundaries.

The boy's parents must distribute the meat of *thuaso awrua* among their close relatives and fellow clansmen who would readily help them in realization of the expensive bride's prices. There are certain customary rules and practices that need to be followed in regard to the distribution of the meat of *thuaso awrua*. The meat is

[149] F.C. Khaima (Secretary, ECM Local Church, New Chapi), interviewed by scholar, New Chapi, October 23, 2023.
[150] Khaima, interview.
[151] V. Makhai (Secretary, ECM Local Church, Theiva), interviewed by scholar, Theiva, February 15, 2024.
[152] Pawla, interview.

customarily divided among relatives and fellow clansmen to strengthen the kinship ties amongst them. The customary division of the *thuaso awrua* is as follows:[153]

Table 2.1: Distribution of *thuaso awrua*

Sl.No	Recipient	Share of Meat
1.	Maternal Uncle *Pupa*	Chest in full
2.	Married sister	Hind leg (full or half)
3.	Mother's close friend *mao*	Spine
4.	Mother's sister *naro*	Spine
5.	Married brother	Neck
6.	Senior close friend *kei uthei*	Neck
7.	Junior close friend *kei seihnai*	Rib
8.	Senior Mediator *lyuchapa-uthei*	Front leg in full
9.	Junior Mediator *lyuchapa-sehnai*	Half front leg
10.	Grand parents	Head or some portion of liver, heart
11.	Relatives/ Fellow clansmen	Any part
12.	Neighbor and others	Any part

In traditional times, the engagement gift, or *thuaso* was believed to bring a lucky dream to the girl's parents. The ultimate decision to accept or decline the marriage proposal rested on the nature of these dreams. If the parents experienced favourable dreams, they would joyfully accept the proposal, viewing it as a sign of blessing for their daughter's future. Conversely, if they had gloomy dreams during the engagement period, they would openly reject the proposal, feeling it was a sign of potential misfortune. In such cases, the *thuaso* would be respectfully returned to the boy's family. Furthermore, to compensate for the perceived disruption of the

[153] Zohra, *A Study of the Mara Customary Law and Justice,* 201.

engagement, the girl's parents were required to give a pig to the boy's family as a form of apology or "fine" for what was seen as defiling the engagement gift.[154] Specific symbols within these dreams held strong cultural significance. For example, dreams like fish, clean water, necklaces, guns, or a *dao* (traditional knife) were viewed as favourable, indicating a good fortune for the proposed marriage. In contrast, dreams of wild animals killed by a tiger or hunter, a dead snake, or images of stolen pigs or fowls were interpreted as menacing, indicating potential misfortune for the union.

Today, the dreams of the girl's parents during the engagement period no longer influence the final decision on marriage. According to the responses of 126 individuals (90%), the dreams of the girl's parents are not considered important in deciding whether to accept or reject a marriage proposal. As shown in Table 2.2, both male and female respondents shared similar views on this matter. However, 14 respondents (10%) stated that the girl's parents' dreams are still consulted when making a final decision about marriage. This indicates that adherence to traditional beliefs about dreams persists, though only to a minimal and almost insignificant degree. Nevertheless, the responses indicated a gradual shift away from superstitions in marriage customs.

Table 2.2: Importance of dreams of the girl's parents

Are dreams of the girl's parents consulted for making a decision for marriage?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	8	6	14
No	62	64	126

The engagement period mostly covers a few weeks or more or even a year depending upon the willingness of the girl's parents. During the engagement period, the boy and the girl are expected to remain faithful with each other. Since they are treated as engaged, they are not allowed to mix up with other friend intimately during the engagement period. Violation of the engagement is considered very disgraceful

[154] Zohra, *The Maras*, 43.

and is treated as pollution of engagement price. If either of the contracting party breaks the engagement, the offending party is punished with a fine of *vaopia* pig or its equivalent, which must be paid to the grieved party and engagement price *thuaso* must be returned immediately. Such a *vaopia* fine is known as *thuaso chatlaona*, which means purification of the engagement price being polluted by such violation.[155]

If the boy breaks the engagement by elopement with another girl, he must be punished with a fine of *vaopia* pig and *thuaso* must be returned immediately. If the girl elopes with another boy during the engagement period, she must be punished in the same way and the *thuaso* must be returned to the boy's parents. It is considered disgraceful or even as an *ana*/taboo for the boy's parents to receive back *thuaso* without a fine of *vaopia* pig or its equivalent.[156] The boy who instigates and jilts the girl is also punished with a fine of *vaopia* pig, which must be paid to the boy who is engaged with that girl. Such a fine is known as *seichaori chhaw*.[157]

In traditional times, the marriage of a chief was far more complex and costly than that of a commoner. Similar to ordinary marriages, negotiations for a chief's marriage were conducted through appointed mediators, known as *lyuchapa*. However, Mara chiefs often preferred to marry women from other villages, viewing these alliances as a means to extend their influence and solidify political ties.[158] When a chief sought the hand of another chief's daughter from a different village, he would dispatch senior advisors, known as *macha*, to act as *lyuchapa* in the negotiations. These mediators would present a gong to the girl's family as an engagement gift, or *thuaso*. If the girl's family accepted the proposal, the chief was required to immediately pay the main bride price, called *okia*, before proceeding to the wedding ceremony known as *amakia*.

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[155] Zohra, *A Study of the Mara Customary Law and Justice,* 201.
[156] Pachi Hlychho (Retired Executive Secretary, Mara Autonomous District Council, Siaha), interviewed by the scholar, Siaha, October 19, 2023.
[157] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 318.
[158] Chawngkhuma Chawngthu, *Marriage Customs of the Maras of Mizoram*, (New Delhi: Spectrum Publications, 2014), 55.

In honor of their daughter, the girl's family would often construct a stone monument, or *loto*, which symbolized her status and the significance of the marriage. This pyramid-like structure, named after the bride, was usually erected on a hilltop or alongside a river on a path connecting the two villages. To create the *loto*, stones were carefully piled around a chosen tree, allowing it to grow naturally through the center, symbolizing growth, endurance, and continuity. The *loto* typically reached a height of four to five feet and served as a lasting tribute to the bride, marking her family's pride and the alliance between the two communities.[159]

In traditional times, the Maras were usually tempted to marry higher clan than their own to raise their status in the society. For most Mara men, the ultimate goal was to improve their social position by securing a marriage with a woman from a higher clan. However, this ambition posed significant challenges, especially in finding a suitable bride at an ideal marriageable age, typically between twenty and twenty-five years.[160] Additionally, the high bride price made marriage even more challenging. Families often had to save diligently for many years to afford the considerable expense required for bride price. This financial burden, coupled with a desire to marry into higher clan often delayed marriages, creating a complex social dynamic where both wealth and status influenced matrimonial choices.[161]

Though a man cannot change his clan, he could traditionally command a higher bride price for his daughter than that typical of his own clan, provided he, his father, and grandfather had all married women from higher clans. In modern times, however, improved economic conditions have significantly narrowed the gap between the chief's clans and those of commoners. As a result, individuals from lower-status backgrounds who have achieved economic well-being no longer feel the need to marry into higher clans to enhance their social standing.[162]

To understand these shifting perspectives, male respondents were asked their views on marrying into higher clans to raise their status. As shown in Table 2.3, a

[159] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 140.
[160] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 292.
[161] Phillip, interview.
[162] Phillip, interview.

striking majority of 60 out of 70 respondents (85.71%) did not consider it necessary to marry into higher clans to gain social status. Only 4 respondents (5.71%) felt it was important to marry a woman from a higher clan, while 6 respondents (8.57%) expressed no particular opinion on the matter. This reflects a significant cultural shift away from traditional practices of social elevation through marriage.

Table 2.3: Marriage into a higher clan to raise status in the society.

Do you consider it necessary to marry higher clan to raise status in the society?	**Male Respondents**	**Total**
Yes	4	4
No	60	60
Uncertain	6	6

Further inquiry was undertaken to understand the most important factor the Maras consider when choosing a marriage partner today. The responses revealed that clan affiliation has largely lost its significance as the primary criterion in marriage decisions. As shown in Table 2.4, an overwhelming 94.28% of male and female respondents now prioritize character and personality traits as the main criteria in partner selection. In contrast, only 5.71% of respondents still regard clan status as the most important consideration. This suggests that, while the tradition of prioritizing clan affiliation persists to a small degree, it is no longer a dominant factor in Mara marriage choices.

2.4 Most important criteria for selection of marriage partner

What do you think is the most important criteria for marriage partner?	Male	Female	**Total**
Character/Personality traits	66	66	**132**
Clan status	4	4	**8**
Beauty	0	0	**0**

In the early period, the ideal marriage age among the Mara ranged from twenty to twenty-five years.[163] However, responses from both male and female respondents indicated that this preference has shifted over time. Today, a significant majority of respondents view the age range of 25 to 30 years as the most desirable for marriage. As reflected in Table 2.5, a notable 78.57% (110 respondents) identified the age range of 25 to 30 years as the most preferable for marriage. This preference was supported by 46 male respondents (65.71%) and an even higher 64 female respondents (91.42%), showing a clear trend toward this age group. In contrast, a smaller portion of respondents expressed a preference for marriage after age 30. Specifically, 14 (20%) of male respondents considered it the most desirable, whereas only 4 (5.71%) female respondents shared this view. Given that female fertility typically begins to decline by the mid-30s, it is not surprising that relatively few women preferred delaying marriage beyond 30. This indicates that biological considerations may still slightly influence marriage age preferences among the Mara, particularly for women.

Table 2.5: Most preferable age for marriage

What in your view is the most preferable age for marriage?	Male	Female	**Total**
18 - 25 years of age	10	2	**10**
25 - 30 years of age	46	64	**110**
Above 30 years of age	14	4	**18**

In earlier times, marriage among the Maras was typically arranged by parents, who took it upon themselves to select suitable partners for their children. When they found a suitable bride for their son, they would formally propose through a traditional gesture called *lyuchapa,* effectively leaving little room for their children's personal choice in the matter. However, if a young man disagreed with his parents' decision and was already in love with another woman, he would sometimes choose

[163] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 292.

to elope with her, fleeing to a different village. Although such elopements were rare in the past, they have become increasingly common among the Maras today.[164]

When a young man eloped with a woman in this manner, he was required to pay an atonement price, known as *hmiatla*, to the woman's father.[165] This fee served as compensation for bypassing the traditional proposal process. However, if the woman later decided to leave the man before the formal marriage ceremony took place, the *hmiatla* was not required. Once the *hmiatla* was paid, the marriage price was customarily negotiated, and the marriage ceremony was conducted in accordance with Mara traditions, upholding the community's cultural norms and practices.

Today, selection of a marriage partner is no longer the privilege of parents, as most individuals now favour love marriages over traditional arranged marriages. A strong majority of respondents expressed their preference of love marriages over traditional arranged marriages, with 78.57% (110 out of 140) respondents indicating their preference to love marriages. Meanwhile, only 7.14% (10 respondents) favoured arranged marriages, and 14.28% (20 respondents) reported no particular preference.

Interestingly, while only 2.85% of male respondents (2 individuals) preferred arranged marriages, a larger proportion of female respondents - 11.42% (8 individuals) still leaned toward this option. This suggests that, even today, women may feel a greater inclination to honour their parents' preferences when it comes to choosing a marriage partner.

Table 2.6: Arranged marriage or Love marriage

What do you prefer-Arranged marriage or Love marriage	Male	Female	Total
Arranged marriage	2	8	**10**
Love marriage	62	48	**110**
No preference	6	14	**20**

[164] A.C. Laima, interview.
[165] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 138.

A peculiar aspect of the traditional Mara marriage system was the practice of child marriage, known as *no-apahaw*, which was commonly observed among the higher clans. Unlike child marriage practices in other societies, which often involved a significant age gap between a mature and an immature person, Mara child marriages typically involved children of similar ages. Marriages between a mature individual and a child were quite rare among the Mara.[166]

Several cultural motivations supported this practice. Parents were driven by the desire to form alliances with higher clans to elevate their family's social status. Additionally, they valued the idea of preserving the girl's purity until marriage. By arranging a marriage for their daughter at a young age, parents believed they could better ensure that she would remain untouched until the marriage was formally recognized.[167] In this way, *no-apahaw* served both social and moral objectives within the Mara community.

In the tradition of child marriage, it was customary for the boy's parents to initiate the process. This began by sending a female family member, often the boy's sister, known as *nono*, to visit the girl's family and formally propose the marriage. This proposal visit was referred to as *athitly*.[168]

If the response from the girl's family was favourable, the boy's parents would quickly follow up by sending a male envoy, or *lyuchapa*, to the girl's family. This messenger would bring a symbolic gift of a *pumtek* bead, to be worn by the girl as an earring, signifying the beginning of the marriage process. This specific gift was called *nachibapa*. Following this, the boy's family would send another present known as *doa*, which represented the official engagement, or *thuaso*. If the girl's parents experienced auspicious dreams, the marriage proposal was accepted, and the

[166] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 313.
[167] Chawngkhuma Chawngthu, "Mara Marriage System," *Historical Journal Mizoram* VII (November 2006): 6.
[168] Zohra, *A Study of the Mara Customary Law and Justice,* 188.

bride prices were discussed and settled. Once the bride price was agreed upon, the boy and girl were considered formally betrothed.[169]

The two families then waited until the boy and the girl attained puberty. The immature bride would spend her time partly in her father's house and partly in her husband's house, as she liked. The couple did not sleep together until they attained the age of puberty. In case a husband forcibly slept and had intercoursed with his wife before she attained puberty, he must pay a fine of *racha*, a large earthen pot or any other equivalent household article. This fine was known as *hmiatla*. If a wife slept with another man before her husband attained puberty, she was treated as adulteress, and penalties incurred by adultery must be inflicted upon her.[170]

If the boy decides to break off the engagement, he is required to pay the primary bride price, known as *okia*, to the girl's parents as compensation. Additionally, the engagement earring, a significant token of the engagement, must be returned to him. On the other hand, if the girl or her family chooses to end the engagement, her parents are obligated to pay a penalty, called *vaopia*, which consists of a pig weighing approximately four to five fists. The engagement earring must also be returned to the boy's family as a formal conclusion to the engagement agreement.[171]

When the girl attained marriageable age, marriage ceremony was performed as usual, and bride prices were paid customarily. If the husband refused to consummate with her wife even when she attained puberty, he was treated as he had divorced his wife. If the girl refused to sleep with her husband, her father would tie her hands and feet and take her to her husband. If the husband refuses to have intercourse with her while she is tied up, he is considered to have divorced her. In such a case, he not only forfeits the bride's prices that had already been paid, he must

[169] K. Beirona (Headmaster, Government Chheihlu Middle School), interviewed by scholar, Chheihlu, October 21, 2023.
[170] Beirona, interview.
[171] Zohra, *A Study of the Mara Customary Law and Justice,* 188.

also pay any balance of the bride's price for which pigs have been killed on the day of the marriage.[172]

If the wife escapes from such custody by inducing her husband to untie her on the pretext that she would gladly offer herself to him for intercourse, the husband is still considered to have divorced her. If either of the parties died before the marriage was consummated, the wife-giver must keep the bride's price that had been paid. But, they can no longer claim any balance that remained unpaid.

Child marriage was quite rare even in traditional times, and today, this unusual practice has totally vanished from Mara society. A recent field study revealed that this practice of child marriage had disappeared altogether as not even a single respondent reported its existence in the contemporary Mara society. As shown in Table 2.7 below, 100 % of the respondents reported that they have not witnessed any cases of child marriage among the Maras, reflecting its total disappearance in contemporary society.

Table 2.7: Question on child marriage among the Mara.

Have you even seen instance of child marriage among the Maras?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	0	0	**0**
No	70	70	**140**

Similar to other societies around the world, the Mara community practices various forms of marriage. The types of marriage systems within a society are shaped by factors such as community structure, political and economic organization, and the nature of its material culture. Scholars like Bachofen and Spencer have suggested that different forms of marriage evolved in response to various stages of societal development.[173] Among the Mara, monogamy is the most common form of marriage, as it is in many other societies. Traditionally, the Mara community acknowledges

[172] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 308.
[173] Promilla Kapur, *Love, Marriage and Sex* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1970), 82.

one legitimate wife, referred to as *Nobei*, highlighting a strong cultural inclination toward monogamy as the principle form of marriage.

In earlier times, members of the Mara chiefly clans and wealthy families often took more than one wife simultaneously. The primary, legally recognized wife held the title of *nobei*, while any additional wives, referred to as *notho* or concubines, occupied a subordinate position within the family. A *notho* was considered inferior to the legitimate wife, *nobei*, and faced several restrictions.[174]

A *notho* was excluded from participating in significant religious and family rituals, such as the *Khazo-piena* and *Zangda* sacrifices, as well as the *Nawhri* sacrifice. The *Khazo-piena* was a deeply respected ritual dedicated to *Khazopa*, the revered supreme creator, believed to be the source of life and blessings. This sacrifice was performed to seek *Khazopa*'s favour for increased cattle, bountiful crops, and good health. Mara tradition held that if a concubine attended any of these sacrifice, it would result in the death of either her husband or one of her children, making her exclusion a serious matter for the family.[175]

Additionally, customs required that a concubine must not give birth within the main household. Instead, she was expected to deliver her child on the veranda or in a small hut built specifically for this purpose. Among the Chapi community, there was a strong belief that if a concubine gave birth inside the main house, either her child or one of the legitimate wife's children would die as a consequence.[176] Furthermore, a son born to a concubine did not have inheritance rights if the father had a legitimate heir from his primary wife. This custom underscored the lower social and legal standing of the *notho* and her offspring within the Mara family structure.

With the arrival of Christianity in Maraland in the early 20th century, the practice of polygyny gradually declined within Mara society. Among 140

[174] Zohra, "The Marriage Customs of the Maras," 280.
[175] Hlychho, *Mara History*, 122.
[176] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 430.

respondents, not a single individual reported the presence of concubines in today's Mara community. The data presented in the table below reflects the complete disappearance of polygyny as an institution in contemporary Mara society.

Table 2.8: Question on the practice of concubines

Have you ever come across of any person having more than one wife at one time among the Maras?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	0	0	**0**
No	70	70	**140**

Although polygyny, where a man had multiple wives was once common among the chiefly clans and affluent families of the Mara, polyandry (a marriage in which a woman has more than one husband) was entirely unknown in Mara society. Any married woman found to be engaging in a sexual relationship with a man other than her husband during his lifetime would be regarded as an adulteress. Such an act was considered a serious violation of marital vows, leading to immediate divorce on grounds of adultery.[177] This strict approach reflects the traditional Mara values surrounding marriage and fidelity, which held marital commitment in high regard, especially for women.

While marriage is a universal institution, every society imposes certain restrictions on choosing a partner. Complete freedom in selecting a spouse is rare, as each culture upholds specific guidelines to maintain social, familial, or cultural norms. Mara society is no exception as it too has its own set of restrictions regarding matrimonial choices. These rules help preserve traditional values and ensure that marriage aligns with community expectation.

Marriage between siblings is strictly prohibited. It is believed that children born from such unions will not prosper or lead healthy lives. Furthermore, while children who share the same father but have different mothers are also forbidden to marry each other, an exception exists for those who share the same mother but have different fathers. Marriages between cousins, particularly the children of brothers, are

[177] Zohra, *A Study of the Mara Customary Law and Justice*, 166.

rare and generally discouraged. Although not an absolute prohibition, there is a strong belief that offspring from such marriages may suffer from poor health, and the couple may face an untimely death.[178] These beliefs highlight deep cultural convictions about family structures and health, reinforcing the importance of prohibitions within kinship-based marriages.

While they prohibited “parallel cousin marriage” or marriage between children of siblings of the same sex, they prescribed “cross cousin marriage” or marriage between children of siblings of opposite sex. This distinction in marital norms led Chawngkhuma to classify the traditional Mara marriage system under a specific category known as a sub-type of elementary marital exchange.[179] This sub-type, often called "generalized exchange" or "Alliance Theory," reflects a structured system of alliances that promotes social cohesion and balance within the community. This approach to marriage ensures not only the reinforcement of family bonds but also the establishment of alliances that support the broader social structure.[180]

In early period, the most favorable form of marriage among the Mara was a marriage between mother’s son and mother’s brother’s daughter as it keeps the maternal avuncular relationship in the same line.[181] In the meantime, marriage between children of a brother and a sister is hardly welcome if the boy happens to be a brother’s child. In such case, the boy’s father being the girl’s *pupa* (maternal uncle) would forfeit her *puma*. If he himself marries his sister’s daughter/niece, he would lose this part of the bride’s price. It is believed that children born to such a marriage would most probably be unproductive and they will be unhealthy and half-wit.

In contemporary times, "cross-cousin marriage," specifically between a mother’s son and her brother’s daughter, is no longer regarded as the most desirable form of marriage among the Mara community. As illustrated in Table 2.9, 48 respondents (34.28%) do not consider marrying the mother’s brother’s daughter to be an ideal practice. However, 32 respondents (22.85%) still view this form of marriage as favorable. Meanwhile, a significant portion of 60 respondents (42.85%) remain

[178] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 293.
[179] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 11.
[180] Patricia Uberoi, *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 5
[181] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 295.

undecided, expressing uncertainty regarding the potential advantages of this type of marriage. This shift indicates evolving perspectives on traditional marriage preferences within the Mara community, reflecting a diversity of views on cross-cousin marriage today.

Table 2.9: Cross cousin marriage

Do you think marriage between mother's son and mother's brother's daughter is the most favorable form of marriage?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	18	14	**32**
No	24	24	**48**
Uncertain	28	32	**60**

Although it is not taboo for a man to marry his father's widow, such a marriage is considered as disgraceful among the Mara. In such a marriage, a son does not need to pay the full bride's price. Instead, he would only pay a due called *abanasong*, which was usually a gong of eight spans. Marriage of a father to his son's widow is not considered as disgraceful.[182]

Among the Mara, there is no restriction against remarriage for widows or widowers. A widow, known as *nohmei*, is permitted to remarry at any time following her husband's death. Although there is no formal prohibition against immediate remarriage, customary practice generally sees the widow remained in her late husband's home until his memorial stone is erected. Typically, remarriage takes place after this memorial stone has been set up.

Once the memorial stone is erected, the widow performs a ritual by sacrificing a fowl in honour of her late husband. This act symbolizes closure and enables her to move forward, granting her the freedom to remarry. If she chooses to remarry, her children often accompany her to her new husband's household. However, children had complete freedom in choosing whether to remain with their father's relations, their *pupa* (maternal uncle) or to go to their step-father.

[182] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 294.

Among the Mara, there were three types of re-marriage. The first form of remarriage was the marriage between the widow and her deceased husband's brother. When a married man died, any of his surviving brothers who remained unmarried has the customary right of marrying the widow of the deceased brother.[183] This form of marriage was known as *lapinokhu*. It is economical for the husband to remarry his deceased brother's wife as he does not need to pay the bride's price except an extra price known as *abanaso*. But, the new husband is obliged to pay any balance of the bride's price that had not been paid by the deceased brother. This form of widow remarriage is very much preferred among the Mara as it ensures the security of the widow and her children.[184] It not only preserves the relationship between the two families, it also safeguards children of the deceased from being placed under the control of a strange woman who belongs to another family.[185] But, such a remarriage was usually performed only after the erection of memorial stone of the deceased husband.

The second type of remarriage in this context is a marriage between a widower and the unmarried sister of his late wife. When a woman passes away, it is customary for her husband to have the right to marry one of her unmarried sisters, a practice known as "*akeipa*."[186] In such cases, the husband, as the new wife-taker, is expected to provide a bride price to the bride's parents, honoring the traditional marriage customs. However, the bride's family, acknowledging the circumstances and showing sympathy, may sometimes offer a concession or reduction in the bride price. This tradition not only continues familial ties but also provides a practical support system for both the widower and the bride's family.

The third form of remarriage involved a straightforward arrangement where a widow could marry any eligible man, or a widower could marry any unmarried woman of his choice. This type of remarriage did not include any formal marriage ceremony, marking it as a more practical and less ritualized union compared to other

[183] Hlychho, *Mara History*, 80.
[184] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 145.
[185] N. Viakhu (Chiarman, Mara Autonomous District Council) interviewed scholar, Siaha, January 23, 2023.
[186] Viakhu, interview.

forms. In cases where a widow remarried and outlived three husbands, she earned the title of "*maluso*." This label carried a cultural stigma, as the Maras held a strong belief that a "*maluso*" would likely outlive a fourth husband as well. Consequently, men in the community were generally hesitant to marry such a widow, as they believed that she would outlive the fourth one also.[187]

Despite the fact that marriage among the Mara involves very complicated procedures, the process of divorce is relatively straightforward. Interestingly, divorce remains an uncommon occurrence among the Mara. Zohra cited that one of the primary reasons for this rarity is the high cost of the bride price, which acts as a significant deterrent. This financial commitment discourages divorce, as returning the bride price upon separation would be burdensome for wife giver's party. Additionally, Zohra observed that men are more likely to initiate divorce than women. This tendency arises because a woman's family strongly encourages her to remain in her marriage, even under challenging circumstances, to avoid the obligation of repaying the bride price.[188] This social pressure places a distinct expectation on women to preserve the marriage, further contributing to the low divorce rate among the Maras.

In the Mara community, both the husband and wife hold the right to initiate a divorce if they have valid reasons. When a husband divorces his wife, it is known as *lopinoma*. In cases of *lopinoma*, the wife's family is not only allowed to keep all portions of the bride price that have already been paid, but they also have the right to demand any remaining balance of the bride price for which pigs had been killed. However, any unpaid portion of the bride price that does not involve a pig-killing cannot be claimed by the wife's family.[189] This distinction reflects the cultural significance placed on certain ceremonial markers in marriage and divorce within the Mara tradition.

When a woman initiates a divorce from her husband in the Mara community, it is known as *soh pakua*. In this form of divorce, the woman is required to return the

[187] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 295.
[188] Zohra, interview.
[189] Hlychho, *Mara History*, 110.

entire bride price that her husband had paid at the time of their marriage. However, if she has had children during the marriage, she is allowed to retain a portion of the bride price, known as *okia*, in recognition of her role in bearing children for her husband.[190]

If, however, the husband chooses not to keep the children, the wife must refund the full bride price, including the *okia* portion. In such cases, the children then become *pupa-saw*, meaning they are regarded as the children of the woman's brother in all respects.[191] They are raised within the mother's family, adopting the clan of their maternal uncle (*pupa*), which underscores the supportive role of the extended family and the mother's clan in Mara society. This practice reflects the Mara's value of kinship and the significance of clan affiliation for children, especially in the context of divorce.

If both husband and wife willingly agree the divorce due to some reasonable ground, it is called *arei-raoh,* which means divorce by mutual agreement. This form of divorce usually took place due to the impotence of the husband or the barrenness of the wife.[192] In case of *arei-raoh* divorce, the wife's party must return the whole of the bride's prices if the woman is found barren. But, the outstanding balance of the bride prices for which pigs have been killed should be ignored. If the husband is impotent, he must forfeit the whole of the bride's prices that have been paid. But, he is not required to pay any balance of the price.

When a man is unable to fulfill his marital responsibilities due to impotence, tradition permits a woman to seek divorce. However, the man is typically granted a grace period of one year (or sometimes longer) to engage in prescribed rituals and sacrifices intended to restore his vitality. If the woman chooses to leave her husband during this period of prescribed rituals, it is considered an act of self-initiated divorce, which is categorized as "*soh pakua*." Furthermore, if she engages in a

[190] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 162.
[191] Hlychho, *The Maras*, 73.
[192] Phillip, interview.

relationship with another man before the expiry of one year, she is deemed an adulteress.[193]

If the husband remains impotent after the year has elapsed, the woman is fully entitled to seek divorce. In this particular form of divorce, she retains the entire bride price already paid by the husband's family. However, she has no right to claim any remaining unpaid portion of the bride price. This approach respects the woman's right to move on with her life while recognizing the efforts made by the husband to restore marital harmony.

A divorce that took place on the ground of barrenness of a wife is called *chhipo*. In such case, a husband may initiate a divorce if he likes to do so. But, a woman is allowed a period of one year during which she must be performing sacrifices to cure her barrenness. If she fails to overcome her barrenness after a lapse of one year, the husband is allowed to divorce her. In such form of divorce, the wife's party must return the whole of the bride prices that have been paid, and the entire balance should be ignored automatically.[194]

Divorce that took place on the ground of madness is called *hrupathei*. If the wife goes mad, the husband must perform sacrifices for her recovery for one year. If there was no improvement, the husband could divorce his wife. In such divorce, the wife giver's party could retain the marriage prices that had already been paid. But, they could not claim the unpaid balance. If the man goes mad, his brother must perform sacrifices for his recovery for one year, during which the wife should remain in her husband's house. If there was no improvement, the wife could leave her husband. In such divorce, the wife's parents retained the marriage prices that had already been paid. But, they were not entitled to claim outstanding balance. If one of the lunatic's brothers wanted to marry his brother's wife provided that she is agreeable, he can do so on payment of balance of her price.[195]

[193] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 346.
[194] Viakhu, interview.
[195] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 346.

Among the Maras, adultery, known as "*aphei*," is regarded as deeply shameful and dishonorable. If a woman is found to have committed adultery, her husband has the right to immediately divorce her and expel her from the household. In such cases, her family is required to return the entire marriage price, with the exception of the "*okia*" portion. This portion may only be retained if the marriage produced children, recognizing the bond created by parenthood. Unpaid balance of the price shall be ignored completely.[196] This practice upholds the Maras' strong cultural values surrounding marital fidelity and preserves the dignity of both families involved in such difficult circumstances.

The adulterer is also subjected to payment of some short of fines. He must pay a fine of *mithun* or rupees 60, a *pumtek* bead known as *sisakuchaki*, and a cloth known as *panglukhu* to the victimized husband.[197]. Apart from this, he is also fined with female pig *vaopia*, which must be given to the villagers for preparing feast. As adultery is considered very disgraceful for husband, traditional belief held that this disgrace would follow him even to the next world. When he arrived the abode of the dead *atikhi*, his spirit would feel great disgrace, and he must use *panglukhu* cloth to cover his face. Adultery is exceedingly rare in actual practice among the Mara.[198]

In the traditional Mara society, common reasons for divorce included impotence (*khuthi*), barrenness (*chhipo)* and mental illness (*hrunaphei*). However, these factors no longer dominate as primary reasons for divorce among the younger Mara generation. When asked about the main cause of divorce today, a significant majority- 112 respondents (80%) identify substance abuse as the leading factor in marital breakdown. This view is widely shared across both married and unmarried respondents, with 64 married individuals (82.05%) and 48 unmarried individuals (77.41%) pointing to substance abuse as the root cause of divorce within their community. The prevalence of substance abuse, including drug use and alcohol dependency, appears to be increasingly common among the Mara and is now a major source of marital instability. Additionally, a smaller proportion of respondents

[196] Zohra, *A Study of the Mara Customary Law and Justice*, 235.
[197] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 164.
[198] Hlychho, *Mara-te Tobul*, 105.

attribute divorce to other issues. 6 married (7.79%) and 8 unmarried (12.90%) respondents cite infidelity, while 8 married (10.25%) and 6 unmarried (9.67%) highlight family interference as a primary cause. This shift reflects a substantial change in the dynamics of marriage within the Mara society, where substance abuse has become a pervasive factor leading to the dissolution of marital relationships.

Table 2.10: Question on the most important cause of divorce.

What do you think is the most common cause of divorce among the Mara in the present day?	Married	Unmarried	**Total**
Infidelity	6	8	**14**
Family interference	8	6	**14**
Domestic violence	0	0	**0**
Substance abuse	64	48	**112**
Others (indicate)	0	0	**0**

Although divorce system of the Mara is not as complicate as its marriage system, there are certain customary practices that need to be followed by both husband and wife regarding reimbursement of marriage prices. Broadly speaking, the one who initiated divorce usually becomes the loser. If the husband divorced his wife, he must forfeit the bride prices that had already been paid. If the wife divorced her husband, she must return the entire amount of the bride prices that had already been paid except the *Okia* price provided that she had children. But, this kind customary payment or repayment procedure of the bride price is not applicable if divorce has been caused by *aphei* adultery.[199]

Opinions have been gathered on the extent to which traditional practices, particularly the reimbursement of marriage prices, continue to be practised in the Mara divorce process today. According to Table 2.14, 22 married respondents (28.20%) and 4 unmarried respondents (6.45%) believe that these customs are still observed to a significant degree in divorce proceedings. Meanwhile, a majority of 48 married respondents (61.53%) and 38 unmarried respondents (61.29%) feel that

[199] Pawla, interview.

traditional practices are followed to some extent in this context. However, a smaller portion of the population expresses concern that these customs are no longer upheld. 8 married respondents (10.25%) and 20 unmarried respondents (32.25%) think that traditional practices are now largely disregarded in divorce cases among the Mara. The fact that over 60% of both married and unmarried respondents agree that customs are maintained to some degree highlights that, despite some changes, the Mara still preserve aspects of their traditional divorce practices. This suggests a continued, though perhaps evolving, adherence to cultural customs within the Mara community regarding marriage and divorce.

Table 2.11: How far traditions have been followed in divorce system.

Do you think that traditions have been followed in divorce system in recent time?	Married	Unmarried	Total
Yes, to a great extent	22	4	**26**
Yes, to some extent	48	38	**86**
No, not at all	8	20	**28**

The fact that over 60% of both married and unmarried respondents agree that customs are maintained to some degree highlights that, despite some changes, the Mara still preserve aspects of their traditional divorce practices. This suggests a continued, though perhaps evolving, adherence to cultural customs within the Mara community regarding marriage and divorce.

CHAPTER 3: THE MARAS AND THE BRIDE'S PRICE

The practice of bride price among the Maras represents one of the most enduring features of their marriage system. This institution, while deeply embedded in Mara cultural values and kinship structures, also provides a fertile ground for theoretical interpretation from anthropological and sociological viewpoints.

From the perspective of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's functionalism, the payment of bride price functions as a stabilizing social mechanism that maintains equilibrium within the kinship system. It operates as a form of social contract that binds two families and extends networks of reciprocity within the community. By formalizing the transfer of rights and responsibilities over the woman, it ensures continuity of lineage and upholds social order through collective recognition of marriage.

Similarly, Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist theory of kinship and alliance elucidates the symbolic meaning of bride price as a form of reciprocal exchange. In his *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Lévi-Strauss contends that marriage is essentially a system of exchange, wherein women are "the supreme gift," whose circulation between groups cements alliances and ensures the perpetuation of social cohesion. Within the Mara context, the transfer of bride price thus represents not merely an economic transaction but a reaffirmation of kin-based solidarity and inter-family cooperation. Each negotiation and payment stage, from the preliminary discussion to the final settlement, enacts and renews a web of social relationships that define the moral economy of Mara society.

However, as Jack Goody has observed in his comparative studies on African and Asian societies, such exchanges often reflect economic asymmetry within the social structure. The monetization of the bride price in contemporary Mara society illustrates this transformation, what once symbolized reciprocity and alliance now increasingly becomes a measure of wealth, status, and economic power. This commodification, as Goody warns, risks undermining the symbolic and relational dimensions of marriage, leading to tensions and conflicts between traditional moral values and modern aspirations.

From a feminist theoretical perspective, the institution of bride price also invites critical scrutiny. Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that woman has historically been rendered the "Other" within patriarchal systems provides a lens through which the gendered implications of the Mara bride price can be analyzed. The transactional nature of the practice tends to situate women as the object of exchange, where their value is measured not in personal agency but in terms of family honour and material compensation. This perspective does not negate the woman's symbolic importance in marriage but highlights how her position is defined within a male-centric framework of economic and social negotiation.

Building upon this critique, Gayle Rubin's concept of the "traffic in women" offers further insight. Rubin argues that the exchange of women in marriage systems serves as a foundation of male dominance, institutionalized through the circulation of women as objects of social value. The Mara practice of bride price, though culturally distinct, resonates with this idea, as it reinforces gender hierarchies through customary forms of transaction that define male roles as providers and female roles as receivers of value.

In addition, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity deepens this analysis by revealing how such customs perpetuate gender norms through ritualized performances. The negotiation, payment, and ceremonial acknowledgment of bride price serve as acts through which masculinity (as the role of economic provider) and femininity (as the role of virtuous receiver) are continually enacted and legitimized. These performances reinforce social expectations and cultural scripts, ensuring the reproduction of gender identities through marriage-related practices.

Nevertheless, it would be reductive to view the Mara bride price system solely through the lens of domination or commodification. As Marcel Mauss's theory of the gift reminds us, every act of giving carries with it the moral obligation to reciprocate, an obligation that sustains mutual respect and social harmony. Within the Mara context, the bride price functions as a "total social fact", economic, moral, and spiritual at once, embodying the intertwining of personal obligation, family honour, and community legitimacy.

Contemporary transformations, however, have begun to reshape this equilibrium. Rising educational levels, wage-based employment, and exposure to Christian values have led to critical re-evaluation of the moral and financial burdens associated with bride price. Many young Mara couples now prefer simplified or symbolic payments, reflecting a gradual shift from material exchange toward affective and spiritual union. These evolving trends illustrate what Anthony Giddens refers to as the "transformation of intimacy," where personal autonomy and emotional satisfaction increasingly redefine traditional marital expectations.

Thus, the study of bride price among the Maras provides a rich intersection of theory and ethnography. From Radcliffe-Brown's view of social cohesion and Lévi-Strauss's alliance model, to feminist critiques by de Beauvoir and Butler, and the moral economy of reciprocity proposed by Mauss, the practice of bride price emerges as both a cultural inheritance and a site of transformation. It continues to mediate between the competing forces of tradition and modernity, collective obligation and individual freedom, material transaction and symbolic meaning.

The present chapter examines the socio-cultural significance of the institution of bride price among the Maras, with particular attention to the complex procedures involved in its payment and distribution. Far from being a mere financial transaction, the bride price constitutes a deeply embedded cultural institution that reinforces kinship ties, affirms the social value of the bride, and formalizes the marital contract between families. Within this framework, the bride price may be understood as both a symbolic and material practice that reflects and reproduces the socio-political organization of Mara society.

The concept of bride price is an ancient and widespread tradition practice in many parts of the world. It refers to a payment made by the groom or his family to the bride's family upon marriage, symbolizing various cultural, economic, and social values. While the specifics of the practice vary across cultures, it remains a significant cultural institution in many societies worldwide, especially in Africa,

Asia, and some parts of Europe. This custom is deeply intertwined with social, cultural, economic, and psychological values.[200]

The social significance of bride price cannot be understood simply as a financial transaction but as a cultural practice with manifold implications. For many communities, the payment of bride price represents an acknowledgment of the bride's new role in her marital family, a reinforcement of gender and family roles, and a symbol of the value placed on marriage as an institution. In cultures where bride price is practiced, it is seen as a socially sacred act that involves not only the union of two individuals but also the merging of families. The groom's payment to the bride's family is often regarded as a form of tribute to the bride's upbringing, a recognition of her value and status, and a symbol of respect to her family. Nkiru Nwosu states, "The bride price in African cultures is not simply an exchange; It is an acknowledgment of the bride's social importance, an act that ties the couple, their families, and their communities together in a web of social and cultural relations."[201]

Economically, the bride price often serves as a form of compensation to the bride's family for the "loss" of a productive labourer. In agricultural and pre-industrial societies, the bride's labour is considered valuable, especially in contexts where domestic work and agricultural production are the primary sources of livelihood. The bride price, therefore, is seen as a form of economic transaction designed to compensate for the loss of her labour and skills within her natal family.[202] In many African societies, the bride price serves as an economic cushion for the bride's family, allowing them to cope with the financial implications of losing a family member who has contributed to the household's labour.

In addition, the payment of bride price can provide economic security for the bride's family. For example, the amount received as bride price may be used to support younger siblings, contribute to household wealth, or secure the family's future in times of economic hardship. The bride price, in this sense, acts as a form of

[200] Nkiru Nwosu, *The Role of Bride Price in African Marriages* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 43.
[201] Nwosu, *The Role of Bride Price in African Marriages*, 45.
[202] Emeka Okafor, *Economic Dimensions of Traditional Marriage in Africa* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 112.

economic protection for the bride's family, while also symbolizing the groom's ability to provide for his future wife.[203]

In psychological context, payment of bride price creates a sense of ownership and responsibility that can have profound implications for gender relations within the marriage. The groom's family, having paid the bride price, may feel a sense of entitlement to the bride, viewing her as a valuable asset whose actions and behaviors reflect the groom's family honor.[204]

In the light of gender, equality becoming a more prominent issue in contemporary society, feminist scholars and activists have criticized bride price for perpetuating patriarchal norms and the commodification of women. Critics argue that the practice enforces gender inequality by reinforcing the idea that women are property to be exchanged between families. They contend that bride price can reduce the woman to an economic asset whose value is determined by the payment made by the groom's family.[205]

In response to these criticisms, some societies have sought to reform or modernize the practice of bride price. In urban areas, where social and economic conditions differ from those in rural regions, bride price is often negotiated on a smaller scale, or the practice may be replaced by alternative ceremonies or gifts. In some cases, the exchange of bride price is symbolic rather than a financial burden, and it may be performed with greater emphasis on mutual respect between families rather than a transactional exchange.[206]

Among the Maras, expensive bride price and its payment procedure is the most complicated affairs in their marriage system. The bride price system among the Maras is not merely a financial transaction but a complex social institution that strengthens the ties between families, affirming the value of the bride and solidifying

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[203] Okafor, *Economic Dimensions of Traditional Marriage in Africa*, 112.
[204] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 102.
[205] Chijioke Umeh, *Bride Price and Gender Equality: A Call for Reform* (Abuja: Nigerian Journal of Social Studies, 2022), 58.
[206] Umeh, *Bride Price and Gender Equality*, 59.

the marriage contract.[207] Traditionally, Mara marriages are arranged by families, emphasizing the role of kinship and social connections in the selection of a spouse. The process begins with a formal proposal, often facilitated by a mediator *lyuchapa* and involves negotiations between the families concerning the bride price, which can include livestock and other valuables. The payment of this bride price is a crucial aspect of the marriage arrangement, symbolizing the transfer of responsibility and reinforcing social ties between the families involved.[208]

The bride price of the Mara is composed of several major prices called *mato,* each of which had a number of subsidiary prices and small dues attached to it.[209] The subsidiary prices and small dues were permanently attached to major price *mato,* and they were inseparable from that of the major price.[210] The marriage price is very expensive and exhaustive for both parties- the wife-giver and the wife-taker families. Nevertheless, this expensive bride price is attributed to be the main cause of extremely rare occurrence of divorce among the Maras.[211]

The marriage prices were usually paid in terms of household goods such as gun, gong, brass pot, earthen pot, bead, dao, axe etc. and animals such as *mithun*, pig, fowl etc.[212] Such material kinds and animals were paid in lieu of various major prices and subsidiary prices of the bride, and they were collectively known as *sohra* or *sodaw*. As the bride's price is usually high, this makes it necessary for a family to save up for many years before they can afford to buy a wife for their son.[213]

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[207] Joseph Lianthang, *Maras of Mizoram: Culture and Customs* (Aizawl: Mizoram University Press, 2020), 45-47.
[208] Lalthangliana Hmar, *The Mizo in the Nineteenth Century: Their Social and Economic History* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1986), 45.
[209] J Barooah, *Customary Laws of the Maras of Mizoram: With Special Reference to their Landholding System* (Guwahati: Law research Institute, 2011), 16.
[210] K. Zohra, *The Maras: The Indigenous Tradition and Folkculture* (Guwahati: Scientific Book Centre, 2013), 45.
[211] M. Hniezo (Resident of Zyhno village), interviewed by scholar, Zyhno, February 12, 2024.
[212] J.H. Hlychho, *The Maras: Head Hunters to Soul Hunters* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2009), 71.
[213] N.E. Parry, *The Lakhers* (Calcutta: Firma K.L.M. Pvt. Ltd., 2009), 293.

A bride price comprising both traditional and modern items

The payment of the bride price, known as *zatlaso*, usually occurred at night. The *lyuchapa* were dispatched to deliver the bride price to the girl's parents during this time. The success of the *zatlaso* ceremony mainly relied on a mutual understanding between the two parties- the wife-givers and the wife-takers. If the groom's family was unable to make payment of the entire bride price during the *zatlaso*, the *lyuchapa* would work hard to convince the bride's parents to allow the remaining amount to be paid in installments over time. Since the bride price is typically very high, the payment process is often lengthy and costly. This demanding process, known as *sahrophia*, translates to "surrendering all family possessions."[214] Due to the substantial expenses, often involving animals or other materials, the groom's close relatives and clansmen would collectively assist in covering the costs.

Kholei-ma is a peculiar mechanism to deter marriage proposal, and the practice specifically confined to traditional elites. In case girl's parents disapproved marriage proposal, they would demand a particular bride price, *Kholei-ma*, which was extraordinarily high, far beyond the capacity of the groom's family to pay. In this way, marriage proposal was automatically nullified.

Various major prices of the bride were distributed among the relatives of the bride who were legitimately entitled to claim and receive the bride prices.

[214] Zohra, *The Maras*, 44.

Distribution of the bride prices among relatives not only widened kinship ties but also strengthened kinship relationship between the two contracting parties. The customary law demanded that each claimant of the bride price had to kill a *mithun* or a pig, and give it to the boy's parents to receive the bride price.[215] Without killing a *mithun* or a pig, the claimant could not receive the bride price. There is no limit to the number of the pigs that had been killed, and the more of the pigs killed, the bigger the feast. The bridegroom had to reciprocate by killing certain number of pigs. If the bride's party killed three pigs, the bridegroom must kill two in return. If they killed five, the bridegroom must kill at least three.

The major or principal price of the bride is of two types- *azila* and *makhotho*. Close relatives of the bride on her father's side such as father, father's son, father's brother, father's nephew, bride's brother and clansmen are entitled to get the *azila*. Women have no customary right to claim any *azila*.[216] The main prices that fall under the category of *azila* are *okia, seipihra, seicheihra, seihra, seipawchyu* etc. Bride's relatives on her mother's side such as mother's sister, mother's brother or bride's maternal uncle, girl's grandparents and female relatives of the bride on her father's side such as father's sister are entitled to receive *makhotho*. The principle prices that are classified under *makhotho* are *puma, nochyu, norihra, nochyu, tinie, mochyu, ahma, keima* etc. Each of these major prices had several subsidiary prices and other small dues, which were permanently attached to it. These subsidiary prices and other dues could not be claimed independently without the major price.[217]

Of the major prices that fall under *azila*, *Okia* is the most significant bride price, as it plays a central role in determining the rates of all other prices. The value of *Okia* sets the standard, the higher the *Okia*, the higher the other prices. The bride's clan affiliation greatly influences the rate of *Okia*. Notably, a man may claim a

[215] Melvil Pereira et al., *Continuity and Change: The Maras of Mizoram* (Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, 2019), 135.
[216] H.T. Phillip, (Church Elder, ECM Local Church, New Colony, Siaha), interviewed by scholar, Siaha, February 15, 2024.
[217] Phillip, interview.

higher *Okia* for his daughter than is typical for his own clan provided that he, his father, and grandfather married into higher clans.[218]

The rate of the *Okia* price varies from clan to clan. It usually varies from a large gong or a *mithun* to a small brass gong called *dawchhy*. *Okia* of the bride belonging to the chiefly clan, *abeipho* is customarily higher than that of the commoners, *machhie* clan. *Okia* of the chiefly clan usually consists of a she-mithun and its calf, *sano-saw* as the main price, *amapi*. Meanwhile, *Okia* of a bride belonging to a high clan *phoso* consists of full grown mithun *sapi* or its equivalent as a main price, *amapi*. *Okia* of commoners' clan *machhie* consists of full grown cow *sataw* or a pig or its equivalent as the main price *amapi*. The lowest clan in the society were known as *dawchhy* who were naturally slaves or war captives. When a person born of *dawchhy* married, her *Okia* could not be charged higher than the value of a pair of small gong or its equivalent. With the incorporation of Maraland into the British Indian empire in 1924 and subsequent abolition of slavery, *dawchhy* clan gradually disappeared in the Mara society.[219]

Table 3.1*: Okia* of different clans may be indicated as follows:[220]

Sl no.	**Clan**	**Items of *Okia***	**Amount**
1	Ruling clan (*abeipho*)	She mithun and its calf *sano saw*	Rs 100.00
2	High Clan (*phoso*)	Full grown mithun *sapi*	Rs 60.00
3	Plebeian clan (*machhie*)	Full grown cow *sataw* or a pig	Rs 40.00
4	Low clan (*dawchhy*)	A pair of small gong	Rs 20.00

Okia is typically paid to the bride's father. If the father had passed away, the bride's elder brother, her father's brother, or another close male relative on her father's side is entitled to receive the price. However, in Savang village, the practice differs in such a way that the father does not receive his daughter's *Okia*. Instead, the eldest son takes the *Okia* for the eldest daughter, while the youngest son receives the

[218] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 312.
[219] Zohra, *A Study of the Mara Customary Law and Justice*, 214.
[220] K. Khiha (A resident of Mawhrei village), interviewed by scholar, Mawhrei, February 16, 2024.

Okia for the youngest daughter. The father only takes his daughter's *Okia* only if he has no sons.[221]

The claimant of *Okia* usually takes the main price *amapi* and other several secondary prices *thuaso, sisazi, chakie, keima* etc. and small dues are distributed among his close relations and friends who are eligible to receive the same. The claimant must kill a *mithun* or a pig, or both which is given to the wife-taker's party to enable him to claim the price. Such a pig, given to the wife-taker's party is known as *awrua*. The wife-taker must also kill a pig, which is given to the claimant of the bride's price. If a claimant does not kill a *mithun* or a pig, he can not claim the subsidiary prices *abawna* and other small dues *hlasiba* which are attached to the main price. The bride's parents have to kill three pigs to claim *Okia* and its subsidiary prices if the prices are not divided up among his sons and brothers. In case the bride's father has done *matlei* or divided the marriage prices among his sons, his brothers or fellow clansmen, each person claiming a price must kill a pig for each price he claims.[222] But, these pigs do not cover those major prices payable to the bride's maternal uncle *pupa*, maternal and paternal aunts.[223]

Seipihra is another significant bride price, traditionally given to the bride's father, paternal uncle, brother, or any male relative on her father's side.[224] It includes the main price, called *amapi*, along with secondary prices like *abawna, keima,* and smaller dues such as *abei machahla, macha bierei, chapaw-tyukhai, chano-tyukhai, sawhla, chotlapa,* and *u-hla.* The value of *Seipihra* is lower than that of *Okia*, both in quality and quantity. Furthermore, certain subsidiary prices like *thuaso, sisazi*, and *chakie* cannot be claimed under *Seipihra*. A female mithun or its equivalent is typically given as the main item for *Seipihra*. It is considered disgraceful for the claimant of *Seipihra* to request a bride price equivalent to that of *Okia*, and the Mara people rarely do so.[225] Additionally, the claimant is required to kill either a mithun or

[221] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 312.
[222] P.T. Hlychho, *Maraland: Yesterday and Today* (Shillong: Rhino Printers, 2007), 96.
[223] Hlychho, *Maraland: Yesterday and Today,* 97.
[224] Pereira et al., *Continuity and Change,* 135.
[225] K. Chilei (Church Elder, ECM Local Church, Amobyu), interviewed by scholar, Amobyu, February 15, 2024.

a pig and present it to the wife-taker's party in order to claim the subsidiary prices and other small dues, collectively known as *hlasiba*.

Chawchyu is another significant payment, made to the bride's eldest brother or another male relative on her father's side. Its composition and procedure are similar to those of *Okia*. Like *Okia*, *Chawchyu* includes the main price, called *amapi*, as well as secondary payments such as *abawna*, *keima*, and smaller dues. However, the amounts of *amapi* and *abawna* for *Chawchyu* are smaller in both quantity and quality compared to *Okia*. To claim *Chawchyu*, the recipient must slaughter a mithun or a pig. Without doing so, he is not entitled to claim the subsidiary prices or additional dues attached to *Chawchyu*. The mithun or pig that is slaughtered as part of this process is then given to the wife-taker's family, and such animal killed is known as *awrua*. In return, the wife-taker's family also slaughters a pig, which is given to the claimant of the bride's price.

Seicheihra is another significant bride price, traditionally claimed by the bride's father, her father's brother, or any male relative from the father's side. It includes the primary price, known as *amapi*, along with secondary prices such as *abawna*, *keima*, and other smaller dues. The rate of *Seicheihra* is identical to that of *Chawchyu* and *Seipihra*. The claimant is required to kill a mithun or a pig, which is then given to the bride's family to realize the claim. Without killing animal, the claimant is not entitled to get subsidiary prices like *abawna* or other small dues attached dues. Items used as substitutes for subsidiary prices and small dues include brass pots, brooms, cane mats, cloths, combs, daos, necklaces, piglets, pumtek beads, raw cotton, skirts, etc.

Seihra is another major price which is usually claimed independently by the bride's father. However, the practice of claiming *Seihra* primarily confined to the chiefly clan or wealthy family who owned slaves. In early days, it was a customary practice that the bride's father could claim one slave whether male or female as the main price of *Seihra* from the wife-taker. If the latter had no slave, he must pay a *mithun* in lieu of salve to the claimant. A full grown *mithun* is considered equivalent

to one slave. But, this customary practice of claiming slave *Sei* or *Seihra* withered away with the advent of Christianity in the Maraland.[226]

Seipawchyu is one of the major bride prices among the Mara. The term *Seipawchyu* literally means "special share for the most favoured slave." It was typically claimed by one of the most favoured male slaves of the bride's family.[227] This practice was mainly observed among the chiefly clans or affluent families that could afford to keep slaves. To claim the *Seipawchyu* price, the claimant had to slaughter a pig and give it to the bridegroom's family. However, the practice of claiming *Seipawchyu* gradually faded away due to the influence of Christianity in Maraland.[228]

Apart from the major prices categorized under *Azila*, there are other major prices typically claimed separately by the bride's paternal and maternal relatives, regardless of gender. Such major prices are being placed under the category of *Makhotho*. Male or female relations of the bride on her mother's side could claim upon such major prices of *Makhotho*.

Of the major prices that fall under *Makhotho*, P*uma* is the most important. It is payable to the bride's maternal uncle who is called *Pupa.* If the bride's mother has several brothers, *Puma* goes to the eldest brother. If the bride's mother has no brother, or her brother was already dead before marriage, *Puma* would automatically go to the *Pupa*'s son or his male relations. *Puma* price consists of the main price *pumapi* and other several subsidiary prices like *loakhyu, keima, phavaw, machabierei* or *machahla, chapaw-tyukhai, chano-tyukhai, u-hla, sawhla, chawtlapa,* etc. The rate of *Puma* depends upon the rate of *Okia,* and it is practically equivalent to the rate of *Okia*. *Pupa* has to kill a pig of the size at least six fists to claim his niece's *puma*.

[226] K. Robin, "The Lakher in Mizoram: The impact of Christianity and Colonial Administration," in *Mizoram: Dimensions and Perspectives,* ed. Jagadish K. Patnaik (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2006), 322.
[227] S. Mokia, *Mara Ra, Awnanopa Thati*, (Serkawr: LLM Press, 1981), 69.
[228] Robin, "The Lakher in Mizoram," 322.

Pupa can claim the price on the weeding day. However, he usually waits till the couple have fully settled down as husband and wife.[229]

When *puma* was paid, *Pupa* usually gives an embroiled skirt and a white cloth to the bride. Such a gift is called *Ngiaty*. If the *pupa* fails to claim *puma* price during the lifetime of his niece and her husband, he can claim from his niece's son a gong of six spans or equivalent, and such payment is known as *chhochhitya*. The *pupa* does not need to kill a pig to claim such payment from his niece's son.

In the meantime, one of the subsidiary prices *loakhyu* must be paid to *Pupa* at the time of payment of the bride price known as *zatlaso*. Unless or until *loakhyu* is given to *Pupa*, no claimants could receive any other major price at the time of *zatlaso*. The *loakhyu* comprises of a pot of eight to ten spans. A red cock and some amount of rice were usually put inside the pot.[230] *Pupa* is a very important person in the marriage of the Mara. He is considered as a source of blessing for his own sisters and her family members. Mara usually maintain a close kinship relation with *pupa* family by giving their son in marriage to pupa's daughter *sawchano*.[231]

Preliminary payment of *Loakhyu* to *Pupa*

Nochyu is another significant bride price, traditionally given to the bride's mother's sister. If the bride's mother's sister has passed away before the marriage, one of her sons is entitled to receive the price. If the bride's mother has no sister, a maternal female relative must claim the price. The *Nochyu* is never transferred to any

[229] Chawngkhuma Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, (Aizawl: Lengchhawn Press, 2021), 153.
[230] A.C. Laima (Headmaster, Government Tisi Middle School), interviewed by scholar, Tisi, February 16, 2024.
[231] Laima, interview.

male relative.[232] However, if the bride's parents are divorced and the mother is separated from her husband, this price goes to the mother. To claim the main price, *amapi*, and other subsidiary prices like *macha bierei, machahla, chano-tyukhai, u-hla, sawhla,* and *chotlapa,* the claimant must kill a pig and present it to the bridegroom's family. Without this, the subsidiary prices and smaller dues attached to *Nochyu* cannot be claimed.

Norihra is a significant bride price, traditionally given to the youngest married sister of the bride's mother. If the bride's mother has only one sister who has already received this price once or more, it must be transferred to another female relative on the mother's side. If the bride's mother has several sisters and the youngest has already claimed this price, she may pass it to one of her sisters, according to her preference.[233] If the rightful claimant of *Norihra* has passed away before the marriage, one of her sons who took care of her until her death typically takes the price. To claim the main price, *amapi,* and any smaller dues attached to *Norihra*, the claimant must slaughter a pig and give it to the bridegroom's family. Without doing so, she cannot claim the *abawna* subsidiary prices, or any other smaller dues linked to *Norihra.*

Nochyu, literally meaning "aunt's price," is customarily taken by the bride's eldest paternal aunt, known as *nono*. If the aunt has passed away before the marriage, one of her sons is entitled to claim the price. If the bride's father has no sister, the price is given to his nearest female relative. Whether the claimant is the aunt or her son, they must slaughter a pig and present it to the bridegroom's family to receive the main price, *amapi*, along with several subsidiary prices such as *macha bierei, machahla, chano-tyukhai, u-hla, sawhla,* and *chotlapa.* The process and structure of the *Nochyu* price are quite similar to that of *Norihra*, with the key difference being that the claimant of *Nochyu* can also collect additional dues known as *tinie*. These additional dues may include items such as an axe, basket, belt, bracelet, brass pot, broom, cane-band, cane mat, cloth, comb, dao, hairpin, necklace, piglet, *pumtek*, raw

[232] Laima, interview.
[233] Zohra, *The Maras*, 54.

cotton, skirt, and more. These subsidiary prices are typically requested by the *nono* when she and the marriage party enter the bridegroom's home.[234]

Mao is a special price which is customarily claimed by one or two friends of the bride independently. *Mao* is a very small price, and there is no any subsidiary or additional due attached to it. If the bride has no friend, the price may not be claimed.

Mochyu is a special minor price which is payable to the bride's grandparents on her father's side. In some village, it is payable to the bride's grandparents on her mother's side. As *Mochyu* is a minor price, it does not have any extra or additional dues attached to it. If the bride's grandparents are no more, the price cannot be claimed.

In addition to the above-mentioned prices, there are minor dues which are payable to the chief, the elders, the cooks, beer makers, water carriers etc. and these are known as *Ahlas*. The practice governing payment of *Ahlas* varies from place to place. In some places, in case the bride and bridegroom belong to the same village, no *Ahlas* of any short are paid.

Ah-ma is another minor price, which is claimed by the bride's father or brother. If the bride's father kills ten pigs for the wedding feast on the wedding day, it is known as *vaothaw-a*, and he is supposed to perform *ah* ceremony in honour of his daughter, and then, he can claim *Ah-ma* price.[235]

Payment of the bride price was a crucial part of marriage proceedings among the Maras, and without it, the marriage ceremony and other rituals could not take place. Typically, the bride price was paid on the wedding day, although in some areas it was given on the eve of the wedding. Since the bride price was often quite expensive, it could be paid in installments. If the father was unable to complete the payment during his lifetime, the responsibility would pass to his eldest son. If the son

[234] K. Zohra, "The Marriage Customs of the Maras before the Advent of the British in Maraland" *Studies on the Minorities Nationalities- The Mizos (*Aizawl: Muka Printing Press, 1992), 102.
[235] Zakhu Hlychho, *The Hundred Years of Maraland* (Aizawl: JR Construction, 2006), 132.

also failed to settle the balance, the obligation would be passed down to the grandson, and so forth.[236]

On the wedding day, friends and relatives gathered at the houses of the bride and bridegroom, and started the proceeding by drinking rice beer, which were profusely available. Persons who were entitled to the bride price had to kill pigs, cows and mithuns.[237] Each party prepared a grand wedding feast by killing large number of animals, and they invited their respective friends and relations to partake in the feast. This first day of the wedding feast is *awraubawna* day. The bride's parents ought to kill three to five pigs to enable them to claim various major bride's prices which they are entitled to claim. The bridegroom's parents reciprocate by killing certain number of pigs. If the bride's people kill three pigs, the bridegroom's people must kill two in return, and if they kill five, the bridegroom's people must kill at least three in return. There was no limit to the number of pigs that may have been killed on the wedding day. The more of the pigs killed, the greater the wedding and the bigger the feast.

When the bride's parents slaughtered pigs, they divided each pig in half. The half with the head was sent to the bridegroom raw, while the other half, containing the tail, was cooked with rice and also sent to the bridegroom's family. It was considered improper for the bride's parents to eat any part of the pigs they sent to the bridegroom, and they strictly avoided doing so. In return, the bridegroom's parents were required to kill a certain number of pigs. If the bride's family slaughtered five pigs, the bridegroom's family had to kill at three two. Similarly, they would cut their pig in half, sending the half with the head raw and the half with the tail cooked with rice to the bride's parents. This exchange of gifts in the form of pigs is called *awraubawna*.[238] However, the bride's parents would not accept or eat the pork sent to them unless the bride price had been paid. Even after the bride price was settled, they

[236] Pereira et al., *Continuity and Change*, 136.
[237] K. Zohra, "The Marriage Customs of the Maras before the Advent of the British in the Maraland," in *History and Ethnic Identity Formation in North-East India,* ed. J.V.Hluna (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd., 2013), 281.
[238] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 299.

still refused to consume any part of the meat until the *Sisazi* price (consisting of three *pumtek* beads) and the *awraubawna* price (a beer pot) were paid on the wedding day.

Once all the preliminary tasks were satisfactorily completed, the invitees gathered for the feast. Following this, the *lyuchapa* retrieved a cup of *sahma* (rice beer) from the bridegroom's house and brought it to the bride's house, summoning the bride and her aunt for the marriage procession, known as *amakia*. In earlier times, this *amakia* was regarded as the most significant and memorable event in the socio-religious life of the Maras. The procession typically took place in the evening, as darkness began to fall. Before it commenced, the *lyuchapa* offered a cup of *sahma* to the eldest person present in the bride's house. Leading the procession were two or three individuals, called *sahmaphalo*, each carrying a large pot of *sahma* on their back. The bride, along with her paternal aunt, friends, and relatives, followed behind. The *lyuchapa* accompanied the group, ensuring the bride and her party were protected from any playful antics or mischief on their way to the bridegroom's house.

If the bride belonged to the chiefly family, the bride's party insisted that the bridegroom must spread valuable garments on the way between the bride's house and the bridegroom's house in honour of the bride and her party. A good number of boys and girls in the locality actively participated in the procession. They chanted a particular verse very loudly, and the verse runs as, "A kia zuano, a kiama, kiah vei ma, Chotlapa riethei, a zahmi tai tlao"[239]

When the bride's party reached the bridegroom's house, they stood outside the house and waited the bridegroom to give the bride's aunt a *dao* for clearing the roads. This gift was known as *lyuvana*. The bridegroom also gave the bride's aunt an axe for cutting any tree that may have fallen across the road, and this gift was known as *thochachaina*.[240] After these dues have been paid, the bride's party demanded the price for climbing up the ladder to the bridegroom's house, this price consisting of a skein of cotton thread was locally known as *kahmikiana*. After climbing up the ladder, the party demanded *chakeichakana*, the price for crossing the threshold. This

[239] Zohra, *The Maras*, 60.
[240] Zohra, *The Maras*, 61.

price *chakeichakana* consists of puggree which is taken by the aunt. Then, the party finally entered the house.

When the bride's party arrived at the house, the bridegroom laid mats or clothes on the floor for them to sit on. Young men then brought out a large basket called *bokai* to collect all the presents. At this point, the bride's aunt began to demand her dues, known as *tini* (aunt's prices), marking the start of the ceremony called *tinitheuna*.[241] The *tini* consists of numerous small dues that can vary from village to village. The aunt does not need to slaughter a pig to claim the *tini*, but all the gifts that make up the *tini* must be claimed during the *tinitheuna* ceremony and paid promptly. There is only one due, called *atawna*, which consists of a five-span brass pot that can be claimed later. The *tini* gifts are all given to the bride's aunt, except for a few items reserved for the bride herself- *sisai*, a necklace of twenty strings of small red beads, *naba*, a string of carnelians, and *chongchi*, a brass wire belt. To encourage the aunt to overlook some of her demands, she was given a cup of beer to get her as drunk as possible.

The components of the *tini* that may be claimed by the aunt on the wedding day is shown in the Table:[242]

Table 3.2: Components of the *Tini* price

Sl. No.	**Name of the dues (in Mara)**	**Payment**
1	*Lyuvana*	A *doe* for clearing the roads
2	*Thochachaina*	An axe for cutting trees
3	*Kahmikiana*	Skein of cotton, price for climbing up the ladder
4	*Chakeichakana*	Puggree, the price for crossing the threshold
5	*Tini sisai*	Ten strings of red beads
6	*Naba rikha*	A string of cornelians
7	*Kheiti rikha*	A string of round white beads
8	*Tini hrakhaw*	Metal belt

[241] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 149.
[242] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 300-301.

9	*Kohrei*	A coat with short sleeves
10	*Peuchi mangnang*	Two skeins of blue thread
11	*Hrokei*	Brass haripin
12	*Sakia*	Men's hairpin
13	*Lara sawng*	A white, a red and a blue thread
14	*Seitidangna*	A brass pot of three spans
15	*Pang*	Two ordinary cloths
16	*Bawhri hra*	Raw cotton for making cloth
17	*Beihnang hra*	Embroidered skirt
18	*Khahnang hra*	A skirt
19	*Zawnglei hra*	One ordinary skirt
20	*Lakeu chavei chacha*	Two bracelets
21	*Chhongpang lakeu hra*	Woman's bangle
22	*Chongchi hra*	Woman's belt
23	*Chhebi hra*	A string of pink beads
24	*Kihlong hra*	A large cowrie
25	*Vopi hra*	A sow of three fists
26	*Vohrang hra*	A piglet
27	*Tini thuasang*	A lucky doe
28	*Mocheu*	Wire belt of four strings
29	*Tini chhongkhang*	A brass pot of three spans
30	*Rithu*	A brass pot of four spans
31	*Tini chateuna*	A white cloth with a black stripe
32	*Siba patheuna*	An aluminum pot of four spans
33	*Aphi*	A cane mat
34	*Tinitlana*	A brass pot of four spans
35	*Baikhai*	A basket or a fowl

Once the aunt had finished claiming the *tini*, which usually took quite a while, the bride and bridegroom sat together beside a pot of *sahma* (rice beer),

marking the beginning of the actual marriage ceremony, known as *tipanie*. The *lyuchapa* took a cup of *sahma*, dipped his brass hairpin into it, and offered a few drops of the beer from the hairpin to both the bride and bridegroom to drink.[243] The *lyuchapa* then spoke a few words, wishing the couple a prosperous life, many children, and long-lasting happiness. This *tipanie* ceremony had to be completed before the first crowing of the rooster, as the bride was not allowed to eat or smoke in her husband's house until it was done.

After the *tipanie* ceremony, the night was spent in celebration with friends and relatives, who drank and sang together. In some villages, an additional ceremony called *tisi* was performed, where one of the men killed a fowl as a ritual to bless the couple with children. Finally, the bride returned to her parent's house, accompanied by some of her relatives and friends.

On the next day, the bride, her parents and few selected friends went to the bridegroom's house with a pot of rice beer, and the rest of the day is spent in feasting and drinking. The bride's parents claimed the prices that had not been paid, and the bridegroom pays as much as he can, leaving the balance to be paid off by installments. In the evening, the bride and her party returned to her parent's house. The following day, they all met again in the bridegroom's house. The bride's parents asked the bridegroom to give presents called *ahlas* to all those who have accompanied them.[244] The *ahlas* are presented to the chief, the elder *macha* who came to the party, the woman sitting next to the bride's mother, who is called *chanongtokhai*, the man sitting next to the bride's father called *chapawtokhai*, the bride's friend called *mocheu*, the cooks called *chongtlapa* who carried the pork to the bride's house. Other members of the party who accompanied the bride probably get a fowl each or a small sum of money. These small dues to the bride's party may vary from village to village. They have to be refunded if the bride later divorced her husband.[245] If the bridegroom finds it difficult to pay all the dues expected from him, he invoked the help of his friends and relatives to cover the payments by distributing

[243] Zohra, *The Maras*, 61.
[244] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 150.
[245] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 302.

pork he had received from the bride's parents to them. After the presents have been paid, the bride and her party returned to her parent's house.

On the next day, the bride finally moved over to her husband's house. After the house has been thoroughly cleaned and purified, an individual household sacrifice known as *miapali* was performed by the bridegroom, and a white cock was killed on the stone in front of the house, and as soon as the cock had been killed, the stone was turned upside down. The reason for turning the stone upside down was to cast the spirit of the pigs *mia* out of the house. The *miapali* sacrifice has been performed to ensure that the couple shall get good crops and shall not cut themselves accidentally while cutting the jhums.[246] This sacrifice is supposed to cast out all evil that might affect the crops of the newly married couple, and to ensure that their jhums shall burn completely and their paddy shall germinate. After this sacrifice, the bride permanently stayed in her husband's house. If the girl married a man belonging to another village, it was a customary practice for the newly married couple to visit the girl's parents after some months, and this special visit was known as *sipalie*.[247] Even after the bride permanently settled in her husband's house, the new couple had hardly slept together till at least one month has elapsed, and sometimes, they may wait for as much as a year.

Over time, the traditional marriage system of the Mara has undergone significant changes. While some customs have been preserved, many traditional marriage practices, rituals, and customs have become obsolete in contemporary Mara marriages. Among these practices, the tradition of an expensive bride price has been the most strongly retained in modern Mara marriage customs. As shown in Table 3.2, the vast majority of respondents indicated that, of all the traditional practices, the custom of an expensive bride price is the most devotedly maintained by the younger generation of the Mara. Specifically, 62 male respondents (88.57%) and 63 female respondents (90%) believe that this tradition is best followed by the current generation. Meanwhile, 3 male respondents (4.28%) and 2 female respondents (2.85%) felt that the divorce system best retains traditional practices. Additionally, 5

[246] Phillip, interview.
[247] Phillip, interview.

male respondents (7.14%) and 5 female respondents (7.14%) expressed that the tradition is best preserved when it comes to partner selection.

Table 3.3: Tradition most commonly upheld

Which traditional practice is most commonly upheld in the modern marriage practices of the Mara?	Male	Female	Total
Expensive bride price	**62**	**63**	**125**
Selection of partners	**5**	**5**	**10**
Divorce System	**3**	**2**	**5**

Keeping in view of the significance of distribution of bride prices in strengthening the bond of kinship relationship, it is not amazing to see that expensive bride price has been the crucial component of marriage system of the Mara till today. Even today, bride prices are systematically distributed in line with the traditions, and recipients of the bride strictly adhere to their duties and responsibilities in taking care of the bride. Till now, kinship structures play a crucial role in the distribution of the bride's prices.[248]

A follow-up question was posed to assess the extent to which the tradition of demanding expensive bride prices contributes to preserving the cultural identity of the Mara community. The responses, summarized in Table 3.3, indicate that this practice is perceived as highly significant in upholding Mara cultural heritage. A substantial majority of respondents - 62 males (88.57%) and 60 females (85.71%) affirmed that expensive bride prices play a crucial role in maintaining their cultural identity. This suggests a strong cultural consensus across gender lines, reflecting the deeply embedded nature of the tradition within the social fabric of the community.

Conversely, a smaller segment of the respondents - 4 male (5.71%) and 7 female (10%) expressed dissenting views, arguing that the practice is not necessarily vital for preserving cultural identity. Their perspectives may indicate emerging shifts of the younger generation towards traditional practices or growing concerns over the

[248] S.T. Pawla (Retired Headmaster, Government Zyhno Middle School), interviewed by scholar, Zyhno, February 17, 2024.

economic burdens associated with this custom. Additionally, a minority of 4 males (2.85%) and 3 females (4.28%) remained neutral, possibly reflecting ambivalence or a lack of strong opinion on the issue.

Overall, the data reveals that while the majority continues to regard expensive bride prices as a cornerstone of Mara cultural identity, there is a small but notable portion of the population that questions or remains uncertain about its relevance in the contemporary society. This divergence suggests the potential for future cultural transformation, especially as economic and social dynamics evolve.

Table 3.4: Significance of expensive bride prices in maintaining cultural identity

Do you think that the practice of expensive bride price is essential in maintaining cultural identity of the Mara?	Sex of the respondents		Total
	Male	Female	
Yes	62	60	**122**
No	4	7	**11**
No, not at all	4	3	**7**

Further insight is required to assess whether the younger generations among the Mara community continue to value the tradition of expensive bride price. The data reveals a notable gender-based divergence in opinion. Among male respondents, a significant majority of 52 individuals (74.28%) indicated that they still appreciate the custom of an expensive bride price. Similarly, among female respondents, 44 individuals (62.85%) expressed support for the tradition, although this figure is noticeably lower than that of their male counterparts.

On the other hand, resistance to the practice is more pronounced among women. A total of 22 female respondents (31.42%) stated that they do not support the continuation of high bride price demands, compared to 16 male respondents (22.85%) who shared the same view. This suggests that women may be more critical of the economic and social implications of the custom, potentially due to their direct involvement in the marriage process and its consequences. Additionally, a small

proportion of both male and female respondents remain indifferent or undecided, with 2 males (2.85%) and 4 females (5.71%) expressing no particular opinion on the matter. Overall, while a majority of young Maras, especially men still uphold the practice of an expensive bride price, there is a noticeable shift, particularly among women, toward questioning or rejecting the tradition. This may reflect a gradual change in attitudes influenced by evolving socio-economic conditions, greater gender awareness, and modernization within the community.

Table 3.5: Whether expensive bride price appreciated or not?

Do you value or appreciate the practice of expensive bride price?	Sex of the respondents		Total
	Male	Female	
Yes	52	44	**96**
No	16	22	**38**
Uncertain	2	4	**6**

Even today, the high cost of the bride price remains a central issue in the Mara marriage system. While animals and household items continue to be included in the bride price, modern household items such as blankets, plastic drawers, plastic water tanks, sewing machines, and dinner sets have largely replaced traditional items like gongs, guns, necklaces, brass hairpins, brass pots, earthen pots, beads, and daos. For the bridegroom's family, the obligation to pay a large sum as bride price often forces them to gather resources beyond their means. This might involve selling property, borrowing money, or taking loans, which can lead to long-term financial strain. The groom's family, particularly in lower-income households, may feel pressured in trying to fulfill these cultural obligations, were often left dealing with unnecessary financial strain, affecting their economic stability and placing stress on what should have been a joyous union. Ultimately, this practice, while deeply rooted in cultural tradition, can impose unnecessary financial burdens on both sides, complicating what should be a celebratory union.

Further investigation into respondents' perspectives on the financial implications of expensive bride prices reveals strong consensus regarding the

economic burden the practice imposes. As indicated in Table 3.5 below, a substantial majority of 118 individuals, representing 84.28% of the total respondents - acknowledged that high bride prices create considerable financial pressure on both the bride's and groom's families. This perception underscores growing concerns about the economic sustainability of the custom in contemporary society.

Notably, the opinions of male and female respondents on this issue were largely consistent. Among male participants, 56 individuals (80%) agreed that the financial demands of bride price are excessive, while 60 female respondents (85.71%) agreed with this sentiment. This alignment suggests that both genders are increasingly recognizing the strain that such traditional practices can place on family resources, particularly in a changing economic landscape where young couples and their families may already face financial hardships related to education, employment, and cost of living.

In contrast, a smaller group of 18 respondents (12.85%) maintained that high bride prices do not pose a significant economic challenge. This minority view may reflect either a strong cultural adherence to tradition, financial privilege, or a belief that the symbolic or social value of bride price outweighs its monetary cost. Additionally, 4 respondents (2.85%) refrained from expressing an opinion, possibly indicating uncertainty, lack of personal experience, or reluctance to express opinion in such a culturally sensitive issue.

Overall, the data points to a growing awareness of the financial consequences associated with expensive bride prices, with broad agreement across genders. This may be indicative of a shifting value system among the younger Mara population, where cultural practices are increasingly evaluated through practical and economic lenses.

Table 3.6: Question on whether bride price is financial burden or not.

Do you think that expensive bride prices place financial burden on both families?	Sex of the respondents		Total
	Male	Female	
Yes	56	60	**118**
No	12	8	**18**
Uncertain	2	2	**4**

Despite the financial strain that expensive bride prices placed on both the bride's and groom's families, very few respondents reported witnessing any case where a marriage proposal was hindered due to the groom's family's inability to meet the bride price demands. This suggests that fellow clansmen still actively support each other in gathering the necessary bride price.[249] Out of 140 respondents, 70 males (100%) and 68 females (97.14%) stated that they had never encountered a situation where a marriage proposal failed due to the groom's family inability to meet the expensive bride price. However, 2 female respondents (1.42%) reported witnessing such an event in their locality. This indicates that these incidents are relatively recent, highlighting that expensive bride prices continue to be a complex issue today. The responses from all 140 respondents on this matter are as follows:

Table 3.7: Marriage proposal stood cancelled due to the inability to pay bride price.

Have you seen any instance where marriage proposal stood cancelled due to the inability to pay bride price?	Sex of the respondents		Total
	Male	Female	
Yes	0	2	**2**
No	70	68	**138**

Although the Maras have traditionally adhered to the practice of demanding an expensive bride price, and families have rarely faced difficulties in meeting these demands, this does not necessarily mean the younger generation is entirely committed to maintaining the status quo. Recent responses indicate a growing

[249] Pawla, interview.

inclination toward reforming the practice to reduce the financial burden associated with marriage. Specifically, 36 male respondents (51.42%) and 40 female respondents (57.14%) expressed support for lowering the bride price. This emerging consensus suggests a shift in cultural attitudes, particularly among the youth, toward a more pragmatic approach to matrimonial customs.

Interestingly, the relatively high proportion of female respondents favoring a reduction is particularly noteworthy. Despite traditionally being viewed as the beneficiaries of the bride price, 57.14% female respondents advocated for its reduction. This indicates an evolving gender perspective, where women, too, are critically evaluating the economic burden the practice places on both families.

Conversely, a notable minority still favour the continuation of the high bride price tradition. Among males, 22 respondents (31.42%) opposed any reduction, compared to 10 females (14.28%). This group may represent those who view the bride price not merely as a financial transaction but as a marker of cultural identity, honour, and familial status. Their resistance underscores the deep-rooted cultural and symbolic value that continues to surround the practice.

Moreover, a significant proportion of respondents remain undecided or neutral on the issue with12 males (17.14%) and 20 females (28.57%). This uncertainty likely reflects the tension between upholding long-cherished customs and adapting to the socio-economic realities of modern life. The high number of uncertain responses suggests that the debate over whether to modify or maintain the expensive bride price is both sensitive and unresolved. It remains a contested space where cultural preservation and contemporary practicality continue to clash.

Table 3.8: Desire to decreasing expenditure on bride price.

Do you think that expensive bride prices need to be decreased to lessen financial burden on both families?	**Sex of the respondents**		**Total**
	Male	**Female**	
Yes	36	40	**76**
No	22	10	**32**

Uncertain	12	20	**32**

Many village communities in Maraland are increasingly concerned about the significant financial strain associated with payment of the bride price. In response to this issue, several villages have introduced measures to regulate and reduce these expenses. One common approach has been the fixation of an upper limit on bride price expenditure. Village committees are responsible to ensure that the total costs incurred do not surpass the stipulated ceiling.

In Amobyu village where *Tlosai* dialect is predominantly spoken, the upper ceiling of the bride price has been officially fixed at 5,000 rupees by Village Committee.[250] All customary payments and expenses directly associated with the bride price must not go beyond this prescribed limit. However, this financial ceiling does not apply to a separate category of traditional payments under that of *Makhotho*. These include *Puma*, payable to the bride's maternal uncle, *Pupa*, *Nochyu* payable to the mother's sister, *Norihra* payable to the youngest sister of the bride's mother, and *Nochyu* payable to the bride's paternal aunt, *Nono.* These specific contributions fall outside the stipulated amount and are considered distinct from the main bride price.

In practice, the total expenditure on bride price surpasses the officially designated ceiling. This is primarily due to the fact that the valuation of individual bride price items is determined by the recipients themselves, rather than being based on prevailing market rates. For instance, in one case, the recipient of the principal bride price component, *Okia*, requested a plastic water tank with a capacity of 3,000 liters. While the market price for such an item is approximately 15,000 rupees, the recipient assigned it a nominal value of only 1,000 rupees.[251] Similar practices are observed among other recipients, who arbitrarily set values for the items they claimed. Consequently, despite regulatory efforts, the bride price remains as financially burdensome as it has traditionally been.

[250] H.C. Pakia (Headmaster, Amobyu Primary School-I), interviewed by scholar, Amobyu, February 14, 2024.
[251] Pakia, interview.

As a coping mechanism, relatives and members of the groom's clan continue to support one another in meeting these substantial demands. Although it is no longer obligatory for recipients of the bride price to slaughter animals in order to claim their share, it remains customary for them to reciprocate by collectively contributing livestock for the wedding feast on the day of the ceremony.[252]

In Theiva village where *Hawthai* is widely spoken, the bride price has been fixed at 5,000 rupees, and the price should not go beyond this ceiling. But, this upper ceiling does not include pride prices payable to mother's sister, mother's brother and father's sister. The recipients of such bride prices of *Nochyu*, *Norihra* and *Nochyu* usually demanded dinner set, pressure cooker, pot etc. Like other places, the actual expenditure on bride price often exceeds the established ceiling, largely because recipients assign value of the items on their own terms rather than adhering to standard market rates. Moreover, it is not uncommon for a single recipient to request multiple items, provided that the combined value of the items (based on their own assessment) does not surpass the maximum amount they claim to be entitled to.[253]

In Theiva, a slight deviation in respect of the distribution of the bride price is noted in such a way that the number of main prices *Azila* is reduced to three only. In traditional period, there were a number of principle prices that fall under *Azila* upon which male relatives of the bride on her father's side had the right to claim. Now a day, only three main prices under *Azila* category are retained, and such prices are *Okia*, *Chawchyu* and *Seicheihra*.[254]

In Tisi village *Hawthai* is the main dialect, a difference in respect of the bride price between the ruling clan and plebeian clan is still observed. While the upper ceiling of the bride price for ruling clan has been fixed at 10,000 rupees, the same has been fixed at 7,000 rupees for commoners' clan. This price range does not include those prices which are listed under the category of *Makhotho* like *Puma, Nochyu*, *Norihra* and *Nochyu*. In Tisi, the wife takers' party are obliged to pay *Okia, Chochyu* and *Seipihra* at the time of *Zatlaso* which usually takes place on the eve of

[252] Pakia, interview.
[253] Makhai, interview.
[254] Makhai, interview.

the wedding day. The price range of the bride price for both ruling clan and middle clan in the village may be indicated in the Table as follows:[255]

Table 3.9: Upper ceiling of the bride price in Tisi village

Main price	Ruling clan	Commoners' clan
Okia	5,000.00	4,000.00
Chawchyu	3,000.00	2,000.00
Seipihra	2,000.00	1,000.00

As in other areas, recipients of customary payments such as *Okia*, *Chawchyu*, and *Seipihra* often assign values to these items based on their own discretion, disregarding prevailing market prices. This practice has perpetuated the high cost of the bride price, rendering it as financially burdensome as it was in earlier times.

In Chheihlu village, the bride price for a ruling clan was set slightly higher than that for a commoner's clan. While the bride price for a member of the ruling clan was fixed at 6,000 rupees, the maximum for a commoner's clan was capped at 4,000 rupees.[256] The primary items required in lieu of the bride price typically included a plastic water tank, pot (*dekchi*), dinner set, pressure cooker, and similar items. However, since the dictated price for these items was nearly ten times their actual market value, the total expenditure on bride prices remained considerably high. This has made the expensive nature of the bride prices belonging to ruling clan and commoners' clan more or less the same in actual practice.

In Chapi village, as well as in other villages where the *Chapi* dialect is predominantly spoken, there has been a sustained preference for demanding traditional items, as far as possible, in lieu of monetary payments or modern items for the bride price. Among the Chapi-speaking community, distinctions in respect of the bride price between the ruling clan, high clan, and commoners' clan continue to

[255] N. Laikia (Senior resident of Tisi village), interviewed by scholar, Tisi, February 15, 2024.
[256] K. Beirono (Headmaster, Government Chheihlu Middle School) interviewed by scholar, Chheihlu, February 16, 2024.

be observed.[257] For a bride belonging to a ruling clan, the traditional *Okia* price includes a she-mithun and its calf, known as *sano-saw*. The recipient of *Okia* usually demands *sano-saw* as the main price when the bride is from a ruling clan. If the groom does not possess a she-mithun and calf, he may offer a pot of twelve spans as a substitute for *sano-saw*. For a bride belonging to a high clan (*phoso*), the *Okia* claimant usually requests a full-grown mithun (*sapi*) as the primary price, known as *amapi*. However, if the wife takers' party does not possess a full-grown mithun, a pot of ten spans may be accepted as a substitute for *sapi*.

When the bride belongs to a commoners' clan (*machhie*), the *Okia* recipient demands a full-grown cow (*sataw*) or a pig as the main price, *amapi*. If the husband's party is unable to provide *sataw*, a pot of nine spans may be offered as a replacement. For a person born of *dawchhy* lineage, the *Okia* price cannot exceed the value of a pair of small gongs or a pot of seven spans as its equivalent.

Okia of different clans and items that may be taken in lieu of traditional items among *Chapi* speaking people may be indicated as follows:

Table 3.10: Traditional items and substituted items of *Okia* among the Chapi community.

Sl.no	Clans	Items	Compensatory items
1	Ruling clan (*abeipho*)	She mithun and its calf *sano saw*	A pot of 12 spans
2	High Clan (*phoso*)	Full grown mithun *sapi*	A pot of 10 spans
3	Plebeian clan (*machhie*)	Full grown cow *sataw* or a pig	A pot of 9 spans
4	Low clan (*dawchhy*)	A pair of small gong	A pot of 7 spans

In Zyhno village, Zyhno Rules and Development Committee was founded in 2022 to look into the matters pertaining to marriage, divorce and bride price in the village. As per the rules laid down by the Committee, the entire amount of the bride price should not exceed 1,500 (one thousand, five hundred) rupees. Though this fixed amount seems to have been very minimal, the actual expenditure incurred on

[257] Neikhu Solo (President, Village Council, New Chapi), interviewed by scholar, New Chapi, February 18, 2024.

payment of the bride prices remains expensive as the value of the items has been dictated by the recipient in his own term.

The committee has chalked out upper ceiling of each of the main prices under *Azila* and the items that may be taken for it and upper ceiling of the actual market price as follows.[258]

Table 3.11: Fixed amount of main prices under *Azila* and items that may be taken in lieu of it in Zyhno village.

Sl no.	Main prices	Amount	Items of the price	Market value
1	*Okia*	Rs. 300.00	Plastic Water Tank (2,000 ltrs)	Rs. 15,000.00
2	*Chawchyu*	Rs. 250.00	Pot of 12 spans	Rs. 8000.00
3	*Seipihra*	Rs. 100.00	2 pots of 10 spans each	Rs. 4,400.00
4	*Seicheihra*	Rs. 80.00	2 pots of 9 spans each	Rs. 4,000.00
5	*Rohahra*	Rs. 60.00	2 pots of 8 spans each	Rs. 3600.00
6	*Dawhkhohhra*	Rs. 60.00	2 pots of 8 spans each	Rs. 3600.00

Although an upper ceiling for the bride price has been set at relatively modest levels in nearly all villages, the actual expenditure associated with it remains considerably high. This continued financial burden is primarily attributed to the fact that the value of bride price items is determined solely by the recipients, based on their own subjective assessments. Irrespective of the items' actual market prices, recipients often assign nominal values that are significantly lower, sometimes as much as ten times less than their real market price. As a result, despite the formal limits in place, the overall expense of fulfilling bride price obligations remains substantial and onerous in contemporary practice.

In recent time, Mara Culture Development Committee (MCDC) was founded with M Hniezo as President and K Ngo U as Secretary to look into the matters pertaining to reduction of bride price and introduction of uniform rate of bride prices

[258] V.T. Sachhua, *Dah Buh*, (Zyhno: Zyhno Rules and Development Committee, 2022), 7.

irrespective of the clans and places in Maraland, Mizoram.[259] The proposed uniform rate of bride price by the Committee is subject to discussion and subsequent approval by Mara Autonomous District Council. If the proposal is approved by the competent authority, this would reduce expenditure on bride to a great extent.

The preceding analysis of the bride price system among the Maras reveals that this institution extends far beyond a mere economic transaction; it constitutes a complex network of social, moral, and symbolic exchanges. When viewed through the lens of Radcliffe-Brown's functionalism, it reinforces kinship bonds and maintains communal harmony, while Lévi-Strauss's alliance theory underscores its role in perpetuating inter-group reciprocity through the circulation of rights and obligations. Yet, as feminist theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Gayle Rubin, and Judith Butler have argued, such systems also embed hierarchical gender relations and performative expectations that regulate women's roles within the patriarchal social order. The negotiation of bride price thus becomes a site where power, gender, and economy converge, simultaneously affirming cultural identity and exposing structural inequalities.

As this practice evolves under the pressures of Christian ethics, economic modernization, and changing gender norms, it reflects broader transformations in the meaning and function of marriage within Mara society. The transition from collective to individualized decision-making, and from material exchange to emotional companionship, signals a reconfiguration of social values and kinship ideology. The following chapter builds upon this theoretical foundation by examining the institution of marriage among the Maras in its wider socio-political and economic contexts, exploring how marriage continues to function as both a cultural anchor and an instrument of social change in a rapidly transforming community.

[259] M. Hniezo (Senior Citizen, Zyhno), interviewed by scholar, Zyhno, February 16, 2024.

CHAPTER 4: THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE AND THE MARAS: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

1. Introduction: Functional and Structural-Functional Perspectives

Marriage, as a cultural institution, has historically constituted the cornerstone of Mara social and political life. Beyond its role in regulating sexual relations and procreation, marriage functions as a mechanism for alliance-building, status negotiation, and political consolidation. This chapter explores the socio-political significance of marriage among the Maras, situating it within both traditional and contemporary contexts.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study draws upon the structural-functional perspective articulated by scholars such as Bronisław Malinowski[260] and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown,[261] who viewed marriage as a fundamental institution serving to maintain social order, reproduction, and cultural continuity. Within the Mara context, marriage performs essential social functions—regulating kinship, legitimizing descent, and stabilizing community relations—thereby reinforcing the structural integrity of the society. The functionalist approach helps explain how marriage operates as a mechanism for transmitting social values and ensuring the continuity of social systems across generations.

According to Lévi-Strauss, marriage is not merely a private relationship but a system of exchange through which groups create alliances and social solidarity.[262] Among the Maras, inter-clan marriages historically served as a means of alliance-building, echoing Lévi-Strauss's notion of the "exchange of women" as a foundational principle of kinship organization. Thus, marriage in Mara society can be interpreted as a structured system of reciprocity that binds families into enduring social networks.

One of its primary purposes was to establish a stable family unit for the upbringing of children, ensuring continuity of lineage and the transmission of values,

[260] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (New York: Routledge, 2017).
[261] Radcliffe Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society.*
[262] Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship.*

customs, and traditions across generations.[263] In many cultures, marriage was also an essential mechanism for forging alliances between families, strengthening social cohesion, and promoting communal stability.[264]

In addition to its social and political significance, marriage had profound religious and moral implications. Many traditional societies viewed marriage as a sacred bond, often sanctioned by religious authorities or customary laws.[265] It was seen as a moral obligation, ensuring fidelity, legitimacy of offspring, and adherence to societal norms. The institution of marriage also provided emotional support, companionship, and a structured environment where individuals could fulfill their familial and societal roles.[266]

In early period, Mara society was characterized by a deep gulf between the higher and the lower clans, and the primary purpose of marriage among the Maras was to raise their status in the society by marrying into a higher clan. By strategically marrying into a higher clan, individual sought to elevate his social status and secured greater recognition within the community.[267] In the traditional period, marriage served as a means of forging alliances and strengthening familial ties across different social strata.[268]

In response to the question regarding the primary purpose of marriage in contemporary Mara society, the survey findings, as indicated in Table 4.1 below reveal distinct perspectives among male and female respondents. A significant portion of participants- 26 males (37%) and 35 females (50%) identified forging family alliances as the primary reason for marriage. This suggests that marriage continues to be viewed as a means of strengthening social and familial bonds within the Mara community.

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[263] Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Viking, 2005), 42.
[264] Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 67.
[265] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1959), 119.
[266] Linda Stone, *Kinship and Gender: An Introduction* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2010), 156.
[267] N.E. Parry, *The Lakhers* (Calcutta: Firma K.L.M. Pvt. Ltd., 2009), 293.
[268] C. Thahe (Retired SDO, P&E, Siaha), interviewed by scholar, Siaha, January 25, 2025.

Additionally, 29 male respondents (43%) and 24 female respondents (33%) highlighted the importance of marriage in ensuring the continued existence of the Mara people as a distinct ethnic group. This perspective underscores the role of marriage in preserving cultural identity and heritage, reflecting a collective consciousness regarding ethnic continuity. Interestingly, a smaller but equal proportion of respondents- 11 males (15%) and 11 females (15%) prioritized personal happiness as the primary motivation for marriage. This indicates a shift towards individual fulfilment within marital relationships, which may reflect evolving social values influenced by modernization in the contemporary Mara society. Notably, only 4 male respondents (6%) cited procreation as the main purpose of marriage, suggesting that childbearing, while traditionally significant, may no longer be the dominant factor in marital decisions among the Maras.

Overall, the responses suggest that while contemporary Mara society acknowledges personal happiness as a reason for marriage, traditional values such as family alliances and cultural preservation remain central to marital expectations. The data indicates that younger generations of the Mara community still appreciate the societal and cultural significance of marriage, reinforcing its role in maintaining social cohesion and ethnic identity.

Table 4.1: Purpose of marriage in the contemporary Mara community:

What do you think is the primary purpose of marriage?	Male	Female	Total
Forging family alliance	26	35	61
Ensuring continued existence of the Maras	29	24	53
Personal happiness	11	11	22
Procreation	4		4

2. Marriage and Kinship: Alliance Theory and Social Cohesion

The Alliance Theory of kinship proposed by Lévi-Strauss provides a useful lens to understand how marital unions among the Maras foster inter-family solidarity and community stability. By establishing reciprocal relationships through marriage, families create webs of mutual obligation and cooperation, ensuring both social

reproduction and political integration. This aligns with Radcliffe-Brown's concept of kinship as a "network of rights and obligations," wherein each marriage strengthens the moral fabric of society. The close bond between maternal uncles and nephews (*pupa* and nieces/nephews) further reflects the structural-functional significance of kinship reciprocity, as such ties sustain intergenerational cohesion and reinforce the social role of extended family networks.

In the Mara society, the systems of kinship and marriage are deeply interconnected. Marriage serves as a crucial mechanism for transforming unrelated individuals into close kin, thereby fostering strong social bonds and mutual obligations. Through matrimonial alliances, individuals and families establish enduring relationships that reinforce social cohesion. Moreover, children born within these unions are inherently linked to both their paternal and maternal kin networks, further strengthening familial ties across generations.[269]

Among the Maras, the bond between a maternal uncle *pupa* and his nieces and nephews is exceptionally strong and deeply affectionate. This relationship is marked by a profound sense of care, guidance, and responsibility. The maternal uncle plays a crucial role in the lives of his sister's children, often providing emotional and practical support. In times of distress, nieces and nephews instinctively seek his assistance, sometimes even before turning to their own parents.[270] In this way, marriage plays a vital role not only in expanding kinship connections but also in promoting social unity and solidarity within the community.

As shown in Table 4.2 below, a significant majority of respondents recognize the crucial role of marriage in strengthening kinship ties and fostering social cohesion within contemporary Mara society. Specifically, 53 male respondents (76%) and 44 female respondents (64%) expressed the belief that marriage remains a vital institution for maintaining familial bonds and promoting solidarity. However, a small minority held a contrasting view. Only 3 male respondents (4%) and 6 female

[269] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 75.
[270] H.T. Phillip (Church Elder, ECM Local Church, Siaha), interviewed by scholar, Siaha, January 25, 2025.

respondents (8%) stated that they no longer see marriage as the primary mechanism for fostering kinship connections and social unity. This indicates a shift in perception among a small segment of the population, potentially influenced by evolving social norms and individual preferences.

Additionally, it is noteworthy that 14 male respondents (20%) and 20 female respondents (28%) expressed indifference regarding the role of marriage in strengthening kinship ties and societal cohesion. Their neutral stand suggests that while marriage continues to be a valued institution for many, an increasing number of individuals may perceive other social structures or personal choices as equally significant in shaping familial relationships and community bonds. These findings highlight both the enduring importance of marriage in Mara society and the gradual diversification of perspectives on its role among younger generation of the Maras.

Table 4.2: Significance of marriage in fostering kinship ties and societal solidarity

Does marriage help in fostering kinship connection and solidarity in the society?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	53	44	97
No	3	6	9
Uncertain	14	20	34

3. Gender Roles and Division of Labour: Feminist and Gender Theories

The gendered division of labour in traditional Mara society can be interpreted through the lens of Feminist Anthropology, particularly the works of Michelle Rosaldo[271] and Sherry Ortner[272] who argued that gender roles are socially constructed rather than biologically determined. The traditional assignment of men to public and women to domestic spheres reflects what Ortner termed the *"nature-culture dichotomy"*, where women's reproductive roles were naturalized, limiting their participation in public decision-making.

[271] Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, *Woman, Culture, and Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974).
[272] Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" in *Woman, Culture, and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 67–87.

However, the gradual shift toward shared parenting and economic participation among Mara women signifies what Anthony Giddens[273] called the emergence of the *"pure relationship"*—a form of companionship-based marriage centered on mutual respect, affection, and equality, rather than rigid social obligations. This transition illustrates the influence of modernization and education on transforming gender expectations within the community.

In traditional Mara society, the division of labour between men and women was well-defined, with each gender playing distinct yet complementary roles. Men were traditionally regarded as the primary providers and protectors of the family, taking on responsibilities that required physical strength and endurance. Tasks such as construction and repairing of the house, engaging in vigorous agricultural activities, and overseeing family affairs were typically assigned to men, reinforcing their role as the backbone of the household's economic stability.

On the other hand, women were entrusted with managing the domestic activities, ensuring the smooth functioning of daily life within the household. Their responsibilities primarily revolved around household chores, including cleaning, cooking, and fetching water, as well as nurturing and caring for children. Women played a crucial role in maintaining the well-being of the family, fostering a decent environment that was essential for the upbringing of the children. This traditional division of labour contributed significantly to the overall harmony and sustenance of the community.[274]

When examining the extent to which marriage reinforces traditional gender roles in contemporary Mara society, the overwhelming consensus among respondents suggests that it continues to play a crucial role in maintaining these roles. A significant majority of 54 male respondents (78%) and 52 female respondents (74%) affirmed that marriage strongly upholds traditional gender expectations within the community. Conversely, a smaller proportion of participants

[273] Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).
[274] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 73.

expressed disagreement, with 10 male respondents (14%) and 11 female respondents (16%) believing that marriage does not necessarily reinforce traditional gender roles. Additionally, 6 male respondents (8%) and 7 female respondents (10%) chose to remain neutral on the matter. Although gender roles for both men and women have gradually evolved over time, the findings as shown in Table 4.3 below indicate that marriage remains a powerful institution in preserving and reinforcing traditional gender norms within the contemporary Mara community.

Table 4.3: Does marriage reinforce traditional gender roles in the Mara community

Does marriage reinforce traditional gender roles in the Mara community?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	54	52	106
No	10	11	21
Neutral/Uncertain	6	7	13

4. Marriage, Procreation, and Social Control: Symbolic Interactionism and Social Reproduction

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, marriage represents not only a social contract but also a shared set of meanings and symbols that regulate individual behavior and moral expectations.[275] The stigma attached to illegitimate births in early Mara society illustrates how social norms and symbolic meanings were employed to control sexuality and maintain moral order.

Meanwhile, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social reproduction is particularly relevant here: through marriage and childbearing, families reproduce not only biological lineage but also cultural capital, social hierarchy, and moral values.[276] The transmission of status and property through legitimate marriage reinforces social continuity, while deviations—such as illegitimacy—threaten the symbolic order.

[275] George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934)
[276] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

In traditional Mara society, the birth of an illegitimate child *riasaw*, was considered a profound disgrace, bringing shame not only to the mother but also to her family. Such children faced numerous social disadvantages, including exclusion from important cultural and familial privileges. An illegitimate child was denied participation in sacrificial rituals conducted by his father and was also barred from inheriting paternal property, further reinforcing his marginalized status within the community. An illegitimate son, along with his descendants up to the fourth generation, was prohibited from taking part in the *Khazopiena* sacrifice, a sacred ritual performed by the family.[277] This ritual was dedicated to *Khazopa*, the supreme being whom the Maras esteemed as the source of life and blessings. Being unable to participate in such a significant religious practice was a matter of deep humiliation, further intensifying the disgrace associated with illegitimate birth.[278]

Due to the immense disgrace linked to illegitimacy, instances of children born outside of marriage were exceedingly rare among the Maras. In cases where an unmarried man impregnated a woman, the families of both parties typically exerted strong pressure on them to marry, ensuring that the child would be born within wedlock and recognized as legitimate. This societal norm is one of the key reasons for rare occurrence of illegitimate births among the Mara people.[279]

Although societal attitudes toward illegitimate births have gradually become more accommodating over time largely due to the decline of traditional beliefs and ritual sacrifices under the influence of Christianity and modernization, the Mara community continues to uphold marriage as the ideal and most stable environment for raising children. While the rigid stigmas once associated with illegitimate births have declined, the fundamental belief that a child's well-being is best ensured within the structure of a legally and socially recognized union remains deeply embedded in Mara society.

[277] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 280.
[278] Mylai Hlychho, *Mara History*, (Aizawl: Huahnar Offset Press, 1972), 192.
[279] M. Hniezo (Senior Citizen at Zyhno), interviewed by scholar, Siaha, January 26, 2025.

As illustrated in Table 4.4 below, an overwhelming majority of respondents affirmed that marriage serves as a stable and supportive environment for raising children. Notably, there was unanimous agreement among both male and female participants, with not a single respondent expressing disapproval of this notion. This widespread consensus underscores the deeply rooted belief within the Mara community that marriage plays a crucial role in fostering a secure and suitable environment for rearing of children.

The absence of dissenting views suggests that, despite societal changes influenced by modernization and evolving social norms, the traditional perception of marriage as the ideal foundation for child-rearing remains largely intact. This strong endorsement highlights marriage continues to be a fundamental pillar of Mara society.

Table 4.4: Marriage as a stable environment for raising children

Do you think marriage provides a stable environment for raising children?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	70	70	140
No	0	0	

Having children is an important aspect of marriage in human society. This is essentially due to the reason that children strengthen family units by reinforcing commitment and shared responsibility within a marriage. Parenthood also brings a sense of fulfilment and purpose, as many couples find meaning in nurturing and guiding the next generation.[280] Among the early Maras, one of the greatest aspirations of parents was to have many children, as this was seen as a means of expanding the family's kinship structure and strengthening social ties. The moment a couple entered into marriage, they eagerly anticipated the birth of a child, viewing it as both a blessing and a fulfilment of their union. However, If a woman was unable to conceive or was deemed barren, she faced societal stigma and was often looked

[280] John H. Scanzoni, *Shaping Tomorrow's Family: Theory and Policy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000), 45.

down upon. Such women were given the insulting term *sawleipa*.[281] This cultural expectation placed immense pressure on women to fulfil their role as child-bearers, reinforcing the belief that motherhood was essential to a woman's identity and acceptance within the community.

Among the early Maras, divorce was an extremely rare occurrence, as marriage was regarded as a sacred and lifelong commitment. However, barrenness was one of the few reasons that could justify a divorce. If a wife was unable to conceive, her husband had the right to initiate divorce proceedings against her. But, Before a divorce could take place, the wife was granted a grace period of one year to attempt to recover her fertility. During this time, she was expected to perform various rituals and sacrifices in the hope of overcoming her barrenness. If she was still unable to conceive by the end of the year, the husband had the right to dissolve the marriage immediately.[282]

In cases where divorce occurred due to barrenness, the wife's family was required to return the full amount of the bride price that had been paid at the time of marriage. Furthermore, they were not entitled to claim any outstanding balance of the agreed bride price. However, if the husband chose to divorce his wife before the one-year period had elapsed, he must forfeit the entire bride price he had already paid. But, unpaid balance of the bride price was ignored.[283] This practice reflects the high value placed on fertility in Mara society, where a woman's ability to bear children was closely linked to the stability of marriage and the legitimacy of her position within the family.

As shown in Table 4.5 below, an overwhelming majority of respondents recognized the crucial role that children play in maintaining the stability of a marriage among married couples. Both male and female respondents strongly affirmed the belief that having children is essential for sustaining a lasting marital union within the Mara community. Specifically, 67 out of 70 male respondents

[281] K. Zohra, *The Maras: The Indigenous Tradition and Folkculture* (Guwahati: Scientific Book Centre, 2013), 66.
[282] Hlychho, *Mara History*, 111.
[283] Hlychho, *Mara History*, 112.

(96%) and 65 out of 70 female respondents (94%) acknowledged the importance of children in ensuring marital stability. Notably, no respondents out rightly disagreed with this notion. However, a small minority expressed uncertainty on the matter, with 3 male respondents (4%) and 5 female respondents (7%) indicating indecisiveness rather than opposition. These findings underscore the deep-rooted cultural and societal perception that children serve as a cornerstone of a successful and enduring marriage in the Mara community. The absence of dissenting opinions suggests a strong social consensus on this issue, while the small proportion of uncertain responses may indicate a degree of evolving perspectives or personal reservations among a few individuals.

Table 4.5: Importance of having children to ensure stability of marriage

Do you think that having children is important for sustained marital union?	Male	Female	Total
Important	67	65	132
Not important	0	0	0
Neutral/Uncertain	3	5	8

In traditional Mara society, a strict division of labour was prevalent, with household management and child-rearing primarily assigned to mothers. Women were expected to take full responsibility for raising children, while men engaged in external economic and social activities. However, this rigid, gender-based division of responsibilities has undergone significant transformation due to the forces of modernization, globalization, and expanding employment opportunities in both government and private sectors. These changes have contributed to a shift in societal attitudes, leading to a more equitable distribution of parental responsibilities in regard to the rearing of children.

As reflected in Table 4.6, child-rearing is no longer perceived as a sole responsibility of a mother. A striking 96% of male respondents (67 out of 70) and all female respondents (100%) agreed that raising children is a shared responsibility between both parents. Notably, not a single female respondent expressed the belief that child-rearing should be the exclusive responsibility of either the mother or the

father. However, a small minority of 3 male respondents (4%) still upheld the traditional notion that mothers should bear sole responsibility for raising children. This marginal disagreement suggests that the traditional belief in gendered parental roles continues to linger among a small fraction of the population. But, it is largely being replaced by a more modern and egalitarian perspective. The overwhelming support for shared parenting responsibilities reflects an evolving mindset in the Mara community, driven increased awareness of the importance of paternal involvement in child development. This transition signifies a broader movement toward gender equality within families and a redefinition of traditional roles to align with contemporary realities.

Table 4.6: Who is responsible for rearing of children?

Who is primarily responsible for child rearing in the contemporary Mara community?	Male	Female	Total
Mother	3	0	3
Father	0	0	0
Both parents	67	70	137

Among the early Maras, the cost and complexity of the traditional bride price made economic stability a crucial factor in the selection of marriage partners.[284] The bride price was so exorbitant and financially burdensome that its payment was commonly referred to as *sahrophia*, meaning the complete surrender of all family possessions. Due to the overwhelming expense, the bridegroom's family relied on the collective support of their clansmen and relatives to gather and fulfill the required payment. This practice not only facilitated marriage but also played a vital role in reinforcing kinship bonds and strengthening relationships among the Mara community.[285]

If the husband was unable to pay the full bride price at the time of marriage, he was permitted to settle the remaining balance in instalments. If he failed to clear the debt during his lifetime, the obligation was inherited by his eldest son. Should the

[284] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 143.
[285] Zohra, *The Maras*, 44.

son also be unable to pay off the remaining amount, the debt would then be passed down to successive generations.[286] Given the exorbitant cost of the bride price and the challenges of paying it in full at once, it is unsurprising that economic status was one of the most critical factors in choosing a marriage partner among the early Maras.[287]

In contemporary Mara society, economic status remains a crucial factor in marriage choices, despite general improvements in economic conditions. As illustrated in Table 4.7, a significant proportion of respondents acknowledged the influence of family economic status on marital decisions. Specifically, 33 male respondents (48%) and 22 female respondents (32%) indicated that economic status plays a very significant role in marriage selection. Additionally, a notable portion of the population, 28 male respondents (40%) and 39 female respondents (56%) perceived economic status as somewhat important in determining a suitable marriage partner. Conversely, a relatively small fraction of respondents- 9 males (12%) and an equal number of females (12%) asserted that economic status has no substantial impact on marriage choices within the society. These findings suggest that while economic progress has been made, considerations regarding financial stability and family wealth continue to influence marital decisions. The data reflects a broader cultural tendency to prioritize economic security in marriage arrangements, highlighting the persistent role of financial considerations in shaping social structures within Mara society.

5. Economic Status and Marriage: Marxist and Political-Economic Perspectives

The role of economic status in determining marital choices among the Maras can be interpreted through a Marxist and political-economy lens, emphasizing how economic relations shape social institutions. According to Friedrich Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, marriage historically evolved in

[286] R.A. Lorrain, *Five Years in Unknown Jungles* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publication, 1912), 151.
[287] F.C. Khaima (Secretary, ECM Local Church, New Chapi), interviewed by scholar, New Chapi, February 6, 2025.

tandem with property relations, serving as a mechanism for the transmission of wealth and control over women's reproductive labour.[288]

Similarly, Jack Goody emphasized that bride wealth systems in traditional societies serve both as economic exchanges and as symbols of alliance and obligation.[289] The Mara practice of *sahrophia* (exorbitant bride price) reflects this dynamic, where marriage consolidates not just social bonds but also economic interdependence among clans.

Table 4.7: Significance of economic status in marriage choices.

How does economic status of a family affect marriage choices in Mara community?	Male	Female	Total
Very significant	33	22	55
Somewhat significant	28	39	67
Not significant	9	9	18

The validity of the aforementioned finding is reinforced by the overwhelming consensus among respondents, as reflected in Table 4.8. A significant majority acknowledged that employment opportunities play a crucial role in determining an individual's choice of a marriage partner. Specifically, 50 male respondents (72%) and 56 female respondents (80%) strongly asserted that employment prospects significantly influence marital decisions within society. On the contrary, a small proportion of respondents held an opposing view. Among them, 9 males (12%) and 11 females (16%) believed that employment opportunities have no significance on marital choices. Additionally, an insignificant minority of respondents adopted a neutral stance on this issue, with 11 males (16%) and 3 females (4%) neither affirming nor denying the impact of employment on marriage selection. These findings underscore the substantial role economic stability and job prospects play in shaping marital decisions, suggesting that financial security is a key consideration in partner selection. The marginal presence of dissenting and neutral respondents

[288] Engels, *The Origin of the Family*.
[289] Goody, *Production and Reproduction*.

further highlights the prevailing societal perception that employment status is a decisive factor in marriage.

Table 4.8: Employment prospect affecting marriage choices.

Does employment prospect affect whom to marry?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	50	56	106
No	9	11	20
Uncertain	11	3	14

During the traditional period, clan affiliation was another crucial factor in determining marriage choices. While a man could not change his clan, he could elevate his social status by marrying a woman from a higher clan. If a man, his father and grandfather had consistently married into higher clans, he could claim a higher bride price than his own clan did it customarily. The strong desire to marry into a higher clan often posed challenges in finding a suitable bride, particularly within the preferred marriageable age range, which was typically between 20 and 25 years in earlier times.[290] This pursuit of upward social mobility through marriage sometimes led to delays in securing a match, as men prioritized status advancement over more immediate marital prospects.

When examining the role of clan affiliation in determining marital choices in contemporary society, as reflected in Table 4.9, the responses present a clear shift in traditional values. While significant proportion of respondents still consider clan association an important factor in marriage decisions, with 22 male respondents (32%) and 20 female respondents (28%) emphasizing its relevance, a larger portion of respondents- 42 males (60%) and 47 females (68%) no longer regard clan affiliation as a primary determinant in choosing a spouse. This suggests a notable decline in the traditional emphasis placed on clan identity in marital decisions, indicating a shift toward more flexible or individual-centered criteria in contemporary society.

[290] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 239.

Additionally, a small fraction of the respondents- 6 males (8%) and 3 females (4%) remain neutral on the matter, neither endorsing nor rejecting the significance of clan affiliation in marriage choices. This neutrality may reflect a transitional phase in societal attitudes, where some individuals recognize both traditional values and evolving social perspectives. Overall, the data highlights a significant decline in the influence of clan affiliation on marriage decisions, reinforcing the idea that modern marital choices are increasingly shaped by personal preferences rather than rigid traditional norms.

Table 4.9: Clan affiliation in determining marriage choice.

Do you think that clan affiliation affects marital choice in the contemporary society?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	22	20	42
No	42	47	89
Uncertain	6	3	9

In traditional societies, marriage was often regarded as a fundamental institution for procreation, ensuring the continuity of family lineage and social stability. It served as a means of legitimizing offspring, thus securing inheritance rights and maintaining social order.[291] In many cultures, marriage was closely tied to religious and communal expectations, where the ability to bear children was considered a primary duty of spouses. Additionally, procreation within marriage reinforced kinship networks, which played a crucial role in economic cooperation and the transmission of cultural values across generations.[292]

Among the Maras, as in many other traditional societies, marriage was regarded as an essential obligation to be fulfilled by both men and women, primarily for the purpose of procreation. Rather than prioritizing personal satisfaction or the fulfillment of sexual desires between spouses, the primary concern of marriage was

[291] Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 45.
[292] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 103.

production of offspring to ensure continuation of the family lineage, with a strong emphasis on having numerous children to strengthen kinship ties.[293]

6. Modernization and Changing Marital Values: Modernization and Postmodern Perspectives

The shift from traditional alliance-based marriage toward individualized, companionate unions among the Maras reflects what Anthony Giddens described as the *transformation of intimacy* under conditions of modernity.[294] The rise of education, Christianity, and wage labour has introduced new ideals of love, choice, and personal happiness, challenging older structures of arranged alliances and clan-based hierarchies.

Likewise, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim observed that modern marriage increasingly centers on "individualization," where personal fulfillment replaces collective obligation as the foundation of marital commitment.[295] This framework helps explain why, even as marriage retains cultural value among the Maras, motivations such as personal happiness and emotional compatibility are gaining importance alongside traditional goals of alliance and lineage preservation.

With the increasing emphasis on personal happiness, the rise of individualism, and the loosening of traditional restrictions on premarital and extramarital sexual relationships, the role of marriage as an exclusive institution for sexual fulfillment and procreation appears to be shifting.[296] Keeping this in mind, the study seeks to examine whether the social significance of marriage is diminishing among the younger generation of the Maras.

As shown in Table 4.10 below, a significant portion of both male and female respondents still view marriage as an essential obligation for procreation. Specifically, 36 male respondents (52%) and 44 female respondents (64%) continue

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[293] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 131.
[294] Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*.
[295] Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *The Normal Chaos of Love*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).
[296] T.B. Bottomore, *Sociology* (Bombay: Blackie & Sons Ltd., 1986), 178.

to uphold the traditional belief that marriage is a duty that must be fulfilled by both men and women for reproductive purposes. However, an equal number of male and female respondents- 17 each (24%) no longer consider marriage a necessary institution for procreation. Additionally, 17 male respondents (24%) and 9 female respondents (12%) expressed uncertainty regarding the role of marriage in reproduction. These findings suggest that while the traditional view of marriage as a fundamental duty for procreation remains strong among the younger generation of the Maras, there is also a growing segment of individuals who challenge this notion. The presence of respondents who reject or remain uncertain about the necessity of marriage for procreation reflects the increasing impact of modern values, such as personal autonomy and evolving social norms, on the perceptions of marriage among the younger generation of the Maras.

Table 4.10: Marriage as an obligation for procreation.

Do you think that marriage is an essential obligation for procreation among the younger generation?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	36	44	80
No	17	17	34
Uncertain	17	9	26

In many traditional societies, marriage was seen as a social obligation, deeply intertwined with religious, economic, and familial structures. Failure to marry was sometimes interpreted as an inability to fulfill societal expectations, particularly in terms of procreation and economic contribution to the household.[297] Individuals who remained unmarried throughout their lives were often viewed with skepticism, social stigma, or even suspicion. Economic factors also played a significant role in shaping attitudes toward lifelong singleness. In agrarian societies, marriage was an economic necessity, as it facilitated supply of labour for agrarian production. A household without a married couple was often perceived as incomplete or economically unstable. Consequently, lifelong bachelors and spinsters were sometimes pitied or

[297] Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 47.

pressured to marry, as their unmarried status was seen as a deviation from the societal norm.[298]

In the traditional society of the Maras, while spinsters were called "*laikhohpa*", a lifelong bachelors were known as "*laithiapa*." Chawngthu noted that like many other traditional societies, individuals who remained unmarried were often viewed with a degree of social disapproval and were not fully accepted until they entered a marital union among the early Maras.[299] In the meantime, Zohra asserted that although there was no conclusive evidence that celibacy led to enduring social disregard, lifelong singleness was often viewed with skepticism, or even suspicion within the community [300]

Given the historical presence of a somewhat sceptical attitude toward lifelong singleness among the early Maras, the study aims to examine whether unmarried adults continue to be perceived differently in contemporary Mara society. The findings, as illustrated in Table 4.11 indicate that a significant majority of respondents still believe that unmarried individuals are viewed distinctively within the community. Specifically, 45 (64%) of male respondents and 50 (72%) of female respondents affirmed this perspective. Conversely, a smaller portion of respondents-11 (16%) of males and 6 (8%) of females expressed the opposing view, suggesting that unmarried adults are no longer regarded differently. Additionally, a neutral stance was observed among an equal number of male and female respondents, with 14 individuals (20%) from each group expressing uncertainty on the matter. These findings highlight the continued prevalence of traditional perceptions regarding marital status within the Mara community, with a strong majority upholding the belief that lifelong singleness remains a distinguishing social factor.

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[298] Tamara Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship Between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 63.
[299] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 131.
[300] Zohra (Retired Professor, Department of History, Saiha College), interviewed by scholar, Siaha, February 6, 2025.

Table 4.11: Societal attitude towards unmarried adults in the contemporary community.

Are unmarried adults viewed differently in the community?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	45	50	95
No	11	6	17
Uncertain	14	14	28

In earlier times, marriage was regarded as the most important event in the community.[301] On the day of the wedding, both the bride's and groom's families slaughtered a significant number of pigs to prepare a grand marriage feast. They invited all their friends and relatives within the village to partake in the celebration. There was no restriction on the number of pigs that could be slaughtered for the feast- the more pigs that were killed, the more lavish the celebration was. A reciprocal tradition was observed between the two families in such a way that if the bride's family slaughtered three pigs, the groom's family was expected to reciprocate by slaughtering at least one. Similarly, if the bride's side slaughtered five pigs, the groom's side had to contribute at least two.[302] Since traditional villages were relatively small with a limited population, inviting the entire community to partake in the wedding feast was a common and easily manageable practice.[303]

The younger generation of the Maras continues to uphold and appreciate marriage as a significant social event within their community. As evidenced in Table 4.12 below, an overwhelming majority of respondents- 62 males (88%) and 64 females (92%) expressed their belief in the enduring importance of marriage. This strong consensus highlights the deep-rooted cultural and social significance of the institution of marriage among the Maras. Conversely, a small minority of 8 males (12%) and 6 females (8%) indicated that they no longer perceive marriage as an important event. Although their numbers are minimal, their perspective suggests the presence of shifting attitudes within a fraction of the population, possibly influenced by modernization, changing social norms, or personal preferences. Overall, these

[301] Zohra, *The Maras*, 44.
[302] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 297.
[303] A.C. Laima (Headmaster, Government Tisi Middle School), interviewed by scholar, Tisi, January 28, 2025.

findings suggest that traditional values surrounding marriage remain deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of the Maras' younger generation. Despite ongoing societal transformations, the institution of marriage continues to be regarded as an essential milestone, reinforcing its role in maintaining social cohesion, cultural identity, and communal union.

Table 4.12: Marriage as an important event in the community.

Do you think that marriage is an important event?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	62	64	126
No	8	6	14
Uncertain	0	0	0

7. Marriage as Political Alliance: Political Anthropology

Historically, marriage has also carried significant political weight, often used to forge alliances, consolidate power, and reinforce social hierarchies. From the viewpoint of Political Anthropology, scholars such as Edward Evans-Pritchard demonstrated how kinship and marriage function as systems of political organization in stateless societies.[304] In the Mara context, marriage historically served as a mechanism for building alliances between clans and chiefs, consolidating authority, and ensuring political stability.

Marriage thus operated as both a *social contract* and a *political strategy*, allowing elite families to strengthen their power networks. Such practices resonate with Lévi-Strauss's broader idea of marriage as a "political economy of kinship," where exchange relations undergird the social and political structures of tribal communities.

Across different cultures, marriage has been more than a personal commitment. Rather, it has been a key tool for establishing connections between families, tribes, and even nations. In medieval Europe, for instance, royal marriages were fundamental in securing peace treaties, forming alliances, and claiming

[304] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940).

territorial rights. These unions were rarely based on personal affection. Instead, they were strategic moves designed to strengthen political ties and enhance power. A notable example is the marriage of Eleanor of Aquitaine to Henry II of England in 1152, which shifted the balance of power by bringing vast territories under the control of the English crown.[305] Eleanor brought with her the wealthy region of Aquitaine, dramatically altering the political landscape of medieval Europe and demonstrating how marital alliances could shift the balance of power.

Throughout history, marriage has been a strategic instrument for forming political alliances, particularly among the ruling classes. In monarchies, noble families often arranged marriages to strengthen ties between dynasties, resolve disputes, or expand territories. One famous example is the marriage of Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile in 1469, which united two of the most powerful Spanish kingdoms. This union not only laid the foundation for a unified Spain but also facilitated the global expansion of the Spanish Empire and the spread of Christianity through colonization.[306] In this context, the political significance of marriage extended far beyond the union of the two individuals, influencing the course of global history.

In many non-Western societies, marriage held similar political importance. In the Indian subcontinent, particularly among the ruling classes, marriage was used to reinforce caste boundaries and ensure the continuity of wealth and power within specific groups. Endogamy, or the practice of marrying within one's caste or social group, was strictly enforced to maintain the purity of bloodlines and protect the privileges of dominant castes.[307] In this context, the political function of marriage was closely tied to preserving social hierarchies, ensuring that wealth, status, and political influence remained concerted within certain families and castes. By controlling marriage alliances, these groups secured their social standing and dominance over lower castes.

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[305] John Hudson, *The Formation of the English Common Law: Law and Society in England from the Norman Conquest to Magna Carta* (London: Longman, 1996), 90.
[306] J.H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain: 1469-1716* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 57.
[307] Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 176.

Like many other societies, the Mara chiefs strategically used marriage as a tool to expand and solidify their influence. They often sought to establish alliances with other villages by selecting brides for their sons from outside their own community.[308] This practice was not merely about forming family ties but also served to extend the chief's sphere of influence and strengthen political and social bonds between villages.

When a Mara chief sought a bride for his son from another village, he would initiate the proposal by sending his most trusted elder *Macha* who would present the bride's family with a symbolic gift, typically a gong. This offering acted as a formal request and a gesture of goodwill, demonstrating the chief's serious intent. If the girl's family accepted the proposal, the next step involved the payment of *okia*, or the main bride price. This payment was a crucial part of the royal marriage process and had to be settled before the actual wedding ceremony *Ahmakia* could take place.[309] Through such arranged marriages, Mara chiefs not only secured advantageous connections but also reinforced their authority and standing within the broader community.

Among the common people as well, marriage was usually employed as a strategic means to establish kinship ties with higher clans. Individuals from lower clans often sought to marry with members of higher clans, as such unions not only enhanced their social standing but also provided them with greater security and protection. So, the greatest aim of every Mara was to raise his status in the society by marrying a girl from a higher clan than his own. Although a man could not change his clan, he could secure better protection of higher clan by entering into matrimonial alliance with them.[310] This practice underlined the significance of marriage as more than just a personal relationship. Rather, it was a mechanism to improve one's status and ensure greater security within the societal hierarchy of the early Mara community.

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[308] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 139.
[309] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 140.
[310] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 233.

Given the historical and political significance of marriage as a means to reinforce kinship ties with higher clans in traditional Mara society, this study sought to determine whether younger generations continue to employ marriage as a strategic tool for strengthening alliances with influential families. As illustrated in Table 4.13, a significant majority of respondents acknowledged the persistence of this strategic function of marriage in contemporary society. Among them, 39 male respondents (56%) and 50 female respondents (72%) affirmed that marriage continues to be utilized as a means of forging alliances between prominent families or clans. Conversely, a smaller yet notable group of respondents- 11 males (16%) and 6 females (8%) argued that marriage no longer functions as a tool for alliance-building among influential families. This minority viewpoint suggests that for some members of the younger generation, the socio-political role of marriage may be diminishing, possibly due to increasing individual autonomy, shifts in personal aspirations, and the influence of external cultural and economic factors.

Additionally, a considerable portion of respondents- 20 males (28%) and 14 females (20%) remained neutral, neither affirming nor rejecting the claim that marriage serves as a strategy for securing alliances among influential families. The neutral stance of this segment suggests that while marriage as a political tool is still relevant, its role is no longer universally accepted among younger generations. Overall, while marriage continues to be a mechanism for consolidating alliances among influential families, its political role may be gradually transforming.

Table 4.13: Marriage as a strategy to strengthen alliance.

Do you think marriage is used as a strategy to strengthen alliance between influential families?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	39	50	89
No	11	6	17
Uncertain	20	14	34

A brief analysis of the origins of the Mara Autonomous District Council, as outlined in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, provides a clearer understanding of the enduring strategic political importance of marriage in modern

society. In 1953, the Mara inhabited area in Mizoram was loosely combined with the neighbouring Lai inhabited area to form Pawi-Lakher Regional Council. This Regional Council was formed under Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution, and its main purpose was to serve as an administrative unit to manage the affairs of both communities. The Pawi-Lakher Regional Council was granted limited autonomy, with authority over forest management, tax collection, agricultural practices, village administration, and customary law.[311] With the elevation of Mizoram to the status of Union Territory in 1972, the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council was trifurcated into three Regional Councils, namely Pawi Regional Council, Lakher Regional Council and Chakma Regional Council. Later on, these three Regional Councils were upgraded to the status of full-fledged Autonomous District Council.[312] Under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1988 of Indian Parliament, the nomenclatures of Pawi Autonomous District Council and Lakher Autonomous District Council were changed into Lai Autonomous District Council and Mara Autonomous District Council respectively.[313]

The Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) spans a total area of 1,399 square kilometres.[314] Currently, the Council comprises 25 elected members, supplemented by four nominated members. Given that constituencies within MADC are relatively small, with each comprising just a little over a thousand voters, the role of clan affiliation and kinship ties becomes a significant factor in electoral outcomes. The success of a candidate is often influenced by their clan background, as voters tend to support individuals from their own lineage or extended family networks. This dynamic has contributed to a political landscape where clannism plays a pivotal role. Candidates hailing from dominant or influential clans within a constituency have a

[311] P. Lalnithanga, *Emergence of Mizoram* (Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board, 2005), 26
[312] J. Doungel, "Autonomous District Councils: A Study of the Implication of the Sixth Schedule in Mizoram" in *Mizoram: Dimension and Perspectives*, ed. Jagadish J Patnaik (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company (India), 2008), 210.
[313] P. Chakroborty, *Fifth and Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India* (Delhi: Capital Publishing House, 2005), 283
[314] Government of Mizoram, *Statistical Handbook* , 2000, XI

higher chance of success in Council's election, as their support base is often built on clan-based loyalties rather than broader political considerations.[315]

The data presented in Table 4.14 strongly underscores the critical role of clan affiliation and kinship ties in shaping electoral dynamics within the MADC. An overwhelming majority of both male and female respondents acknowledge the significance of these social structures in determining political loyalties and support networks during Council elections. Specifically, 50 male respondents (72%) and 59 female respondents (84%) affirm that clan and kinship connections are important in influencing votes' behaviour in election.

However, it is also noteworthy that a smaller, yet not insignificant, portion of respondents hold a divergent perspective. These individuals believe that clan affiliation and kinship ties do not play a decisive role in building an electoral support base for candidates. While they form a minority, their responses suggest the presence of alternative political considerations or evolving electoral dynamics that may be weakening traditional kinship-based influences. This divergence in opinions highlights the complexity of electoral behaviour in the region, where deeply rooted social ties continue to play a dominant role, yet other factors may also be emerging as influential determinants.

Table 4.14: Importance of clan affiliation and kinship ties in electoral politics.

Do you agree that clan affiliation and kinship ties determine support system in electoral politics?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	50	59	109
No	20	11	31

Given the significance of kinship ties in securing political advantages, Table 4.15 highlights the tendency of political leaders to form marital alliances with influential families as a strategic move. The data suggests that a notable proportion of respondents perceive this practice as common among politicians. Specifically, 39 male respondents (56%) and 34 female respondents (48%) believe that politicians

[315] Doungel, "Autonomous District Councils, 221

deliberately seek marriages with influential families to strengthen their political standing. Conversely, a smaller group of 17 males (24%) and 22 females (32%) disagreed with this notion, indicating a divergence of opinion on the extent to which political figures prioritize such alliances. Additionally, a neutral stance was observed among 14 male (20%) and 14 female (20%) respondents, suggesting that a segment of the population remains uncertain or indifferent regarding this trend. Overall, the findings reflect a prevailing notion among the public that political leaders strategically clout marital ties for political gain, although a substantial minority either contests this view or remains undecided. These insights underscore the perceived role of familial connections in shaping political dynamics.

Table 4.15: Politicians' inclination towards marrying influential families for political advantage.

Do you observe that politicians usually seek marital alliance with influential families to strengthen their influence?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	39	34	73
No	17	22	39
Uncertain	14	14	28

The study seeks to explore the potential influence of marriage alliances on political leadership within the Mara community, particularly examining whether leaders tend to emerge from specific families with established matrimonial connections to other influential households. Historically, political figures have strategically utilized marriage as a means to consolidate power, foster alliances, and secure political advantage.[316] As illustrated in Table 4.16, a notable proportion of respondents indicated a perceived connection between family lineage and political leadership. Specifically, 28 male respondents, constituting 40% of the male participants, and 31 female respondents, accounting for 44% of the female participants, observed a tendency for political leaders to have come usually from particular families with significant marriage alliances. These findings suggest that a considerable segment of the community perceives an inherited or alliance-based pattern in the political landscape.

[316] Hniezo, interview.

Conversely, a substantial portion of the respondents disagreed with this notion. Among them, 22 male respondents (32%) and 25 female respondents (36%) expressed the notion that political leadership within the Mara community does not necessarily correlate with specific family affiliations or marital alliances. This opposing view indicates a belief in a diverse political representation, independent of familial or matrimonial ties. Interestingly, a notable group of respondents adopted a neutral stance on the matter. Twenty male respondents (28%) and fourteen female respondents (20%) neither supported nor disproved the claim, suggesting a degree of uncertainty regarding the relationship between marriage alliances and political leadership.

The mixed responses reflect the community's diverse perceptions about the influence of family and marriage alliances in shaping political dynamics. While a significant proportion recognizes prevalence of the pattern, others maintain that leadership selection does not necessarily correlate with familial connections. The presence of neutral opinions further indicates the complexity and nuanced nature of this socio-political phenomenon within the Mara community.

Table 4.16: The tendency for politicians to have come from certain families.

Do you think political leaders tend to come from certain families with particular marriage alliance?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	28	31	59
No	22	25	47
Uncertain	20	14	34

In accordance with the provisions outlined in Paragraph 6(2) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) has established various administrative departments with the necessary approval from the Governor of Mizoram.[317] At present, there are 21 such administrative departments functioning under the purview of MADC. The primary responsibility of these departments is to implement and execute the laws and legislation passed by the Legislative Council. Through these operational units, the

[317] Government of India, *Constitution of India* (New Delhi: Department of Publication, 1996), 156.

Council has not only facilitated the administration of its jurisdiction but has also significantly contributed to local employment generation, providing job opportunities to thousands of individuals within the region. However, the recruitment process for these positions has often been subject to political influence. The practice of politicizing recruitment has led to a growing dependency syndrome among the population, with supporters of elected representatives increasingly relying on these political figures to secure employment in the government services under MADC.[318] This trend has, in turn, given rise to nepotism, where appointments and selections are sometimes based on personal connections and political affiliations rather than merit and qualifications.

Given the perceived importance of personal connections in obtaining government positions, this investigation seeks to understand if political alignments within families play a significant role in decisions related to marriage. The findings reveal that a substantial proportion of respondents consider familial ties with political leaders as a notable factor when selecting a marriage partner. Specifically, 44 male respondents, accounting for 64% of the male sample, and 39 female respondents, representing 56% of the female sample, acknowledged the relevance of political connections in their marital decisions. This indicates a broader social perception that marriage choices are considerably influenced by familial connections with political leaders, particularly in the context of securing employment within the MADC's government services.

Conversely, a smaller yet significant group of respondents did not view political connections as a decisive element in choosing a spouse. Among them, 20 males (28%) and 22 females (32%) expressed that political considerations hold little to no weight in their marriage decisions. This suggests that, for these individuals, personal compatibility and other traditional factors may take precedence over potential political advantages. Additionally, a portion of the respondents exhibited a neutral stance regarding the importance of political affiliations in marital choices. This neutral group comprised 6 males (8%) and 9 females (12%), indicating

[318] Doungel, "Autonomous District Councils, 219

uncertainty or perhaps a lack of direct experience with the influence of political connections in marriage-related decisions. Overall, the data suggests that while familial political connections are a significant consideration for a majority of the population surveyed, a noteworthy minority remains unaffected by these factors. This underscores the complex interplay between socio-political dynamics and personal decision-making processes within the context of marriage in the MADC community.

Table 4.17: Political status as one of the considerations for marital choice.

Do you consider familial alignment with political leaders as one important consideration for partner's choice?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	44	39	83
No	20	22	42
Uncertain	6	9	15

The consideration of political alignment in marital choice reflects the intersection of kinship, gender, and power. From a feminist theoretical lens, Simone de Beauvoir's and Judith Butler's critiques of patriarchal structures are relevant here: marriage becomes not only a site of emotional and familial union but also an instrument through which gendered and political hierarchies are reproduced.

Women's participation in such alliances, often mediated through expectations of familial duty and loyalty, reveals the performative dimensions of gender and the ways in which social roles are inscribed into broader political strategies. Thus, the institution of marriage continues to function as both a socializing and politicizing force in Mara society, shaping the contours of leadership, inheritance, and kinship solidarity.

In light of the above analysis, marriage among the Maras must be understood as a multidimensional institution, simultaneously social, economic, political, and symbolic. Viewed through Lévi-Strauss's alliance theory, it operates as an enduring system of exchange that sustains inter-family networks and communal stability.

From a functional perspective, as proposed by Radcliffe-Brown, it upholds the structural integrity of the social order by linking private unions with public governance. Yet, feminist theorists such as de Beauvoir and Butler compel us to interrogate the gendered asymmetries embedded within these alliances, revealing how patriarchal norms are maintained under the guise of social cohesion.

Hence, marriage in contemporary Mara society emerges as a site of negotiation between tradition and modernity, a dynamic arena where kinship ties, political ambitions, and gender ideologies intersect. It retains its symbolic importance as a source of identity and belonging while simultaneously adapting to shifting socio-political realities shaped by education, Christian ethics, and democratic participation under the framework of the Sixth Schedule.

CHAPTER 5: CHURCH AND MARRIAGE SYSTEM

This chapter examines the transformative role of Christianity in shaping the institution of marriage among the Maras. The analysis highlights how the introduction of Christian norms redefined indigenous matrimonial customs, creating both accommodation and contestation between ecclesiastical regulations and entrenched cultural practices. From a theoretical perspective, these changes can be interpreted through feminist and sociological lenses, whereby religious institutions, missionary education, and colonial interventions collectively shaped gendered roles and kinship structures.

Christianity has historically been a powerful force in transforming traditional societies across different periods. It brought about changes in social structures, economic practices, and political institutions. The imposition of Christian moral and ethical standards often led to the abolition of certain indigenous practices deemed morally incompatible with the Church, reflecting de Beauvoir's assertion that social institutions reproduce gendered hierarchies.[319] By challenging pre-existing norms, Christian teachings on equality and human dignity also destabilized patriarchal and hierarchical arrangements embedded in traditional Mara society, highlighting the intersection of religion, morality, and gendered social reform.

Transformation in traditional societies can also be traced through missionary efforts in education. Wherever missionaries established schools, literacy and formal knowledge replaced traditional oral systems, fostering new pathways for social mobility. This shift aligns with Butler's notion of performativity: by educating the youth and introducing the written word, missionaries facilitated new social performances of gender, authority, and marital behavior, embedding Christian norms in everyday practice.[320] While such transformations brought progress, they also generated tensions with entrenched cultural practices, demonstrating the negotiated and often contested nature of social change.

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[319] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).
[320] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

The arrival of Christianity in Maraland in 1907 was no exception, significantly transforming traditional Mara society. This event marked one of the most pivotal junctures in Mara history, leaving lasting impacts on marriage, gender roles, and social organization. A closer examination of the early missionaries and the challenges they faced illuminates how Christianity reconfigured kinship and marital norms in Mara society.

In 1905, Reginald A. Lorrain and his wife, Maud Louise Ulander, founded the Lakher Pioneer Mission, motivated by the spiritual mission to evangelize the Maras.[321] Learning about the Maras from his brother J.H. Lorrain,[322] R.A. Lorrain was determined to bring Christianity to a people considered "unexplored and un-evangelized," reflecting a broader missionary ethos that often intertwined moral, cultural, and political aims. The missionaries' persistence despite financial and logistical obstacles demonstrates the early intersection of religious zeal with strategic social intervention, laying the foundation for the transformation of kinship and marital structures in Maraland.

Rev. R.A. Lorrain approached various missionary societies in London, seeking financial sponsorship to undertake missionary work in the remote region of Maraland, located in the hilly terrain of Northeast India. However, his request was ultimately rejected on the grounds that the Mara population was considered too small to get dedicated evangelical efforts. Despite this setback, the Arthington Missionary Trust expressed its willingness to support him financially, provided that he agreed to serve in a different mission field. However, Rev. Lorrain firmly declined their offer, as he was deeply convinced that his divine calling was specifically meant for Maraland.[323]

Before embarking on his missionary journey, R.A. Lorrain undertook medical training at Livingstone Medical College in 1903, reflecting a strategy to intertwine spiritual and practical authority.[324] By providing medical treatment alongside

[321] R.A. Lorrain, *Five Years in Unknown Jungles* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publication, 1912), 5.
[322] Donna Storm, *Wind Through the Bamboo* (Madras: Evangelical Literature Service, 1938), 35.
[323] Lorrain, *Five Years in Unknown Jungles*, 5.
[324] Mylai Hlychho, *Mara History*, (Aizawl: Hauhnar Offset Press, 1972), 249.

religious instruction, he leveraged social trust to reshape traditional understandings of illness, hierarchy, and marital norms. From a political-kinship perspective, such interventions functioned to extend social influence: missionary-provided healthcare not only undermined traditional spiritual authority but also created new forms of dependency and moral obligation, reinforcing Christian authority over domestic and marital life.[325]

Despite numerous hardships and challenges, R.A. Lorrain and his wife remained resolute in their mission to reach Maraland. They were determined to embark upon their journey to Maraland even without any financial assistance from missionary societies. At the time, they had little knowledge about the Mara people, except that they were a fierce and warlike tribe known for head hunting. Driven by their strong faith and commitment to spreading the gospel among the Maras, the couple set out from London on January 18, 1907. Their journey was long and arduous, involving both sea and land travel. Finally, after enduring months of difficult travel, they arrived at Saikao village in Maraland on September 26, 1907.[326] The Evangelical Church of Maraland observed this day 26th September as 'Missionary Day' and offices, schools and other educational institutions remain closed on this day as a tribute to the pioneer missionaries' sacrifices and contributions.

The initial response of the Maras toward the missionary couple was one of suspicion and distrust. Having had minimal contact with outsiders, the Maras were naturally suspicious of the newcomers. The missionaries' unfamiliar language, distinct physical features, different skin colour and unique gestures led the Maras to view the couple with suspicion, causing them to question their intentions. At times, some of the Maras even embraced fears that these strangers might be witches who had come to cast a curse upon them.[327] This deep-seated apprehension made the

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[325] Lorrain, *Five Years in Unknown Jungles,* 6.
[326] J.R. Sanga, *Christianity in Maraland (1907-1957)* (Guwahati: Scientific Book Centre, 2016), 53.
[327] Zakhu Hlychho, *Mara-te Tobul* (Aizawl: Self-Published, 2011), 187.

Maras hesitant to interact with the missionaries or to open up to them in the beginning.

Due to initial suspicion and uneasiness of the Maras toward the missionary couple, the pioneers could not get any assistance from them. As a result, they had to take on all essential tasks on their own, including building their house, fetching water, gathering firewood from the nearby forest, cooking, cleaning, and managing other household chores. The sight of the two foreign missionaries- engaging themselves in such manual labor was quite unfamiliar and even hilarious to the Maras. Instead of offering help, the locals mocked and ridiculed them, referring to them derisively as "Wandering Sahibs."[328]

After establishing themselves in Saikao, R.A. Lorrain and his wife dedicated themselves to their mission by first learning the language and culture of the Mara people. Recognizing the importance of communication, they worked relentlessly that they were able to speak in Mara language within short period. At that time, the Maras did not have a script of their own nor was their language reduced into a written form. R.A. Lorrain embarked upon the arduous task of devising Mara alphabet by using the Roman script. He meticulously developed a written form of the Mara language. His relentless efforts culminated in the completion of the Mara alphabet on March 18, 1908, marking a significant milestone in the preservation and development of the Mara linguistic heritage.[329]

Despite initial suspicion and mockery from the Mara community, the missionaries gradually gained acceptance. They learned the Mara language and created the written script, facilitating the translation of religious texts. Literacy and education thus became tools for transforming gendered subjectivities, consistent with de Beauvoir's view that education enables the reconfiguration of women's social roles and Butler's notion that language and discourse construct performative identities. In this context, literacy allowed early Christian converts to enact new marital and social behaviors in accordance with ecclesiastical expectations.

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[328] Hlychho, *Mara-te Tobul*, 189.
[329] Sanga, *Christianity in Maraland*, 65.

Following the successful completion of the Mara alphabet, the next major step taken by the missionaries was the establishment of a school. On August 24, 1908, they opened the first educational institution in Saikao, which was named *Lakherland School.*[330] However, despite their efforts, R.A. Lorrain could not convince any Mara boys to enrol in the school. Instead, a few Lushai boys voluntarily joined, showing an interest in education. Though R.A. Lorrain and his wife had rudimentary knowledge of the Lushai language from his brother, J.H. Lorrain, during their brief stay in Serkawn, they found it extremely difficult to teach the Lushai boys effectively in their language. As a result, they were forced to temporarily shut down the school.

In 1910, the school was reopened when two Mara boys from Siaha, Laihnao and Mawkha, applied for admission. Shortly after, they were joined by another Mara boy, Rato from Tuisumpur village. Rato was not only the first native literate among the Maras, he became the first Mara to write a formal letter in elegant handwriting to the Lakher Pioneer Mission.[331] Over time, the number of students grew steadily. By 1913, the school in Saikao had an enrolment of around 50 Mara students. As the first batch of students completed their studies, they were employed as teachers in mission schools that were gradually established in various villages across Maraland. This initiative helped expand education throughout the region. Tlapyu, the first Christian convert among the Maras became the first officially appointed teacher in a mission school.[332]

In 1929, a night school specifically for girls was established in Saikao, marking a significant step towards female education in the region. Reverend R.A. Lorrain and his wife actively encouraged parents to enrol their daughters in the school. Their persistent efforts gradually bore fruit, as the number of girl students increased steadily from 45 in 1932 to 60 by 1935.[333] The curriculum of the night school extended beyond basic literacy and numeracy. In addition to learning how to

[330] Hlychho, *Mara-te Tobul*, 189.
[331] P.T. Hlychho, *Maraland: Yesterday & Today*, (Shillong: Rhino Printers, 2007), 125.
[332] Nohra, *Lakher Pioneer Missionaries and ECM Workers* (Siaha: ECM Publication Board, 2000), 21.
[333] J.H. Hlychho, *The Maras: Head Hunters to Soul Hunters* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2009), 233.

read and write, students were taught various practical skills such as sewing, weaving, knitting, and gardening. They also received training in music, particularly through singing and tonic solfa, and engaged in simple recreational activities. Furthermore, the school placed a strong emphasis on personal hygiene and sanitation, educating students on the importance of cleanliness for maintaining good health.[334]

By 1910, with the reopening of the Lakherland School, early Mara converts began participating in education and religious life. The first literates not only became teachers but also formed the basis of a new socio-religious elite, embodying Butler's idea of repeated acts producing social norms. Through education, Christian morality regarding marriage, fidelity, and family life was codified and performed, gradually becoming normative. Female education, particularly through night schools established in 1929, challenged traditional patriarchal assumptions, enabling women to acquire skills, literacy, and a sense of agency consistent with de Beauvoir's critique of socially imposed passivity among women.[335]

The Lakher Pioneer Mission remained persistent in its commitment to expanding educational opportunities among the Maras. Over the years, it successfully established numerous schools in various villages. By the time the government took up educational institutions in 1947, Maraland had a total of 21 primary schools and one middle school.[336] The primary objective of the missionaries in founding these schools was to provide the native Maras with the ability to read the Scriptures. They believed that literacy would serve as a crucial stepping-stone toward embracing Christianity. Consequently, education became one of the most effective instruments in the dissemination of Christian teachings among the Mara people.[337]

The Lakher Pioneer Mission also undertook the challenging task of translating portions of the Bible into the Mara language from the very beginning of

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[334] S. Beizawzi, *Lakher Pioneer Mission in Maraland: A Historical Study* (Madras: ISPCK, 2002), 29.
[335] K. Robin, "The Lakhers in Mizoram: The Impact of Christianity and Colonial Administration" in *Mizoram: Dimension and Perspectives*, ed. Jagadish J Patnaik (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company (India), 2008), 332.
[336] Nohra, *Lakher Pioneer Missionaries*, 27.
[337] Sanga, *Christianity in Maraland*, 72.

its work in 1908. After 16 years of relentless dedication, R.A. Lorrain successfully completed the translation of the entire New Testament in 1928.[338] The native literates- Saro Nohra, A. Nyusa, and H.C. Hrachho rendered valuable help to him in his translation project.[339] Following the completion of the New Testament translation, Rev. R.A. Lorrain embarked on the ambitious task of translating the Old Testament into Mara. However, his work was left unfinished due to his untimely demise on February 1, 1944. After his death, the responsibility of completing the translation was taken up by his son-in-law, Rev. A.B. Foxall. Through decades of dedicated effort and perseverance, the translation of the entire Bible into Mara was finally completed in 1951, marking a significant milestone in the linguistic and spiritual development of the Mara-speaking community.[340]

The medical mission was a crucial activity undertaken by Christian missionaries, significantly transforming the traditional beliefs of the Maras regarding disease and its causes. The missionaries' medical work reinforced Christian moral authority. By providing treatment and attributing successful outcomes to God's intervention, they undermined traditional beliefs in spirits as arbiters of illness. This demonstrates the interplay of material and symbolic power in reshaping kinship and marital authority: acceptance of missionary medicine often coincided with acceptance of new marital norms, illustrating a form of social performativity where public adherence signalled moral and spiritual alignment with Christianity.

Traditionally, the Maras attributed illness and misfortune to mean and hostile spirits. To prevent sickness and maintain good health, they performed ritual sacrifices, offering animals to appease these spirits.[341] However, as they witnessed the superior effectiveness of the medicines and medical treatments provided by the missionaries, they gradually abandoned their traditional practices in favor of seeking medical advice from the missionaries.[342] Before distributing medicines, the

[338] C.L. Hminga, *Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram* (Serkawn: Baptist Church of Mizoram, 1987), 157.
[339] K.H. Beithie, *Mara Lei Awhsizy* (Siaha: Tracy Publication, 1997), 7.
[340] Hlychho, *Mara History*, 253.
[341] Sanga, *Christianity in Maraland*, 75.
[342] Hlychho, *The Maras*, 223.

missionaries conducted prayer services, using the opportunity to teach the native people about Christian doctrines. These medical missions not only transformed the Maras' understanding of illness and healthcare but also increased their engagement with Christian teachings, ultimately bringing about a significant shift in their spiritual and cultural outlook.

Every evening, the missionaries made themselves available at the missionary bungalow in Saikao to provide medical care to the native people. Those suffering from various illnesses and diseases were brought to them from distant villages, seeking effective treatment and relief. According to missionary reports, they attended to nearly fifty thousand patients in a single year, demonstrating the significant impact of their medical efforts.[343] As more people experienced healing and recovery through the medical care provided by the missionaries, they started developing a profound sense of trust and confidence in Christian missionaries and their works. This newfound trust on missionary medicine not only led to the gradual dismantling of their traditional beliefs regarding diseases, but also played a crucial role in accelerating the spread of Christianity within the community. As the Maras increasingly turned to the missionaries for medical aid, they also became more receptive to Christian teachings, leading to a deep and lasting transformation in their spiritual and cultural outlook.[344]

The primary objective of the foreign missionaries in coming to the distant land of Maraland was to introduce and propagate Christianity among the Mara people. However, in the initial stage of their mission, they faced significant challenges in convincing the Maras to accept their teachings. Since the Maras had hardly encountered with outsiders before the arrival of the two missionaries in 1907, they were naturally hesitant to open themselves to strangers and were resistant to the unfamiliar doctrine that required them to abandon many of their deeply rooted traditional practices.[345]

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[343] Nohra, *Lakher Pioneer Missionaries*, 30.
[344] Laldena, *Christian Mission and Colonialism* (Shillong: Vedrama Institute, 1988), 108.
[345] Hlychho, *Mara-te Tobul*, 192.

Despite these obstacles, the Lakher Pioneer Mission endured in their efforts, and after three years of relentless dedication, they achieved a breakthrough when Thytu became the first Mara to convert to Christianity. He was baptized on September 16, 1910. The movement gradually gained momentum, and by 1911, the number of Christian converts had grown to three when Chiahu from Theiva village and Laila from Amobyu, embraced Christianity that year. Following the initial conversions, the number of Christian believers among the Maras continued to grow at a steady pace. By the end of 1918, the Christian community had expanded significantly, reaching a total of 94 registered converts.[346]

In order to accelerate the spread of Christianity among the Maras, Rev. R.A. Lorrain took a strategic step by appointing a dedicated group of paid evangelists known as *Kros Pheisaih*, selecting them from among the early native converts. The *Kros Pheisaih* played a crucial role in the missionary efforts, traveling extensively from village to village to preach the Gospel and share the message of Christianity with the local communities. Their tireless work and commitment proved to be highly effective, leading to a remarkable increase in the number of Christian converts. By 1923, the Christian population among the Maras had grown substantially, reaching a total of 2,23 members.[347]

In 1934, the Mara Christian community experienced its first revival movement, a spiritual awakening that had a profound impact on the spread of Christianity among the Maras. This revival movement played a pivotal role in strengthening the faith of existing believers and inspiring many others to embrace Christianity. Remarkably, within just half a century in 1957, the entire Mara tribe across Maraland had embraced Christianity.[348] By 1957, Christianity had become deeply entrenched in Mara society, with 96 local churches established across the region and 14 ordained ministers actively serving the growing Christian community.

[346] Hlychho, *The Maras*, 180.
[347] S. Mokia, *The History of Mara Church* (Saikao: Independent Church of Maraland, 1981), 18.
[348] Laiu Fachhai, *The Maras from Warriors to Missionaries* (Siaha: Evangelical Church of Maraland, 1994), 25.

This period marked the complete religious transformation of the Maras, shaping their cultural and spiritual identity for generations to come.

The introduction of Christianity and the subsequent incorporation of Maraland into the British colonial domain in 1924 brought about profound transformations across various aspects of Mara society, including their social structure, economy, culture, politics, and religious beliefs. Prior to the arrival of Christian missionaries, the Maras were known for their fierce and warlike nature, frequently engaging themselves in raids and plundering expeditions against neighbouring tribes. British administrator A.G. McCall observed that these raids were not merely acts of aggression but were deeply rooted in the Maras' spiritual and cultural worldview. One of the primary motives behind these violent incursions was the belief that such acts would appease malevolent spirits and secure them a place in paradise *Athikhi*, after death. Additionally, these raids served as a demonstration of strength and bravery, elevating his status in the society and even increasing his desirability as a potential husband.[349] Moreover, as slaying of an enemy at war and bringing his head home was accorded with utmost respect by the community, the desire to earn an honour and overwhelming respect in the society considerably induced them to go for raiding and killing their neighbouring tribes.[350]

The arrival of Christian missionaries, however, marked a turning point in the history of the Mara people. Missionaries preached the teachings of Jesus Christ, emphasizing that violence, particularly head hunting and killing of human being was against the will of God, the Supreme Creator of all life. As the Maras gradually embraced Christianity, they abandoned their age-old customs of raiding and head hunting.

Alongside the influence of Christianity, British colonial rule played a crucial role in suppressing these practices. The British administration actively enforced policies against tribal warfare and imposed punitive actions on those who resisted the new order. A notable instance of such intervention occurred in 1918 when the British

[349] A.G. McCall, *The Lushai Chrysalis* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 2003), 38.
[350] Thahe, interview.

authorities took punitive action against the people of Zyhno for continuing their raids. Over time, similar punitive measures were taken against other tribes, including the Hawthai and Tlosai, leading to the eventual suppression of head-hunting among the Maras.[351] This clearly indicated the fact that Christianity and British rule went hand in hand in civilizing the so-called headhunting Mara tribes. While the missionaries worked to install moral and religious values that condemned violence, the British government enforced these changes through legal and military means. Together, these forces played a pivotal role in the so-called "civilization" of the Mara tribes, leading them away from their head-hunting traditions into a new era of peace and tranquillity.[352]

The adoption of Christianity and British colonial administration collectively suppressed violent practices such as headhunting, which previously reinforced male social authority and marital prestige. From a political-kinship perspective, the prohibition of raids and headhunting not only curtailed traditional expressions of masculine power but also created conditions in which marital alliances could be reconfigured under Christian ideals. This structural shift reflects Butler's insight that social norms are both constraining and enabling: by prohibiting violence and redefining male roles, Christianity reshaped the behavioral scripts associated with marriage and kinship.

The teaching of Christian missionaries and introduction of education by them also played a transformative role in shaping the perspectives and worldview of the people. It not only broadened their understanding of the world but also contributed to a significant shift in their cultural and social outlook, fostering new ways of thinking and engaging with society.[353] Beyond equipping individuals with literacy and academic knowledge, education played a transformative role in restructuring the society by giving rise of a new elite class. This emerging group primarily consisted of commoners who had limited access to power and privilege in the traditional

[351] A.B. Foxall, *Sequel to Five Years in Unknown Jungles* (Guwahati: Scientific Book Centre, 2015), 29.
[352] Robin, "The Lakhers in Mizoram," 329.
[353] Chawngkhuma Chawngthu (Retired Professor, Sociology, Government Saiha College), interviewed by scholar, Siaha, January 18, 2025.

societal hierarchy. However, with the advent of Christian missionaries, they were the first to grasp every opportunity for learning and personal advancement. As a result, the early-educated Maras began to use their education as a pathway to secure salaried employment in the church service, educational institution and government service. Many found work in government offices, serving as messengers, vaccinators, road builders, and clerks, while others took up teaching positions in missionary schools. Additionally, Christian missionaries who had received early education played a pioneering role in establishing small-scale enterprises. They were among the first to recognize and utilize the advantages of monetary transactions, particularly in the wake of British colonial rule, which formally took control of the land in 1924.[354]

Education and salaried employment catalyzed the emergence of a new elite, diminishing the authority of traditional chiefs.[355] These developments align with de Beauvoir's framework, which emphasizes how economic independence and access to education transform power relations between genders and classes.[356] Among the Maras, young men and women educated in missionary schools negotiated marital choice, timing, and ceremony in ways that challenged traditional hierarchies, producing a hybridized cultural field where Church norms and indigenous customs coexisted.

The notion that salaried employment was seen as a means of escaping the chief's subjugation is reinforced by the words of A.G. McCall, who observed that "Black coated occupation became synonyms with progress. Christianity led towards blackcoatism. Blackcoatism involved monthly salaries, which secured the beneficiary from subjection to the inevitability of the traditional village life."[357] Christianity, education, and the rise of new elites significantly contributed to the decline of the chiefs' traditional rights and authority.

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[354] Nunthara, *Mizoram: Society and Polity* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1996), 62.
[355] K. Robin, "Lakher Society and Colonial Encounter" in *Social Economic and Political History of Mizoram*, ed. Malsawliana, Benjamin Ralte (Guwahati: EBH Publishers (India), 2011), 84.
[356] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex.*
[357] McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 205.

Another significant transformation that profoundly impacted the traditional Mara society was the shift in its marriage system. With the advent of Christianity, the marriage system of the Maras had undergone many changes in the form of compromise between the indigenous practice and Christian matrimonial practices.[358] Traditionally, marriage among the Maras was a highly complicated process, involving elaborate rituals, a series of ceremonies, and offering of sacrifices to both benevolent and malevolent spirits. However, with the growing influence of Christianity, many of these indigenous traditions gradually diminished and were eventually replaced by new elements. Today, Christian marriages among the Maras are officiated by ordained ministers within a church setting. Marriage is now regarded as a sacred and lifelong commitment between a man and a woman, dissolvable only by death, in accordance with Christian doctrine.[359] This transformation reflects the profound cultural shifts that Christianity has introduced into Mara society, reshaping not only their spiritual beliefs but also their fundamental social structures.

When it comes to marriage celebrations, traditional customs such as reciprocal slaughtering a large number of pigs for the wedding feast, communal drinking, and singing have largely been replaced by modern Christian elements. Today, weddings are characterized by the solemnization of vows officiated by an ordained minister, the exchange of rings, the issuance of marriage certificates, and hymn singing and prayers in the church. Following the ceremony, a home reception typically takes place, where tea and snacks are served, while those who can afford it may still host a wedding feast.[360]

Marriage itself became a site of negotiation between traditional and Christian norms. While early marriages involved elaborate rituals, sacrifices, and reciprocal exchanges (political-kinship strategies to cement alliances), Christian marriages emphasized lifelong union, sacredness, and moral instruction. The Church's codification of marriage, including prohibitions on consanguinity, reflects the

[358] Robin, "The Lakhers in Mizoram", 332.
[359] Mokia, *The History of Mara Church*, 73.
[360] Robin, "Lakher Society and Colonial Encounter", 83.

intersection of doctrinal authority and traditional moral concerns. This dual reinforcement aligns with political-kinship theory, whereby marriage rules both regulate inheritance and maintain social cohesion, while simultaneously incorporating Christian ethical frameworks.

Despite these significant changes brought about by the influence of Christianity, certain traditional practices have persisted. Customs such as courtship before marriage, sending a female emissary to seek the opinion of the bride's parents regarding the marriage proposal, the role of the *Lyuchhapa* as an intermediary in the negotiation process, and the complexities surrounding marriage prices remain integral to the Mara marriage system even today.[361] This blend of old and new elements reflects the enduring cultural heritage of the Maras while adapting to modern religious influences.

Since the Church now holds exclusive authority over marriage, only ordained ministers are eligible to solemnize holy matrimony within the Church. The Evangelical Church of Maraland, the largest congregational church in the region, has outlined the following objectives for marriage among Christian Maras:[362]

1. To unite man and woman in a lifelong bond until death.
2. To raise children born within such recognized marriage in accordance with Biblical teachings.
3. To establish a faithful Christian family dedicated to expanding God's kingdom on earth.
4. As marriage is a divine duty for those created in God's image, it must be regarded as sacred and holy.

An examination of the extent to which the contemporary generation of the Maras upholds and values the principles of marriage as formulated by the Evangelical Church of Maraland reveals a predominantly positive reception. As presented in Table 5.1, a significant majority of respondents- 50 (71.42%) male and

[361] V.L. Zaithanga, *A Study of social and cultural changes among the people of Mizoram through the impact of the Gospel* (Bangalore: Unpublished B.D.Thesis, 1964), 33.
[362] ECM, "Marriage Rules" *Constitutions and Rules* (Siaha: ECM Assembly, 2024), 275.

56 (80%) female participants affirmed that they both uphold and appreciate the objectives of marriage as outlined by the Church. This indicates a strong alignment between the Church's doctrinal teachings on marriage and the attitudes of the current Mara youth. Conversely, a notable minority of 18 (25.71%) male and 12 (17.14%) female respondents expressed that they do not uphold or appreciate these ecclesiastical objectives in relation to marriage. In addition, a very small segment of respondents, comprising 2.85% of both male and female participants, remained neutral on the matter, expressing neither agreement nor disagreement.

The data in Table 5.1 demonstrates that most Mara youth align with Church teachings on marriage, reflecting the powerful social performativity of Christian discourse in shaping marital attitudes.[363] Nonetheless, the minority dissent indicates ongoing negotiation between religious ideals and socio-cultural realities, signaling the limits of institutional moral authority when intersecting with generational, economic, and secular pressures.

Table 5.1: Appreciation of Church's principles of marriage.

Do you think that younger generation of the Maras uphold and appreciate Church's objectives of marriage?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	50	56	106
No	18	12	30
Neutral/Uncertain	2	2	4

Similarly, the Church's strict prohibition against marriage between close relatives resonates with existing Mara customs (Table 5.2), demonstrating a convergence between indigenous cultural norms and Christian moral codes. This alignment amplifies the social effectiveness of Church regulations while illustrating de Beauvoir's point that social institutions both enforce and produce gendered morality.

Since early times, the Maras have strictly prohibited marriage between close relatives. The traditional belief system held that such unions would not only bring

[363] Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.*

misfortune and premature death of both partners but children born to them will not thrive.[364] The Evangelical Church of Maraland also enforces this prohibition, with its regulations which runs in a close parallel with traditional customs. According to the Marriage Rules as outlined by Evangelical Church of Maraland, it is considered taboo (*anna*) for a man to marry his mother, his father's wife, his own daughter, his sister, his sibling's daughter, his son's daughter, his daughter's daughter, his paternal aunt, his stepdaughter and the widow of his deceased son.[365] The only distinction between traditional practice and Church regulations is that, while traditional customs permitted marriage to a deceased son's widow,[366] the Church strictly forbids it.

Likewise the Church's Marriage Rules enforces prohibition for a woman to marry her father, her mother's husband, her son, her brother's son, her sister's son and her grandson.[367] The Church's Marriage Rules further laid down that breach of the Church's rules in this regard would entail punishment in the form of excommunication of both parties from the Church throughout their life.[368]

Table 5.2 provides compelling evidence that an overwhelming majority of the Mara community continues to uphold the Church's Marriage Rules, particularly the prohibition of unions between close relatives. Specifically, 66 male respondents (94.28%) and 64 female respondents (91%) expressed their support for these Church's Rules. This strong adherence can be attributed not only to religious conviction but also to the deep-rooted traditional values of the Maras, which have long discouraged close-kin marriages. The fact that Christian religious teaching and cultural customs runs in parallel in respect of prohibition of marriage between close relatives, and this has induced the people to abide by the Church's regulation for both moral and cultural reasons.

Interestingly, however, a small minority expressed dissent view. Only 4 male respondents (5.71%) and 3 female respondents (8.57%) believe that the current

[364] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 294.
[365] ECM, "Marriage Rules," 280.
[366] Parry, *The Lakhers*, 294.
[367] ECM, "Marriage Rules," 280.
[368] ECM, "Marriage Rules," 280.

generation of Maras does not fully adhere to the Church's marriage regulations. Although statistically marginal, this viewpoint suggests the presence of divergent attitudes among the younger generation, possibly influenced by modernization, increased exposure to external cultural practices, or evolving personal values.

Table 5.2: Church's Rules against marriage between close relatives.

Do you support Church's Rules against marriage between close relatives?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	66	64	130
No	4	6	10
Neutral/Uncertain			

The Evangelical Church of Maraland classified marriage into two- holy matrimony and semi-holy matrimony. While holy matrimony is solemnized by ordained minister in the Church, semi-holy matrimony is solemnized by ordained minister in the Church's hall, pastor's residence or Church vestry. Semi-holy matrimony usually takes place when marriage is preceded by elopement due to the parental disapproval of their union.[369] As this semi-holy matrimony is considered comparatively less valued and inferior, its celebration usually takes place with less joy and less prom.[370]

The Church's categorization of holy and semi-holy matrimony further exemplifies Butler's notion of performativity: holy matrimony represents an idealized script reinforcing moral discipline, while semi-holy matrimony constitutes a socially negotiated deviation responding to economic and familial contingencies. Table 5.3 shows that while preference for holy matrimony is unanimous in principle, actual practice favors semi-holy matrimony due to economic constraints and social pressures, reflecting the tension between normative ideals and lived reality.

When respondents were asked to compare their appreciation for holy matrimony versus semi-holy matrimony, an overwhelming majority of both male and

[369] Chhuakhu Khithie (Executive Secretary (Education), ECM, Siaha), interviewed by scholar, Siaha, February 25, 2025.
[370] Chawngthu, *Mara Marriage System*, 182.

female participants expressed a clear preference for holy matrimony. The data as shown in Table 5.3 below shows that absolute majority of both male and female participants express their stronger appreciation for holy matrimony over semi holy matrimony. This strong inclination suggests that Christian moral teachings, particularly its emphasis on chastity and the sanctity of marriage continue to hold significant influence among the contemporary generation of Christian Maras. The findings may also be taken as indicative of continued cultural adherence of the Maras to the moral expectations related to marriage and sexual behavior.

Table 5.3: Appreciation for holy matrimony over semi holy matrimony

What do you appreciate more – holy matrimony or semi-holy matrimony?	Male	Female	Total
Holy matrimony	70	70	140
Semi-holy matrimony	0	0	0
Neutral/Uncertain			

According to the *Statistical Report of the Evangelical Church of Maraland* for the period April 2023 to March 2024, only 69 members (25.36%) entered into marriage through holy matrimony, whereas a substantially larger number - 203 members (74.63%) were united through semi-holy matrimony.[371] A similar pattern is observed in the Church's report, 2024–2025, which records 68 members (25.19%) entering into holy matrimony, compared to 202 members (74.81%) who entered into marriage through semi-holy matrimony.[372] These statistics highlight a growing discrepancy between the Church's doctrinal ideals and the actual marital practices of its members. This suggests that while religious values are respected in principle, social and possibly economic factor may be influencing the widespread preference for semi-holy matrimony in practice.

[371] Evangelical Church of Maraland, *Statistic Report, 2023-2024*.
[372] Evangelical Church of Maraland, *Statistic Report, 2024-2025*.

Holy matrimony solemnised by ordained minister at the church

When examining the underlying causes behind the widespread prevalence of semi-holy matrimony among the younger generation of the Maras, the data reveals that economic consideration plays the most significant role. As indicated in Table 5.4, a substantial majority of respondents - 38 males (54.28%) and 36 females (51.42%) identified the lower financial burden associated with semi-holy matrimony as the primary reason for its common occurrence. This suggests that, for many young Maras, the Church wedding is often perceived as costly and elaborate, provoking couples to opt for more informal and economically less expensive cost of union.

The second most commonly cited reason for semi holy matrimony is premarital pregnancy, with 14 male (20%) and 18 female (25%) respondents attributing this as the main factor. This highlights a social reality where, despite the strong influence of Christian teachings that emphasize chastity and the sanctity of marriage, premarital sexual activity is rampant among the younger generation. The necessity to legitimize pregnancies outside of wedlock often leads couples to bypass formal Church formal marriage in favour of semi holy matrimony. A smaller portion of the respondents - 8 males (11.42%) and 4 females (5.71%) pointed to shyness or discomfort with the Church wedding ceremony itself as a significant factor. This

could reflect a sense of social anxiety, or a feeling of unpreparedness to engage with the formalities and expectations associated with traditional religious ceremonies.

Additionally, parental disapproval of the union, often leading to elopement, was cited by 10 males (14.28%) and 12 females (17.14%) as the main reason behind semi-holy matrimony. This indicates intergenerational tensions, where young couples may pursue relationships not sanctioned by their families, resulting in unions outside the conventional Church structure. Overall, the findings suggest that the phenomenon of semi-holy matrimony among the Maras is influenced by a complex interplay of economic, social, and cultural factors, with economic consideration emerging as the dominant reason.

As Table 5.4 suggests, economic and social factors—including the high cost of Church weddings and intergenerational tensions—mediate the enactment of Christian marital ideals. Political-kinship theory helps explain why semi-holy matrimony persists: by adjusting ceremonial intensity, families negotiate resources and social obligations without fully violating ecclesiastical or communal norms.

Table 5.4: Reason for greater prevalence of semi holy matrimony

What do you think is the main reason for the wide prevalence of semi holy matrimony?	Male	Female	Total
Lower cost of expenditure	38	36	74
Premarital pregnancy	14	18	32
Shyness about the Church wedding	8	4	12
Parental disapproval of the Union	10	12	22

The finding that the lower cost associated with semi-holy matrimony is a primary factor for its higher prevalence among the Mara community is strongly supported by the majority of respondents. Most participants indicated that holy matrimony entails significantly higher expenses compared to semi-holy matrimony. As detailed in Table 5.5, 64 male respondents (91.42%) and 52 female respondents (74.28%) affirmed that holy matrimony is more costly than its semi-holy counterpart. This strong consensus indicates that the traditionally high costs associated with

marriage continue to persist despite the contemporary practice of solemnizing marriages within the Church.

Interestingly, a minority of 6 (8.57%) male and 18 (25.71%) female respondents expressed the view that there is no difference in respect of the cost of expenditure between holy and semi-holy matrimony. This suggests that in certain cases, semi-holy matrimony is also be conducted in an elaborate and costly manner, particularly by families who have the financial means to do so. This variability highlights that the economic consideration behind semi-holy matrimony may not apply universally across all cases. Notably, no respondents among male or female indicated that semi-holy matrimony is more expensive than holy matrimony. This absence further reinforces the perception that the formal, church-based ceremony (holy matrimony) is generally associated with greater financial burden, and that this cost disparity plays a crucial role in shaping marital choices within the Mara community.

Table 5.5: What is more expensive- holy matrimony or semi holy matrimony?

What do you think is more expensive- holy matrimony or semi holy matrimony?	Male	Female	Total
Holy matrimony	64	52	116
Semi Holy matrimony	0	0	0
More or less equivalent	6	18	24

Historically, marriage among the Mara community has been an economically demanding institution. One of the primary reasons for this high cost has been the cultural expectation that both the bride's and the groom's families host large-scale community feasts as an integral part of the wedding celebration. These feasts traditionally involved the slaughtering of numerous animals, symbolizing the social and communal importance of the union. This practice has persisted into contemporary times, and celebration of marriage with such feasting remains a central part of matrimonial custom of the Maras.

Empirical data as shown in Table 5.6 below suggests that absolute majority of both male and female respondents affirm the continuation of this tradition, indicating

that communal feast is still perceived as an essential part of marriage ceremonies in Mara society. This enduring practice highlights two key socio-cultural dimensions. First, it signifies the community's strong adherence to traditional practice, reflecting cultural continuity across generations. Second, it reveals that marriage is still regarded as a significant social institution, not merely a private union between individuals, but a public event that reinforces communal ties and social cohesion. Thus, the economic burden associated with marriage is not merely a financial concern, but also a reflection of deeply embedded cultural values and social obligations.

The persistence of communal feasts in marriage, as reflected in **Table 5.6**, reinforces the political-kinship function of marriage as a locus of social integration. Despite Christian influence, marriage remains a public institution that affirms communal solidarity, redistributes resources, and maintains social hierarchies, demonstrating the interplay of religious ideals with traditional socio-political imperatives.

Table 5.6: Community feast as integral part of the wedding celebration

Does celebration of holy matrimony always involve community feast in your locality?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	70	70	140
No	0	0	0
Sometimes	0	0	0

When respondents were asked about the scope of the wedding feast in the celebration of holy matrimony, a significant majority of 58 males (82.85%) and 62 females (88.57%) affirmed that such wedding feast generally involve the participation of the entire village or local community among the Maras. This widespread communal involvement indicates that the wedding feast is not merely a private affair between two families but a collective social event, reflecting the communal ethos and cultural fabric of the Maras. However, this tradition of hosting large scale community feast also entails considerable financial obligations. Hosting an elaborate feast for the entire village significantly increases the cost of weddings,

thereby making holy matrimony economically expensive endeavour for many families.[373]

Conversely, as indicated in Table 5.7, a smaller portion of the respondents - 12 (17.14%) males and 8 (11.42%) females indicated that, in some cases, the wedding feast in holy matrimony is limited to a select group of close friends and relatives. This alternative, though less common, may reflect a shift towards more economically sustainable practices or adaptations to changing socio-economic conditions. The divergence in responses may also highlight a growing tension between traditional communal expectations and modern considerations of financial feasibility in regard to the hosting of wedding feasts. From a structural-functional perspective communal wedding feasts serve as mechanisms for reinforcing social cohesion and collective identity,[374] while the emergence of smaller feasts signals a transition towards individualized practices influenced by economic rationality

In summary, while the dominant practice among the Maras continues to uphold communal participation in wedding feasts, thereby reinforcing social unity, it simultaneously poses significant economic challenges. The presence of a minority preferring more intimate celebrations suggests a gradual but noteworthy shift in cultural norms related to marriage.

Table 5.7: The scope of wedding feast in the holy matrimony

Who usually partake wedding feast in the celebration of wedding feast in holy matrimony?	Male	Female	Total
Entire village/community	58	62	120
Selected few of close friends and relatives	12	8	20

In contrast to the patterns observed in the celebration of holy matrimony, the responses concerning the scope of the wedding feast in the context of semi-holy matrimony reveal a significantly different trend. While the celebration of semi-holy matrimony also includes a wedding feast, the scale of participation is narrower. As

[373] Macha K. Vabeitha (President, Krizypha Thyutlia Py, Headquarters, Siaha), interviewed by scholar, Siaha, March 26, 2025.
[374] Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society.*

illustrated in Table 5.8, a substantial proportion of respondents - 54 males (77.14%) and 52 females (74.28%) indicated that the wedding feast in semi-holy matrimony is typically limited to a small circle of close friends and relatives. This selective participation reduces the financial burden on the families involved, rendering the semi-holy matrimony a more economically practical option.

From a **Marxian anthropological lens**, this economic pragmatism reflects an adaptation of traditional rituals to contemporary financial constraints, illustrating how cultural practices are reshaped under economic pressures. Semi-holy matrimony demonstrates a negotiation between traditional expectations of communal celebration and the realities of modern household economics.

However, it is important to note that this pattern is not uniform. A minority of 16 males (22.85%) and 18 females (25.71%) reported that, in some instances, semi-holy matrimony involves large-scale communal participation as well. These responses suggest that socio-economic status continues to play a pivotal role in shaping marital practices. Families with greater financial resources may experience less distinction between holy and semi-holy matrimony in terms of celebration. This divergence highlights the fluidity and adaptability of matrimonial customs within the Mara community.

Table 5.8: The scope of wedding feast in the semi-holy matrimony

Who usually partake wedding feast in the celebration of wedding feast in semi-holy matrimony?	Male	Female	Total
Entire village/community	16	18	34
Selected few of close friends and relatives	54	52	106

When it comes to holy matrimony, there is a societal expectation for community feast, as holy matrimony is considered a significant communal event. Consequently, families often feel obligated to host elaborate feasts, reinforcing **Bourdieu's concept of habitus**, whereby deeply ingrained social dispositions dictate adherence to communal norms. The customary practice significantly elevates financial burden, particularly for lower-income families, making semi-holy

matrimony a practical alternative.[375] This has rendered semi-holy matrimony a practical alternative due to the low cost of expenditure associated with its celebration.[376] Thus, the rise of semi-holy matrimony can be interpreted as a socio-economic adaptation, reflecting a negotiation between traditional cultural expectations and contemporary financial realities.

The Evangelical Church of Maraland (ECM) has expressed concern over high expenditures associated with holy matrimony. To mitigate excessive costs, the ECM passed a resolution instructing the discontinuation of elaborate wedding feasts and circulated an official memorandum to all local churches.[377] In an effort to ensure widespread adherence to this decision, an official memorandum was issued and circulated to all local churches under the ECM, instructing members to comply with the new directive.[378]

Nevertheless, a considerable segment of respondents disregards this institutional directive. As shown in Table 5.9, a substantial majority - 52 males (74.28%) and 58 females (82.85%) - do not support the Church's ban. Only a small minority of 5 males (7%) agreed, with no females affirming the directive. Additionally, 8 males (11.42%) and 12 females (17.14%) adopted a neutral stance. This pattern illustrates the limits of formal institutional control, highlighting the persistence of culturally embedded practices over ecclesiastical authority.

Conversely, only a small minority of 5 male respondents (7%) asserted that they agreed with this directive, while notably, no female respondents shares the same opinion. This absence of affirmative responses among females may indicate a gendered perception or experience of religious and cultural practices, potentially shaped by differing roles or expectations within both the Church and the broader community. Additionally, 8 male respondents (11.42%) and 12 female respondents (17.14%) adopted a neutral stance. This neutrality may reflect social contradiction, or a reluctance to challenge either cultural traditions or religious authority publicly by

[375] K. Khiha (Senior Citizen at Mawhrei), interviewed by scholar, Mawhrei, March 26, 2025
[376] Khiha, interview.
[377] 97th ECM Minutes, 2020, 44.
[378] ECM-SoM/15/2020-2021.

some members of the Church. Overall, the findings underscore the complex interplay between institutional religious authority and culturally sanctioned social practices. They point to the limits of formal institutional control in contexts where deeply rooted cultural traditions continue to shape individual and collective behaviour, particularly in the context of marriage.

Table 5.9: Compliance of the Church regulation against wedding feast

Do you support Church's regulation against wedding feast?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	10	0	10
No	52	58	110
Uncertain	8	12	20

A particularly significant observation emerges from male ordained ministers within the Church. All nine reported that Church members do not adhere to directives regarding wedding feasts. This consensus reinforces the Bourdieuian notion of habitus, reflecting the strength of culturally internalized norms even among religious leaders.[379]

The Church has adopted a lenient stance regarding attire for bride and bridegroom, allowing either traditional or modern Western dress.[380] However, bridegrooms typically prefer suits, reflecting Giddens's structuration theory, whereby actors negotiate between tradition and contemporary influence.[381]

[379] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*
[380] Evangelical Church of Maraland, *Constitutions and Rules*, 282.
[381] Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984).

A bride decked herself with beautiful traditional attire on wedding day

The Evangelical Church of Maraland has expressed concern over the decision to hold the marriage procession during the daytime instead of at night. Traditionally, marriage processions took place at night, led by two or three individuals known as *sahmaphaopa*, who carried large pots of rice beer on their backs. The bride was accompanied by her paternal aunt, friends, and relatives, while the *lyuchapa* ensured her safety from mischievous individuals who would engage in mischievous play, such as throwing small stones and mud at the procession. Children in the community actively participated, enthusiastically chanting special verses for the occasion in cheerful voices.[382] Nowadays, in accordance with the Church's decision, marriage processions usually take place in the evening before nightfall.[383] Only a select group of individuals, including close friends and relatives, accompany the bride to the groom's house.

In the traditional period, marriage prices were very expensive and it entails a lot of expenditure on the part of wife' takers. The marriage prices were usually paid in terms of household goods such as gun, gong, brass pot, earthen pot, bead, dao, axe

[382] K. Zohra, *The Maras: The Indigenous Tradition and Folkculture* (Guwahati: Scientific Book Centre, 2013), 60.
[383] Evangelical Church of Maraland, *Constitutions and Rules*, 282.

etc. and animals such as *mithun*, pig, fowl etc.[384] Such material kinds and animals were paid in lieu of various major prices and subsidiary prices of the bride, and they were collectively known as *sohra* or *sodaw*. As the bride's price is usually high, this makes it necessary for a family to save up for many years before they can afford to buy a wife for their son.[385] This practice ensured social alliances and prestige.[386]

The ECM issued a memorandum limiting bride price to seven pots to ease economic pressure,[387] yet widespread non-compliance is evident (Table 5.10). Specifically, 60 males (85.71%) and 56 females (80%) disagreed with the limitation. The Maras' resistance underscores the enduring cultural value of bride price as a marker of social status, reflecting a negotiation between modern institutional authority and traditional kinship economy.

It is interesting to note that The Maras have long been distinctively known for their expensive bride prices, which are not mere economic transactions but perceived as markers of social status, honour, and familial prestige. The widespread resistance to the Church's regulation indicates a collective desire to maintain this particular cultural identity, even when it come into conflict with institutional efforts aimed at reform and financial moderation.

Only a small minority of 8 male and 6 female respondents supported the Church's regulation. This marginal agreement may reflect a small but growing awareness of the need for financial practicality, or it may represent individuals who align more closely with Church doctrine. Additionally, a neutral stance was reported by 2 male (2.85%) and 8 female (11.42%) respondents. The higher proportion of women expressing neutrality could point to internal conflicts between traditional expectations and contemporary economic realities, or perhaps a reluctance to voice strong opinions on a culturally sensitive issue. In conclusion, while the Church's attempt to moderate bride prices represents a formal intervention in cultural practice, the strong opposition to its regulation underscores the resilience of traditional

[384] J.H. Hlychho, *The Maras: Head Hunters to Soul Hunters* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2009), 71.
[385] N.E. Parry, *The Lakhers* (Calcutta: Firma K.L.M. Pvt. Ltd., 2009), 293.
[386] Staruss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship.*
[387] ECM-SoM/15/2020-2021.

customs within the Mara community. This tension between religious authority and cultural preservation reflects a broader dialogue between modernization and identity in marital practices.

Table 5.10: Compliance of the Church regulation on marriage price

Do you agree with the Church regulation that limits the bride price to a maximum of 7 pots?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	8	6	14
No	60	56	116
Uncertain	2	8	10

A shift is evident in marriage price items, with traditional goods being replaced by modern items like plastic water tanks, dinner sets, and blankets. Table 5.11 shows 58 females (82.85%) and 44 males (62.85%) prefer modern items. Men are slightly more inclined toward traditional items, possibly reflecting a desire to preserve cultural symbolism and heritage. Neutral stances suggest openness to blending traditional and modern practices.

Interestingly, a notable proportion of male respondents - 20 individuals (28.57%) preferred traditional items, compared to only 6 females (8.57%) who shared this view. This gender-based disparity suggests that men may be more inclined toward valuing traditional marriage items, possibly due to their perceived cultural and symbolic significance. This inclination could be rooted in a desire to preserve cultural heritage or uphold family traditions that are often expressed through exchange of traditional items. Furthermore, an equal number of male and female respondents - 6 each (8.57%) adopted a neutral stance, indicating neither a clear preference for traditional nor modern items. This neutral perspective might reflect a growing acceptance of blending both traditional and modern elements in contemporary marriage practices.

Overall, while modern items are gaining popularity across both genders, the data suggests that men may place comparatively higher value on traditional items,

pointing to underlying gender differences in attitudes toward cultural continuity and modernity in marriage customs.

Table 5.11: Preference of modern items over traditional items for marriage price

What do you prefer- traditional items or modern items for marriage price?	Male	Female	Total
Traditional items	20	6	26
Modern items	44	58	102
Neutral/Uncertain	6	6	12

Historically, dowry was absent in Mara society; women brought only personal belongings. Contemporary practices, however, increasingly resemble a dowry system due to gift-giving during weddings, influenced by missionary introduction of wedding gifts.[388] The range of gifts now spans modest to expensive household items, reflecting a gendered economic negotiation consistent with Beauvoir and Rubin's critiques of marriage as an instrument of gendered exchange.

The range of gift items presented during marriage ceremonies varies from modest offerings such as dinner sets and photo albums to expensive household appliances like televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, and wardrobes. The bride usually brings these gift items to her husband house, and the practice is becoming more and more resemble with the dowry system found in other societies.[389] In earlier times, the recipients of the bride price were traditionally required to slaughter a pig and present it to the bride to claim the price.[390] Although the recipients of the bride price are no longer obliged to kill a pig for claiming the bride price, the tradition is increasingly being replaced by the practice of giving expensive gift items by them to the bride. This emerging trend not only reflects the characteristics of a dowry system but also contributes to the rising financial burden associated with marriage among the Mara community. As the value and expectations

[388] Zaithanga, *A Study of social and cultural changes*, 33.
[389] K. Chilei (Church Elder, ECM Local Church, Amobyu), interviewed by scholar, Amobyu, March 27, 2025
[390] Melvil Pereira et al., *Continuity and Change: The Maras of Mizoram* (Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, 2019), 135.

of gift-giving increase, the cost of marriage ceremonies is becoming significantly higher, putting pressure on families and altering traditional marital practices.[391]

The ECM prohibited costly items (TVs, fridges, washing machines) in dowries,[392] This measure was introduced to prevent the financial burden that dowry demands could place on families, particularly those who might feel pressured to provide extravagant gifts to uphold social expectations.[393] But, widespread noncompliance remains evident (Table 5.12), reflecting the limits of institutional power (Foucault) and the persistence of culturally valued exchange practices.

A study shows that the Church's regulation that bans expensive items like TVs, fridges, and washing machines from being included in dowries does not get community support among the Maras. A considerable majority of respondents expressed opposition to this ecclesiastical directive. Specifically, 58 male respondents (82.85%) and 54 female respondents (77.14%) reported that they did not support the Church's regulation on excluding expensive household appliances from dowries. In contrast, only a small minority of 4 males (5.71%) and 4 females (5.71%) indicated support for the regulation. Meanwhile, a notable proportion adopted a neutral position, with 8 male (11.42%) and 12 female (17.14%) respondents choosing to take a neutral stance in this regard.

Table 5.12: Church regulation putting a ban on expensive items for dowry

Do you support the church regulation that prohibits expensive items from being included in a dowry?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	4	4	8
No	58	54	112
Neutral/Uncertain	8	12	20

The memorandum also capped dowry at 30 cloth pieces and 10 blankets, further highlighting institutional attempts to mediate financial burden.[394] Resistance

[391] Chilei, interview.
[392] ECM-SoM/15/2020-2021.
[393] Khithie, interview.
[394] ECM-SoM/15/2020-2021.

to this reflects the enduring social and symbolic significance of traditional marital exchange and illustrates the tension between modernization and cultural preservation.

These findings suggest that the Church's regulation to curtail financial burdens associated with marriage transactions has not resonated strongly with the community. The resistance to the regulation may reflect deeper socio-cultural values wherein gift giving of expensive items by recipients of the bride price and its inclusion in dowry is perceived as replacement of traditional practice of obligatory slaughtering of animals on the part of the claimants of the bride price.[395] Overall, the findings point to a significant incoherence between institutional religious directives and prevailing community norms.

[395] H.C. Pakia (Headmaster, Government Amobyu Primary School-I), interviewed by scholar, Amobyu, March 27, 2025

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

The The institution of marriage among the Maras has undergone significant transformations over time, shaped by the twin forces of tradition and modernity, with Christianity playing a particularly decisive role in redefining norms, practices, and meanings. While certain traditional practices have disappeared or been reinterpreted in alignment with Christian values, other elements have persisted, demonstrating the community's enduring attachment to cultural identity. From a theoretical perspective, these transformations can be interpreted through de Beauvoir's feminist critique of gendered social structures, Butler's concept of performativity, and political-kinship theory, which collectively illuminate the dynamic negotiation between religious authority, gender norms, and kinship obligations. The result is a hybrid system of marriage that simultaneously reflects continuity and change, adaptation and resistance.

6.1 Dialectal Groups and Variations in Marriage Practices

Linguistically, the Mara population is divided into five major dialect groups: Tlosai, Hawthai, Zyhno, Chapi, and Vytu. Despite dialectical differences, inter-group communication remains mutually intelligible. Among these, Tlosai emerged as the dominant dialect, particularly after its adoption by the Lakher Pioneer Mission (1907) as the medium for translation of religious texts, hymns, and formal education.

Marriage practices display slight regional variations across these groups. Among the Chapi-speaking community, engagement gifts were standardized according to clan hierarchy, whereas among the Zyhno, distinctions were drawn in relation to inter-village alliances. These variations reflect both linguistic diversity and socio-cultural nuances within the broader Mara identity. From a political-kinship perspective, such variations underscore how marriages served not only as social rituals but also as strategic instruments to negotiate alliances, maintain clan hierarchies, and reinforce power relations.

6.2 The Institution of *Laipho*, a premarital Socialization

Laipho, a unique Mara practice, provided a culturally sanctioned arena for courtship, enabling young women to exercise agency in partner selection, consistent with de Beauvoir's emphasis on women's negotiation of social constraints. Multiple Laipho groups could coexist within a single village, reflecting the flexibility of indigenous gendered norms.

The decline of Laipho coincided with British colonial consolidation (post-1924), illustrating the gradual accommodation of external influences. Yet its persistence in some areas until the 1970s highlights both cultural resilience and the performative enactment of gendered courtship practices as theorized by Butler.

6.3 Marriage Proposals and Engagement Rituals

The preliminary enquiry (*athitly*) and the role of mediators (*lyuchapa*) underscore the structured negotiation of marriage alliances. Presentation of engagement gifts such as dao, pots, or gongs reflected political-kinship strategies: regulating social hierarchies, reinforcing clan status, and facilitating reciprocity. Butler's notion of performativity is evident here, as ritualized acts codified societal expectations, transforming symbolic gestures into socially sanctioned practices.

6.4 Rituals of Exchange and Symbolism

6.4.1 Slaughter of the Pig (*Thuaso Awrua*)

The ritual slaughter of a pig upon acceptance of engagement gifts symbolized honor and reciprocal obligations. Regional variations - mandatory among inter-village Zyhno marriages - demonstrate kinship-based social strategy, where ritual acts reinforced intergroup alliances and collective identity.

6.4.2 The Role of Dreams

Dreams were traditionally interpreted as prophetic indicators of marital fortune. Contemporary survey data shows only 10% of respondents continue to regard such beliefs as significant, highlighting the gradual secularization of performative rituals in line with Butler's framework, where traditional symbols are reinterpreted or abandoned under evolving social norms.

6.5 Changes in the Mode of Selection of Marriage Partners

Historically, parental selection dominated, limiting children's choice. Today, 78.57% of respondents prefer love marriages. This reflects de Beauvoir's insight that autonomy and agency challenge inherited patriarchal structures, while Butler's performativity underscores how new relational behaviors - romantic courtship, negotiation of consent - are socially enacted to constitute modern marital identities.

6.6 Child Marriage (*No-apahaw*)

The Mara no-apahaw practice involved children of similar age, prioritizing alliance-building over coercion. Its disappearance underscores the influence of Christianity, which, alongside formal education, reshaped gendered roles and childhood agency—aligning with de Beauvoir's critique of socially imposed subordination.

6.7 Polygyny and Concubinage

Polygyny was historically restricted to chiefly families. Christianity's normative pressure eliminated its practice, illustrating the intersection of religious authority and gendered morality, reinforcing monogamy as the socially and morally sanctioned ideal.

6.8 Widow Remarriage and *Lapinôkhu*

Widow remarriage practices such as *lapinôkhu* and *akeipa* reflect political-kinship strategies, ensuring continuity of household welfare and kin alliances. These customs exemplify how marriage functions as both a moral institution and a mechanism of social stability.

6.9 Divorce Practices

Grounds for divorce—ranging from impotence to adultery—show a blend of traditional norms and modern social problems (e.g., substance abuse). The economic burden borne by initiators reflects Butlerian performativity, where social and financial behaviors reproduce moral and normative expectations.

6.10 - 6.12 Bride Price, Ritual Exchange, and Kinship

The categories of bride price (*azila* and *makhotho*) and ritualized feasting functioned as instruments of social stratification, kinship reinforcement, and political-kinship negotiation. The centrality of *okia*, *seihra*, and *seipawchyu* historically reinforced clan hierarchies, while maternal kin involvement demonstrates bilateral kinship logic. Over time, the shift toward modern items illustrates adaptability, yet the underlying mechanisms of reciprocity and alliance-building persist.

6.13 *Kholei-ma* as a Mechanism of Exclusion

The strategic imposition of exorbitant bride prices illustrates the exercise of social agency and political-kinship power to control marital alliances, reinforcing social hierarchies while negotiating economic capacity of prospective grooms.

6.14 - 6.15 Contemporary Concerns, Social Mobility, and Marriage as Alliance

Contemporary survey data shows tensions between economic burden, cultural obligation, and personal preference. While traditional marriage facilitated social mobility via clan alliances, 86% of respondents report economic achievement now supersedes clan status. These findings reflect de Beauvoir's framework (social and economic autonomy shaping gendered roles) and Butler's performativity, wherein contemporary marital behaviors enact negotiated social norms.

6.16–6.18 Marriage as Alliance, Child-Rearing, and Social Obligation

Marriage continues to function as a conduit for alliance formation, collective child-rearing, and fulfillment of social obligations. Despite Christian influence, 68% of respondents still perceive unmarried adults as socially distinct, illustrating the persistence of normative performativity in sustaining societal expectations.

6.19 Political Dimensions of Marriage

Marriage intersects with political strategy, as chiefs and contemporary leaders utilize kinship ties for influence. The ongoing significance of familial-political

networks aligns with political-kinship theory, demonstrating how marital arrangements mediate power, resources, and social capital.

6.20 - 6.21 Transformation under Christianity: Holy vs Semi-Holy Matrimony

Christianity reshaped ritual and liturgical frameworks. Holy matrimony represents doctrinal ideals, while semi-holy matrimony illustrates practical negotiation of socio-economic constraints. Butler's performativity is evident in the enactment of religious ceremonies, while de Beauvoir's lens highlights the increased agency of couples in determining marital form.

6.22 - 6.25 Economic Determinants, Church Regulation, and Dowry

Economic considerations drive the predominance of semi-holy matrimony. Non-compliance with Church directives and the emergence of dowry-like practices illustrate the limits of ecclesiastical authority when confronted with communal expectations and entrenched social hierarchies. Political-kinship strategies continue to shape marriage as a vehicle for status, reciprocity, and alliance, highlighting the enduring negotiation between tradition and Christian modernity.

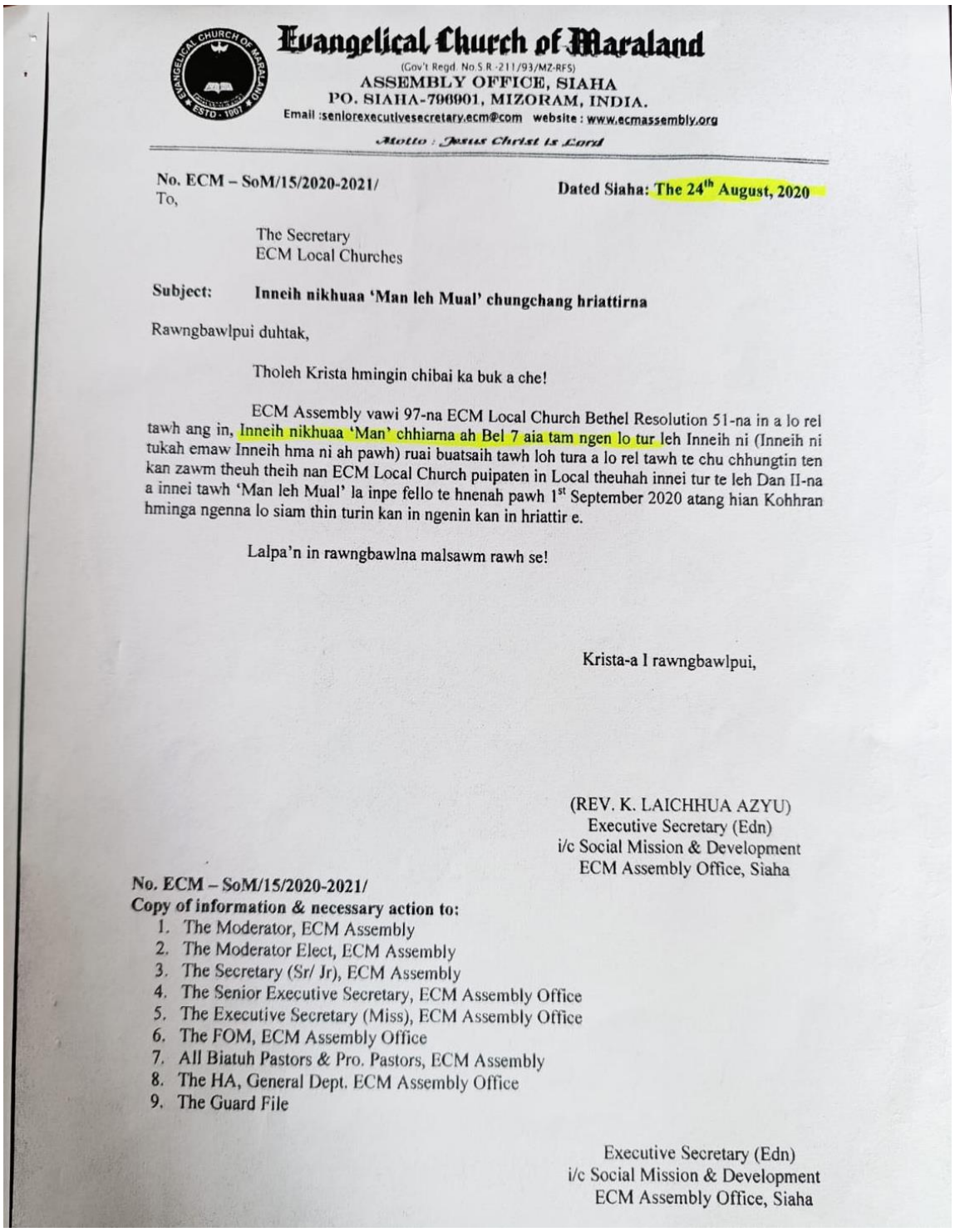
The Mara marriage system today is a hybrid institution, reflecting the interplay of indigenous customs, Christian morality, and modern socio-economic pressures.

- **De Beauvoir's perspective** elucidates how gendered roles are contested and renegotiated, particularly through education, Christian norms, and expanded marital choice.
- **Butler's theory of performativity** explains the enactment of marital, ritual, and social behaviors that reproduce norms while allowing for negotiation and adaptation.
- **Political-kinship theory** clarifies how marriages operate as strategic mechanisms for alliance, status negotiation, and resource distribution, integrating both traditional and modern objectives.

Ultimately, Mara marriages embody continuity and change, where religious authority, social expectation, and individual agency coexist, producing a dynamic

institution that sustains cultural identity while accommodating evolving moral, economic, and social realities.

APPENDIX – A (Documents)



Evangelical Church of Maraland
(Gov't Regd. No.S.R.-211/93/MZ-RFS)
ASSEMBLY OFFICE, SIAHA
PO. SIAHA-796901, MIZORAM, INDIA.
Email :seniorexecutivesecretary.ecm@com website : www.ecmassembly.org
Motto : Jesus Christ is Lord

No. ECM – SoM/15/2020-2021/ Dated Siaha: The 24th August, 2020

To,

The Secretary
ECM Local Churches

Subject: Inneih nikhuaa 'Man leh Mual' chungchang hriattirna

Rawngbawlpui duhtak,

Tholeh Krista hmingin chibai ka buk a che!

ECM Assembly vawi 97-na ECM Local Church Bethel Resolution 51-na in a lo rel tawh ang in, Inneih nikhuaa 'Man' chhiarna ah Bel 7 aia tam ngen lo tur leh Inneih ni (Inneih ni tukah emaw Inneih hma ni ah pawh) ruai buatsaih tawh loh tura a lo rel tawh te chu chhungtin ten kan zawm theuh theih nan ECM Local Church puipaten in Local theuhah innei tur te leh Dan II-na a innei tawh 'Man leh Mual' la inpe fello te hnenah pawh 1st September 2020 atang hian Kohhran hminga ngenna lo siam thin turin kan in ngenin kan in hriattir e.

Lalpa'n in rawngbawlna malsawm rawh se!

Krista-a l rawngbawlpui,

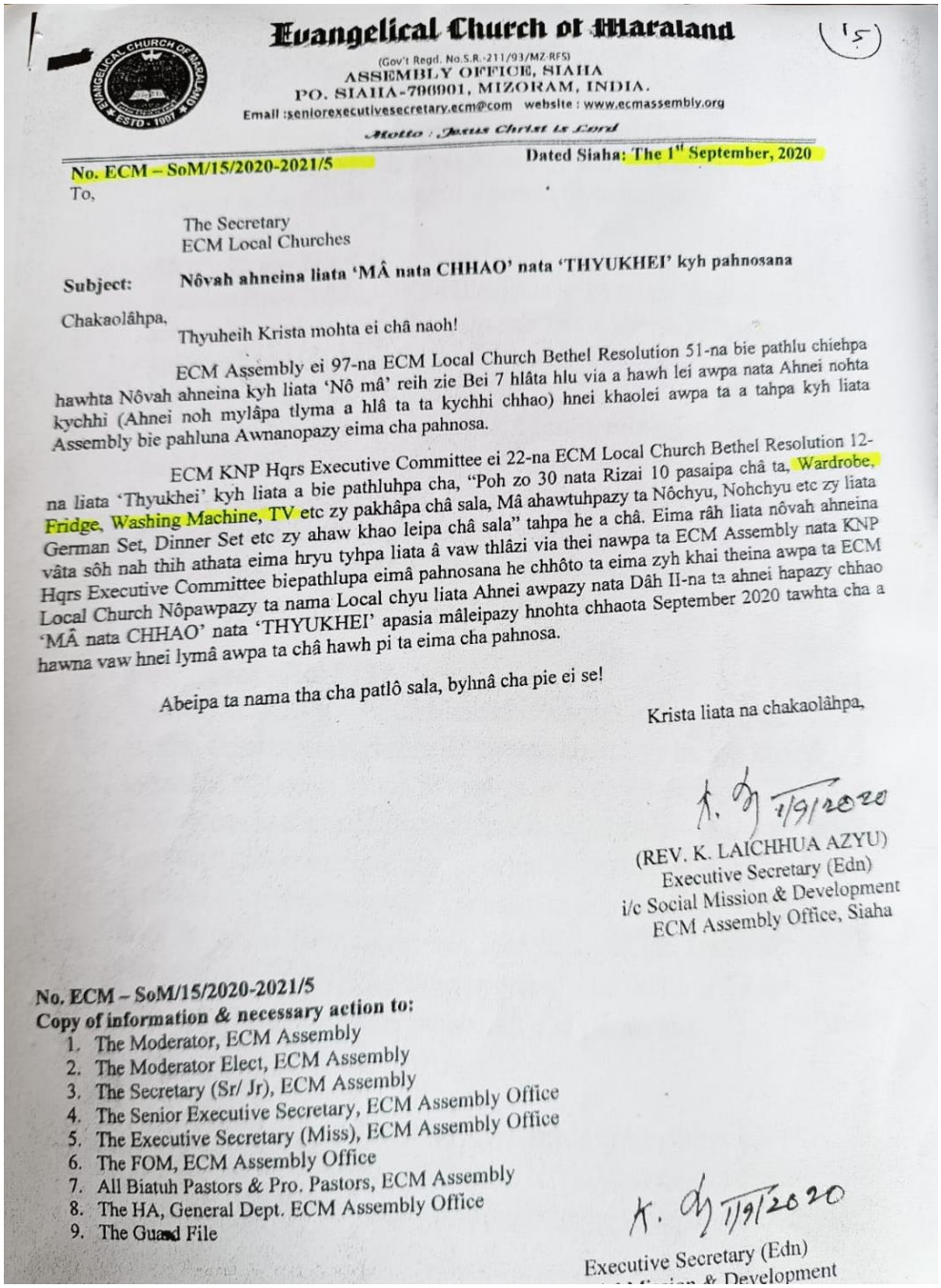
(REV. K. LAICHHUA AZYU)
Executive Secretary (Edn)
i/c Social Mission & Development
ECM Assembly Office, Siaha

No. ECM – SoM/15/2020-2021/
Copy of information & necessary action to:

1. The Moderator, ECM Assembly
2. The Moderator Elect, ECM Assembly
3. The Secretary (Sr/ Jr), ECM Assembly
4. The Senior Executive Secretary, ECM Assembly Office
5. The Executive Secretary (Miss), ECM Assembly Office
6. The FOM, ECM Assembly Office
7. All Biatuh Pastors & Pro. Pastors, ECM Assembly
8. The HA, General Dept. ECM Assembly Office
9. The Guard File

Executive Secretary (Edn)
i/c Social Mission & Development
ECM Assembly Office, Siaha

A copy of ECM official memorandum that limits bride price at 7 pots



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Motto : Jesus Christ is Lord

(15)

No. ECM – SoM/15/2020-2021/5 **Dated Siaha: The 1st September, 2020**

To,

The Secretary
ECM Local Churches

Subject: **Nôvah ahneina liata 'MÂ nata CHHAO' nata 'THYUKHEI' kyh pahnosana**

Chakaolâhpa,

Thyuheih Krista mohta ei châ naoh!

ECM Assembly ei 97-na ECM Local Church Bethel Resolution 51-na bie pathlu chiehpa hawhta Nôvah ahneina kyh liata 'Nô mâ' reih zie Bei 7 hlâta hlu via a hawh lei awpa nata Ahnei nohta kychhi (Ahnei noh mylâpa tlyma a hlâ ta ta kychhi chhao) hnei khaolei awpa ta a tahpa kyh liata Assembly bie pahluna Awnanopazy eima cha pahnosa.

ECM KNP Hqrs Executive Committee ei 22-na ECM Local Church Bethel Resolution 12-na liata 'Thyukhei' kyh liata a bie pathluhpa cha, "Poh zo 30 nata Rizai 10 pasaipa châ ta, Wardrobe, Fridge, Washing Machine, TV etc zy pakhâpa châ sala, Mâ ahawtuhpazy ta Nôchyu, Nohchyu etc zy liata German Set, Dinner Set etc zy ahaw khao leipa châ sala" tahpa he a châ. Eima râh liata nôvah ahneina vâta sôh nah thih athata eima hryu tyhpa liata â vaw thlâzi via thei nawpa ta ECM Assembly nata KNP Hqrs Executive Committee biepathlupa eimâ pahnosana he chhôto ta eima zyh khai theina awpa ta ECM Local Church Nôpawpazy ta nama Local chyu liata Ahnei awpazy nata Dâh II-na ta ahnei hapazy chhao 'MÂ nata CHHAO' nata 'THYUKHEI' apasia mâleipazy hnohta chhaota September 2020 tawhta cha a hawna vaw hnei lymâ awpa ta châ hawh pi ta eima cha pahnosa.

Abeipa ta nama tha cha patlô sala, bylnâ cha pie ei se!

Krista liata na chakaolâhpa,

K. Dy 1/9/2020

(REV. K. LAICHHUA AZYU)
Executive Secretary (Edn)
i/c Social Mission & Development
ECM Assembly Office, Siaha

No. ECM – SoM/15/2020-2021/5
Copy of information & necessary action to:

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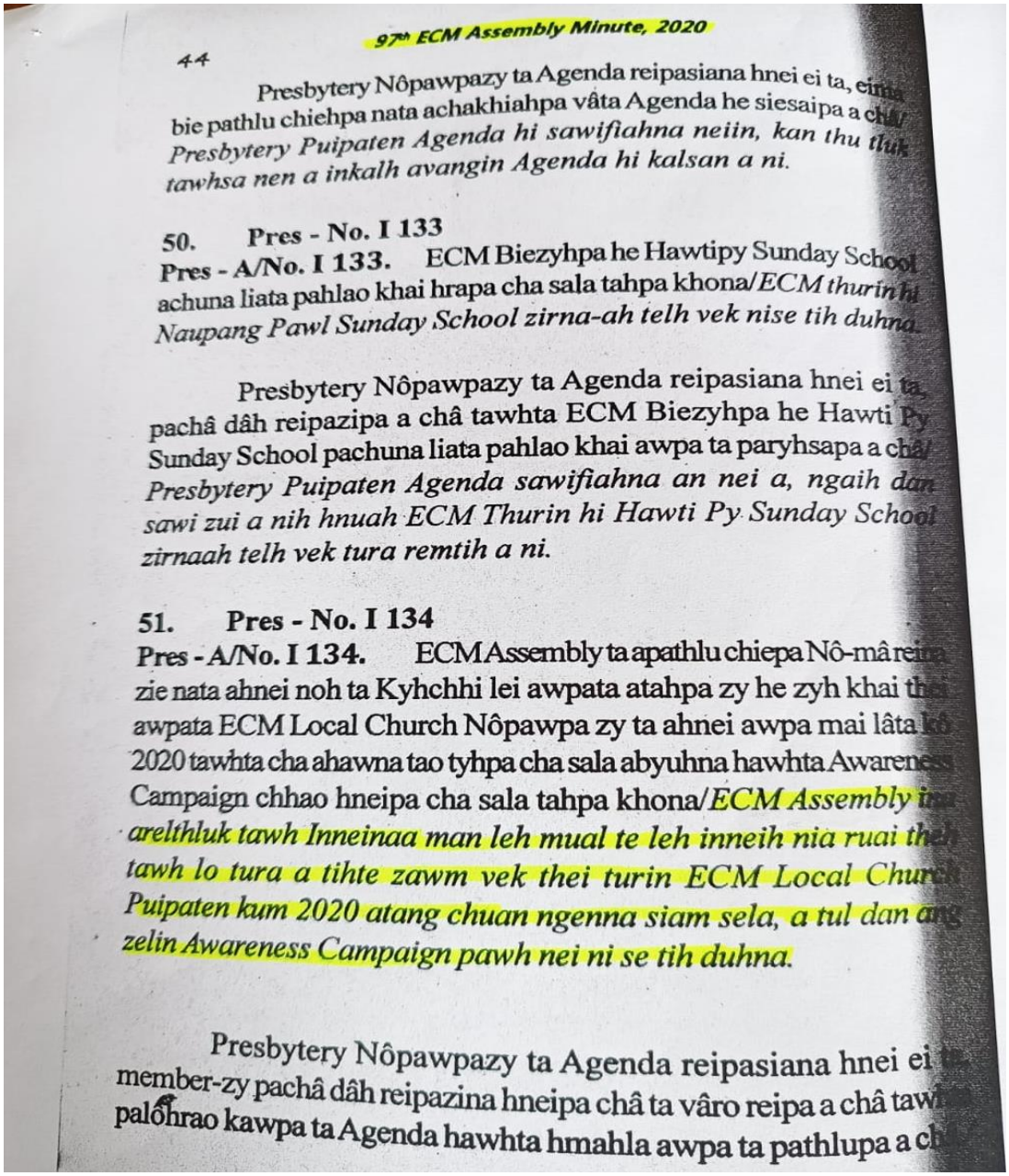
2. The Moderator Elect, ECM Assembly
3. The Secretary (Sr/ Jr), ECM Assembly
4. The Senior Executive Secretary, ECM Assembly Office
5. The Executive Secretary (Miss), ECM Assembly Office
6. The FOM, ECM Assembly Office
7. All Biatuh Pastors & Pro. Pastors, ECM Assembly
8. The HA, General Dept. ECM Assembly Office
9. The Guard File

K. Dy 1/9/2020

Executive Secretary (Edn)
& Development

A copy of ECM official memorandum that prohibits expensive household items from being included in dowry.



97th ECM Assembly Minute, 2020

44

Presbytery Nôpawpazy ta Agenda reipasiana hnei ei ta, eima bie pathlu chiehpa nata achakhiahpa vâta Agenda he siesaipa a chû *Presbytery Puipaten Agenda hi sawifiahna neiin, kan thu tluk tawhsa nen a inkalh avangin Agenda hi kalsan a ni.*

50. Pres - No. I 133

Pres - A/No. I 133. ECM Biezyhpa he Hawtipy Sunday School achuna liata pahlao khai hrapa cha sala tahpa khona/*ECM thurin hi Naupang Pawl Sunday School zirna-ah telh vek nise tih duhna.*

Presbytery Nôpawpazy ta Agenda reipasiana hnei ei ta, pachâ dâh reipazipa a châ tawhta ECM Biezyhpa he Hawti Py Sunday School pachuna liata pahlao khai awpa ta paryhsapa a chû *Presbytery Puipaten Agenda sawifiahna an nei a, ngaih dan sawi zui a nih hnuah ECM Thurin hi Hawti Py Sunday School zirnaah telh vek tura remtih a ni.*

51. Pres - No. I 134

Pres - A/No. I 134. ECM Assembly ta apathlu chiepa Nô-mâ reina zie nata ahnei noh ta Kyhchhi lei awpata atahpa zy he zyh khai thei awpata ECM Local Church Nôpawpa zy ta ahnei awpa mai lâta kô 2020 tawhta cha ahawna tao tyhpa cha sala abyuhna hawhta Awareness Campaign chhao hneipa cha sala tahpa khona/*ECM Assembly ina arelthluk tawh Inneinaa man leh mual te leh inneih nia ruai thei tawh lo tura a tihte zawm vek thei turin ECM Local Church Puipaten kum 2020 atang chuan ngenna siam sela, a tul dan ang zelin Awareness Campaign pawh nei ni se tih duhna.*

Presbytery Nôpawpazy ta Agenda reipasiana hnei ei ta member-zy pachâ dâh reipazina hneipa châ ta vâro reipa a châ tawi palôhrao kawpa ta Agenda hawhta hmahla awpa ta pathlupa a chû

A copy of 97th ECM Assembly Minute, 2020 that prohibits lavish wedding feast.

APPENDIX – B (Photo Section)

Mara elders partaking in traditional rice beer.

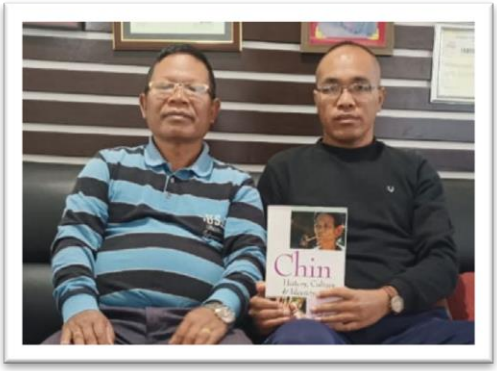
The first Christian missionary bungalow at Saikao.

Maras dressed in elegant traditional costume.

Mara girls adored in beautiful traditional attire

<u>APPENDIX – C</u> (Some of the people interviewed by scholar during field work)

**With Rev. Dr. Setha Solo,
Principal, Maraland Theological
College, Siaha**



**With C Thahe,
SDO (Retired) P&E Dept.,
New Siaha, Siaha**

**With V. Makhai,
Secretary, ECM, Theiva village**

**With ST Pawla,
Headmaster (Retd), Zyhno Middle
School, Zyhno**

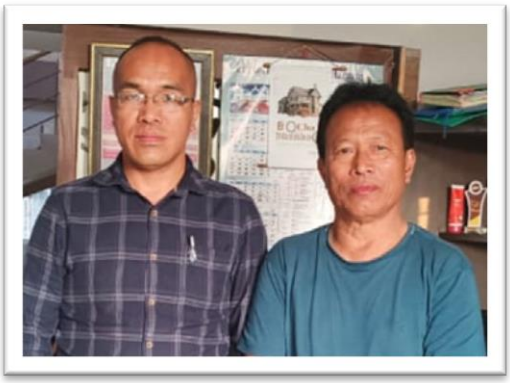
**With Rev. Chhuakhu Khithie,
Secretary, ECM Office,
Siaha**

**With K Beirona,
Headmaster, Chheihlu Middle
School, Chheihlu**

With K Khiha,
Church Elder, ECM
Mawhrei

With Dr. NB Sachhei,
Asso Professor (Retired)
Govt. Serchhip College

With K Chilei and HC Pakia
Church Elders, ECM, Amobyu



With Pachi Hlychho,
Retired Executive Secretary,
MADC, Siaha

With Prof. Chawngkhuama
Chawngthu,
Govt. Saiha College, Siaha

M Hniezo, Church Elder, Zyhno, Siaha

With Prof. K Zohra, Govt. Saiha College, Siaha

With HT Phillip, Church Elder, ECM, College Veng Siaha

With ST Mark, N Laikia, Laichua Syuhlo and AC Laima, Tisi Village, Siaha District

**With Neikhu Solo (VCP), FC Madau (Chairman, ECM)
and FC Khaima (Secretary, ECM), Chapi, Siaha district**

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ABSTRACT

THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE MARAS

AN ABSTRACT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE MARAS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Marriage has historically been regarded as one of the most fundamental and universal social institutions, existing in nearly every known society. It is widely recognized as a socially sanctioned mechanism for regulating sexual relations, legitimizing procreation, and providing an organized framework for family life. Through marriage, individuals' sexual and procreative needs are satisfied within a system that is legally, socially, and culturally endorsed.

Conceptualizing Marriage:

The question "What is marriage?" has elicited multiple interpretations across disciplines, time periods, and cultural contexts. Scholars have offered varying definitions, each reflecting different emphases:

Harry M. Johnson described marriage as a stable relationship sanctioned by society between a man and a woman, with sexual gratification and procreation as its two essential conditions. **G.P. Murdock** emphasized co-residence, regular sexual relations, and economic cooperation as central to the marital bond, with procreation, child-rearing, mutual affection, and economic partnership as additional functions.

Edward Westermarck defined marriage as "a relation of one or more men to one or more women which is recognized by custom or law, and involves certain rights and duties both in the case of the parties entering the union and in the case of the children born of it." **Malinowski** conceived of marriage primarily as a contractual arrangement for the production and maintenance of children, while **Robert Lowie** characterized it as a relatively permanent bond between socially permissible mates.

Despite differences in emphasis, these definitions converge on the understanding that marriage is not merely a private relationship between two individuals but a socially and culturally sanctioned institution that regulates sexuality, legitimizes procreation, and organizes kinship.

The Multidimensional Significance of Marriage:

Marriage must be understood as a multidimensional institution, intersecting with social, political, economic, and religious domains:

Socially, marriage provides the structural foundation for family life, ensuring orderly procreation, child-rearing, and the transmission of cultural values. It regulates inheritance, property rights, and social status, thereby contributing to societal stability and continuity.

Politically, marriage functions as a mechanism for alliance-building across families, clans, and even polities, reinforcing kinship ties and extending its significance beyond the domestic to the socio-political order.

Religiously, marriage is often conceived as a sacred union. Many traditions uphold it as permanent and indissoluble, emphasizing fidelity, moral responsibility, and spiritual guidance for married couples. Economically, marriage operates as a cooperative unit of production and consumption. Historically, it facilitated the consolidation of property and resources across families, while in modern societies, it continues to provide financial security through pooled resources, legal rights, and state benefits.

Thus, marriage is not a unitary construct but a composite institution that operates across multiple dimensions of human society, deeply influencing both individual behavior and collective organization.

Typologies of Marriage:

Across cultures, marriage manifests in diverse forms. The two primary classificatory axes are:

Endogamy and Exogamy:

Endogamy requires individuals to marry within their own group (caste, tribe, clan, or ethnicity), thereby reinforcing internal cohesion and cultural preservation. Exogamy mandates marriage outside one’s group, fostering inter-group alliances, genetic diversity, and broader social networks.

Monogamy and Polygamy:

Monogamy, the union of one man and one woman, is the most widespread and enduring form. It may take the form of serial monogamy (remarriage permitted after widowhood or divorce) or strict monogamy (remarriage prohibited). Although universal, monogamy has come under scrutiny in modern contexts of rising divorce rates and shifting relational norms.

Polygamy entails one individual marrying multiple spouses. Polygyny (one man with multiple wives) has been historically widespread, particularly in societies with significant economic stratification. Polyandry (one woman with multiple husbands), though rare, occurs in resource-scarce Himalayan societies as a means to prevent land fragmentation and ensure economic survival, often practiced in its fraternal form (brothers sharing a wife).

These typologies demonstrate the adaptive nature of marriage across ecological, economic, and cultural contexts.

Theories on the Origins of Marriage:

Scholarly debates over the original form of marriage reveal divergent perspectives:

Promiscuity or Group Marriage Theories: Early anthropologists like Morgan and Tylor proposed an evolutionary model in which human societies progressed from promiscuity to polyandry, polygyny, and eventually monogamy.

Engels, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, theorized that group marriage reflected communal ownership of resources before the rise of private property.

Lévi-Strauss highlighted its role in fostering solidarity in small-scale societies, while evolutionary scholars like Ryan and Jethá suggested it enhanced genetic diversity. However, evolutionary psychologists such as Robin Dunbar and Helen Fisher have critiqued these theories, emphasizing the need for stable partnerships given the prolonged dependency of human offspring for survival.

Monogamy as Original Form: Others argue that monogamy is evolutionarily primary, citing the survival advantages of pair-bonding. Theories of paternal investment (Buss, Shackelford), resource allocation (Wrangham), and protection from infanticide (Hrdy) support monogamy as a mechanism for ensuring offspring survival. Moreover, Henrich's theory of social monogamy speculates that norms of exclusivity reduced intra-group conflict and promoted cohesion.

Both positions highlight the centrality of reproduction, resource distribution, and social stability in shaping marital systems, though consensus remains elusive.

Review of Literature:

Some of these works were thoroughly reviewed to build the conceptual, theoretical, and historical foundations of this research. Each work was critically examined to identify its contributions, strengths, and limitations, as well as to locate gaps that provide scope for further exploration in the present study. The review helped in understanding historical, anthropological, sociological, legal, and cultural perspectives on kinship, family, and marriage, both in Western and Indian traditions, as well as within the specific context of the Maras of Mizoram.

The works of classical scholars such as Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, and Edward Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, *The Future of Marriage*, offered valuable theoretical insights into kinship and exchange systems. Modern contributions, including those of Gayle S. Rubin, *The Traffic in Women,* Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, A History*, and John Witte Jr. *From Sacrament to Contract*, provided critical perspectives on gender, law, religion and the transformation of marriage as an institution. Comparative and cross-cultural approaches were enriched through works like W.N. Stephen, *The Family in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Andrew J. Cherlin, *The Marriage Go-Round*, and E.J. Graff, *What is Marriage For*?

Specific ethnographic and regional studies, particularly those of George Davies, *Land, Marriage, and Economy in the Himalayas,* N.E. Parry, *The Lakhers*, Chawngkhuma Chawngthu, *The Mara Marriage System, Mara Khawtlang Nun,* John Hamlet Hlychho, *The Maras: From Head-Hunters to Soul Hunters,* P.T. Hlychho,

Maraland: Yesterday and Today, K. Zohra, *The Maras, Indigenous and Folk Culture*; *Laipho: A Social Institution of the Early Maras*, and Zakhu Hlychho, *Mara te Tobul*, offered crucial primary references on the history, social organization, and cultural practices of the Maras.

In addition, works by Mizo historians such as V.L. Siama, *Mizo History*, B. Lalthangliana, *A Brief History and Culture of the Mizo*, and K. Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute leh an Thlahte Chanchin*, provided broader historical contexts linking the Maras with other Mizo tribes.

Scholarly works by K. Robin, *The Lakhers in Mizoram: The Impact of Christianity and Colonial Administration;* K. Robin, *Lakher Society and Colonial Encounter*, and Melvil Pereira and colleagues, *Continuity and Change: The Maras of Mizoram*, helped in connecting colonial encounters, Christianity, and modern socio-political transformations.

Together, these sources not only provided an extensive background to the subject but also revealed significant research gaps, particularly regarding the ethnohistorical and cultural linkages of the Maras within the broader Indian civilizational framework. These identified gaps have shaped the direction and focus of the present research.

Statement of the Problem:

Mizoram is home to diverse tribes, among which the Maras of southern Mizoram hold a distinct place for their rich cultural heritage. Despite their unique traditions, the cultural practices of the Maras, particularly their marriage system, remain largely undocumented and underexplored in scholarly research.

The traditional Mara marriage system is intricate, marked by elaborate rites and rituals, the practice of bride price, and a complex process of its payment and distribution. These practices have historically shaped and regulated the social structure of Mara society. However, with the advent of British colonial rule and the spread of Christianity, significant transformations occurred. While certain customs were abandoned or reinterpreted, many traditional elements persisted, creating a

dynamic interplay between continuity and change. In the present context, modernization and globalization have further influenced Mara marriage practices, raising questions about the extent to which traditional systems are being retained, adapted, or replaced.

This study, therefore, seeks to examine the evolution of Mara marriage customs under the combined impact of Christianity, colonialism, and modern socio-cultural forces. By analyzing the interplay between traditional customs and newly adopted Christian values, the research aims to understand how the Maras negotiated these cultural transitions, and what this reveals about the broader processes of cultural resilience, adaptation, and transformation in tribal societies.

Objectives:

1. To understand the theoretical and conceptual discourse surrounding the institution of marriage.

2. To understand traditional marriage system of the Maras.

3. To investigate the evolution of marriage system of the Maras over time.

4. To assess the influence of the Church on marriage practices of the Maras.

Methodology:

This study primarily adopted a mixed-methods approach to assess the traditional marital system of the Maras and the changes that had occurred over time. The approach was undergirded by key theoretical positions such as Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functionalism, Lévi-Strauss's alliance theory, and feminist and gender critiques advanced by Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler. These frameworks guided the analytical focus on kinship structures, marriage exchanges, gender roles, and the political functions of marital alliances.

As an ethnographic study, participant observation and interviews provided rich qualitative details about lived experiences, ritual behavior, and gender norms, while quantitative responses revealed broader patterns in marital preferences, generational attitudes, and emerging socio-political influences.

Archival records and church sources further enabled the tracing of historical changes in customary practices and the institutionalization of marriage, while secondary data from academic literature, vernacular writings, and genealogical accounts informed the interpretation of findings within wider anthropological and feminist debates.

The integration of theoretical insights with both qualitative and quantitative techniques allowed the study to present a coherent and comprehensive understanding of marriage as a cultural, social, and political institution among the Mara people.

Chapterization:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter explored concept and theories on the institution of marriage.

Chapter 2: Evolution of marriage system of the Maras.

This chapter explored traditional marriage system of the Maras and its evolution over the ages.

Chapter 3: The Maras and bride's price.

This chapter examined socio cultural significance of bride's price of the Maras, and the complicated procedures of its payment method.

Chapter 4: The institution of marriage and the Maras: Socio and political significance.

This chapter examined socio political significance of marriage among the Maras.

Chapter 5: Church and marriage system.

This chapter examined the role of the church in contemporary marriage practice of the Maras.

Chapter 6: Conclusion.

This chapter summarized the research findings

CHAPTER 2: EVOLUTION OF THE MARRIAGE SYSTEM OF THE MARAS

The institution of marriage among the Mara people represents a vital social and cultural foundation, embodying not merely a personal contract between individuals but a complex system of negotiations, exchanges, and symbolic rituals that have evolved across historical periods. This chapter examines the traditional marriage system of the Maras, its unique cultural institutions, the dynamics of bride price, and the impact of external influences, particularly the advent of Christianity and colonial rule, on the transformation of these practices. The discussion highlights both continuity and change, demonstrating how the Mara community has negotiated between tradition and modernity in sustaining its cultural identity.

2.1 The Traditional Marriage System: An Overview:

Marriage among the Maras was historically a highly structured and elaborate process, encompassing negotiations, mediations, payment of bride price, and ritual obligations. It functioned as both an alliance between families and a reaffirmation of social status. The payment and distribution of bride price were particularly significant, involving intricate procedures that symbolized respect, reciprocity, and kinship solidarity.

The introduction of Christianity in the early twentieth century marked a watershed moment in this institution. While Christianity challenged and eventually modified many traditional practices, the persistence of certain rituals illustrates the Mara community's strong cultural attachment and their adaptive strategies in reconciling traditional practices with Christian values.

2.2 Dialectal Groups and Variations in Marriage Practices:

Linguistically, the Mara population is divided into five major dialect groups: Tlosai, Hawthai, Zyhno, Chapi, and Vytu. Despite dialectical differences, inter-group communication remains mutually intelligible. Among these, Tlosai emerged as the dominant dialect, particularly after its adoption by the Lakher Pioneer Mission

(1907) as the medium for translation of religious texts, hymns, and for formal education.

Marriage practices display slight regional variations across these groups. For instance, among the Chapi-speaking community, engagement gifts were standardized through specific pot sizes correlating to clan hierarchy, whereas among the Zyhno, distinctions were drawn primarily in relation to inter-village alliances. These variations reflect both linguistic diversity and socio-cultural nuances within the broader Mara identity.

2.3 The Institution of *Laipho*:

Premarital Socialization: One of the most distinctive features of Mara traditional society was the institution of *Laipho*, a unique social arrangement that facilitated courtship and premarital interaction between young men and women. Under this practice, young men selected the house of an unmarried girl as their collective sleeping place until she was married. Each *Laipho* was named after the host girl, for example, *Nasai Laipho.*

Laipho served as a culturally sanctioned arena for premarital interaction, allowing young women to evaluate potential partners and exercise agency in partner selection. The institution was not rigidly restricted by numbers, as multiple *Laipho* groups could exist within a single village, depending on the number of unmarried girls.

The decline of *Laipho* coincided with the consolidation of British colonial rule in Maraland (post-1924). While it disappeared in some villages soon thereafter, its persistence in others until as late as the 1970s illustrates both cultural resilience and the gradual accommodation of external influences.

2.4 Marriage Proposals and Engagement Rituals:

Marriage negotiations traditionally began with the practice of *athitly*, a discreet preliminary enquiry made by a female relative of the prospective groom's family to assess the suitability of a proposed match. Once favorable reports were received, mediators known as *lyuchapa* were appointed. The senior mediator

(*lyuchapa-uthei*) and assistant mediator (*lyuchapa-sehnai*) played a central role in formalizing marriage arrangements.

The formal engagement was marked by the presentation of ***thuaso*** (engagement gifts), which could include a dao, pot, gong, or spear. Among the Chapi, the pot was symbolically calibrated to clan status: ten-span circumference for chiefly clans, nine for high clans, and eight for middle clans. Such ritualized differentiation underscores how marriage served as a mechanism for reaffirming social stratification within the Mara community.

2.5 Rituals of Exchange and Symbolism:

2.5.1 Slaughter of the Pig (*Thuaso Awrua*)

The acceptance of engagement gifts necessitated the ritual slaughter of a pig by the bride's family, symbolizing honour and gratitude toward the groom's family. The division of the slaughtered pig (*thuaso hmiakhuti*) into specific portions, typically three quarters sent raw to the groom's family and one retained by the bride's, signified reciprocity and respect.

Regional variations existed: among the Zyhno, the pig slaughter was mandatory only for inter-village marriages, symbolizing goodwill in inter-community alliances.

2.5.2 The Role of Dreams:

Dreams of the bride's parents during the engagement period were traditionally considered prophetic indicators of the marriage's fortune. Auspicious dreams, such as visions of fish, clean water, or ornaments, were seen as signs of approval, while inauspicious dreams foretold misfortune. Survey data indicates that only 10% of respondents in contemporary society continue to attach importance to such beliefs, highlighting the waning influence of traditional superstition.

2.6 Child Marriage (*No-apahaw*):

Unlike in many societies where child marriage paired young girls with older men, the Mara practice of *no-apahaw* typically involved children of similar age

groups. The primary motivations included aspirations for alliance-building with higher clans and the desire to safeguard the girl's purity until formal union.

The child bride resided alternately between her parental and husband's households until puberty, but sexual relations were deferred until maturity. Although historically rare, survey findings confirm the complete disappearance of this practice in contemporary Mara society.

2.7 Polygyny and Concubinage:

Monogamy was the normative practice among the Maras, with polygyny limited to chiefly and wealthy clans. Legitimate wives were known as *nôbei*, while auxiliary wives or concubines were termed *nôtho*, occupying subordinate positions within the household.

The advent of Christianity in the early twentieth century significantly undermined the legitimacy of polygyny, leading to its eventual disappearance. Polyandry was entirely absent from Mara society.

2.8 Widow Remarriage and the Custom of *Lapinôkhu*:

Widow remarriage was socially accepted and institutionally regulated. A widow (*nôhmei*) could remarry at her discretion, though she often remained in her late husband's household until memorial rites were completed.

The customary practice of ***lapinôkhu*** permitted a man to marry the widow of his deceased brother without repaying the full bride price, except for a supplementary payment (*abanaso*). This practice secured the welfare of widows and children, preserved familial alliances, and ensured continuity of kinship bonds. Similarly, widowers could marry their deceased wife's sister *(akeipa*), sometimes with concessions in bride price, reinforcing familial solidarity.

2.9 Divorce Practices:

In contrast to the elaborate marriage procedures, divorce was comparatively straightforward, though regulated by specific customary norms. Divorce could be

initiated by either spouse, and the initiating party typically bore the economic burden.

1. ***Lopinôma*** **(husband-initiated divorce):** Wife's family retained paid bride price and could demand balance if pigs had been killed.

2. ***Sôh Pakua*** **(wife-initiated divorce)**: Wife returned full bride price, with partial retention (okia) allowed if she had borne children.

3. ***Arei-Raoh*** **(mutual divorce**): Entire bride price refunded, but pig-related payments disregarded.

4. ***Khuthi*** **(impotence):** Grace period of rituals granted to husband; premature departure by wife treated as self-initiated divorce.

5. Chhipo (barrenness): One-year probation allowed; failure led to divorce and refund of bride price.

6. ***Hrupathei*** **(madness):** Divorce permissible after one year of rituals; bride price partially retained depending on circumstances.

7. ***Âphei*** **(adultery):** Considered deeply shameful. The adulteress's family returned bride price (except okia), while the adulterer paid heavy fines including livestock, beads, and cloth, with feasts held to mitigate communal dishonour.

While traditional grounds such as impotence or barrenness once dominated, substance abuse now constitutes the principal cause of divorce (80% of respondents), followed by infidelity and family interference. This demonstrates the shifting socio-cultural dynamics in Mara society and the increasing intrusion of modern social problems into marital stability.

What do you think is the most common cause of divorce among the Mara in the contemporary society?	Married	Unmarried	**Total**
Infidelity	6	8	**14**
Family interference	8	6	**14**
Domestic violence	0	0	**0**
Substance abuse	64	48	**112**
Others (indicate)	0	0	**0**

Although the divorce system of the Mara is not as complicated as its marriage system, certain customary practices need to be followed by both husband and wife regarding reimbursement of marriage prices. Broadly speaking, the one who initiated the divorce usually becomes the loser. If the husband divorced his wife, he must forfeit the bride prices that had already been paid. If the wife divorced her husband, she must return the entire amount of the bride prices that had already been paid, except the *Okia* price, provided that she had children.

CHAPTER 3: THE MARAS AND THE BRIDE PRICE

The present chapter examines the socio-cultural significance of the institution of bride price among the Maras, with particular attention to the complex procedures involved in its payment and distribution. Far from being a mere financial transaction, the bride price constitutes a deeply embedded cultural institution that reinforces kinship ties, affirms the social value of the bride, and formalizes the marital contract between families. Within this framework, the bride price may be understood as both a symbolic and material practice that reflects and reproduces the socio-political organization of Mara society.

3.1 Categories of Bride Price:

Among the Maras, the bride price is broadly categorized into two principal divisions: *azila* and *makhotho*. Each category encompasses a range of payments, designated for specific kin relations of the bride, and governed by customary rules of entitlement. Male relatives of the bride on the paternal side, such as the father, brothers, paternal uncles, and nephews, are entitled to receive *azila*, while women customarily have no rights to claim such payments. The major items under *azila* include *okia, seipihra, seicheihra, chawchyu, seihra,* and *seipawchyu.*

3.1.1 The Centrality of *Okia*:

Within the *azila* category, *okia* holds paramount importance as it establishes the rate for all other payments. Traditionally, *okia* was payable to the bride's father, or in his absence, to another senior male relative on the paternal side. The value of *okia* varied significantly across clans, with higher clans demanding correspondingly higher rates. Payments ranged from mithun (domesticated bovine) to large gongs, while lower clans accepted smaller items such as brass gongs (*dawchhy*). The hierarchical variation of *okia* underscores the stratified nature of Mara society, wherein marriage payments simultaneously reinforced clan status and demarcated social boundaries.

Okia of different clans may be indicated as follows:

Sl no.	**Clan**	**Items of *Okia***	**Amount**
1	Ruling clan (*abeipho*)	She mithun and its calf ***sano saw***	Rs 100.00
2	High Clan (*phoso*)	Full grown mithun ***sapi***	Rs 60.00
3	Plebeian clan (*machhie*)	Full grown cow ***sataw*** or a pig	Rs 40.00
4	Low clan (*dawchhy*)	A pair of small gong	Rs 20.00

3.1.2 *Seihra* and *Seipawchyu*:

Seihra, another major price, was historically claimed by the bride's father and was especially prevalent among chiefly clans and wealthy families. Its most striking feature was the customary right to demand a slave, or in the absence thereof, a mithun. The decline of *seihra* under the influence of Christianity illustrates the interplay between indigenous customs and new moral orders introduced by religious transformation.

Similarly, *seipawchyu*, literally "the special share for the most favoured slave," reflected the presence of slavery within elite Mara households. Over time, such practices diminished as new religious and ethical norms delegitimized the commodification of human beings within the marriage economy.

3.1.3 *Makhotho* and the Role of Maternal Kin:

The category of *makhotho* encompassed payments such as puma, *nochyu, norihra, tinie, mochyu,* and *mao.* Unlike *azila*, these payments were distributed among both maternal and paternal relatives. Of particular significance was *puma,* payable to the maternal uncle (*pupa*). The maternal uncle occupied a central role as both guardian and blessing-giver, and no other payments could be distributed until

the preliminary *loakhyu* was settled with him. This practice reflects the bilateral orientation of kinship among the Maras, wherein both paternal and maternal lineages were incorporated into the marital alliance.

3.2 Traditional and Modern Items of Bride Price:

Historically, bride prices consisted of items with symbolic and utilitarian value, including guns, gongs, brass pots, earthen vessels, beads, and livestock such as mithun, pigs, and fowls. Collectively, these items were termed *sohra* or *sodaw*. Over time, however, the material composition of bride price has shifted toward modern utilitarian goods such as blankets, plastic furniture, sewing machines, and water tanks. Survey data indicates that 72.85% of respondents preferred modern items, citing their practical value, while 18.57% favoured traditional items for their symbolic and cultural significance. This ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity highlights the adaptive resilience of the institution of bride price.

3.3 Ritualized Exchange and Feasting:

The distribution of bride price was accompanied by the ritual slaughter of animals, particularly pigs and mithun, by both the bride's and groom's families. These acts of exchange reinforced reciprocity and generated communal feasting, thus transforming a private transaction into a collective event that celebrated kinship solidarity. Although no longer obligatory, vestiges of this practice persist, with kin continuing to contribute animals for the wedding feast, thereby sustaining the social ethos of reciprocity.

3.4 *Kholei-ma* as a Mechanism of Exclusion:

A distinctive feature of the Mara marriage system was *kholei-ma*, an exorbitant demand for bride price used strategically by elite families to deter undesirable marriage proposals. By setting a price beyond the capacity of prospective grooms, families exercised agency in regulating marital alliances, thereby protecting lineage prestige.

3.5 Contemporary Concerns and Attempts at Regulation:

In contemporary Maraland, the persistence of expensive bride prices poses significant financial strain on families. Many respondents in the present study (54%) expressed support for reducing expenditures associated with bride price, while a notable minority (22.85%) favoured maintaining the practice as a marker of cultural identity and honour. Attempts by village committees to impose ceilings on bride price, such as the Rs. 5,000 limit in Amobyu village, have had limited success, as recipients often manipulate the valuation of items, arbitrarily fixing their worth at symbolic rather than market rates. This reveals a critical tension between the formal regulation of customary practices and the continued social value attached to the institution.

CHAPTER 4: THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE AND THE MARAS: SOCIO-POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Marriage, as a cultural institution, has historically constituted the cornerstone of Mara social and political life. Beyond its role in regulating sexual relations and procreation, marriage functions as a mechanism for alliance-building, status negotiation, and political consolidation. This chapter explores the socio-political significance of marriage among the Maras, situating it within both traditional and contemporary contexts.

4.1 Marriage and Social Mobility:

While clan identity in Mara society was ascriptive, marriage provided a strategic avenue for social mobility. Men of lower clans could elevate their family's status by marrying into higher clans, and successive generations of such unions allowed families to command higher bride prices. This mechanism transformed marriage into a means of renegotiating social hierarchies, even within a rigidly stratified society. In contemporary times, however, the significance of clan in shaping social status has declined, with 86% of male respondents indicating that marrying into higher clans is no longer necessary for social advancement. This reflects a broader shift toward economic achievement as the primary marker of social prestige.

Do you consider it necessary to marry higher clan to raise status in the society?	Male Respondents	Total
Yes	4	4
No	60	60
Uncertain	6	6

4.2 Marriage as Alliance Formation:

Marriage has long served as an instrument for forging alliances between families and clans. Such alliances were strengthened through the shared obligations of bride price and kinship reciprocity, binding families together across generations.

Even today, 44% of respondents view marriage primarily as a means of alliance-building, underscoring its enduring role in social cohesion, despite competing modern values that emphasize personal happiness and individual choice.

4.3 Kinship Reinforcement and Child Rearing:

The practice of distributing bride price among a wide network of kin strengthened collective identity and reciprocal obligations. Likewise, marriage was seen as providing the most stable and legitimate environment for raising children, as reflected in the historical stigma attached to illegitimate births (*riasaw*). Although Christian influence has softened attitudes toward illegitimacy, unanimous support among respondents for marriage as the ideal environment for child-rearing indicates the persistence of traditional values.

4.4 Marriage as Social Obligation:

Traditionally, remaining unmarried was stigmatized, with bachelors (*laithiapa*) and spinsters (*laikhôhpa*) often perceived as incomplete members of society. This normative expectation persists, as 68% of respondents affirmed that unmarried adults are still viewed differently in the community. Thus, marriage continues to be construed not only as a personal choice but as a social duty integral to communal life.

Are unmarried adults viewed differently in the community?	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Yes	43	52	**95**
No	11	6	**17**
Uncertain	14	14	**28**

4.5 Political Dimensions of Marriage:

Marriage also carried significant political implications. Chiefs strategically arranged marriages to expand their networks of influence, while commoners sought alliances with higher clans for protection and prestige. In contemporary Maraland, where the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) governs local administration,

marriage continues to intersect with politics. With constituencies comprising small electorates, kinship and clan affiliations play a decisive role in electoral success. Consequently, politicians frequently employ marriage as a means of forging alliances with influential families, a perception affirmed by 52% of respondents in this study.

Moreover, the increasing dependency on political leaders for employment opportunities within the MADC has further politicized marriage choices. A substantial 60% of respondents indicated that familial ties with political leaders are now considered a significant factor in selecting marriage partners. This trend underscores the manner in which marriage has adapted to contemporary socio-political realities, functioning as a conduit not only for social solidarity but also for political patronage and access to state resources.

CHAPTER 5: CHURCH AND THE MARRIAGE SYSTEM

This chapter examines the transformative role of Christianity in shaping the institution of marriage among the Maras. The analysis highlights how the introduction of Christian norms redefined indigenous matrimonial customs, creating both accommodation and contestation between ecclesiastical regulations and entrenched cultural practices.

5.1 Transformation of Marriage Practices under Christianity:

The advent of Christianity brought significant changes to Mara marriage practices. Prior to conversion, matrimonial ceremonies were deeply embedded in indigenous cosmology and ritual practice, involving elaborate procedures such as the offering of sacrifices to benevolent and malevolent spirits, ritual singing, and the communal consumption of rice beer. These customs, once integral to the social fabric of Mara society, gradually disappeared under the influence of Christian teachings that rejected animistic ritualism and alcohol consumption.

In contemporary practice, marriage is solemnized by ordained ministers within the church. Ceremonies typically involve the exchange of rings, the issuance of marriage certificates, congregational hymn singing, and prayers. A modest reception often follows, where tea and snacks are served. Families with greater economic means may still host larger wedding feasts, particularly in the case of holy matrimony, reflecting the enduring cultural emphasis on communal celebration.

5.2 Holy Matrimony and Semi-Holy Matrimony:

The Evangelical Church of Maraland institutionalized two distinct categories of marriage:

1. Holy Matrimony – solemnized by an ordained minister in the church, accompanied by full liturgical ceremony.

2. Semi-Holy Matrimony – solemnized in the pastor’s residence, vestry, or church hall, involving fewer formalities.

Despite the Church's strong theological emphasis on holy matrimony, statistical evidence demonstrates that semi-holy matrimony has become the predominant form of union among the Maras. For instance, between April 2023 and March 2024, 272 marriages were registered in the Evangelical Church of Maraland, of which only 69 (25.36%) were holy matrimony, while 203 (74.63%) were semi-holy. A similar distribution was observed in the following year (2024 2025), with holy matrimony constituting only 25.19% of unions.

This divergence between ecclesiastical prescription and actual practice underscores the tension between doctrinal ideals and socioeconomic realities.

5.3 Economic Determinants and Social Motivations:

The prevalence of semi-holy matrimony can be primarily attributed to economic considerations. The data reveals that 53% of respondents identified the lower financial burden of semi-holy matrimony as its main appeal. Other reasons included premarital pregnancy (22.5%), shyness or discomfort with elaborate church weddings (8.5%), and parental disapproval leading to elopement (15.71%).

What do you think is the main reason for the wide prevalence of semi holy matrimony?	Male	Female	Total
Lower cost of expenditure	38	36	74
Premarital pregnancy	14	18	32
Shyness about the Church wedding	8	4	12
Parental disapproval of the Union	10	12	22

These findings indicate that the **church wedding (holy matrimony)** is often perceived as financially burdensome, primarily due to the cultural expectation of hosting an elaborate community feast, which transforms the event into a collective celebration rather than a purely familial affair. This socio-cultural obligation substantially increases the cost, making holy matrimony inaccessible for many.

5.4 The Church's Attempt at Regulation and Community Resistance:

Recognizing the financial strain, the Evangelical Church of Maraland has attempted to regulate marriage expenditure. It issued directives discouraging elaborate wedding feasts. However, compliance remains low. Survey data indicates that 79% of respondents acknowledged widespread non-compliance, with only 7% supporting the regulation. Notably, no female respondents expressed agreement, highlighting a possible gendered dimension in negotiating cultural obligations.

Do you think that church members comply with its regulation against wedding feast?	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Yes	10	0	10
No	52	58	110
Uncertain	8	12	20

This suggests that cultural norms and communal expectations outweigh ecclesiastical authority, demonstrating the resilience of indigenous social practices even in a Christianized society.

5.5 Emergence of Dowry Practices:

One of the most notable transformations in Mara marriage customs is the emergence of **dowry-like practices**, previously absent in traditional society. Historically, a Mara bride brought only a few personal belongings to her husband's household. However, influenced by the missionaries' custom of gifting newlyweds, a new practice emerged wherein well wishers, clansmen, and recipients of bride price contributed material goods to the couple. These ranged from modest household items to expensive appliances such as televisions, refrigerators, and washing machines.

Although these practices function as gifts, they increasingly resemble a dowry system, particularly as they place financial expectations upon the bride's family.

5.6 The Church's Opposition to Dowry and Bride Price:

The Evangelical Church of Maraland has expressed concern about the rising economic burden of marriage. It banned the inclusion of costly appliances in dowry

exchanges and sought to regulate the bride price, imposing a maximum limit of seven pots.

However, empirical data demonstrates widespread non-compliance. A substantial majority of 80% of respondents admitted non-adherence to the Church's ban on costly dowries, while 83% opposed the limitation on bride price. Both men and women expressed strong attachment to maintaining traditional practices.

Agreement with Bride Price Limit (7 pots):

Do you agree with the Church regulation that limits the bride price to a maximum of 7 pots?	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Yes	8	6	14
No	60	56	116
Uncertain	2	8	10

The persistence of bride price and the rejection of ecclesiastical restrictions highlight the cultural embeddedness of marriage as a marker of status, identity, and social reciprocity within Mara society.

The influence of the Church has been profound in reshaping the form of Mara marriages, particularly in displacing animistic rituals and introducing Christian liturgical solemnization. However, while the ritual framework has been Christianized, the economic and cultural dimensions of marriage remain deeply rooted in traditional structures.

The prevalence of semi-holy matrimony, resistance to bans on elaborate feasts, and the persistence of bride price illustrate the limits of ecclesiastical authority when confronted with communal expectations and cultural resilience. In this sense, the Mara marriage system represents a hybrid institution, shaped by negotiation between indigenous tradition and Christian modernity, where religious authority coexists with, but does not entirely supplant cultural practice.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

The institution of marriage among the Maras has undergone significant transformations over time, shaped by the twin forces of tradition and modernity, with Christianity playing a particularly decisive role in redefining norms, practices, and meanings. While certain traditional practices have disappeared or been reinterpreted in alignment with Christian values, other elements have persisted, demonstrating the community's enduring attachment to cultural identity. The result is a hybrid system of marriage that simultaneously reflects continuity and change, adaptation and resistance.

6.1 Transformation of Traditional Institutions:

One of the most striking findings is the disappearance of *Laipho*, a pre-Christian social institution that facilitated premarital courtship. Although *Laipho* began to decline following the incorporation of Maraland under British administration in 1924, it persisted in some regions until the 1970s. Its disappearance underscores the impact of colonial administration and Christianity in reshaping intimate practices and gender relations within the Mara community.

6.2 Retention of Negotiation and Engagement Customs:

Despite such transformations, several traditional procedures remain integral to contemporary Mara marriages. The roles of the *athithy* (female relative), *lyuchapa* (mediators), and the presentation of *thuaso* (engagement gift) continue to structure marriage negotiations. Among some communities, the ritual slaughter of a pig (*thuaso awrua*) upon receipt of *thuaso* is still practiced, although with localized variations. For instance, it remains compulsory among the Chapi-speaking Maras, whereas the Zyhno-speaking groups apply it selectively, especially in inter-village marriages. These continuities reveal the persistence of symbolic practices that reinforce kinship honour and reciprocity.

6.3 Decline of Superstitious Practices:

Dreams of the girl's parents, once considered decisive in accepting or rejecting marriage proposals, no longer hold importance. Survey data indicates that

90% of respondents dismiss such beliefs as irrelevant, reflecting a wider dislodgement of supernatural determinants from matrimonial decision-making. This transition illustrates a rationalizing trend under Christian and modern influences, which privileges pragmatic over superstitious considerations.

6.4 Shift in Partner Selection:

Whereas parental authority once dominated the choice of marriage partners, contemporary Mara society demonstrates a shift toward individual agency. The survey revealed that 78.57% of respondents prefer love marriages over arranged unions. This transformation reflects both the expansion of personal choice in intimate relationships and the gradual weakening of rigid parental control, aligning with broader trends of individualism in modern societies.

6.5 Widowhood and Remarriage:

Traditional widow remarriage practices, namely *lapinokhu* (remarriage of the widow to her deceased husband's brother) and *akeipa* (remarriage of the widower to his deceased wife's sister), continue to be widely observed. These practices underscore the Mara community's pragmatic approach to ensuring social security, familial continuity, and protection of children within the kinship system. The persistence of such customs suggests a strong communitarian ethic that prioritizes stability and cohesion.

6.6 Disappearance of Child Marriage and Polygyny:

Child marriage (*no-apahaw*) and polygyny (*notho*) have completely disappeared from contemporary Mara society. The survey found no evidence of their continued existence. The eradication of these practices demonstrates the strong normative influence of Christianity and legal modernity in standardizing marriage practices.

6.7 Changing Causes of Divorce:

While infertility, impotence, and mental illness were traditional grounds for divorce, the contemporary leading cause has shifted to substance abuse. Approximately 80% of respondents identified substance abuse as the major factor in

marital breakdown. This reflects broader social challenges in the Mara community and indicates how new socio-economic realities shape the dynamics of conjugal relationships.

6.8 Bride Price and Kinship Obligations:

Bride price (*azila* and *makhotho*) remains central to Mara marriage. The kinship system continues to govern its distribution, reinforcing reciprocal duties and kin obligations. *Okia*, the most significant component of the bride price, retains its traditional primacy. However, while the symbolic structure of bride price persists, the items composing it have shifted. Traditional goods such as gongs, beads, and guns are increasingly replaced by utilitarian modern items like sewing machines, plastic water tanks, and dinner sets. This transition reflects a tension between cultural symbolism and practical utility.

Despite this change, the high cost of bride price remains contentious. Although 54% of respondents support lowering it, 22.85% favour maintaining the traditional high costs, viewing it as a marker of honour and cultural pride. Attempts by village committees and even the Evangelical Church of Maraland (ECM) to regulate expenditure through upper ceilings have met with limited success, revealing strong community resistance to external regulation of cultural practices.

6.9 Marriage and Social Mobility:

Historically, marriage was a key avenue for social mobility, allowing men from lower clans to elevate their status by marrying into higher clans. However, contemporary Mara society exhibits a diminishing reliance on this strategy, as 86% of respondents indicated that marrying into higher clans is no longer necessary for raising status. Improved economic conditions have reduced the salience of clan hierarchy, replacing it with wealth and education as markers of prestige.

6.10 Continuity in Kinship and Family Roles:

Marriage continues to be seen as central to kinship consolidation and child-rearing. The distribution of bride price reinforces kinship bonds, while marriage is still universally regarded as the most stable and ideal environment for raising

children. Societal disapproval of illegitimate births persists, though less severe than in pre-Christian times. Likewise, scepticism toward lifelong singleness remains significant, with 68% of respondents affirming that bachelors and spinsters are still regarded differently.

6.11 Political Dimensions of Marriage:

Marriage remains a strategic tool in contemporary Mara society, particularly in the realm of politics. Historically used by chiefs to forge alliances, marriage continues to function as a means of consolidating political capital. Survey data shows that 52% of respondents believe politicians deliberately pursue alliances with influential families through marriage, reflecting the enduring instrumentalization of kinship in political life. Moreover, in a context where access to government jobs under the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) is highly politicised, 60% of respondents acknowledged that political connections influence marital choices.

6.12 Impact of Christianity on Marriage Rituals:

Christianity profoundly transformed the ceremonial aspects of marriage. Ritual sacrifices, rice beer consumption, and spirit offerings have disappeared, replaced by church solemnisation, hymns, prayers, and ring exchanges. However, even within the Christianized framework, tensions persist between ecclesiastical prescriptions and cultural expectations. For instance, although ECM discourages elaborate feasts and costly dowry-like practices, compliance remains limited. Survey findings reveal that 79% of respondents defy the ban on wedding feasts, while 80% continue to support gift-giving traditions that resemble dowry, despite ecclesiastical opposition.

6.13 Holy and Semi-Holy Matrimony:

Another significant shift concerns the prevalence of semi-holy matrimony over holy matrimony. While the latter is held within church sanctuaries and involves greater ritual solemnity, the former takes place in less formal settings such as pastor’s residences or vestries. Survey and church data confirm that over 74% of marriages in recent years fall under semi holy matrimony, primarily due to lower

costs and premarital pregnancies. Economic pragmatism, rather than doctrinal adherence, thus shapes marital choices among contemporary Maras.

The findings of this study demonstrate that marriage among the Maras operates at the intersection of tradition, religion, and modernity. Christianity has decisively altered ritual, symbolic, and moral frameworks, eliminating practices such as Laipho, child marriage, and polygyny. At the same time, enduring practices such as widow remarriage, kinship-based bride price distribution, and communal feasting illustrate the resilience of indigenous cultural logics. Moreover, the politicisation of marriage alliances reveals how the institution continues to be strategically mobilised for contemporary socio-political advantage.

Overall, the study affirms that while Christianity and modern socio-economic conditions have transformed the Mara marriage system, deep cultural continuities remain embedded in kinship, reciprocity, and communal obligations. These findings underscore the adaptability of the Mara community, which has neither abandoned its cultural identity nor resisted change entirely, but instead forged a syncretic institution of marriage that reflects both heritage and transformation.