

A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY
OF MARA MARRIAGE SYSTEM

By
CHAWNGKHUMA CHONGTHU
SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT



SUBMITTED
IN FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN SOCIOLOGY
NORTH EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY
SHILLONG

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I

Marriage is one of the oldest institutions of human society. It is as old as human history. One of the sources of our knowledge about the institution of marriage are the legends of ancient societies and the various travellers tales which give us a glimpse of the picture regarding the progress in this sphere.

Marriage is one of the deepest, intimate and most complex involvements of human relationships. It is a corner stone of the society and a very necessary part of the social system. There are various institutionalised rituals and belief patterns that are attached to it. Radhakrishnan writes, "marriage is not only a mere convention, but an implicit condition of human society. It is an adjustment between biological purpose of nature and sociological purposes of man" (Radhakrishnan, 1956; p. 147). With regard to the institution of marriage, Pomerai observes, "Marriage is no less an art than life, and for those possessing the affection, forbearance and determination necessary to make it a success, it is the most richly relationship in life" (Pomerai, 1936; p. 127).

Marriage has been defined by different scholars in different ways in different epochs. There is no universal definition of marriage. As a social institution it has been defined by Westermarck as, "A relation of one or more men and one or more women which is recognised 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" (Westermarck, 1928; p. 26). Marriage, according to Winch, is, "Culturally approved relationship of one man and one woman (Monogamy) or one man and two or more women (Polygamy)

or of one woman and two or more men (Polyandry) 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" (Winch, 1988; p. 2). Stephen defines marriage as, "A socially legitimate sexual union begun within a public announcement and undertaken with some idea of permanency; it is assumed with a more or less explicit marriage contract, which spell out reciprocal rights and obligation between spouses, and between spouses and their future children" (Stephen, 1963; p. 5). According to Lundberg, "Marriage consists of the rules and regulations which defines rights, duties and privileges of husband and wife, with respect to each other" (Lundberg, 1956; p. 124). The fundamental basis of marriage has been defined by H.M. Stone and A. S. Stone 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 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 often not even 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 seek 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 legalise a sexual union, rather to ensure the survival of the species and of the race. From this point of view, marriage is not merely a sexual relation but a parental 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 (H.M. Stone and A.S. Stone, 1952; p. 18).

From the above various definitions one can draw the conclusion that the main objective of marriage has always been to provide marital prosperity and the continuance of human race, and perpetuation of human society.

As a social institution, marriage has taken different forms in different societies. There is a controversy regarding the original form of marriage. The nineteenth century Anthropological and Sociological literature had been almost obsessed with the question whether primitive man lived in a state of group marriage (Eliss, 1970; p. 86). Some theorists such as, Spencer and Westermarck claim that monogamy was its original form, while others such as Morgan and Briffault contend that in its original form it was promiscuous

(Lantz and Synder, 1969; p. 19). According to Bochafen, Mclehnan, Lippert and many others, it was not in the form of an individual marriage but "Group marriage" in which 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 (Westermarck, 1925; p. 103). As a social institution, marriage has usually been classified into four forms by most of the writers. Let us discuss the four forms of marriage as given below:

Monogamy is a form of marriage in which an individual is institutionally permitted to have only one spouse at a time. This form of marriage is the common form in most societies.

Polygamy is a form of marriage in which a man is permitted to have two or more wives at the same time. This form of marriage is prevalent among the Muslims.

Polyandry is a form of marriage in which a women is permitted to have more than one husband at the same time. This form of marriage is commonly found among tribal people of hilly region of Tehri-Garhwal in Utter Pradesh.

Group marriage is a form of marriage in which men in a group or tribe had indiscriminate access to all the women of the group. It is prevalent amongst the tribal people of Marguesus and Kaingang of Brazil.

There are various views in regard to the functional significance of marriage. In a general sense, the concept of marriage in India differs from the concept in western countries. According to the traditional Hindu society, marriage is regarded as a religious sacrament as well as social obligations. On the other hand, in the western countries, marriage is regarded as merely social contract, which enables one to fulfil personal needs and happiness in life. Let us now consider some of the concepts of marriage given by western scholars.

Malinowski, basing his knowledge on the intimate and scientific study of savage life, has presented the concept of marriage. According to him, marriage is not merely "Sexual appropriation" but is regarded as "An institution based on complex social condition" and that sexual appropriation is not even its main aspect and it is not based on sexual alone (Malinowski, 1922; p. 225). According to the views 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 (Bogardus, 1950; p.

75). "Considered as an institution, marriage represents the utmost that the society can do to regulate sexuality and safeguard family life" (Chessar, 1946; p. 126). According to the views of H.M. Stone and AS. Stone, "While particular marriage may, of course, be entered into for any number of other reasons as family pleasure, social convenience, financial consideration and similar motives basically the prime object of marriage are championship, sexual intimacy and procreation" (H.M. Stone and A.S. Stone, 1952; p. 21).

On the other hand, according to the traditional Hindu concept, marriage is regarded as a religious as well as social obligations. According to Hindu view of life, it is necessary for man and woman to marry in order to achieve the four parusharthus: Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha (Promilla Kapur, 1970, 82). Marriage was considered primarily a complex of obligations, religious and moral on the one hand, and social and economic on the other" (Mehta, 1970; p. 17). With regard to the concept of traditional Hindu marriage Kapadia writes, "Marriage was a social duty towards the family and the community, and there was little idea of individual interest" (Kapadia, 1958; p. 169).

Ideally, marriage aims not only at the individual complete development, and fulfilment but also at the development and fulfilment of the family and through it of society and mankind. "Marriage is not for sense enjoyment but to perpetuate the race. This is the Indian concept of marriage" (Vivekananda, 1946; pp. 409-410). In support of this view, Commaraswamy writes, "According to the Hindu sociologists, marriage is a social and ethical relationship, and the Begetting of the children the payment of debt" (Commaraswami, 1924, p. 86).

Going through the various concepts of marriage one may say that, according to the contemporary western point of view, marriage is merely a social contract, which enables one to get an advantage in exchange of duties or obligations. According to the traditional Hindu concept, marriage is regarded as a religious sacrament which enables one to fulfil religious as well as social obligations (Promilla Kapur, 1970; p. 86).

With regard to the traditional Mara concept, marriage is regarded as a civil contract with mutual consent (T.H. Lewin, 1870; p. 150), and the contract is permanent unless dissolved by divorce. Among the Maras, marriage is considered as an essential obligation to be fulfilled by both man and woman

for fecundity. One was disdained and looked down upon unless marriage had been fulfilled. Marriage, according to the traditional Mara concept, is considered not only for sexual enjoyment and legalised procreation but also for establishment of good relationship.

The institution of marriage is characterised by certain aspect of systems. One of the variable aspects of different marriage system is the degree of choice open to the individual. In no system there is absolute freedom of choice. At the very last, the incest taboo limits choice in every society. Any marriage system may be regarded as a system of exchange between groups. In most societies, the groups involved are families, and 'exchange' is indirect. This 'Exchange' is only one kind of exchange, and there is a tendency for marital 'Exchange' to take place in the same social universe in which the other kinds occur; trade, exchange of gifts, ceremonial exchange of hospitality (Levi Strauss, 1949; chapter 5). So the system of a marital exchange that can be found in many societies vary almost infinitely, but they can be reduced to a few broadly defined types. The most fundamental distinction is that between 'Closed' or 'Elementary' system and 'Open' or 'Complex' systems (Johnson, 1966; p. 160).

ELEMENTARY SYSTEM OF MARRIAGE

All elementary systems are characterised by "Preferential marriage" that is, marriage in which ego's spouse is someone who is already related to him in the kinship system. There are two sub-types 'Restricted' and 'Generalised'. In restricted exchange, two kin groups other than families supply each other with marriage partners, the man of one group marries a woman from the other, and vice versa. Such a system occurs in all parts of the World, but they are particularly common in Australia (Radcliff Brown, 1931).

The other sub-type of elementary marital exchange 'Generalised exchange' also involves preferential marriage between groups larger than the conjugal family. Unlike the restricted exchange, these groups do not exchange with each other directly in pairs; the arrangement is circular. This system is complicated by the fact that any group in it may give wives to (or take them from) several other groups, but no group ever takes wives from the group to which it gives wives. Thus any group may be involved in several 'Circles' at the same time. The preferred marriage takes place between a boy and daughter of one of his mother's brothers. This type of system is found among the Kachin Hills people of Northeast Burma (Levi Strauss, 1949, p. 293).

OPEN SYSTEM OF MARRIAGE

Open generalised exchange is the most flexible type of marriage system. Here the incest taboo is the only kinship that determines marital choice; there is no 'Preferential marriage'. In all the cases the primary and secondary incest taboo merely prohibit certain marriages, they do not specify neither indirect circles of choice nor the group from which one must choose. This type of system prevails in Africa, Europe and United States.

Complex or open system of marriage may be divided into two categories:

1. Marriage arranged by partners or by agents of the parents known as *Gobetween*.
2. Marriage arranged by the prospective partners themselves.

Whatever the system it might be, the intermixing of cultures effect the institution of marriage and has always been changing its shape and system in different societies in different epochs. The social order also has affected the

form of marriage in different societies. Thus, it is observed that, of all these marriage systems, there will be the relevance to put the present study "Mara system" under the so called, sub-type of elementary marital exchange as the Mara marriage system has been interlinked with this system. There is preferential marriage among the Maras. The most favoured marriage is with mother's brother's daughter as it keeps the maternal avuncular relationship in the same line (Parry, 1932; p. 295).

II

The scientific study of kinship and marriage is only a century old, but in that brief period it has engendered more controversy and a great variety of theoretical formulation than have most aspect of human society. The earlier study made by Bochafen and Mclehnan concentrated on terminological system and utilised them as evidence for historical relationship as survivals of assumed on promiscuity and group marriage.

The foundation for the scientific study of kinship and marriage has been laid by Morgan in his system of Consanguinity and Affinity of human family (1871). In his work, Morgan assembled data on the terminological

systems from his collection for nearly every major area of the world. He grouped the terminologies into great classes, the 'Descriptive' system, which he ascribed to the Aryan, Semitic and Uralic linguistic families, and the "Classificatory" systems which he thought were characterised of the American Indian, the Polynasians, and many other people of Asia. Morgan's theory thus had three distinct components:

1. A comparative theory of the formal properties of kinship terminologies,
2. A structural functional theory of the relation of kinship terminologies to social formations,
3. A historical thesis and the stages of evolution of human society. The resulting evolutionary development of social institutions and cultural stages presented in ancient society (1877) aroused extended controversies which long obscured Morgan's important contributions to the study of kinship and marriage.

In America, the criticism by Kroeber in his "Classificatory system of Relationship" (1909) were the most influential and far reaching. Kroeber found the distinction between 'descriptive and classificatory' misleading and suggested that kinship terminology be utilised, instead, in terms of "psychological principle" based on the difference generations distinction of lineal and collateral relationships.

In support of Morgan's ideas and his work of kinship and social theory, Rivers, in his work of kinship and social organisation (1914) proposed that kinship terminology is determined by social conditions and particularly by forms of marriage and hence can be utilised to reconstruct the recent history of social institution.

Lowie (1921) had been an influential American ethnologist concerned with the study of kinship and marriage. In his views, accepting River's position, that kinship terminology is related to social usages, but influenced by Kroeber (1909) as well, he sought to test the hypothesis that had been proposed against the available ethnographic information.



In England, Malinowski and Radcliff Brown have been most influential figures in the development of kinship and marriage studies. Malinowski, as a result of his study, "The family among the Australian Aborigines" and his extended field research in the Trobriand Island (1922) emphasised the importance of the family as the 'Initial situation' for the development of kinship, from which attitudes and terminology could be widely extended.

Radcliff Brown (1913), an early student of Rivers, is the central figure in modern study of kinship and marriage system. He was the first to develop the concept of the kinship system as composed of both terminology and pattern of social behaviour and to see kinship as an integral part of the larger social structure. As a functionalist he was concerned with the significance of institution in maintaining the social systems, but he attempted to discover basic structural principles that were relevant to a variety of different terminological and social usages.

By the end of 1920, the preliminary classification of kinship terminologies was well underway. Morgan's twofold classification was remodelled by Rivers, and Gifford (1922) had utilised Kroeber's (1909)

categories for the classification of Californian Indian terminologies into eight empirical types, based on the patterns of grouping for cross-cousins, was particularly influential. Lowie (1929) proposed a world-wide classification into four major types based on the treatment of relatives in the parental generation. These were soon followed by Radcliff Brown classification of Australian social system (1931) into two main types in each of which kinship, preferential marriage, and clan groupings were systematically interrelated.

During the following decade a number of field studies were carried out by students of Malinowski and Radcliff Brown in which kinship and marriage received more adequate treatment. Firth's studies of the Tikopia (1936), Warner's on the Murgin (1930), Evans Pritchard's on the Nuer (1951), Tax on the Fox (1937), Hallowell's on the Plains and Spoehr's studies of the southern Indian tribes (1941, 1942) are among those researches that have contributed to the development and modification of the structural functional approach.

III

In the modern period there have been a number of new dimensions in the study of kinship and marriage, which involve method and theory. Some of these include cross-cultural comparisons involving statistical and correlational techniques, others involves linguistic analysis building on Kroeber's (1909) earlier categories and utilising formal analysis, still other utilised models of various types, some derived from linguistic and other mathematics. These studies have stimulated a great amount of new research and promises to broaden our knowledge of kinship and marriage phenomenon in various directions. Of these a particular significance may be attached to Murdock's cross-cultural study of family and kinship organisation in about 250 societies throughout the world, presented *Social Structure* (1949). Utilising the postulation method and statistical analysis he found that kinship terminologies are primarily determined by such sociological factor as descent and residence, with marriage rules of lesser importance. Murdock's study represents a notable advance in the application of social science methodologies to study social organisation, but there has been considerable criticism of the sampling involved, the statistical techniques used and the data selected for analyses.

The contribution of Levi-Strauss to the study of kinship and marriage systems are of different characters. In his works, "Elementary Structure" (1949, 1968) and Structural Anthropology (1956), Levi-Strauss presents some highly original views on the nature of social structure in general and kinship in particular. The principle of reciprocation, as manifested in various forms of exchange in social life, is central to his view on social institution. Kinship in human society is established and perpetuated through specific forms of marriage, and marriage as forms of exchange involves the circulation of women. He is, therefore, particularly concerned with what he called, "Elementary Structure" or those characterised by preferential marriage with a particular category of kin, usually cross-cousins. In this respect Levi-Strauss has attempted the analysis of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage systems, which he found in Australia and Southern and Eastern Asia as well as in few other regions and he sees the resulting dual structure of "Wife receiving" groups reflected in many other aspects of society and culture. This complex and original contribution of Levi-Strauss (1949) (Summarised In English in de Josselin de Jong 1952) has stimulated a number of important studies and engendered considerable controversy.

Homans and Schneider, in *Marriage, Authority and Final Causes* (1955) essay an alternate explanation based on Radcliff Brown's theory of Sentiments. Needham attacked this strongly in *Structure and Sentiment* (1962) and went to make a number of reformulations of what he calls "Prescriptives" marriage systems. Leach in his *Rethinking Anthropology* (1961) shows considerable influence of Levi-Strauss, and does Dumont, *Whose Hierarchy and Marriage Alliance in South Indian Kinship* (1957) emphasised the importance of treating certain categories of relatives as affinal rather than consanguineal.

In recent years a number of Anthropologists and linguistics have turned to Kroeber's analysis (1909) of kinship terminological and have developed a more sophisticated approach called "Componential Analysis". The general frame work for componential analysis is derived from linguistic theory and the kinship vocabulary is regarded as constituting a paradigm which can be analysed in the same manner as other paradigmatic set in a language. Currently Lounsbury (1964) attempted to construct theories using a limited number of ordered roles similar to those of "Generative grammar". The resulting "Formal account" specifics; (a) A set of primitive elements and (b) A set of rules for operating on these to generate a model which represents the empirical data.

IV

The study of kinship and marriage in India as a separate subject is of recent origin. In the development of the study of kinship and marriage in India, RIVER'S, who has been aptly known as, 'The father of kinship studies in India', has contributed a number of works in the field of kinship and marriage in India. His works, such as: *The Todas* (1906), *The Marriage of Cousins in India* (1907) (in the *Journal of Asiatic Society*) and his article, *Kinship and marriage in India* (India's first Professional Journal of Anthropology *Man in India*) (1921) gave an impetus to the scholars of India for further studies in the field of kinship and marriage in India.

In a general sense, the development in the study of kinship and marriage in India in this century have followed and reflected the changing paradigms and concerns of anthropology and sociology in the west. This is to say that there has been in India a progression through evolutionist, diffusionist, functionalist and structuralist orientations of the plurality of perspective (including important input from Marxist and Feminist theory) characteristic of the theoretical and methodological de-centredness of contemporary metropolitan social science (Patricia, 1993; p. 5).

Iravati Karve has done the pioneering work in the systematic study of kinship and marriage in India, "Kinship Organisation in India" (1953). Karve identified three major types of kinship organisation: Northern, Southern and Eastern co-ordinated with the cultural area of the three major language families (Indo-Aryan or Sanskritic, the Dravidian and Austro-Asiatic). The chief focus of her discussion was the northsouth contrast, and the core of this contrast was the question of marriage (Patricia, 1993; p. 4).

There were few monographic field studies in dealing with Indian family life and marriage, namely Srinivas' description of the Coorg localised lineage or Okka, linked to the community's ritual practice (1952); Mayer's study of the internal and external relation of caste in central India (1960) and Dumont's detailed account of the social organisation and material culture of south India sub-caste (1957). In addition to these, several important papers drew on south Indian data to address problems in anthropological theory, for example, a number of papers by Dumont applying Alliance theory to the study of Dravidian kinship terminologies and marriage rules (1953, 1957), and Kathleen Gough's paper (1959), redefining the institution of "Marriage" in the light of her ethnography of the matrilineal Nayers of Kerala. The works of Pocock (1957) on "Hypergamous marriage alliance" and "Family and kinship

among the Pandits of rural Kashmir” Madan (1965) were another characteristic field studies in India.

The most significant and a major influential theoretical framework in the study of kinship and marriage in India is, the attempt to re-interpret Indian kinship from the viewpoint articulated in Claudia Levi-Strauss “Elementary Structure of Kinship” (1949). The focus and starting point of Levi-Strauss’ reflection was the institution that anthropologists have termed “Incest taboo”, that is, prohibition of sexual relations between certain classes of kin. For some anthropologists, the incest taboo is of interest primarily because it is differently defined in different societies (the principle of cultural relativism), but for Levi-Strauss on the contrary its interest lay in its universality as a signifier of transition of humankind from a state of “nature” to one “culture”. It was this universality that suggested the incest taboo as the real key to the understanding of the basic nature and true functions of kinship system everywhere. Under the influence of Levi-Strauss, Dumont had attempted the study of Dravidian Kinship terminologist (1953) and Hierarchy and Marriage Alliance in South Indian kinship (1957). Through his theoretical and empirical contribution to the understanding of Hierarchy and Marriage alliance in South India Kinship (1953, 1957) and through provocative conceptual statements in

early issues of the journal, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Dumont introduced a completely new dimension in the discursive domain of family and kinship studies in India (Patricia, 1993; p. 6).

Another notable approach in the study of kinship and marriage in India is "Cultural approach" which have been derived from Schneider's theory initially applied in respect of American family (1968). In this framework, the domain of "kinship" was itself problematised as an artefact of an anthropological theory and practice more than an essence in itself. Under this cultural approach, Iden and Nicholas attempted the study of Bengali kinship (1977). These scholars seek first to understand indigenous ideas of relatedness, what Scheider had called the 'Code' and the 'Substance' of kinship relations in the native systems of ideas. There has been a widespread acceptance to the spirit of "Cultural Approach", and under this reflection, Ostar, Fruzzetti and Barnett (1983) did their works. Now contemporary theories of the household have conceded that people's ideas, norms and values concerning their domestic life are an important constraint on their behaviour (Patricia, 1993; p. 6).

The rise of Feminist theory has now brought into focus a complete new set of questions and political issues, with special attention to the

household at the side of production and reproduction, and also of the primary socialisation of children. Particular issues of concern are the structure of marriage alliance (symmetrical or asymmetrical) and the nature of marriage payment (bride wealth or dowry), reflecting on the position of women in the conjugal relation and on their value in wider society, Sharma (1980, 19136), Papanek (1990). An emerging body of literature, much of it also within the Marxian tradition, further seeks to correct aspects of the recent restructuring of relation in the household with interventions by the modernising colonial and post-colonial state, Agarwal (1988) and Afshar (1988) (Patricia, 1993; p. 7).

It is, thus, observed that the most significant and influential theoretical formulation, which guided many scholars in the study of kinship and marriage in India, is the so-called "Alliance Theory". Under this theoretical framework, a number of scholars have attempted their works on kinship and marriage (Leela Dube, 1974; p. 40).

All society prohibits marriage within certain relatives, but some societies complement this prohibition by prescribing or preferring marriage within other relatives. In this way two kinds of cousins are sometimes distinguished, marriage being prohibited between those who are children of

siblings of the same sex "Parallel cousin" while it is prescribed between children of siblings of opposite sex (cross-cousin) (Dumont, 1968; pp. 91-111). The essence of an alliance system is to be found in the continuance of marriage relation between certain groups through the repeated operation of special rules of preferential marriage (Levi-Strauss, 1969; p. 91). Under this theory, marriage are customarily arranged, partners are chosen from within the group (while) excluding certain categories of very close kin, and strategies both of the "extension" and of the "intensification" of kin ties are manifested through marriage alliance (Patricia, 1993; p. 48).

It is, therefore, felt that possibility would find place to put the present study of Mara marriage system under the theoretical framework of "Alliance Theory" with special reference to the work of Dumont (1957). The work of Dumont "Hierarchy and Marriage Alliance" in south Indian kinship (1957) was the first important attempt to apply Levi-Strauss theory of marriage alliance (1949) in the Indian contexts especially to the area of Dravidian kinship. In his work, Dumont tried to show how the Dravidian kinship terminology itself gives expression to the complimentary opposition of the two principles of consanguinity and affinity, and how the positive marriage rules in South India serve to ensure that 'affinal' relation between groups are

transmitted from one generation to the next through successive marriages. An innovative aspect of Dumont's presentation was his investigation of the structure of ritual gift-giving in the context of kinship and marriage. He shows (i) how *kanyadana* marriage creates asymmetrical gift giving obligations - unidirectionally from the wife givers to the wife-takers; (ii) how these affinal rights and duties are transmitted from one generation to the next when a man's obligation to his married daughter's conjugal family is produced in his son's ritual and gift-giving relation to his sister's children; and (iii) how the gift relation in India express and maintains asymmetry of status between wife-givers and wife-takers: wife-givers are always socially inferior to wife-takers. According to Dumont, asymmetry in the relation between wife-givers and wife-takers, as expresses through gift-giving, is the common factor that unites the manifestly dissimilar systems of North and South India (Dumont, 1957; pp. 91-111).

The Mara marriage systems, by and large, have been akin to those analysed by the said theoretical framework. As a rule, the Maras have prescriptive (asymmetrical) matrilateral cross cousin marriage. The most favourite preferential marriage is with the mother's brother's daughter as it keeps the maternal avuncular relationship in the same line. The establishment

of an affinal relationship involves corporate descent groups in a connection that last over time, though not definitely.

In the Mara marriage the social relations between wife-givers and wife-takers are asymmetrical. Obligations in the relationship between taker and giver are in the position of inferior and superior, respectively. Marriage price is a very costly and complicated affair of many specialised categories. This price goes to the bride's people like her mother's brother, real or classificatory. Not only these, prestation of many kinds are repeatedly due to the men of the wife-giving lineages, not only at recurrent crisis rites but also on a number of irregular occasions. Wife-takers also have an obligation to provide assistance in the form of rice beer (*sahma*) and food when their wife-givers perform one of the major feasts.

The marriage payments are not a simple return for a wife and/or rights over the offspring she will bear. Rather, they are earnest money (Dumont, 1957; p. 31) indicative of further payments to come. Bride-wealth pays, in a sense, not for the marriage as such but for the right to an alliance with the wife-giver and his agnates. This alliance relationship, however, must be

formally and symbolically expressed and reaffirmed from time to time (Lehman, 1963; p. 125).

V

The study of tribal societies in North East India have a long history and we have many outstanding monographs about several tribes. Marriage, though having had significant bearing on the nature and contexture of societies in North East, is a neglected field of study. The neglect of study in the field of marriage is true in the case of Mara, formerly known as Lakher, one tribe of southern Mizoram bordering Myanmar. No systematic field study is known to have been done with reference to the subject among the Maras.

The first source of information about the Maras is the work of R.A. Lorrain (1912), the founder of Lakher pioneer mission. His work gives us few knowledges about the Mara society and their way of life. The work of Parry (1932) is very interesting and informative in a general understanding of the Mara custom and practices, which gives us more knowledge about the Mara society and enriches our knowledge on the Mara social customs and practices. Besides these, the second work of R.A. Lorrain (1951) containing few items of

Mara kinship terms, enriches our knowledge on their kinship system. Apart from these, a number of eminent Anthropologists, such as - Murcock (1949), Leach (1957) and Levi-Strauss (1949) discussed the Mara kinship systems on the basis of data given by Parry (1932). Loffter (1960) also discussed the Mara kinship terms on the basis of data given by Lorrain (1951). Recently, another scholar, Goswamy (1996) discussed the Mara kinship systems. The works presented by these scholars are very helpful in understanding the Mara kinship and marriage system, and enrich our knowledge. However, the works left behind by the Missionaries, British Officers and a number of scholars, helpful and informative, did not have exhaustive analysis on the problem of marriage among the Maras.

Although commendable in their respective fields, none of these published and unpublished works on the Maraland has given any specialised attention to the problems of marriage systems. It is, therefore, felt that an attempt at the study of the subject is necessary in order to contribute a better understanding of the Mara marriage system in particular and the society in general as well as their participating role in Mizoram.

Thus the present work is an attempt at the study of marriage systems among the Maras who inhabit the South Eastern part of Mizoram. The Maras are distinctive ethnic group of people. Based on their socio-linguistic distinctiveness, the Maras are different from their neighbouring tribes. Basically, the Mara society is virilocal and descent is patrilineal. The eldest son takes all the father's property. Kinship ties are very strong among the Maras and kinsmen were looked upon with great concern and care. The traditional Mara society is characterised by a high bride price. Their marriage system is associated with a number of complicated rules and procedures. The prevalent form of marriage is monogamy. Right from its inception, marriage system among the Maras has been based on "Purchase system". Marriage could not be arranged unless the bride price is settled. *The bride price consists of the main price, subsidiary prices and dues.* The rates are fixed in terms of a number of different items like animals or household goods, such as cow mithun, bull mithun, fowl, brass pot, earthen pot, gong, gun, etc., in the traditional period. Payment by money is the usual modern version. On the wedding day a certain number of Pigs have been killed as a part of marriage feast. The traditional marriage may be classified into five categories, such as - The Chief marriage, The ordinary marriage, The child marriage, The widow re-

marriage and The Slave marriage. Man of Mara always tries to marry a girl from higher clan than his own clan for better protection from the higher clan.

VI

The main aims and objectives of the present study thus broadly falls as follows:

1. To have a better understanding of the Mara marriage system in the light of Alliance theory.
2. To try to give a clear functional picture of Mara marriage system as a source of social cohesion.

The fieldwork has been carried out in Siaha, the capital town of Mara District, and the two selected villages namely, Tisi and Mawhro. A total of 250 respondents consisting 150 from Siaha Town and 50 each from the two selected villages. Out of 250 respondents, 180 were male and 70 female. The village of Mawhro is located in the southern most corner of Maraland and the village of Tisi is located in the middle part of Maraland. The fieldwork can be

completed within six months, i.e., April-September 1998. The researcher received good response and co-operation from the respondents during the fieldwork. The respondents are mainly Church leaders, Government employees and the staff of Mara Autonomous District Council. During the fieldwork, an interview has been conducted by using interview schedules.

Keeping in view the nature of intended research enquiry, the study is mainly based on primary sources of data as the secondary source is very scanty. All the collected data have been gathered on the basis of random sampling method because of the fact that there is very scanty reliable record regarding the Mara as a tribal group. However, the secondary data collected from Government reports, Journals, Census reports, District Council records, memorandum of political parties, District Statistical reports and various Commission reports have been used to supplement the primary information.

The body of thesis is divided into six Chapters. Chapter-I is the introduction of the study while Chapter-II introduces the Mara people and their land. Chapter-III deals with the traditional Mara social structure. Chapter-IV deals with the Mara traditional marriage systems while Chapter-V deals with

the changing patterns of marriage system. The last part, Chapter-VI is the conclusion.

It is, thus, hoped that the present study might have a mite contribution for a better understanding of the Mara social structure.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

I

The institution of marriage occupies a significant place in the Mara society. It is the backbone of the Mara society and a very necessary part of their social system. Basically, the Mara marriage system is a social and civil contract with mutual consent between man and woman not only for sexual enjoyment and procreation, but also for the establishment of good family and wider social relationships. Right from its inception, the Mara marriage system

is based on "purchased system". Marriages could not be arranged unless the bride price has been paid. Among the Maras. Marriage is regarded as an essential obligation to be fulfilled by both men and women for fecundity. One was disdained and looked down upon until the marriage vow has been fulfilled.

The Mara marriage system by and large, follows the perspective of an "Alliance Theory". They have (asymmetrical, matrilateral) cross-cousin marriage. The most favoured marriage is with the mother's brother's daughter, as it keeps the maternal avuncular relationship in the same line. The establishment of affinal relationship in this way involves corporate descent group in a connection that lasts over time, though not indefinitely. In the Mara marriage, the social relationship between wife-givers and wife-takers are asymmetrical. Obligations in the relationship between wife-takers and wife-givers are related to the inferior and superior position, respectively. The marriage price is a very costly and complicated affair involving certain specialised categories like the bride kin group and her mother's brother, real or classificatory. Besides these, prestation of many kinds are repeatedly due to the man of wife-giving lineages, not only at recurrent rites, but also on certain other occasions, wife-taker also have obligations to provides assistance in the

form of rice bear and food when the wife-givers must be addressed in respectful language; a *teknonym* is a form of respectful address here.

Among the Maras, the payments of bride price are not a simple return for a wife and/or rights over the offspring she will bear. Rather, they are earnest money indicative of further payments to come. Bride-wealth pays, in a sense, not for the marriage as such, but for the right to an alliance with the wife-giver and his agnates. This alliance relation, however, must be formally and symbolically expressed and reaffirmed from time to time. Payments continue to run in the same direction as the marriage payments proper.

This alliance is not reciprocal in a simple sense in terms of the substantial and other benefits passing between the two parties, but the system of interdependence and corporate relationship does exhibit reciprocity. Women have great value and their children continue one's lineage. Furthermore, a powerful ally is a protector and enhances one's prestige so that one may in turn ask from others high prices for one's own daughter.

Among the Maras marriage with certain relatives like brother and sister is prohibited, as the children would not prosper. Children of the same

father but by different mothers may not marry, but children of the same mother by different fathers may marry. The children of a brother and sister may and do marry if the sister's child is a son and the brother's child a daughter, but a man should not marry his father's sister's daughter.

There is a deep social gulf between the higher and the lower class. Noble birth is very highly esteemed as the amount of the girl's marriage price theoretically depends on her clan, and thereby the rate of a girl's marriage price belonging to higher status clan is considerably higher than that those who belong to lower clan. The great aim of every Mara is, therefore, to raise his status in the society by marrying a girl from higher clan than his own as thereby he gains the protection of his wife's relatively powerful and influential relations. In this way there is social mobility in the Mara society through marriage alliance.

The prevalent form of marriage among the Maras is monogamy. As a rule, man of Mara have one legitimate wife. The chiefs and wealthy men nonetheless used to have additional wives known as concubine (*Nohmei*). But the status of a concubine in the society is much lower than the status of a legitimate wife.

On the basis of its nature, the Mara marriage system may be divided into two types, namely, "arranged marriage" and "elopement". Arranged marriage is socially and customarily recognised in the Mara society. In this type, the parents have done the selection of partner. The marriage between man and woman takes place with the mutual consent of both the two parents concerned. The marriage is, therefore, arranged in accordance with the customary rules and procedures. On the other hand, elopement is socially and customarily unrecognised type. In this type the selection of partner is the main business of the new couples. The marriage takes place without the mutual consent of both the two parents concerned.

In the traditional period, the parents have made the selection of partner, as a rule. In selecting the partner for their children, the parents are very careful and fastidious. The main consideration of the parents in the process of selection is on health ground and physical deformity. Another important criteria in the process of selection is the social status and background of the potential candidate. Thus family background is a significant factor in the selection of partner.

One of the distinctive features of Mara marriage system is the practice of marriage proposal. As a rule, marriage proposal is initiated by the boy's parents. When initiating the proposal, the boy's parents sent a female relation as emissary to the girl's parents to convey the marriage proposal. If the proposal is welcome, the boy's parents appoint an intermediary known as *lyuchapa* who will bring a gift in the form of a *dao* to the girl's parents. This gift is known as *thuaso*, performing the function of an engagement ring.

Marriage negotiation is the final round in the process of marriage. As a rule, marriage negotiation is done in the girl's parents house. The main discussion of the negotiation is on the amount and type of the bride-prices. As soon as they come to certain definite agreement, the wedding day is fixed according to the convenience of both the concerned parties.

The Mara custom permits widow remarriage. The widow is called *Nohmei* and she could marry after the death of her husband. However, the widow, as a rule, would remain in her late husband's house till the memorial stone of her late husband has been erected. After erecting the memorial stone, she is free to marry again.

The traditional Mara marriage system is associated with certain rites and ceremonies. These rites and ceremonies have been performed in accordance with the traditional prescriptive rules indicative of a sealing of alliance between two groups in question. They used to celebrate marriage ceremony with a special feast by killing a large number of pigs, and the feast has always been arranged on "gift exchange system". The marriage ceremony was always celebrated by consuming a large quantity of alcoholic drink (rice beer). They usually observed three days for celebrating marriage ceremony.

The Mara marriage price is a most complicated affair, and consists of several parts, each part in turn having a number of subsidiary prices attached to it.

The items of the bride price were fixed in terms of animals or household goods such as: cow mithun bull mithun, fowl, gun, brass pot, earthen pot, gong, bead etc. Different items of household goods and animals are given as bride price and series of gift-giving by the bridegroom to the various relations of the bride, both in the paternal and maternal side.

Besides the above marriage prices, a number of subsidiary prices have been attached to the Mara marriage system. The subsidiary prices are as follows: *Seipihra*, *Seicheihra*, *Meitheihra*, *Dawkhohra*, *Dawhra*, *Rahohra*, *Raipihra*, *Chiamie*. These subsidiary prices were distributed to the various relations of the bride on her paternal sides as a guarantee for the bride's future helps.

According to the Mara custom, a girl is always given a few items of properties as a dowry when she marries. If a girl has any private property, she may take it with her and this has no effect on her price whatsoever. A girl usually goes to her husband's house with only her private possessions like cloths, skirts, necklaces etc.

The Mara system of both inheritance and succession were primogeniture. As a rule, the eldest son is entitled to inherit the family's properties when the father dies. No property would go to the middle son, daughter and widow. Inheritance is traditionally institutionalised. No one has any right to make any will regarding the disposal of his property after his death. The line of inheritance and succession were clearly determined by custom and it could not be changed.

According to the customary convention, divorce is very simple and easy among the Maras. One could divorce the spouse at will. However, certain rules and procedures have been prescribed in regard to divorce. The main issues in relation to divorce are full payment of the unpaid bride prices. There are five forms of divorce, namely, *Lopinongma*, *Sawngpakua*, *Khuthi*, *Hrupathlei* and *Aphei*. Although several forms of divorce have been observed in the Mara society, cases of divorce in actual practices are very rare.

II



With the impact of Christianity, certain changes have been appearing in the Mara society in the first part of 20th Century. Owing the Christian proselytesation, the Mara marriage system has undergone a change in the form of compromise between the indigenous pattern and Christian value. Now the Maras practised a combination of Christian marriage and indigenous marriage system with traces of traditional custom observable in a Christian Church marriage.

However many indigenous practices have been abolished, while retaining certain elements and many new things have been added. In the

indigenous system the Maras used to practise the chief marriage, the child marriage and the slave marriage. But now the above marriage practices have been disappearing among the Maras. In the olden days, Maras used to perform marriage ceremony with a series of rites and offerings of sacrifices to both the evil and good spirits. But now the above old practices have been done away with among them. Now-a-days, marriages are conducted in the Church by a Pastor helped by the elders within the purview of Church's doctrine. In the olden days, the Maras used to consume a large quantity of alcoholic drinks (rice beer) on the marriage day, and they used to celebrate marriage ceremony with a special feast by killing a number of pigs. But now all such indigenous practices have been modified. The modern wedding is characterised by new items such as wedding dresses of western style and giving of presents.

However, it is important to note here that, the Maras still retain by choice their traditional marriage rule of preferential cross-cousin marriage and some other traditional custom relating to marriage such as form of marriage, marriage process like selection of partner, marriage proposal, marriage negotiation, bride price, widow remarriage, inheritance and divorce.

As has been noted earlier, although many indigenous marriage practices have been done away with among the Maras, the traditional system of preferential marriage has been retained and practiced by them even now. As in the traditional period, they have (asymmetrical, matrilateral) cross-cousin marriage. The most favourite preferential marriage is with the mother's brother's daughter. The marriage between certain relatives like brother and sister are prohibited. Children of the same father but by different mothers may not marry, but children of the mother by different fathers may marry. The children of a brother and sister may and do marry if the sister's child is a son and the brother's child a daughter, but a man should not marry his father's sister's daughter.

As the process of courtship has been preserved in the present day, the method of courtship has been different from what they were before. As mentioned earlier, in the past, the Maras used to praactised *laipho* in which young men used to sleep in the girl's house as a part of courtship. But now this traditional practice has been in disused among the Maras. However, as a custom, young men has freedom to go to the girl's house for courting, usually at night. Owing to the great freedom of Mara society, young men and girls were allowed to have free social intercourse with each other.

Great change can be observable in regard to the selection of marriage partner. As has been discussed earlier, the marriage partners were always arranged and selected by the parents in the past. In selecting the partner for their children, the parents were very careful and fastidious by studying the character of the selected partners. The young man and woman now select their marriage partners with or without their parents advice.

The impact of modernisation is visible to have an impact on the choice of marriage partners and young men and women increasingly have liberal view on prescriptive rules. But at present the larger population continues to follow prescriptive rules and thereby keeping alive the traditional alliance between two or more groups through marriage tie.

The Maras retain the traditional method of marriage proposal. As it was in the past, marriage proposal is initiated by the boys parents. However, the item of marriage proposal known as *thuaso* has been changed. In the past, at the time of initiating the proposal, the boy's parents, as a rule, employed two intermediaries and sent them to the girl's parents with a *dao* known as *thuaso* to have a marriage proposal. But today a pot at least 8 to 10 spans has been used as a *thuaso* for marriage proposal.

As in the traditional period, the marriage negotiation is taking place in the girl's house. Now the preparation of feast on marriage negotiation, which was compulsory in the past, is no longer required. The main issues in the marriage negotiation is the bride price. After settlement, the matters of bride price have been written down and preserve as important document.

According to the Christian value, marriage is regarded as ordained by God. It is regarded as a permanent union unless dissolved by death. The Church marriage is a social and civil contract between man and woman with mutual consent not only for sexual enjoyment and legalised procreation, but also for the development of personality, the establishment of good social relationship. As in the traditional period, the Church marriage is based on "purchase system", and marriage could not be arranged unless the bride price is paid. Among the Mara Christians, marriage is considered an essential duty to be fulfilled by both man and woman for fecundity.

As has been discussed earlier, many indigenous practices relating to marriage rites and ceremonies have been abolished and many new things have been added. Any rite and ceremony pertaining to the marriage have been performed by a Pastor under the purview of the Church's doctrine. The

traditional practices of killing of many pigs have been done away with. The age old practices of celebrating marriage with alcoholic drinks (rice beer) have also been disappearing. Tea, bread, cakes, biscuits, etc. have replaced the traditional feast and merry-making. The marriage ceremony is celebrated under the leadership of one of the Church Elders. The whole day is spent with signing Christian hymns. Now-a-days, the marriage ceremony has been observed for only one day.

The present Mara marriage institution is still associated with the issue of bride price and subsidiary prices. No major change has been made in regard to the traditional system of bride price. However, the amount of the bride price is comparatively higher than that it was in the traditional period. The amount of bride price continues to be fixed in terms of animals or household goods such as cow mithun, bull mithun, gun, gong, pot, deckchi,, etc. No fixation has been made on the rate of bride price, and the rate varies from village to village and individual capacity. The actual amount of bride price among the Maras in terms of current monetary value may be higher than Rs. 20,000.00 Economic items given as bride-price and other items as gift givings and presentation all serve the function of sealing alliance or creating alliance between the group joined together by the marriage bond. This is the reason

why bride-price is still considered very crucial in the Mara marriage, and this is the reason why it has been distributed among different relatives.

The component parts of bride-price are as follows: *Okia*, *Laokhyu*, *Chawchyu*, *Nochyu*, *Nohchyu* and *Puma*.

Okia (main price)

Okia is the main price. It is the foundation of all the prices. It is payable to the bride's father.

Laokhyu

It is the price of Bride's *Pupa*. It is payable to the bride's maternal uncle.

Chawchyu

It is the share of the bride's brother. It is payable to the eldest brother of bride.

Nochyu

Nochyu means the mother's price. It is payable to the bride's mother.

Nohchyu

Nohchyu means the aunt's price. It is payable to the bride's paternal aunt.

Puma

Puma means the *Pupa's* price. It is payable to the bride's maternal uncle (*Pupa*). However, this price is never paid on the marriage day, but usually waits till the bride and bridegroom have settled down as husband and wife.

Besides these marriage prices, the present Mara marriage institution is still associated with a number of subsidiary price, namely, *Seipihra*, *Seicheihra*, *Dawhra*, *Meittheihra*, *Dawkhohra*, *Rahohra*, *Raipihra* *Chiamie*. These subsidiary prices are meant for safeguarding the bride's future safety and favour, and were usually allocated to the various relations of the bride's paternal and maternal sides. The bulk of the price has been paid in kind

especially household goods like Dekchi, pot, etc., and only a small portion of bride price has been paid in cash.

Certain additions have been made in regard to the question of bride-wealth among the Maras in the present day. In the past, a girl is given a few items of dowry. But today, most of the girls want to take with them many items of valuables like Wardrobe, Mattress, Sewing machine, Blanket, and a number of clothes. The bride-wealth does not affect the bride price whatsoever.

III

MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings of the present study may be summarised as follows:

- (i) Basically, the Mara marriage is a social and civil contract with mutual consent between man and woman not only for sexual enjoyment and legalised and procreation, but also for the establishment of good family and wider social relationship. Right from its inception, the Mara

marriage system is based on purchased system. Marriages could not be arranged unless the bride price has been given. Bride-price is considered a means of sealing alliance between two groups. Marriage is an essential obligation to be fulfilled by both man and woman for fecundity. One was disdained and looked down upon unless a marriage vow has been fulfilled. The prevalent form of Mara marriage is monogamy. There is the process of social mobility going on in the Mara society as the great aim of every male Mara is to raise his status in the society by marrying a girl from higher clan than his own, as thereby he gains the protection of his wife's relatively powerful and influential relations.

- (ii) The Mara society is patrilineal and inheritance is reckon through male line. As a rule the eldest son is entitled to inherit the family's properties when the father dies. No property would go to the middle son, daughter and widow. The main leading factor of change in the Mara society is Christianity. Christianity have had far reaching effect on the traditional Mara marriage system leading to erosion of traditional norms and values. Christianity, on the other hand, have made the marriage ties more stable and it greatly reduces the cases of divorce. The Mara marriage system has undergone a change in the form of compromise between the

indigenous system and Christian value. Traditional-Modernity dichotomy has emerged in transitional period of Mara society.

- (iii) Significantly, there is perpetuation of traditional prescription of preferential marriage choice following the perspective of Alliance Theory in spite of changes observable as a result of Christian proselytisation. Among the Maras, marriage with certain relatives like brother and sister is prohibited as the children would not prosper. Children of the same father but by different mother may not marry, but children of the same mother but different father may marry. The children of a brother and sister may and do marry if the sister's child is a son and the brother's child a daughter, but a man should not marry his father's sister's daughter. The most favoured marriage is with the mother's brother's daughter as it keeps the maternal avuncular relationship in the same line, but it is not obligatory. This pattern is largely and very easily the most common form of marriage thereby keeping alive asymmetrical marriage relationship. Kinship network in the society is thus relatively vast.

From the above major findings, few suggestions may be given as follows:

- (i) Preservation of cultural heritages, traditional norms and values is of sociological importance in the context of Mara society.
- (ii) Department of Arts and Culture in the Mara Autonomous District Council should be equipped with better facilities for the preservation of Mara culture.

The present work is an attempt at the study of marriage system among the Maras in sociological perspective. The study is only a humble venture in understanding the functional picture of Mara marriage system. A further enquiry with rigorous methodological strategy would undoubtedly enrich our further understanding about the Mara marriage system.