Chapter- IV
Family Life and Kinship

Structure of the Loi House

The Lois live in compounds called *inkhol*, and these are separated from other compounds by a ditch and by bamboos and trees that serve as a fence around them. The structure of a house at a particular place in a particular zone is conditioned by various factors such as culture, religious beliefs, topography and availability of material and local craftsmanship.

The Lois follow a number of customary rules while making the house, right from deciding the location of the building till its completion. Construction of a house follows prescribed rituals, auspicious days and particular time as well as direction. A rectangular shaped foundation is laid, and on an auspicious day the first pillar, *jatra* is erected by a *maiba*. This ceremony of laying the foundation is called *jatra hunba*. After this ceremony, the construction of the house begins.

The courtyard is usually divided into nine parts and the house is made right in the middle of the courtyard. The house usually faces the south east or east because the people worship the sun every morning. Of course, the main reason being that sufficient sunlight is received and also because of the prevailing wind direction from southeast to northwest. It is believed that if the house faces south or north, some calamity may befall on its inhabitants. Due to heavy rainfall, all the houses have a sloping roof. The house is made on a high plinth out of rammed earth, which protects the foundation of the house from rainwater. In this context, Sircar writes: “The entire plan is based on a rigid structure with a strong emphasis on patrilineal values and the preponderance of male status”.1 The arrangements for sitting, sleeping, and dining are made according to a person’s sex and age. The house

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built on an oblong structure under one roof is usually partitioned into three or five room-like sections but without proper walls between them. In such a house structure there is the lack of privacy among the family members.

Before entering the interior rooms, there is the verandah (mango) which is an indispensable space in a traditional house. Most of the household works are performed in the verandah and courtyard. Similarly, many socio-religious and other activities of the family like family meetings, prayers and other rituals are carried out in the verandah and occasionally inside the house. Guests and relatives are usually entertained in the verandah, though now-a-days some families have started keeping a separate room for visitors. On pleasant nights after a satisfying meal, men, women, and children sit either in the verandah or the outhouse or else in the courtyard spending time in light conversation and gossips. However, sitting together and conversing among the family members have been affected with the arrival of television and other electronic media even in the villages. Consequently, people are more engrossed in watching television than interacting with members of the family or other people. After the harvest, crops like paddy, grains and pulses are spread out to dry in the courtyard before being stored and de-husked. Just like the Tallensis of Africa described by Fortes\(^2\), the position and the architectural pattern of the granary, cattle shed and the location of the outhouse in the Loi’s courtyard closely conform to the culture and religious beliefs of the people.

On the right side of the verandah, a mat is spread from early morning till sunset. This place is called phamel and reserved for the head of the family and no one else is allowed to sit on it. The left side of the veranda is reserved for women. On the northeastern side is the ashithong, a place through which the dead body has to pass through when it is taken out of the house before cremation. Generally, people

avoid crossing the poles situated in this area because it is believed that entering the region might invite unwanted incidents in life. The house has two doors one in the front (mamangthong) and one at the back (maningthong), two/three windows that are comparatively very small in size. The southern side of the first room is called lukhumka/phaktong which is reserved for the eldest son and the northern side (ningolka) is meant for the daughters. The room occupied by the head of the house is called Leimaren ka (room for the household deity). In this room, the right side is for the husband and the left side is for his wife. The next room behind this is known as Mangsok, which is kept for young children. As mentioned earlier, a Loi house is the shrine of many household deities. It is believed that the deities look after the welfare and prosperity of the household.

On the northeastern side of the last room is the kitchen, which is mainly the domain of the females. In this room, an earthen pot known as chengphu is kept for storing rice. If the pot is broken or the rice inside the pot is stolen by someone, then the Lois believe that the house may face tragedies and thus a maiba is called to purify the pot in order to protect the family from any untoward danger. In the courtyard of the house there is a long shed (sangoi) with a roof and walls on three sides, which both the sexes use as an outhouse for a variety of domestic purposes. Men, women and children gather in it either to rest, chat or engage in sewing, spinning or in weaving articles such as mats and baskets. Some people keep two outhouses (sangois), one is called mamang (east) sangoi and the other awang (north) sangoi. The Lois avoid building the outhouse on the south of the courtyard because it is not considered good. Between the house and the outhouse, there is an open space called sumang where grains, vegetables and edible leaves are spread out to dry. The entrance into the compound is mostly situated in the direction of the sun. The gate is composed either of two large slabs of stones or two poles of bamboos erected vertically. There are three or four holes in each of the bamboo poles and another three or four poles are kept horizontally along the
holes, which are drawn aside during the day. Though traditionally the
gate faces the east these days some people have the gateway facing the
lanes for the sake of convenience. Some families also have shrines
called *phura* located near the gate of the house where the family
members offer flowers, light and incense everyday.

The following Chart provides a rough sketch of the Loi house.
**Chart-1: Structure of a Loi House**

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**Kei/Kot (Granary)**

As is evident from the chart the granary is situated in the south-west side of the courtyard. A household customarily has one granary
of two or three rooms. The size and the number of the rooms may
differ from house to house. A granary has usually one main door and
two or three windows. Its height may be 4 to 5 feet from the base. The
granary (*kot*) holds an important place in the Loi house because it is
not only a place where the food stock of the household is stored but
also where the household deities are believed to reside.

To emphasize the social importance of the granary, a *maiba*
narrated a story about a girl who suffered from an undiagnosed
illness. When her father-in-law consulted a *maiba* about her illness, he
was told that she was suffering from *kotlai*, an ailment caused by the deities of the granary. To get rid of the suffering, the family was asked to perform a rite called *khayom lakpa* to appease the offended deities. Thereafter, the patient felt better but he reminded the family to perform the rite again. Such stories not only illustrate the important role played by the *maiba* in the society but also reinforce people's belief in the powers of the granary. The deities of the granary are called *keinungba* and *keinungbi*. The Lois treat the granary with awe hence whenever there is a hole in it, either made by a rat or a mouse, they take precaution while filling up the hole. Before mending any hole in the granary the deities are worshipped and some rice and sacred leaves (*cheng lei*) are offered to appease them.

The deities of the granary are also worshipped on other occasions, such as when paddy is stolen from the house or when someone is sick in the family. Since the granary is a sacred place, pregnant women and those during their menstrual period are not allowed to touch it. When a new granary is constructed, the Lois take some of the earth from the place where the old granary is situated. Though these days people are not very particular about the direction in which the granary is located in the olden days, it always faced the northern direction because the Lois believe that this will ensure sufficient food for the household. Also, making a house at the place where the granary was situated is avoided since it is believed that the deities reside there. It is further believed that when there is a conflict between human beings and the deities (*lais*), the deities invariably win and the human beings could die in the process. The Lois also worship the granary every harvesting season on the first day while storing the new crops. The Lois look for an auspicious day and month while taking out the first paddy from the granary after the harvesting season. Again, as in the case of the Tallensi of Africa\(^3\) among the Lois also in filling up the granary and in the consumption of its contents,

\(^3\) Ibid., p.57.
the labour of men, women, and children are equally essential and the rights of all are equally valid. When a joint family splits up, each nuclear family even if occupying a single courtyard, has his own granary or at least a separate room to keep/store the paddy.

The courtyard (sumang) of the Lois is usually tidy; the housewife or any female member of the house sweep the house every morning and the male members sweep the courtyard. However, the backyard and other parts of the compound are mostly dirty since most of the families rear pigs, ducks and hen. The Lois' poultry shed and cattle shed are the dirtiest and most insanitary spot in the courtyard. Its unpaved surface is usually strewn with leaves and straws and with the dung or droppings of livestock.

There are no bathrooms and toilets attached to the house. The concept of bathroom is of recent origin. It has been observed that most of the houses do not have bathrooms. Latrine is constructed far from the house, usually in the backside. Those who have animals such as cows have cattle shed in the compound, which is built on any side of the house according to convenience. Cattle sheds do not have walls and the roof is covered either by thatch or corrugated iron roof.

The study found that the materials used in the constructing of house have changed over time. Till a few years back most of the roofs of the house were thatched with straw but today corrugated iron sheets are used. Out of the 300 houses in our sample, only ten are pucca, 26 are partly pucca and 3 have thatched roofs with bamboo pillars, whereas the rest of the houses are made of wooden pillar, mud wall covered with corrugated iron sheets. A mixture of mud, cow dung and pieces of straw are plastered on the bamboo splits which have been erected to form the structure of the wall.

House construction among the Lois is a collective activity. From the day the site is chosen it is the scene of organized co-operation and

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4. Pucca here means the whole houses are constructed either by using bricks or stones with cement. While in the case of partly pucca, the walls and pillars of the house are constructed by using bricks/stones and cement with corrugated iron sheets as the roofs.
of religious and moral preoccupations. Both men and women work together but a neat division of labour exists between the sexes: building and thatching is men’s work and plastering and stamping the floors into smooth hard surfaces are women’s work. In the olden days, all the members of the family including children, co-members of the lineage, kinsmen, affines, and friends used to extend their co-operation and help in building the house. One carpenter named I. Tomchou Singh reveals that in the past co-operation and help used to be extended between the kin groups. To that extent, the people did not have to spend much on labour and material. Now-a-days, however, skilled builders are engaged for building a house. Most of the Loi houses have the same architectural pattern and basic structure. The climate, the kind of raw materials available at hand, the economic system, and the social organization determine their mode of house building. The Lois have intense love for the ancestral site. Most of the houses in the present area of study follow the traditional house plan but with slight modifications.

**Family Structure**

The smallest unit of kinship is the family *(immung)*, a unit which comprises a man, his wife and their children. When a son marries he spends the initial years with his parents along with his wife and children under the same house, sharing a common kitchen. However, after two/three years, the married son(s) except the youngest move out of the parent’s house and set up an independent residence of his own with his wife and children: If a man can afford to build his house in a new compound, he leaves his father’s compound within few years of marriage. If he cannot afford to shift to a new compound, then he stays in his father’s compound as long as his youngest brother and his wife allow them to stay but ultimately all the married sons move out to set up their own family leaving the father’s compound to be inherited by the youngest son. However, the bonds created by ancestor worship, family deities and observations of pollution persist even after the brothers have shifted to separate compounds. Evidence gathered from
the villages of study show the Lois are strongly patrilineal and patriarchal albeit with an orientation towards nuclear residential pattern. The combined data from Sekmai and Khurkhul, reveal that 55.6 per cent of the families have patrilocal residence, followed by 42.4 percent neolocal residence and 2 percent matrilocal residence.

The partition of the household usually takes place in an amicable fashion. Unlike the Punjabis, studied by Hershman, where partition mostly occurs due to conflict between a man’s wife and her mother-in-law or between the wives of brothers or between a daughter-in-law and a sister-in-law, among the Lois, it is customary for all the married sons except the youngest one to have separate kitchens within one or two years of marriage. The sons separate themselves formally from the joint family by making a new house or sharing the same house of the father but having separate room and kitchen and in such cases they will have separate paddy, firewood and utensils. Once the sons set up their own households, economically they become independent of one another with separate granary and field. So whatever commodities or money they take from one another would be mostly on returnable basis. A man’s responsibility increases when he establishes his own household. Though each man is the head of his own household, the father or the elder brother exercises general supervision over ritual and other affairs of the group.

The elderly parents live in the main house with unmarried daughters and sons. If all the children are married, the parents live with the youngest son and his family members. The last child either a son or a daughter is always pampered by the parents as well as by elder siblings. It is observed that parents tend to exhibit more sympathy and love towards the younger children especially to the youngest son with whom they customarily stay in their old age.

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Inter-relations Within the Family

In Loi society, the father holds the reins of authority, directs its economic life and is supreme in religious and ceremonial matters. Though the mother occupies a special place in the Lois household her position in the family is inferior to that of the father. Both parents are, however, equally obeyed and respected by their children. The relation between father and son is based on respect and obedience on the part of the son, and love and authority on the part of the father. The Lois believe that one must obey one's parents, respect them and take their side against everybody else. Providing comfort, financial and emotional securities to their children are the moral obligation of the parents. Like the Punjabis, though the Lois believe that a child is the equal product of his father and mother yet they are quite clearly a ‘patrilineal’ people.\(^6\)

After the death of the father, the eldest son takes the role of the head of the house. But, the son always takes the consent of the mother in any important decisions concerning the household. Children, from a very young age, are taught to be obedient and respectful to their parents. Answering back or arguing while an elder is speaking is considered to be wrong or unprincipled. While the father is the head of the family, the degree of intimacy is greater with the mother than with the father, but is not generally shown in public, especially between the mother and son. The mother and son relationship is treated with utmost respect and restraint. In general, while relationships between the parents and their children are intimate and strong they are rarely demonstrated in public. Even among the members of the same sex, such as between mother and daughter or even between the sisters, emotional acts such as hugging and embracing are rarely displayed. Public demonstration of feelings especially between the opposite sexes is totally avoided.

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\(^6\) Ibid., p. 47.
Notwithstanding this show of reticence, the bonds between the siblings are very strong.

Relationship between siblings is intimate usually during their teens, and this intimacy continues between the sisters, while between the brothers or between brothers and sisters the degree of intimacy gradually decreases and respectful distance develops as they grow older.\(^7^\) Parents maintain their rights and authority over their children throughout their lives.

**Preference for the Male Child**

Like any other patriarchal society of India, there is a strong preference for the male child among the Lois so that lineage continuity can be maintained in the agnatic line. Notwithstanding the important role women playing in the economy, the Lois look upon son(s) as a support to parents in old age and also as the most important source of economic security of the family. A man without a son is considered the most pitiable and unfortunate one, because there will be no one to carry on his family line. Each and every household wishes to have at least one son, which is constantly expressed in everyday conversation. It is, however, common for a man to adopt in case he does not have a son. The strong preference for son is revealed by an orderly woman who said: "When I came back after helping my daughter during her delivery the first question the passersby asked me was, 'is the baby a boy or a girl'? When I said it is a girl people just said they hope the baby is in good health. But their expression changed the moment I said that it is a baby boy. They said your daughter is so lucky she does not have to hear any harsh words from her husband for not having a son."\(^8^\)

Another informant who has five daughters reported that not only her husband who feels bad and laments at her inability to bear a male child even his friends keep instigating him to take another wife so that

\(^8^\) The interview was held with Kh. Ibeni Devi at Sekmai on 20th April 2001.
she can provide him with a son. In another case, a barren woman cried when I asked her about her children saying that she has no children and that she had visited the famous doctors of Manipur and also consulted a number of maibas but did not yield any fruit. But she did not want to go in for adoption because she fears that this might create more problems later.

Absence of sons not only lead to the termination of the family but also marks an end to the deities of the household. A woman who has two sisters but no brother reported that after her parents' death they had to bury their parents' household deities (of course, with proper rites) since daughters cannot take them to their husband's house.

Most women said that they get a lot of harsh words for not having a son or at times, husbands even threaten to take another wife if the first wife cannot bear a son. Interestingly, those who are barren or do not have a son blame it on their destiny, few ever thought that the fault could also lie with the husband. Parents, without a son, usually have an adopted son-in-law to look after the household and help in cultivation. But hardly any son-in-law stays with the wife's family because of the fear that he will lose his prestige and public esteem. Such an arrangements may also invite comments from the people saying that he does not even have a house but stay with his wife's family by looking after their property. Some may even say that he is a dog of his father-in-law as in the case of the Punjabi reported by Hershman. Sons' roles are important for continuing the agnatic line and for carrying out ancestor worship and funeral rites of the parents. People usually feel that if sons are born in a family, it gets due respect and manpower. If the family has many sons, then the family is considered to be more powerful and dominant than those having only daughters.

9. The interview was held with a woman respondent from Khurkhul on 15th of January 2001.
10. The interview was held with a woman respondent from Sekmai on 15th of April 2001.
In brief, the Lois regard the presence of children, particularly sons, as the supreme purpose of life. Women are even more apt than men to emphasize the insurance value of sons because of the general belief that sons have a moral obligation to care for them in their old age. Most of the families are found to have more than 6 members because of their preference to have more sons. The desire for having a son is still very strong in the people’s mind.

**Adoption**

When a couple is childless, despite the initial inhibition, adoption is usually the solution. The general tendency is to adopt a male child since the family continues in the male line. In the present study area, it is found that at least two men were adopted by different sagei members of the same village. Now both the men have grown up children and they all carry the sagei name of their adoptive parents. For instance, Usham Kol Singh is one of the adopted sons of Usham sagei. Usham is the sagei name of his adopted parents and he maintains his adoptive parents’ sagei name till date continuing the agnatic line of his adopted parents as their descendants. However, his children carry his original sagei name Phuyam and not his adopted sagei name. Therefore, here in this instance, the father owns the surname Usham and the children carry the surname Phuyam. The reason given by the individuals concerned for this switch is because in any religious ceremony a person invokes their sagei ancestors for blessings. This demands that the child turns back to its own sagei for the purpose. Though the purpose of adoption is basically to continue the line of family, in practice, the adoptive son’s children generally tend to revert to the original sagei of their father.

This makes it imperative that in case of adoption a family adopts a child from one’s own sagei. Raghumani Mangang notes: “Normally, the adopted child should be from relatives of the same surname”.12 In

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the present day we have come across a man who has adopted a girl from his own lineage when she was just a few days old.\textsuperscript{13} The family has adopted a girl child because they had only one daughter but they did not intend to adopt a son, because they did not want to adopt a child whose parents were not known to them. However, sometimes the person adopted may not be a relative as in the case of Ngangbi Devi who had adopted a girl two years back. The informant claimed that she had married late around the age of 40. Though she got pregnant after marriage, she had a miscarriage and could not conceive again after that. The adopted girl is neither related to her nor belonging to a Loi community.

As far as adoption is concerned, though the Lois prefer to adopt a son, they do not hesitate to adopt a girl child if the boys are not available. The Lois generally believe that it is better to die in poverty and leave children than to be rich but childless. From the native point of view, a child's natural parents are the right people who have the responsibility to rear, educate, and control the child but once a child is adopted it is treated like one's biological child. Nonetheless, hardly anyone adopts a child whose lineage is not known to the concerned person though there are exceptional cases. One explanation for the preference for real blood relatives is to preserve the families' ancestor cult and to avoid occurrence of marriage within the same lineage.

**Interaction with Kin and Neighbours**

Like all human groups, the Lois maintain close links with their affinal and consanguineal kin groups as well as with other members of the community especially those in the same vicinity. While close bonds are maintained with neighbours living in the same locality, kinship provides the principle for identifying and relating oneself to the other. In most Lois villages neighbours are treated as extended kin. When there is a crisis in the family, assistance comes from neighbours and relatives who co-operate and help each other in times of need. The Lois feel that helping and looking after the welfare of one's neighbours and

\textsuperscript{13} The interview was held with I. Achouba Singh of Khurkhul on 21 March 2001.
relatives are a kind of obligation and compulsion. The idea of mutual help or service among the neighbours and kin groups is inherent in Loi social organization.

While physical proximity strengthens kinship bond, physical distance works in the reverse direction. When relatives stay away from each other, sharing and caring decreases. Responsibilities towards the kin group also decreases to a certain extent. This possibility made the Lois strongly oriented towards their family and locality. Out of the total respondents, eighty eight percent expressed their desire to stay with their kin groups thereby strengthening the kinship ties. Men wish to remain on the land of their ancestors and look after the ancestral properties, work and mingle with their kinsfolk and support each other in times of need. According to the data derived from interviews, collective stay of the relatives strengthens cohesion of the group. When problem arises within the group, they try to face and solve it together. Eating, drinking and sharing of views with one’s kith and kin are considered more enjoyable than with others since they are one’s own people. This however is not to say that there are no conflict between relatives. Though differences may crop up, these rarely remain permanent.

One of the informants stated “elsewhere I will be alone and friendless; if I am injured or killed, who will take care of me or avenge my death?” Another informant, Kh.Tolchou Singh whispered: “when I am in dying state, I would like to meet all my children but if they stay far, some times, I will not be able to meet them before my death. Besides, they may not even be able to see my dead body since in our society the corpse is not kept for long, to wait for the relatives to arrive for the cremation”. Even though the level of development is still very backward throughout the State except in some urban areas, people generally prefer to settle in one’s birthplace.

14. The interview was held with Khwairakpam Brajamani at Sekmai on 19th January 2001
15. The interview was held with Kh.Tolchou Singh at Khurkhul on 19th January 2001.
This, however, should not be construed that the Lois are a static people permanently rooted to their place of birth. While emotional attachment to their village and the policy of segregation adopted by the king may have inculcated in them a strong identification with their habitat, so much so that few want to venture out, a closer observation of the structure of the society, and the dispersion of clans, suggest that the Lois were/are a mobile people.

The study also found that a few of the Lois have moved out of their native place in search of jobs. They feel that relatives should not stay in close proximity as it enhances competition between the groups and develops enmity amongst them. According to them, staying at a distance increases affection and fondness for each other.

Manipur is a small state, where people not only have close links but also co-operate with each other. As stated above, within the village people tend to identify themselves broadly as relatives based on the bond of consanguinity and affinity. Though most of the times these ties are real, sometimes they are fictitious in character. The ideology of kinship and the web of genealogical connections are so dominant and extensive in Loi society that no social relationship or events within a village fall completely outside the orbit of kinship. In this respect, the Lois bear a close resemblance to many other less advanced societies where kinship is the articulating principle of social organization and the basis of social integration. The kinship relations of the Lois are deeply rooted in the social activities of the people. The social organization of the Loi society is maintained by direct inter-personal relationships carried out in the day-to-day life of the people. Solidarity and co-operation pre-dominate the ethos of the social system of the Loi society.

Old people are given due respect and reverence among the Lois. Respect to elders is not confined to one's parents or close kins. It is customary to show respect to elders whether they are relatives or not. This respect is reflected even in government offices where an officer address a staff who may be lower in rank but senior in age by using
classificatory kinship terminology failing which the officer would be considered to be of ill manner. Respect for the elderly is an established norm of any individual in Manipuri society.

**Clan and Lineage**

One of the most distinctive features of the Lois kinship system is the clan. The Loi society is divided into seven clans known as the salais in much the same way as the Meiteis.\(^{16}\) Both the Meiteis as well as the Lois trace their origin to the Supreme God Atiya Sidaba, who is said to have created 7 goddesses (Lainuras) from his body all of who got married to god Pakhangba. From the seven wives, Pakhangba got seven sons and their descendants constitute the seven clans.\(^{17}\) The names of the seven yek-salais are Ningthouja, Khuman, Luwang, Angom, Moirang, Khaba-gnanba and Chenglei.

In one of the legends preserved by the people, Pakhangba is symbolized as a snake and the seven yek-salais are said to have represented different parts of its body. According to the legend, the Mangangs represent the head of Pakhangba, the Luwangs the middle portion or torso, the Moirangs the portion between the head and torso and the Khumans the tail. The Angoms and the Khaba Nganbas are the pelvic area, and Chengleis signify the spot where the head and the tail meet.

This notion bears a close similarity to the way different varnas are associated with the body of Brahma. But unlike the varna system in which the different castes are characterized by a hierarchical relation according to their association with different parts of Brahma's body, viz: Brahmans- head, Khatriyas-shoulders, Vaishya-thigh and Shudra-feet, the association of the different yek-salais to the body of Pakhangba has no implication of hierarchy but symbolizes their

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\(^{16}\) Hodson, *The Meitheis* (Delhi: Low Price Publications), 1908, p.74.

mergence into the Meitei fold and their relations with the Meitei rulers.  

In the course of time, the descendants of the seven *yek-salais* spread all over the State with each *yek-salai* possessing different territories of its own. In this context, T.C. Hodson observes: “It seems probable that in earlier days, these clans occupied definite areas, as we know to have been the case with the *Moirangs* who still preserve a considerable degree of independence and autonomy and are mainly settled in the immediate vicinity of their eponymous village documentation”.  

Despite the common origin of the *yek-salais*, inter group conflicts seem to be a common feature of the society. At one time, the *Khuman yek-salai* became most powerful and on another occasion the *Moirang*. Eventually the *Ningthouja/Mangang yek-salais* subjugated the other six *yek-salais* and ultimately, the *Ningthouja yek-salais* emerged as the most powerful *yek-salai*. In spite of subjugation of the other six *yek-salais*, the kings who belong to the *Ningthouja* did not emphasize a hierarchical set up in line with the Indian caste system or of opposition between the rulers and the ruled. According to R.K. Jhalajit, as the *Ningthouja* kingdom gradually absorbed the principalities of other *yek-salais* and extended their domain to the hills and the *Kabaw* valley, the territory which lies between the present Indo-Myanmar border and the River Chindwin in Upper Myanmar, the people of the kingdom became politically more respectable. In the course of time, all the erstwhile independent principalities were brought gradually under the *Ningthouja* kingdom.

Notwithstanding, the political competition that marks the relation between *yek-salais*, none of the *yek-salais* can be conceived of or treated as autonomous units isolable from the other. The principle

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19. T.C. Hodson, op. cit., 1908, p.73.
of exogamy that prohibits marriage between members of the same yek-salai makes the yek-salais mutually dependent on the other for its continuity. Although the origin myth of the Lois (as well as the Meiteis) clearly suggests the prevalence of incestuous unions among the mythological beings, such practices are strictly prohibited in the society.

In the book, 'Meitei Yek-Salai', it is mentioned that the principle of exogamy as a rule came into existence during the reign of King Pakhangba. The rule is that the descendants of the seven yek-salais should not marry within the respective group. According to authors, such as, Brara, Sircar, and Hodson, the Meiteis have rigid rules of clan exogamy. In this context, Brara writes: "any person marrying within his/her own salai, is to be excommunicated or even sentenced to death." The above view is also supported by Sircar who says that in the past, a Meitei (both man and woman) was ostracized for in-clan marriage and sent to a Loi village in the west, called Haujapan. The view of the above authors regarding the excommunication of the Meities who breached the rule of clan exogamy was equally applicable to the Lois also. This view is also supported by the elders in the villages where the present study is conducted. Elderly people in the field area confirmed the existence of strict rules of clan exogamy during monarchical time even among the Lois. Men and women belonging to the same yek-salai are forbidden to marry and the king punished those who violated the rules.

**Segmentation**

A clan is a system of lineages and a lineage is a genealogical segment of a clan. In this context, Evans Prichard writes: "the structural form of clans remains constant, while actual lineages at any point in time are highly dynamic, creating new bifurcations and

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25. Hodson, op. cit., 1908, p.75.
merging old ones.\textsuperscript{29} What this suggests is that the clan is not a static entity but changes over time giving rise to new segments within it. The same is true with respect to the \textit{yek-salai}. Demographic pressure and the migration of members in search of land and resources in different historical periods have made it impossible for future descendants to retain the bond of brotherhood and co-operation with each other thus gradually loosening the solidarity of the \textit{yek-salai}. This led to the segmentation of \textit{yek-salai} into a number of divisions known as \textit{sageis} (chart 1). It, however, needs to be noted that while some scholars have used the terms ‘clan’ and ‘lineage’ as equivalents for \textit{yek-salai} and \textit{sagei} respectively, the identification of the lineage with \textit{sagei} is problematic as the Lois have another unit called \textit{phurup} which has overlapping function with \textit{sagei} and has a distinct identity of its own.

To have a clear picture of its internal dynamics and the social significance of each segmented units let us take a close look at each one of them.

\textbf{Chart II: Structure of the Clan}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
  \node{Aliya Sidaba (Supreme God)}
  \node[below=of Aliya Sidaba, yshift=-1cm, xshift=0cm] {Ningthouja}
  \node[below=of Ningthouja, yshift=-1cm, xshift=0.5cm] {Yek-salai}
  \node[below=of Yek-salai, yshift=-1cm, xshift=0cm] {Khuman}
  \node[below=of Khuman, yshift=-1cm, xshift=0.5cm] {Luwang}
  \node[below=of Luwang, yshift=-1cm, xshift=0.5cm] {Angom}
  \node[below=of Angom, yshift=-1cm, xshift=0cm] {Moirang}
  \node[below=of Moirang, yshift=-1cm, xshift=0.5cm] {Khaba-nanga}
  \node[below=of Khaba-nanga, yshift=-1cm, xshift=0.5cm] {Chenglei}

  \node[below=of Yek-salai, yshift=-2cm, xshift=0cm] {Phurup}
  \node[below=of Phurup, yshift=-2cm, xshift=0.5cm] {Sagei}

\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

\textbf{Yek-salai}

\textit{Yek-salai} is the largest group of agnates who trace their descent from a common ancestor. It may be pointed out that the ancestor is a myth perpetuated in the society through successive generations.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, P.200.

Theoretically, the exact agnatic relationship of every member of a **yek-salai** to every other member can be ascertained by genealogical reckoning. However, in the present area of study to remember the exact genealogical links of the members of a **yek-salai** are beyond the memory of common people. It is even beyond the memory of the **piba**, the head of the **sagei** and the pundit (knowledgeable person) since most of the **pibas** and pundits in the study areas are illiterate, and they do not maintain written records. However, in general a Loi could trace his/her line of descent three or four steps in the ascending generation from the present. A man could usually remember the name of his father, his grandfather, and sometimes his grandfather's father. During the researcher's stay in the village, it has been observed that some families have started to record the family's genealogical tree. One informant called Ngangbam Donbabu Singh, who is 28 years old, informed that he had written down the names of all his kin in the three generations above him since his father and other **sagei** members could not remember beyond that.\(^{31}\)

It is evident that after four or five generations, the names of ancestors fade away from people's memory and the youth in particular do not remember the names of their fore-fathers beyond two to three generations. Even among older persons there is frequent confusion and disagreement about the names and order of their predecessors. As mentioned earlier, the Lois share the same **yek-salai** and **sagei** systems with the Meiteis, hence it would not be too farfetched to say that in the distant past the Lois and the Meiteis may have come from the same stock or have common ancestry.

In olden days, the **yek-salai** was an autonomous territorial unit with small size of population. The members used to attend socio-religious ceremonies connected with their **yek-salai** which enhanced solidarity and co-operation among them. In addition, the members

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\(^{31}\) The interview was held with Ng. Donbabu Singh at Khurkhul on 9\(^{th}\) February 2001.
were united to protect their territory from the threats posed by various external forces including other yek-salais.

Presently, the yek-salai does not function as a corporate group though its members share the feeling of togetherness. The increase in population as well as the migration of people in search of alternatives for their livelihood and other purpose, led each segment to function independently of the whole. The struggle for power and property that sometimes occurred among members also contributed to the division of the yek-salai. Consequently, the members started settling in other villages and this made difficult for them to make their presence to the ceremonies associated with their yek-salais. As a result, the lower divisions of the yek-salais i.e., sageis and phurups, have gained considerable importance and ultimately, the functions of the yek-salai were taken over by them.

To sum up, it can be said that though the yek-salai is an important institution in the Loi society, its large size and dispersed nature makes it difficult for all members to come together or trace exact genealogical ties with each other. It is at the lower level of segmentation of the sagei and the phurup that the solidarity of yek-salai finds expression.

**Sagei**

A sagei is a segment of a yek-salai. In theory, a Loi sagei consists of a group of agnates dead or alive, between whom relationship can be traced genealogically. Thus, members of a sagei have a sense of shared identity, often referring to each other as ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ even when no genealogical relationship can be traced. The continuity of the sagei is preserved by the successive generations of members within it. The sagei exists ‘in perpetuity’ which implies that individuals come and go, but the sagei continues to exist.

According to L.I.Singh: "there are as many as 116 sageis under Ningthouja, 52 under Angom, 100 under Khuman, 46 under Luwang, 55 under Moirang, 20 under Khaba-Ngamba, and 44 under Chenglei
On the other hand, T.C. Hodson reports that there are 448 sageis under seven yek-salais, that is Ningthouja yek-salai has 115 sagei (yumnak); Angom, 50; Khuman, 103; Luwang, 56; Moirang, 66; Khaba-Nganba, 17; and Chenglei, 41. In the book ‘Yek-salai’ of Tomba Meetei it is written that at present there are altogether 716 sageis belonging to seven yek-salais in the valley of Manipur. In the same book, it is also written that there are some sageis which trace their origin to more than one yek-salai. The above-mentioned three authors had given different number of sageis belonging to different yek-salais. For instance, the sagei Laisangbam belongs to two yek-salais, Mangang and Angom. Similarly the sagei Ngangbam belongs to both Luwang and Khuman yek-salais. The villages under study, Sekmai and Khurkhul have 11 and 12 sageis respectively all of which belong to the scheduled caste category. Many of the sageis belong to the same yek-salai. Out of seven yek-salais, Moirang and Chenglei yek-salais are found to be absent in Khurkhul where as Khaba-gnanba and Chenglei yek-salais are not present in Sekmai.

One explanation for the discrepancy in the account of different authors is that as pointed above the yek-salai is not a static but dynamic unit whose internal structure changes over time. When the yek-salai expands or its members move out to distant places, new pattern of alignment and realignment takes place giving rise to new sageis. Sometimes, the new sageis may knowingly or unknowingly adopt the same name as those in other yek-salais, resulting in members with the same sagei name professing membership to different yek-salais. Another reason that explains the difference in number of sageis shown by the scholars above is the lack of consistency in the use of these categories among the analysts.

In olden days, the sagei was a corporate body and there existed co-operation among the members in any socio-religious ceremony.

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34. A. Tomba Meetei, op.cit., 1993, pp.25-66.
They commonly observed rules related to birth and death (yummangba). They also performed ancestor worship. In the course of time, the sagei becomes large and some families started functioning independently from the group to co-operate with each other in social and religious matters thus giving rise to the formation of phurups.

Though both men and women are born into the sagei, only men are permanent members. Men are born into and die as members of the same sagei. In the context of the female, only an unmarried woman fully belongs to the sagei of her birth. A woman on marriage is transferred from the sagei of her birth to that of her husband and after marriage a woman’s home is in her husband’s house, and her ‘kin’ are his kin. This practice stems from the norm that in Loi society, a man has complete rights over his children as well as over the sexual, domestic and reproductive services of his wife. However, never in her life is a Loi woman fully assimilated into the descent group of her husband, nor is she fully separated from that of her father’s. It is only after her death, when her descendants propitiate her departed spirit that a woman is said to have achieved the status of a member of her husband’s descent group. This is attested by the fact that if a divorce wife remains unmarried, her husband’s family would perform her last rite after death so that her soul would be integrated in her husband’s sagei. This custom gives credence to Robin Fox’s view that in patrilineal societies once a sagei obtains a woman, it hangs onto her.36 For those women who marry again, the current husband’s sagei is responsible for performing the necessary rites for her.

**Phurup**

In addition to the sagei, another significant unit of the yek-salai is the phurup. When a sagei becomes large and its members start moving away from each other, regular contact between them becomes difficult. Sending of news of birth and death to fellow sagei members for observing pollution also becomes difficult. This led to the division of

the *sagei* into different segments called *phurups* (*sub-lineages*). In certain cases, *phurups* have developed out of factional rivalry between the *sagei* members. The functions of the *sagei* have now completely been taken over by the *phurup*.

In many respects, the functions of the *phurup* are similar to the *sagei*. The *Phurup* is a localized and a corporate group. Mutual bonds of sentiments and reciprocal obligations unite each *phurup* members. Co-operation and solidarity among the members is the main feature of this group. At any ceremonial function, the members help each other physically and financially. It is mandatory for at least one member from each family to be present at any ceremonial function that is organized within the *phurup*.

Members belonging to the same *phurup* observe pollution at the time of birth of a child and death of an individual. In olden days, when birth or death occurs, those who belong to the same *phurup* used to break the cooking pot (earthen pot) and replace it with a new pot on the day of purification ceremony (*yumsengba*). But, nowadays the utensils are being purified with water since they are made up of brass or steel.

Men of the same *phurup* grow up together, play together in childhood, often work together as youth, hunt together, perpetually visit one another's homes and act together with corporate affairs. Inevitably, they know one another's personal history in detail. This is different for the female since after marriage a woman is incorporated into her husband's family and group that is totally different from her own. One's *phurup* members are mostly one's nearest kin. The *phurup* norms propel a man to consult and gain the support of the elderly kin members in any important matter. As the members of a *phurup* mostly live in close proximity, there are greater chances for either co-operation or conflict.

**Piba**

The oldest male of the group who is called piba heads the *sagei*. In the past, he had to look after the welfare of each member in the
sagei and to settle any disputes that occur within the sagei. Writing in the context of the Meitei, Brara states that the Piba was not a hereditary functionary, as only an elder person with good moral character, who had married in compliance with the prescribed norms, can become the piba.\(^\text{37}\) The above view does not seem to be applicable to the Lois since the position of the Piba is hereditary in the Loi villages. The first Piba of the sagei is the eldest male member of the group and only his eldest son could hold the title of Piba. It may so happen that after successive generations, the Piba may not be the oldest member of the sagei by age since it is a hereditary position. Even a young boy after the death of his father could become the Piba. In the event of the demise of the Piba, his son succeeds to his position, but if there is no son in the family his younger brother could hold the position of the Piba. The Piba is supposed to maintain the genealogy (paripuri) of the members of the sagei. As stated earlier, most of the Piba in the present study areas are, however, illiterate and do not maintain the genealogy for more than four generation’s back.

At present, the Piba’s position is not an enviable one as revealed by one of the informants Y.Manijao who is a Piba of his sagei. He stated that, in the past, the Piba used to get a piece of land since he presides over the rituals to the deity of the sagei and served his sagei members. However, the deity (lai) of most of the sageis had been dispatched to the Govindajee palace (Imphal) with proper rites by the Piba with the consent of the other members of the sagei. Nevertheless, there are a few sageis that still possess the deity of the sagei. The deity is represented by an earthen pot filled with water and cowries (likon) and covered by plantain leaves. The significance of the cowries is that when the deity is upset, the cowries comes out of the pot indicating to the household and sagei that they might face some problems of illness sooner or later.

According to some villagers, the Pibas who keep the deity need to take a lot of care since the deity has to be protected from pollution

and impurity. Eating of items such as eel, mud-eel, snails etc. are considered to be polluted. However, one can eat outside the house and can enter the house after a bath. These days, most of the Pibas are busy with other engagements and do not have sufficient time to devote exclusively to the deity. That is one of the reasons why they have dispatched the deity to the palace.

On every New Year day (Cheiraoba) or else if any impure object touches the pot, the Piba, after a bath, fills the pot with fresh water and purifies it. In Loi villages, special seats are kept for the Piba at marriage and religious occasions.

**Shairuk Tinnaba**

The clan prohibition is also extended to marriage of children whose mothers belong to the same yek-salai even though they themselves may belong to different yek-salais. This kind of a prohibited relationship is called *Shairuk Tinnaba*. The children of mothers sharing a common yek-salai are believed to be born out of the same womb, and hence are like real siblings.\(^{38}\) The kinship terminology supports this notion since the terms for addressing one's real and classificatory cousins within the same yek-salai are same.

**Pellon Tinnaba**

Ideally, an ego should also avoid marrying a girl from the sagei where his grandmother comes from. This is called *pellon tinnaba*. However, in the present field study, the rules of *pellon tinnaba* are not strictly practised these days. One such case is found, wherein a married couple's grandmothers happened to be real sisters. In this case, L.Nokon Singh's son married H.Nobo Singh's daughter in which both the father of the bride and groom happened to be parallel cousins since their mothers were real sisters.\(^{39}\) It is also found that though theoretically such type of marriage is not acceptable in the society, it is allowed to exist since once the couple had eloped, parents are compelled to formalize the union.

\(^{39}\) Such type of marriage has occurred in Khurkhul.
It may, however, be noted that while exogamic principle is applicable to the yek-salai as a whole, in practice, it is not followed strictly by its members. Elopement as well as village endogamy practised by the Lois often led to breach of the established rule of marrying outside one's yek-salai. This, however, does not mean that the principle of exogamy has lost its relevance. While the parents are often compelled to formalize the union in case of elopement where the genealogical distance between the parties is within the traceable limit, they always abide by the rule of exogamy in arranged marriage.

**Village Endogamy**

T.C. Hodson opines that: “The Lois ... inter-marry with other Loi villages if the industry of these villages be identical with that of their own. Thus, the Lois of the salt making villages would inter-marry, but it is not likely that they would go to Fayeng, a silk village, for wives.” 40 Contrary to Hodson’s view, in the present survey area, it is found that the Lois prefer to marry within the same village or in the nearby Loi village even if the occupation is of different type. This stems from the fact that like many communities in the region, the Lois prefer to marry into the family already known to them.

Indeed, marriage within the village is the most common practice, after which comes marriage between the neighbouring villages, such as, between Khurkhul and Sekmai village or Phayeng and Leimaram village. Incidence of marriage between Sekmai and Andro are very few in numbers because of the long distance between them, despite the fact that both the villages have similar occupations i.e. distilling of country liquor. Another reason for the predominance of intra village alliance, or in other words, village endogamy, could be because of the practice of love marriage where young boys usually court their village girl or at most girls of the neighbouring village rather than courting a girl from far-off places. The strong preference for marrying within the village and custom of elopement prevalent in the Loi society has often

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40 Hodson, op. cit., 1908, p. 74.
resulted in serious breach of the clan exogamy. Though strictly speaking marriage within the clan is prohibited, such unions are allowed to exist if the genealogical distance between them is outside traceable limit. Consequently, many cases of marriage within the same clan are found in the present study area. For example, a boy of Usham sagei got married to a girl of Heikham sagei belonging to the same Luwang clan. According to the villagers' view, one of the couples might die early in this type of marriage because such a relationship is tabooed since the couple are considered to be blood relatives belonging to the same clan. In the past, couples who violate the rule of clan exogamy were considered to be the enemy of the whole clan. It was also believed that there would not be any descendants of the couple after seven generations. While critically examining the situation today, one can argue that among the Lois the effective unit of exogamy is the sagei (lineage) and not the yek-salai (clan). Like in the case of Taiwan, clans and lineages have existed in Manipur for a long time and lineage affiliation has been found stronger than clan affiliation.

It is the lower segment of the clan i.e. the lineage that could be defined as the functional unit with reference to rules of marriage. As Robin Fox states, the rule of exogamy is a part of cultural inheritance even among the Lois. Marrying within the same lineage is considered a crime and those who break the rules are subjected to severe punishment. This point is clarified more clearly by the following example. One man of Angom lineage from Sekmai married a woman of the same lineage who hails from Phayeng (another Loi village). She was ex-communicated and was never allowed to enter her father's house when he was alive. Though the man's family did not expel him, the couple is subjected to intense ridicule in the society. Though such kinds of marriages do occasionally occur, the Loi, in general, forbid marrying within the same lineage. Those who belong to the same

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42. Robin Fox, op. cit., 1983, 175.
lineage are considered to be brothers and sisters and they are not in favour of spoiling the blood relation.

As mentioned above, the Lois usually practice village endogamy. However, in the wake of the improved communication and increased interaction with other communities and as well as with the other Loi villages marriage outside the village is increasingly practised though endogamy is the preferred form. Unlike the Punjabis of North India where the village is an exogamous unit and intra-village kinship ties are usually agnatic, and those between villages affinal or uterine⁴³, among the Lois, intra ties are both agnatic and affinal in character.

**Kinship Terms**

Any discussion on kinship would be incomplete without looking at the structure of the kinship terminology. This is important because kinship terms not only bring out the etiquette of a society but also give lucid expression to marriage rules. When one talks of kinship terms, it would be prudent to begin by saying that Loi terminology can be classified according to the age and sex of the speaker of the person to whom the term is addressed to, and of the person through whom the addressee is related. Further, the term of address also distinguishes the cross from parallel cousins. Affinal and the cross cousins have the same forms of address which are markedly different from the terms used for their consanguine counterparts.⁴⁴ Some kinship terms have generalized usage and are used to show regard and respect and make the addressee part of the ego's kinship network by establishing fictitious kinship ties. It is customary for the Lois to address people by appropriate kinship terms. Ideally, it is the young who pay respect and give obeisance to their elders. An individual, while referring to or addressing anyone older than himself, uses the appropriate kin term indicative of respect. On the other hand, senior relatives refer to and address their juniors either by name or by terms that indicate affection or familiarity.

The data on kinship terminology have been collected by recording the actual statements made by informants in their real-life situations. The following table provides a glimpse into the universe of terms used by the Lois.

### Common Kinship Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Markers</th>
<th>Kin</th>
<th>Other genealogical kin types</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grandparent’s Generation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ipu</td>
<td>FF, MF</td>
<td>FFB, MFB, FMB, MMB, FFZH, FMZH, MMZH, MFZH</td>
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<td>Khura</td>
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## Kinship Terms for a Male Ego

### Ego’s Generation

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Iyamba, tada</td>
<td>eB</td>
<td>FBS, FZDH, MZS, MBDH, WZH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inao-nupa</td>
<td>yB</td>
<td>FBS, MZS, MBDH, WZH</td>
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<td>Iche</td>
<td>eZ</td>
<td>FBD, FZSW, MZD, MBSW</td>
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<td>yZ</td>
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<td>eBW, W eZ</td>
<td>FZD, MBD, FBSW, MZSW</td>
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<tr>
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<td>FZD, MBD, FBSW, MZSW</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ibai</td>
<td>eZH, W eB</td>
<td>FZS, MBS, FBDH, MZDH</td>
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<td>Isen</td>
<td>ZH, W yB</td>
<td>FZS, MBS</td>
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### Children’s Generation

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<tr>
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<td>S, BS</td>
<td>MZSS, FZDS, FBSS, WFBDS</td>
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## Kinship Terms for a Female Ego

### Ego’s Generation

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<td>FBD, MZD, HBW, FZSW, MBSW</td>
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<td>MBS, FZS, FBDH, MZDH</td>
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<td>Inamma</td>
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<td>FZD, MBD, FBSW, MZSW,</td>
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<td>Inao- nupa</td>
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<td>FBDH, MZDH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ichan - nupi</td>
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<td>FBSW, MZSW</td>
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### Children's Generation

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<tr>
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<th>MZDS, MBSS, FBDS</th>
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<td>MZDD, FBDD, MBSD, FZSD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iya</td>
<td>BS, DH</td>
<td>BDH, FBSS, MZSS, MBDS, MZDS, MBDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imou-nupi</td>
<td>BD, SW</td>
<td>FBSD, FZDD, MZSD, MBDD</td>
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### Common Kinship Terms for Grand Children's Generation

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<tr>
<th>Isu-Nupa</th>
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<td>Isu-Nupi</td>
<td>SD, DD</td>
<td>BSD, BDD, ZSD, ZDD</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The kinship terms as shown in the table are based upon the particular set of terms used by both the sexes in common as well as kinship terms used by the male and female ego only. In general, kinship terms are used as a form of address as well as a show of respect to the addressee. The kinship terms are regularly used in addressing or referring to close relatives or otherwise. In Loi kinship network any male in the grandfather's generation would be addressed as *ipu* and any female in the grandmother's generation as *ibok*. Father's elder brothers are called *ipan* while father's younger brothers are addressed as *khura*. Mother's elder or younger brother and father's elder or younger sister's husband are identified as *mama*. Father's sister and mother's brother's wife, father's brother's daughter are identified as *ine*. *Imabok* is used for mother's elder sister and father's elder brother's wife. *Indomcha* is used to address the mother's younger sister, father's younger brother's wife. The elder brother is called as *Iyamba* by male ego and *ibung* by female ego while elder sister is called *iche* by both the sexes. The terms for people of the same generation is similar to those prevailing between siblings. Generally, children address elders according to their age group and sex of the addressee. Younger siblings address elder ones by using appropriate kinship
terms whereas elder people address the junior by familiar terms like *tombi* or *tomba* or by their personal name.

It is also important to note that senior/junior distinction is not determined simply by age but also by generation, for instance, a man address his elder brother's wife as *iteima*, an appropriate kinship term, even if he is older than his sister-in law. Thus, the terms used for woman are in relation to their husband's position. An individual may address the elder sisters or brothers by name with the prefix *iche* or *tada* before it. Eg. *iche Chaobi* (sister *Chaobi*) or *iyamba Chaoba* (brother *Chaoba*). Certain kin terms are also used for addressing nonkins such as calling a friend’s mother *Ima* or a friend's father, *paba* as a show of courtesy and affection. In Loi society, kinship term varies according to the age, generation, sex of the speaker and the sex of the kinsman addressed or referred to.

The Loi kinship terminology makes clear distinction between parallel and cross cousins where parallel cousins are forbidden for marriage while cross cousins are within marriageable categories. In fact, different kinship terms are used for parallel and cross cousins whereas for other categories of kin the same kinship terms are used for patrilineal and matrilineal relatives. For instance, the term *Khura* refers to father's younger brother as well as the mother's younger sister's husband, mother's mother's sister's daughter's husband, father's mother's sister's son and father's father's brother's son. Likewise the term 'mama' which refers to mother's brother and mother's mother's sister's son is also used for father's sister's husband. The terminology used for ego's parallel and cross cousins are different. Similarly, for a male ego, the elder parallel male and female cousins are *iyamba* and *iche* respectively and elder cross male and female cousins, are *ibai* and *iteima* respectively. There are some terms, which are address similarly by both the sexes, for instance, *FZ*, *FB*, *FBW*, *FZH*, *WF*, and *HF*.

The terms used for cross cousins are the same for addressing the affinal categories of the same generation. When a male ego
addresses someone as *ibai*, it may mean elder male cross cousin as well as elder brother in law. Such forms of address are illustrated below: In the first row a male ego (the word in bracket signifies the sex of the speaker) calls his cross cousin, i.e. father's sister's son and mother's brother's son *ibai*. *Ibai* is also used while addressing his affinal relatives such as sister's husband, wife's brother, father's brother's daughter's husband and mother's sister's daughter's husband. The term in the second row indicates that a male ego addresses his elder female cross cousins such as father's sister's daughter, mother's brother's daughter and also to his affinal relatives, wife's sister, mother's sister son's wife by the term *iteima*. The term *innama* is used by a female ego while addressing her elder cross cousins, father's sister's daughter, mother's brother's daughter as well as her affinal relatives, elder brother's wife, husband's elder sister etc. Similarly, a female ego uses *itei* in addressing her elder cross cousins, father's sister's son, mother's brother's son and her elder affinal relatives, sister's husband, husband's brother, father's brother's daughter's husband and mother's sister's daughter's husband.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cross cousins</th>
<th>Affines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ibai (male)</td>
<td>FZS, MBS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iteima (male)</td>
<td>FZD, MBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innamma (female)</td>
<td>FZD, MBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itei (female)</td>
<td>FZS, MBS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cross-Cousin Marriages**

The above account clearly shows the presence of cross cousin marriages among the Lois. However, not all cross cousins are permitted for marriage. In Loi society, a male ego should avoid marrying his patrilateral cross cousin i.e., his father's sister's daughter. However, ego can marry his real or classificatory mother's
brother’s daughter (matrilateral cross cousin) in fact this is considered to be good and could lead to a prosperous life. This form of marriage is called *mane matung inba*, which from the female point of view means (following the father’s sister). The marriage between a man and his father’s sister’s daughter is called *Ningol hanjanba* and means the return of a girl to the family and lineage from where her mother had come. This form of marriage is believed to result in short life for the couple or their children. Generally the Loi avoids such type of marriages. We find that patrilateral cross-cousin marriages are not allowed in Loi society like in most North Indian States. Thus, the rule of no reversal is a negative rule of marriage in Loi society, while the rules of repetition is a positive rule of marriage. Therefore, a man ideally cannot marry his father’s sister’s daughter. However, these rules are not always adhered to in practice. An analysis of the Lois kinship terminology indicates the prevalence of bilateral cross-cousin marriage in the Lois society. Although such marriages are not favoured, their occurrence is non the less accepted. Brara finds the same tendency prevalent among the Meitei community. With reference to the status of cousin, she writes: “nowadays one’s immediate cross-cousins are, in some cases, held as similar to one’s parallel cousins, while the extended cross cousins seem to remain within the sphere of potential marriage partners.”

Teknonymy

Like in many rural societies of India, the Lois, while addressing a married person who already has children, commonly use the latter’s name as a polite way to refer to them. For instance, the parents of a child named Chaoba would be addressed as Chaoba -mapa (Chaoba’s father) for the father and Chaoba- mama(Chaoba’s mother) for the mother. This usage is widely prevalent between the couple too, and may have its origin in the taboo imposed on wives to address their husband by name. Among the Lois there is a strict rule imposed on women that prohibits them from calling the husband by name,

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especially in public as a mark of deference to him. Whereas a woman is constrained to address her husband by his name or title, the latter freely addresses her by name.

**Incest Taboo**

Incestuous relations are strongly abhorred among Loi community. Incest includes sexual relations with a sister or brother, between father and daughter, between mother and son, of a man with his brother's wife, and also between a man and a woman of one's own *sagei*. Such an act is not only strongly tabooed but also a crime and a sin. The villagers expel the wrongdoer from the village. In the case of incest with a real sister, there is a feeling of horror. In one such case a man was expelled from the *sagei* for violating the incest taboo. The man was born in Ngangbam *sagei* and had incestuous relationship with his own sister. The village authority expelled and excommunicated him from the village. The Lois feel that disastrous consequences would follow from such incestuous union such as birth of an abnormal or disabled child.

The Lois designate incest as sinful, disgraceful, scandalous, and unnatural. Children need not to be told that it is wrong to copulate with one's sibling; they learn of it themselves from the socialization pattern. Indeed, sex as a topic of discussion rarely figures in the Lois society either among adults or between parents and children.

**Avoidance**

In the Loi community, a woman's relation with her father-in-law and brother-in-law is regulated by a strict code of conduct that constrained them from freely interacting with each other. Avoidance form of relationship is prevalent between a woman and her husband's real or classificatory elder brother or brothers. A man should also avoid going near the wife of his younger brother. This is practised to avoid intimacy between the brother-in-law and sister-in-law. Similarly, a father-in-law shares a very formal relationship with his daughter-in-law. This however, is not based on difference of sex alone but marks the distinction between kin and affine, which finds lucid expression in
the relationship between brothers-in-law. The relationship between a man and his wife’s elder brothers and parents-in-law is marked by distinct formality though they visit and help one another regularly.

It is also a taboo for a woman to keep her head uncovered in front of the husband’s elder brothers. A daughter-in-law should always cover her head with a scarf in front of her husband’s elder brothers and lineage members. It is frequently held that if a daughter-in-law leaves her head uncovered in front of her brothers-in-law, her corpse would not burn properly at the time of cremation. Needless to say that these beliefs serve to ensure that women conform to gendered codes of conduct.

A woman is expected to show respect to her husband especially in public as a sign of good manner. Generally, a woman walks behind her husband if they have to go anywhere together either on a ceremonial occasion or otherwise. Just like the Punjabi society among the Lois, the rules of kinship morality demand a complete suppression of every expression of the relation of sexuality between the husband and the wife in front of others.\(^4\)\(^6\)

Women always show respect towards men of their husband’s lineage since the social relations is dominated by the patriarchal principle. In the first year or so of marriage a woman generally avoids addressing her husband or his male relatives directly in public. If they address her, it will be somewhat in a formal way, her husband and his brothers would use her name or her first child’s name. The avoidance form of relationships between father in-law and daughter-in-law and brother-in-law and sister-in-law lies at the root of Loi social organization.

**Inheritance**

In the Loi society, being a patriarchal one, inheritance is traced through the male line. The father is the head of the household and the controller of all property in the family, whether ancestral or self

acquired, movable or immovable before it gets divided amongst the children. The property is transmitted from father to son from generation to generation. Husain opines that a wife is not entitled to any share in the property of her husband and cannot demand a partition during his lifetime.\footnote{Majid Husain, \textit{Encyclopedia of India,} Manipur (N.Delhi : Rima Publishing House, 1994) p.64.} When a man dies, a major share of his property goes to his son(s) and the deceased's wife gets only a small portion. The real sons and an adopted son have equal rights in the matter of inheritance.

Not all sons, however, have equal share of the property. Unlike the Mitakshara law where all sons have equal rights to the father's property, among the Lois the major share goes to the youngest brother. The Lois follow the customary law with regard to inheritance under which the youngest son gets the major share in the ancestral property. In addition to movable property like cash and gold, agricultural plots are very much valued. Indeed, the legacy of agricultural land is of extreme importance and a matter of concern for everyone. Paddy field (lou) is distributed among the sons and the youngest son usually takes the major share. He also becomes heir to the compound where his parental house is located. However, it would be pertinent to state that even after the land is partitioned among the children, a piece of cultivable land is always kept as a share for the old parents. After the death of the parents, the youngest son succeeds to this land too because he performs the last rites (\textit{karma}) when the parents die. Although elder sons and daughters may contribute towards the expenses, the main responsibility of performing the ceremony falls on the youngest son. He has to incur all the expenses even if it means borrowing from others and make available all the items such as liquor, meat, money etc. needed at the time of \textit{Karma}.

If any unmarried woman or a widow earns any property or money acquired through her own efforts, she is the owner of it. Similarly, household articles given by the family at her marriage
remain as the bride's sole property. Where land is given as dowry this also remains the property of the bride. There is no established rule which governs the inheritance to the woman's property when she dies in-testate. The woman may give the property in her possession either to her son or daughter according to her wish. Divorced daughters who desire to live separately are usually given land for residence but they have to find other means of livelihood themselves. In case, they decide to come back to their parental house, they fall under the protective custody of the brothers.

Although, the immovable property is not customarily distributed to daughters, in the absence of any son or an adopted son in the family the daughter becomes the sole heir. The researcher had also come across quite a few families who disbursed immovable property like cultivable land to their daughters out of love and affection. The analysis of the field data reveals that 21 families out of 300 (7.3% of the informants) reported to have inherited immovable property from both the lines - males and females. It has also been found that the well-off sections in the studied areas used to give a piece of cultivable land to their daughters. Nonetheless, the important point is that the sons get more than the daughters. The distribution of land in the villages under study shows that the daughters get one third or less of the land distributed while the sons get two-thirds or more than that. The above observation is corroborated by one of the informants, Usham Pramo, who opined that she has inherited 1.25 acres of land from her father while her brothers have inherited 3.75 acres of land and one bus each.48

From the above example, it is clear that parents give more property to the sons than daughters. It is the general feeling that daughters, when married, would move out to her husband's family while sons would stay with them and look after them in their old age. When enquired about the allocation of property among the male and

48. The interview was carried out with U. Pramo Devi at Khurkhul on 17th February, 2001.
female children, one informant responded by saying that sons should be given more than daughters because it is parents duty and obligation to provide security for his sons' future, while the daughters would go to her husband's house after marriage. 49 Although some women expressed resentment at this differential allocation of property rights, yet the researcher has not come across any court case filed by the sisters against their brothers for not distributing the landed property equally. The control and continuity of inheritance of property are primarily in the hands of the men and the patrilineal principle is applied to the regulation of inheritance.

Conclusion

This chapter begins with the structure of a Loi house in which it has been explained that the Lois adhere to various customary rules and give specific importance to the location of the outhouse, granary, firewood shed etc. The Lois treat their granary with awe since they believe that the deities reside in it. It has been observed that most of the houses in the Loi villages face towards the east. This enables the people to worship the sun every morning.

A Loi show a strong orientation toward nuclear household with authority over the unit resting with the father. Within two or three years of marriage, the married son(s) usually shift to another compound to establish their own household, with the ancestral compound going to the youngest son who also has to assume responsibility for the death rituals of the parents. An interesting fact revealed by the study is that while strongly patriarchal in character, daughters are given some land, in addition to household items for dowry, as their personal property.

An important aspect of the Lois kinship structure is the clan (yek salai), a widely dispersed and segmental unit whose members are genealogically linked to each other through a common ancestor. Though the genealogical connection is usually mythical in character except at the lower level of segmentation, the members are bound

49. The interview was carried out with an informant at Sekmai on 15th February, 2001.
together by sentiment of shared origin and principle of clan exogamy that prohibits marriage within the group.

The structure of the Lois kinship terminology has also been discussed. These kinship terms are used as a gesture of courtesy and sign of respect in addressing or referring to close relatives. It has been found that while the Lois make clear distinction between parallel and cross cousins in the use of kinship terminology some of the terms used for consanguines overlap with those of affines. Ideally, a man can marry his mother's brother's daughter (matrilateral cross cousin) and debarred from marrying his father's sister's daughter (patrilateral cross cousin). In practice, however, both types of cross cousin marriage exist.