CHAPTER IV

CUSTOMARY LAWS

4.1. Introduction

In order to study the customary laws of a village, its old traditions and customs have to be taken into account. The general body of traditional law is, as old as the tribe itself. Laws and customs are believed to have been handed down from generation to generation. It is this cumulative weight of ancestral authority that serves as the most general sanction for the observance of traditional norms.198

As people learnt to live in groups, the surrounding situation compelled them to conform to certain patterns of human behaviour in consonance with their day-to-day affairs of life, to accommodate their interests, hopes, desires and wants – both individual and collective. They gradually learnt that a particular mode of behaviour was conducive and beneficial to collective living. Over the centuries, these customs were presented as having divine sanction. These patterns of human behaviour achieved the status of some obligatory customs which were spontaneously and consciously followed by the members of the group.199 Due to motives of fear and of reverence for the supernatural being, no one dared to question the validity of these norms. Fear was felt because deviation from established norms would evoke punishment from the spirit which at times extended even to the entire community.200

199 Manjushree Pathak (2005), Tribal Customs, Law and Justice, New Delhi: Mittal Publications, p. 44.
200 n. 198.
Though in theory we can distinguish between customs and customary law, in practice, the distinction becomes blurred and one may be mistaken for the other. In its origin, customary law may appear to be only a differentiated form of general custom. However, all customs do not enjoy the sanctity of law. Customary laws are part of social customs and as such without specified social group, it may vary from one region to another. These laws are not made by any law-making authority but handed over by one generation to the succeeding generation through the social mechanism of cultural transmission. The customary law exists independently of the sovereign authority and forms the groundwork of every system of legislation. These rules may have been based on utility or social and communal necessity. It enjoys the tacit sanction from the common consent of the people among whom the said customary laws prevail.\(^{201}\)

Customary laws play an important role in an underdeveloped society where the society itself acts as the enforcing agent.\(^ {202}\) These unwritten laws of customary usage are ordinarily obeyed far more spontaneously.\(^ {203}\) No society can work in an efficient and appropriate manner unless laws are obeyed ‘willingly’ and ‘spontaneously’. Society and law are interdependent and cannot operate in isolation. The law has to reflect social attitudes and behaviour, and mould and control the same to ensure that they flow into proper channels.\(^ {204}\) These laws and customs, which in their totality make up the tribal culture, are not merely an inventory of rules of conduct, but a coherent system of relationships between individuals and groups. These relationships do not merely entail the observance of certain actions and

\(^{201}\) n. 199, p. 51.

\(^{202}\) Ibid., p. 52.


avoidance of others, but ideologies and values, mental and emotional attitudes as well.²⁰⁵

In the Maram society the term ‘law’ in its legalistic sense is not known. So there is no Maram equivalent for the term. For administrative purpose the people use the word ‘Aja’²⁰⁶ which has a very wide connotation and is more akin to ‘custom’ than to ‘law’. These norms are uniform and spontaneous within a certain village, clan or even tribe, but it could be very different among the entire society.

Homogeneous societies are the breeding grounds of customs. In a society which is predominantly heterogeneous, customs have little to do with its day-to-day functioning.²⁰⁷ Gradually the Maram society is growing and becoming a heterogeneous one, in the course of its development and modernization. After the coming of the British and the 1891 political scenario, power over the hill areas came into the hands of the Manipur kings; and since 1947, Independent India began to wield control over the area. Thence forward with various enactments of the parliament and the state legislature the people received constitutional privileges. This brought about a marked change in the administration of the area for the better.

From the point of development and the need to accommodate customary laws and to protect different social, cultural and religious interests and to mitigate the shortcomings of customary laws, certain legislation of both parliament and state legislature, like the 1956 Manipur Village Act, were put into operation. This gave


²⁰⁶ The word Aja could mean – the way, the procedure, the custom, the tradition. During hearing of cases, the people would say ‘ajai makle’ to prove a point. It would mean something like this – that’s not the way, that’s not the custom, that not the tradition.

²⁰⁷ n. 199, p. 53.
rise to legal plurality and paved the way for the march of modernity. Today as evident from the pattern of societies all over the world, no society is singular or monogynous. Moreover, certain foreign agencies, extenuating circumstances and new socio-political development compel a society to give up their age old traditions and to accept the new ideas and ways of life. There are spontaneous exchanges of human resources, science and technologies, art, culture, religion, etc. As a result it is imperative and explicit that the society is growing pluralistic and obviously it is against the dominion of customary law and practices.\textsuperscript{268}

The traditional Maram society was predominantly controlled and guided by customs and customary laws. All the personal, cultural and religious activities were governed by the customs. From the birth of a new member in the village to his/her death, the Maram would be bound by a set of customs and rituals which are bonds of his/her relationship with the community. Observances of these would mean that the family is accepting the obligations imposed on them by the norms of the society.

4.2. Rites of Passage

The family is the cradle of customs and traditions. It is here that the tribal customs and traditions are nurtured. Thus when certain ceremonies and rituals are observed in the family during birth, marriage or death, they are all done in the name of the tribe and so all occurrences are viewed as affecting the whole village rather than an individual family.

4.2.1. Birth

The ceremonies relating to the birth of a child could be divided into a) restrictions imposed on the mother during the pregnancy, b) the birth ceremonies which include the n'bang ceremonies that begin soon after the birth of the child and c) membership ceremony.

\textsuperscript{268}Ibid., p. 54.
4.2.1.1. During Pregnancy

Many restrictions are placed on a woman during her pregnancy period. She has to abide by certain norms like abstention from eating honey, sweets, eggs, crabs and brain of animals as these could cause obstruction during the child birth. She is forbidden to eat the flesh of wild animals caught by using traps or animals with foetus. She is to avoid snakes and it is a taboo for the woman to kill them. She should not get frightened and never enter brooks or large ponds. She is to keep away from certain places that are under the spell of evil spirits (sazii ating atu karami). It is believed that if a pregnant woman disregarded these norms, the child would come under the spell of the evil spirit which could cause the newborn to stammer or to become dumb, or to be still born.

In the event of an earthquake, the husband fetches a fresh plant called N'kamrcnnok which is facing the rising sun. It is burnt in the fire and the smoke is made to surround the pregnant woman. It is believed that this ritual will remove the evil effects of the earthquake.

In the case of premature birth and if the child dies, it would be buried in a small earthen pot near the central pillar (Simmung Chingdi) of the house. The family

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209 Eating of crabs is strictly forbidden, as they believe, it could cause miscarriage.

210 Some of the restrictions like attending to nature’s call in places where rats infest or where men have dug holes to catch rats, are just to ensure that the lady does not get frightened.


213 n. 211.
has to hire the services of the poor and old people to bury it. The family members are not to mourn the death of such children.\footnote{Interview with Tarurang and Kangngounii of Bungnamai, of Maram Khullen.}

4.2.1.2. Birth Ceremonies

Among the Marams, child birth is a very special event. People outside the family are restricted by genna from having any physical contact with the members of the family, till the ritual purification is over.\footnote{Ibid.} Only those persons who attend to the woman in child-birth have free access to the house. Rannok plant is tied on the tip of a spear which is planted in the ground. The leaves of Rannok plants are also hung above the front door, to ward off evil spirits.\footnote{n. 25, p. 67.} The husband is to perform all the domestic works.\footnote{n. 211.} The placenta is wrapped in a cloth and kept below the bed of the mother and child till the naming ceremony is over. As soon as the child is born, a cock or a hen is killed, depending whether it is a boy or a girl, and the family will have a meal together before N'bang commences. Any food left over, is buried.

4.2.1.2.1 N'bang rituals

A total of ten days\footnote{In earlier days, N'bang was observed for a month. Later on it was reduced to 3 days. Then the people found that many women were dying and so they increased the N'bang to 10 days. Interview with Aapo Ngouniitaruba of Maram Khullen.} regulation called N'bang would be observed for a first born child. For other children, the days are reduced to 5 or 7. If the child is born in the night, the rituals of N'bang will start in the morning and if the infant is born during the day, the next morning. Until the naming ceremony is over, the family members observe abstinence from meat but they can have fish, snail and wild birds. Chilly is to be substituted with ginger. However, the parents of the child will fast on
rice beer for the first three days of N'hang. During these days, the husband fetches water, while carrying a spear on which the leaves of ramnok is tied.\textsuperscript{219} Just after the birth of the child, even among the family members, no one is allowed to touch each other. A thanksgiving sacrifice is offered to the household deity; this is done by offering rice and ginger on plantain leaves. This is to prevent evil spirits from having any hold over the new born. The wife drinks only the water fetched by her husband. He also cooks for his wife. Neighbours are also discouraged from coming into the house as such visits are believed to bring sickness. A sign would be put up in front of the house to warn neighbours that there is a new born.\textsuperscript{220}

\textbf{4.2.1.2.1.1 First two days}

During the first two days, the mother and the child stay away from the father, and are secluded from the family and community. They have to sleep in the place where the child is born, usually near the warm and spacious fireplace, until the third day of N'hang is over. In the olden days, a house did not have many rooms and placing a log of wood in the centre of the room, ensured separation\textsuperscript{221} of the father and other members from the mother and child. There was a taboo also on normal conversation, with the objective of maintaining the sacredness of the atmosphere. Hence the mother expresses her needs, to which the father may not reply. However, all her needs would be attended to.

\textbf{4.2.1.2.1.2 Third day}

On this day, the wood partition is removed from the room and the taboo on secluded space is no more. This is a very important day in the life of the newborn. It is on this day that he/she gets a name. It is also the day of blessing. This day is called

\textsuperscript{219}n. 212.

\textsuperscript{220}n. 25, p. 67.

\textsuperscript{221}A small fireplace also would be made close to the place of mother and child for the sake of boiling water for the baby's bathing. This is more of a ritual.
Early in the morning of the third day, the father goes to pluck a healthy and fresh stem from the plant called *Kathatarai* which he has marked the previous day. After removing all leaves except the top most two, he would sprinkle on it some of the water in which rice is being cooked and bring it to the chin of the child. This is then taken and tied to a spear and placed along with a small bag and a catapult on the right side of the roof of the house. For a girl child a basket-and-bow are used in place of the small bag and catapult.

The umbilical cord is cut by the mother with a knife made for the occasion by the husband from the bamboo called *Kani*. It is put in a gourd and hung on the back roof of the house. After this the mother fetches water by herself and has her ritual cleansing.

### 4.2.1.2.1.3. Naming ceremony

The naming ceremony is performed on the this day. If not, it should be done during or at the end of *N’bang*. In addition to the omens taken by means of observing a fowl’s feet, dreams are also taken into account. The naming is carried out by turning the child towards the sun. For this purpose, they arrange for a small boy who is a first born (if a female child, a small girl who is a first born) from a neighbouring family. The boy or girl so chosen for the naming ceremony, stays with the newly born’s family until sunset. He is not allowed to play about during the day.

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222 *N’lou* is used to refer to all the blessings uttered to the newborn on this day. *N’lou* can also be spread over to other days as well.

223 According to Ng. Kuhingba, the father collects water in a leaf from the purest spring early in the morning and sprinkles it on the chin of the child that it may grow healthy and fit.

224 The bow is made use of by the women to make thread.

225 n. 50, p. 143.

226 n. 25, p. 67.
As soon as the sun rises, the selected boy or girl carries the baby and goes to the verandah, and after making the child face the sun, gives a blessing and calls the baby by name. While the naming ceremony is going on, the child must not come into any contact with the earth. After the naming ceremony is over, a blameless hen for a daughter or a cock for a son is sacrificed, so that the child may also be blameless like the sacrificial victim.

4.2.1.2.1.4. A Day to Make a new Hearth.

On this day, the family removes the old hearth and makes a new one. The father splits firewood into small pieces and after making the fire place, he goes to the house of a neighbour whose first born baby is still living, and lights the small pieces of firewood he had prepared and brings it to the house. At this juncture, the owner of the house from where the fire is collected gives him a sickle for the child.

After the completion of the new hearth, the mother goes to the nearby jungle with some rice beer along with the selected child and asks him/her to pull out a vegetable called mahangai. They also share the rice beer in the jungle and return. After this, the mother can take the normal food.

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227 The names are usually compounds of a father’s or grandfather’s names for boys, while for girls a simple name is given. If the child gets sick often after the naming ceremony, the parents may change the name.

228 n. 25, p. 68.

229 Some people say that it is the mother who goes to the neighbour’s house with the baby and collect live charcoal for starting the fire. She would also give rice beer to the family. The family also would reciprocate with a gift of rice beer.

230 This ritual is done, so that the child may not develop any allergy to the leaves and vegetables that the mother would touch later on.

231 n. 212.
4.2.1.2.1.5. A day of Blessing (N’lou)

The mother gives the child to the father saying to the child, Afiilam patsaragatale (‘Get the best thing in life’ Afiilam means father’s side). Then the father takes the child out of the house and murmurs a blessing with the words Laimak Ngousaragalo (‘See the sun / the day’, and ‘have the best life’). The baby is ritualistically carried on the back for the first time. They put a sickle and Rannok and gently ties it with a string made from a creeper called Maneiring, and making the child stand in that position, the parents utter Sating kaha ngousaragolo (‘See the brightest heaven’ or ‘the best thing in life’). In this way they wish the child a future as bright as the sun and also introduces it to the world.

The father gives a very special blessing to his child. He cleans an undeformed branch of the tree called Kata ting, and breaks it into 3 pieces and throws it under the bed while blessing the child to be fearless and catch the deer single-handedly: Ramhaulam machii katai n’baiba kaklo (‘catch the deer with a bare hand’ but it means to say ‘have lots of strength and courage’). Some of the other blessings given to the child on this day are: Ragounlampichii saru kapulo (‘Whenever you go to the jungle, may you get the best things from the jungle - for making house, etc.’) and makimai lamka tachii rammii tatlo (‘Even when other people go down, may you always be on the top’. It means ‘be always successful’, ‘be always a toppers’). There is a special blessing for the girls, Maiki kamlaftii tiilo (Have a good relationship with the in-law and the clan of the husband’).

In the evening, the placenta and the umbilical cord are buried in the backyard garden, along with the stones of the old hearth, the gourd and the remaining pieces of used firewood. They use stones to cover these for it is feared that if mud is used, the child will get infected.
4.2.1.2.1.6. On the 4th day

Usually the father searches for a crab on the fourth day. He collects a male crab for a boy child and a female crab for a girl child. He also collects a plant called Katatarai. He makes a basket and puts the crab and Katatarai together.

For the next two to three months, the father should not cut certain trees and creepers like Katitokligai, Saramrou, Alii, Malaiting, Baikou, Bamboo, etc. In the case of a war or feud, the man whose child is below 3 months of age cannot carry weapons, but only a branch of a tree. He cannot kill anyone and even the enemies cannot kill the one who is carrying a branch. This custom ensured that the child was brought up with all due care.²³²

4.2.1.2.2. N’bang rituals for the child of Sagong

In the house of Sagong, no birth can take place. When the time comes for the queen or any other member of the family to give birth, the lady moves to either a relative or a neighbour’s house which is nearby. The placenta and the umbilical cord will be buried in the backyard garden of the house. All the rest of the rituals remain the same.

4.2.1.3. Membership Ceremony

This ceremony initiates the Maram male child into a full fledged member of the community even though he may still be a minor. It is also a rite of purification performed during the festival of N’liem. The only condition for initiation is that the child should have been weaned. Till this rite is performed the mother and child are not to eat of the meat procured from any animal’s head.²³³

²³²n. 212.

²³³n. 25, p. 69.
4.2.2. Marriage

The Marams assume that the life of a Maram really starts after marriage, because family is one of the fundamental units of a village. When one attains a marriageable age he/she gets married in order to set up a family. To enter into marriage would mean to get a special status of dignity in the community. There are two types of marriages - formal and informal marriages. Formal marriage is an arranged marriage in which the parents fix the marriage after knowing the intention of the children. Informal marriage or eloping was frowned upon. In recent times, informal marriages are becoming more common.

4.2.2.1. Degree of Consanguinity

There are very strict laws regarding marriage. Marriages within the same clan\textsuperscript{234} are not allowed. Since each clan has its own Rahangki and Raliiki, it was easy for the youth to know to which dormitory one should go looking for a future bride. In the olden days, because of the exogamous nature of clans, consanguineal relationship even at the fifth order was unimaginable. A breach of exogamy entailed at least immediate expulsion from the village, a punishment which would have meant death in days past, for there was no place of refuge to afford shelter to such mistaken persons.\textsuperscript{235} People believed that these marriages of a consanguineous or incestuous nature would cause them great harm. The couple might even be eaten by tigers.\textsuperscript{236} However, in modern times, marriages even in the fourth and third order occur, though the society frowns upon such practices.

\textsuperscript{234}n. 212.

\textsuperscript{235}n. 50, p. 89.

\textsuperscript{236}n. 25, pp. 70-71.
4.2.2.2. Engagement

Usually engagement takes place during the planting season. Courtship goes on before engagement. Wooing is done at the Raliiki on festivals and on pleasant evenings. In the beginning the boy who wishes to marry, accompanies the group going to sing in the Raliiki and cracks jokes with the maiden. During this time, the young men choose their own prospective brides and spend time with them. Once a boy and girl decide to get married they inform their parents.\(^{237}\)

4.2.2.3. Fixing the date of Marriage

The parents take the trouble to arrange for the marriage and see that there are no restrictions in respect of clan lineages. The boy’s family goes and asks for the girl’s hand. Often the marriage negotiation is settled through a mediator (Kapangaipni). The final settlement is, however, made only after reading the omens to see whether the marriage will be successful or not. This is done through the interpretation of dreams. A piece of thread is obtained from the engaged girl either from the shawl she is making or from the shawl she is wearing. This thread is given to the parents of the boy who give it to the son who is going to get married. The boy wears the thread, usually on the earlobe, gently tied it around the lobe.\(^{238}\) He may tie it on the middle finger of the right hand as well.\(^{239}\) This is done before he goes to sleep. He prays to God to bless him in his dreams.

Next morning, he narrates the dreams to his parents who interpret them. A dream is considered to be good if some iron elements like knives, axes, spears, etc., are seen. Climbing high up the mountains or going with male friends for hunting is

\(^{237}\)Often it happens that the bride may not know the groom prior to the wedding since there is no formal introduction and the parents fix all th marriage formalities.

\(^{238}\)n. 25, p. 70.

\(^{239}\)n. 211, p. 5.
also considered good. Killing of snakes or any creature is considered a bad dream. Carrying anything in the hand especially any creature except snakes augurs well for the boy. If there is no dream at all it is considered a good omen.

When the final negotiation for marriage is completed as per the result of the groom's dream, preparations commence for the marriage ceremony. The parents fix the date for marriage, without the knowledge of the bride and the groom. Most marriages take place in the month of January. The date on which the full moon falls is preferred. The marriage settlement is decided by the parents of both parties. During marriage, the girl must not be in menses. When the matter is made known to the bride, she starts lamenting with her friends; she is overcome with the thoughts of leaving her home and family. Drinking rice-beer with atam (a kind of chutney made of some vegetable and spices) prepared by herself and her friends is common. All her friends also bring rice-beer with atam. They also cry with the bride while singing sentimental songs in a lamenting tone. The songs are so powerful and sweet that they touch deeply the hearts of her friends. Lamenting goes on till the marriage is over.

The family begins to dry paddy for preparing rice-beer and food for the marriage feast. Weaving of shawls for marriage presentations are seen to by her relatives, friends and well wishers. The ladies usually help in pounding the soaked rice for rice-beer which serves as the main drink for the marriage escort party. Traditional songs are sung by the ladies as they pound the rice.

\footnote{n. 211, p. 6.}

\footnote{n. 26, p. 70.}

\footnote{n. 211, p. 6.}

\footnote{n. 25, p. 70.}

\footnote{n. 211, p. 6.}
4.2.2.4. Marriage ceremony

According to the Maram custom, a marriage usually takes place at night. On the marriage day the betrothed girl is not allowed to go out. Her maiden companions come in and sing songs on that day. With them she goes to the spring for bathing to get ready for the marriage. Towards evening they will return home and have rice beer. They will entertain the bride, singing folk songs till the send off ceremony begins.

On the wedding day the bridegroom too goes along with his friends to the spring to take bath and collects three stones to make baiita (the hearth). Towards evening, he and his friends return carrying the stones to akungki, the main gate of the village and keep them hidden there.

At the send-off ceremony in the bride’s house, her mother gives the bride her own necklaces and makes the bride wear them around her neck. Her best maid is with her to help and serve her. Again along with her friends, the bride’s mother laments with the bride in songs. It is the responsibility of the Kapangpaipmi (mediator) to ensure that the bride reaches in time for the wedding. Kapangpaipmi would call her to go for marriage ceremony, but the women in the house press her on to delay the departure, by embracing her. Ultimately, the mediator would have to drag her by the hand to move her out of the house. As the bride leaves the house, her mother blesses her by offering rice-beer in wild banana leaves.

The bride is escorted by the relatives, friends and the villagers to the bridegroom’s residence. The groom’s party welcome them warmly at the village gate. At that moment, dance groups of both parties march out performing thrilling dances and traditional yells in apparently challenging postures.

As the bride’s party reaches the house of the groom, led by the Kapangpuimei, the ladies of the groom’s clan compete with each other by performing psiita (singing and dancing). After a while, the dancers are interrupted by the male party in order to stop their aggressiveness. Then the bride is received by her mother-in-law.
Before entering the house of the groom, the bride has to stamp on a new kafii or thebek (small spade) placed at the steps leading to the house\textsuperscript{245}. Iron is considered as a cool and pure metal and stamping on it signifies that the girl is willing to live in peace and harmony in her new home. According to tradition, the bride is helped by her mother-in-law as she steps into the house over a kafii or thebek with her right leg first. The best-maid also steps over it.\textsuperscript{246} It is also enough that ‘Kapangpaipui’ touches the feet of the girl with it.\textsuperscript{247} In the room, the couple is made to sit, and marriage vows are exchanged. The bride and groom offer rice-beer to the deity in a fresh plantain cup. Then the bride pours the rice-beer in front of the bridegroom\textsuperscript{248}, indicating that she is ready to start her duty as the housewife. She, then, offers rice-beer to the husband in the cup made of plantain leaf. He accepts the drink. This cup along with other leaves used for the ceremony in the room are collected by the mother-in-law of the bride and kept safely on the right side of the roof as sacred.\textsuperscript{249} People believe that if any rat or creatures touch this, it brings bad luck for the family.

Coins are also distributed to the escort party as a token of gift for the marriage. This is called Rahang-Rali Tam. Singing of songs on the wedding night and exchange of songs between the males and females (ali kalem) were common in olden days.\textsuperscript{250} After the completion of this part of the marriage ceremony, it is time for the companions of the bride to bid farewell to her. During this time the bridegroom goes to his own Rehangki to be with his friends and also to give time for the companions of the bride to sing songs and bid farewell. While the bridegroom is out, he is well

\textsuperscript{245} In the absence of a kafii or thebek, a piece of iron will also do.

\textsuperscript{246} n. 211.

\textsuperscript{247} n. 25, p. 71.

\textsuperscript{248} Cf. n. 211. Th. Thumbu is of the opinion that the bride pours rice beer over their feet.

\textsuperscript{249} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{250} Ibid.
guarded for it is very inauspicious for his married life, if any one perchance stamps on
his heel while walking. The husband returns soon after the bride’s party leaves. He
should be with his newly married wife before she falls asleep or before any rat runs
across. If any rat runs across it was believed that the rat has married the bride.251
Marital intercourse within the dwelling house is prohibited for the initial nights of
married life.252

Early morning the next day, all the male members of both parties are involved
in various competitions like wrestling, shot-put, and jumps.253 According to Hodson,
wrestling is only permitted when the girl comes from another village.254 Those
gathered around them will encourage the participants with chants and applause. At
this time, the husband and wife will go to fetch water255. On the way back, the
husband collects the stones from the main gate, where they had been kept hidden, and
brings them to the house to make a new fireplace. With this water they start cooking
for themselves. Only new vessels are to be used for cooking. The couple sits side by
side and drinks rice-beer and discuss, while they cook.256 On this day they kill a
healthy cock and cook it without chilly and salt to be eaten only by the bridegroom.
The wife is allowed to have only rice beer the whole day. The husband should finish
the chicken within that day. If he cannot finish it off, they make a pit near the pillar of
the house, throw it in and cover it up with mud. On this day the couple offers rice beer
to God (azhou maliak).257 With this function, their married life truly begins.

251 n. 25, p. 72.

252 n. 50, p. 87.

253 n. 211.

254 n. 50, p. 145.

255 Cf. n. 211, p.5. Th. Thumbu is of the opinion that the wife and mother-in-law, and
not the husband, go together early in the morning to fetch water.

256 Ibid.

257 n. 142, n. 25, p. 72.
4.2.2.4.1. The Zangrii ceremony

There are five days of rituals for the newly married woman.

- On the first day of her marriage she stays in her husband’s house.

- On the second day she go to stay in her parents’ house and stays for the night.

- On the third day she returns to her husband’s house with rice beer and offers it to the neighbours and relatives of the husband.

- On the fourth day she carries paddy from her house to her husband’s house along with a tiffin packed by her parents.

- On the fifth day the couple go to the field which could even be the forest at the back yard of their house, provided it is facing the east. On her way back from the field, she carries firewood in her basket.

4.2.2.5. Bride Price

The bride price varied according to the tribes and villages, though there was always a bride price. Among the Marams, the husband’s family gives to the girl’s family some gifts like a shawl for the girl’s brother and a spear for the father of the girl. The parents of the girl receive some money too. The newly-wed wife receives for herself two chickens and some eatables. The children of the ‘sadung’ who come for the feast are given eatables and some coins. According to Mr. Ng. Kuhingba, the groom’s family gives two or three apai (shawl) with one Karampai (White Shawl).

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258 n. 142.

259 n. 25, p. 72.

260 Interview with Ng. Kuhingba of Maram Bazar.
4.2.3. Death

The customary practices and rituals vary according to the age group of the diseased and the nature of death.

4.2.3.1. Death of an Elder - a Natural Death.

4.2.3.1.1. Announcement of Death

If someone dies, the Atingha announces early in the morning that a particular person has died. Once the announcement is made, the people of the village gather to pay their respects to the dead. No one will go to the fields that day. The relatives come to look after the dead man until the burial is over.\textsuperscript{261}

4.2.3.1.2. Preparation for Burial

The death of those who are above seven years will be mourned for two days. The burial ceremony is performed by the whole village, male and female alike. If a person dies in the evening, the villagers come to keep vigil by the dead person’s corpse. The corpse is washed by the son if the deceased is the head of the family and by the daughter, if it is the mother. After washing, the body is covered with the person’s own clothes from neck to the feet.

\textit{Atingha} plays a very important role on this day. He has to fetch the water which is used for cooking for the family of the deceased. He ensures that the firewood used for cooking that day, is from the stem of the tree. When the meal is over, \textit{Atingha} sacrifices a hen or cock depending on the gender of the person. The sacrificed bird is hung on the wall and in the evening they cook and offer it to the neighbours. The people who come for the funeral bring with them paddy for the family of the deceased in small bamboo baskets.

\textsuperscript{261} n. 25, p. 123.
If the person dies in the evening or during the day, a herbivorous domestic animal is slaughtered. Thus a buffalo or cow is slaughtered if the person is rich, and a goat, if poor. While one group gets the meat ready, another group gets the coffin ready. It is generally made of wood and has no cover. Big hollow trees are also cut to the size and used to serve as coffin. *Atingha* then places the body in the coffin with the help of relatives.

There is a custom of bringing weapons of war and tools used by him like a spear, shield, spade and knife and they are kept at the side of the dead man’s head. The one who had used stones and wood in fighting with the neighbour while alive, should be accompanied by a *ragoi* (the handle of an axe).\(^{262}\) The son usually brings a cup of rice beer and places it by the head.

The body of a lady should be accompanied by a basket, knife, *kokpi*,\(^ {263}\) spade, *langmu*\(^ {264}\) and cup. They would even put on her necklace or other belongings. If the family wants to take back some of these belongings, they take a particular plant called ‘N’bu’\(^ {265}\) and touch them with it. The daughter usually brings a cup of rice beer and places it by the head.

The shawls placed on the dead are even in number. If the shawls are in odd number, the edge of the topmost shawl should be cut and placed on the top. The shawls used by the diseased which are eaten or cut by rats or burned in a fire, should be cut, mended and washed, before being placed on the body.

\(^{262}\) n. 142.

\(^{263}\) Kokpi is a traditional instrument used for softening the cotton.

\(^{264}\) Langmu is a traditional instrument used for making thread from the cotton.

\(^{265}\) N’bu is a thorny bush which causes allergy and pain.
4.2.3.1.3. Preparation of the Grave

The grave is dug in the village itself. Generally it is dug in front of the house or in front of the house of a relative. The grave is dug in the afternoon and never in the morning. The grave digging is always begun by Atingba and, later, others help him.

The body is buried along with the weapons and rice beer, etc., placed in the coffin on the left side of the body. Atingba takes a tiizii (bead) from the ornament of the deceased and, powdering it, places it on the face of the dead. He places the tamhing plant\(^{266}\) inside the coffin. Tamhing admits a person to heaven. The spears are kept so that, the evil spirit who is blocking the way to atopnirek (heaven) may be afraid and allow the dead person to enter heaven. So after placing all these items, like the spear, tamhing, etc., the corpse is covered with a shawl and is ready to be confined to the grave.

The burial proper takes place towards sunset. A gun shot is fired into the grave to drive away all evil spirits. Before the coffin is laid in the grave, Atingba burns a bunch of thatch, taken from the house of the diseased, inside the grave. This is to give light for the soul as it cannot see in the dark. Then the coffin is lowered and flat stones are placed over the coffin. The earth is heaped and levelled to the accompaniment of gun shots and the wailing of women.

4.2.3.1.4. Distribution of Agha

After the burial, Agha (portions of meat) is distributed. They give out the meat in the way they think deceased would have done it if he were alive, i.e., large portions for those with whom the diseased was more intimate and who, during his lifetime received much from him and vice-versa. The people leave for home after receiving the Agha. Before entering their house, they wash their hands and then take the Agha.

\(^{266}\) In the olden days, people used to make mats and mattress with this plant. It is believed that the diseased will use it in paradise to dry paddy.
inside. They cook the Agha and eat it. If Agha is not sufficient, then meat brought from elsewhere can be used. On that day the people who come to mourn should not eat vegetables and, while cooking, they should make sure that the food they cook should not overflow.

Soon after the burial, Atingha takes a leaf called sazimii and pours water on it and observes the flow of water to predict about the family and the dead person. After the prediction is completed, the water on the leaf is drained out into a freshly made hole. After this, he washes the bed of the deceased. For all the services that Atingha rendered, the family gives him some paddy in his shawl. He is also to be given Agha, a leg and the head of the animal that was killed.

4.2.3.1.5. Divination

That night after the burial, before the family goes to sleep, they place ash or husk at the entrance of the house in which he died. On the next day, they go to see foot prints, if any. This is a form of divination to see whether the dead person’s soul is at peace or not. If the foot prints lead back to the house, the people believe that it is a bad omen. The opposite is a good sign. There is also the custom of putting ash on top of the tomb. If a small hole is seen on top of the ash on the following day, then the person has surely gone to the next world.

4.2.3.1.6. Embellishment of the Grave

Usually on the day after the burial the grave is embellished by relatives and friends. The elders of the village make an effigy of the dead person in ceremonial dress and place it on the tomb. A wooden gun, spears, and knives are placed on the tomb. These symbolise the man’s expertise in dealing with these weapons while he was alive. If children are buried, then only toys and flowers are placed.

On a man’s grave, a particular sign called arii is made on the tomb. There must be at least three arii. If the man had more than three wives, arii should be more. If the man happened to have an affair with a lady, who just gave birth to a baby and is
observing N'bang, a statue of a lady who is breast feeding a child should be made. One who is very famous in a war is honoured with an arii in the riihii (common sitting place) of the village.

If the family of the dead man is rich, then more cattle are killed and meat is given to the village. Meat is kept in the house of the deceased for three days. During these three days, the family members eat curry without chilly but salt can be used.

Three days after the death of a person, the family members go to the Paimimai, in order to ascertain the cause of the death. They go to him with a gourd of rice beer, paddy and ginger in a small basket. On the following day, the Paimimai gives the cause of the death of the deceased.

4.2.3.2. Death of a Minor

The funeral rite of the child is more or less same as those of the elder with the following differences. When a child below 7 years of age dies, the village will observe germa called tainat only for one day. As soon as the child is dead, the body will be bathed and laid out. The paternal aunt is not allowed to present any gifts to the child, especially the sanaimachem (the clothes that she made for the child).

It is the duty of Atingba to dig the grave for the dead. Before the coffin is laid in the grave, Atingba burns a bunch of thatch, taken from the house of the diseased, inside the grave.

4.2.3.3. N'bang’ Kataiki (Death during N'bang)

This is the ritual of 10 days after the birth of the child. If the child dies during the N'bang days, no rituals will be performed. Without much delay, the family hires people to bury the child. Instead of a coffin, the child will be put into a clay pot and be buried inside the house near the pillar.
If the people realise that the mother is on the verge of death during labour, they cut the wall of the house and remove her out of the house and let her die outside. If she dies, no one even touches her. The family hires people to bury her. She is not given bath. All her belongings are removed out of the house and thrown into the jungle.

If the father dies during N’bang, the whole family will vacate the house. They do not take even a single thing from the house. For his burial they hire people, and even the expenses towards it are met by the neighbours or relatives. No rituals are performed and there will neither be a coffin made nor the Agha.

4.2.3.4. Anago Kamai

In the olden days most of the families had more than 15 children. However, due to poor health care, many children would die. If many children happen to die in a family, the elders instruct the family to perform a ritual called anago kamai. In this case the family makes a coffin and buries the child. However, no one should cry, nor should there be any Agha.

4.2.3.5. Suicide

If a person commits suicide, no rituals are performed. The family has to hire people from outside for the burial. No coffin is made. If a person commits suicide inside his/her house, the house is abandoned. The family does not take anything from the house.

4.2.3.6. Death from natural calamities

When a person is drowned or killed by wild animals or any other natural calamities, no coffin or Agha is made for him/her. The custom of pulling a stone for the dead is not performed for those who died during N’bang, natural calamities, anagokamai or committed suicide.
On the other hand, the people who are murdered have all the rituals performed as for one who died a natural death. Those who die in war are buried in a lingtiipung (common cemetery). As the burial is in progress, the people perform the traditional yell of death.

A ‘death-ritual’ is performed on the heads of other tribesmen brought to Sagong after a war. The one who killed and severed the head would give the Agha. In this case the animal is not be killed. People catch hold of the animal for Agha and cut four to five chunks of meat from the live animal and throw the meat. Observing the meat, they predict the future and study the character of the one who cut off the head. Once this is done, they kill the animal and all the people can have the meat. This meat is eaten on the same day and the remainder is thrown into a pit and buried.

If one of the couple dies, the other person cannot use the paddy or the chilli that was cultivated by them. This is exchanged with the neighbours or relatives. The ceiling of the kitchen is replaced. The bed of the dead person is kept outside the house until the first day of the next month, after which it is brought into the house.

4.3. Cultivation

4.3.1. Preparation of the Soil

Only after the Sagong has began the cultivation are the people allowed to begin their cultivation. However, five days after the month of Kanghi (in January), depending on the convenience of the family, the whole family goes to the jungle facing east and pretends to be digging the field, saying ata ta saragale (let there be a good crop for the whole year). This ritual is performed before the sunrise. The one who does the first ritual digging fasts on rice beer until the ceremony is over. Some may also dig near the main gate of the khel. As they return home, they carry some dry wood and burn them in the fireplace.

267Cf. Chapter 2, Duties of Sagong Gongdi and Sagong.
In the month of Lungroukii (February-March) the family begins preparing the field and garden. Normally the work begins before sun rise. Just before the work starts, the head of the family spits on his palm three times and asks God's blessing upon the crop. The spitting is done three times to imitate God's creation. On the first day of digging, they can cook only after the sunrise.\textsuperscript{268} Ploughing and digging are done with spades while they chant and sing in unison to encourage one another and to make the work enjoyable. After the day's work, they return home with fun and merriment. Songs are sung in turns by the males and females all along the way.\textsuperscript{269}

4.3.2. Seed Sowing

Seed sowing is a very important ritual for the people. It is performed in the months of Fitiukii and Tingpukii (March, April and May). Once the soil is ready, they prepare for sowing the seed. However, hatching of chicks and death of any domestic animal are considered bad omens for sowing. In such cases they delay the sowing by a few days. On the night prior to the sowing of the paddy, the family kills a chicken, and opening up its crop and stomach, the father takes out pieces of rice from among the undigested food and bury below the barn where paddy is kept. That day no fire should be lit at the site where the seed is to be sown. While eating in the field, they must not drop any food on the soil that is prepared for sowing. As they sow the first few seeds, they should not see any holes. To avoid seeing holes, they quickly sow the first seeds. Those who go for sowing, are required to fast on wine till the sowing is over.

A day called Katam Manai is kept for the protection of the crops from insects and pesticides. On this day no one may go to the field, not even to the garden. Whatever is needed for the day is collected on the previous night.

\textsuperscript{268}n. 260.

\textsuperscript{269}n. 211, pp. 6-7.
4.3.3. Transplantation

Transplantation of seedlings starts in the month of Pokzingkii (June-July). All transplantation of paddy must stop before the N'pamra festival in the month of Lamangkii (August). During the planting season, it is the king's family who plants first, indicating that the time has come for planting. Soon after this, the villagers too can start planting in their fields. On the previous night to the plantation, the family kills a chicken and cooks it for the next day, as they are not allowed to cook on the plantation day. Those who go from the family for the initial planting, should fast on rice beer. The planting begins in one corner of the field. Along with the saplings, the leaves of Samiiting and Saba is used. As they plant, they utter, 'alnepeol sazir razuol bibito sabaroung kimlo bibito samibui kimlo' ('let the plant be lasting, the plantation quickly finished; let the stem of the plant be as strong as the saba tree and the crop be as numerous as the seeds of samii'). Once the planting begins, they can have food. It is important that no food be dropped in the field. All the left overs, including the waste, are to be collected and disposed off below the first saplings.

4.3.4. Harvesting

Harvesting starts in Mataikii (October-November), and continues up to Rakakii (November-December). However, all harvesting should stop prior to the starting of the month of Kanghikii. On the first day of the harvesting too, those who go for harvesting must fast on rice beer. Usually the women go to harvest first as they believe that things last more in the hands of a lady than man. They do not talk to anyone on their way to the field and back. The first one to harvest cuts the paddy that faces the house. They cut two tufts and place them in the basket. The first tufts of grain are kept separately and put into the barn without threshing.

Threshing of the paddy is done in the field itself. It is the lady who spreads the sack on the floor for thrashing the paddy. She carries the first three bundles of paddy for threshing. Only then the rest of the family start harvesting. The new paddy is used only from the month of November. Before using the paddy, on a particular
day, one member of the family goes to the barn and takes a few grains and eats. From then on, the paddy from the barn can be used regularly, as the need arises. Those who are poor and do not have enough paddy need not put the new grain into the barn. In that way they can use the new paddy according to their need even before the month of November.\textsuperscript{270}

The slash and burn cultivation too is done in the same way. However, only the seed sowing ritual is the most important in such cultivation.

4.4. Construction of houses

Among the Marams, the responsibility for building houses lies with the Village Council\textsuperscript{271}. Houses are constructed during the dry winter months and those interested in getting a house constructed should inform the village council early, so that they will know how many houses are to be constructed. The village council decides who all may build the houses. This is to ensure that there is enough manpower for construction of the required houses. Houses are built mainly for three reasons:\textsuperscript{272} a) when a young man wishes to build a house after living some years of married life in his father’s house and wants to build a separate home for himself; b) a householder whose dwelling has become old and uninhabitable; and c) when a husband who divorced his wife and wants to remarry, as it is not permissible to bring a new wife into the house where his first wife lives. In this case, the house belongs to the first wife.

All the able bodied men of the village are supposed to lend a helping hand; otherwise when his turn comes others will not cooperate with him. The houses of Marams are big and they work in groups of experts skilled in a particular type of

\textsuperscript{270}n. 142.

\textsuperscript{271}Some of those whom we interviewed said that the village council only needs to be informed regarding the construction of the houses.

\textsuperscript{272}n. 25, p. 133.
work. It is the duty of the one who builds the house to get the assistance of the required expert group according to the progress of the building.

The Marams houses indicate wealth and status of the owner. The most ordinary house is Sabangki or Kidaki followed by Rasangki, Kinabui, Aka ki, Zali ki, Rafiki and Bongtuki. All the houses have the same rituals except for a few difference of wealth display. All the three pillars and cross beam of the house have the same rituals. Houses may be built only during the month Kapok kii and Lung n'ron kii. In case they are unable to complete the house within Lung n'ron kii, they may continue in the month of Tingpuuki.

4.4.1. Collection of Thatch for the house

During the month of Rakak Kii the people go and look out for the thatch and halt there for the night. Once they see that it is good enough, they reserve it by tying or making a knot over the thatch. Once that is done they have to make ami kamaka (a fire made out of dry bushes) to let the people know that its already booked. Thereafter no one will cut that except the owner. Tying or forming the knot will be done only in the morning.

After 2 or 3 days they call their neighbours to help them in cutting the thatch. Once the thatch is dried they call the villagers or khel to help them in carrying it. In the olden days the Maram people were not allowed to use tin sheets for making the house. It is said that when the British left Maram the entire population of Maram could have made their house of galvanised iron sheets, if they had not been forbidden to do so by custom. These were sold to the Maos or Meities or they were taken by them. Making house with these sheets started only as recently as 1956 when the then Sagong Gongdi, Rangkarang gave them his blessing. For this act the Maram people give the king the hind leg of the animal killed whenever they make a house with the galvanised iron sheets.

The family of a deceased cannot cut thatch until and unless rakka is done. This day is observed as the day of departure for the dead and the living of the family. On
this day they kill a chicken for their meal. The food should be taken on that day itself. The family should not touch any one by mistake nor may others touch the family. This day is observed towards the end of Rakkap kii. The boys and girls of that family must wait for the sunset before they go to their respective dormitory.

4.4.2. Preparation of Posts and Beams

The posts and wooden beams, roughly trimmed from trees felled in the jungles, are brought up on the shoulders of men. The main front post for supporting the roof is called Kajang Chingdi. The Chingdi has to be selected by the owner of the house much earlier and should be kept marked. After selecting the tree, he should have some favourable dream about the tree. If the dream is about a crab or a live hen it is considered a good sign. To dream of someone weeping or of an animal being killed is a bad omen. The most inauspicious one is to dream about a snake. However, the dream is not the final word. Before felling the tree, the cutters would make, with two strokes of an axe, a diagonal incision near the bottom of the trunk. The splinter that falls out is carefully scrutinised. If the splinter falls with its bark downward, it is a good sign and the tree is accepted and cut. But should the splinter fall with the bark side upwards, it is a bad omen and the tree is rejected.

After felling the tree the bark is removed and the trunk is cut into a square post. The first two strokes of the axe is made by the owner of the future house. The night after cutting the Chingdi the owner is not allowed to fall asleep for fear that he may have bad dreams and so he is kept awake the whole night by his friends sitting around the fire and drinking rice-beer. After this sleepless night the building of the house may begin. The same procedure needs to be repeated to fetch the main beam Semjang (Kasiim) from the forest. Therefore often both Chingdi and Semjang are brought together to spare time and wakeful nights.\textsuperscript{273}

\textsuperscript{273}Ibid, p. 134.
The *Chingdi* forms the centre of the main wall in front and has to be erected first. The raising of this pillar is accompanied by a simple ceremony during which a cock is killed and rice-beer is served to all participating men. The *Semjang* must be a single piece of wood always placed from east to west of the house. If the builder is a rich man and wants to adorn his future house with a cross beam over his roof he has to kill a bull and distribute the meat among the villagers.\(^{27}\)

### 4.4.3. Completion of the House

There is no specific time limit for the final completion of the ordinary house.\(^{275}\) However, the house owner is anxious to occupy the house, lest an evil spirit take possession of it. The family often moves in as soon as the house is somewhat livable. The hearth, consisting of three stones of equal sizes, must be built on the right side of the door. The owner makes a ceremonial entrance into the house with a spear, a shield, a live cock and a few pieces of burning wood. As he enters, he shouts aloud to drive out the evil spirits. He is followed by a male friend who helps him to light the family fire. The owner places the burning sticks in the newly made hearth and thus establishes the household fire. From now on the fire must be kept burning for five days and five nights. On the first evening the family members enter the new house and prepare a meal from a cock killed for the ceremony. The housewife, however, must fast on the following day.\(^{276}\)

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\(^{274}\) Ibid. pp. 134-135.

\(^{275}\) n. 260.

\(^{276}\) n. 25, p. 135.
4.4.4. Types of Houses

4.4.4.1. Sabangki or Kidaki

This is a simple house. It has to be completed within three days. For 3 years they cannot go on the top of the roof, and this rule is applicable to all type of houses. No information needs to be given to the Village Council for making such houses. On the first day they remove the old house. The following day they will build the house. All the three pillars and Semjang should be put up before they can have food. In case a domestic animal gives birth or chicks hatch out that day, or even a death, they have to stop the construction for that day. While they are setting up the pillar, if any person dies, then they have to take out the pillars. Once the three pillars are set up the lady of the house goes and fetches water and sprinkles on all the pillars. As she sprinkles the water she utters these words: Sameituchii saduna deemlo which means if a fire breaks out, the water should cover it or let the house not catch fire. In the evening before the sunset they put the low ceiling on top of the makang rii (hearth). Then the man of the house takes the cock, a spear, a shield on his left hand and takes the fire with his right hand and enters the house. While he enters he utters these words: Nang pattiilo n'ki aluhiing atak tii tangle (You evil spirit, get out of the house and let there be richness and wealth in this house). Men who are outside will shout a particular yell called hatangle, while throwing splinters of wood at the back of the man; it is a sign of chasing evil away.

Then they start cooking the chicken. This chicken is given to the small boys and girls along with rice. It is spread on the mat which is used for cleaning rice and they have to eat it on the side of the house not in the front or at the back. The elders will be given wine and dog meat. It is customary that man should not eat rice at that place. They will have new rice pot and curry pot.

277The time limit within which a house has to be constructed refers to the structure of the building and the roof only. Time limit for other furnishings is not specified.
4.4.4.2. Rasangki

The house should be built within five days. This house construction is specially for the plot of land that has been occupied for a long time. The first day they remove the old house. The next day they build the house. Towards evening or before the sunset they take a dog which is to be killed for that day and take the dog around the house. Once that has been done they take the blood of the dog and sprinkle it around the three pillars.

4.4.4.3. Kinabui ki

The roof and structure of the house has to be completed within 5 days. They kill a cow. A person who has given the festival of merit or has done ‘haijou’ may make this house. Haijou is a display of one’s wealth. One has to be a rich person in order to feed the whole village. During Rakkakii the villagers help the family in harvesting and in preparing the feast. On this occasion a cow is killed with bare hands by the brothers-in-law. This is known as kalot kak. The whole village will have wine and meat, and in addition, they have to provide atam, a piece of meat to whoever comes. They have to give a piece of meat called tiila to the whole khel and a piece of meat to the clan head called N’kunatam. All the clan heads will take this piece of meat and make a commitment saying that if any person dies while pulling the stone, no one will take revenge and no one should be held responsible for it. At the same time on occasions like haijou when they have wine, no one should talk ill of others and if they do so they may be beaten up and no one will be held responsible for it. It is said that people were disciplined and well behaved in spite of the drinks fearing the said act.

During haijou, they must also kill at least one mithun. It is said in the olden days, among the Marams there were no cows or buffaloes. There is a story how the cow came to Maram for the first time at Majungmai, cow dung was seen there and

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278 This is an expensive custom after which a house owner can build special houses of wealth display.
they found the dung quite different; so they followed the footprint and got the cow. With that the rearing of cows started. Instead, it is said buffaloes were bought from Meiteis and reared.

For the making of this house, *kinabui*, the first day they remove the old house and the next day they make the hole for the pillars. Only on the third day they put the pillars in. On the fourth day they rest and on the fifth day they put in the *Kinabui* which has the shape of a stool made of cane.

4.4.4.4. *Akaki*

The construction of akaki has the same rituals as *Kinabui*. The only difference is that they put in a different design called *aka*. When they have to do this, they give meat *tiila* to all the villagers, even to the widows who stay with their parents.

4.4.4.5. *Zali ki*

*Zali* is an additional show of wealth after the completion of the house of aka. Even here everything remains the same except for an additional design of *Zali*. Here too another *tiila* has to be given to all the households.

4.4.4.6. *Rafii*ki

A person who wants to built this type of house must have a house of *Zaliki*. In addition to this he has to go for war and should have killed an enemy. They also have to pull the stone of the living - *tiichem*. Then *tiila* will be given, as well as a basket of paddy, to the households. So far, to the knowledge of the elders, there are two such houses in Maram Khullen.

During the making of *kinabui, aka, zali, haijou*, pulling of stone, etc., in the village, the owner has to honour this person by giving him quite a big piece of extra meat. This person has to dance the traditional male dance and yell in a peculiar voice called *kusuiku*. Only he may yell this particular yell. Anyone else doing it will be
punished. The speciality of this house is that its is made of wood. If they are not able to make the whole house at least the front room of the house must be completed.

4.4.4.7. Bungtaki

It is an improvement upon rafiiki. This person in addition to all the rituals, have to go for war three times or should have killed three enemies during the war. The speciality of the house is that the Kajang Chingdi is so big that the door is cut out from itself. So far there is only one such house known to them in Maram Khullen.

4.5. Festivals and Customary Law

Maram festivals essentially consist in invocation and glorification of deities (during which certain gennas are to be observed) followed by community feasts. Feasts are powerful means to inculcate among the people a strong community sense. Children learn the Maram customs and traditions through festivals. Festivals occur at regular intervals and these become occasions to re-live their rich past and promote a sense of unity. Maram festivals are celebrated on particular days of Maram months.

4.5.1. The Maram Calendar

The months are calculated according to the phases of the moon. With the first sighting of the moon after the new morn, the month begins. The English Naga Lunar Calendar 2007 shows that most of the months have 30 days. Only four months this year have 29 days. Every third year would be a leap year and a month called Sabamkii with 28 - 30 days would be added to adjust the year cycle.

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279 Earlier such integrated calendars were not available. The months were announced according to the moon. Often visibility was a problem. Elders say that earlier, most of the months had 28 days only. Two months Pokzingkii (June) and Lamsengkii (August) have thirty days each. And every three years a new month is added to adjust the days.

280 n. 25, p. 78.
Some rituals like Sakiira – which is the prayer and worship to the full moon and Kalumra - the worship of the New moon – occur every month. The agricultural festival is celebrated at the beginning of most of the months. It is a ritual performed for the protection of crops. Apart from these ritual celebrations, every month has some festival or other which has both aspects of ritual and celebration. Among them, Kanghi, Punghi and Mangkhang occupy a very special place for the people.

4.5.1.1. Kiipok kii - (January - February)

This month has a festival called Achuat. It starts around the 16th or 17th of the month and is celebrated for nine days. This is the festival during which people construct houses and get married. Some important days in this festival are:

4.5.1.1.1. Lambi - on this day rituals are performed by the family so that the paddy in the barn is not destroyed.

4.5.1.1.2. Luikak - the word literally would mean multiplication of seeds. On this day rituals are performed for fertility of crops, animals and humans.

4.5.1.1.3. Kuitupaiba - This day is dedicated for getting married. Construction of houses begin on this day.

4.5.1.2. Lungrou Kii - (February - March)

Chutli, an agricultural feast, is celebrated on the 3rd or 4th of the month. It is a day dedicated for the purification of oneself, house and field. Achuat is again celebrated for 8 days starting from 16th or 17th of the month. Those who did not get married in the month of Kiipok Kii could get married on these days.

4.5.1.3. Fiibui Kii - (March - April)

Mala is observed on 2nd or 3rd day of the month. On this occasion the people pray to god for good crops. Sowing of seeds begins this month.
Kabutra is observed on 25th or 26th of the month. It is a day of the forest. From this day onwards cutting and stockpiling of firewood stops for the year.

4.5.1.4. Tingpui Kii - (April - May) 28

Mala, is observed on 2nd or 3rd day of the month. On this the people pray to god for good crop. Sowing of seeds continues through this month.

Mangkang festival is on the 4th day of the month. It is the feast of women. The festival begins with a purification of women. With the celebration of this festival, all the newly married women stop going to Raliiki. Marumanai is observed on the 5th day of the month. It is a day set aside for the purification of men.

Tingpui festival is a two day festival that begins on 18th or 19th of the month. On this day the newly married ladies go to their parents' house and come back carrying some Adiim zhou (rice beer) prepared by their parents to their husband's house. Along with the rice beer she also carries a bowl of meat, particularly dog meat. They also offer rice beer and meat to God. Among the people of Maram, this festival is given more importance than Kanghi. These days are set aside for pulling of stones.

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This festival is considered the most important festival of the Maram, mainly because of the story where it is said that, on this festival a poor man and a rich man went to the field. As they were on their way to the field, it is said, a spirit came to them and asked why they are going to the field. The poor man answered that he was so poor that he did not have anything at home to celebrate. Hence, he was going to the field. On the other hand the rich man replied mockingly that there was nothing to celebrate about. Therefore he too was going to the field. At this the spirit replied to the poor man blessing him saying that he should be rich until his death. On the other hand he cursed the rich man and asked him to be poor and even go to the depth of scratching the ground to look for food and to die out of hunger. It is on this account that this festival is considered as the most important festival of the Maram.
Katilura\textsuperscript{282} is observed on 26\textsuperscript{th} or 27\textsuperscript{th} of the month, for the safety of the people who go to the fields at katiluga.

4.5.1.5. Pokmataikii - (May - June)

Mala is observed on 2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd} of the month.

One day between 9\textsuperscript{th} - 11\textsuperscript{th} is observed in memory of Rangataiba\textsuperscript{283} Powting. This day is also called Saraha. On this day the elders, along with the Sagong and Atingba, observe the climate and make weather forecasts.

On 16\textsuperscript{th} of the month, Lamkhana Powting is observed. On this day, the people of Lamkhana observe genna so that warriors may get strength and victory in battle.

On 17 or 8th, Aratii is observed by the rich people. On this day they observe genna to purify the special work they would take up during the year viz., pulling of stone for the living or the dead, construction of special houses, etc.

On 27 or 28, the Sagong and his family observe Aratii for the purification of the household and the fields.

4.5.1.6. Pokzing Kii - (June - July)

Sazii Katai is observed on 2 or 3\textsuperscript{rd} of the month. It is on this day that the wealthy start lending paddy to the poor.

Kasii would be observed as a ritual day on 17\textsuperscript{th} of the month, during which the people go to the field to pull out paddy seedling for transplantation.

\textsuperscript{282}This ritual has a direct reference to the Katiluga story mentioned in chapter 1, under Mapoumai clan.

\textsuperscript{283}Refer to Chapter 1 – War with Angami Tribe. Rangtaiba was a person who had extraordinary power. He is remembered with great reverence by the people. His tombstone is invoked upon for timely rain and in case of excessive rain.
Pokdong is observed as a ritual day on 19th of the month, during which they start the transplantation of paddy.

4.5.1.7. Punghi Kii - (July - August)

On the third day of the month, Saramanai is observed as a genna to appease the spirits. On this day rituals are performed for purification to prevent unnatural deaths like suicides and accidents.

The 16th of the Month is called Lingsa. The festival of Punghi begins with the announcement of the festival on this day. The 19th is called Masiu during which animals are killed. On 21st of the month, Nidi is celebrated. On this day, the newly married will get gifts from their families and friends. On the 23rd of the month, Sabangha is observed by the rich people. On this day, they perform a ritual called Gamdong, so that they may not suffer from any illness. The next day is Hangira, marking the end of the festival.

4.5.1.8. Lamsang Kii - (August - September)

On the 2nd or 3rd of the month, Mala is observed. On the 5th day, a genna called Katam is observed for the protection of crops and vegetables from insects and pests. From the 16th of the month, N'pamra is celebrated for 7 days.

4.5.1.9. Tarou Kii - (September - October)

Mala is observed on the 2nd or 3rd of the month On the 8th or 9th Ka'ngba Pouting is observed.284

On the 16th day of the month genna called Sagong liipi is observed. It a day observed for protection of crops from wild animals and birds. On the next day, Matii liipe is observed by everyone in the village, for crop protection.

284 See appendix 4 for a detailed description of this festival.
On the 18\textsuperscript{th} or 19\textsuperscript{th} a \textit{genna} called \textit{Kada kasa} is observed for the protection of crops. On the 20\textsuperscript{th} is \textit{Maputita} during which the family of \textit{Sagong} harvests the field. The 21\textsuperscript{st} is called Matiita. With this ritual, all the people may begin harvesting.

On the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of the month, a \textit{genna} called \textit{Fiimai Taron} is observed for the health of the men in the village.

4.5.1.10. \textit{Makaiii} - (October - November)

On the 3\textsuperscript{rd} day, mala is observed. On the 9\textsuperscript{th} or 10\textsuperscript{th} of the month, a \textit{genna} called \textit{katilura} is observed for the fields of Katiluga. On the 16\textsuperscript{th} or 17\textsuperscript{th} of the month, a \textit{genna} called \textit{Ponting} is observed for victory in war. On the 18\textsuperscript{th} of the month, a ritual called Puimaimatai is observed for the health of all women. On this day, they go and harvest. On the 19\textsuperscript{th} of the month, \textit{Ateenmatai} is observed for the health of the cattle. On this day, even the cows may be given names.

4.5.1.11. \textit{Rakakii} - (November - December)

On the 18\textsuperscript{th} of the month, the festival of \textit{M'pamra} starts. The festival continues for seven days. On the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of the month, a \textit{genna} called \textit{Kataima Rakak} is observed. It is a celebration between the dead and the living. This is the last day of communication between the dead who died during the year and the living.

On the 23\textsuperscript{rd} of the month, \textit{Karingmai Rakak} is celebrated. This is for the living so that all illness will be removed from the body. On the 24\textsuperscript{th} of the month, \textit{Sangkai} is observed for the purification of the child. \textit{Bonlot} is observed on the last day of the month. From this day onwards, people are allowed to use the new paddy from the barn.

4.5.1.12. \textit{Kanghi Kii} - (December - January)

\textit{Kanghi} is a month of competitions. On the 3\textsuperscript{rd} day of the month, \textit{N'lem} is observed. It is a purification rite for men so that they may win in war and
competitions. On the 4th day of the month, Marumanai is observed. On this day men ritually cleanse themselves by taking bath. On the 16th or 17th is Lingsa, on which the festival of Kanghi is announced. On the 20th of the month is Masin during which the cattle is slaughtered in preparation for the festival. The 23rd is the day of Nidi. On this day they celebrate the feast. Matiha is celebrated on the 24th of the month. On this day wrestling will take place in the respective khels. On the 25th would be Sabangha. On this day wrestling is held in the khel of Sagong Gongdi. On the 26th of the month Hangira is observed. This brings the feast to a conclusion. On the 27th of the month a second Hangira is observed for the well being of blacksmiths, fortune tellers and craftsmen.

4.5.2. Chasing the Demons

In order to chase out demons from the village, a dog is taken around the village and then killed and thrown to the demons. But the dog’s head is kept in the common sitting place with a stick stuck between the jaws to keep the mouth wide open.285

4.5.3. Saramanai

This is observed when a dead body is brought from some other place, e.g., when a person dies in the hospital, war, etc. The day following the arrival of the dead body is observed as Saramanai. On this day, all the families kill chicken and offer a piece of meat to God so that such incidents may not happen again.286

4.5.4. War

Before the people go to war they kill a chicken and predict what the day will be like. As they kill the chicken the leg of the chicken is examined by some of the elders and they predict how the war is going to be. If they predict that they are going

285 n. 260.
286 n. 142.
to win, they go for war, but if they feel that they are going to lose the war they do not go.

4.5.5. Achimarung (spread of disease)

This is observed when there is a spread of disease in the village. In this case they kill a dog and the head of the dog is placed in a place called Achimarung. They plant a stick and on top of it the head of the dog is placed. The hands and legs will be thrown at the Akungki (main gate) of Puinameiki, Lamkanaki, Ngaiimeiki and Bungnameiki.

4.6. Crimes and Customary Law

4.6.1. Family (Personal Law)

Marriage within the moiety\textsuperscript{287} was forbidden. There were severe punishments for those who broke this law. In the earlier days, marriages were arranged by parents taking into account this law. Those who eloped were looked down upon and its stigma passed on to their children. Because of this, though divorce was common, marriage by elopement was practically absent.\textsuperscript{288}

However, the situation has changed due to the blessing given by the Sagong of Magai-Bungnamai, who permitted marriage between clans and marriage within the clan to the fifth degree of relationship.

According to the Maram marriage custom, a boy and a girl of the same clan cannot get married especially the blood relations of the father but they may marry

\textsuperscript{287}Moiety is a basic subdivision of a tribe within which marriage was not permitted. For details, cf. n. 25, pp. 53-59.

\textsuperscript{288}n. 142.
from the mother’s side.\textsuperscript{289} Though Marams followed monogamy by and large, there were also cases of polygamy and polyandry. These were not strictly prohibited and depended on the individual’s choice.\textsuperscript{290} However, T.C. Hodson says, ‘in the Mao, Maram and Kabui groups, polygamy is very rare and is not encouraged by public opinion.\textsuperscript{291} Though no specific age is mentioned anywhere, once the boy or girl attained 16 years of age, they are eligible for marriage. The parents were responsible for finding the partner for their children. Many a time the boy and the girl get married without knowing each other.\textsuperscript{292}

\textbf{4.6.1.1. Fines attached for breaking engagement}

After all the engagement formalities have been completed, if a boy or a girl breaks the engagement, a fine is imposed on the person who breaks the engagement. The fine is given in the form of a healthy black spotless cow. There are times where no fine has been imposed depending on the individual or the family.\textsuperscript{293} In case the boy dies after the engagement, the girl will let her hair grow long for some months. But she may get married after some time.\textsuperscript{294}

\textbf{4.6.1.2. Divorce}

Among the Marams, divorce was very common, and yet it was difficult, due to complications of dividing the property. When one of the couple feels that living together has become a burden, they may take recourse to divorce. In such cases, it is

\textsuperscript{289} Interview with (Late) Ng. Luikang of Maram Bazar. He was an elected representative of the people, a statesman and a social worker.

\textsuperscript{290} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{291} n. 50, p.94.

\textsuperscript{292} n. 289.

\textsuperscript{293} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{294} n. 260.
the wife who goes away from the house. But there is always a third party who will try to compromise and try to save the family. If she returns after some persuasion, then the reunion of the marriage takes place. But if she does not want to return, then, the couple is considered divorced. The child belongs to the father, even if he/she has gone with the mother.  

4.6.1.3. Infidelity

The infidelity of a husband is taken leniently. If the husband brings in a mistress and if the lawful wife has a son, then the lawful wife can take away the property of the husband in the name of her son. She stays in the house and the divorced husband has to make another house. If the lawful wife has no offspring, then the whole property goes to her except the paddy fields.  

The infidelity of a wife is taken very seriously. If found guilty, her head is shaved off and is sent out of the house only with her inner garments and without any property. On the other hand if the husband commits infidelity towards a married woman and if the woman’s husband or relatives catch them red-handed, he may be killed on the spot or beaten up very severely.

4.6.1.4. Legitimacy of children out of wedlock

If a lady gets pregnant out of wedlock and is unable to identify the father of the child, she is sent out of the house and the village. No other village will give her shelter. In this way she is compelled to stay in the jungle until she gives birth. Once she gives birth, she may return, but the baby has to be killed and thrown out in the

\[295\] Ibid.
\[296\] n. 25, p. 72.
\[297\] n. 289.
\[298\] n. 260.
jungle.\textsuperscript{299} Usually the child is killed by poking its feet with the thorns of a wild tree. It is believed that this type of death will prevent the child from chasing and torturing the mother in the land of the dead.\textsuperscript{300}

The children born of mixed parents have the social status of their father. Once a girl is married to a Maram boy, she has to follow the customs and traditions of the Marams, and enjoys the social status of the Marams. While, if a boy of another tribe marries a Maram girl, he may either join the Maram tribe or take her to his society. If the boy wants to accept the legal status of Maram, he is accepted into the clan of the Maram girl.

\textbf{4.6.1.5. Rights of the individuals after the death of the partner}

If the husband dies, all the properties go to the wife. It is the same in case the wife dies. But in case the woman is childless, her rights are limited in taking over her husband’s property. The remaining goes to the husband’s family.\textsuperscript{301}

\textbf{4.6.1.6. Rights of children after the death of both parents}\textsuperscript{302}

Children get all the property after the death of their parents.

\textbf{4.6.1.7. Adoption}

There were no clear rules laid down for adoption. If the husband and wife wishes to adopt a child, they go to their relatives or the parents of the child whom they want to adopt. If the child of the family agrees, they take the child and look after

\textsuperscript{299}n. 260.

\textsuperscript{300}n. 289.

\textsuperscript{301}n. 260.

\textsuperscript{302}n. 260.
him/her as their own. There were also cases of Khabangna (slaves) bought by the family. The price was paid in terms of cattle and paddy to the villagers who brought them, often after the war, from another tribe.

4.6.1.8. Provisions for widows and widowers

Unlike the cases of divorce, widows and widowers enjoyed much more freedom. In fact there were lots of widows and widowers in the olden days, on account of feuds, wars and absence of health care. There was a dormitory for the widows, which the men frequented for entertainment. This provided an opportunity for many widows to get married. In the case of a widow marriage less people attend her marriage, and often the crowd consists of elders. A widower could marry a young girl as well, in which case, all the prescribed rituals would be followed. However less people attend such wedding ceremonies.

4.6.2. Laws of inheritance

Marriage provides a child with a socially recognised father and mother. If a couple has no male issue, the property goes to the son of the nearest relation of the father. If the property is acquired during the course of their married life, then the property may belong to the daughter if there are no sons. The wife is consulted in all matters regarding division of property. The eldest son inherits the major portion

303 n. 289.

304 The first preference goes to the husband’s elder brother’s sons; if there is no elder brother, the next in the line.

305 n. 25, p. 73.

306 Some of the traditional properties are: Fields, house, cattle, ahang (private firewood land), tamchii (where grains are stored), sazii koktii (walking stick made of metal), safiiti atiiring (complete set of necklace), karang (basket for carrying at the back), rampak (basket for storing things), takfi ranghun (box made of wood for storing clothes).
of the property while the remaining children get smaller shares according to their position in the family.\footnote{307} The ancestral property is kept by the eldest son.\footnote{308} If the father of the family dies, the responsibility of looking after the family and clearing all debts\footnote{309} rests on the eldest son.\footnote{310} A girl cannot inherit the land and fields, but gets Sazi Koktui, Safi tii, and household items like pots for making rice beer.\footnote{311} If any disputes arise over the land after the death of the parents, the case is settled by the Village Authority, keeping in mind the will of the one who gave them the land.\footnote{312}

4.6.3. Criminal Law

In a tribal society crimes were awarded very stringent punishments. Extreme severity in punishing the guilty, acts as a deterrent for everyone. Crimes were classified into Murder, Theft, Rape, Grabbing of land and Looting (riipim). The gravity of the crime was arrived at depending on whether it was committed by mistake, unintentionally or intentionally.\footnote{313}

\footnote{307}Interview with Mr. K. Namba. He is the present Sagong Gongdi of Maram Khullen. The Queen mother still performs various rites and rituals. Ng. Luikang adds, ‘Often times, the other children get according to the will of the parents which would be obviously less than the eldest son’s share.’

\footnote{308}n. 260.

\footnote{309}According to Ng. Luikang, ‘After the death of the parents, if there is debt, first acquired property of the father is sold to pay the debts, after which the remaining would be shared among the sons. If not such property, the eldest son who inherits the ancestral property will pay the debts.’

\footnote{310}n. 307.

\footnote{311}n. 260; Ng. Luikang adds: ‘If the family is wealthy, a part of the parents’ property may be given to the girl’.

\footnote{312}n. 307.

\footnote{313}n. 289.
It is the Village Authority that deals with crimes. Cases are dealt with depending on the degree of the crime. For murder cases the Sagong, along with the Village Authority (Sagong Kapra) and the Marahang Sadung (representatives from all the clans of village), settle the case. The Sadung would take part in settling such major cases and in taking oaths to ascertain the culprits.\textsuperscript{314} The Sadung would also take the responsibility if oaths are taken.\textsuperscript{315} But minor cases are dealt with by the Village Authority.

The Village Authority always takes the initiative for peace between the two parties when crimes are committed. The cases are settled in such a way that it is for the welfare of the village. Complaints are first put up to the Sagong Kapra and the proposals are taken to the Sagong. It is customary for the Sagong not to accept all the proposals and some are to be rejected. So it is a requirement to submit more than two proposals if the people want the Sagong to accept at least two proposals.\textsuperscript{316}

4.6.3.1. Punishment for crimes

4.6.3.1.1. Murder

The murderer has to pay the fine of one cow before the victim is buried. He is expelled from the village for a period of 7 to 10 years, depending on the gravity of the murder,\textsuperscript{317} and he has to go across a river.\textsuperscript{318} A fine of 3 - 7 cows is imposed according to the gravity of the crime. Meat is also given to all those who come for the funeral. There are even cases of imposing a fine of 11 cows.\textsuperscript{319} The bereaved family

\textsuperscript{314}n. 307.

\textsuperscript{315}n. 260.

\textsuperscript{316}n. 289.

\textsuperscript{317}n. 260.

\textsuperscript{318}n. 307.

\textsuperscript{319}Ibid.
or their relatives may even destroy the house of the culprit. If the person was killed during a robbery, the villagers may kill the robber or expel him from the village.

4.6.3.1.2. Rape

In the case of rape, the accused person has to pay a minimum fine of one cow and may even be beaten up by the villagers. The Sagong Kapra with the village authority decides the case, the appropriate punishment and fines.\footnote{\textsuperscript{320}}

4.6.3.1.3. Theft

Thieves and burglars are punished with beating and have to give a black cow as fine. Often he has to pay the double of what he has stolen.\footnote{\textsuperscript{321}}

4.6.3.1.4. Grabbing land

The village authority takes appropriate action after hearing the case.

4.6.4.2. Granting of pardon and right to appeal

In tribal law, there is seldom an accusation of partiality. Status and power does not play any role in dispensing justice.\footnote{\textsuperscript{322}} There is no person who can grant pardon to the accused, except the victim or his family. However, the accused has the right to request the village authority or the victim's family to reduce the fines imposed.\footnote{\textsuperscript{323}}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{320} n. 307, n. 289.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{321} n. 289}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{322} n. 307}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{323} n. 289.
4.6.4. Land Laws

For the Marams, land could belong to the village, clan, to the Cirele Board, to the Maram Union or to the individual. Community land is kept for community use. If anyone wants to stay or cultivate or cut firewood from the community land, they may do so but, no one is allowed to sell the property and the product from that particular land. The available land has been occupied by the villagers or the clan according to their convenience. Over the years, individual land may have been reduced on account of reckless sales of it. However, a person with little or no individual land, may cultivate the land of others provided the individual gives to the owner a rampoi. Sometimes, the owner of the land may come and collect whatever he wants from the land in place of rampoi. Agreements are made between the land owner and the cultivator to cultivate for two or three years. At times it happens that a person asks for a small portion of land for cultivation and then slowly occupies it for his stay.

Land disputes are settled by the Sagong Kapra. Often the Sagong Kapra makes use of oath to ascertain the proper boundary. Rampoi is collected from the persons who are cultivating in the sadung land or in the village land by the concerned authority and the same is used as fund for the village festivals.

4.7. Oaths and Ordeals

In customary law, oaths and ordeal are used to settle disputes in which culprits cannot easily be identified. Oaths are declaration of an individual’s or group’s position, regarding any particular issue. There are so many ways by which an oath can be taken. “The difficulty is always to settle the formula of the oath and in the

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324 Ibid.

325 n. 307.

326 n. 260.
process as much ingenuity of amendment is displayed as in the committee rooms of more august assemblies.\textsuperscript{327}

4.7.1. Types of Oaths

According to Maram customary law, we can identify four types of oaths, based on the nature of these oaths.

4.7.1.1. \textit{Khiising} is an oath taken between individuals.

4.7.1.2. \textit{Karasat} is an oath taken between families, clans, or villages. This is of a more grave nature and while performing \textit{karasat} either a knife, or an iron piece is used along with the \textit{ramnok} plant.

4.7.1.3. \textit{Agolakatii} is a very sacred treaty contracted by two parties to honour one’s promise. It can be taken in times of war to help or not to disturb the concerned parties, for unification and strengthening of friendship. During this oath, a shield (\textit{azhii}) is cut into two pieces in the middle, signifying that anyone who betrays will be destroyed as the shield is.

4.7.1.4. \textit{Hiidui Karot} is a curse, often used in the case of thefts. A man-like effigy is made with grass or shrub and curses are thrown on it.

Sometimes, ordeals are made use of to settle disputes. If a dispute could not be settled between two villages, they take recourse to ordeals. These could be ‘public’ or ‘private’ ordeals. An example of public ordeal is by water. Each disputing village will proffer its headman as its champion and they proceed to some deep pool and at a signal, the champions plunge into the pool and remain below the water as long as possible, for the victory is with the village whose representative stays under water longest. This can also be made use of in case of individual and clan

\textsuperscript{327}n 50, p. 109.
disputes. The private case of ordeal is that the disputing parties agree that the village or clan which first loses a 'life' shall lose the suit.\textsuperscript{328}

4.7.2. Ceremonies associated with oaths and ordeals

Oaths are taken very rarely as the last resort to seek out the truth. It is taken when there are thefts, land disputes and unpaid debts. The ones involved in the case are to stay awake all night, for if they sleep, it is believed that they will not win the next day. Oaths are to be taken at the disputed site in the case of fields or land and in the case of theft or other crimes, at the common platform of the village.\textsuperscript{329}

Before taking the oath, the participants are to fast on rice beer. They are to offer a portion of rice beer to god (ajon maliak katu) facing the east. Only after the oath is completed, can they take food. In some cases, a cow or a dog is killed and the meal is taken together, signifying that whoever breaches the oath will be dead like the cow or the dog. Oaths are made in the name of the divine and the people leave the punishment of the guilty to the gods.\textsuperscript{330}

4.7.3. Classification of Oaths

Oaths can be classified into the following groups depending on the objects used for making oaths.

4.7.3.1. Oath by stone

This is usually applied in the case of stealing. The accused makes an oath with stones as witnesses. The oath for stealing paddy goes something like this: “If I have taken the paddy, then let grass grow in my field”.

\textsuperscript{328}Ibid., p. 110.

\textsuperscript{329}n 260.

\textsuperscript{330}n 289.
In Maram Khullen there is a particular stone called *Riiling* on which people make their oath. They believe that the stone never forgets the vow made near it. It is commonly believed that this stone knows the truth and anyone making a false oath is punished severely by the gods.

4.7.3.2. Curses on Man-like effigy

This is done by the community. When there is a theft in the village and the person cannot be identified, *Atingha* announces to the people that there is a thief in the village. All the people gather together in the common place, a man-like effigy is made with grass or shrubs and all throw curses along with stones at the image. It is believed that the thief will die in the same way.

4.7.3.3. Oath in case of Adultery

If a man is accused of committing adultery, he is asked to catch his own sexual organ and take oath, like this: ‘If I have committed adultery, then from today onwards I will not have any more children’.

4.7.3.4. Oath by the earth

If anyone is accused of taking land by force or extending his boundary, he takes a piece of earth and throws the mud behind him saying: ‘This is my land and if this is not my land, I will go under the earth’.

If a person refuses to swear an oath then that person is considered guilty and he is made to pay a fine of a cow or a bull and the other person may rightfully take the land or the field over which the dispute arose.\(^{331}\) If the reality is proved contrary to the taker’s statement under oath, then the one who took the oath will be exiled from the

\(^{331}\) n. 260.
village. Thus, for example, if adultery is proved by the girl coming and taking oath by counter witnessing, then the boy will be exiled for life.\textsuperscript{332}

4.8. Tax system in the Maram Customary Law

Though there is a kind of tax collection, it is not an elaborate one. No taxes are paid as we understand it in the current sense of the term, in terms of money, or in exact measurement or percentage. These form part of the offerings to the Sagong, to the Atingba who performs certain rituals or to the village as a whole. We can say that the villagers pay taxes only when they construct good buildings, or during stone pulling ceremony and events of such nature.

4.8.1. Types of Taxes

4.8.1.1. Akiak

It is a tax (aha) given to the sagong when a new house is built or a good paddy field is made. It is given in the form of a hind leg of the animal killed for the occasion. This tax is given at the time of the pulling of the memorial stone both for the dead and the living. The leg of the animal given to the Sagong is referred to as akiak.

On the occasion of the pulling of the stone, both for the living and the dead around 10 cattle or more are killed. For the construction of different houses that display wealth, taxes are also given in the form of food to the community.

4.8.1.2. Pungtatki

This is a tax paid to the village by the house owner when he makes the big pillar, the small pillar and the door of a house out of a big log. Once this is done, the house will be known as the house of Puntat. At this time, four to five cattle are slaughtered and given to the whole village.

\textsuperscript{332}n. 25, p. 132.
4.8.1.3. *Khiisakhii*

The person, who wants to build a house called *Rafii ki*, should have completed certain duties to the village like *Haipou, Aratii, Tuchim* (stone of the living). He should have gone to war and be considered a great warrior by the people, and given paddy to the whole village. Such a person is honoured as *Khiisakhii*. Only those who have fulfilled these obligations can wear *Tiichiipai* shawl.

4.8.1.4. *N'tapui ha*

This is a tax given to the king’s helper who usually performs the rituals before the season of cultivation. It can be performed either by a man or a woman. The person is usually from a poor family. It is said that in earlier days, most of the *N'tapuis* were from the neighbouring tribes, as at that moment there were no poor persons in Maram. *N'tapui* would make the annual collection, in the month of *Tiirokii* (August), going from house to house. Each household gives her a measure of paddy in a small basket (*Raziina*), amounting to approximately a kilo.

Often she would act as the *Kapangpaipui* (mediator) for marriages. She is paid a reasonable amount for this service.

4.8.1.5. *Atingha*

This is a tax given to *Atingha* after he performs rituals for various occasions like death, building of houses, festivals and when animals are slaughtered for various

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333 *Khiisakhii* is one who is the greatest and the wealthiest who can do everything.

334 *Rafii ki* is a house made completely with wood, including the roof.

335 During and after world war II, the Japanese helmet became so famous that the people were using that helmet as a measurement for smaller quantities. And tax for *N’tapui* was given in that.
functions. The tax is given in the form of meat, consisting of parts of liver, lungs, heart, spleen and kidney.

4.8.1.6. Taxes given by the other villages

This tax was given when one village surrendered to another after war, often in the form of shawls. This is given whenever the house of Sagong is made, and at the time of the death of the Sagong or the queen.

Some of the villages used to offer a dog to the Marams. This was done mainly to stop the looting of their crops by the Maram, a common practice in the early days.

4.8.1.7. Taxes for the rat

There is a very peculiar tax among the Marams known as aza ha. It is a tax given to the rat so that the rats would not destroy the whole grain. If they find dung of the rat in the barn, some paddy along with the dung of the rat would be wrapped in a leaf called agungumsang and is thrown at the main gate of the village or khel for the rats.

4.8.1.8. Offering for the spirit

This offering is performed thrice a year during the day of mala. On this day a chicken is sacrificed for the spirit and the cooked flesh from the chest portion along with rice is put into a plate covered with leaf. The food in the plate is divided into three or five parts. After this the food is covered with another leaf and placed on the roof of the house. After 3 to 7 days, they will check to know whether the spirit has eaten the food offered. If the food has been eaten by any insect, the family considers that the spirit is pleased with the offering. If the food remains untouched, it is a bad omen for the family.

[336] This has connection with the Maram folklore, in which Madungkasii gets the help of a rat to get grain for his son Raba. Cf. Appendix 1.
4.8.1.9. Taxes for the Cowboy

Another special tax of the Marams is the tax which is given to the cowboy. Apart from the paddy or money the cowboy is given meat especially the tail of the cow or buffalo. A day of celebration is set apart for the cowboy and the cattle. For the cattle it is purification and for the cowboy it is a festival.

On this day all the owners of cows kill a cock or a hen. They also cook crab, fish, wild bird, etc., but the killing of a wild bird called *tihibi* is compulsory. If any household is unable to get it, they should at least get its feather and cook it along with the curry. As this bird always lands on the cows they feel it is the spirit of the cow and henceforth there should be ‘tihibi’ on this day.

Once the cooking is done all the owners pack food for the cowboy and the children. A bottle of wine too is given. The food is carried by the owners’ children or the relatives and given to the cowboy who in turn serves the food to all who come to the festival. All the chicken heads must be given to the cowboy. On this day the cowboy does not look after the cows.

4.8.1.10. Tax for the poor

The Maram people had tax for the poor as well. But it is not like the other taxes in the sense they do not go and give it to the poor. During the harvest, they leave some paddy in the field uncut. Whatever tuft of paddy they cannot cut at one go with the sickle, is left for the poor. They also leave a certain amount of paddy in the place where they collect the paddy for threshing. They will make sure that paddy is left in four or five places, so that it will not be collected only by one person alone.

4.8.1.11. Taxes by the non-Marams:

There are non-Marams who reside in the land of the Marams. The taxes they pay may be classified into house tax, tax for grazing and tax for cultivation. There is no fixed tax and the tax is taken annually by the land owner.
4.8.1.12. House tax by the Government of India

When the British came to India and conquered India and in particular when they brought Manipur under their control they started collecting tax. But the Marams refused to pay it and even refused to go to France to fight in World War I. They gave an explanation saying that their tradition does not allow them to travel far. The Marams started paying house tax only after the independence of India.