CHAPTER III

THE TARAO FAMILY

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THE TARAO FAMILY

Introducing a Tarao Family:

In the first instance, the family represents both an institution as well as association and characterised by some form of institutionalized mating i.e. marriage. Secondly, there is mode of reckoning descent by having a nomenclature. Thirdly, a family is an economic unit. Fourthly, a family is always associated with a common habitation for all its members. Fifthly, in all cultures the family exercises some degree of control over the individuals and family is the cultural learning place for each individual on the earth. Sixthly, marriage lays the legal foundation for the family. Lastly, a family is regarded as the simple-complex and smallest social unit and still forms the backbone of our social structure. Keeping in mind the above reasons, amongst all associations and institutions of mankind on the earth the family is found everywhere to be most stable and enduring.

This chapter deals with the family organisation among the Tarao tribe of Manipur where I attempt to present the following view-points. In the first place, the study of the Tarao family is both from biology and culture. The
family has always been a microcosm of society and reflects its evolution and roots every culture in the society or family is the origin of each and every culture of a society. Changes in the Tarao family, thus, occupy an important place not only in the context of change in their society but also in the context of the whole range of unprecedented changes in the attitudes and behaviour of contemporary man vis-a-vis birth and death, the forms of conjugal life, the role of men and women, and the role of the children.

A family's foundation rests upon man's biological and psychological needs. In the modern age, many functions of the family have shifted to other institutions but, nevertheless, there are many biological, cultural and psychological needs which man cannot satiate without family. Moreover, psychologists have proved that the absence of family affection has a serious impact upon the child's development. Sexual passions can be satisfied even outside the family but it can never be the source of emotional fulfilment. That 'man is social animal' implies that man cannot live without a family life. Thus family is to be treated as the fundamental unit of society. In addition, in every society, it has been observed that criminals are punished whereas good acts are rewarded. In this way the making of a good citizen in society depends upon the control imposed on the children by the society through the elderly members of the family.
**Family Type:**

Needless to say, a family is as old as man himself. The family is the basic social unit which forms the core of the society. The Taraos like other tribes in the state except the Tangkhul have migrated from one place to another for better settlement. The origin and exact traditions of culture and customs to the present habitat is quite obscure. Nowadays they identify themselves as 'Naga' although Shakespeare placed them in 'Old Kuki' groups (1912). According to Shakespeare there were only 18 households living around the south of the Burma road.

The principal characteristics of a Tarao family are patriarchy, endogamy, Mo Br Da marriage, equality of brothers, (excepting the law of inheritance), residence of newly married man with his father-in-law's house for a period of six years under the custom on marriage by service, but after that with his own parents forming a joint family structure. There is possibility of polygamy but not so rampant and only when there is no issue some of them go for polygynous union.

To my knowledge, from the very beginning the Tarao family had successively been patrilineal, endogamous and male-dominated. These days they have started practising the marriage outside their own tribe. Most of the informants have an
opinion that they are definitely monogamous. The legal basis of the Tarao family has been enriched over the centuries by their customs. Here some changes can be brought into notice. Actually such changes in the modern trend of researches, should not be left out because it affects the present day society. However it was not in the notice of the scholars until the second world war. The contemporary Tarao family finds itself confronting cultural, social and economic diversity and changes linked to the development of the society of which it is a part. A lot of changes seems to have been brought by the introduction of Christianity. During to cultural ambiguity this produces parallel and sometimes contradictory attitudes and behaviour patterns. Moreover, the moral conflict between old and new, between tradition and modernity, has made its home in the heart of the family. The new has penetrated not enough to triumph but quite enough to transform its problems altogether.

The Taraos unlike the Tangkhul Nagas (M.Horam, 1977: 60) did migrate from one place to another seeking better settlements. This suggests that they were once in the nomadic life. The family tie is an important integrating factor among these tribes. The concept of family should be understood by the network of relationship which involves human beings as an organic whole.
On the impact of the modernization on Tarao family, the following important themes were examined comparatively: forms of family, the roles and status of men and women from familial level to society level as well as the roles of the head of a household, choice of spouse, pattern of inheritance, rights for adopted child, division of labour, inter and intrafamilial relationships, problems on domestic space, familial functions, etc. The question of relationship between the development of the family and the role of the family as the agent of an indigenous development has also come up. Before we discuss the above points let us see what is the traditional form of family among the Taraos.

In Tarao society, the traditional family is an autonomous unit of production and consumption, patrilineal and patriarchal in nature and based on male supremacy. The traditional family culture rigorously preserves its belief in the hierarchy, unity, and cohesiveness of the domestic group. The eldest male of the family is considered the master and expected to be obeyed. Next to him is the eldest female member in the family. Apart from sex, the hierarchy is built upon the respect due to age and experience. Marriage concerns not only between the two individuals but also between the two lineages of different clan. By playing such a pivotal role in the maintenance of the social system, the
social organisation is carried on through the kinship network and therefore the community must maintain control over such an important transaction. Thus the arrangement of a traditional marriage is always accompanied by great deliberations at the family level extending up to clan. In such a way among the Taraos the universality of marriage (a formal marriage) is firmly entrenched as well as early marriage (Yurkhu: reservation of a bride followed by formal marriage when they attain the marriageable age) was once very common. But to-day it has declined considerably. Boys are wanted more than girls and are better-cared-for (not better-fed and better-dressed than girls in anyway).

Family Forms:

The Tarao belongs to the patriarchal system. Since family is the primary basis of social life in all societies it is used to designate a relatively permanent, socially approved grouping of parents and children. It may also include relatives of the husband or wife or both. Everywhere be it in rural or urban or amongst the Tribes, a family is both a producing and consuming unit. In a tribal setting like the Tarao where members of a family are tied to landholding as the basis of a total way of life, it is a
producing unit in the sense that all members are actively engaged in agricultural activities.

Among the Taraos, the following forms of family could be classified:

i) Joint/Extended Type of Family
ii) Broken Family and,
iii) Nuclear Family.

Joint/Extended Type of Family:

The joint family system was a must in the traditional Tarao society. In this type, head of the family (a male) is mostly the father or the grand-father. It is regarded to have their origin from male line and so male child has the greater importance. Only the male members have the right to inherit their father's property. There are some of the attributes given by the informants for having joint family structure. Firstly, it is a very early history that once the Meitei Maharaja had a plan to grow some fruits like orange, lemon, guava, pomegranate etc. in a village named at Komlathabi. The king engaged the Tarao members to look after the plantation as caretaker. But there were no production. Then the Meitei Maharaja was so angry with them that he scolded them and said that the Tarao group should not exceed more than 20 families; if it exceeds let them
succumb to death as a punishment given by the God. Thus the Taraos were disappointed and the same had happened in the following year when the number of families came to more than twenty. At this they decided that as far as possible it is better not to have nuclear family because it increases the number of families in the village. Under such circumstances they had started the joint family structure as they were forced to restrict the number of families. When it increased beyond the limit then some of the families had to be shifted to some other place where established a new village. However, they were bound to limit their family number there also. As has been reported that whenever there was increase in the number of families beyond twenty, the villagers had suffered from severe epidemics leading to death.

Secondly, common security - although the family property went to the eldest son only (in the past) the common right on the family property has its most beneficial effect on agricultural production. It helps in pooling all family resources into a single cooperative venture. Responsibilities of a joint family are shared by all the members. In case of physical or social disability of a particular member, the rest come forward to give him or her a helping hand. It is not out of compulsion, but rather a
sense of duty which inspires them to do so. As they reported, maintenance of good family traditions and customs are the advantages of a joint family system during the pre-christianity period. Advice and directions of elders are better utilized in a joint family. There is always encouragement to community feelings that resulted in the harmonious working of the active group.

Although they have joint family structure on the belief mentioned above it has started increasing the number of households above twenty. No longer the people find it maintains the extended or joint family and there is gradual increase in nuclear family. Soon after, they realize this should try to search out a new place where a new village may be established.

But after the spread of christianity the Tarao developed a tendency to live in nuclear families.

**Nuclear Family**

In our classification a family is considered nuclear only when a married couple and their unmarried children live together. And when either a householder or his wife is dead or divorced at an early age leaving behind no progeny, the family is known as a **broken family**.
In Tarao villages at present, joint family is comparatively less in number. With regard to the splitting up of a joint family various reasons may be noted. The increase in family members made them unable to maintain and accommodate. Moral conflict among the members, negligence of duty, etc. are some of the reasons. Many changes have taken place to-day, may be by social maladjustment between the members and the in-laws. Modernisation and westernisation must have led to the splitting up of the joint family structure.

Family research in India had led to the emergence of two divergent viewpoints. One view is that in the wake of industrialization and urbanization and consequent occupational diversity the traditional joint family has been disappearing, yielding place to nuclear family. This view has been put forward by Morrison (1959), Nimkoff (1959), Kulkarni (1960), Ross (1961), Driver (1962), Sarma (1964), and Sen (1965). This view to some extent based on the evidence suggested by the societies in the west where historically wider kin units declined. Another point of view as put forward by Desai (1955, 1964), Kapadia (1956, 1964), Gore (1968), Gould (1968), Singer (1968) and Conklin (1976) is that the joint family has not disappeared.

but it has been adapting itself to the changing conditions, and changes, if any, are limited. Related to this point of view is the observation made by Desai (1964) that nuclear family as it is understood in the west is not found in India. According to Desai, a residential nuclear unit in India is not an isolated entity but instead it is being counted as distant. Thus while representing the Tarao Family structure it must be mentioned that the traditional joint family system has been replaced by nuclear family but the functions have not altogether disappeared and continue to perpetuate with the nuclear family.

The Family Power Structure:

Looking at the power structure of the Tarao it is found that there are three tier system i.e. from family to clan and then to village level. The last one is at the community level. The male is the master and head of the household; the wife is the man's partner in material well-being and his replacement in managing the household in his absence and assistant to man at all time. The father, since called head, has certain duties and rights because he holds major responsibilities, towards maintaining the family. The head who possesses the qualities of an intelligent, brave,
and eloquent man is respected both outside or inside the family and may have an important rank in the clan organisation and village or community as a whole. The head is also being the head of the unit of production in family. He administers the patrimonial land in working together as a team-work under his guidance. He alone is empowered to use the land and responsible for ensuring relationships between the members of his family and with other communities and institutions. A head of the household who, obeys the social rules, may be treated as arbiter on important questions concerning the family; marriage, divorce, inheritance etc.

Power within the family is seemed to be more complex and vary from family to family than it appears from outside. Thus minute observation to some of the selected families like educated family, non-educated family, poor family, rich family etc. are very helpful in shaping the structure of a family in a society. As has rights on families religious duties, he worships the family deity, acting as a priest. A father takes a leading responsibility in the marriage of his sons and daughters. He represents his family at the clan as well as in community meetings and councils. Moreover the head of the family himself obeys the social rules, known to everyone in his family. A wife is
always being an assistant to her husband at any sphere. Sometimes to some extent in the decision making process, uncle and aunt, father's brothers and close relatives partake of it or may have a share of the decision or at least participate in it and whose physical presence is sometimes most important. By custom, a patriarch rarely makes decisions alone. He is, nevertheless, at centre of the stage. He has his decisions executed only after consulting other members in the family. When the head of the family may be unable to fulfil his duties because of reaching old age, sickness, absence or some other disability, he delegates them to his younger brother/elder brother or his eldest son who in turn accedes to this status with all its privileges and obligations. At the top of hierarchy are his oldest brothers. They are his close advisors on decisions concerning the family; all of them make the final decision and may be treated as a family council. However, they do not hold the same position in the family hierarchy. If sons or nephews are timely admitted into the family council they may speak but only after the speech of their elders. The eldest son has a predominant role within his generation.

Women constitute a distinct category. Their hierarchical position varies according to age and rank. The family head's wife has dominant position over those of her husband's
younger brother's wives and have authority over son's and nephews' wives etc. If the head of the family has more than one wife, the first has authority over the others. Mothers-in-law have authority over their daughters-in-law; whether they live together or not but belonging to the same lineage or may be of close kinsmen. Moreover, a mother exercises a great moral authority over her son and son-in-law, her daughter and daughter-in-law and the entire family. One difficulty is to define women's power over the family because they are rarely in the forefront, but are duly consulted on all the important issues concerning the family. Certain other matters about the power of a woman will be discussed under the title 'status and role of a Tārao woman'.

The eldest son in the family shoulders much of the responsibility after the death of his father. The parental house is given to him and he continues to live with his parents even after his marriage. But today the parents may choose to stay with any one of their sons.

A group of families forms a lineage and then extended to clan organisation. The three of such clans form a Tārao community. The eldest surviving son succeeds to the clan headmanship. Eldest men of each lineage of various clans have several functional rights to perform duties in
marriage, death, religion, economic activities, village administration etc. Here heads of the family are secondary because it is at the village level or community level. If an issue is brought to be discussed at village level it is but naturally a clan-cum-lineage issue and formal meeting will be called for to discuss and settle the matter. Moreover, urgent matters are generally discussed and thrashed out by the emergency clan/lineage meetings. In this manner family power structure is extended to clan.

The House and the Household:

All cultures contain patterns for the physical establishment of a home. House types are variable in structure, depending upon the nature of the local climate and materials, the kind of subsistence economy indulged in, and the nature of the social organisation of the society and the kinds of aggressive threats it must face from enemies.

A traditional Tarao house is generally made of bamboo, wood, thatch, split bamboo or split cane, etc. Houses are more or less of the same pattern and of pile dwelling type. It is a big or small rectangular hall duly partitioned in it. The houses are generally only one storeyed, the wall being of either reed or bamboo mat or of wooden. The roof
of thatch usually has two slopes fastened by split bamboo and supported by timbers. The floor is wooden.

Before the construction of a house the villagers are understood to help each other in procuring, arranging and assembling the raw materials required for the construction. When a suitable site is selected by the people and with the consent of village akhim, (a kind of astro- loser) he himself erects the first pillar. The day construction starts the house must be completed on the same day before sunset. The houses are constructed by the villagers themselves and all the co-villagers offer their physical help during the construction work.

After being erected the first pillar which is locally known as Jatra-lon, the final construction is done by the villagers who work collectively and the nature of work for male and female vary. According to the convenience of the villagers the day is fixed to construct the house. Here both sexes comprising different age groups are involved in rendering their valuable services. On the one hand, erecting all the pillars one after another, and fixing the posts by cane and roofing etc. are done by male members (locally known as Kaksheet-eenba) while on the other the female members supply the thatch by weaving into small mat like forms (padi-pin). Old-aged people prepare
the raw materials for its wall. The work that requires hard labour are the responsibility of the youths. This walling is called Weichel-khel and Bangtipting. The room for parents (Kumchungthlo) is made by makchas. Normally no wage is paid to the villagers. But the owner of the house entertains the people with drink who help to construct the house. It is a locally brewed country liquor called Paden-chenchu (rice beer). This rice beer is meant for both male and female but the quality is slightly varying. Alongside with the drink they construct the house.

Just after the completion of roofing any man amongst them must bring a dog in the newly built house which has to be sacrificed there. The blood coming out from the dog is to be smeared on the front door of the house which does mean the protection from theft and evil spirit and it is also performed with the belief of guarding the house or family. Moreover, the dog is their domesticated animal. This part of the magico-religious act is but naturally at the end and obviously, takes place just after sunset.

The next is to produce fire by friction of a string of bamboo over a bamboo stick in the house itself. Here the bamboo stick is firmly fixed, generally in a
horizontal position and over it a string of bamboo is pulled with great force by holding the two ends of the string. At their best level they try to produce fire by doing so and the dog which had been killed earlier inside the house is cooked in that fire. The place where the fire was lit is known as Taphei (hearth) which invariably occupies a space in the middle of the house. At night the villagers are well entertained by the family with drink. There are three types of country liquor. They are Yupi (for all people), Milakyu (to be taken only with the dog meat), and Phamangyu (to be taken when they sing a song relating to entry of the new house). Thus all the workers must dance and sing song inside the house at night with above mentioned drinks. The following type of dances with accompanied songs is the main performance on such an occasion. They are as follows:

1. Sakur-wana (a dance); It is a kind of group dance around the Taphei (hearth). Here every man and woman participates. As dancing is perhaps the expression of man's joy no one is hesitant to perform dancing. This is the first dance in relation to the inaugural ceremony of the new house. A song is accompanied along with this dance Sakur-wana. The song is as follows:
'Sharku Pa Wanate.
Balam: ta Shan Tiyamei
Balam Ta Shan Tiyame
Warui Rashui Tiyame'

2. Thangruilam: Dancing, singing, eating and drinking are highly value in Tarao life. It is the second dance. Most of the male members from every lineage are supposed to perform one after another. It is a single man dance. This type of dance is unique in style and form from other tribes. Two hard ropes are fastened longitudinally, just beneath the top of the roof of the house where one man, from each family or lineage of the village, is laid down over the two ropes and swing like a pendulum. This goes on till every one has completed his acrobatic dance. There he must show his activities to other people who in turn has to participate. This is what the people treat the ordeal as a dance. Here they sing a song as under:

'Theipa Chei Theipa Chei
Ruiya Rankho Theipa Chei
... ... ... ... ... ...'

There are two more dances. One is called Kutching-
konglam accompanying a song:
'Shaireiyula Shaijo
Shaite Reiyula Shaiyo
.......

and the other dance is Meiphu-meithoilam. Every man and
woman must hold a burning fire of pine tree while dancing
together. In the mean time they sing a song as follows:

'Meiphu Meithoi Meithol
Theino Chilli Kangro
Theipa Chilli Kangro
.......

In such a way the new house is made ready for a new
family. Arrangement of drinking, eating etc. are in the
hand of the family head i.e. parents. Generally the parents
make arrangement for food and drink on behalf of their
married son for whom the house has been constructed.

Dancing and singing goes on throughout the night.
Only at the fag end of the night other people go back to
their respective homes and the family members remain in
the new house.

House type:
The Tarao traditional type of house is a large rec-
tangular hall facing any direction, but preferably towards
the rising sun (east). There is a custom of keeping the
front door and the back which should be placed parallel to one another as shown in the diagram:

![Diagram with front door on the left, hearth in the middle, and back door on the right.]

**Fig. 1**

**House Plan and Domestic Affairs**:

There are mainly five cells in a Tarao house which are used for different purposes. Out of which one is dining-cum-drawing room and others are bed rooms.

![Diagram with numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, and symbols # and *.]

# = First pillar  
* = Hearth  

**Fig. 2**

The above fig. 2 shows that the arrangement of the house is ideal. So, the south-west corner chamber is usually occupied by the parents. Chamber no. 2 & 3 are reserved for married sons. There is a provision of cross ventilation for the front door and the back door are placed parallel to one another along the corridor. The next two rooms (no. 4 & 5) are reserved for unmarried girls and boys respectively. In
Tarao custom family hearth (Taphei/Taploi) must be placed at the centre as well as nearby the first erected pillar. In this place everything is cooked and also serves both as kitchen and as a fire place in winter. The partition of the room no. 1 must be carried out by the sons-in-law of the family. In case the family has no such kinsmen then any other man who is at par with the son-in-law (one's lineage circle) have to do such an obligatory work.

A household deity to every family is to be tied round the first pillar (Jatra) but at the top of the post. This deity is locally known as Kashalai. Traditionally any type of tree or timber can not be used as Jatra (first pillar). So they have used a specific type of tree called Kishi. It is because this specified timber is very hard, durable and undestroyable by the insects. Moreover they believe that this post is the most important of all others and functions as a pivot of the house.

When a man dies in the family immediately the dead body is laid down nearby the Jatra. Before this, the family deity called Kashalai is to be removed from the post and be taken away from the house and placed in the courtyard. Until and unless the preparation of burial ground is over the dead body will remain in such a position that the head is towards the first pillar. Then the corpse is carried to
the grave. After that family deity is taken back to its earlier place and tied round the Jatra as before. Generally, women and children in the family are not expected to go near the Jatra since there is the abode of family deity. If the family happens to be the head of the lineage or clan it is completely tabooed for women and children. Moreover, some important weapons belonging to one's own lineage are kept nearby the first pillar of the head of the lineage. These weapons are not to be used at any occasion, but normally kept reserved for specific purpose. Again it should not be touched by anyone except the head of their lineage.

Manner of placing beds in the house needs to be observed here. The following figure illustrates well that there is a systematic direction of one's head while sleeping. The head of the family sleeps keeping his head to the east and the other family members either south or north or keeping their head towards each other's head as directed in fig. 3. Number of beds depends upon the family members.

Fig. 3

= bed

= direction of one's head while sleeping
But today, some changes have taken place. To construct a house is no more a collective responsibility but the responsibility of the individual family unlike the olden days. So they construct at their own cost and labour. Sometimes some help from the friend circle can be sought. It seems that they avoid consulting the village priest or sooth-sayer. Without any formality they start construction of a house whenever they wish. Arrangement of rooms has remained without any change as well as the bedstead and their heads while sleeping is also followed in the same way even today. They neither keep family deity called Kashalai nor any kind of tree as Jatra. No dance and drink accompany today with the construction of a hut. The family, sometimes hire a few skilled workers for a new construction on payment, or the family will seek some of their villagers just to help in the construction and later on offering is made instead of giving wage. There is no house entry ritual and ceremony for a newly constructed house.

There are other sheds in the domicile. For example, granary, cow-shed, poultry-shed, pig-shed etc. are the familial concern. Granary is a platform type supported by wooden logs. It has one small entrance to get in and out. Other sheds are constructed later in the homestead. For such constructions no service is generally sought from anyone outside the family.
Adoption:

Adoption is the institutionalized practice through which an individual belonging by birth to one kinship group acquires new kinship ties that are socially defined as equivalent to the congenital ties. Belonging to a particular kinship group does not imply that all the ties are necessarily biological.

In the Tarao society adoption is practised in a limited way. There are many reasons for adoption. Adoption is locally known as Akhem. The following are some of the reasons for adoption. Firstly, a couple may adopt if it does not have any male issue. But girls are seldom adopted. Secondly, on the death of parents, their children are to be adopted by its nearest kinsmen. Here their parental property goes to the man who adopts their offspring. When the child grows up the property is automatically inherited by him. Lastly, a couple having no child can adopt any child if they wish to attain the status of fatherhood/parenthood.

The practice of adoption is governed by the native custom. When a couple desires to adopt, it should give a formal notice to the king and also to the villagers. Then there will be a public gathering convened by the Khullakpa (king) where the adopted child is to be ritually solemnised.
and formalised by a grand feast. Such ritual ceremony is related to *Markheen-kung-maring* which is of multifunctional nature. The main objective of this ceremony is to give recognition to the relationship between the couple and the child or children. Such a social permission that gives sanction to the child's entry into their kin group is called *Araochal*. In connection with this either fowls, pig or cow is sacrificed and consumed by the villagers with drink. There is also a custom of initiating this feasting. Old people from three distinguished clans and their respective lineages have to be requested to have their seats in the centre of the gathering and start eating and drinking. Before they start eating a village priest from *Khulpu* clan is required to offer some specific items. These items must be prepared in separate utensils (see in marriage) because these are to be offered to the deity just to get blessings. It was during the prechristianity period. From now onwards the foster child belongs to the couple who adopted him or her. Such an adopted child is locally known as *Sharasa*. Now *Sharasa* has a legal right to receive property from his/her foster parents. Generally adoption is done in the same lineage.

Orphans are generally looked after by their paternal and maternal relatives till they become adult to be able to maintain a kitchen. Thus, their relatives allow them to live
separately either in their father's house or in a new house that has been constructed for the purpose. In this way, they can live on their father's property. However, their relatives do not completely withdraw their attention from the child/children until marriage takes place. There is no other ritual ceremony and only when they have fully grown up, they become eligible to take independent charge of their parental property. Those relatives who take care of such children, occupy prestigious position in the society.

A widow having no child is allowed to remarry with somebody else. A widow with children may also marry for the second time and the second husband is made responsible to look after the children. When these children become adult they are sent to their paternal residence to live separately and subsequently inherit the patrimony. Even after that they are constantly being cared by their mother and step-father. In this case the only son gets lion's share of the property and a daughter may also get some share of it as dowry (Amahon) at the time of her marriage. It is also to be noted that when the family has only female issue the couple would normally try to adopt a male child. In this case too, the adopted son has the right to inherit the property. In another case, the family may request to one of their daughter's husbands to live with them permanently. Here the son-in-law
is treated like an adopted child. And thus he inherits the property of his father-in-law, provided he is prepared to take all the responsibilities of that of the eldest son. If his services are satisfactory to his father-in-law he would inherit the entire property. Inheritance of the share of property under the circumstances depend on the services rendered by the son-in-law (Kimak) and also the satisfaction of the father-in-law.

Family Rites and Rituals:

During prechristianity period, every family of Tarao tribe was a follower of Shangku-leima, a Tarao girl who belonged to Khulpu-shakei (clan). She was revered following which her idol used to be worshipped by the Taraos till 1966. The following are the different types of family ritual performed by them in the past. The community worship pattern is common to all the members of different clans and they had a full-fledged pantheon or the series of deity for different purposes as mentioned below:

1. Arao (family deity)
2. Markheeng-kung-maring (domicile deity)
3. Bulon (family hearth deity)
4. Kharpungthou
5. Kashalai and
6. Enkharkung
1. Arao (family deity)

Arao is the family deity. This deity is associated with the ceremony of a new birth ritual in the family. It is locally known as Naothla-thou. When a woman is pregnant she should not discuss about the deformed persons and also ill-treatment to others. She is tabooed to chop a tree intertwined with creepers. Delivery is under the supervision of village mid-wife called Naoshang. At the time of delivery the pregnant woman is made to lie back on a bedstead holding a rope hanging across the bed from the ceiling of the house. The Naoshang sits over the two legs of the woman. While doing so the Naoshang presses against her belly. All the placenta and other associated materials are collected inside a gourd. A notable point is that if the newly born child is a female then the placenta is to be cut by a sharpened bamboo split. This is called Seetha. But when the child is a male it must be cut rupi (a specific variety) bamboo split. Now the collected placenta should be buried under the soil of the left hand corner of the courtyard in case of female and in case of a male it is at the right hand corner. In this connection the family has to arrange wine (home made). Further, a cock for male child is sacrificed to Arao (family deity) whereas a hen to be sacrificed for a female. This ritual is conducted
by village amchan and amlam (priests). Moreover, when a woman undergoes delivery no one (even her husband) is allowed to enter the house where it is going on. Thus the Arao is associated with the ceremony called Naottha-thlou (Swasti Pujah in Manipuri). On the day of the birth there is a feast, and on the fifth or seventh day, according to the sex of the child, a fowl is killed by the Khulpu, and the child's hair is shaved, its ears pierced, and its name decided on, the choice being made from the names of its forefathers. The house is purified by the sprinklings of Zu (wine) by the Khulpu².

2. Markheeng-Kung-maring (domicile deity)

Markheeng is a kind of tree which the Tarao people worshipped it in remembrance of the second Tarao hero, historically known as Khulpu, who came out of a cave (Tu-kleikhur) from the subterranean world and succeeded in killing a fierce tiger with the help of this markheeng branch having horn-like shape of a deer. Moreover it is a multipurpose deity. Such a branch of tree must have three sub-branches at the top of the main branch. It must be cut like this by each family to erect the same like a post at the right hand corner of the courtyard of every house.

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2. Shakespear, J, 1912: 174
When a family suffers from bad luck (dasha) they arrange this pujah (ceremony) in order to get relief from the sufferings and be in good fortune. This worship is also associated with arachal (for adopting a child). When a child is delivered, Yurkhu (child marriage followed by formal marriage) is to be arranged. The deity is also worshipped at the time when a man returns to his family after the completion of six year's service to the family of his wife (through Yurkhu). From this standpoint, the worshipping of markeeng-kung-maring is performed for many purposes. For this ritual ceremony a cow or a cock or a hen is to be sacrificed. At the time of misfortune or famine, it is a must for every family to worship and propitiate the deity. Here the family must sacrifice a goat to get positive results. The specific spear and dao belonging to particular lineage will be used in killing and chopping this goat. After the preparation is over the two priests -- Amchank recites the religious hymns (mantra) and at the same time Amlam offers wine and prepared meat before the markheeng-kung-maring. After that the remaining portion of meat is taken by the lineage members only. They have a seating arrangement in a row according to seniority in age for the feast. In this ceremony no sisters who are married allowed to join. Here all the participants must be
of patrilineal kindred of the lineage. In the adoption of a child, the concerned family worships this deity. Here either a goat, a pig or a cock for male and hen for female child is to be sacrificed to the Markheeng-kung-maring. It is the same as in Yurkhu (child marriage) and in other occasions.

3. Bulon (family hearth deity)

It is the deity of family hearth (Taphei). There is an iron post in the hearth for supporting the utensils while cooking. The Tarao people believe that there is a deity nearby it. Therefore, the head of the family used to drop a little quantity of rice and curry at the bottom of this iron post. After having offered it he starts eating followed by other members in the family. This daily worshipping of hearth is locally known as Bulon. In case of expiry of the head the widow performs the same. The objective of this worship is prosperity of the family.

4. Kharpungthou

Another notable family ritual is kharpungthou. When an individual is suffering from any illness the family has to perform this ritual at the threshold of the house. The materials needed for this ritual are banana, egg, wine etc.
Most of the elderly male members of the lineage are asked to join this ceremony. This ritual is also conducted by Amchan and Amlam.

5. Kashalai:

It is a deity to which the Tarao people refer literally as the household deity. It rests at the top of the first pillar of a family. Generally the corpse's head is directed towards its pillar. At that time this deity is removed and placed in the courtyard. Actually no worship is performed in connection with this deity. It simply rests in the house and protects the family from evil spirits.

6. Enkharkung

Enkharkung is another pujah of Tarao family. It is performed just at the threshold of the front door. The magico-religious act is conducted by Amchan and Amlam. It is associated with the suffering of a child in the family. All members of the family pray to the Almighty for the recovery of the child.

In a Tarao family, different rituals have been associated and were properly arranged and celebrated in different ways. It is found that, if a family has to worship
some god or spirit, first of all the householder is required to consult the village Amchen and Amlam. After deciding all about that and fixing an auspicious day, the family performs the ritual. For these ceremonies every family has to arrange food items and brewed liquor that are to be offered to the god and then to be taken by the participants. For each and every ritual performed at family level the family generally invites all the elderly male members of their own lineage only.

Death:

The Taraos distinguish between two types of death viz, (a) Natural death and (b) Un-natural death. Even in the case of accident if he or she dies at home, it is to be treated as a natural death. However, all deaths that occur outside the house are regarded as unnatural deaths. It is also reported that most of the natives are rather desired of natural death by concept. On the one hand an unsuccessful hunter who died during the course of hunting is not honoured and as such the dead body is not to be taken to the lineage burial ground (lukhangpum). Instead, it is buried in their lineage paddy field. A woman who died during pregnancy is buried a little away from the common lineage burial ground. Usually declaration of a person's death is made by a maipa who treats upon the
person. The maipa who renders services in connection with illness and death gets a nominal remuneration.

In relation to death, a cow is to be killed. At first one end of a thread is tied to the finger of the dead body and another end to the leg or head of the cow. This act signifies that the cow accompanies the dead person on his way to heaven. Now the cow is ready to be sacrificed. After it is over the meat has to be shared by the villagers. The dead body is buried to a common grave of the lineage (lûkhangpun). Before taking it into the grave all the lineage members pay their last homage by way of offering clothes to him which are in turn collected before the deceased is buried. This paying of homage is known as Lukhang-ponyar. Covering of such cloth as coffin must be done first by his/her son or by any nearest kinsman and then to be followed by others.

As has been reported that the cemetery is situated towards the west of the village, these cemeteries are separately distributed for various lineages. Persons died of unnatural deaths are buried elsewhere with no proper ceremony. Often a woman expired at childbirth is buried by an old man particularly who has no further hope of becoming father (may belong to any Shakeis). The grave of this
woman may be found far from the village. In the case of a person killed by wild animals, by accident, falling from a tree, etc. are buried at the spot where they had died. Moreover, persons who died from drowning are to be buried on the bank of the river where the dead body was found. Similar customs, discussed above also exist among the Shans of the Upper Chindwin, which lends support to the fact that the Tarao sojourned in Burma before entering Manipur.

A grave is dug by the Kimaks/Makcha of the family (daughter's husband) and also the preparation of coffin is his duty. It is prepared out of solid piece of wood. Such a coffin required only when the person died at the age below 50 years. If he or she had crossed 50 years of age the dead body is to be carried in a palanquin specially prepared for the purpose. Kimaks generally carry the dead body to the burial place. At the time of passing through the village gate they are supposed to confront to a mock fight in which the members of the deceased family push them back. But the bearers of the funeral must go ahead. This act is to be repeated thrice. In the funeral procession there is a man who carries a lighted torch in his hand and leads the party to the graveyard. The purpose of keeping this torch is to lead the procession and drive away the force.
of evil spirit. The dead body is finally buried inside the burial pit. Over the grave, a flag having 6 colours for male and 5 colours for female is hoisted. This flag hoisting over the burial ground is locally known as Firal. The dominant colours are white, blue and red which may vary in intensity and form different shades.

Before the dead body is buried there are some more notable points to state. A jar of wine and meat of the sacrificed cow mentioned above are to be kept ready by the relatives of the dead person. All these arrangements are in the name of offerings made to the deceased. Generally, all the lineage heads come and consume the wine kept near the dead body. This customary performance is called Thil-roi. But the drink must be started by the Khulpu of the village. After this they perform another ritual known as thilungchun (to ensure a safe journey for the departed soul). The last ritual called Thilam-lam that gives stress on ceremony where the people are busy in dancing and singing. After all these performances the dead body is buried.

On the sixth day (for male) or fifth day (for female) of the burial there is a simple divinatory rite called Roshun-nan. There is yearly giving of homage to all the persons who
have died and normally held in the month of June-July. It is performed at village level and not by the family concerned. Here all the necessary materials for food and drink (including meat) are subscribed equally by the concerned families whose members may have died not less than one year back. Offering is made by village Amchan and Amlam after which they start eating and drinking. The remaining portions will be taken by the villagers. In this way Tarao's death and disposal has taken place.

The Family and Yearly Economic Contribution:

Before Christianity, there was a notable custom existing among the Tarao community. As per this custom each and every household in the village was obliged to subscribe one chiken, 5 litters of rice-beer and one pig or cow to the village king, but not all at a time. This subscription is given by the groups of families in rotation. The family who fails to contribute the above food items must receive a severe punishment, like forcing the family to pay just the double quantity of what was required to pay earlier. This is reinforced by the village authority or the chief. These three items are locally known as aarel, yuren and oksan respectively. At any time, the village Khullakpa may ask anyone in the village to subscribe the
above items. But it is only when visitors or outsiders visit their village. The Khullakpa seeks such subscription to extend hospitality to the visitors. Collection of subscription is made by anyone who is close to the Khullakpa. He must go house to house for collecting the items. However, they never ask to a particular family to subscribe it immediately. Instead, they approach to any other family who is economically in a position to give yearly subscription. That means it is once in a year for every family.

When there is a meeting or sitting by village authority members, the Khullakpa seeks such subscription from any family in his village. They discuss any matter only after eating and drinking. Thus the preparation of local liquor is a home-based-industry among the people of Tarao.

The preparation is very simple. Rice (unboiled) and outer covering of paddy (husk) dipped into water in a large earthen pot (Pitcher) that are kept for a period of two or three days. After getting it fermented they filter the liquid and store in a pot. It is sometimes prepared from boiled rice also. It is ready for drink after filter and shared by all the family members, irrespective of age and sex.
It is also a question of prestige for the family who can produce a good quality and quantity of country liquor. They are given high regards by others. Thus every family takes keen interest and compete with each other to produce best quality liquor as much as possible. Anyone visiting their family is offered this rice beer like a cup of tea during the good old days. The person who can drink more and more is regarded as a Hero amongst them. In such a way this rice beer was part of their life and culture and also an essential beverage.

Family subscription is also needed to meet the necessary expenses for the construction of village roads. Drinks required at the time of jhuming, plantation, housing etc. are the family concern. When they were converted into Christianity they had to give up drinking.

As among other tribes, the stable drink, almost the only drink, is rice beer and so with the Tarao. Tea was rarely used by them. There were different types of beer for different purposes and ages. Before drinking, a Tarao always poured a few drops on the ground as was found among the Sema Nagas.

Today also as has been in the past exist full coordination and cooperation between the members in a Tarao village.

Every Tarao family is required to subscribe a few bags of paddy, the quantity to be determined from the turnover of food grains of the family. A small percentage (10%) of their total food produce is the mandatory subscription. Thus the accumulated quantity of paddy every year are reserved in the Church's granary. It must be made clear that the family without having land or produce gets exemption from paying this subscription. However, those families are convinced to compensate their annual subscription in some other way. Formerly this kind of efforts in making a common pool of food grains was not there. But at present all the villages belonging to the Tarao have this system. This subscription is utilised for making payment to the Church Faster and the Chowkidar in the form of monthly salaries. The Church Faster's pay scale is ₹ 250 to ₹ 900 and for the Chowkidar, ₹ 50 to ₹ 200/–.

From the descriptive account on family ritual of the Tarao it brings out a few significant points in the domain of ideological principles and supernaturalism. Firstly, the concept of soul seem to be in some way or other related to Hinduism. Secondly, the change in material and non-material aspects of Tarao culture is very clear. The processes of change are yet to be understood properly.
Transmission of Property:

The transmission of family property is also known as 'Inheritance'. System of descent and the institution of private property are closely intertwined. So to speak, in many societies the principle function of the family is to provide lines for the transmission of property. When natural heirs are not available, this function may be served by means of adoption.

By and large, it consists of lateral exchanges between the living. The continuity of a society requires that there is an orderly flow of one's property from one generation to the next. This constitutes what we talk inheritance. In other words, inheritance "is the entrance of living persons into the possession of dead persons property". Property can be said as a web of social relations that establishes and maintains a limiting and defined relationship between persons and that object (property). In this web of relationship there must be roles or patterns of behaviour of the people that are associated with certain statuses, which are again in turn related to the object of property. Therefore ownership is a complex of statuses and roles that allows certain persons the socially recognised privilege - right of limited control of the use or disposition of object.

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These rights of control, though limited, established the owners' active and positive relations to the object. Thus, inheritance means a transference of status based upon a preexisting relationship between the predecessor and the successor. The relationship is personal, usually traditional, and based on kinship.

Since the Tarao people have the custom of patrilineal descent system and patrilocal residence, the society is to be said as patriarchy where the mode of transmission of family property is also patrimony. As is said, daughters do not get their father's property by the custom. The customary law of the Tarao permits only males to inherit property. Thus, father's property goes to the eldest son only by the Tarao law of inheritance, if not he gets the lion's share. There are traditional type of inheritance. But today all sons have ideally equal rights to their father's property. However, till today, the eldest son gets more property without involving any botheration among the brothers. The eldest son is supposed to occupy the position of his father, after the death of their father. Generally after the death of the father, they receive the property. On the one hand, girls may receive at least a small fraction of the property as gift from their parents at the time of their marriage,
otherwise they have no legal. The daughters, before they are married, stay with their parents and enjoy the property. But as soon as they get married the privileges cease. If there is no male issue in the family the property goes to the nearest male relative, who is obliged to make some economic provisions for the deceased's widow and the unmarried daughters. Moreover, a widow is entitled to use her husband's land and house during her lifetime but passed on to the nearest male member only when the widow is died and the daughters are married. And in case of her re-marriage, she has no right to use her first husband's property. In Tarao society, property consists of land, house, moveable articles, domesticated animals, money, ornaments and even debts. In the case of ancestral property it seemed to be of great value and a man seldom sells it to anyone.

As is said that traditionally the entire property was inherited by the eldest son, today there is a mode of equal distribution among brothers with mutual understanding influenced by present customs. In the earlier time eldest son must stay together with his parents, throughout life. When the younger sons are married they sometime live together with their parents and elder brother because the younger son has to depend upon them at least economically. The younger son(s) has no right to claim for any piece of
property. Owing to this reason probably there was a need to maintain a joint family. After a few years his brother and parents must try to construct a new house where the younger son has to establish a nuclear family. By Taao customary law there is no legal right for a younger brother to claim any kind of property but in some families the members are generous enough to give away some share to the younger ones. Similarly, in rare case, a daughter may get some amount of parental property as a gift on the occasion of her marriage. An adopted son also can receive the property and treated as a real son for that matter.

Looking out a site for constructing a house for other sons, at any place in the village one may have the choice of a residence either near his wife's parental house or his own parental house. Although they establish a new family their parents and eldest brother have to look after them forever. While separating, no moral or physical quarrel among the brothers is involved. Expenditure on constructing such a new house and others are the responsibility of the eldest brother and the parents.

If there is neither male issue in the family nor adopted male child, the property would go to the nearest lineal relatives, mostly this property is received equally by those very close kinsmen; i.e. to the deceased brothers. Those who are going to receive such property are obliged to
take any kind of financial responsibility related to the deceased's death and disposal ceremony etc. However, the eldest son had to take the above responsibilities and he is always assisted by his younger brothers. An adopted son is also equally responsible. A son can get his father's property only when he is older than the son of the 1st wife, otherwise no claim is accepted.

Lastly, Khullakpaship is inherited to the eldest son, then to his eldest son's eldest son. It does not go to anyone when there is a male issue in descending generations. But today anyone could be a king in the community where the choice of a king in the village is made by public support, but not by election. Present status of kingship does not past to his son at all.

The distribution of household articles, clothes and ornaments belonging to both sexes are handed over to the sons and daughters. That means, the father's belongings will go to the son and mother's to the daughter. The dresses and ornaments of king that generally goes to the next king. These valuables must accompany the funeral procession.

**Status and Role of Men and Women**

The term 'status' is a very elusive one. In sociological literature it is often used as a synonym for 'role'. "By social organisation (also called social structure) we
mean the patterned ways in which groups and individuals are organised and related to one another in the functioning entity that is society. The culture of every society includes a figurative 'manual' that lays out the major tasks to be performed, the job definitions of key personnel, and specific directions for carrying out the assigned functions. The tasks to be performed (as values) constitute what Malinowski called the Charter of social institutions. The job definitions and the assignment of specified persons to carry them out may be called social statuses. The directives for accomplishing various tasks may be called roles$^5$:

Institutionally organised groups in most societies are recognised as kinship groups (family, lineage, clan, phratry and moiety) or associations (age sets, clubs and fraternities, cults, corporations, work groups, guilds and the state). With a view to draw the attention of all concerned towards the status of the Tarao people it must be examined contextually.

It is to be noted here that an individual's status is his or her social position with reference to the other members of the society. Moreover, the status system of each and every society must involve certain amount of ranking between both sexes or in the same sex which are not the

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5. Hoebel, E. Adamson and Everett L. Forst 1979: 141
same; i.e. 'status' refers only to position and 'rank' to hierarchical status. Besides, role is also a customary complex of behaviour associated with a particular status. From such multidimensional aspects of study anthropologists have been drawing keen interest in order to know a real picture on its societal structure associating its various functions of an individual in it. From this standpoint, now, we can say that the status of women in tribal societies are described as high status in matrilineal societies and depressed or low status in patrilineal societies.

Since the Tarao society is patrilineal and patrilocal it can well be made the absolute determination that the status of man is in the dominant position whereas women in the low or depressed one. Thus they used to trace descent through male ancestral stock. Property, as being a determinant factor of status, was inherited by the eldest son only in recent past, but now it is distributed to all sons equally. For a systematic analysis the following is the description of status, to be discussed accordingly, as high or low often regarded as making very generalised and vague statement. Here it is to be remembered what B. Malinowski says that a correct definition of status can be given only after taking into consideration all mutual duties between the sexes and the safeguards provided for the protection of each sex against the high-handedness of the other. According to Lowie, that status
may mean four different things, all the four of which may not be, however, found to co-exist anywhere. Thus, actual treatment, legal status, opportunity for social participation and the character and extent of work, all determine each in a specific sense and manner, the status in a society. Basing on the above fundamentals given by various scholars the possible observations are being drawn from Tarao society, both in past and present.

An actual treatment to a woman in Tarao society is summarily assumed as low and depressed status. Women are treated with sympathy and often subjected to social contempt. Although she has no independent opinion she plays the main role in running the household. Most of the domestic affairs are in her hands. Her other daily performances are looking after the children, weaving cloth for entire family, preparation of local country liquor (rich beer), feeding of pigs, poultry, cattle, fetching of water, collection of firewood and eatable vegetables from the forest, and so on. She retires to bed only after other members have slept at night and gets up first in the morning. Some more roles are to be discussed about women in Tarao society. Unlike Meitês, a Tarao women, during her menstruation, is permitted to do any and every type of indoor and outdoor works excepting religious duties. There is no restriction to cooking, rendering services to her
husband and to her husband's father (marang). She is free to dine together with other senior members of the family and can eat from the common dining basket. What is more interesting to note here that a woman even after taking the food in contact with her mouth will be accepted by not only her husband but also her parents-in-law. A couple always sleeps together on the same bed even during his wife's menstruation period. But no sexual relation takes place during the cycle. Over the dining basket (Budona) is seen unity and affection between the members in the society.

By and large, a Tarao woman during her monthly period cannot render any service for the priest and priestess (Maipa and Maipi). They are tabooed to touch everything which are related to them. Moreover a woman having had no prescriptive form of marriage is also not allowed to do the same. A woman who has recently delivered a child cannot render any service for the priest and priestess for about a month or even more. They must not participate in any activity relating to ritual performance.

Exchange of personal dresses between a father-in-law and a son-in-law is avoided. The man who uses his son-in-law's clothes is looked down upon by the community. So he never makes use of any dress which belongs to his daughter's husband (kimak). However, this restrictions are not there between the wife's brothers. Similarly a woman does
not use Enku (Loin Cloth) of her daughter-in-law. The Tarao male members are tabboed from seeing enku. They believe that very sight of enku particularly belonging to their wives or daughters-in-law may bring bad luck or failure. So women never keep it in the front side of the house even when they wish to dry. A man never passes away through the rope or bamboo where enku is hanging. So much so that during the sudden break of rains the male members would not take the enku inside for fear of superstitions. This belief is also found among the Meiteis.

A brother cannot easily enter the room of his younger brother(s) who is/are married. Similarly younger brother too is not expected to do the same but if one does, it is not so seriously taken. Likewise a daughter-in-law is not permitted to get into the rooms of her father-in-law and her husband's elder brother; and a woman to her brother's bed room. Generally the rooms are separated by partition. Moreover, a women must maintain some sort of physical distance and respect toward her father-in-law and her husband's elder brother. There should not be free and frank discussion between father-in-law and daughter-in-law; between a man and his younger brother's wife in any situation. Similarly, a son-in-law cannot enter the room of his father-in-law and any other bed-room occupied by a couple.
To say about the social status of a Tarao woman it must be mentioned that they are treated with sympathy and often subjected to social contempt. They cannot actively participate in any ritual activity, but are required to serve by preparing the sacred items for certain rites. However, both sexes are somewhat on equal position while taking part in the worship of family deity. At the birth of a child it was noted that they follow different treatment patterns for male and female children. Like Swasti Pujah in Meitei, they also observes a ceremony called Naothla-Thulou on the day of delivery or on the following day. Offerings are made to the Aaro (family deity which has an abode in every household). That is a cock for a male child and a hen for a female child is sacrificed on this occasion. This makes a point of difference. An interesting thing is reported that prior to the profession of mid-wifery came into existence, the Tarao used to bring out the child from the womb of the mother which was done by a crude surgical operation conducted by her father-in-law. While delivery the people would try to save the life of the child at all cost which led to maternal deaths in many cases. It was done by a knife called Takshi. This may be accounted as one of the factors of population declination is the past (around one and half century back).
Spouse selection:

Out of the total female population 21.42% are married. In most of the cases they practised betrothal type of marriage with one's Mo Br Da which was reserved by a ritualized child marriage (Yurkhu). Thus a Tarao girl must marry to her father's sister's son; likewise a Tarao boy has to marry his mother's brother's daughter. It comes to them all by customs, and in this respect there is no distinction in the fulfilment of obligations by two sexes.

But after their conversion into christianity both sexes have started enjoying freedom of choice. Not only this but also a person has started marrying outside one's own community. However, women continue to occupy a low position in many other spheres of life even after their conversion.

Polygyny:

From the very beginning, polygyny is allowed as reported by the informants. At present there are only few families. Even if it is permitted by their custom no one is any longer willing to form polygenous union. It is because of unfavourable public opinion. If at all a man marries twice either the 1st or the 2nd wife must be forced to divorce. A widow is allowed to re-marry only with a widower whereas a widower is free to choose any girl/woman of his own choice.
Pre-marital sex relationship:

Pre-marital sex relation was not there during the former days since they had prescriptive form of marriage. Owing to this every boy or girl had to obey their parents.

The examination of the social facts in contemporary situation had revealed that the traditional behaviours are no longer operative. Many changes have been taking place. The factors responsible for such changes may be stated as educational and occupational diversification. Thus, many of the students are supposed to have free pre-marital sexual relationship. Whether their parents are aware of it or not but it is a fact that they move out of their houses for the sake of education and involve in sexual relationship. In one sense, both sexes have the same rights in moving here and there. Adultery is strictly prohibited. If so happens a severe punishment is imposed on them by the community. However, sexual relationship between widow and widower with mutual understanding is tolerated.

Seeking Divorce:

Both husband and wife have an equal right to seek divorce. But in practice a wife seldom goes for a divorce. So it is the privilege of her husband to seek divorce provided there are substantial changes against the wife. Divorce
is very rare among the Taraos. If the wife decides to leave her husband she has to refund the amount of wine, a pig and repay other expenditure that was made by the bridegroom on his marriage. Similarly, a man who decides to leave his wife has to refund the expenses (usually a lump-sum) to the bride's family. It indicates that here is no discrimination on the basis of sex so far as the conditions of divorce are concerned. Nevertheless, due to male supremacy, they always dominate in initiating such matters.

Women as mothers:

A woman has the usual burdens that are everywhere only the women's lot, like house-keeping, bearing and rearing children including education, kitchen maintenance and so on. It is to be noted that what holds good for women in matrilocal societies holds good for men in patrilocal societies. In Tarao, when a woman is at her husband's house she is with no position of dominating or freedom or will of her own at most affairs. Although Tarao women have no dominant voice but their wishes are always inquired into and generally respected. In a wife the best quality is her ability to do useful work rather than her looks. A woman is constant companion of her husband, and enjoy more or less equal rights with him at the family level and not at the community level. This, however, does not necessarily mean that women enjoy
good status. It may only reduce them (women) to the level which, in view of their limited physical capabilities and maternal duties, would become a positive handicap. To sum up the status of women as mother in any society is connected with their child-bearing and child-rearing functions and as mother they always receive respect and consideration. Much of the responsibilities in a family is in the hand of women.

Women in Economic Activities:

Trying to account for the status of women with reference to the part they play in the economic participation in the society will be discussed along with suitable examples. The sexes hold almost an equal position without having any law relating to the preparation for jhuming fields. Both adults and adolescents of two sexes work together in cutting down the trees for jhuming. Generally men do hard and heavy work whereas women and children are engaged in light work. But women are tabooed from initiating the work. The Tarao women are food gatherers. They collect fruits from the nearby forests. Collection is made at an individual level or in a group. A married woman is free to go for such collection and her husband never hesitates to send her alone to the forests. But unmarried girls do not have this freedom. Male members may take collection as a pleasure if they sometimes
go in search of food-stuff. The collection of fire-wood
lies mainly with the women. Besides this, weaving as a
household industry is run by the ladies. Most of the tra-
ditional clothes were made from a fiber tree called Bulah.
Traditionally women were not engaged in trade and commerce.
Today some of them are in trade and most of the children
and women are working in basketry which maintains the main
economic life of the family. In addition, these ladies have
started small scale industries in embroidery, wool-knitting,
tailoring, etc.

In agricultural activities both men and women have
almost an equal load of work if not more load on womenfolk.
It will not be out of place to mention that there is an in-
teresting custom associated with the storing of the agri-
cultural crops. That is when thrashing of paddy is complete,
the eldest daughter in the household must initiate the storing
of food grains in the granary to be followed by other members.
And at the end also she has to carry the remnant to come to
a close of the storing process.

On the day of hunting, no woman is allowed to collect
fruits, food or firewood from the forests either eastward or
westward. But they may go to other directions for such coll-
ection. If the hunting party happens to see any woman in the
above mentioned directions it is taken to be a sign of bad
luck. Generally on the day of hunting women remain within their houses. A man whose wife is pregnant should not participate in the hunting expedition. He cannot shoot at an animal. Not only this but also he should not look at the killed animal.

The Tarao male members are tabooed to take the meat of any animal which has been killed by a woman. This reflects that women are probably regarded as inferior in physical strength by their male counterparts.

In Religious Sphere:

Religion pervades all the aspects of Tarao life. There is no sacred book, canon, etc. except the custom. Every lineage has got a ritual spear which is preserved in the house of the eldest male member of that lineage. This is used either in war or in any ritual killing of an animal. The spear is tabooed from the touch of a female member irrespective of her clan/lineage and also this should not be touched by any member belonging to different clan and lineage. The parts of a sacrificed animal like head, heart, liver, intestine, stomach and other soft organs are offered to evil god (Kokshar) and goddess Shangkhu after having cooked in a separate pot by the women and the son-in-law. Women and the members of tender age group (from both sexes) are not allowed to share this food item. They eat only the remaining flesh.
Preparation and cooking must be done by Aksheng only (pure women) who are those from betrothal groups for three/four succeeding generation in the family line. In other family line where the male members have not had Mo Br Da marriage in any of the descending generations, the women are called Akbur. These women are not allowed to participate in the preparation of sacred items for worship. During menstruation no woman is allowed to take part in the above mentioned acts. But day-to-day kitchen activities like cooking and any other household work will continue even during the days of menstrual cycle.

Death:

The dead body is buried. A kind of flag (Firal) is erected on the buried ground. For a man a flag having six different colours and for a woman having only five colours are to be erected. The colours are white, blue, and red with varying shades. The death ritual takes place on the sixth day for male and on the fifth day for female. This ritual is locally known as Roshun-an.

Administration:

No woman is involved in any affairs of Administration. Even in a public meeting a woman can have no voice to raise. They would only remain as passive listeners.
Conclusion:

For understanding the status of Tarao women the scholar has peeped into their affairs through the socio-economic life of the tribe. It is only after the spread of Christianity that the community as a whole was exposed to the outside world. As a result of this some of the age-old beliefs, customs and traditions got modified. Women's education brought awareness to them. Womenfolk began to enjoy more and more freedom although the traditional chores of day-to-day life continued side by side.

The domestic duties that are performed by these women do not amount to drudgery. Rather they try to get pleasure out of it. Certainly there has been a remarkable change in their position as a maiden, as a prospective bride and also as a wife. The sphere of economic activities have become diverse which has infused more confidence in them. Although there are some vestiges of old customs which appear to undermine their position. But in reality it is not so.

We have come to realise that the worth of woman is not properly evaluated by the group in question. They also do not seem to realise potentialities of their female members and therefore treat them not equal to their male counterpart. Probably this issue could be taken up properly from the native concept of person.
We should not confuse on what Shakespear says in his book "The Lushei Kuki Clans". When he investigated on this small tribe, there were only 18 households. Due to such a very small population Shakespear might have conceived that the entire population of the Tarao as a single clan and he may have taken the four groups of peoples as four families. According to his analysis on marriage, each group was exogamous. But today, my finding is that there are three exogamous clans to which Shakespear termed as families at that time. The question is why he considered each of these four exogamous groups as family. I have traced out the origin of these groups of people who have different ancestral stocks. After Shakespear, Levi-Strauss (1969) has also defined such a marriage cycle as an *External Limits of Generalized Exchange* in his book "The Elementary Structure of Kinship". I reproduce here the diagramatic expression of marriage cycle of the Tarao as shown by Levi-Strauss.

![Diagram](image)

Fig. 4. Marriage cycle of Tarao (as shown by Levi-Strauss)²

G.Kabui (1976) stated that there are three exogamous clans. They are Trimsa or Katrimsa, Chana or Pachana and Khulpu or Khulpuin. It shows, with the exception of Shakespeare and Levi-Strauss, there are only three exogamous clans. Very recently, Bimal J Dev and Dilip K Lahari (1987) confirm that the Taraos are divided into three exogamous clans. Here I shall talk briefly on the existing clans. Regarding the classification of clans and the lineages relating to marriage made by earlier scholars appears to be little contradictory. It may be either due to structural change or the earlier studies may have suffered from the fallacy of observation. This fact may be further substantiated from the legends. They believe that the Taraos had originated from Kabow, once it was a part of Manipur but now in Burma. They are said to have three heroes (Trang) who came out from under the earth with their followers through the hole of a cave. The first hero called Katrimsa, came out from the inner layer of the earth to settle on the universe. Suddenly he met with a tiger and was killed instantaneously. Then the second hero Khulpu followed and found Katrimsa killed by a tiger. He saw the tiger. No sooner than he saw the tiger he collected some branches of tree from the nearby area in order to drive away the tiger. The tiger ran away. After that he informed and called out his followers, Chana and the members of Katrimsa.

---

In this way under the leadership of Khulpu, who chased the tiger away, they all came out from the cave and settled down in a place called Haobiching (name of a hill). From this account we came to know that there were only three groups of people who came out under the leadership of Khulpu. From that time Khulpu became the chief of Tarao referred as Khul-lakpa or Kurung. Thus the Kullakpaship was hereditary and always went to Khulpu clan. Each of these three groups of people named above are known by the term Shakeis (clans). In due course of time these three Shakeis got multiplied into a number of salais, i.e., lineages. The salai name is essentially prefixed with the personal name. Now let us have a look at the clans and lineages that the Taraos are presently organised into:

Fig. 5 Tarao clans and lineages organisation

It is interesting to note that in the beginning each clan was divided into as many number of lineages as there were number of sons. As a custom whatever may be the lineage name which is invariably prefixed with the personal name. It may be attributed to the practice of ultimogeniture where the eldest son inherits the property or the surname. More details on clans and lineages will be dealt in the next chapter.

**Spouse Selection: Constraints (past) and Freedom (present):**

Kinship plays a considerable role in the initiation of a marriage and in the choice of a mate. The incest taboo constrains the choice of a partner in a first marriage, and the sororate, though to a lesser degree, constrain choice in secondary marriages. The Levirate type of marriage is completely absent in the Tarao community. The primary marriage is of mother's brother's daughter (*amnei*). In addition to this formal constraints, parents must attempt to influence the choice of a spouse, and in most cases they may go so far as to arrange a marriage.

On the basis of the above clan organisation, it is observed that a man is free to choose his wife from any one of these *shakeis* (clans) today. It was not so during those days. It is one of the changes that has taken place. After Levi-Strauss pointed out certain rules of marriage there has been a considerable change which will be brought out in the
proceeding discussion. How marriage cycle has undergone such changes requires to be examined properly.

As now, essentially, the choice of a spouse is voluntary for either a boy or a girl (Table No. 35 and 36 a and b). Traditionally, the parents take the initiative in introducing the future spouses to each other and attempt to influence them to marry. I mean, rather, a marriage in which the children have little or no option but to accept their parents' choice. Similar case is found among the Burmese (Spiro, 1977: 153). In the past, the frequency was much higher for "children obeyed their parents". My strong impression, however, is that in the past, unlike today, such preferred/arranged/betrothed marriages were confirmed by the customs of the Taraos. This impression is supported by Shakespear and Levi-Strauss, that I have already discussed in the preceding section of this topic. It does not take into consideration on families of wealth, social position and to create economic alliance. However, there may be some exceptions.

Traditionally in the selection of mate, the most common practice was for the parents and elder kin members to find out a preferential mate for their marriageable children. The children in turn were obliged to accept their parents' choice. Because marriage was always regarded as a family affair and not an individual affair, the preferential mating had to be responded favourably. The negotiation had to be conducted by any kin
member(s) such as mother, father, father's friends, etc. or a son-in-law (makcha) of the family or all of them who acted as go-between (thimintong) with the concerned parties. The parents also took special care so that their sons and daughters were married one after another in order of seniority. However, it may not be applicable in all cases. If a bride from the preferential group is not found for the elder son (incompatible owing to age difference), the marriage of the younger is generally delayed even if a good match is available for him. But in certain cases where the family is in dire need of bringing a woman as daughter-in-law who may be a working force, the next son has to marry with the preferential bride superseding his elder brother.

Now let us describe a modified marriage cycle of the Tarao in order to understand the system of exchange. We remember Levi-Strauss's marriage cycle explaining the selection of wife which always moved in a clockwise direction. But when we look into the existing situation of the Tarao, this view does not lend support. It has undergone a remarkable change in the system.

![Diagram]

Fig. 6. Marriage cycle as exists now.
It is clear from the above pattern that the cycle also moves reverse direction which indicates that there is a complete change for selecting mate from the cycle that was given by Shakespear and Levi-Straus. Now a man is having much freedom of choice in taking his wife, nevertheless, the traditional mode of acquiring mate (preferential marriage) remains as their ideal culture. With a view to illustrate the endogamous and exogamous union I shall make an attempt to examine the number of marriages that have occurred among the Taraos. The following table shows the marriages that took place between the clans:

Table 35

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Name of Inter-Clan Marriage</th>
<th>No. of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Khulpu boy married Chanasa girl</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chanasa boy married Khulpu girl</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Khulpu boy married Katrimsa girl</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Katrimsa boy married Chanasa girl</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Katrimsa boy married Khulpu girl</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chanasa boy married Katrimsa girl</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of inter-clan marriage 81

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tarao boy married other tribal girls</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 35 shows the frequency of inter-clan marriage on the principles of clan exogamy. Looking back into the recent past it was noted that a man is obliged to marry a woman from a specific group according to Shakespear and Levi-Strauss. Today, the picture is completely different and as a result a person is absolutely free to marry anyone. In this table the number of inter-clan marriages are as many as 81 out of the total married couples i.e. 230 (as in 1988). Moreover, they have gone a few steps ahead in holding inter-tribal marriages --- 17 couples (Table 36 : A ). This increasing marital contact with the surrounding tribal girls is the result of large scale absorption, influence of Western values and haphazard migration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of Tribes where marriage takes place</th>
<th>No. of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Tarao boy married Moyon girl</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Tarao boy married Lamkang girl</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Tarao boy married Maring girl</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Tarao boy married Purum girl</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Tarao boy married Kabui girl</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Tarao boy married Anal girl</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Tarao boy married Assamese girl</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Tarao boy married Garo girl</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Tarao boy married Monsang girl</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 17
Table 36 (B)

Incidence of Inter-tribal marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of Tribes where Marriage takes place</th>
<th>No. of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Tarao girl married Purum boy</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Tarao girl married Monsang boy</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Tarao girl married Lamkang boy</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Tarao girl married Maring boy</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Tarao girl married Tangkhul boy</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Tarao girl married Mayang boy</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Tarao girl married Meitei boy</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Tarao girl married Nepali boy</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though tribe exogamy is not allowed by their customary laws they do not hesitate to marry outside the Tarao community. There are both males (17 couples) and females (12 cases) who have married with persons other than their own tribal group, such as Purum, Monsang, Moyon, etc. In this way many radical changes are now taking place. Here it may be mentioned that the freedom of choice in acquiring mate is not restricted to male members alone but it also extends to the female members. It was further reported that such unions are very common after their conversion to Christianity i.e. after the sixties. Prior to this, such incidents occurred seldom. Probably this is an indicative of a transition period and the Tarao culture is in a flux.
It is clear that the total population of the Tarao is 532, of which 282 and 250 are males and females respectively. 230 individuals are married and 302 unmarried. Of the married persons 18 are widower and 5 are divorcee. The figures in demography the number of married individuals is almost equal in both sexes, i.e. 116 (males) and 114 (females). The incidence of marriage is highest between 17 - 21 age group in both the sexes (male - 26.09%; female - 34.34%). Marriage in the age group of 16 and below does not occur among the males whereas among the females it is appreciably (9.13%) high. But the marriage of girl at the age of 16 or below has been decreasing in number during the recent years. One of the reasons for such changes may be due to the spread of education. The lowest frequency is in the age group - 30 and above (male - 3.47%; female - 0.43%). The second position in order of frequency is accorded to the members belonging to 22 - 25 age group (male - 16.52%; female - 4.33%).

These days children could enter into marital union with or without the consent of the parents. Even though a marriage is based on free choice, the consent of the parents is almost always requested. Although a marriage may be initiated by the parents, it can be effected only with the consent of the children. What is meant by "parental arrangement", therefore, is that the parents -- -- and it is almost always the boy's parents
who make the first overture to initiate the negotiations, subject, however, to the approval of the children. Similar facts has been reported by Nash (1965: 248) and Spiro (1977: 154) in Upper Burma. In some Indian tribes like the Kharia, the Ho, etc. are stated to have the similar situation (Majumdar and Madan, 1980: 72-4). Children can marry without parental consent; and elopement, as we shall see below, is a source of great shame for parents. Just as parents will not, and cannot, compel a boy to marry against his will the boy on the other hand is most likely to tolerate the choice made by their parents, nevertheless the former happens more frequently than the latter. But, conversely, there are some difficulties for a girl to marry against the choice of her parents. Even though, number of such cases (girl married outside the tribe) is as many as 12, it seems that the females also enjoy this freedom.

Choice is consistent with the following criteria listed in descending order of importance. First, it is a must that the intended spouse should be a Tarao, and strongly oppose marriage to a non-Tarao. In fact, in the past, the number of inter-ethnic or inter-religious marriage was negligible.

Parental opposition to inter-tribal marriage is especially strong in the case of parents of a girl who may like to marry a boy from another tribe. However, only a few such cases were found. This happens even though daughters are told that they not only risk a lowering of living standards by such a
marriage, but also they bring a stigma upon their parents. As the expression has it, they 'smear soot on the face of their parents'.

A second preference is that the intended groom should be older than the intended bride by at least one or more years. Aside from important differences in sexual maturation between males and females, a marriage in which the wife is the elder, spouse is considered inappropriate because it would cause important confusion in the sex and age respect categories; on the one hand, females are expected to show respect to males, but on the other hand, the younger are expected to show respect to their elders. Preponderantly, the ages of spouses in Tarao conform to the expected pattern. Thus, in the sample of 89 first marriages, the husband was older in 62, the wife in 4 and in 3 they were of the same age. The same pattern holds for the 9 second marriages, the husband being older in all cases.

The third parental preference is to go for a child marriage (Yurkhu). In the sense that the preferential child of female sex is betrothed to the boy's parents and when they attain the marriageable age the formal marriage is to be held.
Fig. 7. Superiority of the wife-givers over the wife-receivers.
Fig. 8 A genealogy of Mathangmanai lineage showing marriage alliance.
FIG. 9: A genealogy of Khulpu lineage showing marriage alliance.
Fig. 11: A genealogy of Tulekshanei lineage showing marriage alliance.
**Incest Taboos:**

Although incestuous desires are as prevalent in Tarao as anywhere else, it is known in Tarao as *kusur* which means incest taboos are subsumed by villagers under the more general rubric of prohibited marriages. Marriages with parent, child, sibling, half-sibling, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, grand-parents and grandchild are forbidden. Villagers strongly contend that uncle-niece and aunt-nephew marriages are prohibited. Moreover, marriage with one's father's sister's child or with father's brother's offspring is forbidden as it is also not allowed that a woman should marry with her deceased husband's elder or younger brother.

Matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is to be noted as a legitimate basis for alliance. The descent system is unilineal — patriclans. Within these patriclans, there are various sections accommodating an extended family due to their belief in the history of origin of the Tarao. An these sections are known as lineages. The elaborate system of the ritual surrounding engagement and marriage reflect a strong preoccupation with alliance on a structural level. Although arranged marriages are very few now, the system in an extensive structure that catches the vast majority of individuals in its net. Traditionally they encourage only one type of cousin marriage, i.e. matrilateral cross-cousin. This form is 'preferred' in the sense of being positively valued and sought after. But it
is never prescribed for an individual. Moreover, a set of rules barring marriage between most affines serves to restrict the impact of the preference for other forms of cousin marriage.

Which spouse in this cross-cousin marriage has authority over the other is determined not by gender per se but by kinship status with respect to the patriclan. Specifically, the Taraos believe that with a mother's brother's daughter --- father's sister's son marriage, it is the husband who has authority over her wife.

In general, the incest taboos are observed. The conclusion is that rules of incest cannot have a biological implication, viz, the ban on inbreeding due to the fear that it may lead to racial degeneration. The fear of supernatural punishment in case of the violation of this rules is found. Moreover, villagers agree that the sanctions for violating incest taboos vary according to the degree of consanguinity and followed by severe punishment -- legal, physical, social, etc.

Formal Aspects of traditional marriage:

Once the Tarao was an endogamous group. As stated earlier it no longer exists for we have found 7.39% (from the total married persons) of married persons having had inter-tribal marriages. Traditionally marriage (changwang) among the Taraos like the Kabuis of Manipur (Das, 1985: 36) is a
contract made between the parents of the two parties. Some elderly persons like father, mother, son-in-law or other relatives act as go-between (thiminton). In such a contract, the consent of the boy or the girl is seldom taken into account. The acceptance by the bride's parents at the approach of the bridegroom's parents symbolises the fixation of the marriage. The bride and bridegroom are known as Thirei and Changrei respectively. Traditionally, most of the marriages used to be arranged by the parents. But non-a-days approval of both the parties is necessary with the consent of a boy and a girl. Young men of the present generation have enough opportunity of meeting girls regularly in schools, colleges, and public places. Many of these meetings ultimately end in marriage. In former days, the practice of child marriage was very common in view of the Mo Br Da (amnei). Clan exogamy was strictly observed as it is now. The preference was to marry mother's brothers' daughter and held in high esteem.

There are three steps towards the formalization without which the marriage does get sanction. All the three stages are accompanied by nominal ritual and ceremonial acts. Every step terminates with a feast. The food items distributed in the feast are meat of pig or cow with country liquor (made by people themselves). It may take about one year or more in the performance of all the three different steps. These are mentioned hereunder:
1. Mou-Hai

2. Shiluk-Ngathal and

3. Amante/Meilosheh

1. Mou-Hai

It is the first formal negotiation. Like Meiteis, initial negotiation must come from boy's side. Before this formal negotiation, there is the role of mediators (thimintong) which has to be jointly played by father, father's friends, mother, mother's friends and other relatives. This takes place, generally, when the Amnei (Mo Br Da) attains her marriageable age or is available for such initial negotiation. This first visit to the bride's house by the boy's family members/relatives for a formal marriage is locally known as Mou-Hai. When they go for Mou-Hai they must customarily carry one or more Jars of country liquor, a pig or cow, some quantity of Tukshi (readymade green vegetables' food items) to the house of the prospective bride. The elders from both sides will do the negotiation. Meanwhile Makchas (own son-in-law(s)) of the family or any of the patrilineal kins from the boy's family prepares the meat. Normally the two parties come to an agreement since preferential mating (Mo Br Da) has a positive sanction. Now they are served with wine and meat on this occasion implying that they have approved the proposal. Here a son-in-law plays the main role and have a special status because most of the activities are carried out by him and under his active
supervision. If the family does not have a son-in-law any other affinal kin who is on par with son-in-law would be responsible to conduct the work.

Prior to Mou-Hai, one or more Makcha(s) including the parents and relatives of the bridegroom (changrei) will act as go-between (thimintong) and in consultation with the two parties fix up the date of Mou-Hai. When it is fixed they would move from house to house of the relatives and friends giving a formal (oral) invitation to join the Mou-Hai congregation. In this congregation village authorities are compulsorily invited to be supposed to lead the journey of Mou-Hai.

Preparation of meat, distribution of prepared food items, etc. are the duty of the Makchas. A priest (theempu) of the village will offer some quantity of prepared meat and local liquor to God (Akpu) and Goddess (Rapu). Then, elders from both the sides sit at the centre of the feast where they initiate the feasting. After that, other participants follow. It is to be noted that in the feast there is no rice. The elders from both the parties must be served with special quality of local liquor, meat like the portions of liver, head, intestine, etc. Besides, they will get the common share of meat too. On this occasion neither the bride
(therei) nor the bridegroom (changrei) will take any active role. They have simply to make their physical presence.

The Mou-Hai is held in the evening i.e. after sunset. It lasts for one night only. The whole night is spent with songs, dance and music. It is the time when the date for the subsequent ceremony to be decided. In case the date is not fixed during this ceremony then thimintong has to do the needful.

2. Shiluk-Ngathal:

It takes place after two or three months of Mou-Hai. It is the second stage leading to a formal marriage. The term Shiluk-Ngathal literally means a small box (made up of split bamboo) filled with dry fishes. It does mean a offering of dry fishes by the boy's parents to the girl's family in order to seek the permission in the matter of sexual intercourse between the concerned spouses. The box, full of dry fishes, is to be carried by any member, but preference is given to a female. Not only dry fish but also country liquor, pig and other items as in the Mou-Hai are taken to the bride's family. The way of feasting is same as in Mou-Hai. But there is a slight difference i.e. on this Shiluk-Ngathal procession, the bridegroom has to be accompanied by his own sisters, his friends, his father's sisters and other relatives and
father's friends. Here the number of female member who accompany
this journey is more in number than in Mou-Hai.

From this day, it is permitted to have sexual inter-
course and allowed to stay together at night. In the dinning
ground the bridegroom with the bride will have a special seating
arrangement and would be dinning together in presence of all.
Simple ritual performance as in Mou-Hai is done. It is rather
a grand feast which gives the social recognition to the marriage.
After the Shiluk-Ngathal feast is over the relatives of the
boy would go back leaving behind them the bridegroom who is
expected to stay at his wife's house for that night only.

Until and unless the final stage of formal marriage
is confirmed the boy will continue to visit regularly the
girl's house in the evening everyday only after having taken
meal at his house. He shares the same bed with her and comes
back when the day breaks. In this way the boy enjoys his newly
married life for about one or two months. In the meantime
through thimintong the boy's parents will seek to perform either
Amanté(bride price) or Meilosheh (service) which is the last
stage of the Tarao marriage. In fact, the marriage is complete
with the performance of Shiluk-Ngathal. It is because the
last stage is concerned with the payment of bride price either
in cash or kind or in terms of labour.
3. Amante:

In connection with arranged marriage a Tarao boy has either to pay Amante (bride price) or to render Heilosheh (a six years long service) to his father-in-law's family. The decisive role in such matters is taken by the concerned parents. While taking decision on the mode of payment (either in terms of cash or kind or in terms of labour) they will consider the family size of both the parties as well as their financial position.

Without the payment of bride price the marriage will not get social sanction. If the payment is made either in cash or in kind or both, no service (labour) will be required. If the boy's family is economically sound and having a large number of Salesi (lineage) members their social status will be regarded as high. With this background the parents may come to request the girl's family to accept Amante under exceptional circumstances. When the boy is the only son of his parents they may favourably be considered and permitted to pay Amante. Under the above mentioned situation, the bride's family usually agrees to receive the bride price. On the contrary, if the bride's family is economically well off or better positioned the bride's parents must make a requisition for service from the bridegroom, i.e. Heilosheh. When the bride's family
has three or four daughters and minor sons and if they happen
to give at marriage their first or second daughter the parents
must assert on Meilosheh from the prospective groom.

The bride price of a Tarao girl was Rs.30/- during the
twenties as reported by Shakespear and Levi-Strauss. After
that it was increased to Rs.50/-. Besides, this following items
were also to be given as a part of the bride price. These are
one gong (metal drum), 2 or 3 dishes made from split bamboo/
wood/brass, one or more cattle, one pig, some clothes, etc.
And they must offer some jars of country liquor one each to
three different age-sex groups: elders, youths, and women.
After the payment of bride price is made, the boy's family
will arrange a feast to be cooked and served by the son-in-
law of the family as in Mou-Hai/Shiluk-Ngathal.

There is a rule on the preparation of the meat that
the head of the pig should be cut into two pieces and to be
cooked separately and not mixed with other remaining flesh.
These two pieces are to be taken exclusively by two male
members who had witnessed the payment of bride price. The
remaining meat is served to others including those two
witnesses.
Table 37

The rules of witness selection in marriage

<table>
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<th>Clan of the boy to be married</th>
<th>Clan of the witness</th>
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<td>1. Katrimsa</td>
<td>a) One elder from Khulpu</td>
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<td>b) One elder from Chanasa</td>
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In presence of village Chief(s), his assistants and the witnesses, the bride-price is given to the bride's family. After this, the bride will stay with her parent's family for about 10 days or a maximum period of one month. Then the parents and other nearest relatives of the bride will bring her to her husband's house. A box made of bamboo strips, clothes, ornaments, spade, dao, basket, dish, cattle etc. are given to the bride by her parents which she will carry with her as a gift.

When they arrive to the groom's house the bride is solemnised with certain ritual acts to be performed by the village priest in the courtyard of the husband's family.
This solemnisation is known as Markheeng—kung—maring. It signifies her entry into her husband's lineage. Now onwards the new couple will continue to live together in the same house for about two or three years. Then, they can have a separate household.

4. Meilosheh:

In place of bride price, the obligation of a son-in-law to work for his wife's parents may be an enduring responsibility. In other words, it is a kind of marriage by service to his wife's family for a period of six years, simultaneously enjoying his stay with his wife as husband and wife. This alternative is given to those prospective grooms who are incapable of paying the bride price or under the compulsion of any adverse circumstances. Unlike other tribal groups who do not allow consummation of marriage before the payment of bride price/service, the Taraos grant permission. When we look at other tribes like Gond, Baiga, Janusar Khasa, Kolta, etc. (Majumdar and Madan, 1980) we find there is an obligation to serve his physical power in order to obtain a girl. But among the Taraos the consummation of marriage and service (for a period of six years) may go together. Moreover, among the Chirus, it is apparently necessary for the bridegroom to

work for his father-in-law as well as to pay him something as a price. And among the Quoireng too, where the service, is accepted in lieu of the price.\footnote{Hodson, T.C., 1984 : 91}

The Meilosheh starts only when the mode of payment is finalised through Thimintong. For this, they must fix up a date when the boy will go for rendering his services. He does not go alone. He makes companions like his friends, relatives, parents, sisters, etc. To get ready for this journey, he puts on new clothes and carries with him fishing, hunting and agricultural implements. When the journey starts some of his relatives and sisters will try to run after him for sprinkling ashes at him. This he must escape by somehow or other. This is just for the sake of fun. Once he comes out of his room and reaches to the exit of the gate without being touched with the ashes, he is believed to have succeeded.

Soon after their arrival at the bride's residence, one or two Makchas would start cooking the meat and other food items. Celebration starts in the evening and continues throughout the night amidst dances, music, songs, right there at the bride's residence. All invitees will remain there. The whole night is spent with drink and feast. On the following day they will come back to their respective
houses, except the bridegroom, who would stay back to render six years long service. A similar observation was made by Das (1985) about the Kabui Nagas of Manipur. But it is somewhat different from that of the Tarao which states:

"In some cases the boy comes over to stay with the girl's family. He is expected to serve the family in the best way he can, after which marriage is performed. In this type of marriage (nou-mengmei), bride price is put off or reduced to half."^8

We have seen that there is an alternative to bride price by way of offering service. Das does not mention the stipulated period of service. However, in order to get a wife this sort of service to his prospective wife's family were necessary in the former times among the Kabui Nagas. But among the Tarao, service is given while living together as husband and wife.

After this stipulated period is over, the man with his wife and children comes back to his father's house where they have to live for sometime. In some cases, the man will come first and his wife is permitted to stay back for a few more months at her father's house. When she comes


to her husband's house she will bring some clothes, implements, basket, ornaments, cow, fowl, etc. from her parent's house as gift. Thus the married couple will stay for about some years together. Then his parents and he himself would try to construct a new house where they will live in.

**Forms of Marriage:**

In general, marriage can be of several types. All over the tribal India, and the world in general, we have come across rules laying down prohibitions, preferences and prescription in deciding the form of marriage. In the preceding pages we have already discussed the prohibition rules and customs of the Taraos. Here the forms of marriage are being discussed.

Looking into the Tarao ethnography, it emerges that there are six types of marriages through which a wife can be obtained. The following are the forms of marriages:

1. **Yurkhu** (Child marriage)
2. **Kikloumou** (Marriage with Mo Br Da/preference)
3. **Tian** (Marriage by elopement)
4. **Tulmeipaolou** (Widower marriage)
5. **Tulmeinaolou** (Widow Marriage)
6. Church marriage (Recent Development)
1. Yurkhu (Child Marriage):

Majumdar (1980)\(^9\) and other scholars say that in some Indian tribes like the Baiga, the Korwa, the Ho, the Munda, the Bhil and so on are reported to have popularized child-marriage in order to restrict sexual licence. He further mentions that such a child-marriage is a new phenomenon in Tribal India, as a result of contact with Hindu neighbours. But among the Taraos of Manipur, such a marriage is not a new phenomenon. From the very early period of their society they have been practising child-marriage. Here the term 'Yurkhu' means betrothal of a girl to her potential mate. This betrothal was probably necessitated for obtaining a wife from one's mother's brother's daughter. Therefore the parents of a boy always approached to the girl's parents for a commitment. Since a girl may have potential mates related through lineal and collateral kinship, reservation may be justified. It was regarded as a very important alliance as well as a common practice of marriage according to the Tarao tradition. As and when a female child (Mo Br Da) is born, the information reaches to the boy's parents or the news is communicated by the boy's father's sister's family who in turn would go for obtaining a promise from the child's family to reserve her for their son. This follows with a brief ritual known as Markheeng-kung-maring. Now she is not permitted to

marry any other person than the betrothed one because she is ritually reserved for the boy. In other words, the Tarao boy, on the other hand, is obliged to marry the girl who has been reserved by Yurkhu. The actual marriage would take place only when they have attained marriageable age. Yurkhu can be done either with his mother's brother's daughter (Amnei) or any other girls. But the best mate is the mother's brother's daughter. If the Mo Br Da is not available only then the boy's parents will look for any other girl who may be from his wife's lineage/clan. The details may be under Kikloumou. Thus the Yurkhu has been popular among the Taraos. It does not involve any kind of feast. It is a simple arrangement by the parents of both the parties to enter into an agreement of setting up a connubial relationship between them. Later on the marriage must undergo all the three stages, i.e. Mou-Hai, Shiluk-Ngathal and Amante or Neilosheh.

2. Kikloumou:

Looking at the Tarao social matrix it may be proper to examine the rule of Mo Br Da marriage among them functioning as an obligatory regulation based on kinship. Mo Br Da is terminological addressed as kimou (daughter-in-law) by the parents of the boy, even before or after marriage alliance is formed and Amnei by others. This indicates that she is obliged to marry her father's sister's son. Amnei (means an ideal spouse) is the addressing term used by other people in the
community. The term *kimou* for a girl so related also contributes to the custom of Mo Br Da. So that they prefer this form of marriage. Thus, in general, *kikloumou* (marriage by preference) as a rule must undergo through *yurkhu*. In some cases, the boy's parents do arrange such a marriage without *yurkhu*. It is always the duty of the boy's parents to approach for a betrothal girl before any other proposal comes from someone else who may also be from the same preferential group. So the *yurkhu* is to be performed out of dire need in the past. In one sense the two stages are interrelated.

Among the Taraos, the family bondage is very strong. It is common knowledge that a patrilineal genealogy is built up of father-son ties and brother-brother ties, which stand for relations of hierarchy and inequality on the one hand and relations of equality and identity on the other. In a patrilineal society an individual shares part of his being with his paternal group. Identity and sharing are characteristics of relations within the descent groups. So inter-kin group or inter-descent group relations are typically those of exchange of partners. In Tarao society and for that matter in all patrilineal societies every person is related through women to a number of lineages. However, a man is generally aware of the lineage with whom he is directly in contact with. The significant lineages to whom a man is related through
women are those of his wife, his wife's mother, his own mother and the mother of his two parents. Mother's brother and mother's brother's son are members of the same kin group as are mother's sister and mother's sister's daughter. Mo Br Da marriage, which can better be understood as an interlineage marriage, produces a chain of lineages of the different clans in a permanent marital alliance. In other words, matrilateral cross-cousin marriage unites a whole series of distinct patrilineages. In technical jargon the system may be termed as asymmetrical alliance system or generalised exchange. Here some are always supplying women to their allies, while others are always receiving them, in the case of marrying Mo Br Da. It is not reversible for exchange of women as wife between these two lineages, but beyond, it may be so. What is important to note is that the exchange established by matrilateral cross-cousin marriages seem to be inherently unequal. The wife-receivers have to pay bride price (amante) to the wife-givers, which is in most cases to be replaced by physical labour and ceremonial services given to the wife's family after the marriage.

Marrying Mo Br Da is supposed to be the ideal union among the Taraos. The practice is more or less an obligation on both sides. In case Mo Br Da is not available, a person is obliged to seek the bride from his mother's side, who
can still be genealogically regarded as representing the amnel. A man shall not under any circumstances marry his Fa Si Da (ute). Such a marriage is strictly prohibited. Marrying any girl from father's side is out of question and cohabitation with such a girl is strictly forbidden, and so far not a single case has been found. Of course, if no girl is available from mother's side one may marry any girl within the community, but avoiding father's side including father's sister's daughter, father's brother's daughter, etc. However, such a choice of a prospective bride is made by the parents of the boy.

Mo Br Da marriage may come through Yurkhu. In case the Yurkhu ceremony was not performed earlier one should go for it immediately. For this, first of all the parents of an eligible boy decide to bring a suitable match either from his mother's brother's daughter or from his mother's salai (only when Mo Br Da does not exist). When the two parties fail to reach an agreement, the mediator (nearest kin) is discouraged to proceed further in connection with marriage negotiation. It is required to make a number of visits by mediator to the girl's family for settling the matter.

Like the Kabui, among the Taraos also the rule permits a man to take his wife from his mother's lineal
group. Functionally, the Taraos are also supposed to have a wife-giving and a wife-receiving relationship. So marrying Mo Br Da is, under this rule, considered to be the most preferred union. By doing so the relationship between the two families are more strengthened and allowed to continue. Mo Br Da marriage is a kind of kin-group alliance, a sort of implicit contact that must be honoured by the respective parties.

It is clear that the Tarao lineages are linked together on the basis of a wife-giving and wife-receiving relationship. So to say that lineages seem to have a permanent relationship which strengthened further by Mo Br Da marriage. But the way of exchange is different from other in the sense that one side always has to receive wives from another, in return they cannot receive any wife from the lineage to whom they give wife. In the case of preferential mating of Mo Br Da, the prescription is of receiving wives from the one and giving wives to the other. There is no question of high or low in their status. Wife-giving lineages are considered equal to wife-taking lineages. Moreover, wherever there is matrilateral cross-cousin marriage wife-giving lineage is in the same rank with wife-receiving lineage. It is compulsory on the part of every married man to go to his wife's house to serve for a period of six
years which must begin just after the marriage. In case, when the boy's parents pay bride price (amanet) to the girl's parents one may get exemption from the labour and in some cases it is under special consideration.

Marrying Mo Br Da is considered to be the ideal form of marriage not only among the Taraos but among other tribes as well, of whom mention may be made of the Tangkhul, Kabui, Anal, Maring, Kom, Koieng, Paite, Chotme, Moyon, Monsang, Thadou (Das, 1985 : 53). And among the Chiru, the Aimol-Kuki of Burmese, the Mikir of Assam and the Khasi, etc. were reported the same type of union (c.f. Levi-Strauss, 1969 : 269-72). "In some parts of China it was preferred for: the son to become betrothed to his mother's brother's daughter ... ... In fact, a betrothal was almost compulsory in Kao-Yao if a boy had a maternal cousin no more than three years younger, and it could be arranged if the girl was older".10.

"The general rule among the Kachins (Burma) appears to be for a man to marry the daughter of a mother's brother or failing that some other cousin on the female side ... ... "11. Why do all these tribes of Manipur and other prefer marriage with Mo Br Da. In the opinion of one scholar -- "the common answer could be that such a marriage considerably reduces the chance of conflict. Such conflicts arise from failure to abide -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- 10. Hugh, D.R. Baker., 1979 : 43
by obligations involved in affinal kinship. Obligations are more likely to be observed by consanguineal kin who are also related through affinal kinship ties. Evidently, asymmetrical exchange system, which does not favour direct exchange relationship, is a feature common to all the tribes of Manipur. Marriage by exchange at the level of cross-cousins is a form of generalised exchange refers to a situation when marriage can take place between an unspecified number of partners. The exchange partners do not give to those from whom they receive. The partners are, therefore, bound by a relationship that operates only in one direction. It is, however, difficult for a descent group like clan which is a dispersed exogamous unit, to function as an alliance unit ... "12

One could find that the joint interests of brothers are at the centre of lineage organisation. They transmit their interests to their sons. The right of inheritance of father's property, however, remains with the eldest son. It is important to note that authority based on seniority within the descent system provides the structural basis for maintaining order. So long as most members of the Tarao community are united by bonds of kinship, the system remains effective.

3. Tlan (marriage by elopement):

It is another way of acquiring a wife. It is also reported that when the preferential marriage starts withering away by their conversion into christianity marriage by

elopement takes place at a high frequency rate. It shows that the youths are no longer interested in preferential mating. It was observed by some aged informants that since World War II number of elopement marriages have been rising. As we have seen that such type of union is owing to mutual attraction between boy and girl who take an ultimate decision to elope and stay away for a day or two and put in with their friend's house. This information is given to the boy's parents by his friend or anyone whosoever may have subsequently come to know of this. After having come to the boy's parents they will try to have a negotiation with the bride's family. At the same time the girl's parents must pursue to give their daughter at marriage to the person with whom she had eloped. Formerly such elopement cases were very often generated conflicts. However, this resolved by performing a formal marriage. Gradually the elopement came to be accepted by the customs and now-a-days it has become just a symbol of normative behaviour. In marriage by elopement it is not required to go for Mou-Hai and Shiluk-Ngathal. Such marriages directly come to the third stage i.e., either Neilosheh or Amante.

4/5. Tulmeipao/olou/Tulmeinaolou(Widower marriage/Widow marriage):

A widow or a widower is permitted to remarry, usually after one year of death of the spouse. There is no such bindings that a woman should be remarried with her deceased husband's
younger/elder brother. Rather it has a negative sanction. She is free to make her own choice which was also there during the bygone days. Remarriage of a widow is locally known to them as Tulmei-nau-lou. Most of these marriages occurred between widow-widower. In our record there are as many as 4 which constitute 0'75% of this type of marriage of the total. Marriage of widower with an unmarried girl were found in 2 cases. These cases are the sororal union. But no levirate marriage has ever taken place in the community. Why do they allow sororate? The reason is that the man is quite familiar with his deceased wife's sister who may be considered for taking much care of his children on the one hand and there is every possibility that the lady would be the best match on the other. In fact the native think that she (wife's younger sister) would be the ideal step-mother to look after her late elder sister's children. If the widower is unwilling to do so, then, he is free to make his own choice. In the case of a widow, as has already been stated it is not permissible to go for levirate. Here they cannot make their own choice although they enjoy freedom in respect of mate selection. Generally they are remarried with widowers only or maintain widowhood till death. The above two types of widow and widower marriages are not required to undergo through any of the three stages of the marriage. So, no Mou-Hai, Shiluk-Ngathal and Meilosheh or Amante has to be followed. The widower simply
offers some quantity of country liquor with meat to the villagers in order to get recognition as a remarried couple. According to the informants, marriage between a widower and his deceased wife's younger sister has a positive value in their society. As such it is far more dependable to keep the children under the care of a secondary kin who may be no less than the real mother. The children of such a widow who maintains her widowhood would generally be looked after by her patri-kins and also by the relatives of her husband's salai. Thus a widow has only to take up the financial responsibility of running her family. At times a widow may decide to marry again with any man of her likings and on this event the children should be given away to her late husband's family. In this case those children inherit the property of their deceased father.

6. Church Marriage:

It is the present form of marriage among the Taraos. It has been continuing from the very beginning of their conversion into Christianity (about thirty years from now). Before they became Christians, a few cases of polygyny were reported to have occurred. But after the conversion, polygyny has completely disappeared. On the contrary, tribe-endogamy no longer is being adhered to. So a man can marry a woman from any other tribes and the vice-versa. Marriage of today is more a contract than a sacrament. They maintain as
a strong patrilineal society, and if a person dies without a legal heir, his property goes to his nearest patrkin. Traditional type of marriage has been disappearing fast and being replaced by Church marriage. Neither Amante or Meilosheh is no longer compulsory. Social obligation toward blood relationship, kinship organisation, exchange, economic behaviour, etc. are still going strong. But these are not considered for village administration. Cultural items like dance, music, folk songs perpetuate during marriage ceremony and in other festivals. It was further noted that in almost all the festivals they perform traditional songs, dance and put on their traditional dresses and ornaments. Even after the change of religion the people have not completely done away with the preferential form of marriage although that may not be many in number.

Divorce:

Divorce is very rare among the Taraos. But a divorce may be granted only when there is maladjustment between husband and wife and particularly when it goes beyond control. Either the husband or the wife has a right to seek separation. It can be had by mutual consent too. Upon deciding to divorce the wife, a man may pronounce his intentions by the act of discontinuing his visits to her that presumes his willingness to divorce. According
to informant, women seldom seek divorce. A husband decides to divorce his wife which is permissible by their customs provided there are substantial charges against her. However before the divorce is permitted an attempt is made to make them mutually readjusted by the parents. It is regarded as a matter of shame for the parents when a question of divorce is raised by their son or daughter-in-law. In the beginning they try to convince and resolve the matter. But in case the parents fail to solve it is taken up by the village administrators i.e. the tribal council along with the help of village elders has to intervene who would try for the tribal council amicable solution to the problem. But when it is unavoidable, the man who decides to leave his wife has to refund the expenses (usually a lump sum) and the ornaments, dress, etc. to the bride's family. If the wife decides to leave her husband she will be required to refund a sum of £500/- along with wine, pig and other expenditures made by the bridegroom in his marriage. Over and above, a divorce must be followed by a feast to be given to the villagers by divorcée. The question of refund does not come when the divorce is by mutual consent. But for such a divorce also they have to arrange a small feast to the villagers in order to get social sanction. There is always a possibility of remarriages between others who have been separated by divorce. Divorce is public affairs which insists on a community feast and get-together. If the
couple is having children the minor one (breast fed) would remain with the woman and others go to the man after separation.

The Legitimacy of Marriage and Separation: Tribal Council:

Khullakpa is the chief who receives help from this council. The Khullakpaship is a hereditary post. The Tarao has a traditional Tribal Council which is identical to the judicial tribunals. Formerly the Tarao was an endogamous but now they have started permitting tribe-exogamy. The officials are also hereditary. Under the leadership of a chief there are nineteen officials who enjoy powers to inquire into any problem. The headship was introduced in the name of Kurung (king) in 1962, in place of Khullakpa. Thus the village headman with other members constitute the Tribal Council at the village level leading the formation of a single council of the Tarao Community as a whole.

The judicial procedure of the tribal is simple. The session or meeting of the council is called whenever there is any complaint. The matter must be notified to the parties involved before they assemble for such meetings. The meeting is held at the centre of the village. The village will call other kings and officials of neighbouring Tarao villages, if necessary. The council decides disputes such as cancellation of engagement, matters relating to elopement and capture, widow
marriage, divorce and other issues.

If a married woman commits adultery in the village and the matter comes up before the tribal council, the alleged pair is asked to leave the village after paying necessary compensation to the bereaved husband. The compensation is usually the expenses incurred in the marriage. It so happened during my stay there that an unmarried girl was impregnated by a man. An attempt was made to hush up the issue by administering herbs causing abortion. Ultimately, the tribal council interned and compelled the pair to get married.

Most of the decisions of the traditional tribal council are pronounced verbally in the open meetings. Sometimes the proceedings are put on record. However, there has been considerable change in the tribal scene during the present decade. Development administration has reached almost in all the tribal villages. The tribals have come into contact with other communities. Literacy has increased and a new elite group from among the political workers, government servants, military personnel and students have emerged. These have brought about the structural change in the primitive system of justice. However, tribal council are still very much strong.

Concluding Remarks:

The tribe is concentrated in certain villages of Chandel district. Due to contiguous area they have formed a
structured group and function in unison. The nucleus of the Tarao society is the family, which is traditionally virilocal and patriarchal. Basically, the Tarao social structure is built around segmentary lineages which remain stationary. There may be different levels of segmentation. At the basic level there are only household lineages, the lineages of close relatives who are related in a patrilineal line. Formerly, descent through a line of first born was given full advantages to the eldest son, but it no longer exists. The system of equal distribution to each son and no share to the daughter prevails. This probably is their tacit approval to democratic rights of every male members. However, in certain case, there may be an exception. In the olden days, the eldest son had special lineal rights to the inheritance of property. He used to succeed his father's position had to become head of the household after the death of his father and was responsible for maintaining the family. It is still applicable in Tarao society. At present the inheritance pattern had completely changed and on the democratic principle all of the sons have equal share. Each and every son must receive equal share though the eldest son who is supposed to be the father of the family.

Once the Tarao was endogamous. It is no longer so. Today they do not mind to practise tribe-exogamy. The choice of a spouse was limited to Mo Br Da, a preferential system based on matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. There were four
groups of people each of whom had to have exogamy. Today, there are only three clans and they have retained exogamy. According to Shakespear and Levi-Stauss the mode of exchange was in a clockwise direction only. But as indicated by other scholars and my own field data also speaks of an exchange system which is no more unidirectional. That is to say about exchange of woman which follows both clockwise and anticlockwise. Obviously, this cycle of moving in all direction is owing to the fact that there is no priority for Mo Br Da marriage. Not only that but also a Tarao boy or girl can marry other tribes. Marrying outside the tribe is as many as 17. Today all types of marriages come under church marriage. Mo Br Da marriage provides the kinship link between the constituent lineal groups. The presence of lineal ties account for the continuity of family life. Amne marriage provides a means of establishing relations between lineages within the society by the establishment of consistently recurring links between related groups. The Tarao lineages are linked together on the basis of the exchange of women between them on the principle of clan exogamy. Once it was a generalised exchange system as stated by Levi-Strauss which does not exist today. This has been replaced by individual choice based on clan-exogamy. So every lineage should have a permanent relationship with two others, receiving wives from the one and giving wives to the other. The brothers in a family will stay together for sometime, but ultimately each of them will have a
separate unit and he would become the head of a new family.

According to Roop Singh (1987) among the Bhills of Rajasthan -- "There is difference in the assumption on which the Indian Penal Code is based and the customary law of the Bhills. The code is a legacy of British Raj. The customary law regulating marriage is evolved by the community itself. ... ... The administrative personnel, the judges, the lawyers, the policemen, and public prosecutors in the scheduled area are mostly drawn from the elite caste. Although they are aware of existence of tribal customary law, they never refer it for solving disputes. There are far more practical reasons for it rather than any ideological consideration. If the tribals settle their disputes according to their customs, it would reduce the number of cases in the courts which may further affect the flourishing practice of the lawyers and their agents and underhand dealings of others. Therefore, no body wants to defend the tribals by arguing that they have their own customary law to regulate their marriage affairs and therefore the statutory courts are not competent to consider such cases. The statutory law has become a tool of exploiting of poor tribals ... ...".

Similarly, among the Taraos there is traditional Tribal council which maintains the regulation of law and orders based on their customary law. As far as practicable the council will take full initiative in solving the problems in the society.
The present day form of marriage is church marriage which may generally be of elopement in most cases. Here the traditional three tier system i.e. Mou-hai, Shiluk-Ngathal and Meilosheh is almost non-existent. Selection of spouses which was a prerogative of the parents has now gone to the individual members who are involved to form a marital union.