Social structure as the basic concept for the proper understanding of the society has been defined by different scholars in various ways. According to Talcott Parson, "Social structure is the term applied to the particular arrangement of the inter related institutions, agencies and social pattern as well as the statuses and roles which each persons assumes in groups" (Talcott Parson, 1951; p. 89). By emphasising the importance of the network of
social relationships, Nadel writers, “we arrive at the structure of society though abstracting from the concrete population and its behaviour the pattern or network of relationship obtaining between actors in their capacity of playing roles relative to one another” (Nadel, 1957; p. 12). Taking the significance of social organisation, Ginberg has written, “Social structure is concerned with the Principal forms of social organisations, i.e., types of groups, associations and institutions and the complex of these which constitutes society” (Ginsberg, 1932; p. 8).

From the above definitions, it can be said that Social structure is an abstract phenomenon. It refers to the external aspects of society. Its units are groups, institutions, associations and organisations. As we know all men depend on other men in the society. Each society has a Pattern of organisation composed of the structure resulting from the association of men with each other. When men relate themselves to each other they established structural form. It may be group, association or organisation. Social structure is made up of these structural forms which are arranged in an inter-related way to enable the society to function in harmonious manner. Society function through these structural units. Thus, institutions, groups, organisations, associations,
community all are parts of Social structure instruments through which it functions.

Our study of Mara Social structure will, therefore, be undertaken at the study of groups, institutions and organisations like Village, Clan, Kinship, Marriage, Family etc. which are the constituent units of the Mara society as well as an important parts of the Mara Social structure.

Village

The village is the oldest permanent community of man. We do not know one single race or one single nation, which had not had its period of village community. "Human society", as Bogardus says, "has been cradled in a rural group" (Bogardus, 1950; p. 150). Parry also writes "for all purposes of a civil or a religious nature, the Tribal unit is the village rather than the clan" (Parry, 1932; p. 232). Village is the first territorial group in the Mara society and it had been occupying an important part in the framework of Mara traditional society. Village is a political unit as well as economic unit in the Mara society. The traditional Mara village used to control its own administration and economic activities through hunting, food supplying and even group protection and survival through warfare. Separate water point,
forest reserve, cultivable land, place of worship and meeting places gave each village the appearance of more or less self-contained unit.

The villages are generally located on the top of hill slope in easy defending position. High sites are always preferred owing to health and sanitation reason as well. The villages are permanent and are rarely moved to new sites since the Mara developed strong sentimental attachment to their village sites, and dislike abandoning the grave of their ancestors. The villages are usually known by their place names and the places generally refer to some natural feature for example, the Saiko means, Pomelos, there having been many Pomelo trees on the site when the village was found (Parry 1932; p. 60).

As soon as the village had been established, a sacred tree called Bongchi (Ficus geniculata) is planted and a flat spot had been reserved in the centre of the village on which the village communal sacrifices are performed. The Chief and the Noble men were housed in the main centre of the village for security protection in case of raids.

In the olden days every village had its fort or ku. The fort was built in the middle part of the village and consisted of a strong stockade of tree
trunks and saplings about 10 feet height. All round the stockade a trench had been dug and sown with bamboo stakes called \textit{seu} and was crossed by a draw bridge, which was raised and lowered by cane ropes (Lorrain, 1972; p. 164). In case of raid, the women and the children would occupy the centre place of the fort while the warriors would be placed on the wall.

The village community consists of \textit{three estates, such as: the Chief (Abei), the Partrisan (Phansang), Plebeian (Machi)}. The people as a whole are known as \textit{Tlapi} which include the Chief, the Partrisans, the Plebeians, the village Elders and village officials.

The village administration is controlled by the Chief and his elders. The village elders are men selected by the chief to assist him in ruling the village. In addition to the elders there are some other Officials known as (\textit{Tlawpa}) village crier, the Blacksmith and the village writer. The main task of the village crier is to proclaim information announcing on behalf of the Chief to the people. The main task of the Blacksmith is to make and repair tools for the works connected with the daily life of the villagers. The village writer was to write a letter for the Chief and also to act as a clerk for the Chief. There was a special Priest in every village called \textit{Tleuliabopa} which means 'pure man'
whose work is cooking food when the Chief performed the *Khazangpina* sacrifice (Parry, 1932; p. 247).

Each village is bound to participate in certain community work of the village relating to clearance of the path to the water supply, all jungle around the village, fencing of the water supply, and clearing the paths leading to the neighbouring villages and to the fields at regular interval. All work of this nature is known as *Tlariahri* and any one failing to do his share is punished with fine, which is known as *Leu*.

The Mara village is characterised by two peculiar features, the first is the part played by kinship and the second is its communal unity. The bond of kinship and close ties among villagers developed a sense of community feeling. The feeling of familiarity was great, and a large part of the members were related by kinship. The agricultural land had been controlled and managed by the village community on a community basis. The village also acted not only as a unit of production and consumption but also as a unit of distribution too. So the village is an important integral part of the Mara social structure. It is the pivot around which a host of the Mara social relations had been revolving.
Kinship

The study of kinship and the pattern of material relationship is very important for a better understanding of Tribal social structure. “In most Tribal societies, kinship patterns form the major part of the whole social structure” (Goode, 1982; p. 3). Bottamore also writes, “Kinship is supremely important in primitive societies. It is a chief factor in maintaining social unity, and it constitutes the framework within which the individual is assigned economic and political functions and acquired rights and obligations. Usually, therefore, the most effective way to study the social structure of primitive social is to begin with the analyses of kinship” (Bottamore, 1962; p. 176).

One of the important units of the Mara society is the institution of kinship. Kinship ties are very strong among the Maras. Kinsmen were surrounded by concern and care. The Maras are patrilineal descent group. Inheritance is reckoned through male line. The eldest son usually inherits the father’s properties. The Mara kinship system lays stress on mother’s brother’s daughter marriage (matrilateral cross cousin marriage). There is no taboo against marrying kins member except the very close kin like, brother and sister. Kins marriage is popular amongst the Maras. The people are related one another through two ties, namely, consanguinity and affinity. Both
consanguineous and affinal relatives offer reciprocal help to each other when asked for. During family crisis and ceremonial occasions, they help each other without payment. Along with kinship usages, kinship terminology has a great function towards their social unity. Any member of this network get moral, social and economic support from the group because each group has obligation to perform or full fill. The Mara kinship system may be grouped into six main categories, which are given below.

The first structural principle of kinship among the Maras is that territorially genealogical group and individuals are closely related. The second principle is that lineage which is exogamous and is a subgroup of clan has a tendency to expand as well as limit itself within the village or a few villages, which are close to each other. The third principle is that the mutual relationship of kin group to maintain a family in relation to the other. The reciprocal relationship or marriage payments are made to keep a sort of equilibrium of relationships. The fourth structural principle is that wife giving group is superior to wife-taking group, and so again there is a sort of exchange reciprocity. The fifth principle is that among the kin groups, seniors predominate over juniors within the lineage even though the ramifications of lineage through other relatives seem to reveal unity in each unit. It appears that
it is only secondary to an extension of the unity of one’s own lineage. The sixth principle in terms of tradition is to make the whole tribe as close knit unit through affinal relationship in terms of marriage as well as in turning the same into political community (Goswami, 1996; p. 142).

The Mara relationship is classificatory. Strict etiquette is observed in the mode of address. Neither men nor women of the same generation as the speaker’s parent are ever address by name. In addressing the grandparents, they would be addressed by courtesy as, Imapaw (My grandfather) or Imanong (My grand mother). The grandfather and the grandmother are treated with the highest respect, whether on the father’s side or on mother’s side, and with greater differences than any other relation. The maternal uncle is regarded as closely related to a person as his parents, and is treated with deep respect. The most striking feature of Mara relation is the very close connection between the maternal uncle (Pupa) and his nieces (Tunongnong) and nephew (Tupapa). The maternal uncle is bound to help his nephew and nieces if they are in distress, and it is to him that they would turn for help even more than to their parents (Parry, 1932; p. 244).
Clan

Merton writes, “All groups are, of course, collectivistic, but those collectivistics which lack the criterion of interaction among members are not group” (Merton, 1957; p. 2). Clan is a group of people who have similar interests, and the member are interacting with each other and formed a close ties. The study of Clan is, therefore, applicable in the realm of social structure.

The first kin group in the Mara society is the patrilineal Clan (Pho). Each village was inhabited by a multiple clans. A single clan’s village is no existence in the Mara society. The word Clan can be used in a collective sense. It signifies a collective ‘body’, a ‘people’ or a ‘descent group’. The clans were marked by a sense of corporate identity and solidarity delimited by genealogical ties. Clanship provides the organisational structure for cooperative activities among its members. Clanship has a great importance in the political field. Broadly speaking, the Mara society is composed of at least four major clan’s groups, such as, the ruling clans, the high class clans, the middle class clans and the lower class clans.

Each clan is said to have taken the name of its earlier ancestor. It is in connection with marriage, birth, death and certain sacrifices of a private
nature that the clan assumes importance. A clansmen in distress can count on help from his fellow clans members, and in case of unnatural death, it is the dead man's clansmen who handle the corpse. Clansmen help each other in contributing towards the payment of marriage prices. A share of meat after successful hunting and help in case of illness had been readily extended. All such help between clansmen is voluntary. Although there is no taboo against marrying one's own clan members, marriage within the clan is less frequent.

Earlier, the economic status of a person used to determine his clan's name. Nowadays, there is no difference in social and economic status between the members of the royal clans and the lower clans. The children get the clan's name of the father. The marriage price of a girl is determined by the clan. The rate for a girl of noble clan is higher than that of a girl of lower clan. A man can never change his clan. The main aim of every Mara is to rise his status in the society by marrying a girl from higher clan than his own. In this way there was a social mobility in the Mara society, through marriage alliance.

There are four clans which appears to have any sort of totemistic origin, such as the Bohia, the Theutha, the Hnaihlu and the Mihlong. Bohia and Theutha clans have similar origin, both claiming descent from the Python. The
origin of Hnaihleu of Saiko is considered to be Tiger, and they were restricted to hunt and kill Tiger. The Mihlong clan claim to be descended from the great Indian Hornbill. No members of this clan may kill Hornbill, and they say that if they ate Hornbill’s meat it would be equivalent to eating the flesh of their father and mother (Parry, 1932; p. 224).

The ruling clans of the Maras are Bohia, Chozah, Hlychho, Nohro and Zawtha. Besides these ruling clans there are more than thirty clans (Lorrain, 1951; p. 65). It can be said that the Mara society is made up of the combination of the different clans and the clans determined the social framework of the Mara society.

Marriage

The institution of marriage is one of the important units of the society. Promilla Kapur writes, “Marriage is one of the deepest and most complex involvements of human relationship. It is the corner stone of the society and a very necessary part of social system” (Promilla Kapur, 1970; p. 82). There are different forms of marriage. “The different forms of marriage are not stages in an evolutionary series, as Bachofen, Spencer and other would make us believe, but marriage is fundamentally one and its variation is
determined by the type of community, its political and economic order and the character of its material culture" (Malinowski, 1960; p. 940).

One of the basic units of the Mara social structure is the institution of marriage. Marriage among the Maras is a civil contract. The prevalent form of marriage is monogamy. In the indigenous Mara society, polygamy was practised by the Chiefs and the Noblemen. Traditionally the Maras are endogamous and marriage is strongly connected with the economy. Marriage could not be arranged unless the bride price has been given. As a rule, a man’s wife is selected by the parents. The Mara marriage follows the perspective of alliance theory in which preference has been prescribed among the relatives. The most favoured marriage among the Maras is with mother’s brother’s daughter as it keeps the maternal avuncular relationship in the same line, but it is not obligatory (Parry, 1932; p. 295). Kins marriage is popular among the Maras. However, the marriage between the father’s sister’s daughter is usually not encouraged. Marriages are customarily arranged partners are always chosen from within the group (Mara) excluding certain categories of very close kin and kin ties are manifested through marriage alliance.
The Mara marriage may broadly be divided into Chief marriage and ordinary marriage. The Chief marriage is more complicated and most expensive than the ordinary marriage.

In a general sense, the bride price is very high among the Maras. The higher the status of the clan the higher the bride price which may be demanded. Men of Mara always tried to marry into clan higher than his own clan and this is attributed to better protection received from the higher clan. The marriage price consists of several parts and a number of subsidiary prices. The rates of bride price were fixed in terms of animals and household goods.

The marriage negotiation should be initiated by the boy’s parents sending an emissary to the girl’s parents with the marriage proposal and a present of (Tako) dao. Once the proposal was accepted the bride price would be negotiated in the house of the girl’s parents. With the settlement of the price, marriage day would be fixed. On a marriage day certain number of animals like mithun, pig, fowl, etc. have been killed. The Maras usually observed marriage ceremony for three days.
The Mara custom permits widow remarriage. A widow could marry immediately after the erection of a memorial stone in connection with her dead husband. Generally, a brother, younger or elder could marry his widowed sister-in-law. This custom ensures security to the widow, the children and the family property. But a widow is permitted to marry outside the family (Parry, 1932; p. 296).

The Mara society opens a place for child marriage called Noapahaw. Child marriage had been solely arranged by the parents of both the two families and it had been taken place before the boy and girl attained puberty period (Parry, 1932; p. 307).

Divorce is a fairly simple affair in Mara society. One could divorce one’s spouse at will. But there were certain customary procedures to be followed. The main issues concerned refund or payment of the unpaid bride price. If a man divorces his wife, her relations could keep back all the bride prices they had received. If a woman divorces her husband, the entire bride price would have to be returned to the husband. As the bride price is high, however, divorce is rarely found among the Maras (Lorrain, 1912; p.153).
It is clear that the system of kinship and marriage are intimately related. Separate persons or groups have been made into a close kin ties through marriage alliance, so a mutual relationships have been established. The children are also linked to paternal and maternal sets of kins through marriage. In this way marriage is an important instrument for strengthening the social solidarity as well as social unity. More over, family, which is suppose to be the basic and universal unit of the society is formed by the marriage of two parents.

Family

The intense emotional meaning of family relations for almost everyone has been observed throughout history. Philosophers and social analysts have noted that any society is a structure made up of families linked together. Family, then, is made up of individuals but it is also a social unit, and part of a larger social network. Goode writes, “The family is only a small part of the social structure of modern industrial societies. It is nevertheless a key element in them, especially linking individuals with other institutions, such as the Church, the State or economy (Goode, 1982; p.3).

The prevalent form of family in the Mara society is nuclear family. The family usually consists of the father, the mother, and the children.
After marriage a couple normally tries to move to a separate house. The Maras follow patrilocal residence in which the groom brings the bride to the father’s house. Being a patrilineal descent group, the head of the family in the Mara society is the father. The father used to command the family and taken up the family administration in all matters. The eldest son usually inherits the family properties and he is empower to function as the father’s in-charge.

A cordial inter personal relationship is maintained among the family members. Father, mother, and all other elderly person in the family get respect from the youngsters. Elders also show love to the youngsters and take care of them. The young ones fear their father, mother and the elder brother. Traditionally, the Maras have established good inter-family relationship among themselves.

The family environment is usually, in a word, calm. The members of the family seldom talked to each other. Meal times were, by and large, the oportune moments when all members of the family had time to meet each other. Wives would not utter the names of their husbands, and same was the case with husband too. Whenever occasion demand to call husband, the
usual practice was to call after the name of the eldest son or daughter whoever was elder.

Theoretically, the family is characterised by division of labour. The father, being head of the family, usually employ himself in certain profession and looks after the family, and controls the agricultural works in the jhum field. Women on the other hand, take care of the home front, gather and prepare food, cooking, washing, cleaning etc. In this way, family is an important economic unit in the Mara society.

Family is also an important agency of socialisation. It is a primary channel through which children learn societal norms and values of the society. So the life of the children have been shaped by family environment. In short, family is a place of reproduction of young, physical maintenance of family members, social placement of the children, socialisation and social control.
Slavery

The Mara social system presents a peculiar type of slavery. It combines proper form of slavery and social security. This system was known as Sei or slavery. Slavery was a common feature of Mara society in the past.

There were three ways of acquiring slaves, namely, (1) those who were bought or ransomed out of debt, (2) those born as slave, (3) those who were captured in war. The most ordinary way of acquiring slaves was by captured in war. Not only the Chiefs and noble men, but the common people were allowed to keep slaves.

There were two kinds of slaves among the Maras, the Sei a slave who lived in the Chief's house, and the Saiza a slave who lived in his own house. The 'Saiza' were usually favourite slaves of a Chief. Both Sei and Saiza were absolutely at the disposal of the Chief, but the Saiza was in a better position so far as he was allowed to keep all his paddy harvest. He was, however, at the beck and call of the Chief.

On the whole slaves were not treated badly among the Maras. They were regarded as a part of the Chief's family. As slaves were part of the
Chief's family, the Chief had to arrange marriage partner for the male slave. When a Chief bought a wife for one of his male slaves the woman did not herself become a slave, but her children were all slaves.

Female slaves were not allowed to marry any one except a male slave, but if a female slave married a free man who paid her full price to the Chief, her offspring were free, and the Chief had no claim on them. Slave girls were, however, encouraged to have as many love affairs as possible with the lads of the village, as the offspring of such union become slaves. Female slaves were more valuable than the male slaves, as they were able to do all ordinary works like cooking, washing, weaving etc. Both female slaves and male slaves did all works in the fields for their owners. In the traditional period, slaves were saleable commodities among the Maras. The slaves who were disobedient and lazy could be bought and sold. The price of a good male slave was 170 to 180 rupees while the price of a healthy young slave was 288 rupees. However, old family retainers were never sold or given away. Sometimes slaves were given as a part of marriage price. If given as a part of marriage price, the value of a slave, whether male or female was assessed at Rs. 100 (Parry, 1932; p. 226). In this way the institution of slavery had occupied a significant place in the Mara economy, as slaves were saleable commodities.
In a general sense, the relationship between slaves and their Chiefs was one of mutual help and cordial, as slaves were regarded as part of Chief's family. When freed, slaves generally adopt the Chief's clan. The Chief do not object to this, and address their former slaves as 'my brother'. Liberated slaves who adopt their Chief's clan in this way are known as Phanghleupa; they used the name and are regarded as associates of their adopted clan, but not as a full member of the family.

Thus it can be said that the institution of slavery occupied a significant place in the traditional Mara society and it is one of the essential part of Mara social structure.

Chieftainship

The institution of chieftainship emerged out of the collective needs of group life which characterised tribal living (Prasad, 1992; p. 50). The indigenous Mara society was characterised by the institution of Chieftainship. The Mara chiefship was hereditary, and the system of both inheritance and succession were primogeniture. The eldest son succeeds father.
The chiefs had elders to assist and advise them in the administration of their villages. Normally the chiefs nominated the elders from the noble clans. Besides the elders, the chiefs appointed some village officials, such as, the village crier, the blacksmith, and the village writer. The chiefs and the village officials are the main administrative body and their main function is to carry out the village administration efficiently for the welfare of the villagers.

In addition to the power of appointing a members of village officials, the Mara Chiefs had many other powers in the village administration. In fact, the chief was the guardian, the leader, the administrator, the spokesman and the protector of his village (Parry, 1932; p. 25).

As regards judicial power, the chief and the council of elders constituted the village court and decided all types of cases and disputes according to the customs to their village. Normally any decision to cases made by the chief was carried out and obeyed by the villagers. The chiefs and their elders were the highest court of justice.

Theoretically, the chiefs were the administrative heads of their villages and the foundation of justice. As a token of respect for their status,
they were entitled to certain privileges. Most of these privileges had their origin in ancient custom or the willing and voluntary contribution of the people in the Mara society.

The unit of village is the household not the individual, in the Mara society. So the villagers were duty bound to the chief and that all villagers had the responsibility of building and repairing the chief’s residential house, carry loads free while on journey and the share of crop harvested by each family. He had the privilege of receiving rice dues, meat dues and other dues, such as calling upon the villagers to dig his grave and also erect his memorial stone when he or a member of his family died. Not only this, but the villagers had to sacrifice a pig as *Riha* with a view to accompanying the dead chief to the next world.

However, it appears that, the Mara chief was a despotic ruler no doubt, but social mores were so shaped through the process of evolution that he could seldom afford to exercise unrestricted powers over his people. In fact, there was a great deal of mutual trust between the chief and his villagers (Parry 1932; p. 248).
In the post-independent period, there were tremendous change in the political set up of Mara territory. By the provision of (Acquisition of Chief Right) Act, 1954, the institution of chieftainship was altogether abolished with effect from 15\textsuperscript{th} April 1956. The chiefs were compensated in cash for the loss of their tributes and powers. Thus, with the abolition of the autocratic institution ended an era of exploitation of the common Maras. After the abolition of the institution of chieftainship, the affair of the village administration has been entrusted to the democratically elected village council.

Organisation

Organisation is one of the important units of Mara society and it is also an important part of Mara social structure. Organisation in the Mara society may broadly be divided in to two groups, namely, religious organisation and voluntary organisation. Religious institution pivots around the Church while voluntary organisation includes Mara Thyutlia Py (Mara young organisation). Let us discuss the roles play by these organisations and their main functions in the Mara society.
Religious Organisation (the Church)

The first Church of Maraland had been established at Saiko village on 26 Sept 1907. This was known as Independent Church of Maraland. Today, there are numerous denominations and some of the leading denominational Churches of Maraland are – Evangelical Church of Maraland, Congregational Church of Maraland, United Penticostal Church, Presbyterian Church, Baptist Church, Salvation Army and Catholic Church. There is doctrinal variation between denominations necessitating different sets of constitutional set up. Each of the Mara village has at least one of the denominational Church, thereby indicating that the majority of Maras are Christians. Irrespective of denomination, the Church organises itself for upliftment of moral standard, personal development and promotion of good life. The teaching of the Church focus on proper behaviour of children towards their parents, honesty, chastity in women, charitable love, sacrificial and a high moral and spiritual calibre. The Church therefore, acts as important agent of socialisation and channel of social control. The Church also organises regular salvation camping and gospel crusades bringing back many addicts and problem people to follow moral life. There are two orphanage home in Siaha, the capital of Maraland, exclusively run by the Church. The Church has
involved itself in many functions for the welfare of the people and for the betterment of the society.

**Voluntary Organisation**

With a view to integrate the Maras into a well knit-tribe, a voluntary organisation had been established on 09.10.1954, which was known as *Mara Thyutlia Py* (M.T.P.). The motto of the organisation is 'to uplift the Mara backward people'. Beside the motto, the organisation has certain aims and objectives of its own. The aims and objectives are:

1. To promote the welfare of the people.

2. To preserve the Mara culture.

3. To train the young generations to become good citizens.

The organisation has its Office at Siaha, the capital of Maraland and the Office was looked after by the Office Secretary. The office bearers of the organisation, elected by the members include the President, Vice-President and different secretaries. Most of the Mara youths were enrolled as member of
this organisation and the organisation has units in every Mara village. Besides the aims and objectives, this organisation has many functions in connection with the society. The main function are:

1. Digging the grave of dead person and helping in whatever way they can.

2. Helping patient or needy person whenever necessary.

3. Cleaning the village or street.

4. Organising cultural programme.

5. Preventing anti-social activities, like robbery dacoity, drinking etc.

All the works render by this organisation are purely on voluntary basis. This organisation is a very powerful agency in the Mara society. Its contribution for the Mara people as well as for the Mara society is far reaching.