CHAPTER V

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

VILLAGE:

The early Maras lived in small hamlets, each independent of any outside power. Whenever a suitable place was discovered, families would settle followed by some of their relatives and friends. In this manner, Mara village settlement come into existence. It is held that settled life began in the Chin Hills of Myanmar in historical period. The more indigenous Mara villages were Hawthaikhiry, Phiapi, Chhiera, Ngala, Hlaipaokhiry, Boopi, Boly, Sizo, etc.¹

The Mara villages were known by their place-names which generally referred to some natural features of the land. Situated at unequal distance from each other, the villages were scattered separated by hills and rivers. The villages, however, varied in size and location. The larger villages generally consisted of one hundred houses or more while smaller ones about thirty to fifty houses.

The Mara villages were generally situated on the top of the hills or on some high slop surrounded by the crests of precipices in an easily defendable position. The most important consideration in selecting the village site was its safety from enemies. The summit of precipitous peaks or hill side was usually selected for defensive advantages. Moreover, high tops were always preferred owing to unhealthiness of low-lying localities where air was comparatively much warmer and humid. All such matter as forest productivities, soil, water-supply, shelter, etc. were of secondary consideration. The villages were permanent and were rarely moved as the Maras attached sentimental value to their old village sites and disliked abandoning the graves of their ancestors. The village was usually moved to a new site when it was insecure from raids or when dreadful disasters such as starvation, famine, epidemics, severe storm, landslide, etc. had frequently occurred in the village.

A new village called Khithiekia was founded after resorting to divination, the interpretations of which were strictly followed. Some elders proceeded to the site

2 Mylai Hlychho: op.cit., p. 40.
3 N.E. Parry: op.cit., p. 60.
4 Informant: S. Mokia.
5 Khithiekia is transfer of a village to the new cite. Khithazo is newly creation of subordinate or independent village by splitting the parental village.
taking with them two red cocks. They surveyed the site thoroughly. If a monkey skull or twinned bamboo or hunted stream was found, the site was rejected. If the same was not seen, the party penned up one cock at upper site selected and other cock below. The party made a shelter between the two cocks and spent the night there. If upper cock crew first and the lower cock replied, it was a good omen, and the site was lucky.  

The new site was usually occupied first by a phoso person who could act as Azikōpa in the community sacrifices. He was then followed by his relatives and friends. After clearing the new cite, they made first the tlylia ground in the centre of the village, and a sacred tree bōchhie (Ficus geniculata.) was planted near the tlylia ground. The chief's house was generally more less in the centre of the of the village and close to the tlylia ground. When a village was moved to a new site, fresh fire had to be kindled in the new village. The old fire was considered impure bearing several diseases, and was tabooed to take to new village. All other movable possessions were taken from the old to the new village.

The villages were very filthy, being littered with the dung of mithuns, cattle, pigs and other domestic animals.

6 Harapa. p. 44.
7 Informant: T. David.
8 N.E. Parry: op. cit., p. 62.
The villages were not laid out symmetrically and houses were constructed anywhere according to the fancy of the individual builder. There were no rules as to the orientation of houses. The Mara village was merely an untidy collection of houses straggling over a considerable area. Houses were promiscuously scattered in different directions with unequal distances from each other. Within the village several fruit giving trees such as mango, orange, mulberry, etc. were planted. All round the village, a jungle was grown under the chief's protection. The main purpose of growing such jungle was solely for village defence. It also controlled the climate of the village by absorbing moisture and rain. The jungle also supplied raw materials for domestic use.

In the centre of the village a fort called ku was constructed, to which the people retreated in times of trouble or at the news of raid. This fort consisted of a strong stockade of tree-trunks and saplings about ten feet in height. A large trench about eight feet wide and six feet deep was dug all round the stockade. The villages were generally fortified with a strong fence with deep trench by the felling of a great number of large trees, of the cutting of a large felt of bamboos so placed that the sharp ends of these made an exceedingly formidable barrier.

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9 Jungles, p. 164.
10 Ibid.
fortified villages were sufficiently strong to resist attack or raid.

HOUSE:

Family was a functional unit of the village. Each family built its own dwelling house. The houses were generally laid out anywhere at convenience often at unequal distance from each other, arranged usually in two lines, the fronts of the houses all facing each other, the village road running in between. Each house had a small compound separated from the neighbouring houses by a fence or hedge. The chief and important person constructed wooden railing *laupi* all round the house. The wealthy persons also constructed wooden railing *pepaw* which was inferior to *laupi*. The commoners could, however, construct ordinary fence *ape*.

The Mara house was generally one-storeyed, strongly built off the ground. It was elevated about two to five feet according to the nature of the ground surface and underneath was the pig and cattle pen. It was made of wood and bamboos. Wood was used for the posts, beams, ridge-poles, rafters, etc. The roof consisted of several layers of palm leaves called *bahru* (*Calamus erectus*) or the thatching grass

11 Informant : K. Dokha.
ngiadi or bamboo leaves.12 The floor and walls were made of bamboo matting. All the houses were built on the same general principles and varied in size and quality according to the wealth or poverty of the owner. The ordinary house was usually about thirteen feet long and fifteen feet wide. The chief and wealthy men indulged in much larger ones. A chief's house was about one hundred feet long and twenty five feet wide, and was constructed on the same lines as acommoner's house. The chief's house was further differentiated from a commoner's by having wooden walls with special doors made of planks.13 It was generally constructed in the centre of the village, close to the tylia ground.

The houses were generally roomy and not uncomfortable. There were no partitions or chambers. There were no chimneys or windows, the only openings being the front and back doors. The house contain one large room, a verandah in the front and a small room called chhócha,14 a closet used for relieving nature, at the back of the main room. The interior of a chief's house consisted of two large rooms and one chhócha. Each room had its own hearth. The chief and his family lived in the back room and a family of the chief's retainers occupied the outer room. About the middle of the room a hearth was made where all the cooking was done.

12 A.B. Lorrain-Foxall : op.cit., p. 16.
13 N.E. Parry : op.cit., p. 70.
14 The inferior house called rakypa-o has no chhócha.
Sometimes this was on one side of the room. The sleeping bed was either of plants or split bamboos laid flat over the hearth or at the back end of the room. There was no separate kitchen.

The house consisted of a verandah in the front room which rough wooden ladder served as an approach to the ground. In the verandah the mortar for pounding paddy, maize, etc. was placed on the side. Chicken-coops, wood stocks, etc. were also kept in the verandah. Skulls and tokens of the games were lined on the outer wall of the verandah. A raised platform of about ten feet wide and five feet long called *tla'ilai*, facing towards the courtyard was usually constructed in close connection with the verandah. It was made of wooden planks and each side was tightly railed up with planks. Besides, the chief and wealthy men could, however, construct a large platform called *aitla* which ran the whole of one side of the courtyard. It was made of wooden planks or split bamboos.15

The Mara house was usually reconstructed after ten to fifteen years depending on the quality of wood and bamboos being used for the posts, beams, rafters, etc. The roof was generally repaired after every three to five years. As a rule a man could set up his own house as soon as

15 N.E. Parry: *op.cit.*, p. 70.
his first child was born. The house was also moved to a new site if unhealthiness, severe wind and other misfortunes frequently visited the family. The new house site was usually selected with great care. A householder had given a red cock to Khazohnceipa who selected by prayer a suitable house site which was luck for the house owner. Wood, bamboos, etc. were procured for the construction of the house and house was generally constructed after the harvest. When construction work started, the head of household killed a pig in order to have a lucky and lasting house. And as soon as a new house was complete, the family made a ceremonial entry; the oldest member led the way into the house. A red cock was sacrificed. If the house owner was a rich man, a pig or a mithun was killed for the feast called Okia kychhi. The house owner asked his pupa to perform Otonai ceremony blessing the foundation of the house. Next day, the owner caught small fish in the near by stream, picked up some pebbles and throwing them around the walls saying; "May the posts I have erected and the walls I have built be as strong as the stones and the wind may not blow the house away". After this, anahmos were brought inside the house and the khazopina was performed. Thereafter, the house owner and his family started living in the house.

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16 N.E. Parry: op. cit., p. 69.
17 Informant: H.T. Philip.
18 Marapa, p. 55.
19 Chottapadhyaya Kamala Devi: op. cit., p. 224.
AGRICULTURE:

The life of the early Maras was governed by the primitive economy. They devoted themselves for food producing and gathering, hunting, fishing, etc. They were nomadic jhummers and had practised a good deal of cultivation. For centuries, they had practised slash-and-burn or shifting cultivation known as *jhumming*. Farm and terrace cultivations were, however, unknown to them. Gradually, agriculture became the chief occupation of the early Maras and all villagers were engaged in cultivation. Even the chief was also engaged in agriculture. All other occupations such as blacksmithy, art and craft, trade and commerce, etc. were performed only during off seasons when they were free from agricultural works.

After selection of sites for *jhum*, the work was started by cutting the jungle. It was undoubtedly a heavy task and was generally done by men. Each cultivator first explored his *jhum* thoroughly and examined the soil, and also made a boundary line by cutting bamboos of about five feet above the ground, which served boundary posts for the rest of the year. If there was a haunted spring in his *jhum*, he immediately gave it up and selected another field. Clearing of forest was done in the month of December and January. The

20 Stephen Fuchs: *op. cit.*, p. 84.
21 *Jungles*, p. 144.
small trees, bamboos and grasses were all cut down. The implements for cutting the jungle were *daos* and *axes*. Hill slopes were generally steep and sharp with variations of height the *jhums* were cut from the bottom to the top. The thicker the jungle the better the crops was their maxim. In a bamboo jungle the work was comparatively lighter.  

After the jungle had been all cut, the work was suspended for about a month during which the fallen trees and bamboos were allowed to dry. During this period, they performed other works such as building and repairing of houses, fishing, hunting, making crafts, etc. In late March or early April the dried, jungles were burnt. The fire not only killed weeds and insects but also produced ashes which served as manure or fertilizer. Charred bamboos and trees which were not burnt up were collected and burnt again. As soon as the burning was over little quantity of *maize*, vegetables, herbs, etc. were sown. This sowing was called *meisa*. The menfolk began to construct a small hut called *chapu* in their respective *jhums*. A hut was generally constructed which served as a house throughout the year, and the cultivator and his family stayed in the hut regularly if

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22 Informant : K. Nahlei.
24 Meisa crops are always more faster than the others in growth, sooner available for food.
the jhum was far from the village.25

After the jungle had all been burnt, the villagers started sowing rice, maize and other crops. The sowing was done by a crude process and worked by hand with hoe. It was generally started from the lower edge of the jhum. After all other crops had been all sown, the cultivator started to sow rice. Men and women tied to their left or right side a small basket or bag filled with rice. Each made a small hole by scooping out the earth with a small hoe called atu every eighteen inches or more, seven or more grains of rice being dibbled into one before moving on to sow another. The holes were not filled up.26 Sowing required many labours but it depended on the size of the jhum. The average size of the jhum was about two hectares.

Weeding was the main field work, and was hard and back-aching work. Both men and women performed weeding which started soon after sowing rice. The first phase of weeding was mankeipa which took place in May-June. The second weeding lyuchapa was done in July-August and the last phase called hraohrapa in September.27 The villagers harvested maize in the month of September, and at the end of October.

26 Informant: N. Sotyu.
27 Mylai Hlychho: op.cit., p. 55.
they began to harvest paddy. Reaping was done by the family in slow rhythm throughout the jhum. All the paddy was first pulled up by the root in October-November. The putting of the paddy was called saphia. The paddy was collected at the threshing floor and winnowed to separate the grains from the paddy. This was done in the month of December. The grains were all stored in a large bin of circular bamboo plaited frames.28

The staple food was comprised of rice and maize. They also cultivated millet, pumpkin, cucumber, ginger, spices, beans and other vegetables and edible herbs. Cotton was grown for clothing and tobacco for refreshing consumption. Each family was, however, self-sufficient. Production of food crops varied from house and also village to village. A village which had fertile land could produce sufficient rice, maize, etc. Surplus production was very rare among the Maras, and was, however, found among the rich families who could select fertile field and also could cultivate very large jhum. Rice and maize were measured by baskets and the units of quantity were called bai, kai and chhei. Ten kai formed one chhei. Each house generally yielded two to four chheis.29 A person who successfully produced rice measuring above five chheis could perform a ceremony called sah-ia.30

28 S. Das : op.cit., p. 104.
29 Informant : S. Thabau.
30 Interview : T. David.
A rich man who could produce great quantity of rice, maize, etc. was honoured and respected in the society.

The cultivator who yielded good crops usually gave certain amount of rice or maize to his relations or neighbours who worked in his jhum during weeding or harvest when a cultivator was not able to finish the work or when some villagers failed to harvest good crops in their respective jhums. This was called saviaraw. The practice was very congenial to the village economy as it helped the poor and the widow. Because of this practice even a widow could store marginal food crops for her family. The cultivator was sometime followed by his own brother as share-cultivator throughout a year when the latter failed to cut jhum owing to illness or other reason. The total production of the jhum was then equally divided between them.31

OWNERSHIP OF LAND:

The chief was the owner of the village lands or as Stevenson puts it "the chief is the Lord of the soil".32 The villagers had no right to exploit any part of the village land for jhum cultivation without the permission of the chief. Village land was the chief's estate, and ownership was permanent and untransferable. It was hereditarily handed

31 Informant: K. Pheito.
32 Economics, p. 81.
down from generation to generation. It was only under weak chiefs that the village councillors and rich men were able to seize certain areas for themselves, and even so, none of them succeeded in establishing a village. The chief could, however, sell or dispose certain areas of village land as a part of marriage price or dowry. He could also refuse to allow any offender to cultivate jhum in his land.

The villagers had no right to exploit the jungle which was vested in the chief's discretion. The chief-in-council in any given year decided which fields were to be cultivated for the next year. Individual families or groups of families could not, however, identify fields for jhum cultivation by their own choice. The villagers could have their fields in certain large area called lyupi or more than one area if a single lyupi was not big enough. Within the village land, there were several lyupi, each had its own proper name. A lyupi comprised one or more tracts covering several fields, each bound by natural features.

A lyupi was either chholyu, "warm field" mostly covered with bamboo forest or atulyu or zyutla "cold field" which was found rather high up on the hillsides covered with

33 N.E. Parry: op.cit., p. 250.
34 Informant: T. David.
36 Informant: H.T. Phili.
woods. Only a few Mara villages did cultivate atulyu. 37

A lyupi was usually cultivated in rotation after every five to ten years depending on availability of land. The longer the land left uncultivated, the soil became more fertile and productive. 38

The selection of jhum fields was made under the direction of the chief. The chief and wealthy persons held the best and special field called lyubô which was hereditarily handed down from generation to generation. Each lyupi comprised several lyubô, and the whole tracts were, however, the units of ownership that could pass in sale and in formal gift exchange. A commoner could not have a lyubô. If he cultivated a lyubô he must pay dues called rapaw to the owner of lyubô. 39

DUES:

As stated above, the chief owned the whole village land and received certain dues from all products of that soil from the cultivators. The more prominent dues payable

37 The soil is fertile and loose, very suitable for maize with easy weeding but rice is not grown for which such field is rather unattractive for jhumming among the Maras.

38 Informant: S. Chhote.

39 Informant: T. Chhatha.
to the chief and his officials by the villagers are *sabai*, *rapaw*, *sahaw* and *sathie*.

**Sabai**: Sabai was the rice due payble annually to the chief in recognition of his chieftainship.⁴⁰ Each house was liable to pay one *tlabai* or basket of paddy to the chief; One *raihmei* or small basket of paddy to the chiefly family which held chieftainship in that village before called *abeitho*, and one *ziema* or small basket of paddy to the blacksmith and each village councillor. The village officials and the *abeitho* were, however, exempted from paying *sabai* to the chief. The measurement and amount of *sabai* varied slightly from village to village.⁴¹

**Rapaw**: Rapaw which literally means "the product of the land" was the rice due payable to the chief by the villagers for the privilege of cutting *jhum* in his land.⁴² The village councillor or rich man who owned certain fields called *lyubô* also received *rapaw* from the villagers who cultivated the *jhums* in his own *lyubô*, and in his turn had to pay *sabai* to the chief. If the owner of the *lyubô* cultivated any land outside his own field, he had to pay the chief both *rapaw* and *sabai*.⁴³ Each house in the village paid *rapaw* by 15 to

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⁴⁰ N.E. Parry: *op.cit.*, p. 252.
⁴¹ Informant: H.T. Phili.
⁴² N.E. Parry: *op.cit.*, p. 252.
⁴³ N.E. Parry: *op.cit.*, p. 251.
20 percent out of the total production of rice to the chief.\textsuperscript{44} The amount of rapaw varied from village to village. If a villager failed to have good crops, a fowl could be paid instead.\textsuperscript{45}

Besides, the villagers were liable to pay several secondary dues to the chief, namely: rapawti, a pot of rice-beer; rapawsa, two handful of ginger; rapawlo, two handful of cooked rice being wrapped with leaf; and larapaw, one basket of cotton from every cotton-field.\textsuperscript{46}

\textbf{Sahaw} : The chief and his officials also received meat-due called sahaw. The chief usually received a hind-leg of all wild animal\textsuperscript{47} killed by the villagers. The abeitho also got a four-leg, and the village officials, ribs, shoulders etc.\textsuperscript{48} The mode of the subscription was different from village to village.

\textbf{Sathie} : Sathie was a pig due. Every householder in a village was bound to kill a pig whenever the chief and village councillors decided that it was necessary to kill a

\begin{enumerate}
\item Myla Hlychho : \textit{op.cit.}, p. 28.
\item Informant : S. Thabau.
\item Myla Hlychho : \textit{op.cit.}, p. 29. Also N.E. Parry : \textit{op.cit.}, p. 255.
\item There was no sahaw on any animal killed by a tiger, that was called sawsa.
\item Informant : T. David.
\end{enumerate}
pig. The pig for sathie was usually killed to make a feast for the villagers or to entertain the visiting chief. The abeitho and village officials were exempted from paying sathie. 49

FOOD AND DRINK:

The staple food of the Maras comprised of rice and maize. Other food included millet, pumpkin, yam, cucumber, bean and several vegetable herbs. Besides they also took varieties of leaf, bamboo shoot, mushroom, the young spikes of various kinds of palm, fungi of different species and several wild vegetables and edible fruits. They were very fond of meat and took any kind of meat from rat to elephant. All kinds of bird were eaten except crow, eagle, hawk, vulture, kite and owl. Fish, crab, prawn, water-snail, water-frog and eel were delicacies. Bear, monkey, ape, dog and goat were eaten only by men. Horse, tiger and snake were not eaten but cat was eaten as medicine. 50 Their domesticated animals included fowl, dog, goat, pig, cattle and mithun for food.

The mode of cooking was simple and cooking was solely shouldered by the females. The rice was cooked in one pot, and the meat and vegetables were cooked separately. The

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49 Informant: T. David.

50 It is generally taken to cure rheumatism.
cooked rice was scooped out to the bamboo matted plate called *pawkhao*, and the boiled vegetables or meat was ladled out to another wooden plate called *beiko*. A little salt and chilis was added, and then the family gathered round the plates and had its meal. They took meal with their fingers, taking a portion of rice twisted it into a ball, then put it into their mouth. This was followed by a spoonful soup. They did intermittently take a pinch of salt. They usually took three meals a day, a morning meal, lunch at noon and evening meal at sunset. They washed their hands after meal but did not bother to do so before sitting down to eat.

The early Maras were also good drinkers. "A man should drink, fight and hunt" was a common adage among them. Drinking was considered a universal vice among them. Rice-beer called *sahma* was the only drink of the Maras. It was highly regarded as a refreshing drink, making a gathering pleasant in the family, or on inter-social visits and other occasions. No event was complete without rice-beer, and nothing except murder was an offence when committed under the influence of rice-beer. Birth, death, marriage, festivals, ritual ceremonies, trial of cases, payment of debt, slaughter of enemy, shooting of wild animal, harvesting good crops, etc. all demanded a feast and

51 A.B. Lorrain-Foxal: *op.cit.*, p. 11.
52 N.E. Parry: *op.cit.*, p. 85.
feast implied drinking bout.

Both sexes were good drinkers, and drinking was considered an indispensable enjoyment and merriment. Men, women, young men and girls regularly drank rice-beer. They believed that rice-beer was good for health. It could alleviate griefs and reduce pain. Drinking was indeed their pleasure and happiness and also the most important part of their socio-religious activities. Drinking was, however, free and open among them, and they never bought rice-beer for each other. 53

They produced various kinds of rice-beer varying in taste and strength. Each house-mother was capable of preparing rice-beer which was produced from fermented rice or maize or millet. Sahmapi was the most favoured rice-beer produced from fermented rice. The cooked rice and yeast made out of rice flour was mixed up and placed in an earthenware pot. The mouth of beer-pot was closed airtight and left for three or four days allowing it to be fermented. When the rice was fermented, paddy husks were added and the mixture was kept in the beer-pot. 54 This sahmapi was drunk on the occasions of feasts, ceremonies, etc.

Another kind of rice-beer was sahmahei prepared in the

53 N.E. Parry: op.cit., p. 89.
54 Mylai Hlychho: op.cit., p. 65.
same way as sahmapi but no paddy husk was added. The fermented rice was eaten or water was added to make beer.\textsuperscript{55} It was commonly consumed by the householders and also given to friends or visitors as the height of courtesy. Phybu was another drink made from maize, and was prepared in the same way as sahmapi.\textsuperscript{56} It was generally drunk on important occasions. Zurie was a distilled beer, refined from sahmapi or sahmehei.\textsuperscript{57} It was mostly consumed on important occasions like feast, ceremonies, etc. Rice-beer was generally served in the drinking-cups made out of bamboo or the horns of mithun.\textsuperscript{58}

**SMOKING AND SIPPING KARAOTI:**

The Maras were great smokers, and smoking was a universal vice among them. Smoking was free and open for all and no restriction was imposed on children. Everyone usually started smoking since his or her childhood. Both sexes of the Maras tremendously enjoyed in smoking, drinking and sipping nicotined water. The tobacco was commonly cultivated in small patches in the jhum. Parry\textsuperscript{59} suggests that the tobacco cultivated by the Maras resembled the

\textsuperscript{55} N.E. Parry : \textit{op.cit.}, p. 87.
\textsuperscript{56} Marapa, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{ibid.}, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{58} N.E. Parry : \textit{op.cit.}, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{59} N.E. Parry : \textit{op.cit.}, p. 90.
coarser kinds of south African tobacco. Lewin who did inhale
the smoke of the Mara tobacco remarks. 60

They gave me of their tobacco too, and this was a
most welcome gift as my stock had long ago run
out. The tobacco they smoke is fermented, pressed
and cut up like our American cavendish, and is by
no means bad smoking.

Men used a pipe called amabei which was simply made of
bamboo bowl fixed with a thin piece of bamboo for its pipe.
Women were also good smokers. 61 They used a hubbble-bubble
pipe or hookah 62 locally known as karao or karaotla. It
consisted of three parts such as a clay bowl where tobacco
was kept, a vase made of bamboo bowl where water was kept
and a stopper made of bamboo root or wood fixed with a thin
piece bamboo for its mouthpiece. The woman puffed off the
smoke from the pipe and the water inside the vase was
continuously impregnated with smoke. This nicotined water
was called karaoti. Women and girls were all great smokers
and smoked their pipes vigorously not only for their own
pleasure but also to supply men with nicotined water. They
usually smoked their pipes unceasignly from early in the

60 Wild Race, p. 169.

61 R. Quick: 'Native smoking pipe from Burma', Man Vol.
11, No. 3, p. 5.

62 Wild Race, p. 150.
morning till they went to bed at night.

The nicotined water was carefully preserved in a small gourd called *karaotî* which was carried whenever they went. From time to time, they sipped a small quantity of nicotined water into their mouth, and then spat it out after some time. It was strong in taste stinging to the tongue and throat. It really acted as a kind of stimulant removing uncomfortable sensation in the mouth and also refreshed the sipper exceedingly. Lewin remarks:

She acknowledged my courtesy with a gracious smile, and in turn drawing a small bottle-shaped gourd from some recess in her garments, she presented it to me to drink. On inquiry this appeared to contain the lees or dirty water from the bottom of a small Shendu (Mara) hookah which all women smoke, and this poisonous decoction is held high esteem by men as a presentative for the teeth and gums. I was told not to swallow the nauseous abomination, but merely to rinse my mouth with it.63

Nicotined water *karaotî* added social grace. Offering of nicotined water to visitors was the height of usual courtesy. It was also used to console grief or reduce bereavement. It was an indispensable part of the

63 *Wild Race*, p. 163.
socio-economic activities of the Maras. It was permanently attached with economic life, and was much more important than rice-beer. Lorrain says:

> Without the use of this nicotine-water they are far less able to their daily work... where men have a constant supply of this noxious fluid they appear to work faster and more cheerfully.64

**HUNTING:**

The Maras were fond of recreation, and hunting was prominently carried out for the fame and triumph it afford and for meat. They were great hunters of any bird or wild animal, and hunting was considered the contesting game among them. The hunters used guns, spears, bows and arrows, etc. There were three kinds of hunting such as sawdithyu,65 a hunter alone stalked and lied in wait for wild animal in the jungle; rakhie a hunting carried out by a group of men who went out to look for the game in the jungle for some days; and rakha or sakhaloa, a hunting performed by a strong party. A particular area selected was covered by gun-men who lied or hid in ambush for wild animals. From opposition side others had marched into the deep forest towards the gun-men beating gongs and drums to scare wild animals, which became

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64 Jungles, p. 142.

65 Information: K. Pheito.
easy target for shooting.66

In hunting the Maras followed certain rules such as that when two or more gun-men out shooting together at a wild animal, the man who drew first blood of the animal killed was declared as the real shooter of that game. If any dispute arose over the shooting, the bullets were picked out of the body of animal killed and was fairly examined to decide who killed the game. When animal had been wounded and was followed up called sahnachathd, the gun-man other than the first shooter who wounded the animal, who shot down it was regarded as the killer of the game.67

TRAPPING:

The Maras were equally good trappers. They were fond of snaring and trapping of birds and wild animals for food. Trapping was popular method of killing birds and wild animals and was commonly known to them. The more prominent traps and snares were azybatly trap for monkey; vytila trap for bear; meitheikapu, a gun-trap for tiger; various kapu traps for deer and wild-boar, etc.; sawkukapu trap for porcupine; sari trap for barking deer; makhy trap for rat, bird, etc.; chahd trap for rat; leika trap for squirrel; viakho trap for rat; pieva trap for pheasant, partidge, etc.;

66 Mylai Hlychho : op.cit., p. 308.
67 Interview : T. David.
khokha trap for partidge and other smaller birds; aphy for birds, etc.\textsuperscript{68} Each trap was different and was generally made at the most appropriate places near the jhums or within the jhums or in the forest where birds and animals could come across it. Traps were made during off seasons of the agricultural work. Traps produced food and also saved food crops from destruction caused by rat, monkey, wild boar, bear, etc.

FISHING

Fish was another source of food. They considered fish as a delicious dish and also a symbol of purity. Both sexes were fond of fishing. There was no a professional fisherman among them. They had twelve methods of catching fishes in the streams.\textsuperscript{69}

\textbf{Casting-net} : The most popular method of catching fishes was casting-net sao. They used small circular net fixed with several balls of lead weighted round the border. They were expert in casting such net in the streams, and caught large quantity of fishes.\textsuperscript{70}

\textbf{Diversion method (parasa)} : It required great amount of

\textsuperscript{68} Chottapadhyaya Kamala Devi : \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 236-237.
\textsuperscript{69} K. Kheito : \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 70-71.
\textsuperscript{70} Jungles, p. 194.
labour and was done by group. It was usually done when the water level in river decreased down to its minimum course during summer. They diverted the channel of broken branch of the river by constructing a regular dam and baled out the stream, and caught fishes easily after dipping little poisonous plants.71

Poisoning: Poisoning of fishes called arudai or daitlydai was also very common. This method was carried out by the villagers as a whole, and was generally done during April-May when the course of river returned to its minimum. They first procured the barks of the creeping plants such as rukhaw (Acacia oxyphylla, craib) ruchá (Millettia panchicarpa, Benth.), maza (Acacia pennata, Willd.), etc. These were pounded up again and again and dipped into the stream. In a short time, the fishes were rendered insensible and were easily caught.72

Fishing dam: Fish usually moved towards the upstream during rainy season and returned back towards the downstream when dry season sprang in the air. During this period, they caught fish by making fishing dam (chha).73 The chha was difficult work and was done by the villagers. They blocked up the whole wide of the river with a strong bamboo weir.

71 Informants: S. Mokia.
72 Mylai Hlychho: op.cit., p. 234.
73 Jungles, p. 191.
When the weir was completed the actual trap called chhaby was constructed in the middle of the weir. When dry season approached, the river being decreased day by day, fishes moved to the downstreams and bagged themselves easily into the trap.74

ART AND CRAFT:

Art and craft made much progress among the early Maras. The work of art and craft was mostly done during off seasons when they were free from agricultural pursuit. There was no a professional class of artisans or craftmen among them. Every cultivator himself was good artisan as well as craftman. They were industrious workers. Specialisation among them was of two types such a individual and local. The individual specialisation was prominently associated with blacksmithy, pottery, etc. Local specialisation generally involved the whole villages, men had great skills in the fields of cane-work, wood-work, hide-work, etc. and women were well acquainted with weaving, dyeing, etc. Specialisation could, however, produce the marginal subsistence value of their labours and met their daily needs.

Bamboo and Cane-work:

Bamboo grew in great profusion throughout the Mara

74 Informant: K. Dokha.
hills and was the most useful product of the forest. Creeping plants called ari (Calamus erectus, Roxb.) were also found in the hillsides covered with woods. The early Maras had explored the economic potential of their land which was traceable from their ingenious utilisation of bamboo and ari. Bamboo and ari were prominently used for the constructions of dwelling house, *jhum* hut, bridge, village fence, trap, basket mat, tray, sieve, carrying band, etc.

Bamboo and cane work was the most remarkable art and craft dominated by local specialisation. It was done only by men. Each cultivator could make very fine baskets of different patterns and designs, being plaited with bamboo or ari canes. They made different baskets for different uses, baskets for keeping clothes, valuables and other properties were *baiba*, *baitarupa* and *boto*. The basket for carrying fire-wood, rice or others were *baikai*, *dary*, *dawkia*, *hraby*, and *lawbu*. The baskets such as *saikhua*, *kachu*, *tiabai*, etc. were also made for measuring and keeping rice, maize, etc. Chicken coops such as *awby*, *awchari*, *awpai*, etc. were also made in different designs. The basket called *chara* was made for storing dried red sorrel (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) or tabacco. The more prominent trays were *aphie*, *dapi*, *bara* and *pawkhao*, and the sieves *sohri*, *viakuarina*, etc. 75

Baskets, trays, sieves, carrying bands, etc. were,

75 K. Kheito: *op.cit.*, pp. 103-104.
however, different in shape and size but were woven in certain definite plaits. There were two types of plait such as *apiepa*, single plait and *abaopa* double plait. The *abaopa* plait was modified into three categories such as *baikaichei*, *hrabychei* and *saikhuachei*.\(^76\)

The utilisation of bamboo and art canes were very artistic.

**Woodwork**

The Maras were undoubtedly good wood cutter. They were, however, poor in carpentry. There was no professional carpenter among them. Wood work was of local specialisation and was done by men. Wood was very useful for producing several household articles and was much important as bamboo. The more prominent production of wood were house-post, wall, floor and door, sleeping bed and pillow, paddy-mortar and pestle, handle and sheath of the knife, drum, pig-trough, various parts of the handloom, cotton gin, spinning wheel, thread winder and holder and other several tools used in weaving, wooden memorial post, wooden tray, bell, wedge, bellows, etc.\(^77\) Handloom accessories, memorial post and other complicated articles were, however, very artistic that required individual specialisation.

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\(^76\) N.E. Parry: *op.cit.*, p. 110.

\(^77\) Mylai Hlychho: *op.cit.*, pp. 50-55.
Cloth-Making:

The Maras ingeniously made their own clothes. It was of local specialisation and women were very familiar with spinning, weaving, dyeing, etc. Clothes were produced from local grown cotton in the *jhums* the seeds being sown in May and the flowers so plucked in December.78

The raw cotton was spread in the sun to dry for three or four days. The seeds were all cleaned out in a wooden gin called *larie*. The cotton was then thoroughly teased up with a bow called *laka* to make it soft and fluffy. It was again reduced to small rolls with the help of a small stick. Each roll was about eight inches long and about one inch circumference thick, and was ready to make into thread in the spinning wheel called *raha*. Spinning was done during day and night when they were free other household works. They spun each roll into thread in the *raha*. The thread was then spindled with the *hmitlai*, and after this the threads were made into bundles with the help of *laba*. These bundles were cooked with small quantity of rice to make the thread strong, and were then dried in the sun. Each bundle was rolled off into a ball with the help of the thread winder called *kihlo*. The balls were ready for weaving.79

78 N.E. Parry: *op. cit.*, p. 94.
79 Informant: T. Dachei.
Weaving was done on belt loom. The Mara loom appeared easy to handle but considerable practice was necessary to ensure equality in dimensions and regularity of designs. The warp was bound over a fixed beam of bamboo or wood, and the other end was tautened by a woman weaving a hide strap round her back. The weaver sat between this strap and loom to suit the warp. The woof was passed through by the spindle, and each thread was battened down firmly by one-side blade polished wood.80

The women were good weavers, and weaving was excellent. They could weave several patterns and designs, which were very simple but regular, symbolic and decorative, and the elaborate ones required a number of heddles. The patterns were worked in between the threads with coloured cotton or silk by use of porcupine quill. The single heddle loom could be used for weaving plain cloth.81 Some of the clothes were very strong and durable. The more excellent patterns of clothes were of individual specialisation. Besides, they also knew the art of dyeing. The leaves of indigo (Strobilanthes flaccidifolia) and the bark of azy tree (Duabanga soneratioides) were commonly used for dyeing cloth or thread.82

80 Informant : T. Dachei.
81 Informant : C. Rodei.
82 N.E. Parry : op.cit., p. 106.
Blacksmithy:

Blacksmithy was the only metal work known to the Maras since the middle part of the 19th century A.D. It was of great importance producing various implements for agriculture. It was of individual in specialisation. There was no professional blacksmith *syudaipa* among them. A blacksmith repaired tools and fashioned new ones. He could forge spear, arrow-head, axe, *dao*, hoe, knife and other implements. He received certain amount of paddy *sabai* and also meat *sahan* as reward from the villagers. 83

The blacksmith performed his metal work during off seasons. For this purpose a small hut was constructed near his house. The forge was of primitive type, familiar with the Hnaro forge. 84 It was very simple but very effective. It consisted of two upright hollowed wood about six or more inches circumference and about three feet long. Into each hollowed wood there was a rammer made of cock's feather with handle attached. These rammers were pulled up and down simultaneously to blow the fire. The blacksmith then fashioned tools with the help of hammer, file and tongs.

83 Informant: T. David.
84 F.K. Lehman: *op.cit.*, p. 158.
Pottery:

The art of pottery was known to the Maras. It was generally done by widow or old aged woman who had never been married. For unmarried girl and married woman to engage with pottery was a taboo. A potter could produce several ceramic vessels like cooking pot, huge jar called raibô, bowl of woman's pipe karaolu, etc. These were made in different shapes and sizes according to their needs. Clay was obtained from lateric formations and was kneaded on a flat stone. A potter then baked up any vessel which was burnt in the fire. The ceramic earthenwares were very strong and durable.

Hide-work:

Leather was unknown to the early Maras. Hide was occasionally used. Hide-work was of local specialisation. The skins of wild animals killed in the game and domestic animals such as mithun and cattle that had been slaughtered were stretched on the ground of bamboo frame and dried in the sun. The dried skins were used for sleeping or sitting and also used for the membrane of drums. Mithun's hide was also used for making a quadrangular shield called vyphao.

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86 Informant: H.C. Sado.
Weapons:

The Maras possessed few weapons, and some of them locally made were dao, spear, knife, bow and arrow and shield. Gun, ceremonial dao called vaina and sword were imported from Burma through the Haka Chins.88

Dao called tako was the most indispensable weapon as well as bread winner. It was a blade about 18 inches long, pointless and sharpened on one side only.89 The blade was set in a handle made out of wood or bamboo root over which there was no artistic design or decoration. Knife called chaizd was another useful weapon as well as meat winner. It was a double-edged, pointed and sharpened one side only. Its handle and sheath were made of wood.

Spear consisted of a shaft about 5 feet long which was made out of the sasai palm (Caryota urens.) one end was fixed with iron spike and at other end with spear head, a blade about 12 inches long, pointed and sharpened on both sides. There was no decoration.

Bow and arrow were useful weapons before gun had been introduced among the Maras. Bow was made of a hewen bamboo stick about three feet long, and its string made of ari

88 N.E. Parry: op.cit., p. 54.
89 Mild Race, p. 19.
cane. Arrow was of two kinds such as \textit{theiri}, a bamboo shaft being pointed and sharpened like a spear-head at one end, and \textit{chatai}, a bamboo shaft, barbed with a spear-head shaped iron about one inch.\textsuperscript{90}

The \textit{vaina} was a ceremonial \textit{dao}, and was carried to war for cutting off the heads. It was also used in ceremonial when dancing the \textit{Sawlakia} or the other dances performed after taking heads. The blade was curved and about seventeen inches long, its handle was ornamented with a long tuft of scarlet goat's hair. The sword (\textit{zaozi}) was another weapon of offence. It was carried to war but it was more a ceremonial than a practical weapon. It was about thirty inches long with a brass ornamented handle. The \textit{vaina} and \textit{zaozi} were not locally made but imported from Burma.\textsuperscript{91}

Shield called \textit{vyphao} was the only weapon of defence. It was quadrangular and was made of \textit{mithun}'s hide. The upper half of the front of the shield was covered with rows of brass discs.\textsuperscript{92}

The Maras must have known about fire-arms for a long time, since the Burmese, whose border the Maras lived near, seem to have possessed them from at least the 15th

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[90]{N.E. Parry: \textit{op.cit.}, p. 50.}
\footnotetext[91]{\textit{ibid.}, pp. 54-55.}
\footnotetext[92]{Census, Vol. III, 1931, p. 130.}
\end{footnotes}
century. It is, however, possible that they imported guns from Burmese through Chittagong and Akyab since the early 19th century. Most of the old flint-locks were Tower musket marked with dates somewhere around 1815. They decorated their guns with the stocks of lacquered black and red. The powder box called zai-ô, made of mithun's horn was also decorated with ornamentation.

They used bullets and gun-powder when guns were introduced. Bullets were made of iron or lead shaped into various rounds in the village forge. They also made gun-powder which was slow in igniting but very powerful. Lewin who entered the Mara area in 1865 says that they manufactured their own gun-powder. It is, however, possible that they learnt this art from the Burmese through the Chins. They obtained sulphur from Burma. And an inferior sort of saltpetre was also collected from the heaps of the earth beneath the house being impregnated with urine and dung of animals. This saturated deposit was travelled up and placed in a basket, water was poured into the basket to dissolve all the nitrate content of the deposit. Water which

93 A.P. Phayer: *op.cit.*, p. 70.
94 N.E. Parry: *op.cit.*, p. 45.
96 *Dwellers*, p. 113.
97 *Wild Race*, p. 149.
98 George Fruishank: *op.cit.*, p. 113. Also *Jungles*, p. 114.
passed through the basket was boiled for evaporation and the remainder became the nitrate crystals. When it was sufficiently dried in sun, it was mixed up with charcoal made from a thaohma tree (Rhus semi alata). The mixture was thoroughly pounded in a mortar. When it was finely powdered, it was placed in the sun to dry, and was ready for use.  

TRADE:

The early Maras carried on very little trade. There was no currency, and money economy was unknown to them. There was no standard or medium of exchange, and their trade was, however, characterised by barter system which was in practice among them since the time immemorial. All transactions were carried out by barter which solely depended on negotiation between the giver and the taker. They exchanged goods for goods, goods for animal, animal for animal, animal for food grains, labour for food grains etc.

The internal trade consisted of the exchange of goods, food grains and livestock. Mithun  cattle and pig constituted the wealth of the Maras, and also played vital role in internal trade. A man who domesticated several number of such animals was regarded as rich man and was

99 Informant: T. David.

100 In buying and selling, its size is spoken in term of the horns, and its age in term of the number of breeding which is also relatively used to he-mithun.
honoured in the society. The animals were domesticated mainly for use in the festivities, ceremonies, etc. as well as for the profit in the trade. Bride price, fine, etc. were usually paid in term of livestock. And goods like pot, bead, gong, gun, etc. also played important role in the internal trade. Loan on food grain and animal was very common. A person who had specialisation in blacksmithy or pottery or cane work usually got certain amount of food grain or piglet in exchange with his production. As there was no industry among them, trade was, however, limited. Moreover, they were merely self-sufficient having marginal production. G.H. Loch remarks:

The Lakhers (Maras) are self-contained people with few wants that can not be satisfied from within. The external trade carried out by the Maras was negligible. Lewin writes:

Shendus (Maras) ... who dwelt on our borders and traded in our frontier marts, and who occasionally made forays into British territory for the purpose of taking heads and obtaining slaves.

101 Informant : K. Pheito.
102 R.A. Lorrain : op.cit., p. 11.
The early Maras had no potential resources or subsistence to purchase goods from outside or to export goods. They simply sold what livestock and food crops they could have from time to time. They usually raided and looted a village when payment for debt was not possible. Raiding was carried out to obtain great booty in the shape of gun, gong and other portable articles and also to obtain captives for slaves. Slaves were usually sold to the Khumis who were good buyers.\(^{104}\)

The external trade confined to salt, sulphar, iron, brass-pot, gong, bugle, sword ceremonial dao or vaina, gun and other several ornaments. These were imported from Chittagong and Chin Hills in exchange with food grains or livestock.\(^{105}\) The Lautus and Zopheis were good traders who entered the Mara area through different routes. Thlatla sub-area, however, controlled a direct route into the south Lushai Hills. The sub-area of Lautu was also closely connected with the Mara area through trade.\(^{106}\) Hnaro, Haka, Thlatla and Akyab played an intermediary of trade between the Chin Hills and Maraland.

\(^{104}\) N.E. Parry : \textit{op.cit.}, p. 226.
\(^{105}\) Informant : T. David.
\(^{106}\) F.K. Lehman : \textit{op.cit.}, p. 168.