

CHAPTER II

POLITY

POLITICAL INSTITUTION

Genesis of Chieftainship :

Like other Kuki-Chin tribes of the North-East India, the early Maras lived in villages under their chiefs. In fact chieftainship was an integral part of their political life. Originally, the right to rule was bestowed to those who had the power and ability to command a large number of people and to repel attack by enemies.¹ The chieftainship, thus, originated in the physical and intellectual power of a person. In other words one who had the capacity to organise a force became a chief.² Such person was accepted the guardian and defender by his people. It, thus, appears that the institution of chieftainship emerged out of the needs of collective life which characterised tribal living . But no definite information

1 V.Venkata Rao : *A Century of Tribal Politics in the North East India (1874-1974)*, 1976, p.108

2 R.N.Frasad : *Government and Politics in Mizoram, (1947-1986)*, 1987, p.9.

can be obtained as when and how this institution took a concrete shape in the past. It can be reasonably asserted that this had happened at quite an early stage of evolution in their group life.

About the origin of the Mara chieftainship, the Mara tradition says that at the beginning when men came out of the hole in the earth all were equal, but in a short time the cleverer men became chiefs and elders, and ruled over the less intelligent and weak, who became the lower orders and were known as *machhie*.³

Each Mara group had its own ruling clan. The emergence of the ruling clans were, however, different from group to group, and each chiefly clan had its own origin. Some chiefly clans among the Maras were the Nöhro, the Böhia and the Thlyutha.

Among the Hawthai group of the Maras, the *Nöhro* was the ruling clan which had been holding the chieftainship since time immemorial. The Nöhro clan originated according to local elders, at a place called *Maratia*⁴ in historical period. According to one tradition,⁵ during their habitation

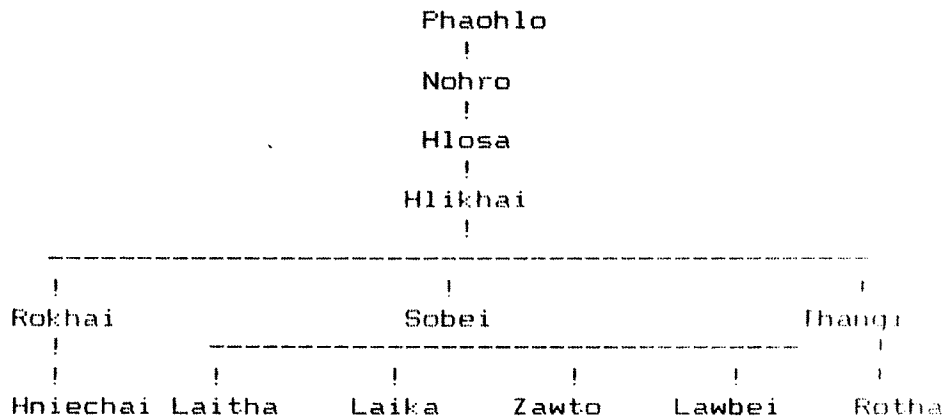
3 N.E. Parry : *op. cit.*, p. 232.

4 It is also known as Hawthai khiry.

5 Informant : N. Zawto.

at *Sothlana*,⁶ the Hawthais had a quarrel among themselves, and as a result of this one of them named Phaohlo left this place, and then started searching new land for settlement. He finally reached the site of Maratla village where he begot a son, Nohro, who became leader of his people. Nohro begot Hlosa who held the chieftainship among the Hawthais. Nohro was thus the first chief who laid the chieftainship on a secure footing among the Hawthais. His name became the name of clan.⁷

Pedigree of the Nohro clan.⁸



The Bôhia and the Thlyutha were the principal ruling clans among the Hlaipaos⁹. The Bôhia clan headed

6 See Chapter I (p.22).

7 Informant : N.Sotyu.

8 Informant : N.Zawto.

9 Hlaipao is one of the principal groups of the Maras.

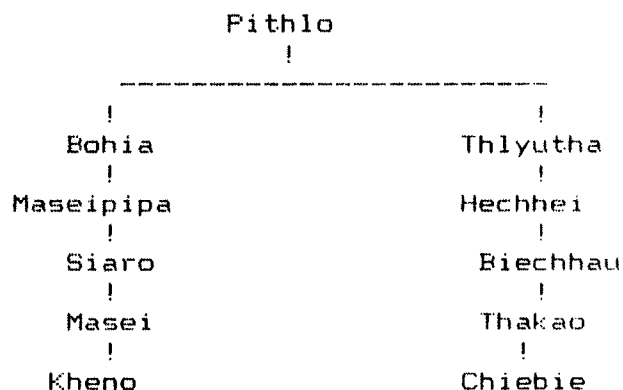
chieftainship among the Zyhno group of the Hlaipaos, and the Thlyutha clan among the Hlaipaos. These two ruling clans belonged to the same ancestry. They were known after the names of the noted and popular persons, Bôhia and Thlyutha.

These two clans have totemistic origin. Story held by local elders says that long ago, there was a girl named Pithlo who was employed as a priestess for performing the *tlylia*¹⁰ sacrifice. As she held a post she had to remain clean and virgin. One night, a python came where Pithlo was sleeping, and assuming human form, had connection with her. In due course, Pithlo gave birth to two sons at a time and named them Bôhia and Thlyutha. The villagers greatly disliked the children and they threw them away outside the village, but soon there was heavy rainfall continuously for several days and no one could go out of the village. The villagers then searched the children and found them wearing a necklace of bead, being encircled by a big python. The children were brought home and were elected as the leaders of the Hlaipaos.¹¹

10 The *tlylia* sacrifice is a ritual ceremony performed over to the mountain called *Khisô*, the abode is spirits.

11 Informant : T.David.

Genealogical tree of the Bôhia and Thlyutha clans¹²



The other chiefly clans which held chieftainship among the Maras were appointed through political invitation. In early days, a chief did not enjoy aristocratic privileges due to the fact that his main business was to lead raids on other tribes. It is, no wonder, therefore, in order to protect themselves from dreadful plunder and raids of the stronger, the weaker groups of the Maras requested the leaders of the big families or powerful clans of their neighbors to protect and lead them. The principal clans which were invited to head chieftainship were the Choza, the Hlychho, the Zawtha and the Chhachhai.¹³

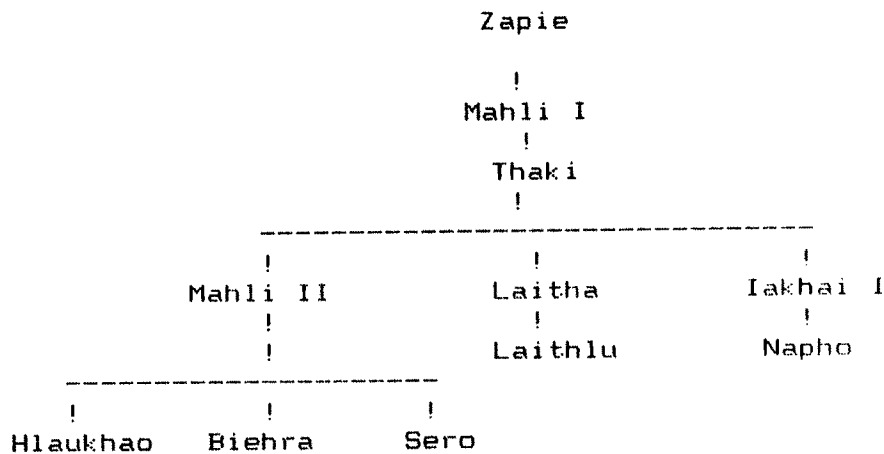
The Choza was the principal ruling clan among the Sizôe

12 Informant : H.T.Phili.

13 "Chhachhai" is also known as "Fachhai" among the Sizôe and the Lôcheis.

and their sub-groups. Local elders say¹⁴ that before the Choza clan was appointed to head the chieftainship, the Khaimichho, the dominant clan, headed the Sizös for several generations. It is held that the Khaimichho clan invited Mahli, son of Zapie who belonged to the Choza clan of the Thlatla origin, to head the chieftainship.¹⁵ The ancestry of Zapie is, however, veiled in obscurity.

Pedigree of the Choza clan.¹⁶



The descendants of Mahli ruled over several sub-groups of the Sizös. The Hlaipao sub-groups, the Heimas and the Lialais were also ruled over by the Choza and the Zawtha clans.

¹⁴ Laicho : *Mara*, p.14. Also C-Haoko : *op. cit.*, p.18.

¹⁵ C-Haoko : *loc. cit.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.35-36.

The Hlychho was another ruling clan which headed the chieftainship among the Tlōsai group of the Maras. Local elders say that before the Hlychho clan was invited to head the chieftainship, the Tlōsais were led by the more dominant clans the Mathipi and the Hnaihly for several generations.¹⁷ According to one tradition, during their settlement at Ngala village, the Tlōsais were frequently raided by the Löcheis, the Hlaipaos and others. It was for such reason, the Mathipi and the Hnaihly clans invited Zawto who belonged to the Nöhro clan to head chieftainship.¹⁸ After his death, they invited Iakhai of the Tlari Hlychho to head chieftainship among the Tlōsai group of the Maras.¹⁹ Iakhai begot Khaicho who was born and brought up at Hnaro village.²⁰ Iakhai was weak and incompetent to protect people from dreadful raids, wars, etc. Moreover he had no legitimate son to succeed him. It was under such circumstances, the villagers wanted to appoint new chief who was a man of great enterprise. Accordingly the Mathipi and the Hnaihly clans invited Laicho to head the chieftainship.²¹ Local elders say that Iakhai

17 Mylai Hlychho : *op. cit.*, p-5.

18 Hiphei : *A brief Report on Village Council Boundaries Siaha Town area*, 1980, p-1.

19 Interview : H.C.Chhakhai.

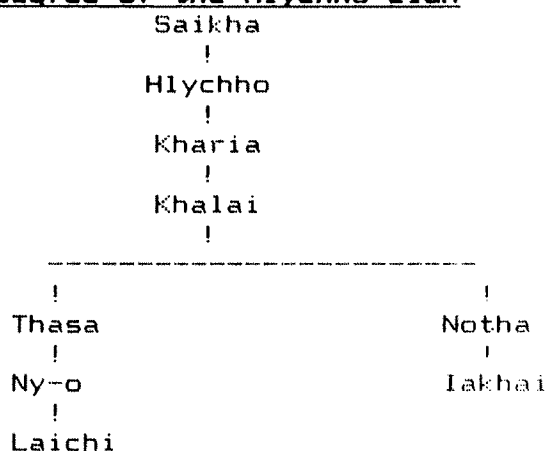
20 Mylai Hlychho : *op. cit.*, p-6.

21 Interview : H.C.Ngosa.

and Laichi belonged to the same ancestral descent.²²

The Hlychho clan was known after the name of the popular chief. It is held that Saikha was the progenitor of the Hlychho clan,²³ and his origin was, however, veiled in obscurity. He begot Hlychho who founded chieftainship at Tlari village being situated south of the Thlatla. Tlari village had been more or less vassal of the Thlatlas and the Hakas.²⁴ The descendants of Hlychho took the name of their great father as the name of clan.

Pidegree of the Hlychho clan



The Hlychho clan ruled over the Tlósais for several generations. This ruling clan was separated into two families, viz. the Mara Hlychho and the Khichha Hlychho. According to Mylai Hlychho,²⁵ the Tlósais were also separated themselves into two groups, viz. the Saikho and the Siaha. It was due to the fact that the people could not tolerate the aggressive rule of Laichi who was extremely cruel and ferocious.

²² Mylai Hlychho : *op. cit.*, p.232.

²³ Interview : H.C.Chhakhai.

²⁴ Mylai Hlychho : *op. cit.*, p.231.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.214.

The Saikaos were led by the descendants of Iakhai who belonged to the Mara Hlychho, and the Siahas by the descendants of Laichi who belonged to the Khichha Hlychho clan.²⁶ This separation had taken place at Bykhi village in the first part of the 19th century A.D.²⁷

The Zawtha was another ruling clan which ruled over the Lialais. It is held that the Cheirie and the Tlahnie clans of the Lialaipis invited Chhakha who belonged to the Zawtha clan of the Haka origin to head chieftainship.²⁸ The ancestral lineage of Chhakha is however, veiled in obscurity. Among the Lialaitas, chieftainship was also held by Saito of the Zawtha clan.²⁹

Local elders believe that the Zawtha clan was of the Haka origin.³⁰ It is held that the Zawtha clan was named after the name of its founder Zawtha who was descended from a Haka woman named Hlynga.³¹

The Chhachhai clan ruled over the Locheis, the Chapis, the La-aos and the Potias.³² Local elders and scholars think

²⁶ Interview : H.C.Sado.

²⁷ Mylai Hlychho : *op. cit.*, p.214.

²⁸ Informant : C.Thahe.

²⁹ *Ibid.*,

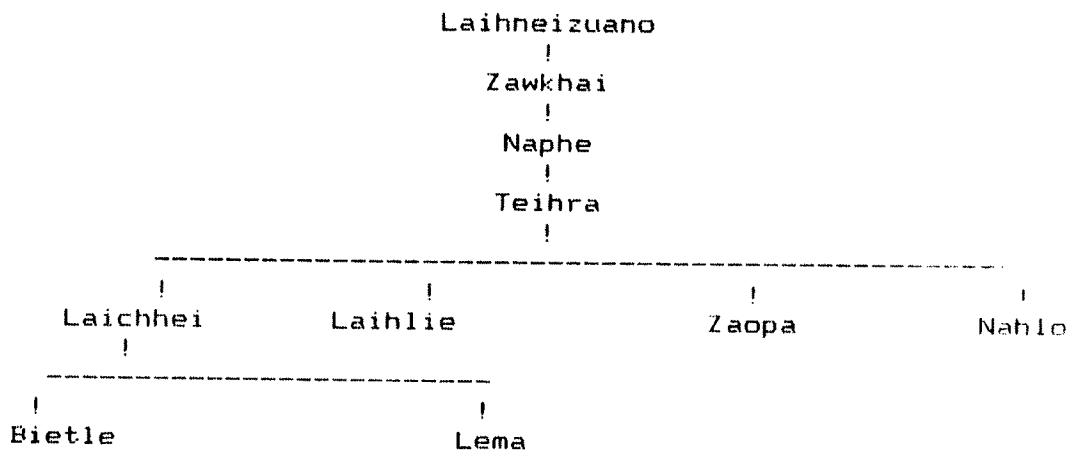
³⁰ Mylai Hlychho : *op. cit.*, p.232.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.231.

³² Informant : C.Thahe.

that the Chhachhai clan originally belonged to the Chhaongai³³ of south Haka sub-division. They say that the Chhachhai clan was descended from the mystical impregnation of a girl named Laihneizuano through some fruits of the Chheihlu tree (*Phyllanthus Emblica.*) she had eaten.³⁴ In due course she gave birth to a son named it Zawkhai who become the leader of the Teisais.³⁵

Genealogy of the Chhachhai clan



It is held that the Solo clan of the Lôcheis invited Bietle of the Chhachhai clan to head chieftainship among the Lôcheis.³⁶

The Chapis were also ruled over by the Chhachhai clan.

33 Chhaongai is a village belonging to the Lautus.

34 This story is also current among the Lautus (F.K.Lehman : *op. cit.*, p.34).

35 Informant : C.Thahé.

36 *Ibid.*,

It is held that the dominant clans, the Solo and the Khithie invited, for the first time, Napho of the Choza clan to hold chieftainship among the Chapis. As the descendants of Napho were uncompetent, the Solo and the Khithie clans invited Beichai of the Chhachhai clan to head chieftainship among the Chapis. The descendants of Beichai being weak and uncompetent, the Solo and the Khithie clans again invited Neilei who belonged to the Choza clan of the Sizö groups.³⁷

Distribution of various chieftains (group - wise)

<u>Group</u>	<u>Sub-group</u>	<u>Chiefly clans</u>
Hawthai		Nöhro
	Löchei	Chhachhai
Hlaipao		Thiyutha
	Zyhno	Böhia
	Heima	Choza
	Lialai	Zawtha
Iana		Choza
Sizö	Ngephia	Choza
	Chapi	Chhachhai, Choza
	Potia	Chhachhai
	Khihlö	Choza
	Sösai	Choza
	Aru	Choza
	Tikei (Taikua)	Choza

³⁷ Informant : F. Teihra.

	Saby	Choza
	Ratu	Choza
	Tisi	Choza
	Lialaira	Choza
Tlôsai	Siaha	Khichha Hlychho
	Saikao	Mara Hlychho

Chief's Position :

The post of chief belonged to the chiefly families, and it was therefore, hereditary in character. Other clans³⁸ were not eligible to head chieftainship.

In ancient days each village was independent and ruled by its own chief, who was, theoretically all powerful within his own domain. His words were law in his own territory. He was the owner of the village, and of all things, including the land. As Stevenson says he was "the Lord of the lord".³⁹ He could call upon his people to furnish him with anything he needed. There was no one superior to him in the village. The chief thus enjoyed supremacy over all matters in the territory under his jurisdiction. He enjoyed power to impose even death penalty within his jurisdiction.

But the chief had to exercise such unfettered power

38 Clan organisation is discussed in the next page.

39 *Economics*, p-81.

with great consideration and restraint. For he could not, at will, afford to antagonize his villagers since they were free to transfer their allegiance to another chief.⁴⁰ He treated his people like his children and helped them in times of famine or other distress. And in turn they looked upon him as their saviour and paid him certain dues, rendered physical services, and aided him whenever he needed their assistance.⁴¹ He had to be careful in exercising his powers. Lewin calls such type of government as "democratic-tempered by despotism".⁴² The position of the chief among his subjects was fluid because his own existence was dependent on the loyalty of his subjects.

Further he could not assume absolutism and act in an absolute manner because his power was balanced by the collective responsibility of the village councillors called *beimacha*.⁴³ In the Mara society, a chief was judged by his beneficent rule and the number of his followers, the greater the number of his people, the greater was his fame and prosperity. The people generally flocked under a chief who was benevolent and at the same time strong and powerful.

40 *Dwellers*, p.100.

41 Animesh Ray : *op. cit.*, p.32.

42 *Dialect.*, p.79.

43 It is discussed under village administration in the next page.

Succession :

In early days, strong men seized power and held it until they were overpowered by stronger ones. Sometimes the sons of a chief quarrelled among themselves for succession. In course of time the chieftainship became hereditary.⁴⁴ As a rule the eldest son was recognised as successor to his father subject, however, to his physical and mental fitness. When the eldest son was found weak and inefficient, the succession devolved upon the next son and so on. The right to succession was, however, reserved only for legitimate sons who were potent and gifted with capacity to rule. They succeeded in order of seniority of age. In the absence of sons, the succession devolved upon the brothers of a deceased chief or even the sons of concubines.⁴⁵

With the increase in their number, particularly with the eldest sons founding new villages with certain number of followers, the size of tracts of land held by them had become small. The chief of a new village called *khichare*,⁴⁶ was not required to pay any kind of tribute to the father-chief but was expected to help him in times of difficulties like famine, war, etc. Chieftainship devolved

44 Robert Romawia Royte : *The Lakher Autonomous District Council (1972-1982) : A Study*, unpublished M. Phil Dissertation, North Eastern Hill University, 1992. p.50.

45 Informant : S.Thabau.

46 If a village moved to a new site it is called *Khithiekia*.

on the son. When a chief died his property was inherited by the youngest son who was living with him at the time of his death.⁴⁷

VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION

The traditional Mara village was simply a little state, independent of any outside control. Within it, individual did not count; a household constituted a unit. The individual was not given separate recognition. For the administration, the village community consisted of all villagers including the chief, the councillors and the village officials. The people as a whole were known as *tlapi*⁴⁸ living under the village administration. The main functionaries of the village administration are the following :

The Chief: The chief called *zibeipa* or *abei*⁴⁹ who always belonged to the chiefly clan was helped by a number of councillors and other village elders. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, he was the head of administration and enjoyed supremacy over all matters within his jurisdiction. He was the pivot on which turned the whole

47 *Census*, 1901, vol-I, p.228.

48 N.E.Parry : *op. cit.*, p.245.

49 Zase : *op. cit.*, p.5.

machinery of the village administration. He was the fountain head of justice as well as the source of the law. His house served as the assembly hall as well as the law court where he decided cases. He usually decided the cases with the help of his councillors (*beimacha*).⁵⁰ He appointed the *beimachas* and other village officials. He was the leader in war and was the supreme commander of his army.

The chief was assisted by his *beimacha*, or the council of advisers. The basis of relationship between the chief and his councillors was reciprocal. The council presided over by the chief administered matters of day-to-day life and activities of the people. Any matter relating to the village could be discussed in the council. The chief could hardly ignore the consensus expressed in the council. The chief and his councillors collectively worked together. However, weak and incompetent chiefs were often overshadowed by able councillors.

It was his duty to protect his people from external danger i.e. raids and war, and to help them in time of famine or other distress. The basis of relationship between the chief and his people was of mutual benefit and help.⁵¹ In conformity with his power, the chief enjoyed several

50 Mylai Hlychho : *op. cit.*, p.24.

51 Animesh Ray : *op. cit.*, p.32.

rights and privileges, and received dues such as *sahan*, *sathie*, *sabai*, *rapaw*, *rapawîô*, *rapawsa*, *rapawti*, *larapaw*, etc.⁵²

The *Beimacha*: The most important organ of the village administration was the *beimacha*.⁵³ They were the councillors or members of the chief-in-council called *tlapi ryureina*⁵⁴ as well as members of the advisory body. The council presided over by the chief administered affairs of day-to-day life and activities of the people. The *beimachas* were appointed by the chief from among those representing, so far as applicable, different clans. Men belonging to the chiefly clans or rich families or the phoso clans were usually selected. The chief was, however, free to choose any one whom he favoured.⁵⁵ The chief had right to dismiss his councillors at any moment without assigning any reason thereof.

The functions of the *beimachas* were multifarious. The council could discuss any matter that came for its disposal.

52 N.E.Parry : *op. cit.*, p.254, Also Mylai Hlychho : *op. cit.*, p.29.

53 Mylai Hlychho : *op. cit.*, p.24.

54 Informant : T.David.

55 N.E.Parry : *op. cit.*, p.246.

It aided and advised the chief in all matters. Its members were the brain and right hand of the chief. They councillors performed various duties under the direction of the chief.⁵⁶ The chief could hardly ignore their consensus arrived at in the council. They helped the chief in carrying on village administration, administration of justice, distribution of land for *jhum* cultivation, etc. The *beimachas* had enjoyed certain rights and privileges. They were exempted from physical services i.e. labour and duties to be rendered to the chief and village community, and also exempted from dues and tithes payable to the chief. On the other hand they enjoyed dues like *sahaw*, *sabai*, etc.⁵⁷

56 S.Das : *The Lesser Tribes of South Lushai Hills* by S.Barkataki (ed.) : *Tribes of Assam*, 1969, p.103.

57 N.E.Parry : *op. cit.*, p.246.

The Blacksmith: The blacksmith known as *Syudaipa* occupied an important position in the village administration and was one of the chief's officials. A person who had expertise knowledge in blacksmithy was usually selected as blacksmith for life. But his son had no right to inherit his status⁵⁸. His duty was to make or repair *dao*, knife, spear, equipments, tools, ornaments, etc. He enjoyed the dues of *sabai* and *sahaw*⁵⁹, and was exempted from dues and tithes payable to the chief and his councillors.

The Tilyiabôpa: The *Tilyiabôpa*, another functionary of village administration, was appointed by the chief and villagers as a special priest for performing the *tilyia* sacrifice⁶⁰. A person who belonged to families that had been in the village for several years was usually selected⁶¹. His duty was to conduct the *tilyia* sacrifices of the villagers. The chief and villagers had right to dismiss him at any moment on the ground of his misconduct. He, however, enjoyed this *sahaw* and *zidei*⁶². He was exempted from dues and tithes payable to the chief.

58 Interview : S.Thabau.

59 N.E.Parry : *op. cit.*, p.255.

60 It is discussed in Chapter IV.

61 N.E.Parry : *op. cit.*, p.246.

62 *Ibid.*, p.254.

The Chysapathaipa: Another important functionary of the village administration was *chysapathaipa*, which literally means "pure man". The term was applied to a person who acted as cook when the chief performed the *khazopina* sacrifice⁶³. Usually such man was a close relation of the chief and belonged to the chiefly or middle clan. Rather a *Chysapathaipa* must be of pure descent on both sides, mother and father, having on disreputation in offences like murder, sexual offences etc.⁶⁴ His primary duty was to supervise the *Khazopina* sacrifice performed by the chief. He, however, did not enjoy reward or due.

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

Offences and Punishment:

Murder, theft, rape, adultery, assault, and other offences and crimes were recognised by the Maras and were dealt by certain recognised customary laws, admitted and obeyed by all. From reports it appears criminal cases were rare among the early Maras.

Murder: Disputes over the price of *mithun*, a wife or the ownership of a field, etc. Sometimes resulted in fighting

63 N.E.Parry : *op. cit.*, p.247.

64 Informant : H.C.Sado.

and killing. this, too, occurred under the influence of rice beer.⁶⁵ In case a man murdered another he had to pay the price of a head called *lutu* to the murdered's relation, and also a pig to the chief and councillors. If he could not pay *lutu*, a chief or rice man who played up the same on his behalf would take him as slave. If the murderer had failed to pay the same, the murdered man's brother could take him as slave.⁶⁶ But the murdered man's relations had no right to kill the murderer in cold blood. If such murder occurred the person responsible for this was fined. If a man was accidentally gunned down or killed any other way, the person who did so would supply a *mithun* for the *riha* ceremony, including a black cloth and a pot of rice-beer.⁶⁷ There was no price of a head. The murderer was, however, debarred from tribal feasts and ritual ceremonies till he performed purification ceremony in the river. On the other hand, if a domestic animal *mithun* or ox killed a man, the animal was killed for the *riha* ceremony, and the owner of the domestic animal had to give the deceased's relatives a pot of rice-beer.⁶⁸

Assault: Assault or fighting among the early Maras was not uncommon, generally under the influence of the excessive

65 Informant : K.Pheito.

66 N.E.Parry : *op. cit.*, p-264.

67 *Ibid.*, p-274.

68 *Ibid.*, p-273.

drinking. Drunkenness was, however, considered a valid excuse for assault or fighting.⁶⁹ No fine was inflicted upon the offender unless he shed his opponent's blood, or if he prayed for forgiveness to the aggrieved person before the next morning. Assault or fighting that caused bleeding or injury was a definite crime. If a man committed assault and his opponent's blood was brown or his opponent got serious injury or wounds, he must be fined a pig.⁷⁰

Theft: Robbery was practically unknown among the early Maras except looting in warfare. But stealing was common. The more common thefts were stealing of domestic animals, paddy, clothes, ornaments, agriculture implements, utensils and other household properties. The thief must return the same or pay the value of the stolen article. He was also inflicted a fine of a pig or a pot or rice-beer depending on the worth of the stolen articles.⁷¹

The most serious offences were stealing of gun, necklace of *pumtek* beads, indigo leaves and cloths from basket. If a man stole a gun and fail to return it back to the owner before the next morning, the owner had right to enslave the thief.⁷² If a man stole a necklace of *Pumtek*

69 Interview : S.Thabau.

70 N.E.Parry : *op. cit.*, p-269.

71 *Ibid.*, p-266.

72 *Ibid.*, p-267.

beads, he must be fined a *mithun* or cow and also return the necklace. If a man stole clothes or others from a basket, he must be inflicted a fine a *mithun* or a pig. If a man stole indigo leaves, he must be fined a gong of seven spans and a *vaopia* (a pig).⁷³

Rape: Rape was not common among the early Maras. A person who raped an unmarried girl must be fined the principal price called *Okia*⁷⁴ and a pig. If he did not accomplish his desire, he must be inflicted only a pig. If a man raped a married woman, he must be fined a pig, a cloth and a bead.⁷⁵ If he did not fulfill his desire, he must be inflicted a fine (a pig). The husband of the woman raped was looked down as a cuckold in most villages and could freely divorce his wife without any question.

Adultery: Adultery occurred very rarely among the early Maras. If a woman committed adultery, she must be turned out at once by her husband. And her whole price must be refunded to her husband. If she had a child, she could retain her price *Okia* as the price of her child. The adulterer was fined the principal price *Okia*, a necklace and a cloth to the injured husband and also a pig to the villagers.⁷⁶ If a man

73 Informant : T.Chhatha.

74 The main principal price of a girl is known as *Okia*.

75 N.E.Parry : *op. cit.*, p.284.

76 *Ibid.*, p.347.

committed adultery, he could be divorced by his wife and the price of his wife must not be refunded.

Fornication: Fornication called *rakhōkia* was serious offence. A young man who involved in the *rakhōkia* was liable to pay a fine of a sow and a fowl or a dog.⁷⁷ If he refused to marry the girl, he had to pay *okia*, a *dao* and a pig. If a man had connection with a sleeping woman without permission, it was called *alyhnao*. The *alyhnao* on married woman was considered serious offence and the correspondent was fined the woman's *okia*, a pig, a necklace and a cloth⁷⁸.

Seduction: Seduction was rare among the early Maras. If a man tried to seduce another's wife it was considered a offence and a man was fined a gong of seven spans and also a pig.⁷⁹ If a man fondled a married woman's breast, the same fine must be inflicted upon him.

House Trespass: House trespass was not common among the early Maras. It was considered a definite act of criminal offence. Quarrel over the *jhum* field, the marriage price, defamation, accusation, etc. resulted in house trespass

77 N.E.Parry : *op. cit.*, p.280.

78 *Ibid.*, p.282.

79 *Ibid.*, p.285.

which often led to serious dispute between the householders and intruder. If a man trespassed in another's house, the householder could use force to expel the trespasser. Householders were not liable to a fine even if the intruder got injured or bloodshed. And if the householder got injured or bloodshed, the house-trespasser must be fined a pig.⁸⁰

Eaves-dropping: Among the Maras, it was a definite offence. If a man eaves-dropped secretly to private conversation or discussion of the inmates, he was liable to fine of a gong of seven spans and a pig. If the eaves-dropper repeated the same, the fine was increased to a *Mithun*.⁸¹

Defamation: Accusation, defilement, speaking abusive language, etc. were defamatory offenses. It was an offence to accused a free man of being slave, a man of having evil eye, a man of being bastard, etc. If any one defamed his or her fellow villager, the former would be fined a pig or an earthenware pot. The fine depended on the nature of defamation and the status of the defamed person.⁸²

80 N.E. Parry : *op.cit.*, p.269.

81 *Ibid.*,

82 *Ibid.*, p.270.

Civil Cases: Civil matters such as marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance, etc. were governed by certain recognised customary laws which were obeyed by all.

Marriage: If a man seduced a girl who had already engaged with a boy, he was fined atonement price called *hmiatia*. If a boy or a girl broke the engagement, the breaker of the engagement was fined a pig, and the *thuaso* must be returned.⁸³ Marriage by elopement, fornication, seduction, etc. were not encouraged among the early Maras. However, if a boy and a girl got thus united, the former would pay the girl's father a *hmiatia*⁸⁴. If a boy had forcibly slept with his girl wife who had not fully attained the age of puberty and the latter complained, he would pay the girl's father and earthenware pot.⁸⁵

Divorce: A husband or a wife could divorce his or her spouse on certain grounds. But it was more common to find a husband divorcing his wife than a wife her husband. If a wife committed adultery or any connection with another man, her husband could easily divorce her, and her whole prices must be refunded.⁸⁶ If a husband was divorced by his wife on the same ground, the whole bride prices must be detained.

83 Interview : H.T.Phili.

84 *Ibid.*,

85 N.E. Parry : *op.cit.*, p.308.

86 *Ibid.*, p.347.

and the remaining dues also must be paid up. A husband or a wife could also divorce his or her spouse on the ground of madness, impotence or barrenness, and the bride price was not refunded.⁸⁷ Assault, dispute, quarrel, etc. also frequently resulted in divorce. If a wife ran away to her parent's house and declined to return to her husband's house after making several apologies, her spouse could divorce her, and her whole prices must be refunded. If a husband refused to make apology of his offence he was declared to have divorced his wife, and the bride price must be refunded.⁸⁸

Adoption: Adoption (*saw-a-lapa*) was prevalent among the Maras. An orphan was, as a rule, protected and looked after by his or her paternal or maternal relations. If he or she had no close relations, he or she could be adopted by others. The childless parents, could adopt children of their cognates as heir.⁸⁹ A child of a concubine and a bastard also eligible for adoption. A childless father⁹⁰ who had no recognisable heir, could adopt a slave or captive made in war as his son. The adopter must perform *Khazopina* sacrifice to effect such adoption.⁹¹

87 Informant : T.David.

88 Interview : N.Soty.

89 Interview : K.Nahlei.

90 Informant : H.T.Philli says that in the past, a childless father was not eligible to claim the *puma* price of his sister's daughter.

91 N.E.Parry : *op.cit.*, p.290.

Inheritance (ryuto): In regard to inheritance, the fundamental rule is that sons alone had right to inherit the property. The youngest son would inherit the father's property according to custom.⁹² In general, neither daughters nor wives could inherit the property. It was the duty of a father before his death to set the house in order to avoid quarrel among the would-be claimants. If a father had several sons, the youngest son had rightful claim for patrimony. But in actual practice, a father divided his property equally among his sons. The youngest son was treated as a legitimate heir because he was to look after his parents and leave with them.⁹³ The son of a concubine could have shares in the inheritance subject to the absence of the rightful heirs.⁹⁴ It was the right of the father to disinherit any son. He could dispose of his property even during his life time, and whatever decision was made by him, it was final.

Trial of Cases:

The chief and his *beimachas* could try any case and make a final decision. The council was the only court and there was no other court of appeal. Trial of civil as well as criminal cases was strictly conducted. The early Maras

92 Informant : T.Chhatha.

93 Informant : H.T.Phili.

94 N.E. Parry : *op.cit.*, p.287.

usually settled and decided crimes and offences by mutual agreement between the offender and the aggrieved person. If mutual agreement could not be reached, only then, it was referred to the arbitration of the chief who with his councillors tried and decided the cases in accordance with customary laws. Such trial was known as *leichho*.⁹⁵

When any one took a case to the chief, the latter fixed a date for hearing. The proceedings might continue for several days. If the proceeding of trial could not reach final decision, then only a aggrieved and guilty parties took oath or ordeal.⁹⁶

Ordeals :

Tiry-ngia (diving into water) : The chief ordered two parties to dive into a stream pool. The *Iyuchapa*, who was appointed by the chief to supervise the proceedings of this ordeal, placed each man's head into the water, held it firmly there. Either of them who took his head out first was the loser. The loser was fined a pig.⁹⁷

Tiei-chaeano (putting hand into the boiling water):
Two pebbles were dropped into the boiling water. Each man,

95 N.E. Parry : *op.cit.*, p.260.

96 Informant : T.David.

97 *Ibid.*, p.262.

in turn, pulled out a pebble and his hand was rubbed with drafted rice. It was then examined by the chief *machas* and a person whose hand had been clearly scalded was declared the loser. The loser was fined a pig.⁹⁸

Oath:

Chakei ha sie(bitting of tiger's tooth) : The accused person who denied his offence was asked to bite a tiger's tooth by saying, "Let a tiger bite me as I bite its tooth if I am a liar". No fine was imposed on the oath receiver.⁹⁹

Chhaoleiti dopa (eating of sand) : In this oath, both parties swallowed sand or dust, and took an oath that the one who was a liar would soon die as a result of this.¹⁰⁰

TRIBAL ORGANISATION

Group System: The Maras were divided into several exogamous groups, viz. the Hawthais, the Sizos, the Hlaipaos, the Tlôsaïs and the Ianas. These groups were further divided into several sub-groups were the Lôchei, the Hawthai sub-group; the Zyhno, Heima and Lialai, the Hlaipao sub-groups; the Saikao and Siaha, the Tlôsai sub-groups; and

98 N.E. Parry : *op.cit.*, p.263.

99 K.Kheito : *op.cit.*, p.52.

100 *Ibid.*, p.51.

the Aru, Chapi, Lialaira, Ngephe, Ratu, Khihlō, Sōsai, Saby, Taikua and Tisi; the Sizō sub-group. The groups and branches constituted the Mara tribe.

Each group had its own origin and migration, and was named after the name of its ancestor or founder. It is said that the migration and distribution of the Maras in various parts of the Chin Hills was the genesis of the differences among them. Their villages became more or less independent of the others, even feud with each other,¹⁰¹ from which the group system came into existence among them.

The group system was a part of the Mara political life, and was permanently maintained in the tribal organisation among them. The structural organisation of the group system was based on the need of protection ties of the blood relationship and clan lineage, organisation of independent polity, group norms and interests, etc. The group system was however, characterised by certain features.

The tribal groups of the Maras were organised independently, and each group was independent of the others. Each group had its own defined territory or are of jurisdiction with specific boundary covering several villages.¹⁰² Each group was headed by a chiefly clan which

101 *Jungles*, p.163.

102 Mylai Hlychho : *op.cit.*, p.23.

ruled several village. Each village had its own political organisation and administration headed by a chief belonging to the ruling clan of its group. The chief of the parental village was the principal leader of his group maintaining law and order within his areas of jurisdiction.¹⁰³

Each group consisted of several villages. The more powerful groups controlled many villages. The villages of each group were permanently controlled and were not transferable from group to group. They, however, formed a sort of loose confederation defending each other against any external aggressions, wars, raids, etc. In external relation each village maintained friendly relationship with others, and feud or dispute was settled through peaceful means. The villages of each group were socially and politically interrelated each other. The villagers could not however transfer their loyalty to another village or other groups without the permission of the concerned chiefs.¹⁰⁴

Reciprocal relations formed the essential feature of the groups. They, however, formed a sort of loose confederation, defending and helping each other against external aggressions or dangers, wars, etc. Feuds or disputes among them were settled through peaceful

103 Robert Romawia Royte : *op.cit.*, p-50.

104 N.E. Parry : *op.cit.*, p-259.

negotiation by taking a solemn oath of peace.¹⁰⁵ Among them friendly relationship had been maintained and social intercourse, inter-visit, inter-marriage, emigration, etc. were open.

Each group had a dialect of its own but they could all understand each other. Each group also had its own nomenclature but all the members of the groups, however, followed the same customs and traditions, and adopted a uniformed social system. There was no difference in socio-religious life among them. The tribal organisation of the Mara groups was socially and politically unified and integrated closely through customs and traditions, blood ties, clan lineages, etc.

Clan Organisation:

Clan was the most important basic factor of group organisation. The village community consisted of three social classes of clans such as the chiefly clan, *abeipho*; the middle clan, *phoso* and the commoners, *machhie*. There were more than one hundred clans¹⁰⁶ among the Maras. Each village was occupied by different clans. Most of the clans were found all the different groups though a few of the numerically weaker clans existing only in certain villages. The people of all clans in a village as a whole were known as *tlapi*.¹⁰⁷

105 N.E. Parry : *op.cit.*, p.220.

106 A list of the Mara clans is appended in Appendix A.

107 N.E. Parry : *op.cit.*, p.245.

The chiefly clan *abeipho* was the highest class among the early Maras. There were seven chiefly clans viz. Nohro, Bohia, Thlyutha, Chhachhai, Choza, Hlychho and Zawtha. Each clan headed a particular group or sub-group. There was no single ruling clan like the Sailo of the Mizos¹⁰⁸. The chiefly clan occupied key position in social and political organisation. The chief and his cognates formed a sort of unilateral grouping i.e. lineage consisting of blood relations called *hrihrua*.¹⁰⁹ The chief's relatives and other people belonging to the rich and the *phoso* families were closely related to them forming sort of alliance.¹¹⁰ Men belonging to chiefly clan occupied the post of chieftainship and other important posts in village administration.

The *phoso* clans occupied important position in social and political organisations. Each of these was, however, associated with a particular chiefly clan. Men belonging to the *phoso* clans could occupy important posts in village administration.¹¹¹ The commoners, *machhie* constituted the subjects and their position was insignificant in political organisation. Although there was a definite gulf among the three social classes, they could however assume close subordination in social and political organisation. Parry calls such type of organisation as "undemocratic".¹¹²

108 R.N.Prasad : *op.cit.*, p.9.

109 Informant : N.Sotyu.

110 J.Shakespear : *op.cit.*, p.217.

111 Informant : T.Chhatha.

112 *Census*, 1931, Vol. III, p.126.