

Chapter - 7

Rites of Passage and Social Control

The study of the rites of passage constitutes an important component of all ethnographic/anthropological study because it gives a general understanding of the process of birth, the growing up, assuming of social responsibilities, marriage, reproduction, growing old and finally dying. It is not just the study of the rites and rituals attached to each of these stages in their life-cycle, but also an attempt to unravel the way the community looks at each of these stages.

Birth

After an expectant mother has passed three or four months of conception the Molsoms observe *sapalang reboul* or *kabeng* rite for good health of the mother and coming baby as a protective measure against evil's eyes and to prevent abortion. In *sapalang reboul* the *awchai* worships four supernatural spirits, namely, *tuior*, *asengoi*, *thingkungoi* and *paoenpa*, by sacrificing seven chicks and three piglets. For *kabeng* the same spirits are worshipped but no pig is sacrificed. *Kabeng* is observed, generally, by those who are relatively poor as it is less expensive than *sapalang reboul*. After *sapalang reboul* or *kabeng* rite is performed the *awchai* forecasts the sex of the coming issue by observing the position of the rectal cecum on the elementary canal of a sacrificed chick. Downward the tip of the rectal cecum portends a female issue whereas an upward position signifies a male embryo.

Among the Molsoms the pregnant women are to observe some restrictions. They are forbidden to sleep with their husband after seven months of conception and they are to keep covered their breasts by breast garment *risa*, especially when they go outside the house. They believe that an evil spirit called *khuri* does harm to the breast of the pregnant women with its malicious look. If the worst befalls, symptoms appear in the form of breast pain and, sometimes, with cracking of nipples. To get rid of the evil, the *awchai* worships *khuri* by offering boiled rice and curry made of seven vegetables. Besides, the expectant mother is to avoid filthy places where, as they believe, the *khuri* lives and may take possession of the mother. If it so happens, the women in the family may lose mental balance.

When the delivery pain starts, a labour-room is contrived in the house with sheets of cloth, bamboo-mats etc. The *awchai* worships *tuior* and *arkhonthace* on the bank of a stream or river by sacrificing one duck or hen for easy delivery and as a protective measure for the mother and the coming baby against evil eyes. The *awchai* also forecasts the time of delivery, that is, early or late and the health of the issue by examining the elementary canal and the colour of the blood of the sacrificed animal respectively. The shorter the distance between rectal caecum and rectum, earlier is the expected time of delivery, and more deep-red the colour of the blood of the sacrificed fowl the better would be the health of the issue. If the colour of the blood is found to be blackish the issue, it is believed, may die before or after delivery.

In the labour room the expectant mother sits on the delivery bed made of bamboo mats, rests on her knees and catches tightly a post or a rope slung from a beam of the roof. At the time of delivery a local midwife and her assistant, locally known as *kurma* and *lauromi* respectively, and some other elderly ladies attend the woman. The assistant of the midwife and some other elderly ladies hold the mother steady from behind and the midwife pulls the baby out.

On the umbilical cord five knots, each at a distance of one inch from the other, are tied with cotton threads. The midwife cuts the umbilical cord at third knot with a sharp bamboo split, locally known as *saranat*. If a son is born the split is obtained from a bamboo post of the house and in case a daughter is born it is taken from a horizontal split of the bamboo wall of the house. The umbilical cord of a son is cut by keeping it on the handle of hand chopper of his father and that of a daughter is cut by placing it on an weaving equipment locally known as *khuroi*, of her mother. Juice of some local leaves is used to check bleeding. Placenta is put in to an earthen pot or in a pot made of dry pumpkin and the father of the baby places the pot on a bamboo stand in a nearby jungle. The midwife, her assistant and other ladies who attend the mother during the delivery are entertained with *zukola*.

After the last part of the umbilical cord is removed, generally four to six days after the birth, *abursuk* ceremony is observed when naming of the new born is done. The *awchai* worships the *arthengoi* by sacrificing one hen and than selects one from two or three names proposed by the baby's relatives. He takes two leaves and drops them from above uttering the proposed name. If both the leaves fall with the same sides up he rejects that name as it is supposed to be ominous. When the leaves fall with opposite sides up, that is, one dorsal and one ventral, it signifies that the name is auspicious and the baby is named after that name.

The names are usually chosen after local birds, flowers, remarkable incidents or happenings which might have occurred at the period of birth. A person of Manithang Bari of Udaipur, for instance, was born in 1952 and has been named Kuminist Pada as the communist movement had entered the region during that period or a girl of the same village is named as Ration Laxmi since at the time of her birth a ration shop was set up near their village, and so on. Most of the names of the present generation are corrupted form of the names prevailing among the neighboring Bengalis.

For example, Bengali name Rupabati is adopted as Rupaiti, Laxmi as Likhi, Pradip as Pudip, Kamal as Kumal etc. Two names, Bhagya and Bahadur, are widely used in case of the males. A few examples especially among the male are Saran Bhagya, Ninda Bhagya, Aprut Bahadur, Nago Bahadur and so on.

On any evening, within one month after the birth of the baby the *awchai* worships *mukotcung reboul* at doorsill by sacrificing one young pig and a chick. This is done as a protective measure against diseases for the new born. If *mukotkung reboul* is not performed within one month, the evil spirit *khuri*, it is feared, will cast an evil look on the baby and the baby will vomit repeatedly. Within one year after the birth, the *awchai* worships *prosenpoi* deity by sacrificing three hens which, they believe, will help the new born to learn speaking at an early age.



Breast feeding is the main source of feeding for the baby

Up to four or five months, the breast feeding is the main source of food for the baby. When the child grows up to one year, he or she is provided with normal meal. The mother and other elderly relatives keep the baby on their laps or on the hammock. During the work time the ladies tie the baby at their back with a short piece of cloth made especially for the purpose which is locally known as *ponai*.

Childhood

The Molsoms observe ceremonies during the first wearing of cloths. The wearing ceremony for the boys is known as *takbrokmi* and that for the girls as *punmizel*. Traditionally they do not wear dresses except warm clothing in winter before solemnization of wearing ceremony. In *takbrokmi* a boy for the first time wears *takbrok*, the traditional male-dress, and in *punmizel* a girl puts on *puenzel* the traditional loincloth for the first time in her life. At an early stage of this initiation, the parents invite some young boys and girls to their house. Generally the ceremony takes place in the evening when the parents leave the house. The boy and girl invitees assemble in the house where they drink *zukola* and do merriment. The boys help the boy or girl to put on a new piece of loincloth. The boy or girl whose Initiation goes on, generally tries to oppose but the other boys forcibly make him or her wear the garment. From this very day the boy or the girl starts wearing dresses.

Childhood among the Molsoms passes joyfully. The children play indigenous games and get training in various socio-economic activities. The adolescent boys and girls keenly observe various activities of their parents and other elderly persons. The boys gain knowledge of bamboo-, cane-, and wood- crafts, agricultural works, hunting, fishing etc. and the girls gain skill in weaving, agricultural works and other domestic

activities. Sometimes they participate in some minor works like rearing of animals, weddings, collection of firewood etc. in groups.

In the new economic set up, the Molsom children are attending schools. Table 7.1 gives some idea of how the Molsoms are responding to the effort of the state government to spread formal education among the tribal communities.

Table 7.1: Level of education of the Molsoms children

| Classes | Number of students | Percentages to total students |
|------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| I ---- II | 128 | 42.67 |
| III — IV | 122 | 40.66 |
| V----VI | 30 | 10.00 |
| VII---VIII | 18 | 06.00 |
| IX --- X | 02 | 00.67 |
| Total | 300 | 100.00 |

Table 7.1 shows that among the 300 school going children, of the sample villages, 128 (42.67 % to total students) read in classes I and II, 122 (40.66

% to total students) read in classes III and IV, 30 (10 % to total student) read in classes V to VI, 18 (6 % to total student) read in classes VII and VIII and only 2 (0.67 % to total student) read in classes IX and X. It may be seen that drop-outs start from start as early as in class I or II and this trend gets intensified as the students reach classes V or VI. Thus while 42.67 % of the total students are found in classes I and II, and another 40.66 % of the total students in classes III and IV the percentage of student fall remarkably to 10 % in classes V or VI, and thereafter. No student in any of the villages I have studied was found to have studied beyond class X.

The table shows that a total of 300 (17.34 % to total population) are students and most of them(280 student) are studying in classes between I to VI (93.33% to the total students). Under normal circumstances, students studying between classes I and IV would be in the age-group of 6 to 12. But table 7.2 shows that only 137 students belong to this age-group. From this it may logically follow that the Molsom children either start going school at a relatively higher age or they drop out even before the completion of primary education.

Table 7.2: Distribution of population according to age

| Age group | Total number | Percentage to total population (N=1730) |
|-----------|--------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 00 – 06 | 61 | 03.53 |
| 06 - 12 | 137 | 07.92 |
| 12 - 18 | 143 | 08.26 |
| 18 - 24 | 238 | 13.77 |
| 24 - 30 | 249 | 14.39 |

| | | |
|---------|------|--------|
| 30 - 36 | 226 | 13.06 |
| 36 - 42 | 409 | 23.64 |
| 42- 48 | 131 | 07.57 |
| 48 - 54 | 76 | 04.39 |
| 54 - 60 | 40 | 02.31 |
| 60 + | 20 | 01.16 |
| Total | 1730 | 100.00 |

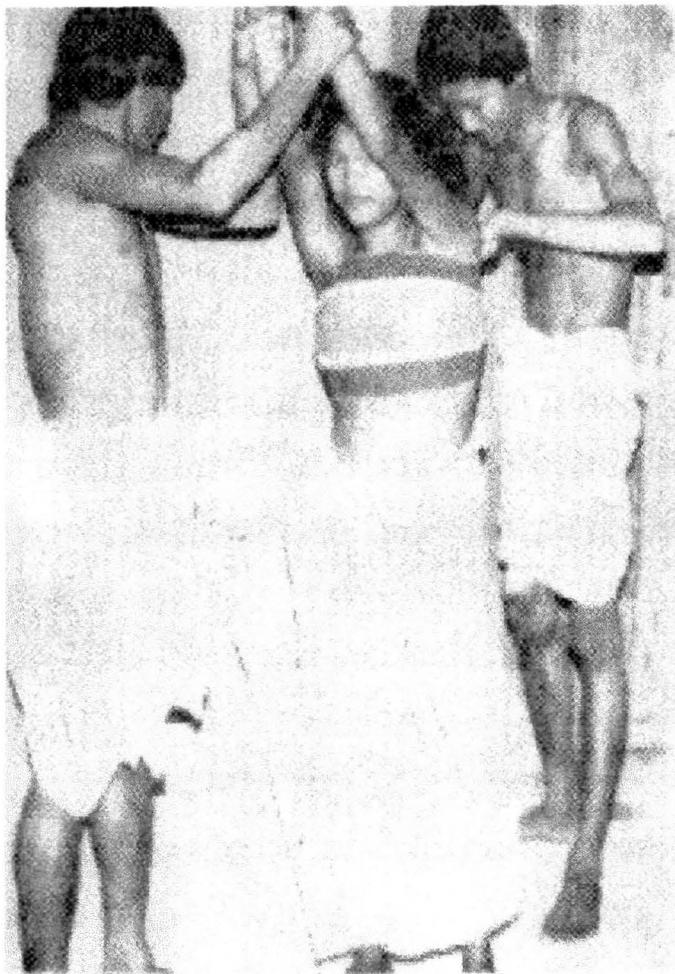
Table 7.2 shows that the people aged between 36 and 42 constitute 23.64 % of total population, and this is the largest of the age-groups. The second largest age-group is the 24 to 30 which constitute 14.39 % of the total population. The third, fourth and fifth largest age groups are 18 to 24 (13.77 %), 30 to 36 (13.06 %) and 06 to 12 (07.92 %) respectively.

Among the Molsoms the child labour (children below 14 years of age) is not uncommon. If we assume that 50% of the people in 12 - 18 age-group do not constitute the work force, and consider all the people up to 60 as the work-force, then as many as 83.26% of the total population would be the actual working population. The non-working people is thus comprised of all children below 14, many of those who are yet to reach 18 and all above 60 years of age. The high rate of work participation is one of the usual requirements of the subsistence economy. Participation to work by children and by the aged, which is also common among the Molsoms is one of the many ways they respond to poverty and hardship in life.

Puberty

Among the Molsoms a ceremony is observed when a girl steps into puberty. The ceremony is known as *risabomb*. After the first menstruation, *risabomb* ceremony is performed when a girl wears *risa*, the breast garment, for the first time in her life. In presence of many boys and girls, during *risabomb*, two strong boys tie a new piece of *risa* around the breast of the girl. The other parts of this ceremony are same as that of *punmizel* ceremony. The boys with whom the marital relation of a girl is tabooed are interdicted from attending the *risabomb* ceremony of that girl. After *risabomb* a girl is formally accepted as a young girl by the society and her parents are allowed to arrange her marriage. In Molsom society no ceremony is observed relating to initiation of the boys into puberty.

Risabomb-ceremony



The cloth wearing ceremony, namely, *takbrokmi* for the boys and *punmizel* for the girls and the puberty initiation ceremony for the females, namely, *risabomb* are unique of the Molsoms since these cannot be found among the other autochthonous tribes of the state. Among the Mogs of Tripura, however, *sangpareebui*, the adolescent ritual for the males and *ranglangsa*, the puberty rite for the females, are observed.



The Molsom *nungaks*

The Molsom youths lead a romantic life. They lighten the hard and tedious works of *jhum* and other economic activities with music and merriment. They participate in all socio-economic activities as and when necessary. In the village the youths are organised under the leadership of *tangoaloulm*, the leader of the boys and *nungakoulm*, the leader of the girls.

After the day's work the young boys visit the house of the young girls and amuse themselves there by gossiping. Generally a group of boys consisting of three to six members assemble in a girl's house in the evening. This

evening-gossiping in Molsom society is known as *leang*. Traditionally there was a room known as *lingna* or *sungna* in every Molsom house for the purpose. In *leang* the girl forms the nucleus and the boys display their special qualities in music, art, craft etc. and try to court the girl. They sing songs; play on the musical instruments, and present bamboo, cane and wooden articles to the girl. The girl offers *zukola*, tobacco, betel leaf and betel nuts to the boys and observe them keenly. Ultimately one amongst the boys becomes successful in courting the girl and for this the green signal comes from the girl when she expresses her willingness symbolically.

After a period of observation one day the girl sits close to the selected boy and offers a portion of her loincloth to him. The favoured boy sits on the extended portion of loin cloth so that the girl is unable to move to attend to another boy's request for preparing smoking pipe or for *zukola*, betel leaf etc. From this the other boys of the *leang* get to know about the affair. No rivalries grow between the selected boy and rejected ones.

A similar type of practice is found among the Lushais of Tripura. The Lushai call it *rim*. In *rim* also, like *leang*, three to six young boys gossip with an young girl at her house in the evening and try to court the girl. The other things of the *rim* are similar to those of the *leang*, the only difference is found in the symbolic declaration of the girl about her choice. The girl in *rim* takes a *bailo* (a cigarette-like tobacco roll made of tobacco and paper) from the boy selected by her and tie the same with her hair and thus makes her choice known.

Sex relation between the unmarried girl and unmarried boy is not uncommon in the Molsom society. Their society generally overlooks the matter as these relations usually lead to marriage. However, if a complaint comes from any corner regarding a delay in marriage then the village council takes up the case. The council imposes a fine of Rs.45, a bottle of country liquor and an earthen pot of *zukola* on the pair. The pair has to declare before the council that they would marry each other soon. If the

premarital sex relation results in pregnancy of the girl then the council takes up the case. The boy at first is fined Rs.45, an earthen pot of *zukola* and a bottle of country liquor. The boy in this case must marry the girl and he has to declare the date or month of the marriage which should take place before the delivery of the issue. If the boy refuses to marry the girl the village council hands over the case to the court of the community council. To take such a stand, the village council conducts inquiries through *nungakoulm* and *tangoaloulm* to be sure that the boy is responsible for the girl's pregnancy. The girl's version too is given adequate weightage and is treated with some priority. If even in the court of community council the boy refuses to marry, he is punished physically until he agrees to marry the girl. But such instances are rare in their society. Such a problem arises, generally, when two boys are found to have had physical relation with a single girl.

Physical relation of a person with whom his or her marital relation is socially tabooed is treated as a major offense in Molsom society. When such an affair comes to some one's knowledge it is communicated to the village chief and if such an affair is proved true the couple is fined Rs.45, an earthen pot of *zukola*, and a bottle of country liquor. Furthermore, they have to promise not to be involved in such immoral relationship in future. In case the girl is made pregnant by someone tabooed to have sex-relation with her the pair gets excommunicated from the society. The pair also have to pay a fine of Rs. 45, an earthen pot of *zukola* and a bottle of country liquor. They are also not allowed to get married socially. Such tabooed biological union, among the Molsoms, is known as *donkir*.

Marriage

The Molsoms are monogamous. polygamy and polyandry are treated as social offense among them. They practice endogamy at the community

level. Their clans are neither endogamous nor exogamous. A person can choose his or her mate from any of the twelve clans. After marriage the clans of the spouses remain unchanged but the children inherit their father's clan. Child marriage is not practiced among them, but age for marriage is not fixed. Marriage takes place at any age on attaining puberty. The groom may be younger than the bride or vice versa. But a man, generally, prefers a younger female as his wife and a female prefers an older mate. Both cross-cousin and parallel cousin marriage are in practice among them with some restrictions on the former type. A person is forbidden to marry his father's younger brother's daughter and vice versa. The marriage between socially permitted relatives is known as *halao ocha*. Both the widow and widower marriage are in practice among them. Marriage may take place between a widow and widower or between a widow and an unmarried boy or between a widower and an unmarried girl. The rites and rituals for widow and widower marriage are the same as those of a normal social marriage but fewer ceremonies are observed in case of marriage between widow and a widower. A married person, male or female, uses no sign or symbol to indicate his or her marital status.

Table 7.1³: Age at marriage of the household heads and their spouses

| Age of marriage | Total brides | % to total brides | Total grooms | % to total grooms | Total bride and groom | % to total bride & grooms |
|-----------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 14 - 16 | 70 | 24.14 | 20 | 06.90 | 90 | 15.52 |
| 16+ - 18 | 118 | 40.69 | 80 | 27.58 | 198 | 34.14 |
| 18+ - 20 | 76 | 26.21 | 112 | 38.62 | 188 | 32.41 |
| 20+ - 22 | 20 | 06.90 | 36 | 12.41 | 56 | 09.66 |
| 22+ - 24 | 04 | 01.37 | 24 | 08.28 | 28 | 04.83 |
| 24+ - 26 | 02 | 00.69 | 04 | 01.38 | 06 | 01.04 |
| 26+ - 28 | 00 | 00.00 | 08 | 02.76 | 08 | 01.38 |
| 28+ - 30 | 00 | 00.00 | 02 | 00.69 | 02 | 00.34 |
| 30+ - 32 | 00 | 00.00 | 02 | 00.69 | 02 | 00.34 |
| 32+ & above | 00 | 00.00 | 02 | 00.69 | 02 | 00.34 |
| Total | 290 | 100.00 | 290 | 100.00 | 580 | 100.00 |

Practice of early marriage can be found among the Molsoms. Table 7.1 shows that, among the females, the incidence of early marriage is still high. Among the brides of household-heads, 24.14 per cent got married at an age between 14 and 16, 40.69 per cent got married while they were in the age group of 16 - 18 and 26.21 percent got married when they were between 18 and 20 years. Thus, among the brides, as high as 91.04 per cent got married at an early age of 14 - 20. Among the household heads, 06.90 per cent got married at the age between 14 and 16, 27.58 per cent got married at the age between 16 and 18, 38.62 per cent married between 18 and 20 years and 12.41 per cent married when they were between 20 and 22. This implies that 85.51 per cent of the household heads married between 14 and 22 years of age. Child marriage or early marriage among both the male and female is thus found in large numbers among the Molsoms and they practice it without caring for the legal restrictions regarding age at marriage.

Negotiation, mutual consent, elopement and courtship are the usual methods for acquiring mates. As stated earlier, *leang* is the customary system for developing courtship. While keeping a vigil of *jhum* crops the young boys and girls express their mind to each other through love songs. Number of pairs are formed during the *jhum*-watching. Elopement usually takes place in cases of socially tabooed couples or other unions where social marriage is not possible. In most cases of elopement the couple performs *baklak* worship and thus gains a status equal to that of a socially married couple.

For negotiation, at first, a middle man, known as *palai*, gives proposal to the girl's or boy's parents on behalf of the girl's or boy's party. The parents and other elderly relatives of the boy and the girl then confer at any party's house and settle an auspicious date for final discussion which is known as *adende*. The *adende* takes place at the house of girl's parents. On *adende* the parents, the head of the clan known as *pungifang* and other elderly relatives of the boy go to the girl's house with an earthen pot of

zukola. In the girl's house her parents, *pungifang* (in case of marriage between members of two different clans) and some other relatives assemble. Having taken a light drink they negotiate and they settle the date of marriage, time period of *samak achangte* (the customary system of staying of groom in the father-in-law's house), the quantity of *zukola* the groom's party would take with them and some other things in presence of and with an active mediation of the *awchai*.

The marriage takes place in the bride's house and continues over a period of four successive days. The first day is known as *tusin*. On this day the groom goes to the bride's house accompanied by his parents, uncles, friends and other relatives with prefixed quantity of *zukola*. Besides, they customarily bring one pig, five hens, one set of ornaments such as necklace, nose ring, arm-ring etc. and one set of dress including one *puenzel* and one *risa* with them. The bride's party accords a respectful reception to them and usher them to a room where they are offered comfortable seats. The groom's party then hands over the pig and hens to the relatives of the bride who ceremonially kill the animals and cook half of the pork. This pig slaughtering is known as *manrakrin*. Everybody then eats, drinks, sings and make merry till all drop to sleep.

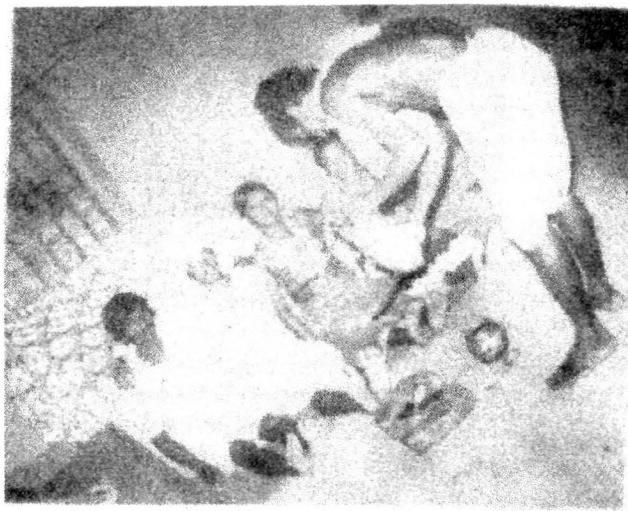
The second day's ceremony is known as *pantapui*. Early in the morning the *awchai* serially place four deities namely, *tuisangro*, *arthungoi*, *thingkungnoi* and *samalaimilika* on the courtyard. The bride and groom take bath, wear new dresses and come in front of the deities accompanied by their friends. The *awchai* then starts worshipping the deities one after another by sacrificing two hens for each. The bride and groom follow the *awchai*. They bow their heads and repeat some sacred spells dictated by the *awchai*. They then enter in two separate room arranged for them and relax there. A pig is slaughtered and half of the pork and the hens which are sacrificed in worshipping four deities, are cooked. This pig slaughtering and cooking is known as *noksag*. After *noksag* the

bride, the groom, other relatives and invitees have a feast and consume large quantity of *zukola*.

In the afternoon the bride and the groom take bath for the second time and put on new dresses. The groom wears *takbrok* and puts a *turban* on his head. The bride puts on a *puenzel*, a *risa* and a set of ornaments on her neck, nose and ears. They are then brought into a room where they sit side by side on a bamboo mat. The bride sits on the left of the groom. They project their feet in front. One boy friend of the groom sits on his right and one girl friend of the bride sits on her left. A stone is kept in front of them (nowadays grind-stone is also used). The *awchai* worships the Moon and the Sun by sacrificing two hens for each of the deities and pronounces some sacred hymns.



Seating arrangement before solemnisation of marriage



Solemnisation of marriage

The *awchai* then puts some sacred water, which was kept after the *tuisangro* worship, on the head of the bride and groom and thus solemnisation of the marriage takes place. After that the *zukola* which was brought by the groom's party is distributed among the relatives of the bride and the groom. Customarily, the parents and maternal uncles of the bride and groom get one pot each. The young male and female relatives of the same generation to which the bride and the groom belong get one large pot for each side and the rest is stored for the next day. After distribution of the *zukola*, all the relatives of the bride and the groom drink, dance and make merry. This may continue through the night,



The young females get one large pot of *zukola*

The third day is known as *dalani*. In the morning the pork which was preserved after *noksag* ceremony is distributed among the parents and the relatives of the bride and the groom. This ceremonial distribution of meat is known as *antamingsemni*. In *antamingsemni*, each of the front and back legs of the pork is divided into two equal parts which are given to the parents of the bride and the groom. The groom's parents further divide their share into two equal halves and one half is given to the head of the clan and remaining half is kept for themselves. The parents of the bride divide their portion into four equal parts and give a share each to their sons, daughters, and the maternal uncles of the bride, while keeping a share for themselves. After *antamingsemni* all gathered take part in drinking, dancing, singing and in making merriment in whatever way they like till they retire to bed.

The fourth or last day is called *oaikbulpantate*. Early in the morning of the day, the relatives of bride and groom take a light drink and start their journey back home. The groom remains in his father-in-law's house for *smackachangte*. Traditionally the period was twenty-five to thirty years, but nowadays it has been reduced to two to four years. During *smackachangte* the bridegroom is treated as a member of his father-in-law's family. The

father-in-law bears all expenses for running the family of his son-in-law. The son-in-law customarily gets a portion of the agricultural products under his personal disposal. Besides, he may also practice poultry, piggery, duckery etc. personally. The son-in-law shares ideas, experiences and knowledge of his father-in-law during socio-economic activities and thus gets training in various spheres of life. In the evening, often, the elderly married males assemble in a house of the village where they discuss various problems related to various economic activities, customary laws, norms etc. and drink zukola. The son-in-law customarily follows the father-in-law in such assemblage where exchange of knowledge takes place. After completion of *samackachangte* a person is allowed to stay with his wife and children in a separate house on the compound of his father-in-law's house or he may return to his father's family. Here the choice is open to the son-in-law but leaving father-in-law's house before completion of *smackachangte* is considered a major offense.

Widow marriage

Widow marriage is not uncommon among the Molsoms and it is a legitimate form of marriage. However, only those who become widow at an early age can think of marrying for the second time. I came across only a few cases of widow marriage in the villages that I have studied although there were many more widows. Here is a case of widow marriage.

Sri Madhu Gopal Molsom, a youth of 25 years of Manithang Bari, married Smti. Bijoy laxmi Molsom, an widow of 35 years whose husband , Chandra Manik Molsom, died of illness. Bijoy Laxmi had two daughters by her deceased husband. After her second marriage she had one more son and a daughter. The wife of Madhu Gopal got a service in the Social welfare Department of the Government of Tripura and was posted at Udaipur township. She got a quarters at Udaipur where she shifted with her husband

and children. Their elder daughters (daughters by the deceased husband of Bijoy Laxmi) got admitted to Udaipur Government Girls Higher Secondary School. At the weekend, they used to visit their village regularly where they had their original house. Bijoy Laxmi was the only government service holder in their village due to which she got some special respect from the villagers.

Divorce

Divorce is socially permitted among the Molsoms provided that the person seeking divorce gives sufficient reasons. Divorce is granted generally when a charge of adultery is proved. It is also granted on a proven complaint of impotency or non-adjustment of the spouses. A divorce prayed on charges of adultery is generally granted at the outset by the village council after necessary inquiries. But a divorce claimed on the charge of the non-adjustment or impotency is more difficult to obtain. In case of the non-adjustment of the spouses the council at first tries to negotiate by reasoning with both parties and by keeping them under observation for a certain period. If after observation period the person again claims divorce and, at the same time, the council also realises that the couple cannot adjust with each other then a divorce is granted. The divorce claimed on the ground of mental imbecility is generally granted almost instantly. Resolving the problem is more complicated when a divorce is claimed on the ground of impotency. The village council usually makes inquiry about the background of the problem through boy friend or girl friend of the husband or wife of the complainer. The *nungakoulm* and *tangoaloulm* of the village also help in the inquiry. After a divorce is granted the claimant has to pay Rs.130.60 to the council from which the divorcee gets Rs.60 as compensation and the rest of the amount is divided among the council members and the youth leaders of the village. A divorcee may remarry or remain alone. When the divorcee women cannot

sustain herself or her kids her parents take care. Minor children stay with the mother and unmarried grown ups are allowed to live with either of their parents according to their choice.

Adultery

Adultery is treated as a major social offense among the Molsoms. The spouse of the adulterous person may claim divorce in the court of the village council. The village council imposes a fine of Rs.120, an earthen pot full of zukola and a bottle of country liquor along with physical punishment of five whip lashes. However, such cases are rare. During my fieldwork I have not witnessed any such case.

Old-age

Old-age among the Molsoms is passed in rest and relaxation. They usually are exempted from all sorts of hard-work. They, however, do some light works like rearing of grand-children, making of basketry with bamboo-splits etc. which they can do without putting much of physical labour and by sitting at home. Besides, they play a great role in socialising their grand-children by telling folk-tales or by decoding the nuances of various ceremonies and rituals, by helping them learn playing their traditional musical instruments etc. In special circumstances, if necessary, they help the new generation by providing theoretical knowledge and personal experiences to solve some of the problems they face in their everyday life. They are looked after by their children-generation with respect and sympathy. Usually, early in the evening, the aged members of the village meet in any house or, in summer, under a tree and pass time by gossiping, smoking *dabo*, playing musical instruments or by singing songs. While the support system for the aged

among the Molsoms is healthy and largely similar to that among the neighbouring Bengalis it cannot be said that this late stage of life of the Molsoms is completely problem-free. At this stage the Molsoms, like all human beings, lose their main personal property, i.e., the ability to work. And given the kind of economic they have physical labour constitutes the most valuable asset in their life. At the old age when they loose control over this asset their social value is considerably reduced. In addition, when they suffer from prolonged illness the social support system develop cracks. Many aged Molsoms, Bishnubhakta Molsom of Manithang Bari, Chunnikanya Molsom of Thali Bari, Chandramanik Molsom of Atharobhola Borobari, who died later, to name a few, thus bear deep inside their heart, the pain of being neglected by the members of their own family. Subsistence economy, poverty, etc. have their bearing on the human values and human relations at times, and the Molsoms are no exceptions.

Death

The Molsoms cremate the body of the dead but bury the corps of a child. After death, the body is taken out from the house and is kept on the courtyard. The close male relatives of the deceased person carry the dead body on a bamboo made stretcher, locally known as *tolai* to the crematorium where the corpse is laid on a pyre and the *awchai* and other relatives of the deceased set on fire. After cremation, the ground is washed and boiled rice, vegetable curry and *zukola* are offered at the crematorium in favour of the deceased. This ritual of offer is known as *busok*. *Meramsi* is observed up to three days by the villagers and seven days by the agnates when they take vegetarian meal. On the seventh day after death *tuisangro* worship is performed by the *awchai* at the house of the deceased by sacrificing a pig. All relatives of the deceased and the villagers attend *tuisangro* worship and have a feast. This is known as *samsir*. On the thirteenth day after death ser rite is

performed when a pig is slaughtered and the cooked pork, *zukola*, country liquor and boiled rice are sacrificed in favour of the deceased . In every month of the date of death the agnates of the deceased offer cooked pork, boiled rice and *zukola* at the crematorium which is known as *zu-thak*. The *zu-thak* continues for one year. After the completion of one year the *besu* rite is performed when a pig is slaughtered and the cooked pork is offered for the deceased and the relatives of the deceased have a feast. The bone-ash are committed to the river Gomati or other holy water after the *besu* rite is performed.