

## Endogamy and Marital Distance among the Phayeng of Manipur

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**ABSTRACT** This paper highlights the incidence of endogamy and marriage distance among the Phayeng, a Loi (Scheduled Caste) community of Manipur, who, in later stage of their history coalesced into the larger Meitei society. It also reveals the relationship between village endogamy and consanguinity on one hand and Loi endogamy, occupational endogamy and traditional occupations on the other. The relevant data of the paper are collected by conducting a fieldwork among the people. Techniques, such as personal interview and schedule supplemented by genealogical method are employed to collect the data. The statistical analysis shows that MMD is much higher among the non-consanguineous couples ( $20.63 \pm 16.65$  km) than consanguineous couples ( $3.88 \pm 10.20$  km). The distribution is positively skewed and leptokurtic. Thus, the findings of the present study agree with that of the earlier study but shows increase in the marital distance and decrease in the incidence of consanguineous marriage.

### INTRODUCTION

Studies on marriage pattern and marital distance have their own merit of great significance, for they, as the important variables in population genetics, can throw light on the understanding of the structure of contemporary human populations. The present study, though not very much deviated from the importance of its genetical significance, has also explained such facts as decrease in the incidence of consanguineal marriage and increase in the marital distance among the Phayeng – a conclusion arrived at by comparing the findings of the present study with those of an earlier one (Manibabu 1997: 387-390) on the same population– in the light of the prevailing socio-cultural conventions and practices of the people.

### People

Phayeng, a Loi (Scheduled Caste) village of Manipur, is a compact, homogenous, small and trapezoid shaped village, 15 kms away to the north-west of Imphal, the capital of Manipur. The name is being used as ethnonyme as well as toponyme as the two are connoted by the same term. There have been two intermarrying exogamous units, namely, Ningthoujam and

Angom, in this village from a very early period. In the olden days, the two units were not only social groups but also physical entities in terms of their settlement pattern as the former dwell in the upper (northern and eastern) whereas the latter the lower (southern and western) parts of the village. The village surrounded by other smaller villages, namely, Kadangband, a Meitei village, on the north, Tairenpokpi, a satellite Loi (Scheduled Caste) village of Leimaram, on the south, Leirenkabi, another Meitei village on the east and finally Chiru, a tribal village on the west at the foothills of Kangchup. The nearest town to the village is Lamshang that lies at a distance of 5 kms from the former.

The village had a total population of 2071 persons in 1991 and 2475 in 2001 depicting a net increase of 404 persons accounting 19.5% growth in the decennial difference (Khan 1991; District Census Handbook Imphal, Government of India 2001; Census of India Primary Census Abstract of Manipur). At present, the village has 2433 people. The people of Phayeng generally prefer to call themselves Chakpa, a traditional ethnonyme, though the term is not yet recognized by the administration. The Chakpas comprising the Andro, Phayeng, and Leimaram are considered to be the autochthones of Manipur by themselves and each had a dialect of its own in the historic days. The Chakpas are a part of Loi community, a section of the larger Meitei population. The Loies are mostly at present enlisted in the Schedule Caste category. McCulloh (1857) wrote, "The Loe (Loi) population consist of

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people who pay tribute, and is considered so inferior that the name Meitei is not given to it. Indeed, ... the Loee population is exceedingly useful. Amongst them are the silk manufacturers, the smelters of iron, the distillers of the spirits, the makers of earthen vessels for containing water ... manufactures of salt, fishers, cutters of grass for the Raja's ponies, the payers of tribute in "Sel," the coin of the country" (1980 reprint: 13).

Although their folk history traces their origin to Soraren (God of Heaven), different scholars (Parratt 1980; Singh 1985; Ibohal 1986) have opined different opinions about the ethnic origin of the people. The Chakpas were ethnically proto-Sino-Tibetan tribes who entered Burma sometime in the early Christian era and were called Sak tribe by the Burmese (Ibohal 1986: 146). They are migrants from China, Burma, etc. who came to Manipur before Pakhangba (33 A.D.-153 A.D.) and later by the time of Naothikhong (A.D. 663-763 A.D.) and Khagemba (A.D. 1597- A.D. 1652 A.D.) (Singh 1985: 23). Contrary to these views, Parratt (1980: 4) opined that they were the aboriginal inhabitants of the land prior to the arrival of the Meiteis.

During the historical days, the Phayengs, like the Leimarams and the Khurkhuls, were the silk producers of Manipur. They were obliged to supply the silk yarn to the then kings and consequently exempted from *lallup* (military and other royal duties) (Brown 2001 Reprint: 90; Hodson 2001 Reprint: 30). At present, they are primarily agriculturalists and engaged in brewing liquor that not only supplements their economy but also wins a name for its quality.

Monogamy is the ideal form of marriage though polygyny is also permitted. MBD (mother's brother's daughter) is most ideally preferred type of marriage and FZD (father's sister's daughter), though not encouraged, is also permitted. Some cases of the direct sister exchange are also found in Phayeng. Direct exchanges of sisters are not favoured nor liked by the Phayeng society though such exchanges are never disapproved by the villagers. In the past, they practised marriage by service, which has no remnant in the present marriage system. They are patrilocal, patrilineal and patriarchal.

The village has two kin groups to which every individual in the village belongs either by virtue of his descent or through his affinal ties. Persons of the same generation belonging to Angom or Ningthoujam are, through descent, brothers.

Everyone in the village is paternally or maternally related. In such a way, people in the village who reckon through their patrilineal descent are grouped into two intermarrying exogamous units, namely, Angom and Ningthoujam. These two groups, being bound to obligations to reciprocate women in marriage, intermarry over a number of generations.

One point that merits a mention here is that they practise not only village endogamy but also Loi endogamy though the former outnumbers the latter.

### METHODOLOGY

The data of the present paper have been collected through a fieldwork conducted in Phayeng. Techniques such as interview and schedule are employed to unfurl the marital relationship between the two kin groups of the village. The data thus calculated have been checked and confirmed by employing genealogical method. A total of 606 marriage cases were collected through personal interview and schedule from the village. However, only 481 cases are found to be having both couples alive and living together. From these 481 cases such information as marriage type, village endogamy, and marital distance are also extracted. The statistical measures such as mean marriage distance (MMD), SD, skewness and kurtosis were also calculated through standard formulae. The tests of significance, such as chi-square and t-tests were computed in evaluating variation differences.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The incidence of village endogamy, exogamy and marital distance of the village is concretised in table 1. It is evident that majority (50.94%) of the marriages take place within the village wherein both the spouses are born. The Mean Marriage Distance (MMD) of endogamous marriages is 0.221 km. The same table that shows the incidence of village exogamy reveals that majority (72.86%) of such marriages are found to be contracted within the Loi community whereas the remaining 27.14% outside the Loi community. Table 1 also reveals that Loi villages like Leimaram, Tairenpokpi and Khurkhul, accounts for more than 84.97% of all the Loi endogamy. One fact that deserves special mentions is that the above three villages contribute 61.90% of all women marrying into the village.

Unlike the ideal trend as found in the Indian villages, such as Rampur (Lewis 1958), where village exogamy is the thumb rule, in Phayeng, consanguineous marriage is preferred to other marriages as one has no social option other than to select a mate from the same group wherefrom one's father takes wife. The incidence of village endogamy/exogamy and consanguinity has been reported from Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and other Indian villages (Chowdhury et al. 1997; Parvatheesan and Babu 1997; Rao 1997). Normally caste endogamy within the same village results

into consanguineous marriage, but in case of Phayeng consanguinity results from the reciprocal exchange of wives between two dominant exogamous kin groups, namely, Angom and Ningthoujam of the village, whose members are believed to have descended from the same ancestors.

Tables 2 and 3 show that consanguinity is highly pronounced in the village. The same tables reveal that 58.63% of all the marriages are of consanguineous type. Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) of the marriage type is 227.427 and it is found to be

**Table 1: Selection of marriage partners and marital distance of the Phayeng**

S. No.	Marital Partner	Marital distance (km)	Number	Per cent
I	Village Endogamy	0.22		
	(1) Phayeng male marrying Phayeng wife(ves)		245	50.94
	(2) Males outside Phayeng Joining wife's household at Phayeng:			
	(a) Loi		19	3.95
	(b) Meitei		5	1.04
II	(c) Tribe		2	0.42
	Village Exogamy			
	(1) Between Loi (Scheduled Caste) community:	22.395	153	31.81
	(2) Inter-community marriage:			
	Phayeng male marrying tribal wife	36	14	2.91
Phayeng male marrying Meitei wife	34	43	8.94	
Total			481	100.00

**Table 2: Village endogamy and exogamy in relation to consanguinity**

Marriage Type	Endogamous	%	Exogamous	%	Total	%
Consanguineous	245	50.94	37	7.69	282	58.63
Nonconsanguineous	26	5.40	173	35.97	199	41.37
Total	271	56.34	210	43.66	481	100.00

Chi-square test = 258.427; p< 0.001

**Table 3: Marital distance and consanguinity**

Marriage distance (km)	Consanguineous couples		Non-consanguineous couples		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
0-1	245	50.94	26	5.41	271	56.34
1-5	8	1.66	35	7.28	43	8.94
5-10	0	0.00	12	2.49	12	2.49
10-15	0	0.00	18	3.74	18	3.74
15-20	6	1.25	15	3.12	21	4.37
20-25	1	0.21	14	2.91	15	3.12
25-30	0	0.00	3	0.62	3	0.62
30-35	0	0.00	4	0.83	4	0.83
35-40	22	4.57	47	9.77	69	14.35
40-45	0	0.00	10	2.08	10	2.08
45+	0	0.00	15	3.12	15	3.12
Total	282	58.63	199	41.37	481	100.00

MMD ± SE 3.88 ± 10.20 20.63 ± 16.65 10.81 ± 20.49

t-value for MMD between consanguineous and non-consanguineous couples is 13.65; p<0.001

Beta 1 (Skewness) = 2.27

Beta 2 (Kurtosis)= 3.08

highly significant with  $P < 0.001$ . That means that there is difference between the type of marriages, that is, between the consanguineous and the non-consanguineous, and moreover between the endogamous and the exogamous. It is observed from the table 2 that consanguinity is maximum in the endogamous type and it slightly accounts for the majority of all the marriages (50.94%). The skewness ( $\beta_1$ ) and kurtosis ( $\beta_2$ ) computed to test the symmetry of the distribution of marital distances (Table 3) indicate that the present distribution is positively skewed and leptokurtic. Again, table 3 reveals that the mean marital distance (MMD) is much lower in the consanguineous type of marriage (3.88 km) than the non-consanguineous type (20.63 km). Moreover, the same table 3 shows that the t-test applied to the MMD between the above two marriage types is found to be highly significant (13.65;  $p < 0.001$ ). The total MMD is found to be 10.31 km against 0.221 km for village endogamy. These findings are found different from those of Manibabu (1997), who reported MMD's of consanguineal and affinal marriages to be 0.34 km and 9.91 km respectively on the one hand and the incidence of consanguineous and affinal marriages to be 74.30% and 25.70% respectively on the other.

### CONCLUSION

The above result and discussion leads to the conclusion that the present study agrees with that of the earlier study (Manibabu 1997), but it shows a decrease in the incidence of the consanguineal marriages which can be explained in the light of the prevailing socio-cultural practices of the Loi community in general and the Phayeng in particular. The Lois of Manipur have experienced a sea-change in respect of their socio-cultural lives because of various exogenous as well as endogenous reasons resulted from their exposure to the changing social environment of Manipuri society. Many instances of disabilities like social exclusion, social isolation etc. that the Loi communities of Manipur once suffered during the historical days have become memories of the days gone by. This is largely due to the secularization policy of the independent India, the largest country practising democracy, and also partly due to the attempt of Loi communities to push up their status in the social hierarchy of the larger Manipuri society either by embracing

Vaishnavism voluntarily or by narrowing down the social hiatus through a process of acculturation in the sphere of their social, cultural and economic lives. This holds true in case of Phayeng except that they still profess their traditional religion. Moreover, the Meitei lifeways are greatly affected by contra-acculturation through which many Meitei have disowned Vaishnavism and embraced their traditional religion. These social circumstances going on concurrently affect greatly the old mindset of the people that draws a sharp dividing line between the Meitei and the Lois on the basis of the pollution-purity concept, and consequently the social dichotomy of the two communities expressed in the form of isolation and exclusion becomes more or less non-functional.

Geographical isolation of the different Loi villages located in different places of Manipur is no longer a barrier in the context of the interaction among the Lois on one hand and the interaction between the Lois and the Meiteis on the other with the availability of the better facilities of transportation and communication. With the lesser degree of social exclusion and isolation, social as well as physical, more avenues for mate selection, outside the village and the community, has been opened to the youngsters. Such a generalization has been concretised by the quantitative increase in the marital distance shown in tables 1 and 3. Change in the old mindset of the people owing to the various factors explained above and indubitable shrinkage in the physical and social isolation have converged to explain the decrease in the incidence of consanguineal marriage.

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