

## **Traditional Marriage System amongst the Vaiphei Tribe**

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**Abstract:**

*The Vaiphei people belong to the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group of the Tibeto-Burman and were scattered throughout North East Region of India. However, the bulk of their population is found in Manipur. They are officially recognized as a scheduled tribe in the state of Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Assam. The Vaiphei tribe has its own distinctive culture and custom which is distinct from other cognate tribes. So is the case with their marriage system. Their custom and culture play an important role in their marriage system. Before their birth the custom and culture have already prescribed whom, they have to marry. The boy has to marry the daughter of his Mother's brother's daughter which is called 'neinu' (intended wife). Conversely, the girl has to marry his 'neipa' (intended husband) her father's sister's son. This form of cross-cousin marriage is the most accepted form of their marriage system. Besides, this form of marriage there is other practices of marriage systems amongst the Vaiphei tribe.*

*The present paper is an attempt to examine and explore such unique practices of the marriage system of the vaiphei tribe. As there is no previous work taken up on this selected topic the scholar makes extensive use of interview, observation, and discussion methods in the investigation of his work. The paper also examines the transformation process of the marriage system of the Vaiphei tribe after the advent of the Christian religion amongst them.*

**Keywords:** *Cross-Cousin Marriage, Custom, Culture, Traditional, Bride-price.*

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### **I. Introduction:**

The institution of marriage has been regarded as the central feature of all forms of human society. It lays down the nucleus of society. It is one of the most important social institutions of all the societies of the world. Marriage uniting man and woman is a ubiquitous and naturally-existing social institution that has been present in some form or other in all known societies.<sup>1</sup> Marriage as a gender-integrating union associated with important sexual-channeling, procreation, child-rearing, and dependent-protecting functions has been in existence before the emergence of states and legal systems.<sup>2</sup> According to MacIver and Page, the family has no origin in the sense that there never existed a stage of human life from which the family was absent.<sup>3</sup> Thus, marriage is one of the most important institutions of human society. It is uniquely beneficial to society because it is the foundation of the family, the basic building block, and the backbone of every society. It brings significant stability and meaning to human relationships. The development of this institution is co-related with the development of every civilized society in any part of the world. It is as old as the dawn of civilization. However, the types or forms of marriage differ from society to society. According to the difference in customs and cultural practices amongst various communities, societies, and cultural groups, different types or forms of marriage systems existed. Amongst the Vaiphei tribe also, there existed a marriage system that is distinguishable from other communities, cultural groups, and societies due to the prevalence of their typical cultural practices. Though their marriage system shares some similarities with the marriage system of their kindred tribes, there also exist many features which are unique to them and differentiate their marriage system from the others. The present paper is an attempt to examine and explore such unique practices of the marriage system of the Vaiphei tribe. As there is no previous work taken up on this selected topic the scholar makes extensive use of interview, observation, and discussion methods in the investigation of his work. The paper also examines the transformation process of the marriage system of the Vaiphei tribe after the advent of the Christian religion amongst them.

The Vaipheis believed that they originated from Khul (Cave). The exact location of Khul is difficult to pinpoint and hence their original homeland is in obscurity. Amongst the historians today, there are different views about the origin of these people. Some say they came from South East Asia, some believe that they came from China, some say from Tibet, and so on. The Vaipheis believe that their progenitor Zahong opened the gate of the cave which was covered by a great serpent called 'Gulheupi'. Many people followed and came out after him. The reason that he opened the door of the Khul for hundreds of people he was called Zahong (Za-hundred, hong-open; open for hundreds of people).<sup>4</sup>

After coming out to 'Chung Khua' (overground) they wandered from one place to another in search of suitable land for permanent settlement. They wandered around the land mass of the South East Asian region over a long period. Then they finally reached the Chin Hills of Burma (Myanmar). At the Chin Hills, it is believed that they established many settlement areas including Phaiza village which were considered one of the most prominent villages during that time. In due course of time, the village had become prosperous, and at the same time, the population also increased rapidly. As a result, the geographical area of the village also expanded to accommodate more people. The growth or expansion of the geographical area of the village had taken place breadth-wise along the horizontal saddle of the hill ridge. In the Vaiphei dialect, this expansion of the village in breadth-wise is called, 'Khaw-Vaiphei' (a village expanded breadth-wise).<sup>5</sup> Since then, Phaiza village is known as Khaw-Vaiphei, and henceforth people used to remember Phaiza in its sobriquet. It is said that in this village the Vaiphei lived together with their cognate tribes peacefully for several years. Rev. Letkhosei, a noted historian of Nagaland in his interaction with Rev. S. Prim Vaiphei in 1984 stated that Thadous were also once settled in Khawvaiphei and this fact cannot be ignored by any Thadou people.<sup>6</sup>

In course of time, some sections of the Vaipheis moved further north and reached the southern part of Manipur hills. It is believed that the first wave of the Vaipheis who took sojourn northwards might have reached Manipur south in the sixteenth century as mentioned by Lt.Col. J.Shakespear in his book *The Lushai Kuki-Clan*. In his writing, he identified Vaipheis within the fold of 'Old kukri'.<sup>7</sup> Today, the Vaipheis are a recognized tribe in Manipur as per the Constitution of India Scheduled tribe order 1950, which was amended as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Act in 1976.<sup>8</sup> In the state of Manipur, the Vaipheis are found scattered all over the 16 districts. However, they are mainly concentrated in the southern region of Manipur called Churachandpur district. The district is home to many of its cognate tribes. As per the 2011 census record, the population of the Vaiphei stands at 42,957, and out of that 39,529 lived in rural areas and the remaining 3,428 lived in urban areas. They constituted about 1.50 percent of the total population of Manipur.<sup>9</sup> The Vaiphei have a dialect called 'Vaiphei Pau' (Vaiphei language) and the people speak that dialect. For the written form of their language, they used Roman script. Way back in 1913, they have a published literary book called 'Naupang Thu Kisangtua' (Children's book in question and answer form). It was published by Thangkai and Lungpau, the first two Vaiphei literate young men.<sup>10</sup> Now, the Vaiphei Pau is included as one of the Modern Indian language (MIL) subjects under the Board of Secondary Education, Manipur, and Council of Higher Secondary Education, Manipur. Their literacy rate is 69.97% according to the 2011 census record. The Vaipheis lived in 219 villages across the state of Manipur as per the independent census of the Vaiphei Peoples' Council, the apex body of the Vaiphei tribe.<sup>11</sup>

### **Their marriage system:**

Cross-cousin marriage is the most common preference form of marriage amongst the Vaiphei tribe. 'Cross-Cousin' may be defined as individuals whose parents are siblings of the opposite sex. In contrast, 'parallel cousins' are individuals whose parents are siblings of the same sex, as the offspring of two brothers or two sisters. In primitive society, the most common form of cross-cousin marriage for a male ego is with the mother's brother's daughter (maternal cross-cousin).<sup>12</sup> Less frequently, a man may marry his father's sister's daughter (paternal cross-cousin). According to this preferential form of cross-cousin marriage, a boy's intended spouse is his mother's brother's daughter (MBD) and a girl's intended spouse is her father's sister's son (FZS) (Z stands for sister).<sup>13</sup>

The form of cross-cousin marriage practice amongst the Vaiphei tribe is matrilateral cross-cousin marriage and patrilateral cross-cousin marriage is not preferred and is avoided on the whole. Most of the cognate tribes of the Vaiphei also follow matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. However, Shakespeare stated that the Lushais can practically marry any woman except his sister or mother, but with certain prejudices against the first cousin. He further stated that girls objected to marrying their brothers. Among the Chiefs, however, marriage among first cousins was more frequent than among commoners.<sup>14</sup> Traditionally, the practice of Cross-Cousin marriage is followed rigidly and very obligatory amongst the Vaiphei tribe like any other tribe of its kindred group. Therefore, it is obligatory on the part of the boy to marry his maternal uncle's daughter. The boy is known as 'Neipa' (intended husband) for the girl and the girl is 'Neinu' (intended wife) for the boy. This type of marriage is generally an arranged marriage; arranged by both the parents of the boy and girl. If the Neipa (intended husband) did not marry the Neinu (intended wife) his maternal uncle is not happy with him. It is believed that the anger of his maternal uncle (Pu) can cause bad luck for the boy. But there were also some instances where the girl (Neinu) refuses to marry the boy (Neipa). In such cases, the boy carried off the girl by force and married her in earlier times.

Though Cross-cousin marriage (marriage with the offspring of a parent's opposite-sex sibling) is the most common preferred marriage arrangement across cultures, its origin and adaptive function of this marriage prescription have not been resolved despite intense investigation. The Vaipheis believe that the practice of maternal cross-cousin marriage brings prosperity, fertility, and happiness. In this connection, summarizing the values and benefits of cross-cousin marriage, Dr. Kamkhenthang said: 'It enhances the original relations of a

boy with his mother's brother doubly. Families that can contract cross-cousin marriage for about three generations in succession are regarded as the happiest and the luckiest ones. Because the two families are brought in closer social contact for many generations.<sup>15</sup>

According to the recently published booklet, 'Vaiphei Thusim Chawn Leh Khan' (Tradition, Custom, and Culture) by the Vaiphei Peoples' Council the practice of cross-cousin marriage may be attributed to the following reasons:

1. The mother of the male ego is the daughter of his maternal uncle (Pu in Vaiphei dialect) and because of this, he owes his existence to his maternal uncle's family.
2. At times of his sickness and misfortune his maternal uncle's family offers sacrificial alters to regain his health and fortune.
3. All the times his maternal uncle is keeping a protective eye on him and shares his happiness and sorrow.
4. At the time of his happiness, his maternal uncle's family offered him rice beer.
5. At the time of his death, his maternal uncle will cover his head with a cloth as a mark of respect loved, and care for his deceased cousin. Till his maternal uncle bid farewell the dead body could not be carried out for burial at the cemetery. His maternal uncle will sprinkle Zu on his burial ground and clear the way for the departed soul.<sup>16</sup>

For all these reasons the male ego cannot neglect his maternal uncle and his family and it is obligatory on his part to seek the hand of his maternal uncle's daughter. In case he does not marry his maternal uncle's daughter he is liable to pay a fine of one Mithun and this fine is called "neichanman" in the Vaiphei customary practice.

Different types of Marriage amongst the Vaipheis:

Amongst the Vaipheis, there existed three different types of marriage. These are 1) Chawngmo, 2) Thepthak, and 3) Sainapua.<sup>17</sup> They may be discussed as follows:

### **Chawngmo:**

Chawngmo means preferred bride. It is a typical form of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage of the Vaiphei tribe. As per their customary practice, Chawngmo marriage can be put into two types. These two types of Chawngmo marriage are:

#### **1. Childhood bride:**

In this type of Chawngmo marriage, with the arrangement of both the parents the girl (Neinu - intended wife) is taken as a bride by the boy's (Neipa - intended husband) family during her childhood days. They will look after her and bring her up as one of the family members, and they will not get married until both the boy and girl attain marriageable age. This type of marriage is very rare. It happens only between two families having an exceptionally good relationship and who don't want to lose such an existing cordial relationship for days to come.

#### **2. Adulthood bride:**

In this type of marriage, the girl is taken as a bride only when she has already attained adulthood. This is the common form of Chawngmo marriage practiced amongst the Vaiphei tribe. Usually, Chawngmo marriage is an arranged marriage. However, in the arrangement of marriage, there are certain customary practices that both sides of the marriage party have to perform. As it is prescribed by their custom and culture no one can ignore and bypass it. The customary procedural practices are as follows:

##### **(i). Mo dawn (seeking of bride's hand):**

At this stage, the boy's parents along with their household council members called 'insung tawi leh chan' go to the house of the girl and request the girl's parents for her hand to be given to their son. The boy's parents take with them Zu (rice beer). Until and unless the Zu is served the negotiation cannot be started. After drinking Zu one of the household members called 'Becha Bul' will announce the purpose of their visit and apologetically request the girl's parents to give their daughter's hand to the boy. If the parents of the girl are satisfied with the request of the boy's parents, they would ask them to come for the conduct of the augury sacrifice.

##### **(ii). Salam Etna (Augury sacrifice):**

On this day the girl's father will provide a pig not less than two fist in size to be killed for the 'Salam Etna' or augury sacrifice. The pig can be killed only by a man who has not suffered from any kind of disease and before the pig is killed the village Thiampu (Priest) chanted sorcery which goes as follows:

'Chung ah Pathian, (Nungaknu lehTangvalpa min alam in)

Amau teni hi kicheng di ahiu in

Pha la sak leh sathin salung

Hung thiang hen la,

Salam hung zang hen!<sup>18</sup>

Free English rendering:

God of above (mentioning the name of the boy and girl),  
Both of them are to be married  
If you permitted their marriage  
Cleanse the heart and liver of the animal  
Let the sacrifices be a triumphant ones!

The Thiampu examined the liver and heart of the slain pig and if these organs are found healthy, he would announce that God is willing to join together the boy and girl for marriage. If the liver and heart happen to be abnormal and unhealthy the marriage may be canceled by saying that God does not permit it. The meat of the pig is cooked and eaten only by the elders of the village who participated in the ceremony. Women and children are forbidden to eat such sacrificial meat.<sup>19</sup>

**(iii). Sumtansa (ceremonial bride price feast):**

This feast is arranged for the discussion of bride price by killing a pig not less than four fist size. The pig is provided by the girl's father. The killing of a pig for the feast on this day is mandatory as per the traditional customary practice. The customary practice also prescribed how the pig shall be cut and who will get and eat which portion of the slain pig. The leg ham and shoulder butt portion will be given to the boy's family. The boy's family will distribute the same to their household council members. The neck portion is cooked for 'sahuai' (a thick slice of pork specially cooked for household council members of both the boy's and girl's family who will be the witnesses of the marriage) and 'sumphalsa' (a smaller slice of pork and the pieces are threaded into a bamboo skewer like grilled meat). The number of slices of pork threaded to the skewer represented the amount of bride price paid by the boy's family. This method is used to know the paid and due amount of the bride price. Another different portion of the meat is collected and cooked for the elders of the village to show respect and to count them as witnesses of the bride-price payment ceremony. This is known as 'salupang'. Another special meal is also arranged on that day for the girl and her friends in the village which is known as 'Nugual Ankuang'. For this meal, there is no specific meat portion prescribed by the custom.

On this day of the feast of Sumtansa, after finalization of the discussion of the bridal price, they will also fix the date and day for marriage. This ceremonial day is like an engagement day on which both parties make a final agreement for the marriage. From this day onward, the girl belongs to the boy. In the case of another man running away with the betrothed girl, he must be fined by one Mithun and one pig. This is called Sumkhausattan. The Mithun is taken by the betrothed boy's family and the pig is taken by the village elders. In the case of a death in either family, the betrothal was canceled, or renewed later.<sup>20</sup>

**(iv). Sawng Sa:**

It means two halves of meat. This meat is provided by the girl's family by killing a sow that has already given birth to at least one set of piglets. The whole body of the sow is cut into two halves and these two halves' meat has to be accompanied by the girl to the boy's house. In the two halves, the meat of the head of the sow is not included. Besides the head, a portion of the spare rib and belly bacon is taken out for Tosa (Family elder's meat). After arranging the 'Sawngsa' by the girl's parents, the girl and the meat can no longer stay a night at the girl's parent's house. Formally, the girl has to be sent off by the Village Thiampu. The Thiampu stands at the door, mutters his charms, and blows out wine from his mouth as a sign of opening the way. Then, the boy's family departed for their home with the bride and the meat. On reaching the boy's house a feast is arranged from the meat they carried from the girl's house. The feast signifies that from this day onwards the girl has become one of the clan members of the boy's family.<sup>21</sup>

**(v). Bride-Price:**

The price of a Vaiphei girl varies between two and ten Mithuns. To a certain extent, the price of the girl may be taken as an indication of the relative importance of the Clan.<sup>22</sup> So, there is a difference in bride price amongst the Vaiphei society depending upon the Clan to which the girl belongs. By and large, at present, the bride price of the Vaiphei girl is ten Mithuns.<sup>23</sup> However, some clans claim up to fifteen Mithuns. Taking a serious view of the difference in bride price amongst the Vaiphei tribe, their leaders and Village Chiefs had a meeting way back in 1930 at Sinjang village. In the meeting, they adopted a resolution that all the Vaiphei women should have the same bride price which is fixed at ten Mithuns.<sup>24</sup> However, today there is still evidence of differences in bride-price within their society. In addition to Mithuns, the bride price of the Vaiphei girl also included a gong, necklace, traditional shawl, etc. The Mithuns to be paid as the bride price is not given at one time because full payment of the bride price at one time is considered taboo. It is said that violation of such customary practice may bring bad luck to the newly married couple in the future. At least one Mithun should be left to be paid by the son of the bride when she is old. Thus, one is not required to pay necessarily all the bride prices at one time.

As per customary practice, on the bride-price payment day, the Zu (rice beer) brought by the boy's family would be served. Thereafter the "Becha" (principal member of the household council of the boy's family) shall bring out one by one all the items which they brought for the bride price along with a description of the items. Usually, the 'manmala' (main bride price) is paid in kind either in the form of a Mithun or animals like cows or buffalo, and the rest can be paid in cash. All the items which they brought for bride-price except the Mithun will be placed on the Bamboo Winnower. The position of Bamboo Winnower will be placed in such a way that its face side will face down towards the floor and the bride-price item will be placed on the back side of the Winnower facing upward. After placing all such items, the "Becha" would request the girl's family to kindly examine the items brought as the bride price and to check whether it is satisfactory to them or not. The Becha would also ask them to examine the health and appearance of Mithun which they brought for the bride price. If the girl's family and its household council members find it satisfactory, they would put the Bamboo Winnower in a proper position i.e the face side facing upward, and place all the items on the Bamboo Winnower. To show their acceptance of the bride price the girl's family would serve their Zu for all to drink.<sup>25</sup>

**(vi) Mo Van Ken:**

The bride's family readies household materials and utensils for the bride to carry to her marital home. These items are called Mo Vanken, and include the following:

- a. Sa-Hap – The body of the slaughtered pig is cut into two parts after removing the head and the internal organs.
- b. Tuthaw – Hoe for weeding and loosening the soil.
- c. Seng and nam – a long bamboo basket and a plaited headband attached to a rope for carrying the basket on the back.
- d. Sengkhu – a simple traditional shawl to cover the Seng.
- e. Sa-thau – A gourd of oil made from the fat of a pig.
- f. Zu – A pot of rice beer
- g. Puanpi – A traditional 1/2-inch-thick blanket made of cotton
- h. Bel – Pots for the Chanu-lian and the Chanu-neu.
- i. Mokham – Shawls and utensils to be distributed among the groom's married-off female relatives.

These are the mandatory materials the bride must bring to her marital home.<sup>26</sup>

**(vii) Wedding Ceremony:**

The wedding ceremony of the Vaiphei tribe is unique and simple. The marriage ceremony is performed by the Thiampu (Priest). The bride and the groom sit together, and the priest sitting before them holds a fowl by its neck saying, "Blow out by your wings all the evil things and bad luck from them, and if there would be any bad luck in their future life, let your (i.e the fowl) dung come out." If the dung of the fowl comes out it is a bad sign.<sup>27</sup> After the performance of this ceremony, they will be pronounced husband and wife.

**(viii) Kisulle:**

A newly married Vaiphei girl is not allowed to visit her parental house until one month has passed since her wedding. After the completion of one month she, along with her father-in-law, mother-in-law, and their household council members, go to her parent's house. On this first visit to the bride's parental house, the village Priest (Thiampu) must accompany them. This first visit to the parental house by the bride after the past of one month of their marriage is called Kisulle.<sup>25</sup> To celebrate this auspicious occasion of the first visit of their daughter after her marriage, her parents kill a pig and eat it together with the visiting team. In case her family was not in a position to kill a pig on that particular day, it can be killed at a later time.<sup>28</sup>

Though Chawngmo is the most desirable and popular form of marriage, the investigation into the Vaiphei marriage system would not be completed without delving into the other forms of marriage which are prevalent in their society.

**Thepthak:**

It means persuaded or convinced. In this form of marriage among the Vaiphei tribe, the girl is convinced by the agent of the boy who takes her away for the boy without the knowledge of her parents.

**Sainapua:**

This is an elopement type of marriage. The marriage is based on mutual consent between the boy and the girl without the knowledge of their parents. It is a form of love marriage practiced amongst the Vaiphei tribe.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to these three forms of marriage mentioned above, there are another two customary practices among the Vaipheis which are considered among their elders to be another two forms of marriage. These are Zawlgai and Kawnglaw.

**Zawlgai:**

The case of zawlgai arises when a girl gets pregnant due to premarital sex. In such a case the boy who got her pregnant is responsible to take her as his wife. It is his bounden duty to inform his family to accept the girl as his wife. Then the boy's family asked the girl's family for permission to take the girl as their daughter-in-law. If the girl is permitted by her parents then the boy's parents take her to their home. If the boy refused to marry the girl the case is brought before the chief or the village court to settle the matter. The boy is fined with a Mithun and pig known as 'Sialpi leh Salam'. Mithun is given to the girl's family and the pig is killed and its meat is eaten by the village elders to confirm the agreement arrived at. However, the girl has to give the child to the boy after delivery. The child is known as Zaucha (illegitimate child) in the Vaiphei society.<sup>30</sup>

**Kawnglaw:**

This is a form of marriage by servitude. Though very rarely practiced it exists amongst the Vaiphei tribe. In this case, the boy stays at his maternal uncle's house and works for him to get the hands of their daughter. The basic idea behind this act of the boy is to prove himself before his maternal uncle that he is worthy to be his son-in-law. Besides that, his presence in his maternal uncle's house keeps away the other possible suitors of the girl. In this way, he also acts as the protector of the girl from falling into the hands of other boys.<sup>31</sup>

It is to be noted that the social sanction, however, is accorded only after the parents of both the boy and girl gave their approvals, which is also essential in the case of Chawngmo marriage as well.<sup>32</sup>

**Divorce:**

Divorce happened very rarely in the Vaiphei society. However, it does not mean that the Vaiphei society is free from divorce. It occurs sometimes. There are several reasons for divorce in the Vaiphei society. One of the common factors responsible for divorce is barrenness. When a woman is found to be barren, she is liable to be divorced by her husband. Extramarital sex is another factor responsible for the divorce. Incompatibility also led to the separation of husband and wife in the Vaiphei society. Another factor for divorce is the ill-treatment of the wife by the husband. However, if a man divorces his wife without sufficient cause he must be fined one Mithun, and if the wife divorces without sufficient cause all the bridal prices must be returned.<sup>33</sup>

**Widow:**

Widows in the village if there are any are exempted from village duties. But whenever the village elders have a meeting in the house of the chief, she must serve there. The village elders are responsible for looking after her. If the widow has a son or sons, she would still belong to her husband's family. But if she has no child or has daughters and no sons there is no future hope for her and she must go back to her parents or brother and the children must be adopted by the nearest male relatives, because a woman has no right to inherit property. If the widow does not like to join her parents or brothers or if she has no one to live with, she is free to remain as a widow under the care of the village elders. If she is still young and has an unmarried brother-in-law (i.e the younger brother of her deceased husband) the young man is bound to marry her and look after the family. A woman who has been divorced by her husband is also regarded as a widow unless she joins her parents.<sup>34</sup>

**Remarriage:**

According to the custom and culture of the Vaiphei there is no prohibition for the remarriage of widow and widower though, the people rarely take to this recourse. Society too frowns upon it. Usually, remarriage takes place amongst the Vaiphei tribe only when one's spouse dies. In this case too, normally the remarriage occurred only after the completion of one year from the demise of one's spouse. It is a common norm amongst the Vaiphei tribe to marry only one wife at a time, though there may be some exceptional cases like the Village Chief who usually keeps more than one wife.<sup>35</sup> Overall, for the Vaipheis, marriage is a permanent and unbreakable lifelong union between husband and wife. It can only be separated by death.

**Impact of Christianity on the Marriage System of the Vaiphei:**

Christianity was first introduced amongst the Vaiphei tribe when the duo Vaiphei young men Pu Thangkai and Pu Lungpau embraced the new religion on 17<sup>th</sup>, March 1910. They were not only the first Christian convert amongst the Vaiphei tribe but also among the entire southern tribes of Manipur.<sup>36</sup> Though Christianity has come as a new religion it has far-reaching effects in the socio-cultural milieu of the Vaiphei

tribe. It is said that the religion of any primitive people inevitably reflects the social structure of the community in which it develops. So is the case with the Vaiphei tribe. Christianity reflects another type of social system that introduces a new culture, outlook on life and worldview, etc. These changes have touched even the realm of the marriage system of the Vaiphei tribe. Its impact on the marriage system may be analyzed as follows:

**Cross Cousin Marriage:**

With the advent of Christianity, cross-cousin marriage gradually died away. In the place of a cross-cousin or close family, inter-tribal and love marriage became common, but not as a rule. The marriage system is now highly exogamous so far as the clan is concerned, but endogamous within the tribe. Cases of people marrying persons from another race are also to be seen.<sup>37</sup> However, the household councils members like the Tucha and Becha still play a vital role to make the marriage successful. They continue to be the go-between to negotiate a marriage between two families, fix the bride price, and marriage date, and convey other details regarding the forthcoming ceremonies.<sup>35</sup> Even love marriage amongst the Vaiphei tribe can be considered a sort of arranged marriage for the simple reason that until both parents agree mutually, no marriage can be materialized. After the parents of the boy come to know of the interest the boy to marry a particular girl, then only the negotiation will begin like in the case of Chawngmo marriage. Though Christianity has transformed the marriage system of the Vaiphei tribe to a certain extent, the basic customary practices are still prevalent. It can be said that a mixture of both (pre-Christian and post-Christian) marriage systems is being followed at present.

**Marriage Ceremony:**

There is a complete change in the marriage ceremony with the advent of Christianity. All the old forms of marriage ceremonies are discarded. Now, the Pastor of the Church conducts the marriage ceremony by reading out relevant Bible verses and Thiampu (traditional priest) has no role to play. Instead of holding the neck of the fowl by the traditional priest now the Pastor will hold a Bible. And the marriage will be solemnized in the Church in the presence of Church members including both the families of the bride and bride-groom.

The dress and style of marriage are entirely Westernized. The bride used to wear wedding gowns and the bride-groom will be dressed in a coat suit. These are a complete departure from the dresses worn in the traditional form of marriage practiced earlier.

**Bride-Price:**

The coming of Christianity has also brought some changes in the area of bride price. Now, there is much flexibility in the bride-price payment and it is more seen as tokenism. The bride-price payment can now be completed in one go which was forbidden in the past. If there is an understanding between the boy's and girl's parents some cultural items like a necklace or traditional shawl can be accepted in place of Mithuns.

Of late there has been a movement against bride prices amongst Christian leaders. Even a seminar on this matter was organized in Churachandpur and Motbung where over a hundred leaders for each seminar attended. The seminar made the following observation about the bride price:

"It is found that the poorer sections of our society are hard pressed by certain customs of marriage, such as bride price, dowry, etc. Some sections of our society claim that they do not take the bride price (man) but the practice of gifts for their daughter prompted them to claim the 'Man' in different ways. This means the bride price has haphazardly increased to the extent that the Bridegroom's family is being exploited. This is against our Christian principle. As Christians, we better stop or at least fix at a level even the poorest can afford to pay. If one is able and determined to give at all costs, presents and gifts may be given later on but not as a part of marriage celebrations."<sup>38</sup>

**Replacement of Zu:**

Zu (rice beer) plays a major in the marriage system of the Vaiphei. It has been considered part and parcel of the system. Without it, no negotiation could be started in the pre-Christian days. With the advent of Christianity Zu has been substituted by tea. Now, Zu no longer served in the marriage negotiation amongst the Vaiphei tribe.

**II. Conclusion:**

The marriage system of the Vaipheis is a cornerstone of their society and a very vital part of their cultural system. It is not only a union between two soul mates but it is also a force that binds the two families together. One striking feature of the marriage system of the Vaiphei is the role played by their custom and culture. Even before the birth of a child, their custom has a prescription for deciding whom they should marry. No one – high or low, could afford to violate the prescription of their customary law. Anyone violating it is liable to face the consequence by way of paying a fine. The reputation of such a person is very low in society and his chance of getting a successful married life is considered to be very bleak.

In the entire process concerning marriage, the activity of individual persons is very little and almost naught. It is a family affair right from the beginning. When one says family, it does not mean the family of the boy's or girl's family only. It included their household council members which include other members from outside the family like other members from their clan, the married female members of the family and their husbands, etc. They are the driving force behind all these arrangements. Without them, no marriage can take place. Therefore, marriage is a matter of group efforts and activities for the Vaiphei tribe; hence it established a strong and deep kinship relationship in their society. It is because of that marriage in the Vaiphei society tends to be stable. The case of divorce is very low and negligible. As many people are involved in the marriage to happen the married couple has to respect them and seek their guidance for a successful marriage. In case the married couple has any problems and differences they can easily patch up and keep the marriage going due to the presence of family members who supported them through thick and thin.

The study of their marriage system also reveals that the Vaiphei tribe placed women in a very respectable position and held them in high value. Any man cannot marry any girl whom they wanted. They must follow customary practices if they wanted to marry a particular girl. If he fails to follow that and treated the girl like a playing thing, he is punished as per the prescription of their custom and culture. No man rich or poor can escape from the long arms of their customary law. So, a woman is very safe in their society. The payment of the bride price is also another glaring example of placing the woman at a high value in their society. Man cannot pluck women like fruits and vegetables on the tree and garden. If someone wants a particular woman then he must pay the price as per the customary law. In case of divorce also the boy has to return the entire *Mo van ken* (materials carried by the bride) to the girl's family. Besides that, he has to pay "monawl man" (divorce fine). So, women are well protected in their society through their culture and custom which have been in practice from generation to generation.

Overall, Christianity has significantly impacted the traditional marriage system of the Vaipheis. It has brought many positive transformations in their marriage system. It has liberated them from the clutch of living under the fear of evil spirits. Now, they no longer examine the lungs, heart, and liver of the pig for the success of a marriage. All superstitions associated with their marriage system have also been discarded. It has widened the horizon of choosing a life partner which is now not only limited to their cousin but to other clans, tribes, and races as well. Still, then, it has not succeeded in driving away the entire traditional customary laws and practices associated with their marriage system and cannot put such practices into complete oblivion.

<sup>1</sup> G.R. Quale, *A History of Marriage Systems 2* (1988) ("[m]arriage, as the socially recognized linking of a specific man to a specific woman and her offspring, can be found in all societies"), cited in W.C. Duncan, 'Marriage on Trial', *Journal of Gender, Race & Justice* 2009, paras. 493 & 494, n. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Duncan, supra note 3, para. 494 n. 1, citing N.D. Glenn, 'Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-One Conclusions from the Social Sciences', *American Experiment Quarterly* 2002 (Spring), p. 34 and 37 ("[a]t least since the beginning of recorded history, in all the flourishing varieties of human cultures documented by anthropologists, marriage has been a universal human institution").

<sup>3</sup> Boalt, G. 1965. *Family and Marriage* (Social Science Series) New York: David Mackay Company, p.192.

<sup>4</sup> Prim.S. Vaiphei, *The Vaiphei Tribe*, Imphal, 1975, p.2

<sup>5</sup> Vaiphei Soitinkhup, 'Historical Background of the Vaiphei', Zillai Seminar, 29th October, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Vaiphei, S. Kamminlun. *Political History of the Suantak Tribe in Manipur*, Unpublished, M.Phil.Dissertation, Manipur University, Imphal, 2009, p.5

<sup>7</sup> Shakespear J. col.Lt, *Lushai-Kuki Clan*, reprint, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, Mizoram, 1988, p.146

<sup>8</sup> Directorate of Census Operations, Manipur, *Census of India 2011*, Manipur, p.174

<sup>9</sup> A-11 State Primary Census Abstract (soft copy) Directorate of Census operation, Manipur for individual Scheduled tribes.

<sup>10</sup> Vaiphei Henzagen, B.A.L.L.B. Chairman Vaiphei Literature Society, Vaiphei Literature Chanchin

<sup>11</sup> Extracted from Vaiphei Peoples, Council record, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Fay E George, *Cousin-Relationship Among the Indian Tribes of the North West Pacific Country*, taken from Jstor.org. p.598.

<sup>13</sup> This fit with Homans and Schneider's definition of unilateral cross-cousin marriage (*Marriage, Authority and Final Causes* 1955:5).

<sup>14</sup> Shakespeare, J. *The Lushai Kuki Clans Part 1*, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, h1975, p.49

<sup>15</sup> Kamkhenthang, Dr. Paite, a seminar paper on the customs and traditions of the Hill people of Manipur, State Kala Academy, Imphal, 1972, pp.4&5

<sup>16</sup> Vaiphei Thusim Chawn leh Khan, 2014, Printed and Published by K.Pyar's micro enterprise p.4

<sup>17</sup> . Prim S. Vaiphei, B.D, *The Vaiphei Tribe*, Imphal, 1975, p.8

<sup>18</sup> Op.cit p.82

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Pu Nengtinkhawm Vaiphei, Thingkeu Village, Churachandpur, 20<sup>th</sup> August, 2016

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Prim S. Vaiphei, p.8

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Pu Henkholam Vaiphei, Kangvai Village, 30<sup>th</sup> August, 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, Shakespear Lt. Col.J. *The Lushai-Kuki Clans*, p.155

<sup>23</sup> Interview with S.T. Liana, at his residence, Salem veng, on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2016

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, Vaiphei Thusim chawn leh khan, p.99

<sup>25</sup> Interview with S.T. Liana, at his residence, Salem veng on the 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2016

<sup>26</sup> Vaiphei, Liankhotang, *Culture and Customs of the Vaiphei Tribe*, unpublished, Hill town, Churachandpur, 2014. p.5

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, Prim S. Vaiphei, *The vaiphei Tribe*, Imphal, 1975, p.9



<sup>28</sup> Op.cit p.11

<sup>29</sup> Op.cit.p.10

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Pu Kailum, Kangvai Village, dated the 7th September, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Pu. Kamlalmuan, Red Cross Road, Churachandpur, 10th September, 2016

<sup>32</sup> Vaiphei, Kaihau. (1999).Maite Days, Shillong, p. 30

<sup>33</sup> Interviewed with Pu Khaitingen, K.Kotlian village, churachandpur, 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2016

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, Prim S. Vaiphei, The Vaiphei Tribe, p.10

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Pu Kamlalmuan, Red Cross Road, Churachandpur, 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2016

<sup>36</sup> Vaiphei Christian Golden Jubilee 1960 (a pamphlet) p.1.

<sup>37</sup> Vaiphei. Th.Lamboi, Advent of Christian Mission, and its impact on the Hill-Tribes in Manipur, Frontier Mission Society,Imphal, 1997,p.166

<sup>38</sup> Seminar on Church and Society, Fifth Annual Conference of the Evangelical Fellowship of Manipur, Motbung, 26th& 27th October, 1984.