



# Hmar Customary Rituals with Reference to the Wedding and Funeral Rites: A Documentation

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**Abstract-** A person's life is believed to consist of three big occasions namely the birth of the person, the wedding, and the funeral of the person which are considered the most important part of his life. Of these three occasions the wedding and funeral reflect the traditional and cultural background of the person. This paper aims to document the knowledge on the Hmar wedding customs and funeral rites for the easy accessibility of the knowledge by the present and later generations and also to understand the significance of these customs. The data was collected through personal interviews including telephone interviews with older people and a few prominent persons who have contributed their knowledge for the welfare of the Hmar community. From the study it was found that with the emergence of Christianity and trending western culture, Holy matrimony, which includes a fusion of traditional and Western culture has become a common trend. The increase in mix-marriages or cross-cultural marriages has also diluted the typical traditional marriages of the Hmar people. Similarly, the Westernization and cross-cultural habits of the people have tainted the indigenous funeral rites as well. Hence, the rising generation has very less to no idea about the authenticity of the wedding and funeral rituals of the concerned tribe. Therefore, it can be concluded that in today's world where cross culture system is prevailing or trending it is important to keep our ethnic traditions alive in the minds of the upcoming generation and in order to achieve this, libraries play a vital role in documenting and preserving this traditional knowledge which are only present in the minds of our people into a tangible form for future posterity.

**Keywords-** Hmar customary rituals, Hmar wedding customs, Hmar funeral rites, Wedding, Funeral.

## I. Introduction

A person's life is said or believed to consist of three important aspects: the birth of the individual, the wedding, and the death of the individual. Of these three aspects, the wedding and the death of the individual reflect the traditional background or traditional roots of the individual. Marriage is commonly known as a union of two individuals so as to start a family. According to the APA dictionary of Psychology[1], traditional marriage is a marriage held according to the historical norms of a given society. While the specific customs may differ among various cultures, a conventional marriage typically involves a phase of courtship, a public declaration of wedding intentions, and a wedding ceremony.

A funeral is seen as the right time and place to be together to talk, to support each other, to reminisce and tell stories, and to pay respect to the deceased and the family. Funeral ceremonies are the customary practices linked to burial and cremation. These ceremonies differ among religious groups and communities, frequently following a particular set of guidelines regarding the procedures to be followed.

Due to these cultural and traditional differences in the wedding customs and funeral rituals of the different indigenous communities around the world and also due to the rapid increase in globalization and modernization, mixed culture systems have become inevitable. Hence, it is important to preserve the traditional knowledge of these traditions by documenting them in the raw form so as to make it tangible and sustainable for the use of future generation.

In this paper we will study about the traditional marriage practices and the traditional funeral rituals of the Hmar people of North-East India.

The Hmars are sociable in nature, hence, they live in groups and practice most of their traditional activities in groups. The word "Hmar" literally translates as "North". The Hmar people are one of the indigenous tribes of the North-Eastern parts of India. They belong to the Kuki-Chin-Mizo tribes of the Tibeto-Burma family. The Hmars believed that their forefather comes from caves from a place called Sinlung (China). However, there are many theories or beliefs regarding their origin. From then on, they migrated through Burma (Myanmar) to their present settlement in the various states of the North-East India, including Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Assam, Tripura, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, Lal Dena[2]. They were acknowledged as one of the Scheduled Tribes of India according to the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution. The Hmar tribe was initially part of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo group of tribes until they attained separate recognition as a tribe in Manipur in 1956. Most of the Hmar still live in rural villages. Every village has a chief who are known as chief or as Lal among themselves. Though they do not have much power like in the olden days. The main source of their livelihood is still farming and hunting.



Hmar society is patriarchal and for many generations have been living together as a closed-knit society. They have great respect for elders and are never called by their names. The Hmar people believed in gods, they had various gods and used to offer sacrifice in honour of their god, in short, they were animistic. With the coming of Watkins R. Roberts, a British missionary in 1910 on a Hmar village, the gospel spread like wildfire now mostly all Hmars have converted to Christianity.

This conversion along with the rapid modernization and globalisation brought some changes to the existing cultural traditions of the Hmar community as well. Hence the need for documenting these customs and rituals.

## II. Literature review

### A. Expression of Culture Through Weddings and Funerals

Weddings and funerals are two of the most important aspects in a person's life as they reflect the cultural background of an individual. Literature on these aspects indicates that the wedding and funeral cultures may differ slightly from one community to another community across the globe or even among the people living in the same area.

Asrizal[3], mentioned that marriage is seen as one of the most important events in the life of the indigenous people of Indonesia. In Indonesia, the tradition of customary marriage is to maintain the local culture that is not owned by other nations. Its purpose is to maintain the values of cultural customs and peace and to maintain a very high cultural heritage as well. According to Ramanta [4], the wedding ceremony among the Minangkabau indigenous community is referred to as Baralek Gadang. Local wisdoms are attained through the traditional ceremonies of these marriages and these traditional insights serve as a way to cultivate the community's identity, ensuring that the culture is preserved for future generations. Suhairi[5], mentioned that the traditional practice of Sesan should be incorporated into the marriage contract, as it represents a form of local wisdom among the indigenous people of Lampung Pepadun. Taufika[6], mentioned that in the Acehese culture of Pidie District, Pidie Regency, Jeuname (dowry) is a marriage condition that needs to be agreed upon before a series of wedding ceremonies. The Jeuname used is the Mayam unit and is a condition that the prospective husband must fulfil to the prospective wife in a predetermined number and form. Hidayati[7], discussed that Oncaran is an ancestral heritage preserved by the Pendalungan Probolinggo community of Kuripan District, Probolinggo Regency. It is a tradition of giving gifts in the form of money to the bride. This tradition is deeply rooted in the people and is done by throwing money onto a tray covered by a tablecloth. Risyanti[8] discussed that the Javanese Surakarta wedding ceremony is regarded as a significant cultural heritage and is interpreted as a pivotal event in the life cycle. She also mentioned that the Javanese Surakarta wedding customs represent a significant local cultural asset that serves as a guiding framework for life teachings. Noortyani[9] has mentioned that the Banjar community of South Borneo (Kalimantan Selatan), Indonesia still adheres to their customs and cultural traditions in many aspects, especially in wedding rituals. The marriage traditions of the community reflect its ideological beliefs, cultural activities, and artifacts, as evidenced in the seven components of its culture. Pratama[10] mentioned that the Sasak community inhabiting Lombok Island in West Nusa Tenggara, possesses a rich cultural heritage and diverse customs which has been passed down from generation to generation. One such being the wedding traditions which is not merely a series of ceremonies and customs but a reflect of the traditional values which is highly esteemed by the community has also been passed down from generation to generation.

Reimers[11], discussed that rites are means by which people of the same community are made aware of their moral unity. She also discussed that just like funeral services, cemeteries depict people's identities through the choice of languages and symbols selected for the stone. In this manner, the deceased is situated within a specific ethnic or cultural context. Sunde[12], mentioned that in Podgora, the community demonstrates a profound respect for its deceased members. The town takes pride in its funeral and mourning traditions. This is exemplified by women engaging in lamentations, which are regarded as one of the oldest components of these customs. Baan[13], mentioned that the Ma'pasa' Tedong, as part of the Rambu Solo funeral ritual, represents a significant cultural discourse. The communication embedded within this discourse conveys messages that encompass information, directives, advice, and expressions pertinent to the cultural behaviours and beliefs of the community. Consequently, it serves as a documentation of diverse cultures, fosters awareness, and assists individuals in the development of their behavioural practices.

From the above literature, it was found that people from different ethnicities have different forms of marriage traditions and funeral rites. In this way, they make use of these differences to maintain the values of their cultural heritage and to preserve the local wisdom inherited through these different traditions.

### B. Need for Documenting Traditional Rituals and Customs

Sunde[12], mentioned that in Podgora, Croatia, lamentation was considered as one of the oldest elements of funeral and mourning customs until the 1960s. It was noted that historically, widowers would remain unshaven; however, with modernization, only women and girls would wear mourning attire, while men typically adorned a



piece of black ribbon on their lapels. Many of these funeral and mourning customs in Podgora are still observed, but they are likely to diminish due to ongoing modernization. Asrizal[3], mentioned that marriage in indigenous communities is considered as one of the most important events in the lives of the Indonesian people as it is an event concerning every member of the families. So, the tradition of customary marriage is a culture that must be safeguarded or preserved by the Indonesian people as it reflects the identity of Indonesia, unity of the family and the unity of a country. Bismawati[14], suggested that the symbolic meaning and the traditional procession of the Kaili weddings need to be known by the public, especially the younger generation so that the culture may be maintained and preserved and its cultural values may continue to exist in accordance with the religious rules. Suhairi[5], discussed that knowledge about the traditional wedding practices of the Lampung Pepadun is essential to be studied more deeply to support social behavior, local wisdom and build social-religious values in the society and these can be done through preservation of the traditional marriage traditions. Vave[15], mentioned that some funeral belief systems and practices of the iTaukei community are no longer entertained or implemented in this day anymore for a very good reason. This change is crucial for such people as they are part of their indigenous identity whereas, some of the practices were morally and legally wrong so did not have a place in the present practices. Therefore, these unique practices need to be preserved or documented for the future generations as they have disappeared from the real world. Risyanti[8], mentioned that The Javanese Surakarta wedding customs represent a significant local cultural asset that serves as a guide for life teachings. Therefore, it is essential to preserve and document these customs to ensure their continued existence and sustainability for future generations. Ghosh[16], noted that a nuanced analysis of death rituals during the pandemic period reveals a dilution of ritual practices, which serve as markers of identity distinction for members of different communities. Therefore, the need for preserving and documenting the traditional rituals and practices is important to keep the younger generations informed about their cultural traditions. Pratama[10], discussed that globalization and modernization brought significant changes in Sasak traditional and cultural practices. The customs and rituals that are carried out reflect the relationships between individuals and groups in society which are influenced by religious and cultural values. The use of modern technology in wedding traditions reduces the personal aspects and direct interactions that are an important part of local traditions. The changes that have occurred show the need for efforts to preserve local culture and values to maintain the identity of the Sasak people in the midst of global change.

From the above literature, it can be concluded that globalization and modernization have affected many cultures and traditional teachings of the people belonging to the many Indigenous communities around the globe. Therefore, there is a need for preserving and documentation of these cultures and traditional practices for future generations.

### III.Objectives

- To document the traditional knowledge of wedding culture and funeral rituals of the Hmar people.
- To understand the significance and importance of documenting these rituals for future reference.
- To highlight the role of libraries in the documentation and preservation of such traditional knowledge.

### IV.Research methodology

This study employs a qualitative research method. Data were gathered through individual interactions with older adults and through telephone interviews. Relevant literatures were also collected from the local people for extracting the data. The information gathered from personal and telephone interviews constitutes the primary data for this research. Conversely, the data acquired from field studies and literature related to the research topic are classified as secondary data, which aids in the interpretation of the primary data.

### V.Findings

#### A. Wedding

According to the latest study there are six traditional ways of marriage in the Hmar culture which are each discussed as follows

1) *Chawng-molak*: This is a form of "Child marriage" and is also called "*Naupang pawibawm chawi inner*". In this kind of marriage tradition, an adolescent (or even younger) girl if liked by a boy's parents as a prospective bride-to-be for their son, is made to live with them (her in-laws-to-be) without any prior engagement but with the consent of her parents until both the boy and the girl become of marriageable age. Even though the girl is meant to be the boy's bride in the future they are not allowed to have any physical relationship between them. Once they have attained a marriageable age, they are then properly wedded to one another.

This kind of marriage tradition was very rare even in the early days as it is not as easy as it seems. This kind of marriage requires a deep sense of trust and mutual understanding between both family members and the girl's parents need to be considerate enough to send their young daughter to the boy's place.



2) *Thlapui Hnuoia Innei (Inruk or Ruka Innei)*: This kind of marriage is also known as “eloping”. Also, the term “*Thlapui hnuoia Innei*” can be translated to “married under the moon”. In this tradition, a man and a woman are willing to get married but are against their family’s will or when a family is financially unfit to provide the couple a proper marriage, they usually follow this tradition and elope with or without the consent of their family. At the time of fixing the bride price, the bride’s family of the couple who had eloped without their family’s consent will convey their grievances to the groom’s family. After which the groom’s family will have to provide tea or liquor (in the olden days) and also meet the demands of the bride’s family to show their desire to reconcile.

3) *Intlun (Tlun)*: In this type of marriage, when a boy is not in a state to pay the bride price due to any personal or unavoidable circumstances, he moves in at the girl’s place that he want to marry and serves her parents for a minimum of 3 years. After sincerely serving the girl’s parents at their home for 3 years, it is then considered that the boy has paid off the bride price. Then the girl is handed over to the boy with honour, they then move out from the girl’s home and start living separately as a married couple. In this process, the bride price is not fixed anymore between the boy and girl’s families but the bride price that is supposed to be given to the bride’s maternal father (or uncle) which is called *Pusum* is considered unpaid and is to be paid by the boy.

In this type of marriage sometimes even a girl may move in at a guy’s place but there are major differences between the two. The condition is that a couple after having physical relation, if the girl becomes illegitimately pregnant but the boy does not want to marry her, then she packs her belongings from her father’s place and forcefully moves into and lives in the boy’s home without the consent of the boy’s family. After moving into the boy’s home if the boy still does not want to accept the girl or does not want to marry her, he will have to pay a fine called *Makman* amounting to one Mithun or money equivalent to the price of one Mithun.

4) *Makpa Sungkhum*: In this type of marriage, the husband moves into his in-law’s place instead of otherwise. In this type, the couple is not allowed to move out and live separately from the wife’s family. They will be the sole inheritors too, as they will be responsible for the well-being of the wife’s parents and the household property. The Hmar community that is known to follow the patrilineal system shows an exception in this particular marriage type. This may be due to many unavoidable circumstances. For example, if the girl is an only girl-child of a family or if the girl’s family does not have any male siblings to take care of the parents, etc.

5) *Sawngpuia Innei (Sawngpuia Thuoi)*: In this kind of marriage whether arranged-marriage or love-marriage both the family elders and members need to give their consent for the wedding. It is after their consent that the bride price is fixed and all demands are met and the girl is then married to the boy with respect and honour. The wedding takes place in a very grand manner and the whole community becomes the witness to the couple’s union. Any girl who gets married in this tradition is given *Sahrap* (i.e., a slice of half-cutting pork including the tail) as a dowry after the bride price handover ceremony. This *Sahrap* is sent over to the groom’s place by the bride’s kinsmen. This ceremony is followed by “*Mo Inthlana*” meaning “bridal blessing or farewell blessing” and then “*Mo Lawm Ni*” or “*Innei Ni*” meaning “the wedding day” in the coming days. In the olden days, couples who got married in this tradition would boasts about themselves saying “*Kei chu nipui hnuoia pasal/nuhmei nei ka nih insawnnaw*” which translates to “Don’t you know that I have been married under the Sun”.

6) *Kohran Dana Innei*: This type of marriage is also known as “holy matrimony”. This process is a blend of Hmar traditional customs incorporated with Christian culture. This marriage is carried out with the mutual agreement of both families where the bride price is fixed and handed over followed by the “*Mo Inthlana*” and then “*Innei ni*”. The wedding takes place in the presence of a church pastor along with friends, families and relatives from both sides bearing witness to the union of the two individual and is carried out inside a church. This kind of marriage is similar to the above-mentioned “*Sawngpuia Innei*”. The only difference is, “*Sawngpuia Innei*” was a tradition that was followed before Christianity was introduced to the Hmar people. While, “*Kohran danna Innei*” was the kind of wedding tradition that the Hmar people started following after they have converted into Christians. It became a tradition with a mixture of both worlds that is the Hmar traditional customs and the Christian culture.

## B. Wedding Rituals

The marriage custom of the Hmar community can be broken down into the following steps as given below:

1) *Mo Biek (Matchmaking/Proposal)*: This is the very first step but it mostly takes place behind the scenes. This is done as a formality. Here, one or two of the prospective groom’s *laibung* (kinsmen) and *makpa* (paternal male-in-law) pays a visit to the prospective bride’s house to inform the bride’s parents about the interest of their son in marrying their daughter. The girl’s parents then decide to discuss the matter with their daughter and the rest of their relatives so as to decide on the date of the engagement.

2) *Thirdam Si (Engagement)*: The engagement date is provided by the bride’s family which is followed accordingly by the groom’s family. This is the beginning of a formal wedding ritual and the most important step for moving the marriage forward. The engagement ceremony of the Hmar tribe does not involve the presence of either the groom or the bride to be. This is an arrangement or meeting that takes place only among the elders and kinsmen of the bride and groom. This ritual decides the fate of the prospective bride and groom.





Depending upon the conversation between the groom and bride's kinsmen, the matchmaking session will either end up very well or will go downhill and spoil the whole process which may even end up breaking a good match. On this day the *laibungs* and *makpa* from the groom's side bring over *Zubel* or pot of liquor (now replaced by tea) and snacks to the bride's place. The liquor is first served by the groom's side to show respect to the girl's family and if the bride's family consume the tea, it is then considered as a pass to go ahead with the engagement. In the Hmar custom engagement does not involve exchanging of rings. Traditionally, *Thirdam* (hand hoe) and *Pa inhawn* (i.e., ₹20, a price paid for opening the bride's father's house, this is included in the bride price) is wrapped in *Puondum* (a traditional black cloth) and handed over to the bride's family. After this handover, the date for "*Man Khum Ni*" (fixing and handing over of bride price) and "*Innei Ni*" (the wedding date) is decided on the same night. In some cases, they fix a separate date for another meeting in order to decide the dates for "*Man Khum Ni*" and "*Innei Ni*". As part of the closing ceremony or to celebrate the after engagement the bride's family serve the liquor to the guests.

3) *Wedding Notice*: This process comes after the engagement ceremony. Here, the respective churches from both the prospective groom and bride's side are required to put up a public notice on the signboard informing people of the wedding to be held between the couple. The notice is to be put up for as long as at least two consecutive Sundays. This is done to ensure that there is no objection from anybody regarding the couple's wedding. If in case somebody takes off the notice from any of the churches, the wedding is considered cancelled unless the conflict is resolved. Whereas, if there are no disturbances on any side then only the wedding process will be headed forward to the bride price fixing ceremony.

4) *Man Khum Ni/Zan (Fixing and handover of Bride price)*: This is the occasion where the bride price is fixed and handed over. The Hmar custom already has a fixed amount of bride price which is part of the tradition and to be followed by all. No amount is allowed to be added or deducted from this already fixed amount.

The family kins from both the bride and groom's side gather together just for this special occasion. First of all, with the permission of the bride's kins, the *Makpa* or *Makhai* (plural) from the groom's side will serve the liquor first to the *Pa aiaw* (father's representative) followed by the rest of the bride's kins. This marks the opening ceremony of the Man Khum Ni/Zan. While still drinking the liquor, the groom's *palai* (few kins and paternal in-laws) will start the fixing and handing over of the bride price. Firstly, the *Thirdam* and *Pa Inhawn* is asked to be produce from the bride's end, to ensure the safety of the two. This safety of the engagement tool signifies the respect the bride's family has towards the groom and also willingness of the bride's family to take part in the marriage process. Once they have witnessed the condition of the hand hoe and the ₹20 wrapped in *puondum*, the groom's *palai* brings a *leidar* (a traditional circular bamboo sieve) and places it upside down on top of a table, the *leidar* is then covered with a "*hmar-puon*" (traditional shawl or wrap-around of the Hmar tribe). The remaining money of the bride price is then placed and counted on top of the *leidar* by the groom's *palai*. The *leidar* is then turn upwards by the bride's kin and the money is thoroughly counted again and made sure not a single penny is missed or more. After this, an amount of ₹50 which is known as "*Man thungpha*" is returned to the groom's kins. This is done by the bride's kins as no dowry is demanded by the groom's family and is not taken to her in laws, so this amount is returned to them so that the bride will be able to live life with good conscience at her in-laws also this amount will be staying at her in laws for as long as the couple stays married. After all this process an agreement is signed in a written document between the palais of the bride and groom. After this liquor and snacks are being served by the bride's kins to close the ceremony. After this ceremony the bride's kin gives *Sahrap* to the groom's side. This *Sahrap* is taken home by the *Makpa* from the groom side. To mark the bride-fixing ceremony, the bride's family slaughters a pig and calls it *Sumkhumsa* (meaning the price has been fixed). The body is then cut into equal half (excluding the head and the innards), half the pig being called *Sahrap* is the one that is given to the groom's family. Even the bride's maternal grandfather or maternal uncle has to slaughter a pig for their niece and prepare a meal for his niece once the *pusum* has been cleared by the groom. Also, *Sabar* (part of the *Sumkhumsa*, which includes a little bit of every part of the pig including the innards) is given to the two persons from both the bride and groom side who were involved in the handing over and counting of the bride price.

#### The bride price is fixed in the following ways:

*Pa Inhawn* (₹20, revised to ₹200): This is the money given at the engagement ceremony signifying the opening of the bride's father's house for wedding preparations.

*Manpui* or principal bride price (₹800, revised to ₹4000): This is the principal bride price which amounts to *Se Li*. In the olden days, *Se Li* means the Price of 4 Mithuns. Not everyone was in a literal position to buy 4 Mithuns, signifying the value of a woman to be priceless. The bride price does not significantly mean the price of the bride. It is a formality that was made mandatory, instead of just sending over one's daughter to a stranger's place.

*Panghak* (₹50, revised to ₹500): This is the share of the bride's father's trustee or representative



*Nisum* (₹30, revised to ₹200): This is the share of the bride's paternal aunt. If the bride has more than one *Ni* (paternal aunt), then this amount will be equally divided among the aunts.

*Sangdawn* (₹20, revised to ₹200): This is the share of the bride's elder sister or the bride's babysitter who had also taken part in raising the bride since childhood.

*Pusum*: This is part of the bride price that is to be fixed separately at the bride's maternal grandfather or maternal uncle's house. This bride price is fixed only after the *Pu* is served liquor (or tea). It includes of these two sub-types viz., *Pu Inhawn* (₹20, revised to ₹200)- This is given to open the doors of the bride's *Pu*'s house signifying the permission granted by the *Pu* for the niece's wedding to be taken forward. *Pusum* (₹100, revised to ₹500)- This is the share of the bride's *Pu*'s. That is, this is to be distributed equally among the bride's maternal grandfather and maternal uncle(s) (if any).

*Ukhel man* (₹100, revised to ₹200): This is a fine paid to the bride's unmarried elder sister for breaking the rules of chronological order by getting married before her elder sister. This applies only to girls who have elder female siblings in the family.

*Nuzum* (₹100, revised to ₹200): This price is paid only if a guy marries the youngest daughter of a family with more than one daughter.

*Man Thungpha* (₹50, revised to ₹400): This is the amount that is returned to the groom's family during the fixing of the bride price which is supposed to stay at the groom's side for as long as the couple is married.

5) *Mo Inthlana (Bridal blessing)*: This is a ceremony that is conducted by the bride's family in order to honour the bride and to prepare her for the wedding and after. On this day the bride's family, friends and kin gather together and bless the bride for her future endeavours. She is given words of advice and words of wisdom from both her paternal and maternal sides. The groom is not allowed to attend this ceremony but he may appear for a short while to only introduce him to the guests present after which he is to leave the ceremony. The feast for this day is prepared by the bride's maternal grandfather and maternal uncle side although this is not mandatory and can be prepared by anyone from the bride's side.

6) *Innei Ni (Wedding Day)*: This is the main day or the wedding day itself. The groom heads straight towards the venue i.e., the church and waits for the bride at the end of the aisle. The bride and the maid of honour who are all dressed and ready to leave for the venue are picked up by the best man of the groom. The bride then makes an entrance walking down the aisle side by side and hand in hand with her father (if the father is not present, the brother or the father's trustee/representative can take the place of the father). The girl is then handed over to the church pastor (the minister in charge of the wedding). After which the pastor, for the last time, opens a short period for any objection and then he declares that the wedding is going to proceed and hence no one is to interfere or disturb the whole ceremony. Then comes the vow-taking ceremony followed by the exchange of rings. The pastor then blesses the couple with prayers and blessings. This ceremony is the highlight of the whole wedding process.

In the Hmar tradition, after church service, comes the reception also called the "Hall program". The program includes the cake-cutting ceremony, and receiving words of advice from both the groom and bride's kins. Here we also have honouring of the bride's parents and her maternal grandfather or maternal uncle by the groom's parents to show their gratitude towards the bride's family for willingly giving them their precious beloved daughter. The program is then followed by feast which marks the end of the actual wedding ceremony.

7) *Mo thruoi*: Once the reception is over the bride returns home along with her maid of honour and waits for the groom's cousin sisters known as *Farnu*. The groom's cousins come to the bride's house to finally take her to her in-laws. But first they serve tea to the members present as a sign of their willingness to take the bride away. This is then followed by a short program where the lists of the bride's dowry(optional) are read out and counted before leaving the house. This dowry is then sent off along with the bride. The bride is followed by her fellow sisters or cousin sisters called *Zuor* who help her carry the dowry to the groom's place. Every *Zuor* is given an amount of ₹10 (revised to ₹20 for *Zour naupang*, younger sisters) and ₹20 (revised to ₹50 for *Zuor upa*, older sisters) by the groom's kins as part of the bride price (called *Zuor man*) for helping the bride bring her belongings. Every bride's *Makpa* who helps in carrying the heavy loads of the dowry are given an amount of ₹20 (revised to ₹50 and are called "*Lawicha*"). Upon reaching her in laws the bride is welcomed by the groom's family and a small welcoming ceremony is held for the bride as part of the celebration of the couple's union.

The old list of the dowries mainly includes *Puonri/puonchil/puonphasa, Hreipui, Dawrawn, Kawngvar, Tuthlaw, Thingrem/rel/suitcase, Belvar, Hmui/puonkawl*.

The newly revised list of dowries mainly includes *Rizai/blanket/mattress/puonri, Thingrem/almirah/suitcase/rel, Hreipui/tuthlaw, Leidar/kawngvar/kawngphui, Mofam* (This is a collection of cloth material taken to the in-laws by the bride which is to be distributed among the groom's sisters and cousin sisters as a keepsake.) The dowry also includes the gifts given by the family member who had a share of the bride price and the gifts given by other relatives and friends at the bridal blessing ceremony.



Here, dowry is neither imposed nor it is a demand made by the groom's family. The dowry in the Hmar custom is considered a parting gift from the bride's parents which is given voluntarily. It means that if the bride's family is not in a position to gift anything to their daughter for her wedding, this will not have any impact on the marriage.

Generally, in a Hmar traditional Christian wedding, if the bride is not able to afford a white wedding gown, she may wear a Hmar traditional wrap-around called *Puonlaisen* or *Hmar puon* along with a white top and a white veil to the wedding venue. The bride changes her wrap-around to *Ngochei* at the time of *Mo throui*. The bride's *Zuorpui(s)* wears a wrap-around called *Ngoteker* to the wedding. The female wedding guests can wear any traditional wrap-around except the *Thlanlam puon*. The groom and other male guests wear suit and ties to the wedding.

### C. Funeral

According to the Hmar tradition and custom, a male leader called *Val Upa* is elected by the people to lead the male youths and a female leader called *Nunghak Upa* is elected by the people to lead the female youths. These leaders lead the youngsters in both good and bad occasions like funerals, other celebrations, etc.

During funerals, *val upa* instructs the boys to do certain works like arranging halls, and seats, digging graves, etc. Whereas, the *nunghak upa* is responsible for instructing the young and old girls in keeping the vicinity clean, serving tea and snacks, doing the dishes, etc. These youngsters both girls and boys stay at the funeral home for upto 3 nights so as to help with different household chores. Every burial service is conducted either by the Pastor in charge or a Church Elder. The different types of death in the Hmar tradition are as follows:

1) *Hlamzuia Thi (Premature Death)*: This is the kind of death where the deceased is a baby who is as old as 6 months old or lesser. Hence, the term premature death. In this case, the *Val Upa* and paternal *Makpa* are responsible for digging the grave. The whole community does not get involved in this matter, which means there is no gathering of people at the deceased home. The deceased is not allowed to be kept overnight. Only close relatives, friends and family members may visit the funeral home according to their own understanding. As there is no official funeral/condolence program. Everything takes place within the family itself. The deceased is not allowed to be buried at the graveyard but is buried below their home or on their land itself. Whereas, in modern times the deceased has to be at least 90 days old and is now allowed to be buried in the graveyard like the rest of the people.

2) *Thitha or Thi Dan Pangngaia Thi (Natural Death)*: As the name suggests this is the kind where a person undergoes a natural death which may be due to old age or some illness. In olden days, in this kind of death, the *Laibung* (kinsmen) would bring *Zubel* (pot of beer/liquor) as a form of conveying their condolences. An animal is slaughtered and the sisters or cousin sisters of the head of the family are equally given a little bit of every part of the animal's body. Whereas, the *Pu* is given the chuck/shoulder part. If the person passes away before noon, then the deceased is not kept overnight. Although, people gather and an official condolence program is prepared and help comes from the youngsters under the leadership of the *Val Upa* and *Nunghak Upa*. In modern times, the slaughtering of animal to honour the deceased is discontinued and liquor is replaced by tea which is served among the people attending the funeral service and funeral home. If the person passes away after noon, the deceased is kept overnight and the youths and close relatives stay over at the funeral home for the night. The youths take turns during this time, among the ones who do not stay over during the night the boys go to dig the grave in the morning and the girls tend to them by serving them tea and edibles.

3) *Thisie or Sar Thi (Atypical Death)*: This is the kind of death that involves accidental deaths, suicides, deaths during childbirth, murders, etc. In the olden days, the body of the deceased for this kind of death is placed differently from the others. That is the head is placed towards the door facing outside. Also, the deceased person's grave is dug differently, i.e., their grave is dug horizontally whereas, for the deceased who died a natural death, their grave is dug vertically. However, this tradition is no longer followed in today's world.

4) *Lenglai Thi (Youthful death)*: If a deceased person is unmarried then this is considered *Lenglai thi*. In this type, the deceased is given a grand condolence service to show their respect and grievances. Even the grave of these deceased people is dug deeper than other ordinary graves. Even their coffin is carried by the male youths and not by the *Makpa*. In this tradition, an unmarried female coffin is even covered with a white cloth to symbolize that she is unmarried, in case others may not know the deceased person personally.

5) *Khuolrala thi (Foreign Death)*: This is the kind where a person passes away far from their homeland. In the olden days, when a person dies in a foreign land and his homeland is within a travel distance the corpse gets passed on from one village to another till the body reaches his own home. The youths from every town are responsible for passing on the corpse within their territories. The funeral service is held after it reaches its home. Whereas, for someone who stays too far away, if there is someone ready to take the responsibility of burying the dead then, the person is buried at the place of his death and they die as a guest. In such cases, the family of the deceased is expected to prepare a meal (including animal slaughter) for the family who played as their family's representative at the burial service. The various condolences money and materials received





during the condolence period are returned to the original deceased family after deducting all the expenses. Whereas, in modern days with the advancement in the transportation system, most deceased person's corpses are brought back to their homes where their condolences services are held in the presence of their loved ones. In general, at a Hmar funeral home, the women or girls wear their traditional attires called *Thlanlam puon* pairing it with commonly a formal black top. For those who do not own this attire they put on plain black wrap-around or other traditional attires like *Thangsuopuon* or *Hmar puon* as well. Whereas the men simply wear a formal black suit or black shirt and pants.

## VI. Figures and interpretations



Fig. 1: At an engagement ceremony.



Fig. 2: Handing over of *Thiridam* and *Pa inhawn*.



Fig. 3: *Thiridam* and *Pa inhawn* covered in *Saipikhup* (in this cross cultural marriage between a Hmar and Kuki couple, *Puon dum* is replaced by *Saipikhup*).



Fig. 4: Showing the groom's kins that the engagement materials is safely kept to proceed the bride price fixing ceremony.





**Fig. 5: Fixing and counting of bride price by the groom's *palai*.**



**Fig. 6: Counting of bride price by the groom's *palai*.**



**Fig. 7: Fixing and handing over of bride price by the groom's *palai* to the bride's *palai*.**



**Fig. 8: Counting of bride price by the bride's *palai*.**



**Fig. 9: Displaying of bride price by the bride's *palai* (including some extra amount).**



**Fig. 10: Returning the extra amount included in the bride price by the bride's *palai***



**Fig. 11: Displaying of bride price by the bride's *palai*.**



**Fig. 12: Signing of agreement for clearing the bride price between the bride and groom's kin.**



**Fig. 13: Distribution of bride price among the bride's kin.**



**Fig. 14: Distribution of bride price among the bride's kin.**



**Fig. 15: fixing and handing of bride price at different wedding occasions.**



**Fig. 16: fixing and handing of bride price at different wedding occasions.**





Fig. 17: *Sahrap* to be given to the groom's family.



Fig. 18: Handing of *Sahrap* by bride's family to the groom's *Makpa(s)*.



Fig. 19: *Puon dum*.

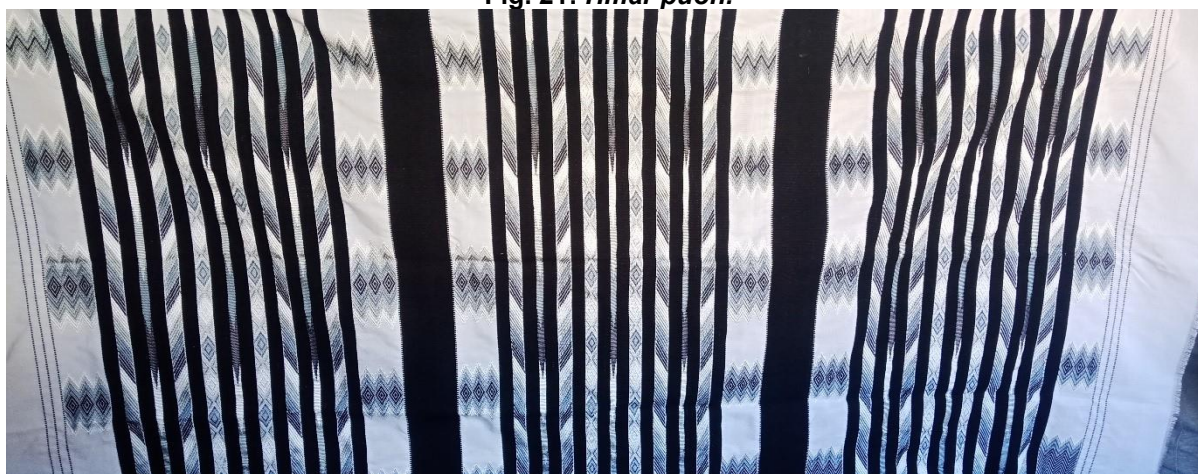


Fig. 20: *Puonlaisen*.





**Fig. 21: Hmar puon.**



**Fig. 22: Ngochei.**



**Fig. 23: Ngoteker.**



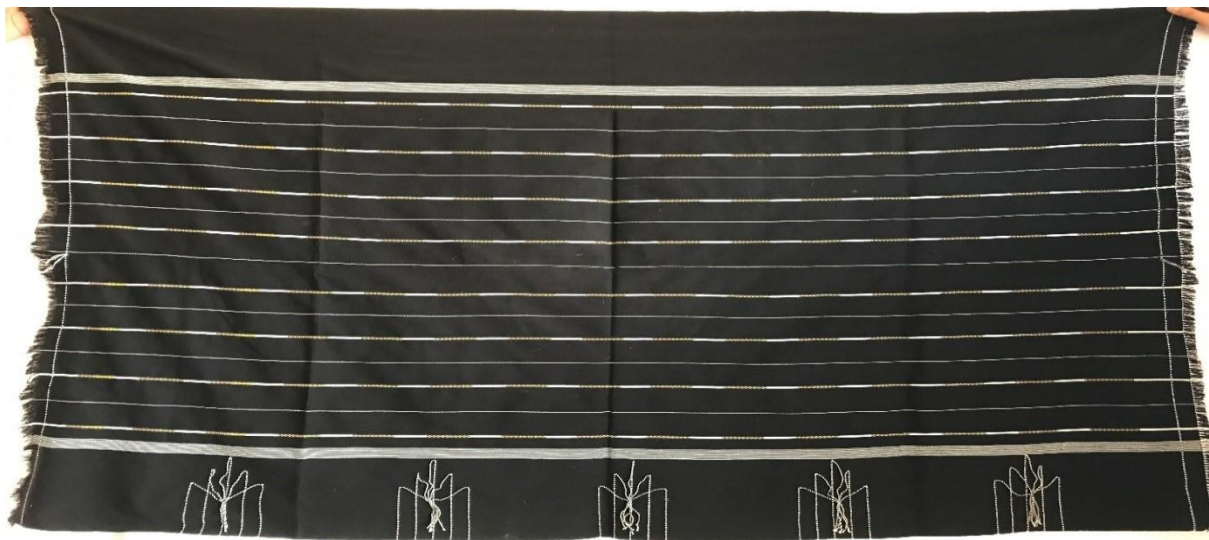


Fig. 24: *Thlanlam puon*.

## VII. Conclusion

From the study above it can be concluded that with the developing world, people have also developed and upgraded themselves. There is less discrimination among people and people have started treating each other equally. As seen above, some of the traditional practices are no longer being practised due to many reasons they are not legal or they have been revised and so on. These changes that have been made although more convenient or better for the people now, impact the uniqueness of these ethnic traditions and culture making them lose their identity as a whole and turning the traditions into a common one. Some of the forms of marriage do not exist anymore. With rapid modernisation and globalisation there is an increase in mix-culture or cross-culture traditions and marriages which have caused cultural dilution to some extent.

Since these indigenous traditions are mostly stored in the memories of the people and orally passed on. Therefore, if not preserved and documented into a tangible form it is bound to slowly disappear from the minds of the people and gradually from the world. As this traditional knowledge when passed down orally, loses some of its parts or some parts get altered along the way and these losses and changes are inevitable.

Throughout the study, the researcher also came across some traditions that had not been heard of until recently. Therefore, more in-depth studies and documentation should be conducted on the Hmar tribe of Northeast India on different aspects like their dances, festivities, divorce systems, and so on.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to God and everyone who has contributed to the development and completion of this article. Firstly, to my mentor and co-author, Assistant Professor Jacqueline J. Thabab, I express my gratitude for her continuous support, insightful criticism, and teamwork, all of which enhanced the caliber of my work.

I also want to sincerely thank my spouse, parents, other family members, and friends for their unwavering support and patience. Finally, I would want to express my gratitude to all of the responses who have been really helpful in giving me the information that I required.

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