

Marital Patterns and Women's Economic Independence: A Study Of Kham Magar Women

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This paper is a preliminary report on the marriage patterns among the Kham-speaking Magars of Western Nepal. Unlike women in many Hindu groups in Nepal, Magar women exercise a fairly high degree of control over their own marriages. They marry later than women of most other Nepalese groups,¹ often choose their own husbands, can divorce and re-marry one or several times if discontent, and are not completely dependent upon their father's or husband's lineage if widowed. Their marriage patterns are interrelated with and influenced by their economic roles in Magar society. These women are very independent economically and engage in many non-agricultural activities to generate cash income. In this paper, I wish to describe their marital patterns and explore the interrelation between these patterns and women's economic independence. Data for this paper was collected in Thabang Panchayat as part of ongoing field research.²

The Kham-speaking Magar are an ethnic group living in the northern districts of Rolpa and Rukhum in Rapti Zone and parts of Dhaulagiri along the upper tributaries of the Sani Bheri, Barigad, and Rapti rivers. Although Magars, these people distinguish themselves from the Magar who settled mostly in the middle western hills (concentrated in Gulmi and Palpa) whose traditional language is Magarkura. The Magars discussed in this paper speak a distinct Tibeto-Burman language called Kham (meaning both the name of the language and 'speech' in Kham).³ This language has no relation to the Kham dialect of Tibetan spoken by the Khampas, a Tibetan people from the region of Tibet known as Kham. Nor do the people apparently have any relation to this Tibetan group. Because these Kham-speaking Magar do form a distinct cultural group bounded by use of the language, I will hereafter refer to them for methodological convenience as the Kham Magar to distinguish them from other Magars who do not speak Kham. Although they write their names as Magar, not Kham Magar, because of their own feeling of separateness from other Magars, I find this term useful in identifying them.

The Kham Magar are nominal Hindus with a strong shamanistic tradition. They are adapted to high altitude farming and engage in pastoralism to varying degrees. Despite some cultural and ecological differences between communities, Thabang (where most of the data for this discussion was collected) is fairly representative of the Kham Magar area. The most significant difference between Thabang and more northerly Panchayats is in the extent of sheep and goat herding. To the north, Panchayats may have sheep and goats numbering 15-18,000. In Thabang, there are no more than 8000. Formerly, there was more emphasis on herding in Thabang, but the recent decrease in available pasturage and the rising rates for grazing rights in the traditional summer and winter pastures has forced many herders to sell the bulk of their flocks. Wool and meat production and the making of a variety

of wool products is still central to the economy in Thabang but not to the extent that it is in the north. Animal husbandry is now more confined to cattle, which are used for ploughing and fertilizer production. Pig raising is another important economic activity, and almost every household in Thabang keeps one or two pigs.

During the slack agricultural seasons and leisure time women engage in a variety of income-generating activities: processing wool and local fibers, making liquor, and raising pigs for sale. They spin and weave local wool for coats and blankets, which are used in the household, sold in the village, or sold during seasonal trips to Butwal, Tansen, Ghorahi, and Bhairawa. Besides processing wool, women also prepare hemp (which grows wild or is intercropped with wheat) and puwa (a wild nettle fiber which yields a cloth slightly coarser than cotton). The raw hemp is sold or traded for salt. Women also make grain sacks from both hemp and puwa and sell them. In addition, some women bring cotton thread up from the Tarai Bazaars and weave it into cloth for local sale.

Liquor is an important part of the Magar diet and is used in the whole range of pujas (worship ceremonies), life cycle rites, and festivals. Many women, especially unmarried and widowed women, sell liquor within the village for these and other occasions and also at local fairs (locally, ram; Nepali, mela) which are held throughout the year in nearby villages.

Kham Magars are divided into four northern Magar sub-tribes (thars):⁴ Pun, Roka, Gharti, and Buda. In addition, in Thabang, there is a thar called Jhankri.⁵ These thars are subdivided into named localized lineages, each of which has a common mythical ancestor or a common place of origin. These localized lineages rather than the thars form the effective exogamous unit.

Magar communities are generally very dense. The typical settlement is a large village cluster above the river valley with smaller hamlets nearby forming a single cultural entity. The people in the village own land scattered throughout the valley at varying altitudes. An individual's land holdings may be separated by a four or five hour walk. In Thabang, the village is typically large — 430 households out of a total of 600 in the entire Panchayat. Marriage usually takes place within the region bounded by the community's farmlands; only seldom does a bride come from a distant Panchayat. Although informants claim that thars are the exogamous unit, data on actual marriage exchanges indicates that marriages often take place between members of the same thar. The localized lineages seem to be the true exogamous units within Kham Magar society. In Thabang, these lineages include:

<u>Pun</u>	<u>Roka</u>	<u>Buda</u>	<u>Gharti</u>	<u>Jhankri</u>
Dharlami	Rumkami	Rumkami	Sutpaharai	
Ulunge	Rumjali	Rumjali	Paharai	
Ledda	Danunge	Bajjali	Marke	
	Jebangi	Haimali	Rumjali	
		Khala	Harimange	

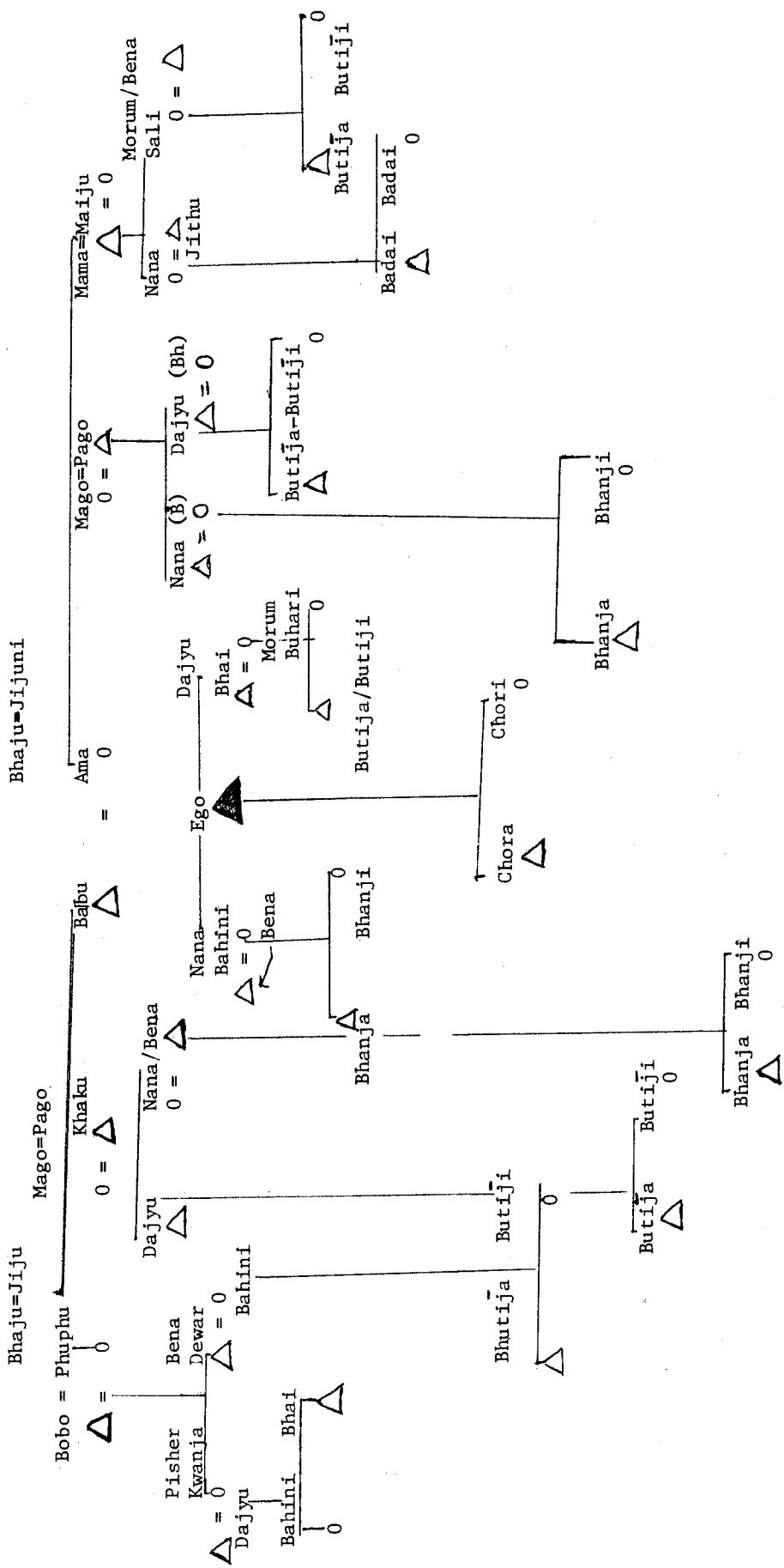
Marriages, then, are permitted within a thar (i.e. a Buda can marry another Buda), but not within a localized lineage group (i.e. a Baijali Buda cannot marry another Baijali Buda). Because of the preference to marry within the local area, most of the lineages have bride-giving (maiti)/bride-taking (bhanja) relationships to all other lineages within Thabang. Recently, marriages have been contracted between members of large lineages. These families justified the marriage because there was no living relative or remembered ancestor common to both families. Although some people in Thabang condemn such marriage practise, it is becoming more acceptable. To the north, especially in Taka, where these lineages are quite large, marriage within the lineage group is quite common. There the rule is stated that no marriages are permitted within 14 generations. The first marriage contracted between two lineages (daju-bhai)⁶ within a localized lineage group is referred to as 'breaking the bones', a conception based on the belief common to many groups in Nepal that males contribute the bones and structural parts of the body while females the flesh and soft parts of the body.

In Thabang, the people themselves explain the marriage rule as preferred matrilineal cross-cousin marriage with the stipulation that one cannot marry into a lineage whose women are classificatory sister's children (bhanji). (Refer to kinship chart). If one translates this into bride-giving/bride-taking relationships, the rule forbids the reversal of existing relationships; a lineage cannot take a bride from a lineage to which it has traditionally given brides or vice versa. The reason seems to be that this would confuse the existing status ties of rights and obligations created by prior marriage exchanges.⁷

Matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is common among the Magar. Marriages between matrilateral cross-cousins were once arranged while the couple were both still children although this is no longer standard practise. Kinship terms bear out the originally heavy stress on this marriage rule; a man addresses his wife's parents as mama-maiju (MB and MBW, consistent with Nepali) whether his wife is his actual cross-cousin or not. His wife addresses his parents as Phuphu-Bobo (FZ and FZH; bobo is particularly a Kham kin term). The term for mother's brother's daughter is also indicative of this preference; she is called sali, a term usually meaning wife's younger sister in Nepali. In Thabang, it refers to these two and to younger brother's wife.

Although a few marriages are still arranged, it has become more common for children to choose their own spouses. However, the tight web of bride-giving/bride-taking relationships and the use of classificatory kin terms greatly limit the choice of marriage partners. All members of the village are addressed by kin terms, both actual and classificatory. Thus flirtation or marriage is permitted only with those women whom a man calls sali. The two most recent marriages witnessed in the village were both with actual matrilateral cross-cousins, although the individuals themselves chose to marry and one couple did so secretly without their parents' knowledge.

KINSHIP CHART - KHAM MAGARS



This pattern of marriage between matrilateral cross-cousins is not so strong as before, however, due to an increased contact with marriageable partners from other villages. Numerous fairs are held throughout the year in various surrounding Panchayats. It is becoming more popular for local teenagers to attend these fairs, and it is there that they come into contact with unmarried people from other Magar villages. Girls go to sell liquor and pork and they flirt freely with their customers since there is no parental supervision. Although this considerably widens their choice of partners, most girls still marry within their own communities so they will be close to their maiti (natal home). However, there does seem to be a trend toward marriages between people from more distant Panchayats.

In the northern villages, marriageable girls are openly permitted to have sexual relations with potential marriage partners in community houses where teenagers gather to sing and dance in the evenings. In the more southern villages, such as Thabang, however, sexual activity is more restricted. Although young people gather to sing and dance at night, premarital sexual relations are not publicly condoned and they attempt to keep them secret when they do occur. Such relationships may lead to marriage, especially if a girl becomes pregnant. If the couple choose not to marry, several courses are open to the girl. She can request some compensation from the boy, which is usually given upon formal request before the Pradhan Panch. It is more likely that she will try to hide the fact that she is pregnant, however, and rely upon local abortion measures or infanticide. Statistics on abortion and infanticide are hard to gather, but female informants report that both are options for young women who do not wish either to marry or raise an illegitimate child.

Magar society is patrilineal. Traditionally, a woman cannot inherit, although villagers now follow the Nepalese national law which entitles an unmarried daughter over 35 years of age to a share of her father's ancestral property. Men without sons or close lineage brothers may pass their property on to daughters by local customary law. One young woman inherited her Father's estate at his death as there were no close male relatives to inherit. Her sister divorced her husband to come and live on the estate because she had no children. Both are now quite well-off. They make enough cash by selling blankets and by selling liquor and meat regularly to pay hired labourers to do most of the agricultural work on their land. They are even able to dress more stylishly than their neighbours. Other women are very ambivalent toward these two sisters. To some women they are socially reprehensible and certainly witches; to others they are lucky and to be respected for living so well and so independently of men.

Residence patterns may be either patrilocal or neolocal. Elder brothers generally set up separate households with their share of the property within a few years after marriage, while the youngest brother stays with his parents and inherits the house. This pattern gives wives of older brothers considerable independence. Indeed, it is

usually the wife who initiates the break from her husband's parents. This can cause conflict between the father-in-law and the bride. The father-in-law is reluctant to divide up his estate to satisfy what he sees as the whim of his son's new wife.

Despite the variety of choices open to women, the majority of marriages are monogamous and the majority of women do not divorce. Most women marry once and remain in their husband's household for the rest of their life. If they are widowed after bearing male children, they remain with their youngest son and his family, supported by his share of the property.

This is the ideal, and women who live differently usually wish they did not have to do so, although this opinion is by no means universal. If the ideal course is not open to a woman for reasons discussed in what follows, or if she is unhappy with her married position, a variety of courses are open to her.

Polygamy

Marriages may be polygamous as well as monogamous. Polygamy is an old custom apparently practised for several reasons. The first is male prestige. It is common for a fairly wealthy villager or a returned soldier to take a second or third wife as a way of expressing his social status (and manhood). Men with several wives are quite proud of this fact and this is often the subject of much joking and boasting. The second reason is labour shortage. Women do most of the agricultural labour, except for ploughing. In addition, they collect firewood and carry water, both of which are crucial and time-consuming activities.

The sheep and goat herders in Thabang are migratory. Most men must take their animals north in the summer months to Taka-Bachhi, Hukam and Maikot Panchayats (four months - mid-June to mid-September).⁸ In the winter, they go south to Kata in Dang. Cattle are kept in gots near the village during post-harvest season and the winter months. During the summer months, they are kept in gots in the high pasture near or in the forests. Wealthier families hire herders for this purpose or send a male member of the household up to the got for an extended period. If there are several men in the household, they may alternate for a few weeks at a time. Women usually remain in the village and perform most of the agricultural labour. In addition, during the spring season until the potato crop is harvested, the women must carry grain supplies periodically up to the gots. After the potato crop is ripe, herders live mainly on milk products and potatoes with occasional supplements of grain, brought infrequently by women in the household. Thus, a household with herds of sheep or goats needs women to do all the work in the village as well as to make periodic trips to the gots with food supplies.

Men with considerable land holdings prefer to marry another wife rather than depend on hired labour. In addition, those villagers who have sheep and goats need someone to weave and prepare wool. Although both men and women spin wool, women generally do the carding, washing and fluffing of the fiber and they do all of the weaving of woollen cloth. As mentioned above, women also make cloth from hemp and puwa, which is a time-consuming and exclusively female task. Families may 'borrow' a female relative to help in these and agricultural activities; a richer man may decide to take a second wife.

The third and most common reason for polygamy is the first wife's failure to produce a son. The mortality rate is very high among the Magars, and almost half the children die before adulthood.⁹ The desire for male progeny is high, as only male children carry the line and only sons can properly perform the death rites that insure their father's passage to the realm of the ancestors. A man without a male child will often take a second wife, even if he is not financially well-off. Since informants claim that sisters are more apt to get along well as co-wives, there is a preference for a man to take his wife's sister as a second wife.¹⁰

The second (or third) wife is subordinate to the first in status. It is generally the elder wife who makes decisions about household work patterns, household expenditures, etc. As would be expected, polygamous marriages can set up considerable conflict between wives, especially between a woman who has no sons and a young pretty wife, who usurps her place and whose children will inherit her husband's property. A man's decision to take another wife generally leads to great disputes with the first wife, although she is generally powerless to prevent the marriage.¹¹ She may refuse to live with the new wife or vice versa and the husband may be forced to build his new wife a separate house. If he is the youngest or only son, he may move in with his new wife and leave his eldest wife with his parents. He is required by customary law to maintain both his wives, although favourite wives often manage to divert a major part of his income to their household.

Polygamy does not always result in conflict between wives. The older woman may indeed welcome a younger wife who can share the workload. If the first wife is old and past childbearing age, there will not be a conflict unless she has children of her own whose exclusive rights to the property can be usurped if the new wife bears children to her new husband. However, all children inherit equally, regardless of the seniority of their mother. Women with only female children (who could inherit if there are no male children) will be threatened by a rival who may well bear a son.

Marital Age

The age of women at marriage varies considerably. The normal range is between 15 and 25 for a woman but most women marry later.¹² The pattern of later marriage can be attributed to several factors.

First is the lack of concern about the sexual purity of a bride. As mentioned earlier, premarital relationships are not severely condemned although not publicly condoned. Hence, there is no pressure to marry one's daughter before or soon after puberty. Secondly, marriage usually entails the transfer of a considerable amount of gold and copper goods with the bride as insurance for the future. Because of the time it takes to accumulate this capital, marriages are relatively late. Because the elder sons usually set up their own households within a few years of marriage, marriages are generally not arranged for them until the family can afford to split up the estate. Another reason is that couples who choose their own partners tend to marry later into their teens and early twenties when they are relatively mature.¹³ Young women also have a chance to earn considerable personal wealth while in their father's house through the sale of liquor and wool goods. The initial capital and grain to make liquor is provided by the family and the girl is entitled to all of the profits. Although she is expected to use part of her profits to buy some luxury goods and luxury food, such as meat, for family consumption, most of the money is her own to be taken with her at marriage. She invests increasingly in her own grain supplies for liquor but the household continues to give her a certain amount of their own grain as well. A young teenage girl will thus seldom marry before she has had a chance to generate cash for clothing and jewelry and a few trips to a distant Bazaar. This has an effect on young men's marriage preferences as well. A young man usually prefers to marry a girl who has accumulated a certain amount of cash and jewelry as she brings this into his household at marriage.

Despite the factors mitigating against early marriage, the marriage age in Thabang seems to be decreasing. Part of the reason for this may be that arranged marriages are decreasing. Love marriages usually are performed with a minimal ceremony and at minimal expense. The families of a couple who wish to marry when relatively young can afford the ceremony earlier. Many older women attribute the slightly decreasing age to the fact that formerly unmarried daughters did not have to work very hard. Increased labour shortage and economic pressure has changed this. Women nowadays work as hard before marriage as they do after.¹⁴

If they have brothers to inherit the estate, women tend to marry soon after their parents die. Brothers are usually less lenient with their sisters than their own parents were. They usually pressure the sister to work harder for the family as she is absorbing part of the income. The brother's wife usually resents the sister as well and may pressure her to work harder even if the brother is lenient. Usually, a girl in this position either marries or goes to live with a widowed relative, who will welcome the extra labour. One young girl was living with her youngest brother after her parents died. Soon after her elder brother died, leaving a widow and a four-year-old son, the girl moved in with the widow to provide extra labour and obtain some freedom from her brother. Her marriage expenses are still the responsibility of her brother, but all other expenses are provided by

her sister-in-law. Both women are entrepreneurs, attending all the local fairs and selling food and liquor and raising pigs for sale.

Divorce

Divorce is common in Magar society. A young girl may marry two or three times before she chooses the husband she will remain with. The reasons given for divorce are: not getting along with her husband, not getting along with her mother-in-law, or falling in love with someone else. A woman obtains an informal divorce by either returning permanently to her maiti (natal home) or by running off with another man (jari). If she runs off with another man, her husband will call her lineage members together and demand that they return the girl. The couple will be brought before the Pradhan Panch and the lover sued for compensation by the husband. The first time, a woman runs off, the standard customary fee is about 1000 Rs.; the second time, 500 Rs.; the third time, half again, but this is hard to claim. If the girl returns to her maiti, she may also be sued for compensation, but often in this case she must pay it herself - her family will not always give her the money.

One young girl, whose parents died and who was living with her brother, ran off twice and had to pay compensation each time from her own money. The first time, the cost was 900 Rs. She paid half, borrowed 300 Rs. to pay part of the rest and finally gave the lineage a goat to supply the rest. The second time, she paid 450 Rs. from money she earned selling liquor at fairs.

A woman seldom divorces after the birth of a child.¹⁵ Perhaps, this is because of her higher status in her husband's house vis-a-vis the child. If she does divorce, the male children automatically go to her husband. Female children generally go with her if they are very small. In one case, a woman divorced her husband due to incompatibility and took her small daughter with her. Five years later, her former husband's elder sister kidnapped the child from a field near the house of her new husband, a day's walk from the village. The child was raised in the ex-husband's house for the next eight years. When the child was 13, the woman returned to claim her daughter but was unsuccessful. At present, the husband is offering to pay his ex-wife gold for the child, but no decision has been reached.

Widowhood

Widows in Magar society are not subject to the social degradation and economic dependency faced by higher caste Hindu women. If a young widow has male children, she will keep her husband's house and property and borrow bullocks for ploughing from her husband's lineage brothers, supplying them meals occasionally. If she has no male children, but only a female child, his lineage members often give her a tijara, or half of her husband's property. This she can use while alive, but the property reverts to his brothers at her death. Her funeral expenses

must be borne from her own income. This tijara gives some widows considerable independence.

A widow can become an entrepreneur and earn a sizable amount. If she has only young children, she may ask a female relative to move in with her to share the work. One widow had one daughter and wished to leave the girl some security. The widow earned enough cash from the sale of her gold, blankets, pigs and liquor to buy the house and some of her tijara land to give the property to her daughter at her death. Widows may remarry with little social condemnation. Although a widow is usually condemned for open flirtation and for attending fairs to sell liquor, there is little talk after she remarries.

There is a religious stigma to widowhood, which is reflected in the inferior ritual purity of the widow. A widow is traditionally brought in to clean a house of death pollution because any other woman who performed this task would cause the death of her husband. Widows are also quickly suspected of witchcraft.

Many men from the area have traditionally been recruited into the British Gorkha and Indian armies. Often their wives are sole claimants on pensions if these men die in service or after their return. Widows may thus have the advantage of a pension in addition to tijara.

Case Histories

As the marriage patterns are quite variant it is useful to present some examples of a few marriages in the area.

1. Ram is a wealthy man who owns land in the Terai bought with cash from selling his sheep herd. When his first wife had no children, he married her younger sister, but she also has had no children. Both get along well and live in the same house. The elder wife makes most decisions concerning labour division, household expenditures, etc. The younger girl makes most of the meals and carries most of the water, although both share equally in agricultural tasks.
2. Bal Man is a shepherd who has been married five times. His first wife divorced him due to tension with his mother and left him one male child. He remarried but the second wife died of an illness, and because he had no male children from this marriage, he took a third wife. The third wife was also barren so he married again, setting the third wife up in her own house near the village. The fourth wife had a daughter, but no sons, so recently, he married a young girl who lives with him and his fourth wife and their daughter. The last wife has given birth to a son. The youngest wife is the same age as his daughter and they often work together.

3. Basanta is a forty-five year old Magar who comes from a wealthy family. He married at nineteen and his first wife gave birth to a daughter. A few years later they set up a separate house. He soon fell in love with a younger girl and married her. She refused to live with his first wife and made him build her a house soon after the birth of her first son. He moved in with this wife and left his first house to the first wife. The younger convinced him to stop visiting the elder wife. After the birth of two daughters, he fell in love with another girl and married her. The third wife lived with the second and each gave birth to a son about the same time. They nursed each other's children and seemed to get along fairly well. A conflict ensued between them, however, and the second wife convinced Basanta to send the third wife back to her maiti. He still visits this younger wife occasionally, but clearly, the second wife has control of his affections. The first wife gets no income from her husband at all. The third wife gets a meager share plus occasional presents, while the second wife and her children run the household, manage their land and reap most of the benefits from his various entrepreneurial ventures which have included a small store and sale of hashish and medicinal herbs.
4. Krishna Bahadur has three wives. They all have separate houses. At first, the original two wives lived together, but after their eldest sons reached the age of about ten, they separated and the second wife moved into her maternal uncle's house in the bottom floor. The first wife has four children, two sons and two daughters, and the second wife one son. Krishna stays mainly with the third wife, and she is clearly the favourite. As he is the only surviving son his first wife lives with his father on a pension from his brother who died in service in the Indian army. She has a small share of the property. He keeps contact with all three wives, however, and can often be seen combing his second wife's hair or sitting on the front steps with his first wife and his father. Both of the first wives are extremely jealous of his newest wife and often work together in the first wife's courtyard discussing her and complaining of the injustice their husband has done by giving most of his income to his favourite wife and her children.
5. Suki is 24 and has been married twice. She ran off with her first husband, but two months later divorced him, paying 900 rupees in compensation from her own money. She returned home but after her parents died ran off again, only to divorce four months later. Her second husband demanded 500 rupees which she paid, again from her earnings from selling liquor and blankets. She returned to live with a married sister, as she did not get along with her brother. She was unhappy there, however, so she moved in with Basanta's second wife, (see case 3), her mother's sister's child, to help share the work load after the third wife moved to her maiti. She claims, she will never remarry but regularly attends fairs to earn money and flirt with eligible men.

6. Ram Pura is 45 years old and was Bal Man's first wife. After she returned to her maiti, she married a veteran and since has had another son and two daughters. Her first son is away in India but stays both with her and Bal Man when he comes home on visits.
7. Mon Pura is about 50. She was married to Ram Bahadur as his second wife when about 23, but had no children. His first wife died leaving him a son and a daughter. Ram Bahadur died leaving her in charge of the property. The son went to India as a soldier and died there. The daughter went with a husband to work in India, but returned at her brother's death to claim his pension. Mora Pura remarried three years after her husband's death and had a son and daughter by this marriage. When her new husband gambled away all his property and tried to claim her gold, given to her by her maiti at marriage, she separated from him. He went to the Terai with a new wife to start a hotel. Mon Pura bought back some of his property and his house with her gold and various earnings from selling liquor and weaving. She has sent both her children to high school with borrowed money. Her brother now does ploughing for her and heavy labour and she often goes to work with her sister and brother-in-law in exchange for meals and some grain.
8. Shanti is a widow who was married twice as a teenager, for a few months at a time. She has one daughter. She acquired tijara from her third husband when he died and brought her husband's sister's daughter to live with her after the girl's mother died and her father remarried. Recently, the girl married her cousin and moved out. Shanti then married a returned soldier as his third wife. Before this marriage, however, she bought half of the tijara, (house and some land) to insure her young daughter's future.
9. Jamuna is the daughter of a widow who has been divorced three times. The first two marriages as a teenager were unsuccessful, and as she had no children she returned to her maiti. Her reason for these marriages seems to be that, after her mother died, she was forced to do most of the household work. During the last marriage, she gave birth to a daughter, but the child died after seven months. Her sasural (husband's parents) accused her of adultery while her husband was away in India in army service and after a long dispute with them, they wrote her husband convincing him to divorce her. She returned to her maiti to live with her widowed father and his son and buhari (daughter-in-law). She sued the soldier for compensation in court and won. He has now eloped with another village girl and run off with her to India.

Conclusion

A Kham Magar woman has many options for marriage. Although she cannot inherit from her father ordinarily, she can acquire considerable income from entrepreneurial activities before and after marriage. As

a young bride, she is not powerless as is the case with many Hindu groups, for she always has the option of divorce if she is unhappy with her husband. If she does not get along with his parents she can pressure her husband to set up a separate household or return to her maiti if he refuses.

Sons may insure a woman a secure position in her husband's lineage and/or household after marriage, but this is not always true. A woman's husband may easily take another wife, and if this wife has male children, they compete with her own children for a share of her husband's property. A Magar woman may thus find it necessary to take advantage of her other options. Her entrepreneurial activities give her considerable independence and even if widowed or replaced by a new wife, she usually has her own house and some property to support herself and her children.

Most marriages, however, are monogamous¹⁶ and the majority of women marry only once and remain married throughout their life. Although most women acquire their social position vis-a-vis their husband and their children, there are always other strategies for a woman who does not have this security.

Marriage patterns have an important interrelation with economic roles and status in Kham Magar society. Women engage in numerous entrepreneurial activities and generate a sizable amount of income before marriage which provides them some insurance after marriage. During marriage, these activities are an important source of family income. Widowed or divorced women rely upon these activities to maintain their independence in a strongly patrilineal society. Without this economic independence, women could not choose to live independently of husbands or fathers.

There is definitely a close relation between women's marital patterns and their economic independence. To what extent each of these factors is causal, however, is an open question. What is important is that these two factors do reinforce one another. In taking the options of divorce and establishing an independent household, women extend their own independence and make it possible for other women who wish to become independent of male relatives to move in with them. Their economic independence in turn makes it possible for them to choose between a variety of strategies. Further investigation of the Magar and other groups is needed to further examine this interrelation.

Footnotes

1. The national mean age for marriage is 16.8 for women.
2. The data for this paper was collected as part of on-going research for a Ph.D. on the Kham Magar. Research is being conducted under the auspices of CNAS at Tribhuvan University and the University of Wisconsin, Madison. I am grateful to these institutions for their support and guidance and to Dr. Lynn Bennett for her exchange of ideas which helped in the formulation of this paper.

3. For a more complete discussion of the Kham language see David and Nancy Watters, A Kham-English/English-Kham Dictionary, Tribhuvan University Press, Kathmandu, 1973.
4. The divisions Pun, Roka, etc. are called thar in Kham. This term in Nepali is the final division of a group defining marriage exogamy. For these Magar this use of thar is thus very confusing. Pun and Roka are more closely a sub-tribe and the unit important in marriage is what I have called localized lineage. I use "Localized lineage" rather than thar or the term "clan". Both of these are not congruent with Magar organization either conceptually or linguistically for this subdivision. There is no local term other than thar for either division, and thar more commonly refers to what I have termed sub-tribe. Conceptually localized lineage is the most accurate approximation of the subdivision within Pun, Roka, etc.
5. The relation of this thar to the others is somewhat confusing. According to Jhankri informants, the original shaman (jhankri) was the product of an incestuous union between a Roka brother and sister. His descendants are the Jhankri thar. In Thabang, the majority of shamans are of this thar, but to the north most shamans are of the Buda thar. It is possible that this was a localized lineage of Rokas, who assumed this name after migrating to the area because of the prestige that accrues to claiming descent from the first shaman.
6. The daju-bhai are the members of a lineage who share common ancestor spirits (pittar). The pittar of any household include males up to the great-grand-father of the sons alive in the household. Thus no marriages could take place even within a large lineage in less than 5 generations.
7. The bride-giving/bride-taking relationship carries with it important rights and obligations. The bride-givers are of higher status than bride-takers and usually request work from the bride-takers for weddings and funerals. In addition, the bride-givers can ask for and expect a certain amount of labour from the son-in-law. Reversal of the status relationship would create social and ritual problems.
8. This is now very expensive. Individual farmers charge herders 1 Rs. per adult sheep or goat and Panchayats an additional . 50 Rs. per head in the northern and summer pastures.
9. In a sample survey conducted in Thabang 47% of the 160 children born died before adulthood.
10. In the survey conducted of marriages, there were three instances of this in the main village.

11. Women are becoming increasingly aware of their legal rights and one wife with male children prevented her husband from taking another wife by threatening to go to court. If she had not been supported by her mother-in-law, however, she would have had little recourse but to accept a co-wife. (Mothers-in-law seldom take the side of their daughters-in-law). Her husband can threaten her with divorce and the need to find a new economic base. If a man wishes his wife to sign a statement of manjur (permission) she seldom has the option to refuse.
12. In a sample of 47 married women of all ages, the average age at marriage was 19.1. Of the 25 women over 35, average age was 20.2. The average age for the 27 women under 35 was 18.
13. See Mc Farlane, Alan, Resources and Population: A Study of the Gurungs of Nepal (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976), p. 223.
14. At present, I do not have enough data to support or refute this claim.
15. See Rex and Shirley Jones, "Limbu Women and the Divorce Cycle," Kailash, 1976, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 169-84.
16. In a sample survey, I conducted, out of 73 recorded marriages involving 60 women: 9 were polygamous, (15%), and 13 ended in divorce, (21%).

