

Tribal Marriage System in India - A Sociological Analysis

***K.M.Chandrankantha, Lecturer, Govt First Grade College, Tekkalakote.**

Abstract

Marriage is one of the important social institutions. It is a means of establishing a family through which the society perpetuates itself. A successful marriage is presupposed trust, mutual affection, capacity to adjust and sharing the responsibilities equally, at every stage of the life. Marriage in India is regarded as one of the most significant life-cycle rituals and is a familial and societal expectation for Hindus. This social process is expressed in the form of rituals and symbols. Every society employs certain forms of symbolic actions and physical symbols to communicate the values, expectations and ethos concerning marriage and family life. For ex. Banjaras, one of the most colourful and vibrant of the Indian tribes, have a unique culture of their own. Banjaras culture is an important grain of the mosaic of the culture of India. Their customs, traditions, language, food and dress habits, in short, their lifestyle is unique which does not have anything in common either with the population of plain areas or with the local tribes. There are very few studies on the banjaras marriage systems, and hence this study. This paper brings under the focus of banjara women's status, leni-deni (giving & taking), gole khayero (eating jaggery), marriage process and practices. The finding shows that the majority of banjaras are now following non-tribal marriage systems. Thereby throwing their own identity into jeopardy.

Marriage is one of the important social institutions and it is a means of establishing a family through which the society perpetuates. This social process is expressed in the form of rituals and symbols. Every society employs certain forms of symbolic actions and uses several physical symbols to communicate the values, expectations and ethos concerning marriage and family life. In traditional Hindu society, marriage was considered a sacrament and not a contract and therefore was expected to be for life. It is important to point out that vivaha (wedding) is generally obligatory for all individuals. According to Kanailal Kapadia (1966), the primary aim of a Hindu marriage is dharma praja (progeny, particularly sons) and rati (pleasure). Furthermore, marriage is regarded not only as a union of two individuals, but also as the union of two families, making them almost like blood relatives. Marriages are religiously, economically,

politically, and socially oriented and they are generally arranged by the elders and extended family members (Chekki 1996; Surender, Prabakaran, and Khan 1998).

Key words: Marriage practice, society, rituals and tribals

Introduction

Marriage as a social institution is an arrangement that enables persons to live together and co-operate with one another in an orderly social life and institutionalised relationship. It is essentially a rearrangement of social structure. In order to understand how it works. We have to examine how it binds persons together by convergence of interest and sentiment and how it controls and minimises those conflicts that may possibly occur due to divergence of sentiment or interest. We may as well examine as to how it contributes to its working as a system. In doing so, we may come to an understanding or explanation as to how the system came into existence.

Marriage makes certain existing relationship particularly that of the bride to her family changed. New social relatives are created. It creates a relationship between the husband and the wife in the first place. It also creates new relationship between the husband and the wife's relatives and between the wife and the husband's relatives on the one hand, and between the relatives of the husbands and those of the wife who are, on both sides, interested in the marriage and in the children that are expected to result from it. In fact, marriage, like birth, death, or initiation at puberty, is rearrangement of structure that is essentially recurring in any society. It is a moment of continuing social process regulated by custom which is institutionalised way of dealing such event. When marriage involves some modification or partial rupture of the relations between the bride and her immediate kin, it is least marked or felt, if the husband goes to live with his parents-in-law in a matri-local society. But it is most marked if the bride leaves her family and goes to live with her husband and his family in patri-local society. Her absence makes her own family suffer a loss. But it would be wrong to interpret the same as economic loss. It is the loss of a person in the family, and it is a breach of family solidarity. This aspect is given symbolic expression between the two kin groups in the forms of hostility by attempting to take or kidnap the bride by force. Either the girl or her kin or both, are expected to make a show of resistance at her being taken away.

Prof. Radcliff Brown (1960: p.50) says, "Customs of this kind are the ritual or symbolic expression of the recognition that marriage entails the breaking of the solidarity that unites a woman to the family in which she has been born and grown up". In fact, such customs may be interpreted as manifestations of recognition accorded to the structural change that has been brought about the marriage. The question of prevalence of payment of bride price in some tribal societies is an important aspect in marriage. Such payment of bride price may be taken as an indemnity or compensation given by the boy's party to the bride's kin for the loss of their daughter. It may also be regarded that such payment gives the husband and his kin certain rights over his wife and the children she bears.

Another indispensable aspect that should be understood is sets of regulations that govern marriage between persons related by kinship or through marriage. In some tribal societies there are rules which prohibit marriage between persons who stand in certain relationship. In some cases there are certain relatives between whose marriage is not merely permitted but is desirable. The term 'preferential marriage' is commonly applied to customs of this kind. The most common form of this system is found in the cross-cousin marriage. Having sufficiently covered some pertinent features on marriage over which attention needs to be focused, it is now expedient that we examine them as to how they are operative among the tribals of the North-East India. For a thorough understanding of the subject matter, it is essential that a brief background as to prevalence of systems of marriage and divorce among the tribals of North-East India is highlighted. The entire North-East India comprising Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, known as 'Seven Sisters' is frequented by different groups of people from time immemorial in the form of migration from Burma and other places. Thus we find people of Mongoloid strains in respect of their physical features, culture, language, etc.

Objective:

This paper seeks to explore the sociological impacts and the advantages and the disadvantages of different kinds of marriages found across different tribes throughout India.

Different types of marriages:

Marriage is a social institution and marriage and family are complementary concepts. As such marriage is found in almost all societies. Without marriage one cannot think of a family.”Marriage is,” say Beals and Hoijar, “a set of cultural patterns to sanction parenthood and to provide a stable background for the care and rearing of children.”

The Tribal Marriages can be classified into the following types:

1. Monogamy:

In this type of marriage one man married to one woman or one woman marries one man. The husband and wife may or may not be (usually not) related to each other before marriage, most of the Indian tribes practise monogamy.

2. Polygamy:

It is the marriage of one person with more than one person of the opposite sex.

It has two sub types:

(a) Polygyny.

(b) Polyandry.

(a) Polygyny:

In this type of marriage one man marries to several women. The husband and wives may or may not be related to each other before marriage. Wives may be related among themselves. When the wives are related to each other as sisters it is called as sororal polygyny. If they are not related as sisters, it is called non-sororal polygyny. Polygyny is found among the Naga tribes, the Gond, the Baiga and the Toda. It is also found among the Lushai, Juang and the Kondh.

Polygyny is practiced among the tribals due to several reasons. First of all, it is practiced due to the imbalance of the sex ratio, where women outnumber men. The second reason is that the practice of polygyny accords higher status and prestige. This is the reason why the tribal chiefs keep many wives. Thirdly the tribals like the Lushai or the Gonds practise polygyny. So that a number of wives and their children will provide the husband with free and reliable labour.

Merits of Polygyny:

Polygyny has the following merits:

- (i) It facilitates better division of labour in the family.
- (ii) It ensures the adequate sexual satisfaction of the husband.
- (iii) It reproduces a number of strong children born to the wives of physically strong men.

The following are the demerits, of polygyny:

- (i) It makes the family a centre of quarrel and spoils family peace.
- (ii) The status of women suffers a serious setback in a polygynous family due to the presence of a number of wives.

- (iii) Children are not properly looked after in the polygynous family.
- (iv) It lacks in better understanding, fellow feeling, sympathy, love and affection among the co-wives.
- (v) It is also disadvantageous from the economic point of view.
- (vi) It snatches away the conjugal love and psychological satisfaction from women.
- (vii) It causes jealousy and suspicion and family instability due to lack of proper understanding among spouses and offspring's.

(b) Polyandry:

In polyandry type of marriage, one woman marries to several men. The wife and the husbands may or may not be related to each other before marriage. The husbands may be related among themselves. If the husbands are all brothers, then this marriage is called fraternal polyandry. If the husbands are not related to each other and share the same wife, it is called non-fraternal polyandry. Polyandry as a form of marriage is very much restricted and is confined to a few tribal communities, mostly along the foothills of the Himalayas. The Kota, the Khasa, the Toda, the Ladani Bota and the Khasi practise this type of marriage. There is evidence to establish the fact that some pre-Dravidian and Dravidian tribes practise Polyandry. Fraternal Polyandry (Adelphic): The Todas of Nilgiri hills and the Khasa practise fraternal polyandry. The elder brother marries j wife and according to this practice of Adelphic, she becomes the wife of all the brothers. She is shared by all the brothers of a family for satisfaction of sexual urge. The minor brothers of the family become her husband after being major. But the elder brother becomes the father of all her children. Non-Fraternal Polyandry (Non-Adelphic): In this form of marriage a woman marries many men who are not necessarily brothers. She satisfies their sexual desire. By turn, going from one husband to another. The husbands may either live in one place or in different places. During her living with one husband, that particular husband enjoys her exclusively for that particular period and others do not have their right at that time. The Nayar women practise non- fraternal polyandry and constitute matriarchal family. Polyandry is practiced due to several reasons. The imbalance in sex ratio, less number of females of marriageable age is another reason. The poor practices polyandry whereas the rich can afford to practise polygyny. Fraternal polyandry is often preferred to keep the family property undivided because, it does not allow the brothers to marry separate wives and live with them in separate households. Higher Bride price may be considered as another cause of polyandry. When the husbands are unable to pay the bride price individually, they may prefer polyandry to monogamy. Bigamy: In Mysore, the Medara and Holiya tribes practise bigamy type of marriage wherein a male is allowed to marry two women at a time. The co-wives are related as sisters.

Preference & Prohibition in Tribal Marriage: All societies have rule and restrictions about whom one may or may not marry. This is referred to as the system of prohibition or encouragement or preference of the choice of male in marriage. Madan & Majumdar write that "All over India, and in other parts of the world as well, we come across rules laying down prohibitions, preferences and prescriptions in deciding the form of marriage." There are certain categories of relatives who come within the prohibitory degree of marital relationship. There are also some other relatives with whom sexual relationship is prohibited. "A Taboo on sexual relationship between closely related kin like parents and children and between siblings is universal. An extension of this "nuclear prohibition" is found

everywhere. Therefore among several tribal communities we find the practice of marrying outside the family, clan, village etc. Violation of this restriction is seriously dealt with. The practice of marrying outside one's own family, clan, village or group is called as Exogamy. Among the Indian tribes we also find another peculiar practice of marrying within one's own group. This marriage within one's own group is known as Endogamy. The Victorian Anthropologist MacLennan, had coined these two terms, which simply meant marrying in and marrying out.

(a) Family Exogamy: Marriage outside the family.

(b) Clan exogamy: Marriage outside the clan.

(c) Village Exogamy: Marriage outside the village. The practice of clan exogamy is widely followed among the Indian tribals like Gond, the Baiga, the Ho, the Korwa, the Khasi, the Nagadsoon. The Munda tribe of Chhotanagpur region practise village exogamy. Tracing the cause of Exogamy, Audrey Richards has pointed out that "in hunting and food gathering societies, food is difficult to obtain. Women and children are generally a burden in such societies, particularly those which rely more on hunting. This could have led to female infanticide, which in consequence, would lead to female scarcity. This must have led to marriage by capture, and the next step—since such capture had to be effected from outside the tribe to exogamy. Thus food scarcity may be, historically speaking a probable cause of exogamy." In his book on the people of India, Sir Herbert Risley has mentioned that "probably there has existed in man a tendency to vary. This desire must have driven man to seek marital alliance with strangers, un-familiar and unknown to him." Westermarck has viewed that having seen all the girls growing up in the village along with him, the male may develop a feeling of aversion for the familiar. This may be explained as the cause of exogamy. According to Malinowski the strong sense of incestuous feeling and the very elaborate rules for the prevention of incest may lead to exogamy.

Endogamy: Majumdar and Madan say that the practice of marrying within one's own tribe or very rarely the clan is called endogamy. Thus, mainly, we find two types of endogamy:

(a) Clan endogamy—Marriage within the clan.

(b) Tribe endogamy — Marriage within the tribe.

The Todas of Nilgiri Hills have two main clans such as Tartharol and the Teivaliol. These clans are endogamous groups, but their subdivisions and sibs practise exogamy. Likewise the Bhils have two endogamous groups such as the Uyale Bhil and the Mele Bhil. Most of the tribes are clan exogamous but phratry and tribe-endogamous. However, now-a-days, some sophisticated tribes in India like the Gond, the Bhil and the Santhal have broken down the barriers of endogamy and have started marrying with the lower castes, for their incorporation into the Hindu castes.

A number of causes may be given in support of the practice of endogamy:

(a) Universal fear of the stronger, unknown and the novel- Generally the tribals are afraid of the neighbor's witchcraft and sorcery. The Korwa tribe practices endogamy particularly on account of that reason.

(b) Territorial and Linguistic factors-Territorial and linguistic factors "impose limits on the communication of thoughts and persons (Spouses) between various groups."

(c) Desire to preserve the socio-cultural identity-Each tribal group possesses its own distinctive socio-cultural identity, sharing enough thought and action pattern. Which they want to preserve through the practice of endogamy.

Preferential Marriages: In certain cases there is a prescription expressed for establishing martial ties with a particular kin or preferences designed to promote inter-familial cordiality by making certain linkages imperative. Such marriages are known as preferential marriages. The tribes in India practise the following types of preferential marriages:

(a) Cousin marriage.

(i) Cross cousin marriage.

(ii) Parallel cousin marriage.

(b) Levirate

(i) Junior Levirate.

(ii) Senior Levirate.

(c) Sororate. Cousin Marriage: The Gond, the Kharia, the Oraon, the Khasi, and the Kadar practise cousin marriage.

The cousin marriages can be sub- divided into:

(i) Cross-cousin marriage and

(ii) parallel cousin marriage.

The marriage between mother's brother's (Maternal uncle's) children and father's sister's (paternal aunt's) children is called as cross cousin marriage. Majumdar and Madan hold that "cross-cousin marriage as a form of exogamy, the only form of exogamy under dual organisation, is often explained to be a device for avoiding payment of a high bride price and also for maintaining property in the household". Cross Cousin marriage is found among different tribes in southern India. The Gonds of Madhya Pradesh practise cross-cousin marriage and call it; 'dudhlautawa' or the 'return of milk'. This is called so because the bride price paid by the husband for his wife comes back to his own family through the marriage of his daughter with the son of his wife's brother. Marrying one's father's brother's child or mother's sister's child is called as parallel cousin marriage. The main purpose of preferential mating, according to Levi-Strauss is to strengthen the solidarity of a tribal group.

Levirate: Sometimes, preferential marriages also aim at solidifying the inter-family unity. If a man dies, his wife is inherited by the brother of the deceased husband. This practice of being actual or potential mate to one's husband's brother is called levirate. The custom of Levirate is found among several tribes like Santal, Ho, Saora, Bhuinya, Munda etc. Marriage of the widow with the deceased husband's elder brother is called senior Levirate. But when she marries to the younger brother of the dead husband, it is called as junior Levirate. Levirate as a form of marriage is useful for the tribal society. First of all it allows widow remarriage. Secondly it provides the widow with social security within the same family. Thirdly it also

provides social security to the offspring's of the widow which is not possible in other type of widow remarriage. Fourthly it strengthens the solidarity between inter-family unity.

Sororate: The practice of being actual or potential mate to one's wife's sisters is called sororate. Majumdar and Madan holds that "when several sisters are simultaneously or potentially, the spouses of the same man the practice is called sororate. The death of a spouse is compensated by supplying a new spouse, generally a younger brother of the deceased". The custom of Sororate is found among the tribal communities where the practice of bride-price is prevalent. Sororate also recognizes marriage as a tie between two families and lays emphasis on the acceptance of inter- familiar obligations.

Positive sanction in Tribal Marriage: The following types of marriage in the tribal societies are accorded positive sanction:

(a) Tribe endogamy.

(b) Clan exogamy.

(c) Preferential Mating.

The tribe exogamy, clan endogamy (incest) are looked down upon, pre-marital or post-marital sexual relationship is .not uncommon among tribal societies in India Indulgences in this kind of sexual activities is possible even without the displeasure of the society because pre-marital chastity is not stressed in marriages. The tribes living in the central India do not view pre-marital relationship seriously unless that leads to pregnancy. If it results in pregnancy, the male partner is compelled to marry the pregnant girl. In the Bastar district of Madhya Pradesh, the Muria Gonds allow the bachelors and Maiden to sleep in a common dormitory. They are free to indulge in pairing off in the dormitory. The Oraons, the Khaddi, and the Hos indulge in pairing off activities on important festivals like Magha-parab, among the Konyak Nagas a girl may indulge in pre-marital sex till she becomes a mother. The Khas allow pre- marital sex but strictly prohibit any extra-marital sexual relationship for the wives.

Conclusion

We are living in the 21st century but a majority of people's minds are parochial. They date back to a million years! Some are, on the face of it, conservative, and some are hidden conservatives, i.e. they seem liberal from the outside, but from the inside, they are next level conservatives. It feels bad, that even after so many years our society doesn't have progressive thinking. But, it is a blessing to have a community who are progressive, and yes! I'm talking about the very same community who are tagged as backward, jungle, untouchables, पिछड़े जाति and what not – the tribals! They were progressive from the very beginning.

Tribal marriage is a complex marriage system, as it includes marriage by negotiation, marriage by trial, marriage by Bride Price and a few marriages on marriage by elopement. Ninety five per cent Banjara marriages are arranged by trial and the remaining are marriages by elopement. There is an argument that tribal customs and traditions are not easily amenable to change. But it is proved to be wrong. Changes in tribal customs and traditions are taking place rapidly.

The disturbing feature of this change is that the most retrograde and unjust aspects of the other cultures are being absorbed into it and positive aspects are being eliminated. For instance, it is becoming fairly common now for Banjara girls to pay dowry instead of accepting the traditional "Mamlo", of course, giving mamlo and taking dowry, both are equally undesirable. It is the responsibility of all of us to prevent the decay in tribal culture and to initiate a new direction for positive changes for the betterment of the tribal community, now a days tribal traditional marriage system we could not find in plain areas except in rural some pockets only. All most all Banjara tribes are following non-tribal (Hindu) marriage system.

References

1. Key human rights concerns highlighted by Amnesty International in advance of Swaziland's Universal Periodic Review hearing in October 2011 . Amnesty International
2. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Twenty-eighth session, United Nations, 14 February 2003.
3. Women in France Archived 4 March at the Wayback Machine. Modern and Contemporary France, Taylor and Francis.
4. France's leading women show the way Archived 28 July 2013 at the Wayback Machine. Parisvoice.com. Retrieved on 6
5. Lesson – The French Civil Code (Napoleonic Code) – Teaching Women's Rights From Past to Present. Womeninworldhistory.com. Retrieved on 6 April 2013.
6. Bennhold, Katrin (5 October 2010). 20 Years After Fall of Wall, Women of Former East Germany Thrive, The New York Times.
7. Trzcinski, Eileen and Holst, Elke (April 2010) Gender Differences in Subjective Well-Being in and out of Management Positions, German Institute for Economic Research, Berlin.
8. Spain – Social Values And Attitudes. Countrystudies.us. Retrieved
9. Statistics by Area – Attitudes towards wife-beating – Statistical table Archived 4 July 2014 at the Wayback Machine. Childinfo.org. Retrieved
10. "UNICEF Data" (PDF).
11. "Decriminalization of adultery and defenses". www.endvawnow.org.
12. "HUDOC - European Court of Human Rights". hudoc.echr.coe.int. Retrieved
13. Lichauco de Leon, Sunshine. "The fight to make divorce legal in the Philippines". CNN.
14. http://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1828&context=faculty_scholarship
15. "The Economics of Dowry and Brideprice" (PDF). econ.arts.ubc.ca. Archived from the original (PDF)
16. "Human rights groups ask NWFP Govt. to ban 'bride price' to curb women Trafficking". Thefreelibrary.com. 18 January 2010.
17. iSite Interactive Limited (21 November 2011). "PNG Police blame bride price for violence in marriage". Islands Business. Archived from the original on 26 January 2013.
18. "Addressing dowry-related violence through criminalization of dowry demands". Endvawnow.org.
19. "Changing Patterns of Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States". CDC/National Center for Health Statistics. 13 May 2009. Retrieved 24 September 2011.

20. The 1997 Global Study on Family Values found that only 3% of respondents in Iceland, 8% in France, and 9% in Germany, thought that it was "wrong" to have a child outside marriage. Global Study of Family Values. An International Gallup Poll. Family Values Differ Sharply Around the World. hi-ho.ne.jp
21. In many parts of the world, especially in Muslim majority countries, children born outside marriage and their mothers face severe social and legal difficulties Refugee Review Tribunal Australia. mrt-rrt.gov.au. 21 April 2009.
22. European Convention on the Legal Status of Children Born out of Wedlock. Conventions.coe.int. Retrieved on 5
23. Council of Europe – ETS no. 085 – European Convention on the Legal Status of Children Born out of Wedlock. Conventions.coe.int. Retrieved on 5
24. Family Law Act 1975 – SECT 69Q Presumption of paternity arising from cohabitation. Austlii.edu.au. Retrieved on 5 September.
25. ECHR : Anayo v. Germany Publication : [not yet received] Archived 26 February 2014 at the Wayback Machine. Sim.law.uu.nl. Retrieved on 5
26. Parental rights and responsibilities. GOV.UK (1 July 2013). Retrieved on 5
27. Legal guardianship and cohabiting couples. Citizensinformation.ie (8 March 2013). Retrieved on 5
28. "Global Children's Trends | The Sustainable Demographic Dividend". Sustainedemographicdividend.org.
29. Joice Melo Vieira. The Evolution of Births Outside of Marriage, Paternal Recognition and Children's Rights in Brazil. Department of Demography (IFCH) and Population Studies Center (Nepo), State University of Campinas
30. "Eurostat – Tables, Graphs and Maps Interface (TGM) table". ec.europa.eu.
31. "FastStats". www.cdc.gov. 8.
32. AGD. "National Apology for Forced Adoptions". www.ag.gov.au. Retrieved
33. "Gillard sorry for forced adoptions". BBC News.
34. Bawah, AA.; Akweongo P; Simmons R; Phillips JF. (1999). "Women's fears and men's anxieties: the impact of family planning on gender relations in northern Ghana" (PDF). *Studies in Family Planning*. 30 (1): 54–66. doi:10.1111/j.1728-4465.1999.00054.x. hdl:2027.42/73927. PMID 10216896.
35. Sing Ging Su, (1922) *The Chinese Family System*, BiblioBazaar, pp. 54–5. ISBN 0-554-50635-1