

Marriage system among the Bodos

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Abstract

Marriage is an important institution of the society. Marriage is the union between a man and a female to create new generation. Marriage creates new social relationships and reciprocal rights between spouses, between each and the kin of the other. Every society has recognized procedure for creating the relationship of marriage. Marriage is a more or less permanent association of two spouses for the purpose of giving social sanction to progeny.

Bodo is the name and language of a community. They belong to Tibeto-Barman language family. They have rich in culture, language and literature. Actually Bodos are exogamy in culture. In Bodo community marriage takes an important role to establish a family. The marriage is celebrated by social order in Bodo society.

The present paper will highlight the marriage system among Bodo society. Primary and secondary data were collected for the purpose.

Keywords: bodo, marriage, society, signs, family, spouses, dress, ornaments, religion

Introduction

Bodo is the major Kachari tribe of Assam and they constitute an important ethnic group in North East India. Ethnically, Bodos are of Mongoloid origin and their language belongs to Bodo sub-section of the Bodo-Naga section under the Assam-Burmese group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese language family (Grierson 1903). The Tibeto-Burman group of language has close affinity with languages like Bodo, Garo, Kok-Borok, Lalung, Sonowal, Rabha, Mech, Deori, etc. Bodos have their own language and literature, which are known as Boro language and literature. They have their own culture, tradition, belief and customs. The word Bodo was first used by B. H. Hodgson in 1846. It is mainly spoken in northern part of Assam, Jhapa district in Nepal and West Garo Hills of Meghalaya. It is also spoken in Karbi Anglong district of Assam. This paper gives a glimpse of marriage system of Bodos however it will not mention the marriage system of Bodo Christian, Bodos who live in Bengal, Nepal and Bhutan.

Marriage is an institution of society which admits men and women to family life. It is said that marriages are made in heaven and celebrated on earth. The popular belief is true to some extent, because it is a special bond shared between two souls, who tie the wedding knot after promising to be companions for a lifetime. It is the physical, mental and spiritual union of two souls. It brings significant stability and substance to human relationships, which is otherwise incomplete. It plays a crucial role in transferring the culture and civilization from one generation to the other, so that the human race is prospered. The institution of marriage is beneficial to the society as a whole, because it is the foundation of the family, which in turn is the fundamental building block of the society. For regulating sex relationship, society has designed and evolved the institution of marriage. It provides permission for sex relationship between the two particular individuals of opposite sex and grants legitimacy to the offspring born out of this relationship. Marriage as a

universal institution of human society from primitive to the modern time has had the institution of marriage but its form and nature has varied from time to time, from society to society.

Objective of the Study

To study the system of marriage among the Bodos and traditional superstitious in their social custom.

Methodology

The data is collected mainly from the primary and secondary sources.

Primary data is collected directly from the field by observation and questionnaire.

Secondary data is collected from available written record, books, journal, magazine and Wikipedia.

Definition of Marriage

Some of the definitions of marriage are given here.

According to Westermarck, marriage can be defined, "as a relation of one or more men and women which is recognized by custom or law, and involves certain rights and duties both in the case of the parties entering the union and in the case of the children of it."

According to Jacobs and Stern, "Marriage is a term for social relationship of husband and wife or plural males; also used for the ceremony of uniting marital partners."

Harry M. Jhonson has defined marriage as "a stable relationship in which a man and woman are socially permitted, without loss of standing in the community, to have children."

According to Collins Dictionary of Sociology "Marriage is a socially acknowledged and sometimes legally ratified union between an adult male and adult female."

According to Robert H. Lowie, "Marriage denotes those unequivocally sanctioned unions which persist beyond sexual satisfaction and thus come to underline family life."

According to D.N. Majumdar and T.N. Madan, marriage may

be defined by saying “It involves the social sanction generally in the form of civil or religious ceremony authorizing two persons of opposite sexes to engage in sexual and other consequent and correlated socio-economic relations with one another.”

Marriage Kind among the Bodos

Marriage is an important social institution. Its form and function changes according to change in culture. Bodo marriage is a religious sacrament in which a man and a woman are bound in a permanent relationship for physical, social and spiritual purpose of sexual pleasure, procreation and observation of Dharma. In Bodo society, exogamy, endogamy and polygamy marriages are seen. Bodos have six kinds of marriage, these are, (i) *nynanui lainai haba*, (ii) *k^harsonai haba* (iii) *du^hark^harnai haba*, (iv) *bunanwi lainy haba*, (v) *gurziya haba*, (vi) *donk^ha habnai haba*.

Nynanui Lainai Haba (arranged marriage)

This marriage takes first place in Bodo marriage. Traditionally this marriage is solemnized according to the standard social customs. According to this system of marriage the bride is selected by the parents of the bridegroom and then the marriage is settled after negotiation. In earlier days this type of marriage was solemnized only at the house of bridegroom but in now a day's marriage is also solemnized at the house of bride in influence of Hindu marriage. This type of marriage is regarded as a regular and respectable marriage in Bodo society. Bride price was compulsory in earlier days but now a days it is not.

K^harsonai Haba (girls flee away to boy's house)

In this system of marriage, the bride enters into the house of bridegroom before the settlement of the marriage in case of mutual understanding between the bride and bridegroom occurs, and also sometimes understanding between bride and bridegroom's family. It is not a regular kind of marriage. The consent of bride's parents is not taken much consideration.

Du^hark^harnai Haba (Elopement marriage)

This type of marriage is not socially approved but seldom takes place in Bodo society. It is a type of marriage akin to the Aryan Gandarva system. Both boy and girl run away to distant place and live conjugal life. Understanding between bride and bridegroom is enough in this type of marriage.

Bunanwi Lainy Haba (marriage by capture)

In this type of marriage, the bride is taken away forcefully from parent's house and marriage takes place. It is almost similar to the paisasa marriage of Aryans. This system of marriage is not approved by society. It is also irregular marriage. This kind of marriage was prevalent in earlier days but present Bodo society has discarded this system of marriage. It is regarded as a crime in the eyes of law.

Gurziya Haba (obtaining girl by service)

It is solemnized at the bride's house. Basically one who has no son brings a male person to his/her house and solemnizes the marriage with his/her daughter. Though this marriage system is approved by society, it is found very rare in Bodo society. In this marriage, bridegroom enters in bride's house as son-in-law.

Donk^ha Habnai Haba (widow remarriage)

Though this type of marriage is approved by the society yet this system of marriage is very rare in Bodo society. In this marriage the bride is widow. If a man lives in the widow's house as her husband, then the society recognizes them as husband and wife after solemnizing their marriage with some social rules. It is an irregular type of marriage.

A widow and widower can re marry with any person who is not related to him/her. If a widow marries second time she may or may not lose the authority on the property of her deceased husband. If she has son, her son is always entitled to get the father's property. Widow re-marriage is accepted in Bodo society. Widow is allowed to re marry with her husband's relatives too. Although the widow marriage is allowed in Bodo society, there are some restrictions which are followed strictly. A widower can re-marry his deceased wife's younger sister but not elder sister, whom he is obliged conventionally to regard in the light of a mother. Similarly, a widow can re marry her deceased husband's younger brother, but she is not allowed to re marry her deceased husband's elder brother.

Stages of Bodo Marriage

The entire proceedings of a Bodo marriage can be divided into three stages (A) Pre marriage (Selection of bride) (B) Proper marriage and (C) Post marriage.

Pre Marriage

Generally, pre marriage is only performed in *nainanwi lainy haba* (arranged marriage). In Bodo society arranged marriage is the respectable and high standard marriage. The stages of pre marriage are given below:

Gonk^han Hunai/Asan T^hebnai

This ceremony is celebrated after bride selection. In this ceremony the parents or relatives of bridegroom come to the bride's house along with a pair of silver bracelets and leave them at the house of the bride; a pair of rice-beer is also used besides silver bracelets. After selecting the bride from bridegroom site, some members of bridegroom go to the bride house to ask whether she is ok or not. Whether she is ok or not *gonk^hon* were kept in the house roof of north side. If she is not ok, then the *gonk^hon* are returned. Traditionally it is observed in Bodo society. But in present time bridegroom party come to bride house with sugar and some eatable things.

Goi K^haonai

Cutting areca-nut is the important ceremony observed by the Bodo society according to their traditional custom. This ceremony is celebrated after the final settlement, at the house of bride. In this ceremony some members of bridegroom party come to bride's house with bundle of areca-nut and betel leaves, and rice-beer in abundance. In earlier days the bridegroom party carried sufficient quantities of rice-beer, to the house of bride and entertained the parents of the bride and relatives. Now a days, it is not compulsory.

Biban Lajnai

The two ceremony mentioned above are not so compulsory whether it is performed or not. But '*biban lannai*' ceremony is performed compulsorily by the bridegroom party. Areca-nut and betel leaves are essential in this ceremony. A pair of

earthen pitcher is carried to the bride house. The signs of moon and sun are painted in the pair of pitcher. If the signs are detected to be wrong the bride party charges a fine from bridegroom's father.

Signs

Bodo is Patrilineal in society. When the boy becomes marriage worthy, parents have consultation with relatives and with friends and then they start preparation for marriage. Traditionally Bodo society believed in some bad or good signs while selecting the bride. Some of such signs which are traditionally believed are given as follows:

Good Signs

If the bride is seen drying or husking paddy at the courtyard at the time the selection party reaches the house of the bride, it is believed that the bride would be a fortunate one.

If the bride is seen by the members of the selection party cleaning or sweeping the court-yard or busy at combing her hair, it is believed that the bride would be long life etc.

Bad Signs

At the time of consultation about the selection of bride if the member of the selection party hears sound of thundering, then is believed that the bride will be hot temper and it is believed that there will be possibility of quarrel between husband and wife after the marriage.

If the selection party meets with an obstruction while sitting, it is believed that the marriage will be unhappy.

If the mongoose is seen crossing the road from the right side to the left side it is believed that there may be separation between husband and wife etc. After seeing the bad sign, the marriage will be canceled.

Proper Marriage

Marriage is the basic institution of human society. In the words of Gillin and Gillin, "Marriage is a socially approved way of establishing a family of procreation". Alfred McClung Lee writes, "Marriage is the public joining together, under socially specified regulations of a man and women as husband and wife". The nuke of the family formed by husband and wife comes into existence. Through marriage, two families enter into kinship bond, which expands with the expansion of family and thus, grows into complex web or network. Marriage also serves an important economic function since it defines proprietary rights and rights of inheritance which may vary more or less from one ethnic or religious community to another. According to Bodo society, proper marriage is divided into some division. Any kind of marriage needs to follow any one system to celebrate the ceremony. These are described below:

hat^hasuni

The earliest and traditional form of Bodo marriage is 'Hat^hasuni K^hurnai'. This system of marriage is very simple and easy. All kinds of marriage mentioned above are to celebrate this system of marriage. In this type of marriage, first of all bride is made virgin by the law of Bodo society. After that, inside the kitchen, bride is allowed to kneel down in front of the fire where the "mainao bwrai-mainao burwi" (god and goddess) are kept, and the wise lady the one who has the knowledge about the marriage utters some holly

words introducing the bride to the god and goddess. After that an egg is rounded in the bride's head and this is called "daodui neosinai" and the bride pray to the God and Goddess "mainaobwrai-mainao burwi" for their marriage life.

As a ritual the bride prepares meal. The meal consists of rice and curry prepared with the rice powder and chicken without applying spices and colouring agent like turmeric. The rice and curry are kept in two "hat^ha" (landler utensil) in front of 'Bat^huu' altar; the bride and groom kneel down before the altar (bat^huu) and the priest (duury) which is given responsibility for that marriage prays to God "Bat^huu burai". The meal is placed on banana leaf, while the priest (duury) chants the mantra, introducing the bride to the god and goddess.



hat^hasuni marriage

After the end of advices to the bride and the groom, the 'Hat^hasuni k^hurnai' is served to the villagers present. First of all, bride serves the groom and after that she serves each item of the meal to the villagers present. Then the main function of the 'hat^hasuni k^hurnai' comes to the end.

The feast of the marriage continues at least for three days. During these three days, rice-beer and pork are supplied in abundance. In earlier days the feast is said to have continued for five to seven days. Traditionally rice-beer and pork is the main feast in Bodo marriage. Without rice-beer and pork Bodo marriage is meaningless. That's why Bodos have a famous idiom 'uŋk^ham ni ali zuu ni p^huk^hri' (pond of wine and road of rice).

Brahma Marriage

The Brahma marriage is performed with Vedic rites associated with some traditional customs and rituals. Under the guidance of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, thousands of Boros had been embracing Brahma dharma and consequently the new system of marriage came into existence in Bodo society. This system of marriage is different from Bodo traditional marriage hat^hasuni. Brahma dharma refined the old customs to suit the new religion. Of course they have not given up all the traditional customs of marriage. In fact, many of the traditional customs associated with the pre marriage ceremonies are followed by them. Only they have discouraged the use of rice-beer and pork during the ceremony. At present tea has taken place of rice beer and the use of pork is not compulsory. It is due to influence of Brahma Dharma. The bride and groom are taken to the altar of the yajna which is

called mandab. Both the bride and groom are allowed to seat in front of the yajna, facing towards the east. The priest performs the function of the wedding. The guardian of the bride prays to the god facing before the blazing fire of the yajnahuti uttering the mantra of the Brahma Gayatri following the priest like,

“Om aiahi barde devi trayakshare
Brahma badini Gayatri sandasung
Matoh Brahmajoni nomohastyute”



Brahma Marriage

The guardian of the bride by chanting the formula of marriage salutes the blazing fire of the yajna three times, after the chanting formula is completed he offers mixed corns to the fire. While doing so, he has to chant the *ahuti* formula.

“Om Verde devi paramajyotih Brahmane svaha;”
“Om chaarchar Brahmane svaha
“Om purna parobrahma jyotih svaha”

Thus after offering the corns to the fire the father of the bride prays to the God for blessings to the bride and groom. He declares before everyone gathered that he has offered his daughter/sister to the bridegroom keeping the fire as witness. Then the bride and groom chant the ‘*Gayatrimantra*’ separately and again jointly, under the guidance of the priest. They also offer the mixed corns chanting the above *ahuti* mantra. Then they pray for blessing of God. After the prayer is over, the function of “*Ashirbsd*” goes on some times. While the *Ashirbad* function is over, the priest concludes the main function of the marriage with the new slogans in the name of the *Brahma* invoking to the newly married couple.

The bride and groom along with their friends and two *buirat^{hi}* with *alari bat^{hi}* walk around three or seven times from left to right they are led by the priest and they enter into the main house. Inside the main house the priest and the elder ones advice the bride and groom for a while.

bat^{uu} haba

Bodos are animists; they worship the god “*bat^{uu} burai*” (Siva) by offering birds, goat pigeon, buffalo etc. *Bat^{uu}* is the holly place of Bodo people and they worship there by lighting fire in earthen lamp. “*Bat^{uu} haba*” is similar with *Brahma haba*. In ‘*Brahma haba*,’ ‘*Yajna*’ with mixed corns are offered but in *Bat^{uu}*, *yajna* is not performed only pair of areca nut and betel leaves (goi zora p^hat^hwi zora) and mixed corns are offered and an earthen lampis kept inside the “*Bat^{uu}*” instead of *yajnahuti*. The *Gayatri mantra* is uttered

in Bodo language according to the rule of *Bat^{uu} dharma* like: “*aham un^h hri^hij k^hli^hij p^hud se*”.



bat^{uu} (altar of Bodo)

After uttering this mantra, the guardian of the bride chants some words by order of *duuri*. All the functions like *blessings* and walking around the ‘*Bat^{uu}*’ is similar with ‘*Brahma haba*’ (Brahma marriage).

bat^{uu} aroz haba

Everything that is performed in this marriage is similar with “*Bat^{uu} haba*” only difference is that prayer song is sung with Bodo’s musical instruments like *serza*, “*sip^hun*”, and ‘*flute zotha*’ ‘*cymbals*’ and *kham kram*’. And while walking around *Bathwu* five or seven times, bride carries on head ‘*mainao*’ ‘*rice which is kept in small basket*’. This is called ‘*mainao dik^haynai*’.



bat^{uu} aroz haba

Mondir Haba

Mondir haba (marriage in temple) is not socially recognized in Bodo society. It is not a traditional marriage in Bodo society. Generally, it is performed by elopement. Earlier in Bodo society this system of marriage was not performed. If somehow marriage is celebrated at temple, bride and groom are brought back to the community according to the traditional society’s rule and thereby marriage is re-celebrated with the performance of *hat^{asuni}*. But now a day *mondir haba* is also accepted and performed in case of time and economy condition.

Court marriage

This type of marriage is not accepted in Bodo society but also often performed according to condition. Though this system of

marriage is accepted in modern society, yet it is very rare in Bodo society.

Post marriage ceremonies

at^hmaṅla

After proper marriage or marriage ceremony the important marriage ceremony in Bodo society is at^hmaṅla. On the eighth day from the day of wedding, the bride and bridegroom come to bride's house for the post marriage ceremony known as at^hmaṅla. In the traditional society the bridegroom brings cocks, goat or pig in honour of his father-in law's family and relatives. But the educated section of Bodos has almost given up such practice. Post marriage ceremony is very brief ceremony. No big feast is arranged on the occasion. Only a few selected persons are invited to the ceremony. After the ceremony the bride and bridegroom come back to the house of the bridegroom along with the articles of presentation which they receive from their friends and relatives on the occasion. This ceremony is celebrated if the marriage types are nainanui lainay haba, k^harsonai haba and bunanui lainay haba but not performed if the marriage types are gurziya haba and donk^ha habnai haba.

K^hola/k^holar got^hainy

If the husband expires suddenly after marriage, the bride returns to her parents and the amount of 'Malsa' (bride price) is given back to the parents of the deceased husband by the parents of the bride. The act of returning of the bride and 'Malsa' is known as 'k^holar got^hainy' or 'khola gothainai'. This act is not compulsory to do; some parents of the bridegroom do not return their daughter-in-law.

mamai mara

If the parents of bridegroom are not able to pay the 'phone t^hak^ha' (bride price) at the time of marriage and if the bride expires leaving a female child behind, then the 'p^hone t^hak^ha' would go to her uncle at the time of her marriage. This system of marriage is known as 'mamai mara.'

Divorce

Divorce is allowed in Bodo society. If the couple decides to divorce mutually then it is performed by tearing betel leaf according to the village rules. The betel leaf is kept in the meeting and then it is torn by the couple in to two pieces. This act is known as 'p^hat^hui lai bisinai' in Bodo. After this act the marriage bond of the couple comes to end. This is a kind of symbolic and extra ordinary nature, which indicates that just as the torn leaf never re-unites, so their marriage life is separated forever. However, if a husband divorces his wife without the consent of wife, husband has to bear the responsibility of her livelihood for a certain period of time and he must also pay certain amount of fine for his freedom. Woman and the village committee share the fine paid by the man that estranges his wife.

Dress and Ornaments

Traditionally 'dok^hona t^haosi' is used in Bodo marriage. Before marriage no girl wears dok^hona t^haosi in Bodo society. When one is seen in this dress she is regarded as married. But now-a-days it is changed. However, Bodos also use yellow coloured dok^hna these days apart from red coloured dok^hna.



Bodo Bride

Hindu married woman wear red and white coloured bracelet. The same type is also used by Bodo brides traditionally. During the time of marriage two pair of red and white bracelets are gifted to the bride from bridegroom side as it is compulsory to give two pair of bracelet to the bride to use in both of her hands. The bride wears traditional dress of red colour like, dok^hna, blouse, shawl and puts on gold ornaments and a small murari (wedding crown) on her head. Her face is covered with a veil of transparent synthetic cloth of red colour with floral design. The bridegroom wears white Punjabi shirt, white dhoti and wrap white towel on his neck and puts on murari on his head. The bridegroom is also decorated with cosmetics, ascent etc. on wedding day.

Conclusion

From the above discussion we came to know that as marriage is a social institution, Bodo marriage can be divided into six sections. By the nature it is named (i) nyanui lainai haba (ii) k^harsonai haba (iii) dunk^harnai haba (iv) bunanui lainy haba (v) gurziya haba (vi) donk^ha habnai haba and widow re marriage. All these kinds of marriage need to fulfill the social ceremonies i.e. hat^hasuni k^hurnai, brahma haba, bat^huu haba, mondir haba and court marriage. Although these marriages are celebrated in accordance with the norms of the society yet some of them are not socially accepted by the Bodos. Traditionally hat^hasuni is the most respectable and socially recognized marriage in the Bodo society. But unfortunately this type of marriage is rarely celebrated in present age by the Bodo people due to the influence of other community. Before and after marriage proper pre and post marriage ceremonies are performed as the completion of the rituals of marriage. The pre marriage ceremonies are rarely performed these days while among the post marriage ceremonies athmaṅjal ceremony is compulsorily performed in Bodo society.

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