



Research Article

SOME OF THE MARRIAGE RITUALS AMONG THE APATANIS

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ABSTRACT

Marriage is a universal phenomenon. Every society has their own way of giving social recognition to the union of a male and female as a couple. The Apatani people also have their own way of giving social recognition to the marriage of a couple. The Apatanis practiced elaborate marriage rituals. Effort has been made to cover all the marriage rituals of Apatani in detail in this paper. Traditionally the boy goes to the girl's parents to ask for her hand. Earlier, the parents of the boy look for girl. If they found a suitable girl, they perform a rite called Pahin Koniin. The priest takes a chicken and recites the hymns over the chicken. After the

incantation is over, the chicken is killed by knife. Then the liver of the chicken is taken out and carefully examined by the priest. If the chicken liver gives good omen for the couple, then the parents of the boy take it to the parents of the girl and show the chicken liver. To show the chicken liver to the girl's parents the parents of the boy appoint a smart and active person as a messenger to convey the message. He is called Gunthang. Generally, the Gunthang is a relative of the boy. When the Gunthang reached girl's house the girl's parents perform another rituals called Pahin Biini Nii. In this ritual the girl's parents killed a chicken and request a priest to examine the liver of the chicken to see whether the result is favourable or not.

KEYWORDS: Apatani Gyutii Gyuchi Gunthang Mabo Mida.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a universal phenomenon. Every society has their own way of giving social recognition to the union of a male and female as a couple. The Apatani people also have their own way of giving social recognition to the marriage of a couple. There are some papers on the marriage system of Apatani. For instance, Gyati Aruna, Mihin Kaning etc, has talk about the marriage rituals of Apatani. In this paper I have tried to highlight those rituals also which is absent in their papers. The main focus of the present paper is on the rituals and ceremonies perform by the Apatanis to solemnize their marriage. The paper is mainly based on secondary sources like books. Interview method was used to collect primary data.

2. SOURCES AND RESEARCH APPROACH

The research is mostly based on secondary data like published books. Intellectuals and knowledgeable Apatani person were interviewed to collect primary data. Interviewed person were informed by the author about the purpose of interview. The view and opinion of the interviewee were included in the article with due permission and consent of the concern person.

3. FINDINGS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

3.1 Marriage Patterns and Social Organisation

At present, in the Apatani society, both endogamy and exogamy exist. But in the early time exogamy was prohibited by the customary system. Apatani society is divided into two endogamous groups of

Gyutii, the patrician and the Gyuchi, the plebian. Under no circumstances can a Gyuchi ever become a Gyutii. However, these divisions into two exclusive groups are in no way parallel to the caste system as practiced in other parts of India. The two groups do not markedly differ in their style of living. They freely intermingle with each other except on certain ceremonial occasions, which are strictly observed by them¹. Exogamy in the Apatanis means the marriage between Gyuchi and Gyutii. If a Gyuchi boy marries a girl belonged to Gyutii, the marriage was not recognized by the society. He was not allowed to participate in the social ceremony like -Myoko, Murung and Subu pujas. It is in fact, tantamount to ostracism. Even if a boy of Gyutii marries a girl of Gyuchi, the people of Gyutii did not recognize the marriage. They also prohibited them to participate in the social ceremony. This prohibition was considered as a great punishment for both boys and girls in early time. The marriage with the girl from outside the Apatanis is also included in exogamy. Whoever commits such mistakes is not allowed to participate in the social ceremony². Monogamy is the general rule of the marriage. However, polygyny is also found in exceptional cases but polyandry is unknown. Marriage with wife's elder or younger sister and even with younger brother's widow is permitted³. In the matter of marriage the Apatani society give freedom to the young people to select their own partner. There are various kinds of marriage among the Apatanis. For instance-love marriage, arranged marriage, levirate, sororate etc.

3.2 Marriage Proposal and Preliminary Rituals

The Apatanis practiced elaborate marriage rituals. Effort has been made to cover all the marriage rituals of Apatani in detail in this paper. Normally all the rituals are perform in arranged marriage. However some of the rituals are perform in other kinds of marriage also as mention above. Traditionally the boy goes to the girl's parents to ask for her hand. Earlier, the parents of the boy look for girl. If they found a suitable girl, they perform a rite called Pahin Koniin. The priest takes a chicken and recites the hymns over the chicken. After the incantation is over, the chicken is killed by knife. Then the liver of the chicken is taken out and carefully examined by the priest. If the chicken liver gives good omen for the couple, then the parents of the boy take it to the parents of the girl and show the chicken liver. To

show the chicken liver to the girl's parents the parents of the boy appoint a smart and active person as a messenger to convey the message. He is called Gunthang. Generally, the Gunthang is a relative of the boy. When the Gunthang reached girl's house the girl's parents perform another rituals called Pahin Biini Nii. In this ritual the girl's parents killed a chicken and request a priest to examine the liver of the chicken to see whether the result is favourable or not. If it is favourable then the chicken liver is sent to the boy's parent's through the Gunthang as a sign of acceptance of the proposal. If the parents of the girl accept the proposal for marriage after seeing the chicken liver, they may ask for the Mabo Inchi ceremony⁴. A particular date is fix for the Mabo Inchi ceremony. On the appointed date the boy goes to the girl's house to ask for her hand formally. He is accompanied by the Gunthang and few other who may be his friends or relatives. At this time he has to gift a Tibetan sword called Chiri Elyo to the girl's parents. Money can also give in place of the sword. The girl's parents serve local beer to the boy and his party. The boy is serve beer in a particular kind of cup called Yaju in local dialect. The mother of the girl presents a shawl called Tipya Pulia or Mabo Puliya to the boy who is known as Mabo (meaning son-in-law). Sometime in this ceremony all details about bride price are discuss. The discussion about bride price is called Arie Paniin. Some people called the bride price as marriage gift. Arie Paniin may be done later on as per the convenience of the parties. The groom may give the bride prices in Arie Paniin or later on as per the agreement. Generally, while discussing about the bride price the economic condition of both the families is taken into consideration. The bride price is given to the parents, brother(s), cousin(s) etc, of the bride. The bride prices are handed over to the parents and relatives of the bride in cash or kind in the following denomination-

3.3 Forms of Bride Price

(a) Diiran, it is the highest in terms of value and is considered as the highest bride price presented to parent, brother or close relative of the bride. And the price is one matured mithun. The bride price can be replaced by cash.

(b) Laache, this is given to cousin brother or uncle of the bride, which consist of animal other than mithun

or appropriate commodities. This can also be replaced by cash.

(c) Arie mechu, this is next to Laache in value offered as bride price to any two relatives of the clan of the bride which consists of few fowls. This is also more or less replaced by cash in many cases.

3.4 Harvest and Transfer Ceremonies

Another important ceremony is Rutu piniin. This is done at the time of harvesting. On this occasion the bridegroom and his relatives proceed to paddy field of the bride's relatives who accepted the bride price viz, Diirran, Laache and Arie. In a way it is a kind of exchange of price. The bridegroom and his relatives are offered to harvest and gather huge quantity of paddy which is stocked in bridegroom's granary. In the evening of the same day the priest performs rituals in the house and granary of bridegroom for safety, economic prosperity and peaceful life with abundance. After this ceremony the girl can go to her husband's house any time. Another important ceremony called Rutu Baniing is performed after that. This ceremony is performed immediately after harvesting during the month of October and November to mark the occasion of transfer of bride's belongings like beads, bangle, attires, etc to bridegroom's house. The procession begins early in the morning led by the bride who is beautifully decorated with traditional attire carrying grains in cane/bamboo baskets, ginger plants, seeds of all agricultural plants like cucumber, millet, maize, pumpkin, chilly and paddy, and one hen along with newly hatch chicken inside the bamboo made cage in her hand. These seeds will be planted or sown in agriculture field of her bridegroom. During the procession the bride is accompanied by her doi ajing (female friends who share her bed), patang ajing (female friends who accompanied her in cultivation), relatives especially her maternal aunts and neighbours. As per the belief the bride should not look back during the procession as this is considered as bad omen. The entire people who accompany her carry some gift for the bride and bridegroom. When the party reaches groom's house a ritual is performed. This is called Imo Hinniin. In this ritual a fowl and a cow is sacrificed. This ritual is performed to show that the groom and his family accept the bride as a member of their family. The bride's parties are served with food and drinks. Sometime they are offered cash also as a token of appreciation. On this occasion

doi ajing and patang ajing can demand any items from the bride as per her capacity. All the aunts carry rice in their basket and they give the rice to the bride after reaching her husband's house and after that they return to their home.

3.5 Mida and the Completion of Marriage Rituals

The last marriage ceremony of the Apatanis is Mida. This ceremony is celebrated during the month of January, February or March. On this occasion the parents of the bride invite the bride, groom and his relatives. In the Mida following people accompany the bridegroom-Miji (priest), Guntang (mediator), Subukani (caretaker of mithun), Yo kani (meat caretaker) Khein Peni (one who cut the umbilical cord of child), Libang Bani (one who carry the child) etc. There are various kinds of Mida like Dati Mida, Dachi Mida, konchiyaju etc. Dati Mida is the biggest amongst these Mida. The Mida is performed according to the bride price paid by the groom. For instance, if the groom had paid a mithun then the girl's parents have to give Dati Mida⁵.

4. CONCLUSION

Apatani people have very interesting marriage rituals and system. However it is pertinent to note that at present time it is not essential to observe all these rituals and ceremony. Due to spread of education and economic reason people leave their village and home town. As a result they don't have time for elaborate marriage rituals. So they only perform necessary and important rituals. Nevertheless Apatani people still rejoice and respect their culture and tradition.

DECLARATIONS

Conflict of interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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5. Data collected from shri Pura Tago vide interview on 09.10.2009 at Changlang, Arunachal Pradesh, India. The informant was well aware of the purpose of the interview and he has given his consent to use information provided by him as primary data for the present paper.