

Marriage System in Bhumija Tribe of Mayurbhanj - A Cultural Study



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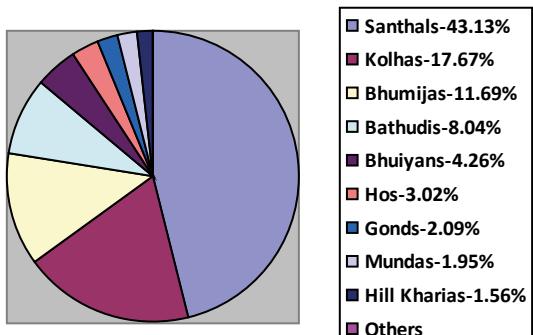
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This paper attempts to study the marriage system of Bhumija tribe of Mayurbhanj in the state of Odisha, India. Bhumija tribe in Mayurbhanj has their unique culture traditionally followed from very ancient time. Among the cultural tradition linked with the Bhumija's life cycle, 'marriage' is the most significant part. Bhumijas have various types of marriages such as marriage by elopement, marriage by agreement, marriage by force and arranged marriage. The system of marriage among them has been affected partially by the process modernisation and sanskritisation. Still the uniqueness of their marriage system remains intact. The paper also highlights the impact of this marriage system on their socio economic life style.

Key Words- Culture, Bhumija, marriage, Handia, Bride Price.

Introduction

Culture is the way of life of any group of people or people of any place in the society. Among the people, tribals are accepted as very simple and original people of any place. There are over 500 tribal live in India as notified under article 342 of our constitution of India spread over different states and union territories of the country. Tribals have their simple life with unique culture which is very different from the culture of non-tribals in the society. The state of Odisha is the seat of tribal homes. 9.17% of the total tribal population of India live in Odisha. The Odisha state has 62 different tribal communities spread over 30 districts and 314 blocks which constitutes 22.85% of the total population of Odisha. The largest district of Odisha is Mayurbhanj which has the highest concentration of tribal population (around 60 % of total population). The district shares the inter-state boundary with Jharkhand and West Bengal. As per the 2011 census the percentage of scheduled tribe population to the total population in the district constitute 58.58 percent as against 22.85 percent in the state.



The given pie chart shows the percentage of tribes live in the district of Mayurbhanj, Odisha. The majority tribals of Mayurbhanj are the Santals, Kolha, Bathudi and Bhumija. The Bhumija, a major Scheduled Tribe of Odisha is found largely in the district of Mayurbhanj. Bhumija tribe in Mayurbhanj has their unique way of life and cultural tradition followed from very ancient time. Their cultural tradition is linked with their personal and community life. Among the cultural tradition linked with the Bhumija's

life cycle, ‘marriage’ is the most significant part. Here the study area of my topic is about the unique marriage tradition among Bhumija tribe, their marriage types and impacts on them. We must understand the rich cultural tradition of the Tribe like Bhumija which was a very old practice continues though partially affected by the modernisation and sanscritization process.

Methodology

To make a systematic study on the marriage system of the Bhumija tribe of Mayurbhanj, odisha the author adopted a suitable method of data collection for the ethno-historical study which includes: a field study, interviews with people, data collection from different sources (primary as well as secondary sources). This article used research papers from the State Library, State Archives, and ST, SC Welfare Department.

The Term ‘Bhumija’

Etymologically, the term ‘Bhumija’ means ‘one who is born out of the soil’. According to their oral tradition, their original abode was in Tamulia of Bihar where they were the part of Munda tribe. Racially they are of proto-Australoid origin. They had their mother tongue called ‘Bhumija’ that belongs to the Munda family of dialects.

Different groups of Bhumija

The Bhumijas are divided into several endogamous groups based on territory and occupation. In Mayurbhanj, the various groups of Bhumijas are identified. They are like Tamuriya Bhumijas, Haldipukuri Bhumijas, Teli Bhumijas, Desi or indigenous Bhumijas, Vada Bhumija and Kol Bhumija. Each group forms an exogamous group of its own and don’t intermarry.

Marriage System among Bhumijas

Marriage plays a very significant role among the cultural traditions of Bhumijas. Generally a Bhumija boy gets married at about 18 to 20 years and a girl at about 15 to 16 years. Like other tribes, Bhumijas have various types of marriages. They are such as

- i. Marriage by elopement
- ii. Marriage by agreement
- iii. Marriage by force
- iv. Arranged marriage

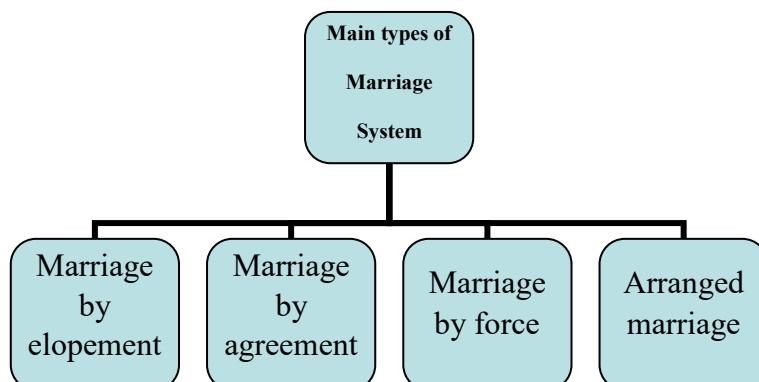


Fig 1

Let's know about the different types of marriage system among the tribe Bhumija.

Marriage by agreement

In case of marriage by agreement, the girl stays with her potential husband for some days or a week, which is known as kothamaduni. If they like each other, then they stay together forever. In this case marriage never takes place. If they do not like each other, they can get married elsewhere.

Marriage is by elopement

The most prevailing system of marriage is by elopement. Usually boys and girls, if they like each other, elope to escape from physical punishment and expenses on bride price, feasts and drinks for the whole community. Generally, poverty stricken Bhumijas, they do this case going against the norms of the society. After elopement, they flee to distance places and stay either with relatives or somewhere else. After some days, if the parents and relatives search for them and bring them back to house or they themselves come back. Then, they live together as couple with due social recognition. But if a Bhumija boy or a Bhumija girl flees with a boy or a girl of another community, then this act is taken very seriously by the whole community. In this case, the parents and to some extent the person eloping has to pay the compensation for the damage caused to the community sentiment. If a Bhumija girl elopes with a non-Bhumija boy, then the parents of the girl have to arrange a community feast after tonsuring their head as a mark of total abandonment of the girl from the community. If it is not done then the entire family has to face social ostracism. The family may be out casted from the community.

Marriage by capture or force

In marriage by capture or force, the boy puts a vermillion mark on the girl's forehead when the girl is in visit to the field or the market place alone. If the girl agrees to marry the boy then the marriage takes place. This is called sinduri baha.

Marriage by negotiation or arrangement

In case of marriage by negotiation or arrangement, the marriage is finalised through a mediator known as kandara. The marriage proposal always comes from the boy's side as the girl's side is thought to be superior. This shows that girls are given more importance in tribal society. For solemnisation of the marriage, bride price is a must. After the proposal is finalised, both the parties visit each other's house to see the girl and the boy. In the process, the potential groom visits the bride's home along with his friends in order to see the bride. There, they are treated well and served with handia and a good meal. The bride's side is reciprocated when they visit the groom's place. The important consideration for finalising the marriage is bride price, which is known as Pana. It is settled in the presence of the negotiator and the villagers.

Important features of the marriage system

- Bride Price

Here, the system of the payment of bride is a unique phenomenon different from the dowry system accustomed in the marriage system of non-tribals. The unique thing is that the payment of the bride price (ganang) is mandatory which is paid by the boy side to the bride. Following things (as in the table mentioned) are paid by the boy side to the bride to show his efficiency and capability.

Types of Bride Price paid by the boy side

Cash or kind	Animals	Gifts to bride family
Money	cows	clothes for grandmother and grandfather of bride
grains – mainly rice	bullocks	clothes for mother and father of the bride
handia	goats	clothes for sister and brother of the bride
potato, dal, vegetables and spice		a saree, a petti coat, a blouse, cosmetics and a finger ring or a necklace made of silver to the bride.

The Engagement (Nirbandha)

The engagement is the half done of marriage. A feast is arranged on that day at the bride's place. On the day of engagement, the marriage date is also fixed. Both fathers of the bride and the groom keep seven betel nuts in the border of their dhoti and crush it with a stone seven times. Then they divide and distribute it between them. They take this broken betel nut to their relatives and inform them about the fixation of the marriage and the marriage date as well.

In between the engagement (Nirbandha) and the marriage, if some festivals like Raja, Makar Sankranti, etc. happen to fall, the groom's side has to make presentations in the form of saree, blouse, petti coat, cosmetics and handia to the bride's side. If these are not presented, then the marriage can be cancelled and the presentations offered at the time of the Nirbandha can be retained by the bride and the bride can marry elsewhere. But within one year of the marriage, if the bride elopes with somebody else, then the entire presentation made at the time of Nirbandha and on the festive occasions has to be returned by the bride's side. If everything goes right, the marriage takes place on the fixed date.

Preparations for Marriage

Preparations for marriage start before some days of the actual marriage date in the houses of both sides.

- Relatives and friends arrive with their presentations like saree or dhoti, handia, vegetables, and utensils.
- On the day before marriage, both the bride and the groom are given a bath and ritualized in the presence of the village priest (Dehuri) of their respective homes.
- Early in the morning on the marriage day, the village deity is worshipped with plain rice, chicken and handia. Dehuri is offered with Dhoti and some money.
- The groom is to prepare himself with proper dress (in dhoti and kurta).
- The bridegroom with the marriage party goes out in a procession to the bride's place. Now-a-days vehicles and band parties are also used in the procession.

Marriage Day

- Before the marriage party, the Kandara (mediator) is sent in advance to the bride's place with the Pana (bride price). The Kandara wears a peculiar dress. His whole body is painted with different colours like red, black and yellow as a mark of identification. After he reaches the bride's place, his legs are washed with turmeric water.
- The Pana taken by the Kandara is kept in the middle of the bride's home for inspection of all. Then the bride applies on her body the oil, turmeric etc. and uses the cosmetics taken by the Kandara. She wears the saree and blouse. After getting dressed she awaits the arrival of the groom.
- Before the wedding party reaches the bride's house they have to be well treated and served with handia on the way itself. Then the marriage party reaches the bride's place. The bride groom is specially treated and offered with handia and rice cake.
- The mother of the bride gives a ritual welcome and applies vermillion on the forehead of the groom.
- The girls from the bride's side apply turmeric on the face of the groom and start joking with him. The bride is hidden somewhere and the groom is asked to search her out. For the sake of joking, another girl or a eunuch is dressed exactly as bride. If the groom succeeds in searching out the bride that is well and fine. If he fails, after some time the elders tell him where the bride is hidden. After identifying the bride, the groom goes to the marriage dais and sits there.
- Then the girls from the groom's side apply turmeric paste on the face of the bride and take her to the marriage dais. Then the marriage ceremony takes place on the marriage dais which is made of the branches of the sal tree.
- The dais is decorated with rice powder water. Four arrows are dug in the four corners of the dais. Cotton thread is rounded seven times around the dais. Four diyas(lamps) are lighted in the four corners.
- After the bride is taken to the marriage dais the bride and the groom start throwing mustard seeds at each other. After that the weeding headgear is placed on the head of the bride and the groom.
- The Dehuri keeps the bride's hand on the groom's hand. Then he performs certain rituals and burns ghee in the sacred fire. The marriage is solemnized in the presence of the village Dehuri and the Brahmin priest. The father of the bride performs the kanyadan.
- After the marriage, the women folk celebrate with diyas (lamps). The marriage ceremony ends at about 9 or 10 PM in the night.
- After the marriage, the marriage feast takes place. After that, all indulge in song and dance. They do not sleep the whole night. In the morning if handia has been prepared from the bride's side all are served with it.
- The entire party returns home with the bride to the bridegroom's house. Relatives of the bride

along with the villagers accompany her to her husband's house.

- On the way at the starting of the groom's village, they are served with handia and pika along with fire to light the pika (now a day's bidi and matches).

At Bridegroom's House

- After arrival, the bride and the bridegroom are given a ritual welcome with diya (lamp), incense stick and plain rice. Then the bride is given a separate room.
- On the third day of the marriage, the bride and the groom play with the mud in the presence of the woman folk. Here satirical remarks are passed and jokes are carried on the bride and the groom.
- Then the bride is given chicken to cook and serve to the entire family and relatives. Marriage feast along with handia is also offered to the villagers. The bride's relatives who had accompanied her leave for their village. Before they leave, they jokingly take the bride with them to a little distance with a pretension to take her back with them to their village. But the girls of the groom's side remain prepared to engage in a mock fight and obstruct their plan to take the bride away. During their stay at the groom's place they are well treated specially with handia.

Findings

- In the Bhumija society, monogamy and adult marriage is the rule but sororal and non-sororal polygyny are also found in rare cases where the first wife is found to be barren, mentally retarded or suffering from serious or contagious diseases.
- Junior levirate (sanga baha), junior sororate (sanga baha) and cross cousin marriage and remarriage of widows, widowers and divorcees are also permitted in their society.
- Bhumija society allows either party to divorce. It may be on the ground of misunderstanding and maladjustment in their married life, cruelty, contagious diseases and poor maintenance, etc. The cases related to divorces are finalised in the traditional community council presided over by the headman (mundmaniks) and the secular head (Sardar) of both the villages including the family members of both husband and wife.
- In case the wife wants to desert the husband, her paternal family has to return the bride price (ganang) paid for her to her husband. But if the wife wants to marry another male, the new husband has to repay the bride price with a penalty which is settled depending on the will of the former husband.
- If divorce takes place because of the fault of husband, he cannot reclaim the repayment of the bride price. After divorce, the wife has to return to her father's house with her children. She lives at her paternal father's house permanently.

Conclusion

Even though the marriage ceremony is an individual family function, everybody in the village participates in it, takes part in dance and song and partakes of delicious drinks, i.e., handia. Marriage songs

and dances are a special attraction for each Bhumija. Especially the women folk participate in the function more actively. And by involving the whole community, the institution of marriage integrates the whole society. Thus, marriage plays a distinct role in the socio-cultural life of the Bhumijas in Mayurbhanj.

Key Terms

Sanskritization is a particular form of social change found in India. It speaks the process by which caste or tribes placed lower in the caste hierarchy seek upward mobility by emulating the rituals and practices of the upper or dominant castes.

Endogamy is the practice of marrying within a specific social group, caste or ethnic group, rejecting those from others as unsuitable for marriage or other close personal relationships.

Exogamy, also called out-marriage, custom enjoining marriage outside one's own group.

Handia (Also handi or hadiya) is a rice beer popular in the tribes of Indian states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh.

Sororal polygyny – It's a form of marriage in which the co-wives are sisters, is often the preferred form because sisters are thought to be more mutually supportive and less argumentative

Non-sororal polygyny is a type of marriage in which the wives are not related as the sisters.

Junior levirate is a form of the levirate in which a younger brother (as the next eldest one) marries the widow of the deceased husband.

Junior Sororate is a form of levirate where the bereaved husband marries his deceased wife's younger sister.

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