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Marriage Reforms and Practices in the Bhottada Community

Dr. Sabitri Majhi

Asst. Professor in Tribal Studies,

Council of Analytical Tribal Studies (COATS), Koraput

Abstract

Marriage includes one or more men and women and has natural (sexual) and relational features that are socially and legally acknowledged. Marriage is an essential institution that acknowledges gender relationships. Marriage is a social institution with rights and responsibilities, unlike biological mating. It organizes society sexuality via residential cohabitation, socio-economic collaboration, and shared duties. Marriage is generally seen as a contract between two persons, especially in maturity, reflecting cultural and ethnic differences. Different civilizations practice monogamy, polygamy, polygyny, and polyandry.

Keywords: marriage, Polygamy, Monogamy, Culture and ethnic.

Introduction

Marriage is a social relationship that involves one or more men and women and is characterized by distinct aspects: natural (sexual) and relational, both of which are recognized socially and legally. As a fundamental institution, marriage has existed throughout human history and serves to acknowledge the relationship between genders. Unlike organic mating, marriage is inherently social, consisting of standards and institutions that confer rights and obligations. It acts as an organized framework that guides societal sexuality, establishing recognized partnerships through residential cohabitation, socio-economic cooperation, and mutual responsibilities. The concept of marriage also reflects cultural individuality and tribal characteristics, often viewed as a contract that involves input from both parties, particularly during adulthood. Various forms of marriage include monogamy (one husband and one wife), polygamy (one individual married to multiple partners), polygyny (one man with multiple wives), and polyandry (one woman with multiple husbands), which are adapted across different societies.

The Bhottada.

"Bhottada" comes from the words "Boo," which means land, and "Tara," which means hunting. They are found in small numbers in the Odisha districts of Kalahandi, Koraput, and Naranpur. They are said to have been the original inhabitants of Balsagada, from whence they moved to Visakhapatnam, Madhya Pradesh's Bastar area, and subsequently the nearby undivided Odisha district of Koraput. According to ethnologists, the Bhottada share ethnic ancestry with the Bastar Muria, who are also Gond tribal subgroups. According to some ethnologists, the indigenous people are fundamentally Hindu because of their extended interaction with them. They speak Bhatri, which is a dialect of the southern Indo-Aryan language family that is semi-autonomous, illiterate, and strongly tribally identified. They communicate across groups by speaking Odia and using its script. The tribe has 375,845 members overall, according to the 2001 census (1,88,584 men

and 1,87,261 women). The ratio of men to women is 993. The total literacy rate is 24.29%, with 11.09% of women and 37.39% of men. According to the 2001 census, the tribe's decadal growth rate is 23.58%.

Personal Appearance

The Bhottada are medium-height by physical characteristics, with a long, thin head and a somewhat broad face with wide nasal features. In the past, Bhottada women wore a short piece of coarse fabric that they bought from local weavers, which barely covered their bodies up to the knee, while males wore a short piece of loincloth (langoti), which only exposed the top section. Youngsters under the age of seven were nude. In the past, tattooing was popular among women, but it has since faded.

Their current attire design has been inspired by their extensive cultural interaction with their Hindu neighbours. The Bhottada ladies now wear patterned sarees and blouses that they buy from the local market, while the males wear slacks, shirts, lungis, and banian. To look beautiful and appealing, their women's modern jewellery includes brass khadu, different kinds of armlets, glass bangles, nose ornaments like noli and nose rings, necklaces made of beads, ghagla, or old coins or silver, finger rings made of brass, aluminium, or old coins, toe rings, and pahud on their legs. Golden jewellery is often worn by women from wealthy backgrounds.

Settlement and Housing Pattern

The Bhottada habitat is often found at an elevation of around 2000 feet above sea level in the southern strip of the Nawarangpur district of Odisha and its neighbouring districts of Bastar, amid undulating terrain with scenic views that extend beyond the mountain ranges. The Bhottada communities are mostly uniform and situated close to foothills or hill slopes where perennial hill streams run, giving people year-round access to drinking water. However, they only live in distinct wards, holding other ethnic groups at bay and preserving their own cultural identity in multiethnic communities, which are often found in plain locations. Agricultural areas surround some Bhottada communities, which are excessively large and diverse. They don't have a dorm house or community. At one end of the hamlet stands a statue of the local god.

A small village street results from the linear arrangement of their homes. Their women meticulously construct individual homes with low roofs thatched with piri grass and mud walls polished with white or red clay. In the Koraput region, the dwellings often have two or three rooms, whereas in the Kalahandi area, they typically have one room. The smaller chamber serves as their kitchen, while the larger one serves as their living area and grain storage. There are no ventilation windows. To house their animals, they build a separate shed at the back of the home.

The homes include expansive verandas that are polished with black clay and taller than the plinths, which serve as seating areas and shelter for visitors. The rooms' doorways go out onto the terrace. To keep the girls apart when they reach their first menarche, some of them even build a separate hut in a corner of their back verandah. They confer with Disari, their traditional priest, who determines an appropriate time to build a new home. The Bhottadas often maintain a tidy, hygienic, and verdant environment.

They have little home possessions and a very basic material culture. Sitting and sleeping are done on string cots. The local potter makes clay pots that people use for cooking, hauling, and storing water. Rich folks have brass pots, jars, and utensils made of aluminium. To store grains, they create straw containers. They have the kituni, or hand pounder, and the husking lever. Ploughshares, ploughs, sickles, bullock carts, and wooden sticks are some of their agricultural tools. They manufacture ploughs themselves. The Nangara, Dhol, Tamak, Tudubudi, Mahuri, Gini, and Thala are the names of their musical instruments.

Social Life

The Bhottadas are an endogamous group that is further subdivided into three groups: Madhya, Sana, and Bada. Because of their purer ancestry, the Bada group asserts social supremacy over the other two. Several exogamous and totemic septs (bansa) are further subdivided into these divisions, including kachchimo (tortoise), bhag (tiger), goyi (lizard), nag (cobra), kukur (dog), mankad (monkey), cheli (goat), and pandiki (pigeon), among others. Bhotra, Bhatra, Pujari, Bhandarkaria, Panigirit, Bhatnayak, Padhani, Choudhury, Somaratha, Nayak, Randhari, Majhi, Chalan, and Khordia are among their surnames.

Family

The majority of Bhottada families are patrilineal and nuclear. Kutumb, the members of the lineage, see themselves as descended from a common ancestor. After the oldest male member dies, the patrilineage disintegrates after seven generations. In rare instances, extended families may also be vertically or horizontally arranged. Only males inherit ancestral property according to the primogeniture law. Daughters inherit the paternal property in families without a male heir, while households without children may adopt a male child from the closest patriline to inherit the property. In addition to doing their usual household tasks, Bhottada women are involved in religious, ceremonial, social, and agricultural activities.

Marriage Reforms

Here are three classes of Bhatra Tribes. The three classes of Bhatra Tribes are Bada Bhatra, Madhya Bhatra, and Pita Bhatara. Various animals are theirs, and they are domesticated as clans. This tribe does not kill animals and birds, as they are considered sacred (tokm). Consanguineous marriage is prohibited among them. Generally, it is auspicious to marry one's uncle's daughter. Many folk songs include examples of relationships between uncles and their nieces. Many folk songs feature examples of relationships between uncles and their nieces, including the following:

Bada Bhatras, who identify as distinct from Pita Bhatras, organize themselves into various clans including the Payam (turtle tribe), Neyam (dog clan), Payak (tiger clan), Gai (goth clan), Bendari (monkey clan), Naga clan, Bakadi (sheep family), Kukudi (chicken clan), and pigs clan. These clans engage in specific social performances related to marriage ceremonies, which adhere to outlined rules. Four prominent types of marriages are notably practiced within this community: large Bibha, Uduliya or Pani Besani, Paisamundi or Dengi Bhatarani Bibha, and Gharjokua Bibha, each with unique characteristics and cultural significance.

In Bhottada culture, the planned marriage, or magni, is a complex and costly event that involves several steps to finalise the wedding. To negotiate with the bride's side, the groom's parents choose a mediator from their bandhu clans. The groom's parents make their first visit to the bride's home with a jar of country liquor (mohuli) and some sweets to obtain the bride's parents' opinion, known as manguni, if the bride's guardians accept the proposal. If they get a favorable reaction, they bring their kinsmen along for the second visit (sugajanki) to gain the bride's family members' acceptance of the proposal. The third visit (chidni) to validate the proposal in front of both sides' relatives comes next. The bride payment (jholla) is then paid at the fourth visit (balarani). On the fifth visit, the bride's father welcomes and amuses the groom and his family members at the bride's home (guojokni) by providing them with sweets and a betel nut, which signifies completion of the marriage. The bride price is then paid to the bride's father on a designated day by the groom's parents during the sixth visit.

The bride is led in a marriage procession by her parents, friends, and family members as they sing traditional wedding folk songs and dance to the music performed by the Dom musicians. The marriage ceremony takes place at the groom's house. Seven sal poles are used to create a marriage altar, and an earthen pitcher filled with turmeric water is tied to the middle pole. Disari, their traditional priest, unites

the couple's hands and leads them around the altar seven times during the marriage ceremony. Then, using the sharp edge of a sword (tika), the groom marks the bride's forehead with vermilion. Today, the bride's forehead is marked by the groom using turmeric paste and arua rice, and vice versa. The kada handi ceremony comes next, in which the bride searches for and presents the cowri—the shell of a sea snail—that the groom has placed with some fruits in a ditch of dirt and water. Thereafter, the groom promises to be with the bride for the rest of his life and agrees to offer her certain presents as requested. When the request is met, the bride and groom and their guests start having fun, dancing, singing their customary romantic wedding folk tunes, and making jokes by smearing each other's faces with mud and water. The bride is then carried back on the groom's shoulder after they wash in the river. The guests, family, kinsmen, and the bride's party are then treated to a non-vegetarian feast by the groom's parents, along with ragi beer (landa), rice beer (handia), and country liquor (mohuli).

The newlywed couple, together with five young and five elderly men and women, visit the girl's parents' home on the ninth day of their marriage. They bring rice, pulses, vegetables, poultry, and other food items, and they entertain with a lavish feast before the group heads back home. The bride prepares meals for her husband, in-laws, and their family the next day using brand-new pots. After presenting the meal to the ancestors, she joins her husband's family. The other methods of marriage in Bhattada civilisation include elopement, consent, servitude, and captivity. Their civilization also allows divorces, widows' and widowers' remarriages, junior levirate, junior sororate, and cross-cousin marriages.

To avoid the hassle and costs of an arranged marriage, marriage by capture is used. With the help of his friends, the boy captures a girl from the marketplace or during Chait Parab and keeps her captive. Following the news, her family members rush to the boy's house to demand her release and threaten him. The girl remains at the boy's house, where the wedding is planned, once the bride price has been agreed upon by both parties, if she agrees to marry her kidnapper. Her father retrieves her and demands payment from her kidnapper if she declines.

Sometimes, a poor lad who cannot afford the costs of the planned marriage and bride price seeks relief by opting for marriage by service. After the allotted time of duty is over, he goes to work in the home of his prospective father-in-law to marry the latter's daughter or sister. There is a five- to ten-year service period. The girl's guardian provides him with only food and clothing during this period. When the service time is over, the girl and the guy tie the knot. He has the option of returning to his parents' home, building his own home, or staying with his father-in-law.

Types of Marriage in Bhattoda Community

Bada Bibha (Bada Mahala)

Mahala Karia Biva, a customarily approved arranged marriage, begins with the son's father and older family members reaching out to the girl's family. The girl's mother receives a formal marriage proposal from the boy's family. Traditionally, the boy's family would visit the girl's house 12 times; however, they now visit only once. During the proposal, the boy presents gifts that include a bag of rice, wine, and coconuts. If the proposal is accepted, a Kanya Jhola ceremony is conducted in the presence of village elders after consulting a priest to update the marriage log. Practitioners of Uduliya or Panivasani Biva are also involved in various other types of marriages, such as Mahalakaria, Dinakarya, and Lagankaria.

Udulia or Panivasani Bibha

In this marriage, it discusses the initial interactions between boys and girls in various social and natural settings, such as water sources, mountains, forests, fairs, and dances. It also describes the custom of love weddings within a specific cultural context. Song and dance enhance these interactions and strengthen their bond. Udalia refers to the practice where a boy proposes to a girl to leave their homes without seeking permission from her parents when he feels a connection with her. Afterwards, the couple resides with

family until their parents eventually arrange the marriage through a public ceremony at a place known as Mahalakaria, which formalizes their pre-nuptial relationship within the community.

Paimundi or Dhenga Bhatarani Bibha

Love plays an essential role in this marriage. When a girl has the intention of marrying a boy, she is not shy about expressing her feelings. She will move into the boy's house on her own volition if he gives her permission, and she will remain there until his family finally accepts her. During this time, she is forced to endure the harassment that she receives from her mother-in-law. Following that, the marriage ceremony, which is traditionally referred to as Paimundi or Thengabhatrani Bibha, is finalized through discussions between the two families.

Housekeeping Marriage or Ghara Jyuain

If a young man from a poor family is interested in marrying a girl from a wealthy family, she should ask him to move in with her under the condition that he gives his consent. When it comes to helping the girl's parents with a variety of chores around the house, the young man makes use of his intelligence, skills, and determination. After the couple has been together for a period of two years, the girl's father will make arrangements for a traditional wedding ceremony that is commonly referred to as a house wedding.

Divorce

According to Bhottada society, any spouse may request a divorce on the grounds of incompatibility in the marriage, infectious disease, impotence or infertility, adultery, and extramarital affairs, among other things. The groom's and bride's village chiefs (naik and chalan), as well as their relatives and family heads, including the appellants, participate in a special session of the traditional inter-village council that is typically held to decide divorce cases. It is typically presided over by their regional secular head (bhat naik), his assistant (panigrahi), and messenger (desia ganda). Typically, the appellant sets up the refreshments and food for the gathering. If the woman marries someone else and deserts her husband, the latter must refund the bride price together with a specified fine. However, if the wife wishes to divorce her husband, her parents must return the bridal price (Jhollatanka).

Conclusion

The indigenous people appear to be quite aware of their caste and ancestry based on their peaceful conduct and marital rituals. It is impossible to rule out the likelihood that this had an impact on Aryan marital practices later on. In Hindu tradition, caste distinctions are still given particular weight when it comes to marriage. Members of a same caste may occasionally relocate or alter their means of subsistence in several facets of Hindu culture. Nonetheless, it is noted that in the majority of locations, their fundamental beliefs and traditions have been maintained. It appears important to mention their strong conviction in caste unity and the preservation of their own ancient practices while talking about tribal folk culture. Communities in the Koraput district that split out from a single founding tribe or caste to become many sub-tribes or tribes.

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