



Marriage System and The Dimasa Society

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Abstract

The proposed article will highlight an account of the Dimasa and a general account of the institution of marriage in the Dimasa Society. Marriage is a pious, spiritual and social institution which binds the members of the civilized society. The procedures and traditions of marriage in all the societies are not the same. Some societies in the country are not well known to the common intellectuals. So, their traditions and customs are also hidden. The articles proposes to bring the interesting tradition and customs of the Marriage system of the Dimasa to light with pinpointing some typical and traditional words such as Sandi Dang Singba, LaothaiLangba, , Kalti, GilimGasaNaiba, Mayaopagarba, MunhaEaba and Na-Japinoba.

Introduction

People in general living together in communication constitute society. People of a society mostly share the same customs, laws and tradition. A society has some basic institutions such as marriage and family which interlock people in a group and form a society. Marriage is an important institution in every society. Marriage is the legal relationship between two genders: male and female in which they live together as a husband and wife. Marriage serves some purposes such as biological, psychological and social needs. It insures both biological as well as psychological satisfaction. On the social perspective it leads to the survival and growth of a group of people and their culture. Every society has its own system, customary laws, norms, and tradition for the foundation of marriage institution. The Dimasa Society has also its own system and tradition to solemnize marriage. The Dimasa race belongs to Kachari Tribe. In the census report of 1961, the Dimasa people have been given the status of an independent group of Tribes in Assam. The history of the origin of word Dimasa is controversial one. The etymological meaning of the term Dimasa is usually explained as, di-water, ma-big, sa-children. Thus the word Dimasa means children of the big river. It reflects that the Dimasa were the settlers on the bank of a river. And this river referred to here is believed to be the Brahmaputra. The Dimasa once ruled over the vast track of the Brahmaputra Valley. After the arrival of Ahoms through the Pataki passes and with the settlement of Aryan civilizations there had been a disastrous fall of Kachari Tribes and the Dimasa had to leave the north bank of river Brahmaputra. Afterwards they settled on the bank of the river Dhansiri to the south of the river Brahmaputra. The Dimasa Kings made their capital at Dimapur. But the Ahoms defeated the Dimasa King and invaded Dimapur.

Therefore, in the middle of the 16th century the Dimasa king shifted to Maibang which is situated at present in the Dima Hasao district of Assam. Later on, the Dimasa king shifted to Kaspurdue to the invasion of the region by the powerful king RudraSingha in 1706. Kaspur in Cachar district of Assam was the last capital of the Dimasa dynasty which was established in 1771. Most of the Dimasa today live in the Dima Hasao district of Assam, KarbiAnglong, Nagaland, Cachar district of Assam. The Dimasas are known differently under the heads of territorial divisions, made according to their territory. These divisions are such as:

- 1) Dijusa- Dhansirivalley (KarbiAnglong district of Assam and Nagaland).
- 2) Dembrasa- KolongKapili valley (Nagaon, Hojai and KarbiAnglong district of Assam).
- 3) Hasaosa- North Cachar Hills.
- 4) Hawarsa- Barak Valley.
- 5) Semsas- Semkhor in Dima Hasao district of Assam.

Marriage System and Dimasa Society

The marriage system in the Dimasa Society is a unique one. The marriage ceremony is solemnized through a series of procedures of its own. In the Dimasa Society the clan is the most important factor in marriage. They strictly follow the clan system patrilian and matrilineal and it has made the marriage system complex and complicated. There are 40 male clans and 42 female clans. Marriage cannot take place within the same clan be it patrilian or matrilineal. This clan exogamy can never be violated by anybody. The violation of the clan exogamy leads to severe punishment. A Bodosa boy is not allowed to marry a girl of a Bodosa father while a Rajama girl cannot marry a boy of Rajama mother. The distinctive feature of the clan system is that the sons always belong to the father's clan, while girls belong to the mother's clan.

Procedure of Marriage

First of all it should be mentioned that among the Dimasas, intercaste marriage is strictly prohibited. No Dimasa boy/girl is allowed to marry a non-Dimasa girl/boy. Anybody doing this will be excommunicated. Child marriage is not found among the Dimasa. The minimum age for marriage for the girl is 15 to 25 years. It is the general rule that the girl should always be younger than a boy but this rule is not hard and fast. Cross-cousin marriage is allowed in the Dimasa Society provided the rule of exogamy of male clan and female clan is strictly followed. In the Dimasa society, due to this strict exogamous rule of clans in the matrimonial affairs, the population has decreased to a greater extent than the other tribal in the region. Marriage by negotiation is the prevailing practice among the Dimasa. The will of the boy and the girl to be life partners is given top priority. The parents and guardians never impose their will on the boys and girls in this respect. They are given first choice and consideration.

In case of a formal social marriage in the Dimasa Society, negotiation takes place in several steps with rigid formalities. In the first step, the father and the relatives of the boy pay a visit to girl's house on a fixed date with a view to holding an informal discussion regarding matrimonial relation with parents of the girl. Interestingly, both parties exchange their views through idiomatic phrases and proverbs freely and frankly. The boy's party

carries a kilogram of salt wrapped in banana leaves tied with seven pieces of threads, which they offer to girl's parents. If the girl's parents are ready to accept the bundles of salt, it indicates the willingness of the girl's parents to the matrimonial alliance. If they refuse, then it signifies negative view of girl's parents in this matrimonial alliance. The system of offering the bundle of salt is known as Sandi Dhangsingba

A few months later, the second step is taken to pay a visit to the girl's house by the boy's party on a fixed date with four bottle gourds full of rice beer, which they call Laothai, on any other day than Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. These three days are treated in the Dimasa Society as unsuspecting days. The system of carrying the Laothai to girl's house is called LaothaiLangba. The girl's party, along with her parents, guardians and other members of the village, including both male and female, receive the Laothai from the boy's party with due respect. Then the discussion and entertainment with drinks and prepared food take place. Again, a day is fixed for finalizing the matrimonial date.

This is the third and final stage when the boy's party pay their visit to the girl's house on the fixed date as finalized earlier with two bottle gourds full of rice beer. They arrive at the girl's house before noon. They start for the girl's house in the morning. If it is a distant village, they stay at the boy's relative's house or the boy's village Semphong nearer or in the girl's village. Next morning they arrive at the girl's house with Laothai where the relatives and guardians of the girl, along with the villagers remain present and greet them cordially. They sit usually in the two parts of a big bamboo. Two young boys of the boy's party bow down before the girl's party. The boy's party offer Laothai to girl's parents. As they feel tired, they are provided refreshment with drinks etc. this system is called LaothaiLangbaGini. They start exchange of views through idiomatic phrases and proverbs among them and worship Sibrai to bless them. Then only do the girl's parents receive the Laothai with entertainment to the boy's party and other relatives and villagers with drinks and meal etc. they will fix up a date for the marriage after a long discussion of various conveniences and inconveniences of both the families. Thus the marriage is finalized and the groom's party returns.

There's a general belief among the Dimasa that marriage ceremony should be solemnized within one month from the day of LaothaiLangba ceremony. If not, then the Conjugal life of newly married couple would not be happy and peaceful.

Kalti

Kalti is a system of bride price to be paid by the bridegroom to the bride's parents. During the fixing of the marriage, they don't forget to fix the bride price. In earlier times it varied from fifty to one hundred to five hundred rupees. Kalti is still retained among the Dimasa of Dima Hasao and its surrounding regions.

GilimGasaNaiba

Generally the marriage is solemnized at the house of the bride on the fixed day. On the previous day of the scheduled day, an advance party of some boys is sent to the bride's house to see if everything is all right. If everything is found all right, a mock fight is arranged between the boys of the two parties at night at the bride's house. This system is called GilimGasa.

Maiyaofagarba

The groom's party along with his relatives, elders and other family members headed by the groom's father, start for the bride's house for the marriage on the fixed day. Before starting, they perform the Maiyaofagarba ceremony by sacrificing an egg, worshipping all the deities for safe journey to satisfy the evil spirits.

According to Nirupama Hagjer, the Maiyaofagarba ceremony is to be performed on the very day of marriage. In the evening of that day, an Ojha is called in, who worships Sibrai (Shiva) by sacrificing a duck for the wellbeing of the newly married couple.

There's no customary law of engaging the Brahmans on any occasion like marriage and others. In the bride's house, all the elderly persons of the parties sit systematically as per seniority in the rows in the courtyard face to face.

In the presence of all the people gathered of the bride, the father of the bride declares a kind of oath in Dimasa that his daughter would be the family member of the groom from that day onwards and the groom's father also declares with solemnly to accept the bride as one of his family members hence forth. Thus the Yaopaiba ceremony comes to an end. Then the girl is taken into the house. But the groom is not allowed to return to his own house. The groom's party returns home without the bride and the bridegroom. After staying a few days at the bride's house for at least 3/5 nights, they return to the groom's house. This is known as **FiraTangba**.

After spending three nights at the bridegroom's house, again they go to the bride's house where he stays for 3/5 nights. This return journey to the bride's house is known as Firasa. Finally, the marriage ceremony comes to an end. The bride is formally accepted into the groom's family with a small ceremony organized at the groom's house with the relations of both sides, known as Maiyaofa.

Minhapba

In the Dima Hasao Society, Dimasa Families do not like to send the newly married daughter to the bridegroom's house right after their marriage. So, the couple stays at the bride's parent's house for a period of one year. This is known as Minhapba. In the newly constructed house they perform a small ceremony and throw a feast where the relatives of the sides take part on the first night of entering the house. They perform the Maiyaofa ceremony on the first night by sacrificing a duck or a hen by a witch doctor for the well being and peace of the family. Thus the family life of a newly married couple starts in the Dimasa society.

Divorce

Divorce is allowed among the Dimasa. The intending couple shall have to lodge the complaint before the Khunang, the traditional village headman, and the village elders for the dissolution of the marriage. The divorce can only be obtained based on the degree and merit of the complaint. Generally the Kalti is forfeited after the divorce. The village headman tries to solve the problem through mutual settlement. If the divorce is granted, the male issue, if any, are allowed to live with the father while the female issues are to be taken by mother.

Widow Marriage/Remarriage (Noh-japinbaz0).

Widow marriage in the Dimasa Society is allowed provided that the rules of the exogamy are strictly maintained. Customary law is there among the Dimasa that the younger brother can marry the widow of the elder brother, while the elder brother is never allowed to marry the widow of his younger brother .

Though Dima Hasao District of Assam is regarded as the storehouse of traditional customary laws of the Dimasa customary laws prevailing at present, yet Maibang may be treated as the core of the customary laws which are obligatory to the Dimasa Society in the present day because of its dominance as the majority Dimasa people.

Conclusion

In fine it can be said that the marriage system in the Dimasa Society is unique and has distinctive featured due to its differences from other tribes of the region. With the emergence of the modern education and western culture and civilization directly or indirectly, the new educated elites are not keen to follow the traditional rigid principle of exogamy changes and reforms are emerging due to the changing social political and economic scenario of the country. Generally the Dimasas are following Hinduism, so they adopt some Hindu, Aryan Culture and Tradition. The Dimasa of some plain region engage Brahmans in marriage ceremony. In spite of this, the traditional marriage system is still prevalent in the society with slight differences from the previous state.

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