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MARRIAGE AMONG THE BINJHAL OF WESTERN ODISHA: RELOCATING RULES AND IDENTITY ISSUES

Abstract

This article describes the rules and regulations of the marriage in Binjhal tribe of Western Odisha. Binjhals follow tribal endogamy and clan and lineage exogamy. The clans and the lineages play instrumental role in regulating marriage alliances. The study also highlights the role of tribal associations and traditional political council in framing marriage rules and regulations in written form to preserve traditional marriage customs and maintain the Binjhal identity. The major findings reveal that the threat posed by the process of acculturation and modernization has brought certain changes in the traditional marriage rituals. The sense of cultural loss especially in marriage customs motivated the Binjhals to frame rules and regulations on marriage which not only blocked the evil practice of dowry as well as rituals of dominant religions to enter into the Binjhal society, but also minimised the unnecessary expenditure during marriage ceremony. They have been successful in preserving the traditional marriage customs and maintained the Binjhal identity amidst changing scenario in and around them.

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Introduction

Marriage is a universal institution and an important life cycle ritual of the tribal as well as non-tribal societies. As per cultural diversities we have around the world, “marital patterns differ among societies and change over time in a variety of ways that challenge any single theory” (Becker 1974:300). The rules of marriage also differ from one society to another. In certain societies, there is prevalence of cross-cousin marriage, in certain others there is absence

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of cross-cousin marriage. The concepts of endogamy and exogamy also have varied dimensions. These variations place a challenge for the social scientists to define marriage that could be applicable universally. Tambiah stated by citing "B.Z. Zeligman and a committee of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland that marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that children born to woman are recognized legitimate offspring of both parents" (1966: 264). Madan and Majumdar (2002) defined marriage as "a socially sanctioned union of male and female for the purpose of establishing a household, procreating and providing for the offspring". According to R. Brown and Forde (1950:43), marriage rearranges "social structure", "existing relationships" are altered and "new social relations are created". Establishment of new "social relations" not only between the husband and the wife, and between the husband and the wife's relatives on the one side and between the wife and the husband's relatives on the other, but also in a many great societies, between relatives of the husband those of the wife, who, on the two sides, are interested in the marriage and in the children that are expected to result from it. According to "old Mizo custom" the institution of marriage is "vitally necessary to maintain the continuity of the clan and their culture, customs and traditions" (Gangte, 2016:19). Sitlhou (2018:32) stated that "marriage in the Kuki society is the legitimization of union of man and woman in a community. It allows for the social recognition of both partners as responsible members of the society. They become eligible for certain offices in the community and also in the kinship network". Among the Paudi Bhuyan of Keonjhar district in the state of Odisha, the "youth considers marriage as the most eventful occasion of the life while it is an event for celebrating social prestige for the parents and closely associated kin" (Acharya et. al. 2015:39). Harper (1949:6) describing modern American society stated that "marriage is a sacred contract and marriage should bring happiness to the individuals who enter it". It is difficult to cultivate a definition of marriage which could be applicable to all the societies. However, we have number of definitions of marriage delineating different dimensions which have been devised by the scholars from varied disciplines.

Change is the rule of nature and a continuous process. The institution of marriage in the tribal societies is also changing. The present paper makes an attempt to discuss the rules and regulations of the Binjhal marriage (including rituals) in Western Odisha. Further, a critical analysis has been made to understand the role of Binjhal councils in strengthening ethnicity and preserving Binjhal identity by framing certain rules of the marriage and making it binding for all sections of the Binjhal population irrespective regional as well as economic differences.

Methodology

The present study is a descriptive and analytical one based on empirical data. The primary data was collected from the Binjhal villages of Baragarh

district of Western Odisha. The methods used for data collection were observation and interview. Key informants of the study were Binjhal priest and elderly persons (both male and female) who described the traditional marriage customs. In the later part of the data collection, role of the traditional Binjhal council as well as Binjhal associations were taken into consideration. Interview of different personnel from traditional council and association had been taken to understand the reason behind framing the marriage rules which have been presented in subsequent section of the article. During the period field research, we could observe two Binjhal marriage and verified information collected through interview process. Using observation method, recent changes have been carefully recorded which helped us in interpreting the causes why Binjhal council framed certain rules for marriage. Secondary sources of data have also been used specially on the new rules and regulations.

The Binjhal Tribe: A Brief Outline

The Binjhal (also known as Binjhwar) tribe are mainly found in the districts of Balangir, Baragarh, Kalahandi and Nuapada in the state of Odisha. They are also found in the state of Chhattisgarh. Binjhals refer to themselves as ‘Swa-Lakhi Vindhya Vasini’ (Panda 2005) and considered to “an offshoot of the primitive Baiga tribe” (Russel and HiraLal, 1916). The nomenclature ‘Binjhal’ comes from two terms ‘Bin’ (without) and ‘Jhal’ (sweat), which delineates that, they are ‘capable of taking great strains, facing hazards and doing hard labour without sweating (Panda 2005; Ota, et. al., 2015). Linguistically they belong to the Dravidian group. In Western Odisha, apart from the Binjhal dialect, they speak Sambalpuri or Kosoli language. As per 2011 Census, the Binjhal population in the state of Odisha is 1,37,040 (male-68810 and female- 68230). Sex ratio as per 2011 Census is 992. The Literacy rate of Binjhal tribe in the state of Odisha is 57.16%.

Binjhal is an endogamous tribe, which is divided into numbers of exogamous divisions (clan) called “vansas”. The descent is traced through the male line (patrilineal descent). The Binjhal are settled agriculturist but they also depend on forest for their living. With changing time, some of them who are well educated are now in both government and private sectors jobs. Important festivals observed by the Binjhal tribe are *Karma*, *Harali Parab*, *Pusa Punei* or *Madhen Parab*, *Makulbhaja Parab* and *Magha Parab*.

Binjhal Marriage

The marriage rules and regulations vary from society to society, be it in tribal or caste communities. Binjhals follow tribal endogamy and clan (*vansa*) exogamy. The clans and the lineages play instrumental role in regulating marriage alliances and indicate descent and social status. According to Ota and Mohanty (2015) cross-cousin marriage with mother’s brother’s daughter is not allowed and hence, punishable in their society. Panda (2005) in his book

Traditional Political System of the Binjhals described that “a boy, as far as possible marries his mother’s brother’s daughter, or a girl from a clan/clan cluster other than his own”. Junior levirate and sorrorate marriage is allowed. Monogamy is the usual form of marriage but in some cases polygyny including sorroral and non-sorroral polygyny is permitted. Marriage by negotiation “*biha*” is commonly preferred and practised by them. Bride price is customary and it is paid both in cash and kinds during the marriage ceremony. The wedding rite is performed at the bride’s residence and a feast is hosted by both the families. Lac bangle is the symbol of marriage for the woman.

Rules of Binjhal Marriage

The discussion on the Binjhal marriage in this section is presented by blending traditional customs and also recent additions by the Binjhal traditional council.

Selection of Mate

The selection of marriage partner and the criteria for selection vary from culture to culture. Lloyd and Yeilding (2008:614) citing “social-exchange theories” said that the “focus on the contextual characteristics of the larger marriage market, where individuals compare the assets and liabilities of prospective spouses. Mate selection criteria include; income, wealth, home-versus labor-market production and physical attractiveness”. One study of “cross-cultural survey of hunting and gathering societies” reveals that there is “strong influence of parents over the marriage of their sons and daughter” (Apostolou, 2007). In the Paudi Bhuyan society, the “girls do not like the boys at late age and boys with developed beard are taken as older. The Bhuyan girls do not like to choose them as life partners” (Acharya et al. 2015:35). In the Binjhal society, the marriage proposal starts from the boy’s side. The family members start searching for respective mate for the boy and girl when they attain marriageable age. The term “*kaniyadekha*” means looking for a girl for marriage. The term *kaniyadeka* is a local term which combines two words. The word ‘*kania*’ means a girls and ‘*dekha*’ means to see or to search. The process of looking for or to see a girl for marriage is called ‘*kania dekha*’.

The family members of the boy go to the girl’s house and meet the girl’s family. If things go well and boy’s family like the girl, then girl’s family members make a visit to boy’s family. The main criteria for finalization of the proposal from both the sides are good behaviour of boy and girl, economic conditions of both the families and when boy and girl like each other. Then a suitable auspicious date is fixed by both the parties sitting together in consultation with village tribal priest and a Brahmin as per the new rules. But the worship of Bindhyabasini Devi as well as binding of sacred thread during marriage is done by the Binjhal priest of the village.

The council in the year 2003 has framed certain rules and regulations on the marriage in the *Mahasabha*. The Binjhals of Odisha have traditional councils at different level (village, inter-village level). In every three or five years gape; they convene a grand meeting which is held at Padampur King's Palace in Baragarh district of Odisha. This meeting is known as "*Mahasabha*". The meeting is organised by Sarba Bharatia Binjhal Samaja. In the meeting both the male and female can participate and guests are also invited to deliver lectures on the important issues of the Binjhal society. Different rules and regulations are finalised in the *Mahasabha*. To maintain peace and order in the society they also take oath in the meeting.

In this part of the initial process, the boy's side visiting the girl's village in connection to initiate the proposal have to show the identity cards of self (social identity card) to the headman of the village. For that every family receives a membership receipt from the Association as the proof of belonging to the Binjhal tribe. During the process of initial negotiations between both the sides, the headman of the village or his representative along with two or three person of the society should be present with them. At least one must be present. Not more than 21 persons will be allowed to participate during the process of exchanging visits by both the sides before marriage. They have made it very clear that once the bridegroom and bride side have given their consent for marriage, they will not be allowed to entertain any new proposal unless there is a genuine reason thereof. If any such developments come across, the person involved will be penalized as per the rules. The new rules also strongly emphasize on the consent of the boy and girl before finalizing the marriage proposal. In the year 2008, the council has clearly added regarding the age at marriage as per the rules of the government on the age of the marriage, the age of the boy and girl must not be less than 21 years and 18 years respectively. Use of alcohol is prohibited in these occasions.

The recent rules prohibit marriage by elopement. The young boy and girls who falling in love and if that leads to elopement, as per the decision of the *Mahasabha* that their parents will be fined Rs. 15000.00 (Fifteen thousand rupees) and they will give a feast to the members of the society. Any married female or male having fallen in love secretly (extra marital relationship) and accepting him/her as husband/wife or make elopement will be ostracized from the society for lifelong. Regarding their children to be included in the Binjhal society is decided by the *Laat* President.

Invitation to Relatives

Traditionally, Binjhal used to invite their relatives and guests for marriage ceremony by turmeric rapped inside the *sargi* leaf (Sal) as an invitation card. First invitation is given to Goddess *Vindhyabasini*, which is followed by maternal uncle and then to other relatives and friends. The goddess Vindhyabasini is the tutelary deity of the Binjhal tribe. Migration history of the tribe says that the Binjhal tribes migrated from the Vindhya, Satpura and Aravalli hills

of Madhya Pradesh to **Bilaspur, Raipur, Raigarh and Sargujaand and later to** Bargarh district of Odisha and settled there. In all the auspicious occasions, they seek blessings from the deity. Therefore, the first invitation is offered to her and they pray for smooth completion of the entire process of marriage without any problem. Now a day, they have also adopted the modern printed card system for invitation. When it is done through card, they apply turmeric on the outer side of envelop of the card.

Ritual of Maulabhar

Day before the marriage, the girl's maternal uncle brings new clothes, bamboos basket for the girl, new sari and dhoti for her parents. When they come to bride's village they come along with a traditional musical sound with a procession which is called *maulabhar*. The bride's family also welcomes *maulabhar* into the home. The same process takes place in the bridegroom's side where all the ceremonial gifts come from maternal uncle's family.

Jangia

Three to four persons from the groom's side come to the bride's house and they stay in bride family till the end of the marriage which is called *Jangia*. They come with ceremonial gifts such as seven sarees, liya (puffed rice), bangles, vermilion and some cosmetics for the bride. The female members welcome them by washing their feet and escort them into the house. The seven numbers of Saree are the part of bride price which is given by the groom's family to be handed over officially to the girl's parents.

Aruapat or Kunabhainra Puja

This is the name of their home deity, which is usually placed at back side of the house. The bride's father, uncle and other male members worship the deity. The ritual ingredients for the worship are sun dried rice, vermilion, incense stick, local wine, flowers, coconut and deepa. The practice of using the ingredients mentioned seems to be borrowed from the neighbouring Hindu religion. On completion of the worship they drink the wine as *prasad* of the God. When that has been completed, they return to the house and worship the deities inside the house which is called *de ghar*.

Worshiping Deegudi

The term *Deegudi* means, the place where number of Gods and Goddesses have been installed in different form like stone, trees, arrow and knife. The names of the deities are *Thakurbudha* (male deity), *Bhatparsi* (female deity), *Phulmali* (female deity), *Peren Pat* (female deity), *Balaram Pat* (male deity), *Khail Buli* (female deity), *Budhimaa* (female deity) and *Baburaae* (male deity). The *pujari* (village priest) and six unmarried girls and a married woman (bride's sister-in-law) go to the place and worship.

The ritual ingredients are new clothes, turmeric, vermilion, sun dried rice, incense stick, lighted lamp (deepa), flowers, coconut, mango twig and liquor.

The priest of the village performs the worship. He offers white colour new clothes to all the deities. Ritual purification of deities by priest using turmeric in a very specific way is called *ganasana*. After that the *suasen* (six unmarried girls and one married woman) follow the same procedure. Then they offer liquor to the deities and pray to forgive them in case of any mistake in the process. All young girls then go to the house of the priest and bring water and sun dried rice to the bride's house.

Ganasana and Telpia

On the day of the marriage, the bride is seated facing east near the marriage platform (bedi). Six unmarried girls and one married woman come one by one and perform the *ganasana*. One girl takes four mango leaves in both hands and remaining other five girls touch the leaves placed on pot with turmeric. They tap with mango leaves on the legs to head of the bride seven times to complete the process. After that *telpia* (ritual drinking of oil) ritual takes place. All the seven *suasen* place their hands on the head of the bride. Then priest takes an arrow (*kaan*) and put it on the hands of the *suasen* in a horizontal position. Priest pour oil in the upper portion of the arrow and it flows downwards and that oil is drunk by the bride. The *ganasana* and *telpia* ritual is performed for purification of the bride before actual marriage ritual.

Pindhén

The *Jangia* who have come from groom's side, present all the ceremonial gifts which include ornaments, saree, lia, mudi, chuda, sweet, cosmetics, coconut and associated elements. Herein seven sarees are important gifts and a separate one for the bride. Out of the seven, two specific saree are called as *Aisar* and *Maisar*. *Aisar* for the grandmother and *Maisar* are for maternal aunt. All other edible things given to bride's family are distributed in the village.

God-dhua (washing of feet)

In Goddhua ritual the bride wear new clothes and ornaments which are given by the groom's family. She seats in a room with her friends. That place is arranged with *deepa*, *kalasa*, *cake of wice*, milk in a pot and *aruachawal*. The bride's family members come one by one to wash bride's feet with milk and give one cake in her leg and another in her head then give some money to the bride. They believe that, this is the last time before she leaves her parental house; the family members do the process.

Khania

The word *Kahnia* means half or incomplete. The priest has a procedure

to see the *khania* of the girl by using the rice. The priest takes some rice and makes pair of two and if single rice is left out, it is called *khania*. This particular situation is considered inauspicious in the Binjhal society. The priest or *lagania* says to bride's family that "your daughter is incomplete or half unless you give one or two chicken to the god". Then the bride's family gives two chickens to the priest which is sacrificed to the home deity. At night the priest, *lagania*, and cook and other male members cook the chicken and drink liquor at night and eat the chicken curry.

Rules for Bridegroom Party

Binjhal marriage takes place at the early morning. After the arrival of the bride groom's party, they are given light refreshment by the bride's family. Now a day, marriage procession takes place with modern music sounds. Earlier they used to have traditional musical sounds for the procession. When looking at the attire of the bridegroom, he must have in his hand an arrow which is an important symbolic element of the Binjhal society. Arrow is the weapon of the goddess Bindhyabasini. An arrow in groom's hand symbolizes protective shield. They believe that problems do not arise during the entire process of marriage. Therefore, the arrow is one of the important markers of Binjhal identity. The groom and others are welcomed in a very systematic way. In one of the case studies, we observed that the bride's family welcomed the bridegroom with new cycle, umbrella, new shoes, a pot of water, *pindha* (a type of clothe), flowers and sun dried rice. After washing the feet of the bridegroom by maternal uncle and aunt of the bride, he was escorted into the house in a brand new cycle. Other members of the *braati* party also get their feet washed and welcomed.

Rules for the *barati* party have also been mentioned. Not more than fifty-one people along with guests from other caste can participate from the bridegroom's side in the procession. If any problem arises due to the act of other caste people participating in the process, bridegroom will be held responsible. Unmarried young girls are prohibited to go in the barati party. Aged women can participate as per the traditional custom. Obscene songs and indiscipline dancing during the process has been stopped in the marriage ceremony and hired male dancer may be called for amusement. It is not compulsory to arrange the baza or drum at the marriage ceremony. On the arrival to the bride's village, they deposit Rs. 101.00(one hundred one only) to the head fund of the village and they get a receipt from village community head.

Galseka

The bridegroom seats in a particular chair in front of bride's house. The mother of bride comes with kalasa (bronze water pot) on her head where lighted lamp is well placed. She takes betel leaves and money in her both hands and she moves around the groom from left to right and touch the betel

leaf in groom's forehead. Second time she moves from right to left of groom and touches the betel leaf on bridegroom's forehead.

Bat-chheka

After the ritual of *Galseka*, the bridegroom is escorted into the house. But on the door, friends and sisters (joking relatives of the bridegroom) block the door and demand some amount of money. There is no fixed amount, but depend on the demand and some sort of compromise and negotiation take place. So bridegroom has to pay the agreed amount and enters into the house.

Rituals at the Marriage Bedi

The Brinjhal are the Suryabanshi and they believe to have descended from the Sun. They believe that blessing of the Sun God is highly essential in an auspicious moment like wedding. The predecessors were arranging wedding ceremony keeping sunrise period as auspicious moment. The *Mahasabha* has decided the period of sun rise or morning period as the auspicious moment for the wedding. If any members of the society disobey the rule, he will have to pay cash penalty of Rs. 10,000 (ten thousand rupees) and will be ostracized from the society. So night marriage was stopped. In the marriage ceremony, the village priest (*Ganit*) will be paid Rs. 1500/- (Fifteen hundred rupees), a dhoti and a towel for the service.

When everything is ready, the priest of bride's side and *lagania* (person who fix the time of the marriage) of groom's side take the charge to perform the main marriage ritual. The bridegroom and bride are escorted to the marriage *bedi* by their respective sister-in-law (*bahu*). The groom comes with extra white cloth and bride come with a new saree. Major ritual ingredients for marriage are vermilion, *lia* (puffed paddy), and sun dried rice, rice and milk. The puffed rice directly from paddy and rice have a symbolic significance which is called *Palla* kept in the bamboo basket. The *lagania* gives *lia* to both bride and bridegroom and he also offers to the *bedi*. This process is done twice and *Lagania* call both parents of bride and bridegroom sides. Then priest join the hand of bride and bridegroom through their parents and chants the mantras. After that both the priest together binds the clothes of bride and bridegroom and instruct bridegroom to apply vermilion in the forehead of the bride.

Kankanrasichida

Kankanrasi means a ritual which is observed when a girl attains seven years of age. If it was not done at seven years of age, then it has to be before the actual marriage. It is one types of half marriage for the girl. The *kankan* is made with mango leaves and the girl wear it like a tabiz in right hand. Then at the time of marriage of the girl, the Kankan roof is cut or broken by her younger brother. Then the bridegroom's parents give him new clothes.

God-dhua

Completion of the main ritual is followed by *god-dhua* ritual (washing of feet) of the bride and bridegroom. This is performed by the parents and relatives of bride's family for the final time. At first mother of the bride washes the feet of bride and bridegroom and bless them. Then other members of the family as well as the other close relatives bless the newlywed couple by washing their feet.

Unjhali-chauldia

When all the rituals have been completed, the couples are taken to a room and the *unjhali-chauldia* ritual is observed. Both the bride and bridegroom give rice seven times to her friends or brother's wife to close their hands. This seven *unjhalichaul* is the gift to seven *suasen* who had been engaged in the *ganasana* and other rituals of the marriage.

Marriage Feast

Marriage feast or *bhoji* has always been important part of marriage ceremony. Number of food items depends on the financial conditions of the parents. As per the rules, marriage feast must be organized in the day time. No one can compel the organizing family to give fish and meat in the feast of the marriage ceremony. The family can arrange feast according to their financial conditions. The feast giving process to bride groom's party and community members of bride's party should be completed by 1.00 P.M of the day time. It has been made compulsory to organize the feast in right time. If intentional delay is observed in this regard, disciplinary action is taken and bride party will be held responsible for it.

All men and women will eat the food in sitting position in the floor. Perhaps they are strictly against the eating food in standing position and moving one place to another which is the usual trend in non-tribal marriages. No one is allowed to take food to their houses. Usually this is done by the villagers where the marriage is taking place.

Tiken

When all of them have completed the lunch, they again gather at the *bedi* and make a complete list of all the commodities given to the bride by the family, relatives and friends. The bride and bridegroom put their signature in the marriage form. They count all the commodities very strictly as per the list and give separate copies to both the sides. They said that it is necessary because in case of dispute the bridegroom have to return all these items.

When the *tiken* is completed, priest or *lagania* call to the newly married couple to *bedi* and the priest tell a story to all and said how they would help

each other in their every situation of life. Both the parents of the couple come there and priest, village head, and grandparents give blessings to the couple in the name of *Vindyausani Devi* and finish the marriage. After completion in all the respect, bridegroom party returns with bride.

Bride Price and Ceremonial Gifts

In the tribal society, prevalence of bride price is widespread and very crucial component of marriage ceremony. Bride Price “sometimes referred to as ‘bride wealth’ is a form marriage payment in which the bride’s group receives a payment of goods, money or livestock to compensate for the loss of a woman’s labor” (Fleising 2003:175) and the children she bears. In the Binjhal marriage, payment of bride price is very simple. They have fixed the amount of money to be paid by the parents of bridegroom as well as clothes and other supporting elements for ceremonial giving and made it compulsory for all the Binjhals in Odisha. In the year 2018, the council added new point where the bridegroom party will have to pay Rs. 3101/- and seven number of *Kapda* (Sarees) to the bride’s family for wedding. From this money Rs.1000 is given to managing party, rest amount is given to the father of the bride. Further, the bride party and bridegroom party give Rs. 301.00 each to their respective assistant young girls of bride or bridegroom.



Seven saree (Kapda) given as Bride-Price

As per the rules, nose ring one pair is given to the bride from the family of the bridegroom. One gram gold material can be given in exchange of nose ring. The bride party cannot demand more from that. If someone demands more than the prescribed items, the council can impose cash fine against the person. Unlawful collection of money from bridegroom’s father to bride party or bride’s father to bride bridegroom party was stopped. If any activity against the rules is reported, double amount of cash fine is imposed on the person involved. As per the council, practice of dowry will not be allowed and strictly prohibited. The exchange of goods other than prescribed in the rules of marriage ceremony as been stopped by the council. The economically well-established

persons of the society also bound to obey the direction of the organization. Blessing to the newlywed couple after the marriage by relatives and friends with gifts is acceptable. But if evidence comes regarding behind the scene transactions of any kind, they will be ostracised for uncertain period and will be fined financially as well.

Apart from bride-price the bride and grooms are given different gifts by the relatives and friends. During the primary data collection, we have observed one marriage ceremony from bride's side and we found that usually utensils are given as gifts. But, with the change of time, they are also giving modern appliances as gifts by the relatives and friends.



Gifts for bride by family and relatives (photograph from the field)

Exogamy and Widow Re-marriage

The Binjhal rules on tribe exogamy are very strict but does not completely prohibit. When a Binjhal man marries a woman from other tribe or caste, the society accepts the woman but man faces ex-communication (*Pangat / Samaj*) from the society. Their children will be accepted as the member of the Binjhal society. If a Binjhal woman marries a man from outside the Binjhal tribe, parents of the girl have to pay Rs. 25000/- to the traditional council.

Widow re-marriage is permissible and accepted in the Binjhal society. The widow who wants to marry again, she must marry a man from other clan except her own. Three pair of saree with Rs. 2001/- (two thousand one only) rupees is given for widow marriage.

Polygyny is permitted. The person who wants to have second wife, he can only do that after taking consent of his first wife. He also has to take permission from the local Panchayat president and approval of the Head Quarters of the Traditional Council. Otherwise it will be taken as an offense.

Rules of Divorce

Binjhal society does not encourage divorce. But when the situation becomes worse between husband and wife and they want to terminate the marriage relation are allowed with certain rules and regulations. When one wants divorce (husband or wife) has to pay Rs.50,000/- as compensation. If both parties agree to give divorce, then both party will compel to give Rs.20,000/- (Twenty thousand rupees) each to the concerned Board. From Rs. 50000.00(Fifty thousand rupees) divorce money Rs.7500.00 (seven thousand five hundred rupees) is deposited in joint account of Head Quarters.

The above rules and regulations framed by the Mahasabha have brought uniformity amidst regional differences in the Binjhal tribe. The main objective of framing written rules and regulations are to preserve traditional cultural practices and maintaining Binjhal identity. Particularly, in terms of marriage, many tribal communities have adopted different elements of either Hinduism or the Christianity. In the Western Odisha, many tribal communities have adapted the Christianity or converted into it. Most of the cases, it is found that the educated and economically sound families are first to adopt the new religious practices in the belief to enhance the horizontal social status. But in case of Binjhal tribe, the elites and traditional leaders have taken revivalist attitude to preserve the traditional practices. Looking at the rules and regulations, few important understanding can be developed. This rule has brought uniformity in terms economic differences. It also strongly emphasizes that marriage should take place within the Binjhal tribe. To ward off the practice of child marriage, they have also fixed up the minimum age as per with the government rules. The rules indicate strong action against the payment of dowry. They only allow the bride price which has also been specifically categorised what to be paid. The rules and regulations have incorporated all the aspects of marriage, such as adultery, polygyny, divorce and love marriage. The community has very well understood that marriage is an expensive affair and it should be minimised as far as possible through this written rules.

Reasons behind the Framing of Rules and Regulations

In the traditional Binjhal marriage ritual, not many changes have been observed during fieldwork. But certain changes have taken place due to acculturation and modernization. Apart from traditional musical procession, they have adapted modern musical sound with DJ sound for procession. Dress pattern for the bridegroom and bride has also changed. New additions in the ornaments have also come into the Binjhal society. In terms of ceremonial gift giving, modern home appliances are also now the part of it. Few elements of Hindu religion can be witnessed in the marriage rituals which seems to have been borrowed from local Hindu neighbours. Binjhals have realised in time that repercussions of acculturation and modernization on the marriage rituals would be leading to decline of the cultural heritage and tribal identity.

As it is seen in the other tribal societies also who have almost transformed their religion either into Hinduism or Christianity. Majority of the tribes in Western Odisha like Oraon, Munda, Mirdha and Gond have adopted either Christianity or Hinduism. The tribal communities adopted Christianity or Hinduism are now performing life cycle rituals as per the customs of respective new religions. But the elites and traditional leaders of Binjhal tribes thought of framing rules and regulations related to marriage and that would be binding for all the Binjhals irrespective economic differences. They formed different tribal associations at different level and framed rules and regulations for marriage in the Mahasabha.

Conclusion

Marriage in the Binjhal society is one of the important socio-religious occasions. The traditional customs related marriage has been well maintained by the community amidst changing scenario. Due to acculturation and modernization, certain changes have taken place, but core rituals of the marriage have not been affected so far. Even today tribal priest performs the marriage rituals rather than a Brahmin priest. People from Binjhal tribe are now occupying important government positions after attaining higher education. The educated elites and the traditional leaders realised that changing scenario will bring drastic changes and rupture customs and traditions of the Binjhal society, which in turn would lead to identity crisis. This sense of consciousness towards the cultural practices which are the identity markers of the Binjhal tribe led to the development of solidarity. Different associations in collaborations with traditional political council they framed written rules and regulations for marriage and made it binding to all sections of the Binjhal community irrespective of economic differences. This effort not only blocked entry of the evil practice of dowry as well as other elements of dominant religions in the locality into the rituals and customs but also ultimately preserved the traditional marriage customs of the Binjhal tribe.

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