

MARRIAGE AND DOWRY SYSTEM OF THE RONGMEI NAGA IN BARAK VALLEY

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Abstract—Rongmei is one of the oldest major Tribes of Nagas inhabited in the North-Eastern region of India. The Rongmei Naga belongs to the Tibeto Barman family of the Mongoloid race. The ancestral home of the Rongmei lies in the mountain ranges in the South and South-western parts of Manipur including Churachandpur and Tamenglong District. Later, they migrated to the South Assam specially in Barak Valley. In the Rongmei Marriage System the process of Solicitation; negotiation; for a bride begins from October-April of the Year. It is said that the attempt of Solicitation for a Bride (Nouthanmei) takes quite a long period from two to Seven or more years in the old days. On the day of Settlement of Marriage, if the parent so desire and agree, a convenient date is fixed with the Solicitants for fixing the number of Bridal cost (dowry from man Side) or *Malsing rem khang*. In the Early days the Bridal cost was paid after one year of the settlement. '*Malsing Remmei*' denotes to determine the actual number of Bridal cost demanded by the parent of the girl. As usual practice, before the day fixed for determination of bridal cost, the parents of the girl used to consult and discuss the senior family members. In Barak Valley traditional practice of bridal cost in kinds is compulsory. Under the traditional custom of Rongmei there were two kinds of Bridal cost, namely i) The bridal cost of the virgin girl ii) The cost of the Widow. It is customary law to bring a big cock by the bride's family to the bridegrooms house for formal marriage ceremony and to examine its legs. Imitating the practice of the divine Marriage ceremony of Diphungpu and Dikoilunglu, brides family brought a cock to examine the omen in the holy marriage and formal presentation ceremony of dowry. This tradition continues till today.

This paper will attempt to analyse the Dowry system of the Rongmei Marriage in present Barak Valley.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Rongmeis are in important tribal segment belonging to zeliangrong community. Rongmei is one of the Oldest major Tribes of Nagas inhabited in the North-Eastern region of India. The Rongmei Naga belongs to the Tibeto Barman family of the Mongoloid race. The ancestral home of the Rongmei lies in the mountain ranges in the South and South-western part of Manipur including Churachandpur and Tamenglong District. Later, they migrated to the South Assam specially in Barak Valley. Rongmei a marriage in the ordinary sense, means the union of one young girl with a young boy

from different clans out of their mutual love, or under an agreement of both parents with the consent of the boy and the girl. The Rongmei society is slowly imitating the Hindu dowry System. When a marriage takes place, the bride is expected to bring 'gifts' and a woman who fails to bring dowry is often sneered and laughed at. Though this may not bring about any physical harm to the woman but she surely becomes a victim and suffers from Psychological and mental torture. [169]

2. Objectives

- i) The objective of the present study is to explore the marriage system of Rongmei (Kabui) tribe of Barak Valley.
- ii) This paper will attempt to analyse the Dowry system of the Rongmei Marriage in present Barak Valley.

3. Rongmei Marriage System in Barak Valley

Traditionally, marriage is considered as a means to procreate children. For the girl; the imposed purpose of marriage is to serve her husband, children, parents-in-laws and the whole family. This reduces the status of women to that of a slave.[63] In Rongmei Society Marriage system has two types, i.e., One is 'Noupuimei' and other is 'Nousonmei'. Here 'Nou' means wife and 'Pui mei' means courting or winning the love of a girl or woman. Therefore, by combination of 'Nou' and 'Kaomei' i.e. 'Noukaomei' means the sacred of holy marriage by solemn administration with spiritual ceremony seeking the blessing of God. Marriage is unavoidable in the Society for existence. In the ordinary Sense, The custom of Marriage means the Union of a young boy with a young girl from different clans out of their mutual love or agreement of both parents with or without consent of the boy and the girl. But every proper or genuine marriage is to fulfil the code of marriage prescribed under the social custom of marriage.[130-131]. Traditional Marriage System of Rongmei is something different than any other communities of Barak Valley, the nuptial ceremony perform in the house of the bride groom residence.

3.1. Types of Rongmei Marriage

- i) Thane Noukao: Genuine marriage by proper engagement and solemnisation.
- ii) Charai noukao: Ordinary marriage known as love marriage by elopement.
- iii) Noumangmei: Marriage by espouse
- iv) Meinou Kasoumei: The marriage of other fellow-mans wife by force or trick of wooing.
- v) Kakhoumei Noukao: The successive marriage of a widow, the wife of the deceased brother, by the youngest brother of the deceased brother, if Survived, in order to look after the children of his deceased brother. [134]

3.1.1. Performance of the Marriage Ceremony

- i) In the case of Laangdei Mailak (Nousonmei), the marriage ceremony is usually Performed at the bed of the bridegroom sitting together with the bride and the groom.
- ii) In the case of Love marriage (Charei Noukao), the marriage ceremony is also performed at the bed sitting together with the boy and the girl in his house or in the house of his relatives or friends in other village where the girl is lodged by elopement.
- iii) Marriage of other man's wife by force (Meinou Kasoumei) and its marriage ceremony is performed in the house where the girl or the woman is kept in hiding.
- iv) In the case of Marriage by servitude (Noumangmei) the marriage ceremony is executed at bed in the house of the girl or the woman on a particular day fixed by the parents of both families sitting together with the boy and the girl.
- v) In the case of Successive marriage (Nou Kakhoumai), the marriage is carried out at the bed by sitting together with the man and the woman in the house of the man who is going to be married with the widow (the wife) of his deceased younger brother or elder brother. [219-220]

4. Bride Price and a woman's value

A woman's value in Rongmei society becomes evident mainly during her engagement and marriage. She is not easily given away in marriage by her kinsmen. The boy's kins are to respectfully approach the girl's family for her hand. In the past the formal marriage proposal for Khaemthan or Holy marriage was usually done by bringing a pot of rice wine and later followed by the payment of Bride Price agreed upon by the two parties. The first instalment of the Bride price may be paid on the day of engagement. Bride price is usually paid in the form of paddy by the groom's family to her parents. The bride price is determined by the status of the bride whether she is a virgin, a widow or a divorcee. After the bride price is fully paid, the girl's parents will arrange a customary function called Puatsumei (packing up for the bride) by cooking the meat of a sizeable boar and sending to the groom's house along with a sufficient quantity of sticky rice beer. There are other forms of Bride Price such as Mandu-which is paid to her family if she has died before her Bride Price was cleared. Maigong Mann (Widow's Price) is paid by the late husband's

family to the widow's parents if the former do not want her to go back to her parents. If it is not settled, the widow can go back home. Rou mann (Bone Price) is paid after the death of the wife by the one who inherits her husband's property. This is the last payment for a bride which is not fixed but agreed between two parties.

The woman's kinfolk closely observe the way she is being treated by her husband's family and clan. If she is being mistreated, her relatives can raise the issue of taking her back. Or in case the same clan comes with any other marriage proposal in the future the girl's clan can bring up such subject against the man's clan and even decide to withhold the girl's hand in marriage. Nowadays paying Bride Price is no longer a common practice due to economic reasons but it has become a tradition to bring a boar to the girl's home and serve food on the day of the marriage proposal regardless of the type of marriage. But expensive weddings are replacing these practices. While the practice of Bride Price has become uncommon, the practice of Puatsumei (Packing up for the bride) is religiously continued especially among Christians as a day of blessing a daughter and arranging gifts/dowry to take to her new home.[5]

4.1 The Bridal cost

At present in Barak Valley, the following is the list of essential items with quantity of bridal cost in respect of a virgin girl for valid marriage under the traditional custom of Rongmei followed from generation to generation though there is little variation of items and quantity from village to village, Son-in-law takes very important roles to bring the following items to the bridal house in the morning of the marriage ceremony

- i) Manpi - (a one rupee Silver Coin)
- ii) Bangkhoi Tario - (a Sickle)
- iii) Fhu - (a Spade 'for working of the jhum')
- iv) Siyan Kuyak- (a big size decorated brass plate)
- v) Bang - (A Tribal Sword)
- vi) Fhaipuwang - (a White woollen Shawl)

Above this Articles is to be kept in a 'Koluwang' (a basket made of bamboo and cane) and this is to be carried by a married women who has husband and child.

- vii) Utan juran - (a spear)
- viii) Gailuyai- (a male buffalo)

This two item is to be carried by son-in-law (lugan)

5. Dowry System of the Rongmei

Maximum case of arranged marriage, dowry system is most common attribute. The parents of girls make an estimate of expenditure on various items like jewellers, clothes, sweets, furniture, travelling, all household goods, bike or car, bungalow or flat, and other miscellaneous expense. Parents of

girls have to arrange of above mention goods. If there have missing something then marriage will not be happen.

‘Podnam’ means dowry which is the property given by the parent and near relatives to their daughter in marriage. In general dowry means the gifts or parents either in cash or in kinds given by her parent to their daughter at marriage for her welfare and utilisation at her new house of her husband. As a matter of fact there was no custom no compulsory System of Dowry in the society of Rongmei other than the individual contributions in cash and in kinds of any moveable things as present or gifts by her parents, grand pa, grand ma, uncle, aunt, brother, sisters, relatives, friends, and well wishes to the bride in marriage out of their love and affection for her welfare and utilisation in her new house. However, in the present Society Some of the Rich Families use to give a huge amount of money, Radio, TV, Cars, etc. including even some immoveable property as gifts to their daughters at marriage.[150]

5.1 Traditional Dowry

- i) Zoumu: wine container made from wild gourd.
- ii) Pheingaou: a traditional shawl for bridegroom
- iii) Masin Pheipong: a traditional tribal shawl usually worn by elders
- iv) Peisoi: a traditional garment for mother-in-law
- v) peisoi: a garment for the oldest women belonging to bridegroom’s clan
- vi) Lee: a hoe
- vii) Mui: a cotton Spinning
- viii) Tareng: a Spinning wheel
- ix) Baang: a Tribal sword
- x) Bsmlin Sen: a coin
- xi) Manpi: a one rupee Silver coin
- xii) Siyan Kuyak: a big size decorated brass plate
- xiii) Guwai nai: a Cow
- xiv) Guwak nai: a Female Pig for rearing
- xv) Aduna- a hen
- xvi) Goiroi kakui: a female buffalo
- xvii) Kaipui Napodam: 7 packets of delicious food and meat curry
- xviii) Khook: one bamboo/can made basket having four stands
- xix) Khoujai: a bamboo basket containing a few items of dry meet, fish, eatables for personal use till familiarity with the hands of father-in-law and mother in law

5.2 Payment of Dowry

After payment of bride price, the family of the wife will give a number of dowry as written at pre-page of traditional dowry fixing a particular day. The procedures of payment of dowry are same mostly that of holy marriage.

Holy marriage happens very rare in the Society of TRC thinking that it is very meticulous and expensive in this modern world. Rather they are interested in mutual love marriage by elopement which is the most common practice

among the people of TRC. Actually, holy marriage is honourable. [222]

5.3. Formal presentation of Dowry (Daomei potshu/ Lupot)

Accordingly to mythology of Rongmei, it was decided that one who could go round the world and reached the koubru hill first would succeed the throne of Didimpu. Accordingly, all the Six elder brothers of Raguang (pouna) set out to go round the world, but Charasinglangpui Stopped Raguwang from running the race. Instead she made Raguwang move round the garden of Didimpu which is similar to go round the world thus Raguang occupied first the seat of Didimpu’s throne before his six elder Brothers reached the divine palace. So, Raguang was declared as king of the lower realm. Out of Desperation and anger, Vishnu, eldest son of Charasinglangpui moved out of Koubru Hills and carried away all creatures, flora and fauna to the kingdom of Bhuvan hills (from the soil of Koubru hills) in protest against the deceitful activities of his mother in the competition of Succession of Didimpu’s throne. After sometimes gods minutely discussed and made a proposal of marriage between Diphungpu, Son of Raguang and Dikoilunglu, daughter of Vishnu (first son of the charasinglangpui). At last, an agreement was reached between Vishnu and Raguwang that the marriage ceremony had to carry out inspite of having taboo. By that time, there was no cock in the House of Raguwang to perform the marriage ceremony. Whereas, there was full of cocks in the house of Vishnu. So, a big cock was brought by the Brides family to the bride grooms house for formal marriage ceremony and to examine its legs. Imitating the practice of the divine marriage ceremony of Diphungpu and Dikoilunglu, brides family brought a cock to examine the omen in the holy marriage and formal presentation of dowry.[213-214]

6. Conclusion

The dowry and marriage system of Rongmei tribes is practically influenced by the land where they inhabited. The mythology of the community which they belief and the mode of old faith to the ‘Tingkou Raguang’ the supreme God totally involved in their holy marriage ceremony. The items of dowry reveals the art of living, the equipment they discovered and activities they deserved from the Pre-historic period. The precious traditions is the leaving evidence of the origin and civilization of the Rongmei Society.

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