Abstract

Marriage exists in all societies. Various factors have been responsible for evolution of marriages as an institution. The rules and regulations of marriages vary society to society. There are great differences in marriage as it was prevalent in the primitive as well as civilized societies, according to the prescribed laws of society. The present study is an attempt to understand the marriage system of Garos of the Assananggre village of West Garo Hills of Meghalaya that how they select their spouse, their rules and regulations of marriage, their marriage ceremonies and customs, rules of residence etc. From the study conducted in this village it can be said that the society is a strong matrilineal and line of descent is traced through the mother side. The impact of modernization and education has brought the change in the entire marriage system including the ceremonies and rituals of marriage among the Garos of Assananggre. The paper also attempts to study the changes in the marriage system among them. The paper has been prepared through primary data collected from fieldwork by applying anthropological research methods.

I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is an important social institution in all societies. Marriage creates new social relationship and reciprocal rights between the spouses, between each and kin of the other, and establishes what will be the rights and status of the children when they are born. But there is no general definition of marriage which covers all of the kinds of institutionalized inter-personal relationship which it is convenient to include under the term (John Beattie,1964).
Garo is a major tribe of North-East India. Like other communities or tribe this indigenous tribal group also has distinct culture, belief, customs, language and unique cultural identities of their own. To understand the Garo society we need to understand their Marriage system along with other social institution of the society.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Most of the literatures of marriage discuss about the origin or theories of marriage, forms of marriage and rules and regulations of marriage etc. Benokraitis(1993) described the theories of marriage and the family that there are a number of sociological explanations of marriage and family. The four most influential explanations are structural-functionalism, conflict, symbolic interaction and exchange theory.

Benokraitis(1993) again talked about the forms of marriage. There are several forms of marriage that are allowed by a society: monogamy (one man, one woman); polygamy (several spouses for one man or one woman); and group marriage (two or more men and two or more women). [Benokraitis, 1993]

Bohannan(2007) states that there are two sorts of polygamy (the word means plural marriage in Greek). The situation in which a man may, according to the rules of society, have more than one wife at a time is known as polygyny (plural women). That which results when a woman may have two or more husbands is called polyandry (plural men).

Regarding the rules and regulations of marriage the literatures mostly mention about exogamy and endogamy. Exogamy is the rule by which a man is not allowed to marry someone from his own kin or clan group. Marrying outside one’s clan is called exogamy. The reverse practice of marrying within one’s tribe or clan is called endogamy (Madan and Majumdar, 2009).

Some tribal societies practice different forms of cousin marriage (Scupin and R.DeCorse, 2009). Madan and Majumdar (2009) mentioned cross-cousin marriage as a form of exogamy. Cross-cousins are children of siblings of opposite sex, that is, a person’s cross-cousins are father’s sister’s children and mother’s brother’s children. Some societies favour matrilineal cross-cousin marriage- marriage of a man to his mother’s brother’s daughter or a woman to her father’s sister’s son (Haviland, 2008).

On the other hand, the parallel cousin is the child of a father’s brother or mother’s sister. In some societies, the preferred spouse for a man is his father’s brother’s daughter. This is known as patrilineal parallel cousin marriage (Haviland, 2008).

There are many scholars who have been made effort to study Garo marriage system as well. Playfair (1975) states that in theory, marriage is strictly exogamous among the Garos, and husband and wife must belong to different septs and motherhood.

Sangma(1981) tries to elaborate the forms of marriage among the Garos. The recognised and normal form of marriage is called Do’sia. Other forms of marriage are marriage by capture, marriage by elopement, marriage after a girl goes and sleep with the boy etc.
On 'songa marriage that is, when a nephew is made to marry the widow, after the death of his uncle or when a girl is made to marry a man, after the death of her elder sister.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the present study are:

i.) To understand the marriage system of Garo society of the Assananggre village.

ii.) To study the rules and regulations of marriage and residence.

iii.) To analyse the changes in marriage system.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The methods and techniques used for present study are observation, interview methods and some case studies. The semi-structured interview was conducted for case studies. Some data are collected with the help of an interpreter by asking questions face to face to the informants. The secondary data are collected from books, monographs, articles, journals etc.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Selection of Spouse: Selection of spouse can be found by self-choice, arranged by parents or relatives and elopement. Parents concern that children choose their partner should be of good character, hardworking, physically and mentally healthy. With change of time additional qualities like educational qualifications, job status and financial condition of a person is considered.

In the present study, marriage is found mostly by self-choice, where partners may decide to get married after some months or years of courtship. Proposal for marriage must come from the girl’s side and not from the boy’s side. When a girl falls in love with a boy, she indicates her love to one of her relatives, after which her parents, uncles and other relations go to the boy’s house on an appointed day, to negotiate the marriage. If everything goes well a marriage day is fixed. This custom is known as Nokchame comparable to engagement. After the Nokchame marriage ceremony takes place in the presence of church leaders, family members and mahari of both families.

In the case of arranged marriage, the main system in traditional Garo marriage is to marry a father’s sister’s son by negotiation. Because the essential factor in the continuance of a Garo household is bringing a Nokkrom to be the future head of the household. The selection of a nokkrom is fraught entirely with consideration for management of property. When a real sister’s son is not available, then the girl’s father tries to get one from his own mahari. Nokkrom is the husband of nokna or heiress of the household. The son in laws who are not nokkrom are called as chaware. At present this practice has changed. The people of this village no longer practice this. If a couple fall in love with each other then they approach to their parents and they have their own freedom to get married and not forced by their parents.

5.2 Rules and Regulation of Marriage:
Exogamy: The marriage laws of the Garos are regulated by the two most important laws of clan exogamy and A-kim. Due to the very existence of these two laws no marriage may be contracted between two persons belonging to same clan (mahari). Thus a Sangma cannot marry a Sangma, a Marak cannot marry a Marak and so on. If a marriage takes place between members of the same clan, they are looked down upon by the society. According to the data collected through this study, the village strictly follow the clan exogamy.

Endogamy: Although clan exogamy prevails amongst the different clans the Garos prefer to marry within their own tribe. From the study conducted it has been found that there is no strict rule of village endogamy, an individual can marry a person inside or outside the village.

Cross-cousin marriage: Cross-cousin marriage was first formulated by Tylor in 1988. In these village, where I conducted the study people rarely follow the cross-cousin marriage. Regarding the selection of a Nokkrom they usually prefer to follow the MBD (mother’s brother’s daughter) type of marriage. If the girl is heiress (Nokna) of the house then her husband should be the nephew of her father or father’s sister’s son. But in case of Chaware or other daughters this is not compulsory.

Monogamy: The law of monogamy is strictly adhered to by the Christians in this village. A man can marry only one wife. No Christian is allowed to have two wives at the same time and can only marry another woman after the death of the first wife.

Polygamy: Polygamy was found at all. The Garo customary laws prohibit the multiple spouses during the lifetime of husband or wife. Both polygynous and polyandrous marriage is not common in this village or it is in practice.

5.3 Marriage Ceremonies: Marriage ceremonies are usually carried out with much pomp and grandeur. Due to Christianity the people of Assananggre village do not practice the traditional rituals in their marriage ceremony. The wedding party is generally celebrated at the bride’s residence. Marriage among them is conducted in the church and is presided over by the pastor or minister shall administer the holy Matrimonial service.

5.4 Rules of Residence: The pattern of residence among the Garo of Assananggre village is Matrilocal. It is customary for the boys to leave his natal home and live with his wife either in her parental house or their own house. After their marriage the couple is given a plot of land by the parents of the bride, those who are rich can live on their own house and form a Neolocal family. In case of heiress or Nokna the couple has to stay with her parents. They have the responsibility to look after the parents during their old age.

5.5 Changes in Marriage System: Like other aspects of culture in Marriage system also some changes have been taken place according to the changes of society. Different changes are found with the passing of time and with the adjustment of the people to modernization. The people have been influenced by modern life as this village is getting government provided facilities. Since majority of the people from this village are Christian, they have begun to adopt the western culture in beliefs and material culture as well.
In the present study regarding the selection and mode of acquiring spouses became more flexible than the older days. Based on the interview during fieldwork, it has been noted that that the definition of the quality of the spouse has changed. In the past, hardworking is the most important quality in a person. At present, however, education, job status and economic status etc. are the most important factors for deciding the eligibility of a person. The impact of modernization and education has brought the changes in the ceremonies and rituals of marriage among the Garos of Assananggre village. After converting to the Christianity the people of the village do not practice their traditional marriage ceremonies and rituals. They follow church marriage and their marriage is presided over by the pastor. Education is an important factor responsible for changes in the marriage system. Majority of the couple got married by self-choice. The people who are well educated prefer an educated partner and feel that one should first be financially stable before getting married. Through education and trade and commerce people come in contact and through such interactions the marriage with people outside the village and town is also occurring and village endogamy is not strictly observed.

VI. CONCLUSION

Marriage is an important social institution. Marriage is a bond between a man and a woman, a bond for procreation and cultural continuity. It is a bond which connects two different families or clan. From the study conducted in Assananggre village it can be concluded that the society is a strong matrilineal society and line of descent is traced through the mother side. The children take the title of the mother. The system of marriage in this village is based on clan exogamy. The changes are seen in the marriage system, but not in all aspects. The main factors responsible for changes are the impact of modernization and education. However, all the traditional practices are not completely washed out, like traditional food and dresses and ornaments are still existed in their marriage system.

VII. REFERENCES

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

I have completed my Masters Degree in Anthropology from North Eastern Hill University, Shillong and graduated from Cotton College, Guwahati. Currently I am working as a faculty of Anthropology in a private Junior College. I worked as a part time field Investigator in an ICSSR funded project as well. My research interests are ethnography, tribal studies and ecological Anthropology.

PAPER CITATION