

Traditional Marriage System of the Adi Tribe of Lower Dibang Valley, Arunachal Pradesh: Continuity, Rituals, and Cultural Meaning

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Abstract

This paper examines the traditional marriage system of the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, with particular reference to practices observed in the Lower Dibang Valley District. Based on ethnographic fieldwork oral narratives and participant observation the study explores the social ritual and symbolic dimensions of marriage among the Adis. It highlights the continuity of customary practices alongside subtle transformations influenced by ecological beliefs seasonal cycles kinship norms and moral values. Marriage among the Adis is not merely a personal union but a socially sanctioned institution central to lineage continuity kinship solidarity and cultural transmission. The paper reports major processes involved in marriages including but not limited to the process of partner selection and engagements to the post marital settlement and ceremonies: affirming the continuing applicability of indigenous knowledge systems in governance of marital life.

Keywords: Adi tribe, marriage system kinship ritual. Arunachal Pradesh indigenous customs.

Introduction

Marriage is one of the basic social institutions that organize family life control sexual behaviour and social continuity. Marriage is entrenched in the cultural beliefs the ecological cycles and the familial-lineage duties among the tribal societies. Marriage in Adi society is not only a union between a man and a woman but it is the alliance between families and clans. Although there is a growing exposure to the modern influences the old marriage practices among the Adis have remained influential in the social life.

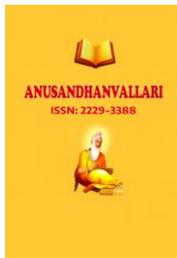
Objectives of the Study

The present study seeks to:

1. Research among the Adi tribe of the Lower Dibang Valley District on the traditional forms and stages of marriage.
2. Record marriage rituals symbols and ceremonies.
3. Know the cultural value and social roles of marriage in preservation of kinship lineage as well as social cohesion.
4. Examine the persistence of marriage traditions with the slow socio-cultural transformation.

Significance of the Study

The current research has academic cultural and social importance. To begin with it adds to the body of ethnographic literature on the Adi tribe and it puts the in-depth account of traditional types of marriage rituals and cultural meanings in the Lower Dibang Valley District where the current literature is still underrepresented.



The recording of the indigenous practices based on oral traditions and the performance of the rituals by the indigenous people through the study stands to conserve the precious intangible cultural heritage that is progressively endangered by modernization and socio-economic change.

Second the research provides a sociological perspective of the role of marriage as an important institution in the strength of kinship ties continuation of lineage and social integration in a tribal community. It emphasizes the importance of ecological beliefs seasonality and traditional laws in controlling the marriage practices which adds to the general discourse on the indigenous knowledge systems and society.

Lastly the results have practical implications to other scholars policy-makers and cultural institutions that care about tribal well-being customary law and cultural conservation. The research could be informative to culturally sensitive development efforts legal frameworks and future comparative research of marriage systems among tribal groups in Northeast India because it offers an empirically based insight into the practices of the much discussed Adi marriage.

Methodology

It relies on the qualitative ethnographic research performed in the Adi villages of the Lower Dibang Valley District of Arunachal Pradesh. Primary data were gathered under the form of participant observation in-depth interviews with old people informants married couples village elders and women and the recording of oral stories myths and rituals. Related secondary sources like the ethnographic literature historical literature as well as earlier research on the Adi society were also reviewed to substantiate the findings of the field. The interdisciplinary understanding of marriage system was facilitated by this interwoven method that focuses on the marriage system within the context of socio-cultural environment.

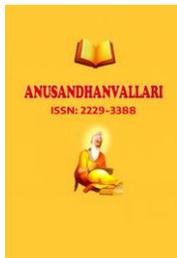
Marriage is supposed to have a mythological origin.

Adi cosmology dates marriage to the divine cosmogonic myths that were passed orally. It was the fate of the first woman *Kine Nane* according to Adi *Miri Aabang* and the first man *Doying Bote*. A first effort having been made and failed with *Kosung* (chipmunk) as messenger *Doying Bote* despatched the *liipo* (red-breasted squirrel) whose beauty and grace convinced *Kine Nane* to make the offer. This sacral marriage is considered to be the first human marriage. The red-breasted squirrel therefore takes a revered position in Adi marriage ceremonies as it is a sign of one thing which is association beauty and marital bliss.

Social institution of marriage.

Adi society marriage as it is locally called that is *nyameng lanam* translates to obtain the bride. It legalizes the marriage between a man and a woman and creates legal social economic and reproductive relations. Adis follow tribe endogamy and clan exogamy with the society being mostly patrilocal. The socially accepted type of marriage is monogamy and polygamy is very uncommon and discouraged in the culture.

The traditional culture of Adi society allows some pre-marital sexual freedom in both girls and boys. The socially recognized place of interaction among young people is found through institutions like the *Rasheng* where they are able to formulate a relationship before they get married (Roy 1960).



Marital meaning of cultural meaning.

Marriage is considered to be a holy responsibility of Adis as opposed to an individual choice. It satisfies the biological emotional and social needs and assures the continuity of the bloodline traditions and cultural values. One of the Adi proverbs documented by Srivastava (1990) highlights interdependence in marriage by using metaphors of tools and other common objects to show that it is believed that individual wholeness is accomplished through a partnership. These expressions indicate what the community perceives marriage to be based on their perception of marriage as a source of equilibrium collaboration and social order.

The interaction seasonal and taboos.

Weddings are customarily planned during the time of November-March when there is plenty and celebration is implied. This good season is reflected when the insect *Yiyng-Barbi*, appears and matches with such festivals as *Unnyng*. Activities at this stage are characterized by the presentation of *Reyng Apong* to the family of the bride.

Conversely the late months of March to August are inauspicious because of the difficulty in farming and insufficient food. The singing of birds *Supir* and *Pakkom* is said to be the arrival of *Dire-Kone* the spirit of famine. The activities in this time are shunned since they are considered to possess ill ominousness. There is a proverb against entering into marriages at this taboo period.

Marriage age and choice of partners.

Even though it does not have a specific age prescription marriage is usually taken to place once both the individuals have reached adulthood. Early marriages have been practiced in past whereby wealthy families were the ones that arranged the marriage although maturity was later ceremonially accepted. In the past parents have been in the center stage of selection of a partner and the factors that were considered included the status of the family ancestry and the economic conditions. Individual preference was however not fully ignored.

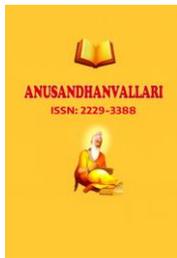
Rituals of marriage proposal and engagement.

The groom family initiates marriage proposals and usually through an intermediary called *Nyamang Tomnam*. Offers are delivered in an indirect fashion using symbolic language instead of straightforward language. When acceptance is made the family of the groom then offers *kepel* which includes rice beer, squirrels, rice, ginger, ritual sticks (*taku*) and sacred boughs (*taan*) that represents the formal union between the two families.

Marriage rituals and ceremonies.

There are several steps and ceremonial exchange of marriage rituals. The *Nyameng Kepel*, is the official acceptance of the proposal to get married. Later visits feasts and exchange of gifts enhance relations within the kinship. The process of the bride being transferred to the clan of her husband is socially accepted by the way of the ritual practices as well as the involvement of the whole community.

Another important post-marriage ritual is *Lungkang* which is used when there is a festival like Lutor or Etor and different families have the ability to perform the ceremony due to their economic status. It is a ritual



that includes pig sacrifice and mutual sharing of meat which strengthens family-to-family committed interactions and solidarity.

Post marital place of residence: Duran/Nyameng Gilik.

Some years after marriage the bride usually remains in her native place. She officially leaves her home to the home of her husband which is referred to as *Duran or Nyameng Gilik* in good seasons. The ritual has a farewell feast and exchange of gifts (*Ali Pannam*) gifts may be in form of seeds livestock tools and ornaments so that the couple can create a new household. Inheritance of land and ancestral property however remains patrilineal.

Conclusion

The traditional marriage system of the Adi tribe reflects a complex interplay of mythology ecology kinship and ritual practice. Despite gradual social change these customs continue to regulate marital life and reinforce cultural identity. Marriage among the Adis remains a collective institution that ensures social cohesion, inter-generational continuity, and the preservation of indigenous knowledge. Documenting such practices is essential for understanding tribal social organization and for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in a rapidly changing world.

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