

A Study on Marriage Among the Tiwa's of Sidhabari Village, Morigaon District, Assam

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Introduction

The Tiwas or the Lalungs are scheduled tribe of Assam belonged to the Indo-Mongoloid ethnic race. The Tiwa community has a mythological and historical origin and migration. Some of the scholars claimed that the Tiwa people are group of Tibeto-Burmese tribe. They came down through the course of the Brahmaputra and settled in different parts of Assam. They were later pushed to the present area of habitation by other tribes probably during the Kamata period. According to Sarma Thakur (1985) "The River Brahmaputra rescued or gave shelter to the Bohemian people, hence they were known as Lalungs. The Tiwas are divided basically into two sub-groups as Hill Tiwas and Plain Tiwas. Hill Tiwas lives in the westernmost areas of Karbi-Anglong as well as in the north eastern corner of Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya. They are divided into several clans recognized by specific names. In the plains, Tiwa concentrations are mainly found in the districts of Nagaon and Morigaon in Central Assam. They are spread in Morigaon, the Revenue Circles of Nagaon, Kaliabar, Lanka, Raha, and Kampur in Nagaon district, and the South Tribal Belt of Sonapur. According to Sharma Thakur (1985: 66), originally, they had only twelve clans which are as followed: Amehong, Amfli, Chalang, Dapor, Damong, Kakhor, Radu, Lasa, Lorom, Macharang, Madur, Maloi, Sukai. These clans are further subdivided into various sub-clans. The mainstay of the Tiwa economy, both in the hills and plains, is agriculture. The Tiwas worship different gods and goddesses but their supreme deity is Lord Mahadeo or Fa Mahadeo. The most important festivals are the three Bisus, Sagra, Misawa, and Jon Beel Mela etc. The three Bihus, Bohag Bihu, Magh Bihu and the Kati Bihu, which are the state festivals of Assam, are celebrated by the Tiwas as Bisu.

Marriage in every human society that we know is a complex cultural phenomenon which ensure that continuance of the family and other grouping based on kinship. Marriage has been defined as a "union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are recognized as legitimate offspring of both parents" (Notes and Queries in Anthropology, 1951:110). Marriage is also defined as "a recognized relationship between male and female which is expected to result in the establishment of a domestic unit consisting of both parents and their children. Obviously everywhere this domestic unit is not the same". It is an established union for starting of a family and their children born out of the union are legitimate offspring. Thus marriage is a social contract for the satisfaction of physical, biological, economic, and spiritual needs of male and female leading to the formation of a family. The important functions of the marriage are procreation, social and economic function and fulfilment of sexual urge.

Objectives: To study the marriage system among the Tiwa tribe.

Methodology:

In order to fulfil the objective of the study data has been collected from the village Sidhabari of Morigaon district. The paper is based on both primary data and secondary source. The methods and techniques used in the data collection are interview, observation and case study.

Findings:

Sidhabari village is located 5kms away from Nagaon Town which comes under the jurisdiction of Morigaon District. The total number of population of the village is 1140. Among this 564 are males and 576 are females. The total number of family in the village is 213. Agriculture is the main source of income. The people of the Sidhabari village describe their concept of marriage, as it has been universally described. They consider marriages as a universal bondage which binds two individuals of opposite sex and admits into a family life.

Marriage is also a set of cultural patterns to sanction parenthood and to provide a stable background for the care and rearing of children. Apart from this, they are more or less dependent upon cooperation and division of labour between the two sexes, and marriage an institution that help in these aspects permanently. Among them marriage is an elaborate process which involves many rituals and traditions and heavy expense so, many families prefer marriage by elopement due to unsound economic status but they have preserved many of traditional rituals. The concept of marriage among the Tiwas of Sidhabari village is monogamous in which one man marries one woman at a time. It is the most prevalent marriage. A man can have second wife after the death of his first wife. Widow and widower can marry for the next time if they want. There is no social stigma but their marriage does not involve any big ceremony. They strictly follow incest taboo and clan exogamy in which they can't marry within their clan members because they consider themselves as siblings. Great importance is attached to this rule and those who break it and marry within their own clan are considered to have committed a social sin.

Among them, marriage is usually accompanied by a ceremony, except in the case of elopement. However, there is much variation in the style of these ceremony mainly depending upon economic status of the party involved in the marriage. Among them we found *Borbiya*, *Poluai Ana Biya*, *Gobhia Rakha Biya*, *Juron Biya* – are the forms of marriage. In the village another form of marriage is found which they called as "*Burha Biya*". It is a kind of marriage which is prevalent mostly among them. This type of marriage is done after elopement. Without the performance of "*Burha Biya*" a married couple will not get social recognition. The villagers discourage divorce and as such divorce case is very rare. Bride price is prevalent but it is very nominal. Mainly they practiced patrilocal residence but in some cases matrilineal residence is also found where boy resides at his wife's house after marriage. As among the Tiwas of Sidhabari village we found that after the performance of *Paluai Ana Biya*, they perform *Burha Biya* which is said as same as *Bor Biya*. But in some cases, we found that they performed *Choklong biya* which is also called as *Athukora Biya*. Where one performs the marriage in front of the clan members. The married couple wear new

dresses, and offer *tamul paan* (betel ana betel leaf) with an amount of Rs.50 in a *sarai* (dish with a stand) and took *ashirwaad* (blessings) in front of the samaj.

Among the Tiwas of Sidhabari village we find different types of marriage. They are *Borbiya*, *Paluai Ana Biya*, *Gobhia Rakha Biya*, *Juron Biya*, *Choklong Biya*, *Burha Biya*.

Paluai Ana Biya:

Paluai Ana Biya by elopement is widely prevalent among the Tiwas of the Sidhabari village. Most of the families try to avoid the irksome procedure of a formal marriage although they have eagerness to solemnize formal marriages. The main reason to perform this kind of marriage is the less expenditure involved in the elopement marriage. Besides love at first sight, it is one of the major causes for solemnizing *Paluai Ana Biya*. In this case the boy and the girl decide, and are not sure whether their parents will agree to their marriage. So, the boy takes away his beloved to his residence at night with the help of his friends. Next day two or three relatives of the boy informs the girl's house and informs the girl's father about the matter. After seven days, they perform a ceremony called *Mitir Khuwa*. The married couple go to the bride's home with groom and other family members. On this day the groom's family have to take some things with them, the list of the things is given by the bride's family on that day in which the boy's relative informed the girl's father about the matter. The list of the things includes 'Zu' one *jari*, *tamul* 5 poon, pan 20 *guchi*, 'Lowpiya' (vessel containing ricebeer), one basketful of *pitha* (rice cakes), *urahi pitha* (made of Bora chawl, Sali chawl). All these things are arranged in two baskets one side containing *pitha* and other side is the jar of *lowpani* and all these things are covered by one "Uka seleng kapoor" (white handwoven cloth) The *Bhar* is carried by the 'Bharwa' who take the things to the bride's home. 'Bharwa' is followed by the elderly members of the groom, some villagers and the bride and the groom.

The bride's family arranged a small feast. Some members of the village of the bride's father invited and after reaching the groom and bride along with the *bharwa*. Both the families are together. After that the groom's family gave things to the bride's family in front of all the members present there. The groom gives an amount of Rs.50-30 to the bride's family and after that the married couple take 'Ashirwaad' (blessings) in front of the members present there. The elderly members give blessings to the bride and the groom. Both the parties enjoyed a small feast in which 'Zu' plays an important part. After attending this ceremony the bride and the groom return to their house. Now in the groom's house, some kind of ritual is performed. Near the gate of the groom's house the mother of the groom will cut a 'Chorai koni' (hen's egg) and it should fall in the 'Kol paat' (plaintain leaf) which is placed near the gate. The bride and the groom are welcomed by the groom's family and other family and relative members.

Juron Biya:

The Tiwa people of the Sidhabari village performed *Juron Biya*. *Juron biya* is not so much prevalent among them. It is another form of arranged marriage minus the details of a *Bor Biya*. Generally, persons of low economic status perform this type of marriage. The father or the guardian of the prospective groom meets the father of the guardian of the prospective bride and discuss about the marriage. When both the parties agree, a date is fixed for the

Juron ceremony. On the appointed day the boy's party consisting of the elderly relatives goes to the girl's house with ornaments, dress and 'Bhars' (which include *pitha*, *zu*, and *tamul paan*). The elderly people of the girl's village bless them for happy married life. After some entertainment the boy's party leaves the girl's house along with the bride which marks the end of the marriage.

Bor Biya:

The well to do and educated Tiwas generally prefer this type of marriage which involves huge expenditure and long drawn formalities. Generally it continues for three days. Two days before the marriage the groom and the bride are ceremonially bathed in their respective houses by their relatives and *khel* (clan) members. Water for this purpose is ceremonially collected from rivers or streams or well. On third day rituals of marriage ceremony are undertaken by both the parties. The *khel* members takes the initiative for this purpose. Other villagers are also invited including *Gaon Burha* (village headman) and elderly persons. Marriage ceremony is solemnized at the house of bride at night. During the day a big feast is arranged for the people in both the side. Rice beer (Zu), Fish, Meat, Vegetables are essential items in their marriage feast. In the evening the groom, along with his friends and the *Zela* (go between) proceeds to the girl's house. The groom and bride are dressed in their traditional attire. And their ceremony proceeds. After concluding marriage rituals the couple bow down in front of the elderly persons and they bless them with good wishes for their happy married life. And the groom and bride go back to groom's house and live there together. In Sidhabari village *Bor Biya* was not so much prevalent.

Choklong Biya:

It is a typical form of marriage found among the Tiwas of Sidhabari village. It can be performed by a single couple or number of couples. It is done in a very simple and short method. On an auspicious day all the *khel* (clan) members, relatives and elderly villagers are invited. The girl and boy will ceremonially bath and dressed in their traditional attire. One place is made in front of the clan members and elderly villagers where the couple will sit. There will be 1 bunch betel nut and 10 *guchi* betel leaf. Rice beer is an essential item of this marriage. It is kept in a special type of vessel called "*modor down*". The girl and boy will bow in front of the people and they will bless them for happy conjugal life. Then, the girl will serve the rice beer from "*modor down*" to the villagers and they will have it. Betel nut and betel leaf are also distributed by 2 or 3 persons of clan members to other members. In this marriage there is no feast for the villagers. This marks the end of *Choklong biya*. *Chaklong biya* has one specific feature that it can be performed by a single couple or number of couples at a time. In that case also some formalities and procedures are involved and all the clan members and elderly members are invited and proceeds the *Choklong biya*.

Gobhia Rakha:

Though the Tiwas of Sidhabari village follow patrilineal system but a very thin matrilineal system is traced which is reflected in the *Gobhia Rakha* type of system. Generally parents having a single daughter without any son prefer to have a *Gobhia*. Not much rituals are

observed in this type of marriage. For the villagers the girls side arranged a small feast. Many cases are found of *Gobhia* in Sidhabari village.

Burha Biya:

This is a very interesting concept which is found among the Tiwas of Sidhabari village. Marriages other than *Bor biya* like *Gobhia Rakha*, *Juron Biya*, *Paluai Ana* are incomplete without *Burha biya*. Generally, *Burha Biya* are solemnized after some years of marriage. It may be performed at any time after 2,3 or 5 years also depending on their situation. So, it is called *Burha biya* because it takes place later and their children also get to witness their parents marriage. *Burha biya* is generally performed to get approved by the society and can enter any socio-religious function or ceremonies. The society will approve their relation. The ceremony will take place for two days as in *Bor Biya*. The groom and bride are ceremonially bathed by their relatives and *khel* (clan) members. They will get dressed in their traditional attire and the couple will sit in front of clan members and elderly villagers and ceremony starts and priest will chant *Duan(hymns)*. The couple will bow down in front of the clan members and they will bless them for happy conjugal life. A big feast is organized for members. And now the couples get approved by the society and can enter and socio-religious ceremonies or formalities. This ends the *Burha Biya*.

Conclusions: Marriage among the Tiwas is an elaborate process which is very expensive and takes 3 to 4 days. But due to poor economic condition they perform in a very simple and short way. The villagers mainly perform elopement marriage. They perform every rites and rituals connected with the marriage. They follow monogamy form of marriage and clan exogamy as they believe that clan members to be the siblings of the same parents. The acquiring of mates is done through elopement and mutual consent. The residence after marriage is patrilocal as decent is traced through father's side. But in the village few cases are found where the married couple use to live in the girls house after marriage. And in some cases like where there is only one daughter and no son then the family adopt their son in law as *Gobhia* and it becomes matrilineal residence. There is no bar for widow or widower to enter into marriage. Divorce is rare. Dowry is absent as bride price is present among the Tiwa tribe but it is very nominal.

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