

FINDING THE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES IN MARRIAGE CEREMONY BETWEEN DESHI & POLI COMMUNITY: A CRITICAL SURVEY ON THE WEDDING CULTURE OF RAJBANSHI COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

It is believed that Rajbanshi people are the descendants of the Royal Family of Coochbehar, from which the word ‘Rajbanshi’ has been originated. This community people belong to the entire North Bengal such as in the central part of Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Darjeeling, North & South Dinajpur and Assam districts. The Rajbanshi people speak in their own mother tongue i.e. Rajbanshi language but in different tone. There are many debates regarding their ethnographical identity. Some believe that they belonged to Indo-Mongoloid community. Whatever their origin is but there are different sub-castes under this community, like- Deshi, Poli, Koch, Kamata etc. The linguistic tone and the cultural practices are also different in nature and characteristics but they are internally linked with each other through their physical appearance, food habit, religious faith and other perspectives. If we make our journey through the wedding culture of Deshi & Poli then we will find some different perspectives regarding their marriage such as the role of the Ghatak (media), the initial part of marriage, Ashirbadi parba, Aiburo-Vat Parba, Gaye holud parba, Dress of bridegroom etc. Thus my paper seeks to explore the different perspectives in the wedding culture of Deshi & Poli community and how their ritual, customs and social environment differ from each other.

Keywords- Rajbanshi Community, Deshi & Poli Community, Language, Cultural Tradition, Marriage Ceremony

INTRODUCTION

The people of Rajbanshi community lead a very common life. They are very cordial and they possess the features of cordiality and hospitality. They can easily earn people's attention by their hospitality. The masses of North Bengal are mainly occupied by the Rajbanshi community people. They are regarded as 'dalit' and belong under scheduled caste category. Panchanan Barma, the leader of Rajbanshi Community not only in North Bengal but also of the North-Eastern India revolted against the caste system which is a custom based structure of social hierarchy. Under his leadership 'Kshatriya Samity' was established in order to educate the Rajbanshis. This organization found out that the Rajbanshis are of a king's lineage and they are somehow connected with Bhaskar Barman, the king of Kamrupa. Under his leadership they participated in 'Kshatriya Movement' and finally became as Kshatriya. They love their own culture and follow it thoroughly. In this community we find the existence of joint family where elders are always respected as the main leader of a family and everybody follows his advices. Their main occupation is agriculture. Every community has their own rules and regulation regarding marriage. There was only one gotra, i.e. 'Kasyap' and marriages only happened under the same gotra. They always like the inter-caste marriage in order to preserve their own culture. They are fond of their cultural practices that glorify their identity. Though they are neglected as marginalized people by the upper class society but their distinct culture and language earn the honour of Bhumiputra (The son of soil) of the entire North Bengal. As 'Rajbanshi' is an umbrella term and under it we find many sub-castes; Deshi, Poli, Koch and Kamata therefore there is a slight difference in their culture, languages and other rituals.

MARRIAGE SYSTEM OF RAJBANSHI COMMUNITY

Marriage in every community means a lot of enjoyment and get together in between relatives and friends. But in Rajbanshi community marriage reveals the dual nature one is the enjoyment of the groom's family and on the other hand the financial struggle of the bride's family. The dowry system is highly preferred in Rajbanshi community. And it is a great burden of those families who have daughters to marry. However, there are some important rituals that have to maintain by both the family in marriage ceremony.

Role of Elders:

At the time of marriage elders play a great role. They are the ones who first exchange the marriage proposal among themselves and then inform the would-be bride and groom. The boy and girl are not allowed to talk to each other before their marriage. The elders select the bride or groom and take the commentary from all. Then they decide to arrange the marriage ceremony by the extreme support of all the members of both the family.

Role of Ghatak/ Medium:

Here Ghatak plays the role of a media. All the messages are delivered through him. He brings the proposal for marriage. For the lack of communication, the family members talk about the marriage at 'hat' or 'bazaar'. On the day before going to the house of the bride, the groom's family do 'Gopuja' i.e. to worship the household cows for goodwill.

Role of Society:

The role of society in a marriage is very important part as it is closely related with the marriage ritual of Rajbanshi community. The people of society are cordially invited to take part in all kinds of rituals that are held in the time of marriage. If any person of society is intentionally or unintentionally not invited then the society will not stand by their side in danger or other activities.

Dowry System:

This is an old tradition of marriage which is a great factor in Rajbanshi community especially for the bride's family. Because the groom's family demands some money for complete the ceremony, jewellery, home decor items and so on. The cow gift is an important part of Rajbanshi marriage. To gift a cow to the groom from the bride's family is an ancient ritual which must be fulfilled at the time of marriage.

Jewellery: Rajbanshi men usually don't use ornaments but the women wear different kinds of jewellery. The use of silver is very popular than the gold but the silver ornaments were very heavy and in beautiful design. Gold was mainly used by the wealthy women. They preserve the ornaments with care and at the time of any crisis or daughter's marriage they make use of

it. They wear the jewellery in different body parts like- ear, neck, nose, arm, hand finger, toe, wrist, head etc.

TYPE OF MARRIAGE IN RAJBANSI COMMUNITY

In the old days of Rajbansi society there were happened two types of marriages such as formal and informal. The formal marriage basically happened in the rich or middle class family who had sufficient capability to arrange a social marriage. But on the other hand the informal marriage relied on the lower class or poor family who were out of the capability to arrange such a social marriage.

Formal Marriage:

Phul biha- This marriage is also known as ‘Phul Bio’ or ‘Phulmara Biha’. Here Phul naturally symbolizes to a ‘virgin girl’ or to the ‘crown of the head or topor’. This marriage is well accepted by us and our society. It’s the first priority than other marriages where a boy marries to a virgin girl. The Brahmin purohit does all the rituals. Ghatak plays the role of a messenger. Guardians have the complete confirmation and bless the newly married couple.

Gharzia pratha- This is the system, by which mainly the poor or the orphan boy makes the decision to stay at father-in-law’s house, helps them and finally becomes a family member of them.

Informal Marriage:

These types of marriages were not well accepted in our society and very rarely happen. We can find it in Tarai of Darjeeling, Purnia of Bihar, Rajgang of Jalpaiguri etc.

Panichita Biha- This is mainly seen in the poor families. When a person is unable to pay the dowry for marriage, he with the consent of his family members requests to the bride’s family to sprinkle some water with the twig of a mango tree on his and his wife’s head. After that they can stay with each other as a husband wife. While sprinkling the water on their head the parents of the bride say that-“mor chuyar laj sorom sob tok sopi dinu” that means now they have transferred the total responsibility of their daughter on him and it’s his duty to keep her healthy with dignity. This couple can marry as per the social norms when they will have money.

Another important feature of this marriage is that they will serve all the relatives and neighbours after that society will accept their marriage, otherwise not. Sometimes it also happens that due to poverty they have not married socially until their children's marriage in this case they have to marry two or three days before of their children's marriage. Otherwise their children cannot marry. If they become parents before their formal marriage and if they die then their children will be regarded as legal and they will be the heir of their parent's wealth.

Chatradani Bibaho: In this marriage we can find the liberty of a married woman to marry again with another man. So this is the remarriage of a married woman. This marriage happens for different situations like- when a husband is unable to bear the expenses of his wife or the husband is outside of home for two or three years etc. As the 'koina becha' system existed in the society, sometimes for the greed of money the bride's father remarries her daughter with a wealthy man or sometimes the bride's father-in-law also does the same. If the remarriage occurs the entire dowry is returned to the former husband. But for this system the social value is decreased of that woman decreases. This separation happens automatically, there is no need to seek permission of the husband .This type of marriage is seen in Darjeeling & Jalpaiguri district.

Vauj Bibaho: In this marriage system if the elder brother dies, the younger brother marries his wife. Here also the wedding reception is mandatory, otherwise this marriage will not be accepted.

Koina Becha System: Early girl child marriage still exists especially in villages. The dowry system of our society existed but it was in its reverse form. This was known as 'Koina Becha', where the bride's father sells his daughter to the groom's family and receives the dowry. The price of dowry depends upon the lady's beauty. The demand of a fair and beautiful lady can be up to five hundred rupees. Unmarried women were known as 'Phul' or 'Opari', when these women are married in second times, known as 'Dodiya' and for the third times, known as 'Tetiya'. The price of unmarried or Phul women was four hundred rupees (400/-), Dodiya was one hundred rupees (100/-) and Tetiya was zero but if the Tetiya women had not more than two child and is beautiful, it will be eighty rupees (80/-).

Ghor Sodhani Biha: This is one kind of forceful marriage. When two persons love each other and want to marry but their family members are not agreed, in that case one day the lady goes

to her lover's home forcefully and does all the household duties or work then his family and society give her the permission to stay as a wife. This marriage is also followed by a wedding reception. If a married woman does this marriage, her later husband provides some money to the former husband for the separation. This amount of money is decided by the Morols or the elders of the village. In maximum case widows are indulged in these marriages. These women are known as 'Pachuya or Pashuya' and the men are known as 'Sangana'.

Widow Marriage: Widows have the liberty to marry. The price of a widow without children was 200/- and the widow who have children, her price was 20-100/. The groom goes to marry with his friend and they were served with doi and chira. The women who have elder children, only goes alone with her husband but if she has a little child then she carries it with her but the children have no right over the property of the later husband. They only claim for it to the former husband.

Two types of widow marriages were well known-

1. Danguani: This marriage only happens for the sake of wealth. When a wealthy woman lost her husband, she needs a man for the management of her property. In this time a money seeker man comes and takes this responsibility. He starts to live with that woman with her consent and gradually becomes her husband but here the woman has the liberty to drive him away at any time from her house without her permission. This kind of marriage has no dignity in the society and it has provided a name to them- the woman is known as 'danguani pachhuya' and the man as 'dangu'.
2. Gao-gach (tree): This marriage also has no dignity in society. When a widow becomes pregnant, she marries her lover and lives as a husband and wife, this marriage is known as 'gao-gach'. Here the man acts like a tree that's why he is known as 'gach' and the woman is known as 'gao-gach pachhuya'.

Respect for Elders: Rajbanshi community women have a great respect for the elders. They even cannot call them with their name, even of her husband also. In case they will pronounce a word and there is a quite similarity between the name of the elders and the word in pronunciation, they will use a new word instead of it, like- a woman's husband name is Vadu, she will not pronounce the word 'vat' (rice), rather she herself will discover a new word that is

‘gorom’ instead of ‘vat’. The wives always use the ghomta to cover their face before the elders. They cannot keep the eye contact while speaking and the elders cannot touch them.

MARRIAGE SYSTEM IN DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES IN BETWEEN DESHI AND POLI

There are some different perspectives in marriage system in between Deshi and Poli sub communities of Rajbanshi community which are significantly maintained by both the community. If the marriage will be happened in between Deshi and Poli then the Deshi people will maintain their own rituals whereas the Poli people will do their own cultural practices. But here lies a significant rule for the bride’s family to maintain some rituals of the groom’s family.

Deshi people call the marriage as ‘Beha’ but Poli people call it as ‘Biya’. It’s assumed that at the time of marriage the bride’s father remains in a situation of money crisis and on the other hand when we pronounce these words ‘beha’ or ‘biya’, we have to open our mouth broadly. This widely open mouth is compared with the situation of money crisis of the bride’s father to indicate the exact situation of the common people at the time of marriage.

Both the family will go to see the boy or girl and provide some money as a reward. If they like each other they wait for three days after seeing the girl or boy whether that marriage will be happy or not but if any mishap happens, they will not proceed further. After this they make the ‘Ashirbadi parba’ and fix a date of marriage. When the patri dekha parba is done the Deshi people send some betel leaves to the bride’s home. These betel leaves are known as ‘Suber Pan’ but this ritual is not in among Poli people.

Thukur Vat Parba/ Aiburo Vat:

It is a very interesting custom. In other culture it is known as ‘Aiburovat parba’, where ‘aiburo’ means ‘bachelor’ and ‘vat’ means ‘rice’. It’s regarded as the last meal as a bachelor. All the relatives, family members, friends and neighbours make the arrangement at their home and they also provide some gifts like- cloth or money depending on their capability. They also make up the bride or groom with alta, sono powder and kajal, turmeric paste. A bunch of tulsi malas are seen on the neck of the bride or the groom. With the bride always remains her brother-in-

law and he participates in all the rituals. This ritual is known as ‘Sanjomer Vat’ in Deshi people in which the bridegroom is fed a mixture of rice and milk by their elders and relatives in his own house but in Poli people this ritual is not present among them rather it is known as ‘Thukur Vat’ where the bride is allowed to visit the relative’s house for taking a lunch or dinner.

Gaye Holud Parba:

It is done before one day of marriage. Turmeric is pasted and mixed with the mustard oil and overlapped over the whole body. It brings the yellowish colour and makes the skin fair. They believe that this turmeric will save both the bride and the groom and purify the body and mind also. Poli people use the turmeric roots but the Deshi use the root of kasai tree and it’s known as ‘kashai khura parba’.

Din Dhara / Marking Specific Days:

It is another ritual that’s found among the Deshi people. Before three or four days some people go to the bride’s home and from that day both the bride and the groom cannot go outside of the house if needed. But the poli people do not follow this ritual.

On the specific day, the groom of Deshi community goes to marry with a white pagri on head and carrying a swastika sign on it but the Poli people carry the topor on head.

The wedding mandap is the main attraction. It has four pillars which indicate the four stages of life according to the Vedic shastra-

1. **Brahmaharya**- This is the student life.
2. **Grihastha**- In this stage a person becomes a family man, earns money and fulfills his pleasures.
3. **Vanaprastha**- This is the transformation from a family man to a spiritual man.
4. **Sannyasa**- This is the abandonment of complete material possession and passions.

Bondhu Puchha (Make Friendship): Bondhu puchha is an important part of ritual among the Deshi community people. It is a friendship relation recognized by the society and family where friendship is made between two boys of the same age. And this friendship is for whole life. After that friendship the two friends are equally responsible for each other’s family. At the time

of the marriage this particular friend of the groom will participate in all the rituals of marriage from first to the last. He also goes to marry with the groom. After marriage when any one of these friends will die, the other friend has to follow the death rituals also.

Ritual of Cow Gift:

This is an old tradition of Deshi community which is regarded as the integral part of marriage. This is not a dowry rather a ritual or a belief that is maintained by all families whether the family is poor or rich. They think that the newly married couple will be happy if they have to provide a cow which is the symbol of god's blessing. But this ritual is not a tradition of Poli community. They do not know the actual reason behind this tradition. So when the bride of Poli community is going to marry the groom of Deshi community, then this ritual will be held through the understanding of the two families.

CONCLUSION

Every community reflects of their own culture, language and belief system. Rajbanshi people have a great honour to their own culture even they do not hesitate to speak in native language in formal areas also. Diversity is the main feature of our Indian culture. Though Deshi & Poli people sustain some distinctive nature in their marriage, language and other cultural practices, these practices are not majority in number. These diversities have made our culture more attractive. The rules of marriage have also been changed from the then society. When people of different community live together, they will make exchange of their own culture, for these though arrange marriage is preferred in both the communities, it has been replaced by the love marriage. The role of elders, ghorzia pratha, koina becha system, different kinds of marriages like- panichhita biha, vauj bibaho, chatradani bibaho, gao-gachh, danguani have lost their existence.

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