

Traditional marriage custom associated to Pongching Naga women

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Abstract

Marriage is considered as one of the most pure and celebrated ceremony in one's life. It is considered the most universal and cultural phenomenon. Each society has their own traditional marriage custom which is distinctive from each tribal society, marriage and the customs vary from religion to religion and from culture to culture however irrespective of the differentiation in every tribal community women from all tribal societies had certain criteria and fulfillments in order to be married, therefore the study on the traditional marriage custom associating to Pongching Naga women will give an inside view of their custom, traditions, believes where a Pongching woman must lug certain qualities in order to get married.

Keywords: customs, tradition, marriage, women, pongching

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I. Introduction

Marriage has been practiced since the very beginning of society's formation and is in active practice till today it is one of the most common and important social institution worldwide. 'Marriage in Nagaland is centered around many interesting beliefs, facts and principles that are rooted deep within the tribal people of the state. They strictly follow a set of traditional morals of marriage. As far as the marriage of Nagaland are concerned, the different tribes have different beliefs and morals, which they maintain with dedication and commitment'¹, for any society before any marriage happens it becomes a tradition to consider and know the overall disposition and the genealogy of both men and women including the families/clan in order to have a good relation for day after. Every society has different norms and customs when it comes to marriage, the culture and tradition in each society portrays the rich cultural practices that have been rooted since time immemorial and tribal people have highly and respectfully follow the tradition because without this there is no identity for the tribal people. A woman before getting married was expected to learn and carry certain qualities she was required to be dutiful in every field, the Naga women are well built, hard working fairly pretty but short in stature. They are seen idle. Their chores include fetching water, cutting wood, cooking food, brewing liquor, working in the fields and weaving cloth at home. Most of the tribes shave the girls' head until she reaches the marriageable age. The idea is that she is not expected to look attractive and have physical relations with the opposite sex until that age², Pongching women were also expected to be dutiful and proficient in every field especially in slash and burn since that was the only source for survival and to manage the financial stability she was also expected to have the qualities of a good housewife, therefore women were required to learn all this when she attains the marriageable age. Pongching is a medium size village which is in the heart of Longleng town the district headquarter of the Phom tribal people located in the eastern part of Nagaland, North-east India, the village is 7km away from the district headquarter – Longleng.

The tradition before proposal³, the law of proposal⁴ and the custom after proposal

Before any marriage takes place, proposal is very important where two families get the opportunity to acknowledge and ascertain about each other, in the Pongching society if a marriage was to happen then the man's parents will observe not only one woman but some few handful women within the village who had the best temperament and an affable woman, most importantly a proficient skillful woman who can shoulder upon

¹ <https://www.mapsofindia.com>mar..>

² <https://www.webindia123.com>ma...>

³ Yüük phepü

⁴ Phepü Vanglem

his men through muscle strength in the paddy fields and who can do all the household chores who can also be a good custodian and well behaved towards their guest, hence it was very important for a women to learn and practices it from certain age, in the traditional times the life of the Nagas were confined to a village level, their social life was one where everyone knew each other, their economic activities centered on agriculture- a homogenous society where their leisure and occupational activities were more or less uniformed and collectively performed⁵, it was only after monitoring the women's capability to manage the domicile the best women was chosen to be their lawful daughter-in-law this was the most formal traditional practice before the proposal, however there were times where not only the women's behavior was taken into deliberation but even her parents etiquette was considered very important the man's family expected a considerate well-behaved parents to be there in-laws, sometimes even the affluent of the family played a vital role for marriage therefore in the Pongching society marriage was considered very important and a significant ritual.

After the women was chosen for marriage the custom in Pongching society was to send a relatives from their clan who is supposed to be the most trusted one therefore a sole male representative from the clan is send to women's place to meet the parents and ask for marriage, A common feature noticeable is that the initiation of marriage proposal by the man's side is reflective of the patriarchal structure of all the tribes. Besides, while the choice to accept or turn down a proposal being left to the girl's side may be first believe the patriarchal set up involved in the marriage rituals, the fact that the decision to accept or reject a proposal is not possible without the consent of the girl's father (or his kinsman in-case of his absence/death) reveals patriarchal authority in the acceptance of a marriage proposal too⁶, the Pongching society no doubt was /is from patriarchal society therefore father had the important role to play in every decision hence marriage was one such important accountability for the father/kinsman to be made and if there was no objections from the parents for the proposal then the boy's parents with some elders visits the women's place for final deliberation of marriage, and incase if the parents want to repudiate the marriage proposal then they amiably refuse the proposal and send off the representative who approach the family for marriage, the parents and women had every right to turn down the proposal if they wished, there were also times where another type of marriage proposal was also practices which was also not performed and practice always but only when needed suppose if the women clans and ancestors have dept related to land and cannot repay it then in return the owners asked the hand of their unmarried women for marriage for their son hence women is given for marriage in exchange of the dept their clans and ancestors had, the other way round in some cases was if the bride's family have depts/land dispute with the grooms family then until all this depts/ and land dispute was resolve marriage cannot happen, therefore matters were to be rectify before nuptial.

Ajawaila(1990:93) had noted that marriage is an agreement between two different group of people originating from different houses to establish affinal relationships and when a marriage is contracted the groom's house is called the 'man's side' and the bride's house 'the women's side'. Likewise among all the Nagas in pre Christian traditions the process of marriage began with a marriage proposal initiated by the man's side and conveyed to the women's side (house)⁷, the same customs was practiced even among the Pongching community where man's family took all the initiative for the proposal,⁸ among the Konyaks of Tamlu village after the acceptance of the proposal the man's side gifts mulang according to the demand of the women's family. Likewise after the acceptance of the proposal the Pongching people also practiced the custom of gifting *Langnyü* (a circular brass plate which was very much significant and holds a high economic value for all the Phom tribal people during those days), the number of *Langnyü* was range from 2 till 10 depending on the capacity from the groom's family also considering the social position of the bride's family. *Langnyü* was a sign of commitment for marriage from both bridegroom sides.

The feast and taboos of marriage -Inter-clan marriage

During the traditional times, if marriage happens between two affluent family slaughtering of gayal/Mithun (Ngoh) was required and highly practice after slaughtering the thigh of the mithun was given to the grooms family and all the clan from grooms family celebrated the feast together this is a tradition and customs which was practice from forefather times even today slaughtering of gayal/ mithun is practice and it is only the affluent family who can do that which signifies the rich tradition and custom pass down from generation to generation, marriage among the common family was like that of those other tribal people from their neighboring area, however slaughtering of pig was practice without which the feast and marriage was incomplete, after the ceremonial function is completed according to Christians rituals the women is gifted with handlooms clothing like shawl and mekhala(wrap around skirt) also tools all related to agriculture was given by

⁵ <https://hrdc.gujaratuniversity.ac.in...pdf>

⁶ <https://hrdc.gujaratuniversatiy.ac.in...pdf>

⁷ <https://hrdc.gujaratuniversity.ac.in...pdf>

⁸ <https://hrdc.gujaratuniversity.ac.in...pdf>

her clan which include varieties of spades namely- langquieh, muyong, pheaklak, heichak, all this are spades of different size and shapes, hung and chug were two different baskets made of bamboo which was used to carry firewood and paddy rice, yan-machete, hence this narrates that women was expected to carry and pull through the practice of cultivation which was the source for survival and economic stability, the custom and tradition in the Pongching society follows the customary law where the bride's clan and family send off the bride with all her belonging to the grooms residence this custom is alive even today in the Pongching society, after the bride has been send off to the grooms place it is a taboo for the bride to visit her family's/clan home for 12 consecutive days she is not allowed to even cross the lane of her family's house and to even drink a glass of water incase if she violets the custom the bride becomes physically ill for days/ months and people perceived through her appearance this make people to concede the idea that she has not followed the custom and has violated the taboo, however this does not continue in the later period. After the marriage the grooms family/clan decides to assist the bride's family in paddy field therefore the bride informed her family to prepare a big paddy field and rare pigs in order to feed them during the time of cultivation this was done to maintain and cultivate a good relationship between two family/clan a tradition implemented and practice since time immemorial. There were also cases where if a women after marriage cannot bear child she was handed over to her family to be return back home from the grooms family, however the bride's family in return ask the grooms family/clan to either give them a plot of paddy field/*Langnyü*.

The tribal people have always stringently followed the customary laws in every field and as far as marriage is concerned, the Naga tribes of Nagaland follow the exogamous principles. People of the same clan do not marry each other⁹, inter-clan marriage in the Pongching society is stringently practice and taboo to marry from the same clan, if it happens then the bridegroom were expelled from the village even today this practice is rigorously followed and will continue till society's existence. The Pongching's has 5 clan namely Angh, Chungdok, Chungpang, Chemphang, Chemdok. **Angh** can marry Chungdok, Chungpang, Chemdok and Chemphang but they cannot marry from their same clan, **Chungdok** can marry Angh, Chemdok and Chemphang but cannot marry Chunpang and Chungdok, **Chungpang** can marry Angh, Chemdok and Chemphang but cannot marry Chungdok and Chungpang, **Chemdok** can marry Angh, Chungdok and Chungpang but cannot marry Chemphang and Chemdok, **Chemphang** can marry Angh, Chungdok and Chungpang but cannot marry Chemdok and Chemphang (Angh2020:60). Hence marriage is considered very important in Pongching society where they stringently abide the laws, customs, believes and traditions, women are also expected to contemplate the customary laws to have a good and meaningful life after marriage.

II. Conclusion

The traditional customs of Pongching people specially Pongching women portrays the unquestionable customs, tradition and believes which was imperatively practice, and certain customs and traditions is still practice. It can be concluded that the importance to the tradition and customary law was made from the time of ancestor's existences and is still carried out however leaving behind those which has no significance today.

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⁹ <https://www.mapsofindia.com>mar...>