
Marriage Custom And Tradition: Bride Price System Of Thadou Kuki Society

In this paper I would like to talk about how the act of modernization has impacted the marriage custom, and role of the kinsmen in light of the marital customs of the Thadou -Kuki Society. In this paper I would like to bring into picture how Christianity has impacted to the norms and customs of marriage of these people group. What the drawbacks where and how did the community respond to the Christian ideology of Holy Matrimony; and how it has held on to its traditions while still keeping up with the religious transition after colonization? I would also like to point out how the two cultural and religious ideology of marriage has similar impact on the community and what are their positive aspects. Marriage in Thadou Society The Thadou-Kuki society has many ancient tradition and customs, it is one of the people group in north east with varied rules and customs be it for birth, death or marriage. Every activity has various norms and customs associated with it, and marriage being one of the most important events in life of an individual is attached with various customs and norms which he is required to carry out. There is four recognized types marriage among the Thadou namely: chongmu, sahapsat, jol-lha' and kijam tnang. [footnoteRef: 1] The first two forms are considered proper marriage, while the other two amounts to forms of elopement where there is no proper ceremony.

a) Chongmu: In this form of marriage, the bridegroom's parents send go between to the parents of the bride to find out if they agree to allow the union. If the parents of the bride give their consent, they kill a pig for the representatives (their kinsmen) of the bridegroom, they dine together and ju (rice beer for instance) is drunk. This is referred to as sumtansha. After this there is a settlement made as to the amount of marriage price to be paid, they instead discuss how much of it should be brought on the wedding day. If the question of return of the m?n (marriage price) should ever arise for reason like divorce then the sumtansha expenditure is returnable. During that time, itself the date for taking the bride is fixed alongside this feast. The representatives of the bridegroom's people then return and inform him and his parents of the settlement. There may be some haggling over the amount of the marriage price, but the full amount to be paid is finally settled before the bride is taken away. When everything is finalized, the bridegroom sends strong young men along with his representatives to take the bride on the fixed day, sending the amount of the marriage price agreed on to be paid at the time, but leaving the greater part as a balance to be paid later. These representatives are celebrated at the expense of the bride's people and both parties wrestle and much dung and filth are thrown at the bridegroom's party.

Drums and gongs are played and songs sung in the evening by all together while feasting. The

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next day the bridegroom's party departs triumphant with the bride and the marriage is complete except for the wrench of paying up the balance of the price by degrees. After the bridegroom has taken his wife, the marriage is still not consummated till she revisits her father's house on a subsequent date previously agreed upon, when a further installment of the maupi (bride-price) is paid. This may be a few days, a month, or even three months later.

This throwing of mud, dung and rotten eggs at the bridegroom's party takes place at three occasions* first on its arrival at the bride's house; next when the pig is killed or the feast on the following day, and finally when the bridegroom's party departs, which must be before dawn on the day after that. The wrestling likewise takes on these three occasions, and the young men who wrestle must be perfect, none of them must lack a limb or an organ or even a little finger joint. This condition also applies rigidly to the thempu who officiates at the wedding.

b) Shapsat: In this form of marriage unlike the Chongmu, the wrestling and other festivities are not indulged in and generally the bride is taken away the same day or early the next morning. c) Jol-lha: This kind of marriage system doesn't have any arrangement with regards to the marriage price. It is a case of marriage due to the pregnancy of the women which is the result from an intrigue between a young man and a girl. This man takes her to be his wife as a consequence, when her state is made known. No previous arrangement exists between the parties and there are no marriage ceremonies.

The man however is settled upon as a rule.

d) Kijam Mang: When a young man and girl elope and live together without or against the consent of the parents of either or both parties. No ceremonies are held and the man is settled on in due course. In the last two forms of marriage there is no sumtansha and therefore, none can be claimed hereafter in case of divorce. In these two forms of marriage a ceremony called inlut is usually performed by the husband after a period of time; it is merely a way of approaching the parents of the woman and making his peace with them. It is usually at this time that the marriage price is fixed on. Inlut in its literal sense means "house-entering," the eloping pair being thus recognized as daughter and son-in-law. **Bride Price**The question on the amount of marriage prices among the Thadou's is not definite. Chiefs and wealthy persons usually claim and pay the equivalent of 10 mithun, Rs. 200 in cash, 2 Dapi (large gong), 2 Dapu (set of trio gongs), 2 Khichang (ear beads); 2 Khichong (necklaces). The ordinary person often actually pays a couple of mithun, khichang and a khichong and Rs. 25 or so in cash. In most cases the man is commuted. For example, a pig in some cases may be taken as one mithun. There are cases where Rs. 40 has stood for 4 mithun and a jar of ju for a khichang or khichong. Thus, the parent of the bride hardly ever receives the marriage price in full, but more or less in the form of fictitious substitutes.

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They love to name large amounts as the man not with any guarantee of getting it, but for the sake of pride that their daughter was married for so much; when questioned as to what precisely they received, it will be found that actually a much smaller amount has been accepted in full satisfaction by a system of fictitious values. Here we see that though it is a huge amount in the sense of the term but unlike the Hindu Dowry system it is not very rigid. Besides very few, if ever intend paying the man of their wives in full themselves, as it is accustomed thing that their sons or next-of-kin male heirs should pay some if not the greater part. Therefore, it is often seen that claims are admitted as outstanding for more than 5 generations for balance of man still unpaid. Consequently, the present generation is inevitably burdened by debts due for great-great-grandmothers and aunts and other relatives whose descendants they are or represent. So, the Thadou tribe is full of litigation on this score and the Christian movement has done good in this direction. The varied Bride prices that can be claimed by the bride's family as given below:

a) Mankeng: Mankeng is a mithun which may be claimed by the bride's father's brother or by his best friend, but in return he must give the bride a dowry in the form of necklaces, etc. To claim this, however, he must at different times, kill three pigs or their theoretical equivalents, for the husband or for his male next-of-kin if the husband be dead, but it is considered a breach of etiquette for the claim to be made by anyone other than the husband. If the donor dies before one pig is killed no claim lies against the bridegroom.

b) Sumkhao Sat Tan Man: If after being betrothed by the act of sumtansha, the girl remarries then one mithun has to be paid to the grooms first elected for breach of promise. The same applies to the man should he fail to carry out his contract, and a mithun is payable to the girl's parents. But in that case, it is called jouman (for lying).

c) Chalam: The first child that dies in a family is known as the chalam. No longman is claimable for it, that implies to the first group (father, mother and child) but as soon as one of these children grows up and marries and has a child he is considered to have left the family for Chalam as they form a fresh unit or group. d) Jalkhunchonman: This payment of mithun is in lieu of the second man to the parents or nearest male kin of the women by her second husband if he is the brother or in direct relation to her first husband. This is because it is customary for a brother to take the wife of his deceased brother although he may be already married. A form of polygamy can be traced here.

e) Noitnichonman: When a woman's husband dies and she doesn't return to her parental home but goes on to live in her husband's home or village. And if she happens to marry another person, then one mithun is paid to the late husband's next-of-kin male by her new husband in addition to any man which may be agreed on between him (new husband) and her parents to be paid to the latter. On second marriage full man is never taken for a divorced,

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widowed or runaway wife. It must be at least one mithun less according to custom. This second marriage price is spoken of as nungkitman, lamlhang chotlha man or lamlhang lho'lha' man and not as man or manpi.

f) Dumdi'man: This is a payment of one mithun, should a married woman die without having a child this is paid as a form of completion of all the dues to her father or next of kin male. No longman is due either.

Dumdi'man is only paid when none of her man or nungkitman has been paid up. If any part has already been paid of the man or nungkitman then the death of the woman merely cancels the balance. Dumdi'manna can be claimed only if she has given birth to a girl child and has no boys, but in present day there is a new school which advocates that if girls are born then the full man should be paid since the girl's man will be enjoyed by the husband or next-of-kin male. William Shaw says, in such cases one mithun of the marriage price of each girl is paid to the next-of-kin male of the mother at the time of the marriage in compensation for the loss of the man the mother's people suffered. If a boy has been born then full man has to be paid although much of it is usually compounded for a smaller sum unless the parties happen to be at enmity, when they fly to the court in hopes of pulling a larger tooth.

g) Jol-lei: This is an amount of one mithun to be paid by the courter of a pregnant lady to her father or male next-of-kin, if he does not marry her. If he intends to take the child when wean able, then he has to pay yet another mithun for maintenance to the father or next-of-kin at time of taking over the child. This is called Chavahman, if he refuses to take the child when wean able then it is treated as a member of its mother's family. However, at time when the question of Jol-lei is settled the paramour must then say whether he intends taking the child or not and must adhere to that. The child should strictly speaking be born in the paramour's house thus according it a formal recognition of parentage.

h) Sukai: this is an amount of Rs. 4 paid by the bridegroom to the Chief or the village to which the bride belongs when he takes her as his wife. The story of how this came about is an intriguing one. In the time of the chief Munthom one of his villagers took to wife one Kilnem and fled away to Khodai village. Munthom went to Khodai village to call them back but was killed by the villagers of that village. Mangjel, brother of Munthom, was too much of a coward to avenge his brother's death but when Thomhil, son of Munthom, grew up he attacked Khodai village and killed many taking a war drum and mithun horn. He then said he would take sukai from all who married girls of his village hence forth as the longman of Muntlion and so the custom became established.

i) Jachatman: It is an amount of one mithun paid by the man who entices away or makes pregnant another man's wife. It is paid by the adulterer to the husband. In addition, he has to

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recoup to the husband all man or nungkitman yet paid.

The woman's father or male heir will then sue the adulterer for the balance still due.

j) Divorce: If a man drives away his wife without cause then he forfeits all paid man or nungkitman and in addition has to pay one mithun as Daman(refusal). If the woman runs away from her husband for no cause then the paid man or nungkitman is returnable to the husband. It is customary for the man to attempt to call back his wife should she go away from him. If he does not do so then it is obviously a case for daman and forfeiture of such man or nungkitman as has been paid. If she refuses to return in spite of the request to do so, then man is returnable. The causes of divorce are often very trivial and mostly the man is to blame in some way or other. Thadou's often work their way through divorces in such a manner so as to avoid the customary financial consequences.

k) Sumken (money carried): This is the dowry given to the bride by the brother or best friend her father. The original name was Thilken (materials carried) which means "Property gift" which has been modernized to Money gift. "

l) Lutom (head covering): This is the gift of a black cloth (that called pondum) to the bride's mother by the husband for having given birth to the girl he has chosen.

m) Laisui: It is the gift of a pugaree to the father of the bride by the husband for being the begetter of the girl he has selected.

These are few of the customary laws and norms practiced by the Thadou people with regards to marriage customs. Accordingly, there is varied amount of manpi for the bride according to the clan and order of her birth. Christianization: and its impact on the Thadou community Wherever the European Powers, and later on Americans, spread their political and commercial tentacles, the Christian Mission accompanied them. So, naturally North-East India, drew their attention. And like everywhere else in India, the proselytization in this region too began through schools, hospitals and orphanages. We see how slowly the traditional practices be it religious or customary were being replaced by so called Christian tradition and norms. While there were only four schools and only 85 church goers in 1851, the numbers had risen by 1856, to 74 and 1922 respectively. The Garos, who first became converts in large numbers, accounted for 875 out of 1922. The number of converts went on increasing rapidly in all parts of North-East India. The membership of the Nagaland Baptist Church alone increased from 28,623 in 1941 to 88,378 in 1965, an increase of more than 300 per cent. According to the 1971 census, the Christian population in the North-East was more than 1. 7 million or 9. 12 per cent. The states of Nagaland (66. 86 per cent), Meghalaya (46. 94 per cent), Manipur (26 per cent) and Mizoram, (86. 14 per cent) are the most Christianized in the North-East. The schools, colleges and

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churches, opened by the Christian Missions, went a long way in changing the needs, as well as the perception of such needs, among the local people. They provided new ideas, elements of new culture and new ideologies. In many cases, the sudden void created at the ideological level due to a change in traditional Jhum cultivation was filled by Christianity. As one of the informants of Majumdar (1978, 150) says, "we have no rice to prepare rice beer, so we cannot perform Amua or Krita when somebody is ill in the house. Now that we have accepted Christianity, we do not need to perform such rites, we go to the doctor and bring medicine which is much cheaper than providing Chu or ju. When some of our kinsmen visit us, we offer them a cup of tea, which costs little. We need not now offer Chu to them, even a small pot of which costs five or six rupees.

Art and culture of north-east india

From this we see how Christianity became widely spread in northeast this as an effect also reached to the Thadou community, and from the vigorous rituals of marriage customs there was a sudden shift in the dynamics of the marriage norms in the Thadou community. Where once the Thadou community who took pride in their customs and tradition to today's scenario where only 10 out of 100 population of the Thadou community still rigidly follow this norm. In other light if we evaluate the Jewish customs and norms there seem to be certain linkages to the Thadou society and through this we see how although Christianity has taken its toll on this people group yet it seems to be the case where the tradition of the Kuki community is adapted into the Christian culture. The Thadou community is one example of a community that has imbibed into its tradition Christian values, although it has still held on to its own traditions. Holy Matrimony, as a concept is very much popularized especially in the present day Thadou society it is seen as a means of boasting for the families which replaces the amount of the bride price culture mentioned earlier.

The concept of purity has pushed many to follow the first form of marriage mentioned above that is the Chongmu. This has very good impact on the community group as this helps prevent elopement and unwanted pregnancies, yet although it has many positive factors attached to it yet we see that it has various drawbacks as well. With the concept of Holy matrimony especially with the poorer people group of the Thadou society seem to have to suffer most as many today use it as a platform to showcase wealth and their piousness; but the negative impact seems to be the fact that in many Thadou society it can be seen today, that parents encourage their children to elope. As we have seen earlier that the expenditure of eloping seems to be far less and all that is required of them is the in-laws. Christianity motivates and yet pervades all, their meaning reflects something beyond their present conditions and enables them to rise above their circumstances. This allows the individual to carry out his activity in a more meaningful and purposeful ending. It creates a form of general order of existence which we see very much in the Thadou community. In present statistics majority of the Thadou population are Christians

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with varied denominations this has had its own drawback with division among the people group yet it has also laid down a set of conduct in the society. It can be said that due to its Patriarchal foundation can be seen why Christian practices seem to be legit and reasonable. Conclusion As in the case of Christianity and marriage norms of the Thadou society, as we can see that there are various norms and consequential laws enforced by the Thadou society on its people group, it can thus be seen why Christianity is an easily acceptable religion to these people group. Because though not completely identical but most of the laws put out by the Thadou society for its people group seem to resonate though not in totality but to a great extent with their cultural norms and practices. We cannot keep praising Christianity as it does have its own drawback like I mentioned earlier it tends to push people towards being materialistic, individualistic and there seems to be a segregation and alienation of the people group in the society who do not completely imbibe to the Christian norms. But also, on the other hand it does promote a more community-based society interdependent on one another but it is not so for those who do not follow or seem to agree to these religious norms.

Christianity and its role in the marriage system of the Thadou society seem to be that of a mixture of culture orientation in a more vibrant sense of the term yet, we also see that in the process of being Christianized most of the norms traditions and values of the society seems to have been forgotten or subtly replaced by Christian values. This has led to two extremes in the Thadou society one group completely disregarding traditional norms and practices for their Christian faith while the other being in the other extreme and rigidly still following the traditional ancestral norms. There have been efforts made to draw a middle ground between the two extremes and in a positive light there seems today that the people group have finally succeeded in imbibing traditional as well as religious practices together. For example, the Kut festival, traditionally it is the spring festival but today it is also taken as a day to thank God for all his blessings. Therefore, we see that this society has been able to draw to a great extent a middle ground between cultural and religious norms.

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