



Marriage System of the Galos of Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract: Marriage is a sacred socially recognized universal institution whose sanctity is recognized by every society. It is a system where the union of a man and a woman has been given social sanction as husband and wife. Devotion to partner are still considered to be the essence of marriage. Every society in this world has its own unique and different types of marriage system. The Galo is a tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. In this research paper, the researcher is going to evaluate about different types of marriage present among the Galos. In the Galo society, every member enjoys freedom to choose his or her partner. The parents allow enough freedom in matter of selection of soul mate to their sons and daughters. Both primary and secondary sources of information are used to collect data. Research tools like interview method, observation method and case study method are extensively used for the collection of primary data. Further, fieldworks were carried out in few Galo villages of West Siang District Arunachal Pradesh.

Keywords: Arunachal Pradesh, Galo, child marriage, levirate, sororate.

Received : 6 April 2021

Revised : 9 April 2021

Accepted : 29 April 2021

Published : 2 September 2021

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Kardong, N. 2021. Marriage System of the Galos of Arunachal Pradesh *Skylines of Anthropology*, 1: 1, pp. 48-57

Introduction

Marriage is an integral part of the human life and society, which is prevalent among human beings from time immemorial. Men and women get recognition of their physical relationship formally through marriage. Westermarck in his book, *"The History of Human Marriage"*, (1921) defines marriage as, "A relation of one or more men and women which is recognized by custom or law and involves certain rights and duties both in case of the parties entering the union and in the case of children born of it". The *Anthropological handbook Notes and Queries* (1951) opines marriage as, "A union between a man and a women such that children born to the women are the recognized legitimate offspring of both partners". Murdock (1949) defined marriage as, "The family is a social group

characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It includes adult of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the socially cohabiting adults”.

Arunachal Pradesh is home to 27 major tribes, and Galo is one of them. Galo tribe belongs to the Tani group, where 4 other tribes are also part of it, namely, Adi, Apatani, Nyishi and Tagin. The Tani group of people traces their descent through their ancestor Abo Tani, and they are different from each other due to language and certain features of cultures. In the past, Galo was considered as a sub tribe of the Adi tribe, but now, they are considered as an independent tribe, part of the Tani group.

West Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh is largely inhabited by the Galos. The Galos are divided in smaller groups and each group has its own villages and the villages inhabit in clan wise. These groups are the Karga, Karka, Bogum, Tator – Tani, Paktu and Lodu, some of which can be further divided into sub – groups. According to Husain (1995:73), ‘The term Galo was given to them by the neighbouring community Minyong, their original name being Tapo’. The central part of Arunachal Pradesh is west Siang districts and it is inhabited by the Galo tribe.

The Galos belong to the Mongoloid racial stock. They speak Galo language and it is not much different from Adi dialect and comes under the Tibeto Burman branch of the Sino - Tibetan family. The Galos are patrilineal and patrilocal society. The Galos are agrigarian and their economy is fully depends on the agriculture and they consume homemade country liquor called *apong*. Rice is their staple food. Along with the rice, rice beer (*apong*) and rice cake (*etting*) which is supplemented by maize and millet, are taken by them. Good numbers of wild leafy vegetables are taken in large quantities. Most of their rituals and festivals are integral to cultivations. Among the animals which the Galos domesticate include cow, goat, mithun, pig, cat, dog, and among the birds, the fowls. There is a legend related to domestication of animals among them. The Galos build permanent houses which require major repairs only after six or seven years. Their houses are bamboo structures, strengthened with wood and secured with cane strings. The house is built on wooden piles at a height of one to ten feet from the ground. The local disputes among them are generally solved through a social council (*keba*) as per the customary rule in practices. They follow traditional tribal religion which has now known as Donyi Polo religion and their supreme deity, Sun and the Moon. They believe in a good number of malevolent and benevolent deities. Their religious expert

is called as the *nyibu*. Both monogamy and polygamy type of marriages are practiced by them, however monogamy is very common among the Galos. Child marriage was prevalent in the past but now only adult marriage is practiced.

Methodology

This study has been conducted in three Galo villages of West Siang district, viz., Nari, Lumpo and Depa villages. Both primary and secondary data are used for this paper. For collecting the primary data, intensive field work has been conducted in the study villages. For secondary data, library work, books, journals, internet sources, were studied. For collection of empirical data, anthropological methods like type of observation, open end interview and case study have been adopted.

Marriage

According to Srivastava (1988:54), 'Fraternal polyandry is the distinguishing culture – trait of the Gallong'. The Galos consider marriage as an important institution meant for the continuity of the lineage and culture. For the Galo, marriage does not mean a mere relationship of a man and a woman; rather it is a relationship between two families in particular and clans in general. Through negotiation the marriages are settled in Galo society. The Galo society is endogamous, and strictly they follow the rule of clan exogamy. For marriage, there is no particular age. The Galos are traditionally polygamous. Polygamy is permissible and not obligatory on the man's part to seek consent for it from his wife. The status of the husband increases in the society with the more number of wives. He can take many wives if he can afford. Cicisbism is a custom practiced and sanctioned by the Galo society. Divorce is very rare but granted. In case of divorce, children remain with father and remarriage is allowed for the widow, widower and divorcees. The married women are allowed for sexual access to all of her husband own brother, cousin brother and sometimes to clan brother, if both the brothers bonding are closed. Sometimes even to the clan members of her husband but often her wishes are honored.

Among the Galos, marriage season are always taken for consideration. Since Galos are agriculturists and it is also an ancient tradition among them to marry after completing cultivation work. They also do not prefer rainy season for marriage and during Autum season the parents arrange the engagement for the boy and the girl after harvesting the paddy. Before the date and time of marriage is fixed, omens are performed. But there is no specific inauspicious

month, time and date. It is the custom to observe omen. If it shows bad omen on the way, then auspicious dates are waited for marriages. Generally during rainy season and cultivation periods, marriage is not performed and inauspicious months, date and time are also avoided. The Galos prefer marriage in winter season and especially after January and the period continue till April/May. Because during this time all the villager remain free of work and the weather is also very pleasant. Galos think that for marriage, it required lots of rice and millet so they organized marriages after harvesting when granary is full. At present, especially after the adoption of Christianity and its influences on other religions too, they arrange the marriage ceremony in the autumn also.

Types of Marriage

The Galos follow a distinct system of marriage which includes a good number of marriage types which are described below:-

Arranged / Negotiation Marriage (nyida tagaknam)

Most of the Galo marriages are arranged marriages (*nyida tagaknam*). Nyori (1993:241) writes, "The selection of the bride is sometimes influenced by the mother of the bridegroom; because she prefers to bring a daughter in law from her parent's family, clan or village and thereby she tries to maintain the increasing relationship there". In negotiation marriage (*nyida tatnam*) the parents settled. Normally the proposal comes from the boy's family. In this type of marriage, the parents decide the marriage without the consent of their child.

In arranged marriage, the initiative for marriage comes generally from the parents of the boy. When the parents of a boy consider their son to have grown and fit for marriage then they are on look for a suitable girl. On finding the one who is suitable to be their daughter-in-law, a hint is given to the boy through his cousin or friends to ascertain his wishes and consent for the girl of their choice. If the boy agrees, the matter is pursued further. Apart from this, arranged marriages also take place when a boy tells his family about his willingness to marry a particular girl of his choice. In this case, it becomes the responsibility of the parents and family members to negotiate with the girl's parents. However, the family members of the boy carefully observes the activities of their son and to be daughter in-law as well as discuss the line of descent of the father and the mother of the girl and prevailing status of the relatives and parents of the girl. If all the conditions satisfy the boy's parents and the relatives, they decide to contact the girl's parents for marriage proposal. This is the most respected way

of tying the two. Next is the reading of omen on chicken's liver, (*Porok Roksin Kanam*) or in pig liver (*ek roksin kanam*), by the (*Mibu*) Priest in the groom's house to find out whether the marriage between the two is favorable. If it is favorable, then parents, relatives and the *lumpo* (Mediator) will go to the girl's house with formal marriage proposal. This procedure is called *Nyida tadnam*. The middle man (*lumpo*) is sent to girl's house by boy's parents with rice beer, meat, *tapum jeera* (a piece of cloth), vegetable, in conical basket (*egin*). If the girl's parents decline the proposal, they don't accept the offer but if they agree, they make a return offers *Topum Eji* (Eri chador/shawl). After the return from girl's house, the boy's parents and relatives fix the date. After the fixation of date, the *Nyida* ceremony follows. Marriage by elopement does not exist among the Galos. If a boy and a girl are in love and want to marry, then parents even though not interested with the alliance at last for the sake of the son and daughter's happiness, they agree and follow the procedure marriage through negotiation.

Pre-birth Betrothal (Neppe nyida)

Traditionally the Galos practice marriage even before the birth of the child which is known as Pre-birth betrothal (*Neppe nyida*) is the marriage where the decision is taken by both the parents of unborn child just before the time of conception. This type of marriage exists among few friends (*kedens*) and not so popular. According to Padu, "If one's child is a daughter and that of the other is a son, their marriage should be solemnized between them (Cited in Nyori, 1993: 243-245)". Pre-birth betrothals also took place when a person was not able to pay his own bride price. Such a person enters into a contract with another person pledging that he would give his prospective daughter to become the wife of his son if he agrees to pay his settled bride price. In that case, he receives the bride price for his daughter though she is yet to be born.

Child Marriage

The child marriage (*neppe nyida*) was the most common form of marriage prevalent among the Galo at past. From infancy to little above adulthood was marriageable age among the Galos in the near past. Minor boys and girls can be betrothed, so it is the duty of the parents to decide at what age the children get married. In the present time adult marriage are encouraged and practised.

Marriage by Exchange

Marriage by exchange (*Nyime lape sinam*) is also common type of marriages. Here two men exchange their sisters among them. To equalize the cost of

payment of bride-price, the marriageable girls are exchanged among the families. Age is not a factor in establishing marriage by exchange.

Marriage by Abducted/forced

Abducted/forced Marriage (*nyimen sinam*) is the marriage where the girl is abducted by the boy for marriage. When the girl is not ready to marry or she may not approve the alliance chosen by her parents, then the girl is abducted by a boy for marriage. Here the girl's parents are aware of the abduction.

Levirate Marriage (Yigo/Rigo Ginam)

There are also instances of man inheriting wife under some special circumstances apart from acquiring her by paying bride price and going through certain ceremonies. The most common form of inheritance is levirate, which is locally termed as *Yigo/Rigo Ginam*. After the death of the husband, it becomes compulsion on the widow to live with any of her deceased husband's unmarried elder or younger brother as his wife. Since the family has paid the bride price, no one else but the brothers of the deceased has a right over the widow. If the deceased has no brother, the cousin and clan member has the right to inherit the widow. If the bride price of the widow is half paid by the deceased husband, then the brother inheriting her takes over the responsibility of future payment after he has inherited the widow and kept her as his wife. The main reason for the Galo to remarry the widow to the deceased husband's brother or relatives is to keep the widow and her children within their family and also to provide care and protection and to help the widow.

Sororate Marriage (Yigne Lanam)

Among the Galos, there are widower re-marriages. If the wife dies then he can re marry his wife's younger sister or cousin sister with the permission of his wife's sister and family members. Such marriage is not forceful. Again among the Galos, there are also instances of re-marrying for the sake of procreation. If the wife is a barren and has no male issue, then he takes the permission of his wife and family and remarries his sister or any other girl as his co-wife. If the wife's sister and her parents are reluctant to such marriage, the husband can't force them. But, if they agree then a new marriage is arranged without bride price. Such form of marriage is known as *yigne lonam*.

Bride Price (Ari)

Bride price (*Ari*) is the indispensable part of a Galo marriage. Among them whether the marriage is arranged marriage, marriage by abduction, the bride price must be paid to the father of the bride. It is the custom of payment from the groom's family to the bride's father. Some of the Galos called bride price as *Ari/Ome Ari*. The main factor for paying bride price is that a daughter is considered as an economic asset of the family. The bride price is depending upon the groom's family. If the groom's family is wealthy, then they give more bride price to keep the family's reputation and if the family is poor then they give comparatively less bride price. Generally, the bride price composed among the Galos is mithuns, cows, pig, brass bowl and one piece of cloth are the customary bride wealth. Her marriage means a loss of a helping hand in her family. In order to compensate this loss, the bride price is taken by her family. Bride price payment can be an installment or one at a time as per the convenience of the groom's family. The economic status of the boys determines the amount of bride price and non payment of bride price may result in breakdown of the marriage or inferior status of the groom's family. Bride price varies from family to family. The rich families give 10 cows, 10 mithuns (*Bos frontalis*) and a number of brass utensils, while a poor family gives 1 pig, 1 cow, 1 mithun and small number of big and small brass utensils. The brides are given mother's ornaments, brass utensils, beads, chicken, seeds and clothes, which are the property of their mothers. It is also seen that the girl's parents also give articles to the boy's family in order to commensurate the bride price received by them.

Changes in Marriage System

The Galo society is transforming gradually by acquiring cultural traits from different societies. Marriage system of the Galos is changing due to the increasing rate of education, modernization and development. Conversion to Christianity has also brought a lot of changes among them. In marriage, there are conspicuous changes are evident among them. Most of the marriages among the Galos are arranged by parents through negotiation. The bride price which is a part and parcel of the Galo society is changed day by day. In earlier days, in the payment of the bride price, the bride's father had to give a plot of land, cows, brass utensils and mithun (*Bos frontalis*). But now, instead of bride price, the father and the family of the bride want the welfare of their daughter and grand daughter so they prefer not to take any bride price from the son in law and his family and desire to see their daughter and grand children

happy. They also want their would be son in law have to give up polygamy in their marriage. The parents of the divorcee girls need not return the bride price paid by the groom's parents. The bride price is not heavy as the olden days. Marriage were broken due to non payment of bride price are no more in the Galo society. Earlier among them, arranged marriage was very common where the opinions of the boy and girl were given importance but at present, the love marriages are becoming popular among the youngsters and parents are also accepting the system. As the parents are becoming liberal, even in arranged marriage, the parents take the opinion of the boy and the girl before negotiation of the marriage and they also give the freedom to their children to choose their partners. The educated and modern Galo women are not ready to become second and third wife.

The marriage ceremony of the traditional Galo is almost same to that of the Galo who have adopted Christianity. However the Christian Galos perform the marriage in the Church, the animist Galos held it in their residence. In the Christian marriage also, bride price is taken which is devoid of rice beer because drinking of liquors is a taboo in Christianity. Instead of local rice beer, they offer the tea, soft drink and sweets, as bride price which is available in the markets. The Christian marriages are performed by the Pastors or Priests in the Church. The date of a marriage is fixed by priest and on that particular day, the ceremony is conducted where the bride and groom exchange the ring and marry. The dress codes are different for the Christian marriage. However it is the bride's choice and she can wear any of that it may be traditional or gown of the Christian bride it is completely her decision. However a Christian bride prefers to wear gown and the groom wear a black coat, white shirt and black trouser. They can also wear traditional dress and ornaments, of the Galos also.

The women folk are not ready to submit to the males of her males of her husbands clan. The customs of sharing the sister in law (cicisbism) among the brothers still exists in the remote places even though it is declined day by day. Women are debarred from parent's property after marriage but change in it also has been taken place, especially in case of widow, she cannot inherit her deceased husband's property. But due to the influence of modern legal system in traditional judiciary changes has come, even though the women folk inherit property are very less in number. The traditional marriages were very expensive and it is not possible for the all parents to organize such marriages. As changes have effected in all spheres of life of the Galos the ceremony of marriage also have undergone conspicuous changes. Today, they perform marriage in an economic way. The traditional utensils made of bamboo have

been replaced with market utensils which are made of aluminum or steel. They also make sure that the food, vegetables, meat, should not be wasted in the process of marriage. The child marriage which prevailed in the Galo society is totally abolished. Observing omen before marriage is still present among them. It is checked either in chicken or in a pig. But now a days, even if the omen gives bad indication still people did not initiate and celebrate the marriage with pomp and gaiety.

Conclusion

Arunachal Pradesh is located in North East India which is primarily inhabited by the tribal people. There are 27 major tribes in Arunachal Pradesh and Galo is one of them. Traditionally the Galos are animistic, although a section of them have recently converted to Christianity. Both these sections practiced jhum cultivation and their principal crop is paddy. There is nuance in life ways of these two sections of Galos including in their marriages systems. The Galo has a traditional system of marriage where clan exogamy is strictly maintained. Among them marriage by negotiation, marriage by exchange, marriage by abductions, are very common. Traditionally they practiced child marriage and even sometimes marriage was arranged between the two unborn children and if the parturient mother give birth to a boy and a girl, their marriage is performed in due time. Levirate and sororate are practiced by them. A widower can marry the elder sister in law and a widow can marry the younger brother of the deceased.

Among the Galos a pseudo type of polyandry has been observed (cicibism). After marriage, a girl can maintain physical relations with her husband's brothers, cousins, even to his clan members. Divorce is rarely occurred among them and after it the man and the wife can marry again following the pristine rules. The children born from the divorced couple stay at their family of orientation. Traditionally they practiced cicibism which is presently not found among by them.

A Galo girl has to perform many duties for which she is taken as asset in a family. She cooks, cleans the house, fetch water, firewood and wild edibles, and look after domestic animals, minors and elderly persons, she also works in shifting cultivation. Marriage of a girl, is therefore, loss to a family. Such loss is compensated by paying bride price by the groom, which is compulsory among them. Mithun, cow, pig, brass utensil, country liquor, bamboo basket, are given by the groom to the bride's father amount of which depend on his economic status.

Conspicuous changes are evident in the pristine Galo marriage system due to the acceleration of education, urbanization, role of mass media and so on. The Christian Galos observed marriages in the Churches conducted by the Pastors or priest, while the traditional Galos observe their marriages at their residences. The Christian Galos do not offer country liquor as bride price. Now a days, many parents do not accept bride prices as they are more concerned to their children's happy conjugal lives.

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