

Exploring changes in the institution of marriage among Bakerwals

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Abstract

Marriage stands as a cornerstone of social institutions, serving as the conduit through which families and societies endure. In India, it assumes paramount importance as a pivotal life event, carrying profound familial and societal implications. Across cultures, symbolic rituals and tangible symbols convey the cherished values, expectations, and ethos surrounding marriage and familial bonds. Among the Bakerwal tribe, steadfast adherence to time-honored customs and traditions prevails. Customs, in this context, encompass not merely statistical patterns of behavior but also embody a prescriptive dimension. For the Bakerwals, deviating from these customs signifies a transgression against their deeply held social tenets.

Keywords

Perception, marriage, tribe, Bakerwal, family

Introduction

Marriage is an important institution in India. The country is divided into two regions with respect to marriage practice and customs, the north and the south. Other variation can in marriage practices can be seen among various ethnic and tribal groups in the central, mountainous north and eastern regions. In the northern part, it is seen that brides, especially Hindu brides, have to go and live with strangers in a home which they have ever visited. The natal family is geographically distant. In central India, the pattern is similar to that of the northern part. Here marriages

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outside the village are common. Daughters are often given to lineage or villages where other daughters of their lineage or village have earlier been wed. However in the southern part of India marriage practice are very different. Marriages are generally preferred between cousins. Cross cousin marriages and marriages between uncle and niece are common. The major reasons for the prevalence of this type of marriage practice are that the family that gives a daughter expects one in return if not immediately, then in the next generation. Here the bride moves to her in-laws home which is usually the home of the grandmother or her aunt's home. Hence she is often comfortable there.

Changes in the marriage system are that love and mixed marriage have been rise among tribes in India. A mixed marriage is the term often applied to a marital union of two individuals from different races or religion. It also describes the marriage of a couple which has different cultural, ethnic or national background. In various tribal communities dowry has traditionally been given by a bride's kin at the time of her marriage. Since the late twentieth century throughout many parts of India dowry payments have risen enormously. Some dowries demanded are oppressive, amounting to several years' salary in cash as well as items such as motorcycles and refrigerators.

Traditionally tribal marriage has been conservative in practicing and preserving their cultural standards to their marriages. Their ethnicity has been one of the potential factors in preserving conservatism. Most tribal communities consider the attainment as the appropriate age for marrying their daughters. There are customs and practices to initiate the process of marrying their sons and daughters by adhering to the established rules and procedures. All the steps involved, namely the selection of mates, ceremony of marriage, residence of partners and lineage have cultural specificities.

Formerly, parents would arrange marriages for their children. This method shows the social importance of marriage, especially as it concerns the families and relatives of the couple. Tumwine (1995) indicates that there has been a general in parents choosing marriage partners for their children. An extreme case was observed from the males because while about 10 percent had their partners chosen by their parents among respondents aged fifty and above, the percentage fell to zero among those aged 15 to 24 years. The change was attributed to modern education that was reduced the authority of the parents on the children. Moreover, many parents who reside in the villages may know few educated youth fit for their children because it is not common for educated people to marry uneducated ones since many formal marriages begin with cohabitation.³ Education also increase the changes of cross marriages

between tribes and marriage partners may not necessarily have to be from the same locality as observed from the increase in the number of intermarriage. Education has also increased individualism in young people. A wife is as thus meant for the husband and not the whole family as it used to be in the past.

India is still by and large a traditional society with rigid caste system. Caste plays a very important role in the selection of mates in marriages. To most Indians, it is difficult to think of marriage beyond the own caste. To think of marriage between different castes and different religions is a difficult and social unacceptable proposition. Recently the process of modernization, democratization and development has brought lot of positive changes in Indian society. Similarly, among the missing of Assam a marriage within the community is the norm of the Missing Society. But is being observed that the traditional binding of the community in marriage selection is gradually loosening over time. It is observed that about ten percent of the marriage among the Misings is inter-community (with non tribal communities), inter tribe and inter religion. The modernization has impacted every aspect of tribal life in India either it is tribal marriage, tribal education or tribal economy. The only thing is that some tribes have affected a lot or some have affected a less but change has occurred among tribes.

Under the traditional practice, marriage was almost permanent in the tribal societies as it was viewed as a permanent social and spiritual bond between the couples, on the one hand, and the families involved. In the past, marriage was contracted between two families without the consent of the girl among the tribes, and any future opposition by her was not tolerated. Marriage and family, therefore, constituted a cohesive social organization that provided the realization of private and social aspirations. The Indissolubility legitimized of traditional marriage was based on the force of custom and traditionally legitimized norms which compelled spouses to live together.

The legitimization of such marriage was pivotal on contracts between the partners and between their respective families. The first of these contracts is the primary legal contract between spouses as the only two partners to the marriage relationship. Secondly, there is the social contract of mutual agreement between the families of the couple. The contract between the families may be described as "social investment" which operated through the extended family support that both families are committed to offer the couple in times of future crisis. The object of the "social investment" is to make the marriage succeed as its failure could bring disgrace to the families or generate ill-feelings between people who previously owed each other social obligations. Finally, there is the social-legal contract for

the settlement of marriage payment in the presence of other members of the extended families. The payment and witness put the seal of indissolubility on the whole transaction.

In contemporary times, marriage in all transitional societies has become vulnerable to the forces of rapid social change. Society has witnessed a decline in the stability of marriage as a result of individualism, economic independence, and emancipation into freedom from cultural bonds. Since the process of mate selection has become the responsibility of the two principal actors in the marriage transaction, the traditional role of the extended family in vetting the choice of a life partner has suffered a decline. The modern family isolated under the modern industrial and bureaucratic conditions tends to lack the traditional institutional support necessary to avert crisis. The slow decline of worship from which it is traditionally believed that elders derive their lineage political authority further implies that the social control function of lineage elders to a certain point has lost its effectiveness. The consequences of all these processes is the increasing instability that marriage has continued to experience in modern times. Marital instability is therefore a phenomenon which is associated with a complex of factors which makes the determination of cause highly problematic. According to Olusanya, (1970) factors like age at marriage, age differential between spouses, typed of marriage (customary or statutory), monogamy or polygamy and education often affect the stability of marriage.⁵

It can be concluded from the above text that contemporary changes in India present us with a paradoxical situation. With greater intrusion of technology and science, it was expected that a secular-scientific outlook would emerge and, consequently, the non-essential ritual and customs have always pleaded for avoiding of wasteful expenditures on meaningless customs and rituals. Today, there is a revival of many rituals and customs, which soon after independence, appeared to have become weak. To an extent this revival is a function of affluence. Many people in society have a lot of money to spend lavishly on weddings, and there is a tendency among the not-so affluent to imitate the affluent.

Ways of Acquiring Mates in Tribes

The manners in which mates can be acquired are various in tribal India. Marriage is generally regarded as a civil contract and not a religious sacrament, and therefore, religious solemnization does not take place everywhere. However, contact with Hindus has invested this religious solemnization with a prestige value in the eyes of the tribal people; and numerous are the instances in Middle India where the tribal folk have their traditional marriage ceremony as well as some imitation of the

Hindu ritual marriage. The Ho provides such an instance. It must be noted, however, that among several tribes, like the Khasi for instance, marriage has had something of a religious sanction also. Marriage brings together, not just two individuals, but two families in a network of social obligations.

Eight important ways of acquiring a mate may be listed on the basis of data reported from tribal India. They are

- Probationary marriage
- Marriage by Capture
- Marriage by trial
- Marriage by purchase
- Marriage by service
- Marriage by exchange
- Marriage by mutual consent and elopement, and
- Marriage by intrusion

Probationary marriage: in this case, a young man is permitted to live with the girl of his choice in her house for weeks together, after which, if so they desire, they marry. If the couple does not find each other suitable and compatible during the probationary period, they decide not pay cash compensation to the girl's parents. This kind of marriage has been reported from among the Kuki. They permit a young man to live with his sweetheart in the latter's house for weeks together, after which, if they so decide, they marry each other. In case the couple do not find each other's temperament to be suitable and compatible, they separate with each other.

Marriage by capture is growing rare with social advance and the widening application of the India penal Code. However, it continues up-to-date, to be one of the ways of acquiring a mate among the Naga tribes, fear of raids having in the past led to female infanticide. Cases of capture have also been reported from the Ho, who call it *oportipi* and the Gond who call it *Post' othur* and the Bhil, and several other pre- Dravidian tribes.⁶ It is called abduction or marriage when a boy is interested in a girl but the girl's parents are not willing to give her daughters to that boy in marriage. The boy with the help of his family members takes away the girl by force. This type of marriage is practiced in Naga and Santhal tribes of India.

Marriage by trial is the recognition of personal courage and bravery as highly desirable traits in a young man; and some tribes require a young man to prove his prowess before he can claim the hand of any girl in marriage. If he succeeds in the task assigned to him he has the right to name any girl as his wife. Among the Bhil such a practice is reported to

prevail even now. During the Holi festival young men and women practice a folk dance round a pole or a tree to the top of which cocoanut and gud are tied. Anybody is free to dance round this tree. The woman make an inner ring of dancers round the tree, and the men an outer ring. The trial of strength begins when a young man attempts to break through the inner ring to reach and climb the tree to eat the gud and break open the cocoanut. The woman dancers resist his attempt by tearing at his flesh, though all this 'in good faith'. If, in spite of all these obstacle, a daring man succeeds in reaching the top of the tree, he has the right to choose any of the surrounding girls as his wife and take her away immediately.

Marriage by, what has been called, purchase is found prevalent all over tribal India. The Naga tribes pay a bride price, and so do the tribes in Middle India. The bride price may be paid in cash or kind or both. Lowie has emphasized that although the economic nature of this tribe price payment cannot be minimized. It nevertheless would be wrong to regard the payment of a bride price as indicating sale and purchase. It may be only symbolic of the utility of a woman, and by way of compensation to her parent's family.⁷ The economic aspect of the bride price has assumed huge proportions among some of the Indian tribes. In the type of marriage, a man is required to give an agreed amount of cash/kind to the parents of the bride as price which usually varies according to the physical beauty and utility of the bride.

Marriage by service is a type of marriage by service the bride price is not paid in the shape of money but is the form of service. The youth before the marriage gives services to his future father in law for about three to five years. During this period he can meet with girl but cannot enter into sexual relations with her. If the father of the girl was satisfied from the man, then he give his daughter to him otherwise he dismisses the young and give chance to other person. This form of marriage is practiced in Gond, Viga, Lamnai etc.

Marriage by Exchange is also called preferential marriage. It occurs only when the society specifically suggests and directs an individual to marry another individual. The most elementary form of preferential marriage is "sister exchange" cross cousin marriage, and "Uncle-Niece marriages." In Sister Exchange Marriage two men exchange their sisters to one another in marriage. This type of marriage done by poor Bhil families, when both parties do not have money to pay for dapa and have sisters to exchange. In this marriage consents of the girls are necessary. The marriage is arranged in a very simple manner without formalities. In local language it is called Ata-sata. Patrilateral Cross Cousin Marriage is a type of marriage in which man marries his father's sister's daughter. Several

Indian tribes such as Munda and Kadar prefer patrilineal Cross cousin, Matrilineal Cross-cousin Marriage or Mother's Brother's Daughter Marriage. In this type a man marries his another's daughter. Several Indian tribes such as the Kharia and the Oraon prefer Multilateral cross - cousin marriage. Uncle Niece Marriage; it is a type of marriage in which a man marries his sister's daughter. Although in contrast to above two forms of preferential marriage that occur between persons belonging to the same generation. But this form of marriage takes place between persons of two following generations in a cross-generational marriage. Several South Indian Tribes practice Uncle-Niece marriage.⁸

Marriage by Elopement is the most common form of marriage among the Bhils. This type of marriage is popular because its romance, easy consent, quick decision for marriage and it is less expensive. In elopement, the boy and girl run away from their house and marry, but this marriage is recognized by the society after payment of bride price i.e. dapa is paid by the boy's father to the girl's father and payment of penalty imposed on them by their panchayat, if any dispute arises is to be solved by the patels or Gameti of both villages.⁹ In simple context, a young man captures the girl of his choice, runs and marries her with or without her wish. Later, public approval is accorded to such a marriage.

The well-known social anthropologist's D. Mujumdar and T.N. Madan have classified a form of tribal union, as marriage by intrusion. In this case the girl intrudes into the privacy of the home of the boy she loves. In spite of being treated with bad behavior and abuse very often, she persists and stays on till the boy accept her. If the girl in question is a widow, the question of bride price does not arise. If she is maiden, although her people not by custom entitled to bride-price, the people of her chosen husband generally pay it in order to establish friendly terms between and the people of the bride. It is popularly believed that the woman is attracted to the man by some secret spell or some drug indirectly administered. The bridegroom and his people arrange, a feast, where the bride's people and the village panches and other tribe fellows are invited, and vermilion is anointed on the bride's forehead and the couples are then formally recognized as husband and wife.¹⁰ For a valid marriage the parties must belong to different clans. A few cases of marriages are regularized by the village elders and panches.

Research Methodology

Techniques of Data Collection: To carry out the study, the techniques of interview schedule and observation were used to get objective and reliable findings.

Sources of Data Collection: The present study involved both primary and secondary source of data collection. For primary sources, first-hand information was collected through interview schedule and observation in the field. The secondary source of information was based on books, book chapters, journal papers, unpublished thesis and newspaper articles etc. available on the topic. Facial expression, body language was given due importance and informal talks with the respondents helped in enriching the study. The American psychological Association 5th ed. (APA) style was used in the present study for citation and references.

Objectives of Study

- To explore the opinion regarding marriage practices of *Bakerwals* in Kashmir
- To provide reflection of changes in marriage of Bakerwal tribe

Results and Discussions

Changes in the Institutions of Marriage Among *Bakerwal* Tribe

India, the land of traditional society is going through the social change in its social institutions. Marriage is the beginning of a new way of life for young man and women. Making the practical arrangements for the wedding day a great deal of time is required. In India all these occasions are planned and celebrated with the help of relatives.¹² The winds of change have been blowing over many traditional institutions and concepts. One such institution, that still remains popular and which seem to be under a savage attack from shifting social trends, is the institution of marriage. Along with the change is family norms in the contemporary society, the pattern of marriage is also changing.

Since marriage is an important social institution, different social groups have devised their own rules and regulations in regard to mate selection. The term exogamy and endogamy refer to these rules. The rules prohibiting marriage between men and women who share a certain degree of blood are known as exogamy. The exogamy prevail in different societies in varying degrees.¹³

The process of change in the social structure is an inevitable universal social reality. The changes in the last few decades are so rapid and far reaching that many thinkers look upon this is a new era in human history. The process of industrialisation, urbanization and secularisation have brought about many socio-psychological changes in the attitudes and values of the people. Marriage is considered to be oldest and the most basic and fundamental institution in the society. The concept of marriage varies in degree from community to community and nation to

nation. In this regard opinion based questions were asked to check how much this community are satisfied with the change.

Table 1.1.
Changes in the Institutions of Marriage

S.No.	Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
01	Have the institution of marriage witnessed change in your community.	Strongly Agree	40	20.00
		Agree	130	65.00
		Neither Disagree nor Agree	10	5.00
		Disagree	20	10.00
Total			200	100.00
02	Have you witnessed the age of marriage increased in your tribe	Strongly Agree	110	55.00
		Agree	55	22.50
		Disagree	35	17.50
Total			200	100.00
03	Have you witnessed the choice marriage has increased in your tribe	Agree	10	5.00
		Disagree	120	60.00
		Strongly Disagree	70	35.00
Total			200	100.00
04	Have you witnessed amount of <i>Mahr</i> has increased in your tribe	Strongly Agree	40	20.00
		Agree	110	55.00
		Disagree	50	25.00
Total			200	100.00
05	Have you witnessed Marriages have become more extravagant	Strongly Agree	30	15.00
		Agree	130	65.00
		Disagree	40	20.00
Total			200	100.00
06	Have you witnessed changes has occurred in the feast given to guests on marriage	Strongly Agree	40	20.00
		Agree	130	65.00
		Disagree	10	5.00
		Neither Agree nor Disagree	20	10.00

	Total		200	100.00
07	Have you witnessed arranged marriage is more successful than love marriage	Strongly Agree	200	100.00
08	Have you witnessed divorce is increasing in your tribe	Disagree	110	55.00
		strongly Disagree	85	42.50
		Agree	05	2.50
	Total		200	100.00

Table 1 reveals that institution of marriage among *Bakerwal* community as witnessed change. It was found majority of the respondents 170 (85 percent) agreed that changes have occurred in the institution of marriage among *Bakerwal* community. Out of 170 respondents; 40 respondents (20 percent) strongly agreed that they have witnessed change in the institution of marriage. 20 respondents that is 10 percent disagreed having witnessed change in the institution of marriage. While as a very small percentage of 10 respondents (5 percent) could not express their views. Hence it was found that change has occurred in the institution of marriage among *Bakerwal* community.

Table 2 reveals that age at marriage among *Bakerwal* has witnessed a change and It was found majority of the respondents 165 (82.50) percent) agreed that age at marriage has increased among the *Bakerwals*. Out of 165 respondents it was found majority of the respondents that is 110 (55 percent) strongly agreed that age at marriage in their community has increased. Out of 200 respondents (100 percent) 35 respondents (17.50 percent) disagreed having witnessed change in age at marriage in their community. Age at marriage has increased among girls from 14 to 19 years and above while as among boys it has increased from 17 to 25 years and in some cases up to 30 years.

Table 3 reveals that the custom of choice marriages is not prevalent among the community. It is very rarely practised that too with no respect attached to it. It was found that a very small percentage of respondents 10 respondents (5 percent) affirmed about the presence of choice marriage custom within the community while as a majority of respondents 190 respondents (95 percent) denied the prevalence of the custom of choice in their community. Out of 170 respondents; 70 respondents (35 percent) strongly disagreed about the prevalence of choice marriage in their community. Since the *Bakerwal* community strictly follows the cultural

customs and choice marriage custom is strictly looked down upon in their culture, it is mostly not followed by the members of the community. Table 4 reveals that the amount of *Mahr* as a religious obligation has increased. It was found the majority of respondents 150 respondents (75 percent) agreed that the amount of Mahr has increased. Out of 150 respondents; 50 respondents (25 percent) strongly agreed that the amount of *Mahr* has increased. a small percentage of respondents 50 respondents; 25 percent did not agree on the fact that the amount of Mahr has increased. it was observed that with the passage of time the price of commodities has increased and they are no longer cheaper as they were in the past. This is the reason for increase in the amount of Mahr as well.

Table 5 reveals that the expenditure on marriages has witnessed a drastic change and it was found that majority of respondents 130 (65 percent) a that they agreed that they have indulged in extravagant marriages and are spending lavishly on their marriages; 30 (15 percent) respondents strongly agreed that the marriage ceremonies in Bakerwals have become more extravagant and this trend may be attributed to extravagancy, peer pressure, and influence of other communities and a small percentage 20 (10 percent) disagreed that the expenditure on marriage in Bakerwals have become more extravagant.

Regarding the changes has occurred in the feast given to guest on marriage ceremonies among *Bakerwal* tribe, a majority 135 respondents (67.50 percent) agreed and affirmed that a lot of changes have occurred in the feasts given to guests. The respondents said that three to four cuisines of *wazwan* are served to guests on marriages; 45 respondents (22.50 percent) strongly agreed that changes have occurred in the feasts while as a small percentage 20 respondents (10 percent) disagreed that any changes has occurred in the feasts given to guests on marriage ceremonies among *Bakerwals*. More over those who disagrees said that we continue to serve *Dal* and *Dahi* to Guests on marriage ceremonies to the guests.

In response to question asked regarding the significance of arranged marriage than choice marriage among *Bakerwals* all the 200 respondents (100 percent) strongly agreed that arranged marriage remains very successful in us. Moreover all the respondents said that in arranged marriage there remains the interference of parents and if some untoward happens after marriage it remains the sole authority of the parents to resolve the issue which is the same in choice marriage. It was observed by the researcher those who do the choice marriage looked down upon in the tribe.

In response to table 8 regarding the divorce is increasing among *Bakerwals* out of 200 respondents (100 percent) 110 respondents (55.00 percent)

disagreed that the divorce is increasing in their tribe; 85 respondents (42.50 percent) strongly disagreed and completely denied that divorces occur in *Bakerwals* and is considered unacceptable.

However a small percentage of respondents i.e., 5 percent agreed that divorce is increasing among Bakerwals and it was observed by the researcher that sometimes lack of understanding between husband and wife, adjustment problems faced by the daughter-in-law communication gap, financial issues, unmet expectations become the bone of contention become the cause of divorce. As such the concept of divorce is very rarely seen.

Conclusion

From the study it appears that both the trends of modernity and traditions are equally established in the marriages of Bakerwals. The modernity here is an indicator with respect of cultural and not the tribal stigma. Therefore it is clear that there are still some rights with respect of marriage that should be with boy and girl but are confined with their parents respectively mate selection or meeting the other partner between engagement and marriage and time of marriage. The old practices, rituals and beliefs are still significant and very important. The researcher concludes there is a process of continuity and little change in marriage among Bakerwals. The continuity indicates here that traditions and rituals while as little change is indication of some modern practices in marriage. The marriage process, mate selection, rituals and other marriage related ceremonies are still the same and are being done on classic traditional patterns but having said that the change factor always place its part. There may be different reasons for different changes but the fact is that these little change are taking place without any doubt. The inclusion of wazwan in cuisine, the replacement of electronic gifts from traditional gifts, document for Nikah (Nikah Nama) Kashmir and hindi movie songs sung in different days of marriages are some of the changes that can be widely seen. The concept of marriage has gone through numberless changes from time to time and place to place. These changes are in the way of nature of performance of marriages, in customs and rituals related to marriage in mate selection, age of marriage and so on. The social issues with marriage are also increasing day by day like confined to inter caste marriage, dowry, and the relationship of girl with her in laws and impact of modernization on marriages. Different social experts have tried to study the multiple aspects of institution of marriage in worldwide but at the same time very less or no such study has been conducted on the community of *Bakerwal* so far. In this context, the present study, "Marriage among *Bakerwals* in Kashmir" was taken in

consideration to study the customs, rituals, practices, beliefs and changes brought in the institution of marriage among *Bakerwals*. In order to present a picture of the marriage among *Bakerwals*, the marriage as prevailing among *Bakerwals* was studied in detail both theoretically and practically participating in marriage ceremonies of *Bakerwals*.

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