

‘MARRIAGE’ CEREMONY OF THE MEITEI

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Abstract

In every society, whether primitive or civilized, marriage is in many respects the most important social institution. The stability of human societies depends upon this universal and primary institution. It is through marriage that the very basis of the family and the society are organized and fulfilled. On account of its vital importance, the sanctity and permanence of marriage has been universally emphasized in all societies and the Meiteis are not an exception to this. In Meitei society marriage is called ‘Luhongaba’. Meitei marriage ceremonies lie in the concept of Kujaba. There are four elements in the concept of Kujaba, viz. the earth, the food-grain, the cloth and the accessories. Marriages in Meitei society according to different scholars have different forms.

Key words: Luhongaba, Kujaba, Kambi, Waroipt Puba, Chada-laihui, Chenba, Yathang-Thaba, etc.

Introduction:

The Meitei concept of marriage means the sacred and ceremonial union of a woman with a man with due religious rites. In the Meitei marriage, ‘Kujaba’ takes very important role. The most important ingredient of Meitei marriage ceremonies lies in the concept of Kujaba, which consists of one big earthen plate called ‘Kambi’. In marriage the first gift is given from the groom to the bride on the day of heijing Kharai Puba or Heijing Puba ritual. Then, on the day of marriage the second gift of Kujaba is given by the bride to the groom. The five fingers each from both the bride and the groom are tied together by the garland of fresh flowers and on it the Kujaba is placed for a whole till the completion of the rites. In short, this rite is the starting point of a new life. The internal significance of Kujaba is that both the newly married new life. The internal significance of Kujaba is that both the newly married couple has their equal shares of life’s burden under a joint hand. There are four elements in the concept of Kujaba, viz. the earth, the food-grain, the cloth and the accessories. According to Pandit Khelchandra Singh there are five forms viz. 1, Hainaba or engagement, 2. Chenba or elopement, 3. Chingba or Phaba or marriage by capture, and 4. Loukhatpa or recognition or unsolemnized elopement, 5, Nambo-Thaba.

MARRIAGE IN MEITEIS SOCIETY

The Meitei concept of marriage means the sacred and ceremonial union of a woman with a man with due religious rites. The vernacular term for marriage is ‘Luhongaba’ which is a synthesis of two words namely ‘Lu’ and ‘Hongba’. The term ‘Lu’ means ‘Head’ and ‘Hongba’ means ‘Solemnise’ or ‘Change’. In short, the surname, clan and tradition of the girl changes with marriage.

In the Meitei marriage, ‘Kujaba’ takes very important role. Kujaba, which consists of one big earthen plate called ‘Kambi’, containing the prescribed quality of husked-rice, a hand of banana having odd numbers, the prescribed fruits having good small, permissible loin cloth(dhou), shirt, turban, comb, scissor,

nail-cutter and knife. In marriage the first gift is given from the groom to the bride on the day of heijing Kharai Puba or Heijing Puba ritual. Then, on the day of marriage the second gift of Kujaba is given by the bride to the groom. The five fingers each from both the bride and the groom are tied together by the garland of fresh flowers and on it the Kujaba is placed for a whole till the completion of the rites. In short, this rite is the starting point of a new life. The internal significance of Kujaba is that both the newly married new life. The internal significance of Kujaba is that both the newly married couple has their equal shares of life's burden under a joint hand.

There are four elements in the concept of Kujaba, viz. the earth, the food-grain, the cloth and the accessories. The implication is that both the newly couple required all these things for their livelihood. Kujaba is the blessing for starting a new thought of life, the winding up of a past chapter of the girls life and changing the head of the family from father to husband.

FORMS OF MARRIAGE

There is various form of marriage in Meitei society according to different scholars. However, one opinion varies from another scholar in respect to marriages. According to Dr. M. Kriti, there are four forms of marriages. But according to Pandit Khelchandra Singh there are five forms viz. 1, Hainaba or engagement, 2. Chenba or elopement, 3. Chingba or Phaba or marriage by capture, and 4. Loukhatpa or recognition or unsolemnized elopement, 5, Nambo-thaba. The five forms of marriage are discussed below.

1. Hainaba or Engagement: It is the initial approach of the parents of the boy to the family of the girl. Here the woman of the boy's family usually three in number with articles of food go to the house of the girl and asked her parents for the hand of their daughter. If the response is favourable a date is fixed for the next stage in which men folk of the groom go to the bride's house to finalize the negotiation. In short, it is begging for the bride.
2. Chenba: Chenba means 'marriage by elopement' or 'love marriage'. In ancient time, this was not regarded as marriage because it lacks special rites such as Heijing-Kharai-Puba and others. But now-a-day this kind of wedding is the most widely prevalent one usually with some preliminary ceremonies and others accompanying rites. Thus the preliminaries of marriage by engagement, such as Pakna-Wainaba-Yengba, Yathang-Thanaba, waroipot-Puba, Heijingpot-Puba are included in the Chenba form of marriage.
3. 'Chinga' or 'Phaba' is another form of marriage. It is a form of marriage by capture. This is done against the will of the girl by force. In it, the girl is always against the will of the boy. But their marriage ceremony may be held or not when their parents and they themselves, become in negotiable stage and in a mood to do so – or not.
4. Loukhatpa: It is a short and simple form of marriage ceremony. This ceremony may be performed in the case of the girl who is acquired as wife through elopement when that guardian of her is in a mood to do so. But, in the case of Mou(daughter-in-law), a married woman, who is at her parental house as her former husband is not yet alive or divorced, she may be recognized in a short or simple form of marriage. T.C. Hodson also describes thus "widows may remarry, but not with their deceased husband's brother, there is no ceremony for the remarriage of widows". In olden time,

some tribes of Manipur, especially hill tribes, married their deceased brother's wife. But this practice was not known to the Meiteis in those days and still not practiced till today. In Loukhatpa ceremony, there is an unavoidable aspect called 'Lai-Tin-Thaba' which means offering something to the 'Apokpa' the originator of sagei or clan, but in the case of mau, it is not known and practiced. The terms 'Loukhatpa' means "To recognize the private marriage or elopement by both families and both husband and wife's family and also offer fruits to the family and local deities.

5. Nambo-Thaba: The literary meaning of the term 'Nambo-Thaba' is "To come with luggage to the house of a girl or woman with the intention of staying at the house of the lady as her husband even without her consent". In this form of marriage, there is no marriage rite. But when both parents come to know about the reality, a nominal ritual ceremony may be performed. Gradually, both couple is recognized as husband and wife. Now-a-days Nambo-Thaba form of marriage is obsolete.

CONDITION OF MARRIAGE

There are several surnames of the Meiteis, which are prohibited degrees of kindred in the Manipuri society. Some of them are Yek_thoknaba, Shairuk-Tinnaba, Pendinnaba, Leinung-Pendinnba, mungnaba, Ee-omnaba are prohibited to marry each other. Some conditions are given below:

1. Both the parents must not be of the same Yek-Salai
2. Neither party falls within the prohibited degrees of Shairuk-Tinaba, Pendinnaba, Leinung-Pendinnba, mungnaba, Ee-omnaba.
3. Both the party has attained puberty.

CONCLUSION

Child marriage is practices in Meitei society. Purdah system is also not found in Manipur. Widows may remarry. Wives act according their husband's instruction. In Meitei society marriage is called 'Luhongaba'. Meitei marriage ceremonies lie in the concept of Kujaba. According to Pandit Khelchandra Singh there are five forms viz. 1, Hainaba or engagement, 2. Chenba or elopement, 3. Chingba or Phaba or marriage by capture, and 4. Loukhatpa or recognition or unsolemnized elopement, 5, Nambo-Thaba. Several surnames of the Meiteis, which are prohibited degrees of kindred in the Manipuri society. Some of them are Yek_thoknaba, Shairuk-Tinnaba, Pendinnaba, Leinung-Pendinnba, mungnaba, Ee-omnaba are prohibited to marry each other.

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