

The Marriage System of the Kishan Tribe of Western Odisha

Laxman Kishan

Abstract

This paper attempts to study the marriage system of Kisan Tribe of Western Odisha. It attempts to outline how the institution of marriage has undergone changes due to modernization and other factors. As a whole the institution of marriage has undergone dynamic changes under the influence of Hinduisation as well as modernization. The significance of tradition, culture and value system of Kisan are gradually losing their meaning to the young and educated Kisan. This paper would highlight the changes in traditional marriage system of the Kisan tribe of Western Odisha.

KEYWORDS : Kisan, Kunhar, Oraon, Rice Beer, Grooms, Vermilion, Sindura.

Introduction:

The Kisan tribe is a numerically larger community in Odisha, the home land of 62 different Scheduled Tribes distributed in all the thirty districts of the state of Odisha. The Kisan people are a peasant community. They are agriculturist. They cultivate and thus are called as Kisan. The Kisans call themselves as "Kunhar" which means hill men. They are known by various names according to the place of their residence. In Sundargarh district they are called as 'Kuda' or 'Kor' and even 'Mirdha' whereas in Kuchinda area of Sambalpur district they are known as 'Kola' or 'Morva'. The Kisan of Odisha use surnames such as Eka (Tortoise), Kujur (A kind of leafy plant), Kindo (A kind of fish seula), Tapo

(A kind of Bird), Tigar (Monkey), Punner (Iron), Babala (Wild dog), Minz (Kite), Majhi (Term used for the boatmen), Bada (Bangan), Bahala, Bekur (salt), Lakada (Tiger), Hesar (Paddy), ha-ha and Kisan after their names. Probably they came to Odisha earlier than Oraons and settled in the states of Gangapur, Bonai and Bamanda. According to their local traditions they first lived under the patronage of Bhuinya chiefs and later migrated to different parts either in search of land or labour. Now the Kisan is a peasant community and many of them possess land of their own. The tribe is very adaptive. In most areas people of other castes and tribes are their immediate neighbour. The name of Kisan is found in the list of Schedule Tribes in the state of Odisha. According to 2001 census, the total population

of Kisan in Odisha is 321592, i.e. 3.94 % of the total tribal population of the state. Their sex ratio comes to 933 female per 1000 males. Their level of literacy is 50.19 per cent for all, 64.43 per cent for males and 35.88 per cent for females. Their cultural life enriched with traditions, values, performing arts, faiths and festivals. The unique culture of the Kisan has undergone changes under the influence of Hinduisation as well as modernization. The significance of tradition, culture and value system of Kisan are gradually losing their meaning to the young and educated Kisan.

Methodology:

To make a systematic study on the marriage system of the Kisan tribe of Western Odisha the author adopted an appropriate method of data collection for the Ethno-Historical study which includes – field study, interviewing the people, data collection from different sources (primary as well as secondary sources) report writing by asking or interviewing with different persons of the Kisan tribe. This paper would use both research materials from State Library, State Archives and visual data in the form of photographs and ST, SC Welfare Department. The observation method is also to be used here.

Marriage rituals:

Marriage is a remarkable event in the life of Kisan people. It is a ritual union between a man and woman. Marriage as a social institution is found in almost all the societies. The life cycle of Kisan passes through such events as conception, birth, childhood, adulthood, marriage, old and death. The rituals associated with life cycle are also cautiously observed. The Kisan marriage custom strictly follows the principle of endogamy. Monogamy is the practice, but the Kisan society also considers the bigamy. Marriage within the same clan or to a member of any other caste or

tribe is forbidden. The Kisan prefer adult and arranged marriages. In some cases, marriages by mutual consent, phony capture, elopement and service are also considered acceptable. Marriage with one's mother's brother's daughter is common. The bride price called as Kania Muli Hesu (Kanya mula or Suka mula). It may be ten Khani (One quintal rice). The Kisan society is divided into various clans. As Kisan is strictly exogenous in nature, marriage within the same group is strictly prohibited. The clan exogamy is due to the fact that, the member of a Bansa is believed to have descended from common mythical ancestor and are related to each other by blood tie. The Kisan usually marry outside their clan. Monogamous marriage is most preferred and cross cousin marriage is widely observed. Generally adult marriage takes place. The following modes of marriages are found among the Kisan society. 1. Marriage by negotiation or arrange, 2. Marriage by Capture, 3. Marriage by love, 4. Marriage by Intrusion, 5. Marriage by Adoption, 6. Marriage by Exchange and 7. Widow Remarriage.

Among all these forms of marriages, the marriage by negotiation is very common. Except this form of marriage all forms of marriages are arranged at the groom's residence. Bride price is widely prevalent in Kisan society and it is paid by the groom's father to settle up the marriage. Marriage takes place on a platform erected in the courtyard of groom's house. The Kalo officiates as the priest. Vermillion is applied by the groom to the girls forehead. The ends of their clothes are tied together usually by bride's sister. They circumambulate the platform for seven times invoking Dharme Belas/Dharam Rajas the supreme God and Goddess. All forms of marriages are arranged at the groom's residence. For marriage by negotiation, a mediator becomes necessary to pursue with the marriage formalities.

The mediator first approaches the bride's father. Then on an appointed day, the groom and his relatives visit the bride's house. They carry with them rice and rice-beer, dal, goat, cock etc. The marriage consent is symbolically given. The grooms party prepare their food and in the evening they sing and dance with the girls of the village. The next morning they return back. Similarly a party of the bride's relatives, unaccompanied by the bride, pay a visit to the groom's village. After the bride price is agreed upon by both the parties, a date is fixed for marriage with the consent of the village Kalo. Usually marriages are solemnized during the post harvest months.

On the morning of the day fixed for the ceremony, some members of the groom's family, proceed towards the bride's village with rice beer and present to escort the bride. In the afternoon they escort the bride, accompanied by the brides relatives, when they approach the groom's village at the outskirts, a mock fight begins between both the parties. After this, the bride is greeted to the house. A platform is erected for this purpose in the courtyard of the groom's house. In the evening, both the groom and the bride sit on the pandal, rice is cooked on the spot in a new earthen pot. The Kalo worships the Dharme Belas and other Gods. The marriage ritual ends with giving Vermillion to the bride by her new husband and feasting and dancing follow throughout the night. Divorce is allowed in the Kisan society but it must be sanctioned by the members of the family and community council. Ceremonial marriage according to tribal tradition is called Benja. The main features of the Benja are that selection of partner is made by the father or some other guardians of the person to be married. A mediator called Agua is appointed to negotiate between both of the families. The amount of bride price must be settled to mutual satisfaction. The village headman must also be consulted to the clan.

Consequently marriage can take place only during those months of the year when there is not much pressure of work in the field. The symbols of matrimony for women include *sindur* (vermillion in the mid hair parting), glass or lacquer bangles, earrings and toy rings. The practice of bride price is prevalent among them. Divorce due to adultery, maladjustment, impotency and cruelty is socially permissible. Re-marriage of widows, widowers and divorcee are also socially approved. A widow may marry her younger brother-in law, while a widower is allowed to marry his younger sister-in-law.

Conclusion:

Although they have been greatly influenced by Hinduism, their practice of animism is unabated. They have undergone with perceptible changes due to influence of education, development interventions, hinduisation and modernization. The Kisan marriage rituals are same like Gand, Munda, Santal, Kharia, Kolha and Ho. But in some extent it is little bit different from other tribal groups. The marriage is within their tribe, inter-tribe marriage is strictly tabooed in all tribes. Previously, after payment of bride price, the father of bride allowed the bride to accompany the father of grooms and marriage was performed in the house of bride-groom. But now-a-days, the father of bride wants to welcome the Barat Party at his village and house. On the occasion of marriage, the bride, groom and their parents do not wear black clothes. They wear red, yellow and white dresses. Previously, they use *Palaki* to carry the bride and groom. But now bicycle or rickshaw is used for this purpose. Previously, the members of the Barat were served meat, rice and *handia*, but now they are served *mahua* liquor with meat and rice. Previously they danced on *mandar* but now they dance on loudspeaker. Domkach dance and play are

organized in the house of the groom by female members on the day of marriage. This ritual is still continuing. The marriage is considered successful when the couple is blessed with a child. For the happy married life, the blessings of Gods, Goddess and elders are taken. Worships and sacrifices are made in the name of different spirits. Bigamy and divorce are considered as permissible, but they practice monogamy. The unique culture of the Kisan has undergone changes under the influence of modernization. The educated Kisan people are adopted the new methods of marriage system which has crossed the blind faiths and rituals of the Kisan. Rituals of the Kisan tribe are still on practice but some of them are removed from the list. Gradually the use of rice beer is avoided by young mass and in the place of rice beer the modern educated Kisan are using foreign liquor. But some of the Kisan people are still strictly observing their own cultural practices.

References :

1. Dijabara, T., *Adisunya Gupta Puran*, (Odia), Ashok Publication, Cuttack, 1982.
2. Goswami, G. S. and Mahapatra, K., *Kisan*, Academy of Tribal Dialect & Culture, Bhubaneswar, 1989.
3. Kisan, S., *Kunha Samaj: Kisan, Mirdha, Kuda*, Rourkela, 2006.
4. Kolha Mananka Khadya (in Odia), *The Samaja* (newspaper), 12 October, 2006.
5. Mahapatra, V., *Odishara Adivasi O Odia Bhasa*, (Odia), Jhankar, April, 2006.
6. Ota, A. B. and Sahoo, T., *Kisan*, Bhubaneswar, 2013.
7. Naik, A. K., *Odia Lokasahityare Dharmiya Chetana* (Odia), Punthi Prakasan, Cuttack, 1972.
8. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Kisan_people&oldid=667144443 2/25/2016 11:47 AM
9. Senapati, N., and Kuanr, D. C., *Orissa District Gazetteers*, Sundargarh, Cuttack, 1975.
10. Sing, K. C., *The Scheduled Tribes of Orissa*, Ajanta Publication, Cuttack, 2003.

Laxman Kishan, P. G. Dept. of History, Utkal University, Vani Vihar C/o- Baikuntha Sahu, At- Ranihat Tala Teli Sahi, Po-Buxibazar, Cuttack-753001.