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RESEARCH ARTICLE

MARITAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN SARTANG SOCIETY: A STUDY IN GENDER GEOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

The term gender is a socially constructed term referring to roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a society considers for both men and women. The term marriage is the formally recognized union of a man and a woman and it confers social status to them. It is a bond of two people for whole life until death. Sartang is one of the tribal group of West Kameng district, Arunachal Pradesh (India). Like other ethnic groups of country they have their own customs which existed since the inception of human civilization. The prime objective of this paper is to find out the marital activities in Sartang tribe and the position of women in terms of marriage. The present study is also to examine the form of marriage in the locality and how far women get decision making power in marital affairs. The marital status of women in the study area is highlighted with the help of various data based on primary survey.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Malinowski, "Marriage is contract for the production and maintenance of children". According to Lowie, "Marriage is relatively permanent bond between permissible mates". The status of women in any field can be analyzed only through the decision which is being accorded to her. Like other tribal society, the marriage system of *Sartang* tribe has certain customs and traditions in the community. In order to study the social life the term marriage signifies a bond of two people for whole life. Marriages are of different type which varies from tribe to tribe. But in *Sartang* society two types of marriages they use to practice as arrange and love marriage and no elopement system is taken place. If anyone find guilty in marital affairs such as secret relationship, capture other wife etc. may be punishable according to customary laws. The present discussion is regarding the marital status of Sartang women in concern region and how far women get the decision making power in married life.

Study Area: Four villages have been selected for study area as Khoina, Jerigaon, Salari and Rahung in West Kameng District, Arunachal Pradesh (India).

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The study areas confine in highly mountainous region with valleys, slopes, high hills, river coasts etc. The inhabitants of selected region constitute the total population of 5000 persons approximately.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To find out the marital status of women the investigator has selected 70 household samples from the study area. The present paper is fully based on primary data being collected from the field study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The *Sartang* have a patriarchal society where man plays the role of head of the family. Polygamy is a common phenomenon in the society whereas, polyandry is not existed. Marriage is taken place within the community with different clan as well as with outside the community. The exogamy is also acceptable in the society. In *Sartang* society, one of the most common marriages system is cross-cousin marriage which means marriage takes place between one's mother's brother's daughter/son with father's sister's son/daughter. In olden days, maternal uncle i.e. mother's brother was considered as very important in terms of marriage. He plays

the role of negotiator (*khlae*) during marriage ceremonies of sister's daughter. Sister's daughter cannot marry without consultation of maternal uncle. In addition to it, he has the right to get his sister's daughter as daughter-in-law without any consent. This is the reason of most arrange marriages taken place in olden days. Still cross-cousin marriage practice in the locality but the role of maternal uncle is not so strict like earlier. The case of divorce is very rare in the concern region. Now a day, they have positive attitude towards the form of marriage system. Parallel –cousin-marriage is not acceptable in the society. Sororate and levirate is also a common phenomenon in concern community.



Source: Photographs taken during marriage ceremonies at jerigaon village (Ar. P, India)

In study area two types of marriage practices such as arrange marriage and love marriage. Arrange marriages are again two types willingly marriage by the girl and forced marriage. In the following figure: (1), it shows that 68.6% are love marriage, whereas, 31.4% are arranged by the parents. The data reflect that women have free to choose their mate according to their choice. Most of the girl prefers love marriage in the locality. Thus, in terms of cross community marriage, there is less restriction from the parent side. Most probably the arrange marriages used to experiences in rural areas or geographically remote areas. Once the girl and boy like each other, they will express to their parents and arrange the ceremonies for marriage. It is the boy's parents who use to go to girl's home and propose for the marriage. After the acceptance of proposal from both the parents, each parent will invite their kith and kin (*khunu-budu*) to attend the marriage function. The Girl's

maternal uncle (mother's brother) will be the negotiator for whole process of marriage ceremonies. As already cited above the role of maternal uncle that he will be the key role to play in marriage process. While going to propose for a girl, the boy's parent must have to take permission from girl's maternal uncle because he is more important than the girl's parents. If he denies the proposal then parent also cannot take further step for marriage. According to *Sartang* customary law, if girl will go against the decision of maternal uncle, he will curse her and she will suffer for whole life without child. This kind of situation was strictly followed earlier but in present days it is very rare.

Table. 1.

Type of marriage	Frequency	Percent (%)
Arrange Marriage	22	31.4
Love Marriage	48	68.6
Total	70	100.0

Source: Primary data

Table. 2.

Do you agree that women should remarry?		
Respondent's view	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	53	75.7
No	16	22.9
Nil	1	1.4
Total	70	100.0

Source: Primary data

Table. 3.

Do you agree cross community marriage?		
Respondent View	Frequency	Percent (%)
No	20	28.6
Yes	50	71.4
Total	70	100.0

Source: Primary data

Table. 4.

Decision related to marriage for son and daughter?		
Respondent View	Frequency	Percent (%)
Husband	13	18.6
Jointly	33	47.1
Nil	22	31.4
Wife	2	2.9
Total	70	100.0

Source: Primary data

In order to study the women remarry, every respondent having their own opinion. Out of 100%, 75.7% agree that women should remarry after the death of her husband or in case of divorce. But 22.9% have negative response and stated that they should not remarry. 1.4% has no answer. One interesting fact which has been found was age of the women. If woman is young then she should get remarry and if become old then should not step towards it. Some respondent express that if she will remarry, their child will not get the expected love and care from step father. According to few people, if women having the child of deceased husband, she should not think of second husband because her child will take care in old age. If a widow goes for remarry, she will not get the property from deceased husband's family. Thus, it depends on once faith whether she will get love and care from second husband or not. The

Sartang's have a marital relationship with other neighboring tribes such as Miji, Monpa, Aka, Bugun, Sherdukpen. Besides, they have a marital relationship with the other states. Regarding cross community marriage most of the people believe that their child will be talent, good looking, smart etc. It is also believe that the girl must be taken from other tribe to know more about the different culture. Some use to marry from other tribe to have a good relationship with two different communities. In the study area, 71.4 % agreed that there should be cross community marriage and 28.6% do not agree. It has been observed that in cross community marriage one difficult barrier is language. Someone share their opinion that the other tribe girls do not follow their culture in most cases. According to few respondent regarding other tribe girl was that they don't care boy's parents especially in old age. Those who are staying in exclusively backward areas want to have their daughter in law from own tribe. By studying above analysis, most of them have positive attitude towards the marital affairs where women are free to choose their life partner. Decision is one of the important aspect in social science which being made by the people. Most importantly the majority of the decision related to marriage is being taken by jointly. In modern age most probably the husband considers their wife as equal importance. So whatever before going to do anything they consult with their wife. In terms of marriage for both son and daughter both husband and wife take the joint decision. In terms of decision making, husband has 18.6%, 47.1% is jointly, 31.4% did not answer, 2.9% is taken by wife.

Conclusion

The human being is dynamic in nature and it keeps changing with time. In *Sartang* society many changes have been taken place in terms of marital affairs. Earlier the thought of people were static in terms of marriage because girls were not allowed to married outside and specially arrange marriages were taken place. But with the passage of time the social transition emerged. In the present day mostly are love marriages and there is no social restrictions for girls to have a marital relationship with other tribes.

They have a cordial relationship with other neighbouring tribes. Now a day due to emergence of modernization, they are delayed in marriage so that they can get good education and engage in a colorful job. Widow Remarriage is also acceptable in the society and the divorce is a rare phenomena. In terms of decision making related to marital activities husband never take any decision without consulting his wife, because both male and female are equally treated in the society. People always have a positive thinking regarding the marriage and the girls are free to choose their mate according to their choice. Thus, the marital status of women in *Sartang* society is quite encouraging in the modern age.

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