



Traditional Marriage System Of The Zeliang Nagas: A Case Study

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Abstract: This paper examines the traditional marriage system of the Zeliang Nagas prevalent among the Peren villagers of Nagaland. This practices which is deep-rooted centuries-old customs, is a complex social institution that unites not only individuals but also reinforce clans ties and cultural continuity. The planned marriage process begins with proposals made between the groom-to-be and the bride-to-be during the auspicious autumn months—September and October. Once a proposal is accepted, community contributions began to pour in to the groom's family, whereby poor families rely on it to pay the bride-price, while affluent families managed themselves. The wedding is carried out as a mass event on a predetermined day. A series of intricate rituals like carrying of symbolic items such as "Nkangkie" during the Hega festival and the ceremonial procession took place on the wedding day. While modernization and western culture have changed the present social norms and traditions, many of the core elements persist, that is essential to be documented and preserve. This paper also explains the cultural and social dimensions of this traditional marriage system, highlighting their significance, challenges they face in contemporary society, importance of documenting and preserving the same in the face of modern influences.

Index Terms: Zeliang Nagas, traditional marriage, Peren Village, bride-price, matrimonial rituals, cultural heritage, indigenous practices, social cohesion

I. Introduction

Zeliang Nagas are one of the major tribes of Nagaland. Zeliang Nagas are the inhabitants of Peren district located in the south-western part of the state of Nagaland in India. The traditional marriage system among the Zeliang Nagas of Nagaland represents a rich tapestry of indigenous customs. In the Zeliang Naga tradition, marriage is more than the union of two individuals, it is a social institution that unites individual, reinforce clan ties and cultural continuity. In Peren Village, matrimonial ceremony is taken as a communal event imbued with social, cultural and spiritual significance. Arrangement for the marriage ceremonies such as proposals for the marriage, payment of bride-price, preparation of Nkangkie etc has to be completed before the festive month. The present paper explores the intricate process of the traditional marriage system of the Zeliang Nagas of Nagaland with special focus on Peren Village community. It also highlights the significance of the traditional practice and the importance to document and preserve the traditional marriage system. The study is based on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data include direct and verbal interviews with the village elders. The secondary data were gathered from books, unpublished works, journals and pamphlets.

II. The Matrimonial Process

Traditionally, matrimonial proposals are made during the autumn months, particularly in September and October, as these months are deemed auspicious. The peak rainy season is avoided mainly due to beliefs and taboos, which are apparently, associated with death and the activities of ancestral spirits. Moreover, proposals are strategically timed to precede the Hega festival, which begins on February 10 and span for five days. Once the marriage proposal is accepted and officially declared in the community, the groom's family must secure the bride-price, which is often funded through community contributions and donations. But for those wealthy families, they managed themselves and so do not rely on contribution or donations from others to made bride-price payment. The successful bride-price payment is a necessary condition for the marriage to take place.

Rituals during the ceremony, such as the carrying of the "Nkangkie" (named after the stink-bug) by the bride and the ceremonial procession involving the calabash (Kela), plays a crucial role in symbolizing purity, good fortune, and the welcome of the bride into her new family. Traditional marriage among the people of Peren Village is based on a mass marriage system, to be held on appointed day. The practice of sending invitation to the people is not prevalent in the traditional marriage system of the people. No official invitation will be given to any members in the village. On the wedding day, only the clan and family members accompany the bride to the groom's house. After successful payment of the bride-price, the groom's family does not required to make any special arrangement for the guests or the people. Usually they collect and make a stack of firewood, sweep and cleaned their house and surroundings and then wait for the arrival of the bride into their homes. Necessary arrangement is made from the brides' families. The peers of the brides from her clan and family members carry things required by the bride to the groom place.

Traditionally, two wooden pieces cut out of the big trees symbolizes the purity and virginity of the bride, which signifies her life. The firewood with barks removed and the wooden pieces curved out of big trees are kept in the main gate of the village. With these two heavy wooden pieces (ten to twelve feet in height) the bride will start from village gate and the rest of the boys and girls will carry the firewood and follow the bride to the girls Morung. On this night, the bridegroom will provide food and drinks to the girls in the girls' morung.

On the wedding day (mass marriage system), bride arrive to grooms place by carrying Kela, (calabash) where local brew is stored, which is handed over by the father to the daughter. The male members and young damsel from the clan readied themselves in traditional attire and followed the bride till she reached the place of the groom. The bride will be followed by both parents if alive, and if the bride happens to be an orphan then no one shall stand behind her, not even her aunty or uncle.

Once the bride moved out of her house, she ought to walk slowly and diligently as to avoid stumbling over as it was a sign of bad omen, and as she enters the groom's place, she put forth her right leg into her new house which also signifies bringing of good luck and fortune. As soon as the bride enters inside, the eldest amongst the groom's family welcome the bride and blessed the couple in traditional way by saying, "Let this house be filled with happiness, be prosperous, may you two live long without any sickness". With the pronounced of blessing, they welcome the bride into her new home.

Upon the arrival of the bride to the groom's place, no one partake food as a feast instead those who accompanied the bride will only drink Zautau (local brewed beer) which is especially made for this occasion. They sing along as they continue to drink in merriment.

On their departure from merry-making, since the groom family is readied with the stack of firewood, the boys and girls and whoever accompanied the bride while going back will collect firewood from the stack, while going back they will keep it in their respective Morung, that is boys in boys morung ,girls in girls morung.

III. Significance and Challenges

Traditional marriage system of the people of Peren village is an integral part of the cultural identity of the Zeliang Nagas. This tradition act as a catalyst to reinforces clan bonds and ensures continuity of traditions and customs that have evolved over centuries. The intricate rituals and communal involvement in matrimonial ceremonies serve not only as to celebrate unions of the couples but also to preserve and transmit ancestral traditions. Important features of the traditional marriage system of the people of Peren village include the timing of proposals, the community-based contribution to the grooms' family for the marriage, and the unique rituals that accompany the wedding ceremonies. For instance, a ritual that involves the bride to carry symbolic items such as the "Nkangkie" during the Hega Festival, representing her purity and marking her transition into married life. Besides, the bride's procession to the groom's house accompanied by her clan and family members, where the bride carries a calabash containing local brew, symbolized the welcoming of prosperity and good fortune for the new couple. These rituals ensure the smooth integration of the bride into her new family. These customs not only underscore the sanctity of marriage but also reinforce social cohesion and cultural continuity among the Zeliang Nagas.

However, the traditional marriage system faces several challenges in the present era. Modernization has diluted traditional social and customary values and Christianity has led to modifications in traditional practices, including the shift towards simpler ceremonies and increased personal choice. Economic constraints with changing attitude of the people have been reshaping the traditional practice and further complicate the traditional system. Thus, preserving these traditions requires concerted efforts in research, community engagement and policy support from the community as well as the government to ensure that the rich cultural heritage of the Zeliang Nagas is not lost but preserve.

IV. Conclusion

The traditional marriage system of the Zeliang Nagas in Peren Village is an integral part of their cultural heritage, encapsulating the values, beliefs, and social structures and beliefs that have sustained the people and the community for centuries. While modernization and globalization poses challenges to the preservation of these practices, the rich rituals and communal bonds inherent in the traditional marriage system has been playing a vital role in reinforcing social cohesion and rich cultural heritage. Balancing traditional practice with modern influences in the contemporary world remains a key challenge that requires collaborative efforts from community leaders, researchers, and policymakers. Efforts should be made to document and promote these traditional practices for ensuring their continuity and to foster in adaptation of indigenous heritage in a rapidly evolving society.

V. References

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