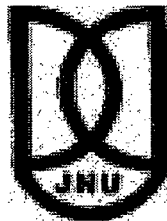


**MARRIAGE PRESTATIONS:  
THE SOCIAL CONTEXT AND MEANING IN SUMI NAGA SOCIETY**

**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THEREQUIRMENTS FOR THE  
AWARD OF THE DEGREE**

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**2007**



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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation Titled, "Marriage Prestations: The Social Context and Meanings in Sumi Naga Society" by Miss. Lovitoli Jimo, in partial fulfillments of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy has not been previously submitted for any other Degree of this or any other University. To the best of our knowledge this is an original work.

Lovitoli Jimo  
26/07/07

We recommend that this Dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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*To my Dearest Parents,  
“Iza” and “Ipu”  
For all your Love, Support and Inspiration*

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## **Introduction**

The institution of marriage plays a very important role in the functioning of the society. Every society has a different norms and ethos to be followed and kept in marriage. Through the institutions of marriage a family is born and with family the society comes into being. Today we are led into a new era of change and continuation from the past to the present and the future. The marriage practices and institution has undergone a tremendous change and people have altogether a different perception of marriage from what it was earlier to what it is today. There is a new outlook in the minds of the people on marriage and its institution.

Traditionally, marriage was considered as a legally recognised relationship between a male and a female with certain rights and obligations. It is a cultural phenomenon which sanctions a more or less permanent union between partners, conferring legitimacy of their offspring. Since marriages is a very important institution for the running of the society, the practices and rituals, the prestations, the idea of gift and exchange associated with it is being examined to see how marriage is looked at or understand.

Different societies have varied ideas on the marriage prestations among the societies of Africa and the Indian subcontinent. This study tries to understand the complex institution of marriage prestations among the Sumi Naga against the backdrop of the Naga of Nagaland. An attempt is made to understand how marriage is viewed and taken as. The very idea of marriage prestations and the similarity on prestations, the items involved and the transition it have undergone over a period of time. Marriage prestations such as the bridewealth or brideprice, dowry, the idea of gift and exchange has been considered and how different societies have different names and rituals associated with it and the cultural similarity that is seen brings us to the very fact that exchange of prestations exist with the institution of marriage in one form or the other across societies and culture..

## Theoretical Concepts

### Marriage

Marriage has been defined by Westermarck (1921) as, more or less durable connection between a male and female, lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of offspring's. The exchange of gifts at marriage (be it a bridewealth or dowry) is ever-present that it is regarded as fundamental to human culture. Levi-Strauss (1969) postulates, that cultural connection between groups are established and strengthened through marriage. He argued that women and bridewealth were the most significant of 'gifts' exchanged between cultural groups. He delineated marriage as the site where the gift of women travelling in one direction and bridewealth travelling in a counter direction was put into play between groups, the combination helping to cement intergenerational exchange.

Radcliffe Brown (1950) while studying the African kinship system said that, the African does not think of marriage as the union based on romantic love although, beauty as well as character and health are sought in the choice of a wife. The strong affections that usually exist after some years of successful marriage is the product of the marriage itself conceived as a process, resulting from living together and cooperating in many activities and particularly in the rearing of the children.<sup>1</sup>

Leach's (1954) alliance theory has dealt with systems involving the exchange of women, in relation to rank, political organisation and economics. He reanalysed the Lovedu society and reinterprets it in terms of the model derived from the Kachin and suggested a series of direct relation between the operation of the Lovedu political systems and the kinship system. In tracing the structural implications of matri-lateral cross-cousin marriage for the Lovedu, he comes up with several hypotheses relating with the rank of the wife givers and wife givers which among the Kachin, the wife

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<sup>1</sup> Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. 1950, in Radcliffe-Brown, and Forde's (eds.) p. 46



receivers are lower in rank unlike other societies and how women were used in the political process to tie lineages to the throne.

Goody and Tambiah (1973) in their work on bridewealth and dowry has described bridewealth as a transaction between the kin of the groom and the kin of the bride which is not to be consumed in the course of the celebration nor is it to be handed to the wife but goes to the bride's male kin. Bridewealth involves the transmission of property at marriage, whatever symbolic aspects marks these transfers, they also have the economic functions, not primarily as intermediaries in a purchase, but as a way of redistributing the property. Hence, this must be seen in the context of the wider movement of property and its exploitation for productive and other social purposes. Viewed in these ways, these marriage transactions have to be linked to other aspects of social organization particularly the economy.

Comaroff (1980) argues that the meaning of marriage payments are to be found in two types of analyse: Analysis of the relationship between marriage and marriage payments, where he insists that marriage cannot be assumed to exist prior to marriage payments: Marriage payments are not necessarily an institutionalized mode of facilitating marriage; nor do they exist to expedite or regulate proper exchange, to realize the rights and duties inherent in conjugal bond or to control the timing of espousal. The second is the analysis of the relationship between marriage itself and other constitutive principles. Marriage itself is not a single phenomenon: rather it may take several forms in the same society as in different societies. But it is marriage payments where they exist, which transform a mating relationship into "a socially meaningful process, thereby locate it in a universe of relations" as marriage. For which marriage and marriage payments are "complementary elements of the same thing".

According to Patricia Uberoi (1993) marriage is not simply a relationship between two individuals, but is a link between two social groups. Thus the choice of partners is rarely an individual matter and religious rituals, but public festivities and exchange of goods and services mark marriage. She talks about bride price and dowry as two

types of marriage payment. Bride price is a transfer of resources from groom's family to bride's family in acknowledgment of transfer of rights over her productive and reproductive capabilities. Dowry is essentially a gift to the bride or the couple by the girls parents for the setting up of their new conjugal estate. Dowry is commonly understood as different sorts of gifts given by the bride's parents at the time of her marriage, usually in forfeit of claims by her on the immovable property of the parental estates.

### **Marriage Prestations**

While defining marriage, marriage prestations plays a very important role. There are different views and ideas on marriage prestations. Some scholars argued that marriage prestations are an economic compensation for a productive and reproductive loss of one group to another and that bridewealth is not paid where the cost benefit ratio is balanced, and that the absence of the institutionalized groom price may reflect the absence of such a loss by the groom's group. There is enormous inconsistency in marriage prestations and Camaroff (1980) says, there are variability with respect to contents and timing as well as to the structural context and symbolic ramifications and yet the current paradigm have generally attempted to reduce marriage prestations to a single analytic class. He holds that another problem with the current approaches is that, they treat marriage prestations as a casual factor in the social order. The payment of marriage gifts by the bridegroom to the bride's family and some senior female members marks the women as being properly married. It confers the status of a wife on a woman and implies that a husband acquires control of power over his wife. The customary marriage becomes invalid if the whole marriage prestations are not paid and under the customary law among the Africa, the children which the women had outside marriage are taken to be the children of her marriage.

Spiro (1975) has argued that marriage payments are an economic compensation for the productive and reproductive loss of one group to another; that bridewealth is not paid where the cost benefit ration is balanced and that the absence of institutionalized

groom-price may reflect a lack of such a loss by the groom's group. He further classified and distinguished four different types of marriage payment as followed:

- a), Brideprice which is also called Bridewealth, payments made by the groom's family to the bride or her family.
- b), Groom price which is also called Groom wealth, the payment made by the bride and her family to the groom or his family.
- c), Dowry, which is paid by the bride's family to the newly married couple.
- d), Dower, is the payment made by the groom's family to the newly married couple.<sup>2</sup>

Groom price as described by Thurnwald (1938) was an optional transaction, confined to "well established" families. The bride's mother pledged one to three fathoms of red shell money to the groom's mother: the more prominent the groom's family, larger the amount. The groom's mother was then to furnish an equivalent in pigs for the marriage feast.<sup>3</sup> The pigs for the marriage feast might be provided by the groom's family and though they were called "return for groomprice" but in truth any such prestations did not equalize the exchange. This is because the shell value represented man and not the pigs and were to secure rights in him

Often dowry is used to refer to property provided by either spouse's family, which he or she may bring to the marriage. In the traditional European law, however this term was often restricted to property provided by the family of, and brought to the marriage by the bride, whereas property provided by the family of and brought to the marriage by the groom was referred to as dower. Spiro (1975), in contrast with bridewealth dowry and dower shares three attributes. Firstly, the property can be viewed as the child's wedding present from his or her parents. Secondly, in those societies that follows the rule of partial inheritance it can be viewed as consisting-in whole or part of the child's pre-mortem inheritance. Thirdly, although brought to the

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<sup>2</sup> Ivy, Papps. 1983. p. 203

<sup>3</sup> Jill, Nash. 1978. p. 106

marriage by only one of the spouses, the property usually comprises becomes the part of the conjugal estate.

Dowry and dower are to be distinguished from those forms of marriage payments where the property instead of being brought to the marriage is offered to the family of the spouse. In case of groom wealth the property is offered by the family of the bride to the family of the groom and in case of bridewealth the property is offered by the family of the groom to the family of the bride. Bridewealth and dowry appear to be the more common institutions and connected with the giving or receiving of the bride, they have become connected in the popular mind with the subjection of women.

Among the tribal societies, there is a practice of the payment of Bridewealth which is paid by the groom to the bride's family. It has a very important role in the society's social structure though; the amount varies from societies to societies. The whole process, context and meaning associated with it are not as simple as it appears to be. Every single item involved in the marriage payment has its own meanings and its significance and there is a particular way, means and context of how these marriage prestations are to be presented and received as well. It is thus very implicit that cross-cultural diversity of marriage payments indeed is too great to be subsumed within a single analytical domain and this diversity precludes meaningful comparison.

This work tries to look at the Bridewealth involved in the marriage prestations. The term prestations is defined in Oxford Dictionary as, *the act of paying, in money or service, what is due by law or customs.*<sup>4</sup> The term prestations here refers to all the gifts and payments of goods and services which are required by the custom in the process of establishing a valid and to complete the marriage. Different societies have different practices and custom while enacting marriage and during the course the

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'Prestations' is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as the act of paying, in money or service, what is due by law or customs. The prestations with which we are here concerned are all gifts and payments of goods or services which are required and used by custom in the process of establishing a valid marriage.

marriage prestations in one form or another are paid though it is culture and society specific.

The term marriage payment or marriage prestations sometimes are subjective and are capable of misleading restrictions when they imply that exchanges are only concerned with marriages. Marriage prestations may be reserved or used for those segments of the set of exchanges which are most directly connected with the union itself, and may refer to the goods given either by the wife's relatives or the husbands. The payment here does not imply the commercial purchase, which otherwise can be clearly indicated when it is needed. Bridewealth is an indication of the marriage prestations given by the husband's relative's to the wife which is our main focus of interest here.

During this analysis, various themes have been looked into. Most importantly, the meanings and context in which such a payment is made is analyzed. Additively, the contents and the whole process associated with Bridewealth and reasons for such marriage prestations are also looked into. The emphasis is on exploring how and why such prestations occur in the first place itself. The basic idea of exchange involved in such transactions is analysed. It has to be noted that the Bridewealth payment system is being looked in the context of rites and rituals performed in marriage and the resultant relationships.

### **“Bridewealth” vs. “Brideprice”**

There is a debate amongst the scholars on the usage of the term “Bridewealth” vs. “Brideprice” whether it has the social meaning or the economic transaction is taking place. The question arises as on what ground it is useful to use a term with a specific meaning in western economy-price to describe a transaction in primitive economy. The latter in some way resembles price in our present situation and in some way does not. To use the term “Brideprice” is to imply that payment at marriage is a market or commercial transactions and therefore that marriage entails a commercial purchase of rights or services.

Evans Pritchard (1931) took a position that the term “brideprice” is misleading because price has an inextricable association with the commercial transactions of market purchase. The material goods and services that form a necessary payment at marriage – Bridewealth- are not the same as the dollar price of a commodity. The payment of Bridewealth is not recognized by those participating in it as commercial transaction. From the anthropologist’s point of view, the social situation of which Bridewealth is a part marks off the transaction sharply from impersonal market purchase.

Evans Pritchard (1931), there are very good reason for cutting the term brideprice from the ethnological literature since at best it emphasized only one of the function of this wealth, an economic one, to the exclusion of other important social functions; and since, at worst, it encourages the layman to think that “price” used in this context is synonymous with “purchase” in common English parlance. Hence we find people believing that wives are bought and sold in Africa much in the same manner as commodities are bought and sold in the European markets. The term “Bridewealth” was instead proposed because it does not attempt to define what are the many aspects of this transference of wealth in the situation of marriage... the term Bridewealth stresses very definitely the economic value of all the different things which are handed over by the group of men to women as one of the concrete obligation of the union; for whatever they may be have an economic value. But while the economic value of these are suggested in the term “Bridewealth” there is no expressed indication that the wealth has any one economic function such as is implied in the word “price”.<sup>5</sup>

Gray (1960) argues that the transaction involving marriage payments are much like other transaction involving the same item. Thus important emphasize is on the similarity between payments at marriage and other transactions by treating brideprice also as an economic transaction. The real question at issue is not whether women in some African societies are transferred as wives in a manner that has a basic resemblance to the manner in which other economic commodities are transferred in the same societies. Where this resemblance is found, then if economic terms are applied to in dealing with other commodities then it is legitimate to apply them while dealings with wives as well.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dalton, George. 1966. p. 732

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p. 733

Thus the debate over “Bridewealth” vs. “Brideprice” is about the kinds of transactions made that exist in primitive economies. This indicates the need to establish unambiguous categories for classifying types of exchanges, appropriations, and transactions in small scale economies that are neither industrialised nor integrated by markets for labor, land, or produce.

The Bridewealth payment varies from societies to societies and from group to group as well, depending on the situation and status of the family. In Africa, the relative size of payment is in general sense is linked with the quantum of rights transferred. Indeed the connection between the substantial Bridewealth and agnatic descent are recognized. It is seen that the social organization in East Africa have been influenced in opposite direction by the increasing accumulation of Bridewealth. The societies in which there is matrilineal descent groups, Bridewealth consisting of livestock are statistically quiet insignificant. However with the appearance of such a Bridewealth, we find the levirate, verilocal marriages, important patrilineages and the disappearance of bride service. Ultimately, marriages become almost un-dissolvable when the figures of twenty heads of cattle or their livestock equivalent are reached.

It is also seen that where the Bridewealth is very high as in the case of the Barma society (Africa), the young men have to compete in the marriage market and gather a large Bridewealth. Here the number of women available for polygynous marriage increases because younger men lose out in the marriage competition due to their inability to offer competitive Bridewealth. This increases the supply of mates to elderly men at a time when they have more resources to meet the Bridewealth payment.

It is to be noted that in matrilineal descent groups the payments are not always low as found in the Lo Dagao (Africa). It appears to be the opposite case as here greater the emphasis is on matrilineal group higher is the payment. In this context the insistence on high payments seemed to be related to reluctance to allow women to move out and a reluctance to allow women to leave the natal home. Thus, it is a payment to

discourage bride removal or to encourage initial farm service on the part of the husbands. Women here are used as a bait to attract the economic services of man. In bilateral societies of Africa, the marriage payments seem to be low and it is certainly true of the Lozi of Zambia and in West Africa, low payments are associated with a certain type of centralized state. In Nigeria the amounts involved are increasing under modern conditions and have become a substantial factor in the groom's calculations. But although the amounts have increase the payments are of very different character from the Bridewealth of East and South Africa.<sup>7</sup>

Among the Nuer (Evans Pritchard, 1946) the marriage is not considered complete till a child has been born even though the couple may continue to live together. The Bridewealth consists of forty heads of cattle. In case there is not enough cattle to satisfy everyone at the time of marriage, the bridegroom remains in debt for some years to the bride's family, but the maternal relatives are less interested in her than in the cattle and are less willing to forgo immediate satisfaction. The maternal kinsmen cannot make exorbitant demand because they have only a right to a conventional proportion of the Bridewealth and the approximate number of cattle to be paid to them is therefore determined by the total number to be paid all rounds.

In the Zande (Evans Pritchard, 1970) society, a girl's status of being married or not is known by whether or not she has received the spears. When the father gives his consent to the proposal, it is regarded as a valid engagement and the husband brings the present of a bracelet which is put on the bride's wrist and she grows up wearing this pledge. From then onwards he accepts the obligation as husband such as building a hut for his mother-in-law, assisting her in hoeing, and most importantly he must treat his in-laws with respect. The payment of the initial spears is the big step towards being and truly married. It indicates that the time is approaching when the husband will be able to enjoy his wife sexually and her labour.

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<sup>7</sup> Goody, Jack and Tambiah, J. S. p. 4



Also, by the payment of the spears he places himself in a more promising legal position which he begins to require it because the girl is of an age to commence sexual play and may shortly begin to indulge in affairs with men unless he is watchful. On the other hand the father-in-law becomes more insistent on the payment of the spears and performance of hut building, cultivation of gardens, visiting of hunting pits and other assistance on his behalf, though the former may not press the latter too hard.

The relationship between high Bridewealth and labour migration goes beyond the problem of the disadvantaged son. In Northern Ghana, it is the people with a highest Bridewealth payment that have the highest rates of labour migration. Among the KonKamba, there have been cases where women have been mortgaged by a tight system of infant betrothal for girls and if the man wants to marry young they have to import wives from others.

Where substantial Bridewealth changes hands, the opposite effect occurs. When the cattle payments are made, the marriage of the girl tends to be early for the same reason; that of man is late. In case of girl's marriage it increases her father's herd while that of a because he has to pay a very huge bridewealth. In Bridewealth system, a man may be in hurry to see his son begets descendants while a girl's marriage may be delayed if the mother is still bearing children. Nevertheless there is an interesting link between the economic calculation and the prevalence of plural marriage. Polygyny which is so wide spread a feature of African marriage is made possible largely by the differential marriage age i.e. early for girls and later for man. Bridewealth and polygyny thus interact in an important manner.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The term Sumi has been used in this work instead of the term Sema because it is a colonial construction which came with the British administration and originally they are called Sumi. It has been officially passed by the Nagaland State Government in

the State Legislative Assembly in 1995 to use Sumi instead of the term Sema. The Sumi tribe is one of the major Naga tribes inhabiting the central part of Nagaland. With the advent of Christianity the Sumi tribe had undergone a lot of changes in their tradition and customs. Some of their age-old tradition blended with the demands of modernity in the Naga society; while some still stands out for their complexity and uniqueness.

“*Ame*” (bridewealth) is one such tradition. It plays a very important and unique role in the Sumi's marriage. Bridewealth is paid by the groom to the bride's family. It is only after the amount of “*Ame*,” is decided and paid, that the marriage takes place. The amount of '*Ame*' depends and differs according to one's social standing and position in the society, higher the social standing in the society; more is the amount of “*Ame*” (bridewealth). It can be paid both in cash and kind. Bridewealth is passed from the kin of the groom to those of the bride. It is not simply an item in an exchange system but it entails the dispersal of wealth in exchange for conjugal rights and duties. Unlike other Naga tribes, bridewealth among the Sumi is not just a token gesture.

When we talk about marriage and marriage prestations the questions that arise are that where does one draw the line between “gifts” in accordance with community norm and the Bridewealth, dowry of the *ame* in the context of the Sumi? Why is this area so vulnerable and sensitive and where does one place the prestations taking place during marriage? To what extent does women participate and what do they try to express through such participation? If we see bridewealth or dowry or *ame* as a gift, on what premise the scholars see women as an economic transaction in bridewealth? When we talk about bridewealth the first question that arises is the selling of women. On what premise is this notion based upon? If this prestations are seen as a form of inheritance, than is gifting encoded both in material and emotional meanings? To what extent this effect the inheritance practices and women's access to a fuller share both natal and affinal resources? What “exchanges” involving and accompanying marriage are about? Should we abandon all these prestations such as bridewealth,

dowry and *ame* system in all forms or how do we look at it? Are these marriage prestations to be substituted by other things? All these questions need to be pondered upon and dealt with in accordance with the time and context.

Basu<sup>8</sup> while talking about the turns bridewealth and dowry has taken over time writes that, the conversation has centered around the definitions and significance of dowry and inheritance: the connection between dowry and bridewealth norms as alleged measures of women's status; the punitive role of dowry as a form of inheritance; the relationship between inheritance and women empowerment.

Strathern<sup>9</sup> writes that marriage exchanges, like other exchanges, are regarded from the viewpoint of the exchanging partners, a view which rests on a model of (active) subjects transacting with (passive) objects. She says that the sister exchange which is frequently found in Melanesia, can be subsumed under the general phenomenon of reciprocity. Two points arise here, the first is what else should be seen as part of marriage: what objects indeed are being exchanged? The second is who are the subjects? If more things are going on in marriage transactions than the exchange of women, than whom do we identify as the transactors?

### **Rationale and Objectives of the Study**

The main aim of the study is to understand and to highlight the issues related to the practice of bridewealth and its impact on the society. In the present study we will try to explore the whole notion of marriage and marriage prestations with the emphasis on the bridewealth among the different societies of the world taking the African society, the Indian society and also taking the Naga society into consideration giving special attention to the Sumi Naga society. Here we will look at how the African society and the Sumi Naga society though they are worlds apart share some cultural continuity and similarity among them which can be traced from their original form. Here the

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<sup>8</sup> Basu, Srimati. 2005. p. iii

<sup>9</sup> Strathern, Marilyn. 1984. p. 42

bridewealth, the dowry system and the *Ame* system of the Sumi has been taken into account

This study also tries to look at the Sumi marriage system and the practice of *Ame* (Bridewealth) and makes it one of its main reference points. It will find out possible explanations with special emphasis on understanding the Sumi social structure underlying these practices. The study also makes an attempt to study the marriage practices and rituals and its effect on the kinship system and the social structure of the Sumi society.

An effort has been made to present a detailed ethnographic study of Sumi marriage, the system of *Ame* find out the change and continuity in marriage practices, *Ame* and its effect on the society. It will look into possibilities of the continuity of its traditional practices and terminologies relating to rituals of the community in a modern society. Till today a systematic study on the custom of *Ame* and its function has not been carried out. Therefore this study makes an effort to study the area in detail to the best possible way.

### **Sources and Methods of Study**

To study on the marriage and bridewealth taking into account the general perception among the Sumi Naga society for an M.Phil dissertation is not an easy task as each of this topic is worthy of research by itself. However, I have taken all the three topics into account to present a complete picture as it is not possible to study them separately as they are inter-related. The tribes such as the Angami, the Ao, the Konyak, the Lotha, the Rengma and the Sumi been selected because they represent some of the major tribes in Nagaland and also because of the availability of the resources. It was neither desirable nor feasible to carry out an intensive field work at this stage. Thus I have tried to briefly describe and made my presentation as short as possible to accommodate the entire topic while trying to maintain a possible continuity of the work.

The present study makes use of both primary and secondary sources. A brief field work has also been carried out from 10<sup>th</sup> December 2006 to 18<sup>th</sup> January 2007 in the major Sumi Inhabited areas of Satakha, Zunheboto district, Nagalnd. As the study of the Sumi *Ame* and social structure has no written record, the study has taken into account the Oral history which has been passed down the generation has been recorded through interviews, the local writings have been translated and used for this study. Also the colonial writings of the administrators, missionaries and anthropologists who came in contact with the Naga people in the latter part of the eighteen century have been looked at. Thus the primary sources include the interviews, local literature, and colonial writings and monographs on different Naga tribes.

The secondary sources have been collected from the works of many noted social anthropologists, sociologists, historians and political scientists who have carried out various empirical, analytical and theoretical studies in this subject matter. The present study has taken both the views of the scholars from outside and inside and analyse their observations and comment on the subject of the study.

The materials have been collected from the central library in JNU, the DSA library in the Centre for the Study of Social System, Nehru Memorial Library, Centre for Women Development Studies (CWDS), Nagaland State Library Kohima, Nagaland University Library Lumami. While, most of the local literatures are collected from elders from Nagaland, seniors and colleagues who are doing their own researches in JNU and outside.

### **Outline of the Study**

The present study is divided into three chapters to look into the marriage prestations, the social context and meanings taking references from the Nagas society with special emphasis on the Naga society to study different forms of marriage prestations, the gifts and presents being made during marriage. Also to locate the cultural continuity

and similarities found among the different societies of the world. Chapter one, **Marriage prestations: The Social Context and Meanings (Bridewealth)** deals with the theoretical genesis of the term marriage prestations, the different kinds of marriage transactions among the different societies taking the cases from African bridewealth practices and the Indian system of dowry and different forms of gifts into account. The chapter starts with marriage, the discussion and the debate on bridewealth. This chapter analyses the different kind of marriage prestations and the similarities and traits they share and how different scholars tries to place and mark them.

Chapter two, **Social Structure and Marriage Practices in Naga Society**, talks about the socio-culture of the Naga society since time in memorial, and the transition over the years taking the Ao, the Angami, the Lotha, the Rengma and the Sumi community as the main point of reference. Here Naga society has been assessed through the colonial writings and the recent local writers who writes and gives a portrayal of the Naga society. The institution of marriage and the practices and rituals associated with it have been looked at and also how marriage practices underwent a change with the introduction of the Christianity. We also look at the coming of Christianity over the Naga hill and the spread of western education and westernisation, which brought about the socio-cultural, economic and political changes that takes lace in the region

The third chapter titled, **Kinship, Marriage and Prestations among the Sumi** is a case study of the Sumi tribe. This chapter examines the social structure and different institutions in the society. How through this payment of *ame*, (bridewealth) the individual's status in the society changes. This chapter studies the different types of marriage practices among the Sumi society and the practices that are still in use. It also looks at the change and continuity in the marriage system and how there has emerge a new system of marriages blended with both the traditional marriage practices and rituals and the western ideals of church white wedding.

## Chapter 1

### *Marriage Prestations: The Social Context and Meanings of Bridewealth*

#### **Introduction**

The notion of bridewealth has gained immense importance in the recent times. There are various reasons for such importance like rise in the anthropological discourses on marriage and kinship and the critiques of the euro-centric attitude of reading only economics in the concept of bridewealth thereby reducing women to commodity among others. Additively there is another aspect which deals with the “outsider” vs./and “insider” views. The “outsider” is the one who has his/her own understanding of bridewealth on the basis of his/her experiences of the society. The “insider” is the one who deconstructs it and provides logic for the same activity.

There are not less than two ways in which the discussions on bridewealth can be analyzed. The first one is the chronological way in which the respective thinkers can be discussed in the timeline scale. The other view is based on the thematic understanding of bridewealth along with its constituent elementals. The present chapter tries to merge both the views and has primarily opted for the thematic explorations in which the thinkers are chronologically discussed.

In most of the societies there is an institution of marriage which has a very important role to play in the social structure of the society. The systems of marriage are related to kinship and gender which are later on tied to the economic and political structures. Broadly understood, marriage is a culturally approved relationship that legitimizes a sexual and economic union between a man and a woman. Through the union of marriage, a set of relationships are created. In the process of marriage, various transactions takes place between the two parties where in, the payments are made either by the groom or by the bride and her family.

## **Anthropological Understandings of Marriage and Marriage Prestations**

Marriage has been defined by different scholars at different point of time and it is not possible to come up with a solid universal understanding of the term marriage. marriage is seen as a union between a man and a woman, where they come together as one and set up a family. Marriage entails the transfer or flow of rights, the sets of rights passing from the wife's group to the husband or vice-versa, work services, sexual rights, rights over children, property and so on. Marriage can also be an economic relationship or political alliance rather than a sexual relationship.

For Radcliffe-Brown (1950) Marriage firstly, is an alliance between the two bodies of kin based on their common interest in the marriage itself, its continuance and in the offspring of the union, who are kin of both the groups. Secondly, a marriage involves a payment by the bridegroom or his kin to the father or guardian of the bride. Marriage involves the whole set of prestations and while the most important prestations are from the husband and his kin to the wife's kin, they are frequently or usually in the same direction. The term marriage prestations is used for major prestations made by the bridegroom to the wife's kin. In case there is a payment from the wife's kin to the husband it is called a counter prestations. A distinction is also made between the legal marriage and an irregular union. In legal marriage, the children born are given definite "legitimate" status in the society. It requires a series of transactions and formalities in which the kin of both the families are involved, where the payment of goods or services by the bride groom to the bride's kin is an essential part of the establishment of legality.

Leach (1954) argues that, Marriage among many tribal societies is seen as a contract between two lineages or families. Here the groom's kinsman made substantial payments of valuables to the bride's kin. This was seen by the missionaries as degrading customs and they tried to suppress these custom. For this reason, the term "Brideprice," with its connotation of a woman being sold as chattel came, this is very current and colonial origin. Here, marriage are often more or less free choice but when



a substantial bridewealth needs to be paid and the young man cannot pay, his choice is often sidelined and a more politically and economically correct partner is decided by the family. The politics of affinal alliance and the standard of appropriate or culturally valid marriage also affect the choice of marriage.

Levi-Strauss (1969) comes up with the exchange theory, where he explains that the exchange of women is the basic phenomenon by means of which kinship is to be understood. All the marriages are exchange of woman between two groups of men. He focused on two models of exchanges; the first is the reciprocal exchange of woman between paired sections which he calls "restricted exchange". The second is the circular pattern of wife giving and wife receiving which he calls "generalised exchange". It permits either the even or odd numbers of groups to participate in the chains and it requires a minimum of three groups.

Marriage is not a single phenomenon, rather it's a process. The marriage prestations transform a mating relationship from a socially meaningful process to a universal relationship as "marriage". the case of Tshidi (Tswana) was taken by Comaroff (1980) to explain marriage and marriage payment. It is seen that a man and a woman may live together for many years but are not regarded as married until bridewealth is paid, till which they refer to each other by terms which imply temporary liaison. Once the bridewealth payments is agreed and paid, the status of the relationships changed. It thus removes the ambiguity and defines the status of the union and locates its offspring to a genealogically ordered social field. Among the Bedouin, the instalmental schedule of marriage prestations "marks marriage as a process of becoming rather than as a state of being". It is thus seen that, marriage payments plays an important role that without the whole payment, the existence of marriage is not even recognized in some societies. Strathern (1984) while talking about exchange marriages said that, the Melanesian men and women may equate women with wealth as well as seeing them as a source of wealth. It is seen that the anthropological accounts is borrowed from such models in postulating that the subject matter of marriage exchange is the exchange of "women".

## **Bridewealth: The Social Context and Meaning**

Generally speaking, bridewealth is viewed as the transfer made between two families, clans or kin circles. In the course of exchanging prestations and rights in women, the relationships of affinity and debt are created with each other, affirming their own internal solidarity and mutual interest in the process. Bridewealth is paid by the bridegroom's family to the father of the bride while deciding the marriage. Scholars are of the view that amongst the tribal groups, the girl is by and large taken as an economic asset and to lose her in marriage as she joins her husband's house is a loss to the parents. In order to compensate for the loss, bridewealth is arranged between the parties which enhances the social status of a woman for whom a higher bride price is given.

"Bridewealth", was proposed by Evans Pritchard in 1931, as a term

"...which would avoid suggestion of 'purchase', while nevertheless stressing the economic values of the goods transmitted, and he seems to have been anticipated by several decades in his selection of the words by Dutch anthropologist using 'bruidschat'. Evans Pritchard's express declaration that 'Bridewealth has everywhere an economic values' has not prevented anthropologist from interpreting his new term as a euphemism, disguising an economic institution. This misunderstanding depends upon equating economy with commerce".<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the fact that, bridewealth is normally the common features of the tribal life, it has gained academic recognition more than dowry from the social and cultural anthropologists. It became the main area of their interest during the 50's and 60's. In the recent years the importance attached to bridewealth has reached a higher level because of various modern trends. The awareness of the idea of women's liberation affecting researchers has meant that less attention is paid to bridewealth on the assumption that, it symbolizes the inferiority of women.

Radcliffe Brown (1953) argued that, the transfer of goods was not rightly called wife purchase or even brideprice. It is not an economic transaction at all but substituted the word like bridewealth and dowry. He called them "prestations" and these transfers are

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Comaroff J. L. Ed. 1980. pp. 94-95

symbolic expressions more nearly comparable to the of engagement rings in western marriages. He stressed on the place of mother's brother during marriage and the hold he has over the bridewealth which is known in Sotho (South Africa) as *ditsoa*

There are differences of opinion with regards to bridewealth. It has been given a ceremonial or status defining function by some literature. The western anthropologists have given the explanation that, the purpose of bridewealth is to compensate the father's household for the loss of her work. However, the fact is that the son's bride who moves in takes the place of the daughter who marries out. Thus, the profit from the daughter's bridewealth is the result that is paid to the son's wife. The payment of bridewealth is the sign that the marriage has taken place and also as an indication of the status of the various parties to the marriage agreement. The other viewpoint sees bridewealth as price compensation to the bride's parents for the loss of the productive member of the family. This is an uncomfortable interpretation for some anthropologists because they feel that it implies the chattel status for woman, despite the fact that women have high status and fairly large amount of freedom of action in societies where bridewealth is prevalent.

The existence of price indicates that only some property rights are exchanged. Here bridewealth may be a price without a women being slaves. It is the price paid in exchange for services but does not necessarily give the husband other rights over the women. He cannot sell those services to another man, nor can he obtain the rights to put his wife to death. It has been argued that when the bridewealth is received and kept by the bride's family, woman is seen as property to a certain extent. In such cases, some of her services can be disposed against her will. On the other hand, if the bridewealth is received and kept by the bride herself, then the women have some personal freedom and rights for their own services.

According to Mauss (1970) the problem that arises while using the term bridewealth is that, bridewealth is not applicable to a situation where groom wealth is exchanged in return for a man. Moreover, it does not fit as a general term for the Asian systems of

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reciprocal and opposed cycles of prestations associated with alliance. Especially in the context of India, dowry is more in practiced and widely recognized. All the marriages takes place in a system of what Mauss called “total prestations”.<sup>2</sup> Mauss in his book, *The Gift*, argues against the economic aspects of gift-exchange and pleads for a renewed emphasis upon its moral and social elements where the relationship between gift-exchanges and social structure was primary. He identifies a type of gift-exchange as “prestations” or “total prestations”, which are meant to apply to a type of compulsory gift that falls upon the entire group and all its social phenomena including religious, legal, moral and the economic aspects.

Prestations were regarded as being structured around three obligations: the obligation to give, to receive and to repay. He referred to the type of gift-exchange systems that involve moral judgments or religious sanctions as “prestations systems”. He developed the term “prestations” for gift-giving when it is systematically perpetuated within the community or group, thereby distinguishing it from the occasional gift given by an individual. In special cases, it is made possible for the sequences of reciprocal gifts to be completed when the union is first established but, the normal pattern is a “constant re-documentation by payment through out marriage”. The exchange of gift is not limited to marriage, as it is also a very important occasion to realize, strengthen or continue the link between the two sides of social reality, between wife givers and wife takers.

It has often been held that bridewealth is particularly associated with patrilineal societies where as, it is absent or is replaced by bride service in the matrilineal communities. Wilken (1883) speculates that bridewealth originated in those societies which were changing from an original matriarchy towards patriarchy. Bridewealth in its origin would not have been a purchase, but a settlement for the offence caused by abduction of the bride. When patriarchal societies latter firmly established themselves, bridewealth became a true purchase. According to Mair (1953) and Laughlin (1974) in

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<sup>2</sup> Panoff. M. 1970. pp. 60-70. Also see Herman, H. 1993. pp. 51-73.

many societies the father's right with regards to children depends on the amount of bridewealth he has paid for their mother. Bridewealth is the output that the wife is not expected to consume within the household during the marriage. Becker (1973) suggests that bridewealth is the discounted value of part or the wife's entire share of marriage output and the value of this output must at least equal the bride's possible earning in alternative households.

Among the Barma of Chad, a man has to compete in the bridewealth competition while the women are not involved in such contests. It implies the later marriage for man than for woman which resulted in the high age-differentials between spouses in the Barma household. The inability of the young man to collect the resources necessary for marriage means that brothers must depend on their kin, most importantly those resident within their household to marry. This produces a situation in which the marriage of the elder brother postpones the marriage of the younger brother.

Marriage is continued to be seen primarily as a bundle of rights and bridewealth as the instruments of their production or exchange which is subsumed. As marriage prestations are essential in establishing the legitimacy of a union, it is assumed that a clear distinction is generally made between regular and irregular relationship. According to Mair (1971) the most significant concern is the affiliation of children in this context, especially in patrilineal systems "Bridewealth" is taken as "Child Price". Fortes (1962) points out that the payments mark the transformation of personal and social statuses not merely for the couple but also for the wife givers and takers who become affines whatever else they might have been before.

Under the Muslim law, the woman is worth half a man. On the death of the father, his property is supposed to be divided amongst his children, a daughter's share being half that of a son. Moreover, a man's testimony in the court is technically worth that of two women. Moreover,

"Under the Islamic law brideprice must be always paid, usually half on marriage and the other half if the marriage ends in divorce, in which case the husband has the custody of all children over a certain

age. Here the wife can continue to enjoy their share of marriage output connected with the children while they remain in the household, but when divorce it become impossible for them because of the monetary compensation they receive".<sup>3</sup>

In case of exchange marriage, no bridewealth is paid, instead brides are exchanged where each bride acting as the other's bridewealth. Ideally the two brides should be of the same quality and if they are, the price will be 'correct' in the sense that the bridewealth for each will be that implied by her characteristics. Again if the woman marries her cousin, her children will be an addition to her own larger family. Wherein, if she marries a stranger, her children will be lost to him. Thus the closer are the bride and the groom, the lower is the bridewealth payment.

Bridewealth has been described by Goody (1973) as a transaction between the kin of the groom and the kin of the bride which is not to be consumed in the course of the celebration nor is it to be handed to the wife, but goes to the bride's male kin. Bridewealth involves the transmission of property at marriage. Whatever symbolic aspects mark these transfers, they also have the economic functions not primarily as intermediaries in a purchase but as a way of redistributing the property. Hence, this must be seen in the context of the wider movement of property and its exploitation for productive and other social purposes. Viewed in these ways, these marriage transactions have to be linked to other aspects of social organization particularly the economy.

"The term 'Bridewealth' has been used to cover a set of transactions each of which has very different implications for the social structures. But this range of institutional variations and its economic implications have been obscured by a loose applications of the so-called exchange theory of marriage. That marriage in simple societies involves an 'exchange' is a somewhat vague notion that has been often confused the analysis of social system".<sup>4</sup>

In many societies of Europe and Asia, marriage prestations are made by the groom and his kin and are consequently classified as bridewealth. However, we need to remember that the ultimate recipient of this gift is the bride and not her kin. In Africa,

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<sup>3</sup> Ivy, Papps. 1983. p. 204

<sup>4</sup> Goody, Jack and Tambiah. 1973. p. 2

bridewealth is common in patrilineal system and usually absent or insubstantial in matrilineal and in the so-called bilateral societies where, marriage with the bridewealth is one option among several. Moreover, its non-payment usually entails reduced control over the bride on the part of her husband's kin and the affiliation of the children to her own natal unit, non-agnatic devolution and perhaps non-verilocal residence. However, marriage prestations and unilineal structures are not reducible to separate institutions which may be conceived or accurately described as two transformations of the socio-cultural rules.

Barnes (1980) considers the connections between corporate organizations, descent and marriage payments in his studies in Eastern Indonesia. According to him,

“...where unilineal descent, affinal alliance and marriage exchange occurs together, they all have an essential part in the constitution of the corporations, but each of these features may be present or absent independently of the others. Marriage payments may allocate from one family to another not only children but also wives, and in some cases even husbands. Such payments can be used to establish an exclusive connection, but they may just as well leave an individual with membership and obligations in two locations.”<sup>5</sup>

The structural functionalist argument is that, while marriage prestations may operate as payments, they have more important social functions like the creation of the jural statuses and the structuring of unilineal descent group relations.<sup>6</sup> While, Meillassoux (1981) takes a Marxist position and maintains that, bridewealth function “to reproduce the relations of production” in domestic economies, at least partially by providing elders with the means of controlling the juniors.<sup>7</sup> This situation suggests “ontology of nascent class formation”. Ogbu (1983) is of the view that the major structural functionalist interpretations of marriage payments are represented in the writings of Levi-Strauss and Needhan. They are a kind of “Symbolic Currency” with which people carry out indirect exchange of women and thus realize the principle of exchange. It was thus proposed by Evans-Pritchard that, the transfer of marriage

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<sup>5</sup> Comaroff, op.cit. pp.16-17. This point is elaborated by R.H. Barnes in the fourth chapter of the book under the title, *Marriage, Exchange and the Meanings of Corporations in Eastern Indonesia*.

<sup>6</sup> Reyna, S. P. 1984. p. 59

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

prestations be termed as “bridewealth” to express the fact that they largely performed non payment functions.<sup>8</sup>

In Schweizer and White (1998) work, *Kinship, Networks, and Exchange*, Bell tries to clarify the understanding about the bridewealth and dowry. An important distinction between payments are emphasized such as bridewealth, which are wealth transfers between groups, and gifts such as dowry which are exchanges made with the expectation of continued alliance between groups.

### **The Receivers and Givers of Bridewealth and the use of Bridewealth**

It is understood that bridewealth is not meant to be consumed during marriage nor is it to be given to the bride. It is given to the bride’s male kin. It involves a kind of rationing system that, what goes out for a bride has to come in for a sister. If the payments are small, the egalitarian distribution of spouses could be disturbed. To achieve this end, an important aim is not to let the amount received fall below the effective rate. Mayer (1950) remarks of the Gusie that, every father fears being left in the lurch by finding the bridewealth which he has accepted for his daughter will not suffice to get a daughter-in-law.

The balance can best be achieved if the items have little exchange values outside transactions. Such is the case with cattle in the Savannah areas of Africa. Among the Lobedu, the cattle coming in as bridewealth are not suppose to be used for any other purpose than marriage. Unlike the Zulu who kept a large herds, constantly replenished in the old days by rage against neighbours, most Lobedu families do not possessed cattle’s except for a short periods of time. Though, among the Zulu pastoral societies, livestock’s have a critical part to play in subsistence but are rarely exchange for other items of value no more than land. While lesser objects can be exchange into cattle among kin, it is more difficult to change out, except through sacrifice.

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<sup>8</sup> Ogbu, John. U. 1983. p. 343



If cattle transactions are largely confined to marriage, then the dependence of the groom on the similar transaction is overwhelming. These are even so if the payments are freely exchangeable like cowries, hoes or iron bars but, large in terms of the individual's capacity to accumulate. Here, a man is again highly dependent upon sisters for bringing the wealth and fathers for distributing it. The effect is to reinforce the authority of the fathers and emphasize the tie with the sister. The father's role here is very clear and the authority of the older generation is linked as the young are dependent on them for marriage cattle or the equivalent.

Bridewealth is used and distributed in a particular way among the different societies. In the case of the Nuer, the first rule of the distribution of bridewealth is the equal division between the bride's paternal and maternal kinsmen. The second rule is that the cattle are distributed in fixed proportion between three families: the bride's own family, her father's family and her mother's family. The bride's own family receives half of the cattle, which are known collectively as *ghok dieth*, the cattle of the begetting. The family of the bride's father and her mother each receive one third of the cattle each known collectively as *ghok cungni rar*, the cattle of outside claimants, i.e. those who are outside the bride's own family.<sup>9</sup>

In case a man marries from the family herd in which his brothers have equal share, his wife is called by the brothers as, "Our wife" because she was married with "Our cattle". She acts in domestic duties as a wife to her husband's unmarried brother as well as to her husband, though she cohabits with the husband alone, and her children are all "our children" since they are children of "our cattle". Very often, the girl's paternal uncle proved to be the most serious obstacle to bringing about her marriage, for he does not hesitate to veto the marriage if he thinks that he is not getting his fair share of the cattle.

"...Sometime the final Bridewealth are not transferred. In such a situation when the husband has cattle and the wife's brother wants to marry they may raid his herd of cattle and take whatever is owed to

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<sup>9</sup> Evans Pritchard, E. E. 1946. p. 247

them. But these kinds of debts are subjects to a rule of limitations. If the cattle have not been transferred before the eldest son of the marriage is initiated into manhood, the debts lapse. Also, if the cattle owe, claimants cannot take them from the Bridewealth of a daughter of the union, that is to say, from cattle allotted to the bride's family. They get their due portions from the daughter's marriage but 'The cattle of a mother and the cattle of her daughter may not meet'. It is thought that the eldest daughter would be barren were this to happen".<sup>10</sup>

Among the southern Bantu societies, there is a so-called cattle linked brothers and sister's complex which meant that bridewealth cattle received on the behalf of a woman at her marriage enabled a brother of her "house" to marry and set up his own family. Such a woman then has an important claim on her brother, including securing of his daughter for her son.

It has been argued that in some societies, marriage results in certain kinds of debt which can be repaid at the next generation, by means of the return of spouses or by remitting a proportion of bridewealth received for the daughters at marriage. Though in latter cases, the compensation would appear to be travelling in the reverse direction. The transactions in the same direction may be destined for different persons. In Africa, bridewealth does not go to the bride but her kin, which is used as compensation or recompense or even bridewealth. It is a wealth for and not to the bride.

The payment of the bridewealth is the responsibility of the immediate kin where, the same group serves as the focus for the allocation of bridewealth between males and females, where the sister's bridewealth is used for the brother's wife. The mutual dependence on bridewealth may lead to the institution of cattle linked sibling as practiced by Lobedu. In this case, the prescriptive multilateral cross cousin marriage is to be seen as a continuation of the relationship between siblings at the succeeding generation. Rather than as an aspect of the affinal relationship between lineages and this is clearly associated with the type of bridewealth payment and the cattle linked siblings. The sister in question has the right to demand a son of her brother to be her daughter's husband where each is said to be "born for the other".

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 254

The question that arises is, if the bridewealth is both high and held within a domestic unit how are the inequalities of child birth evened out? One possible answer may be that, in polygynous societies a man continues to hope and in extremity a man may sometimes use the daughter's bridewealth to marry a wife in order to bear a son. There bridewealth can be used to obtain a wife for the brother. Here, as a result of polygyny, the problem of imbalance is always a temporary for any male. The lack of bridewealth payment could also lead to the action of other sons entering into a filiatic union or leaving the country side.

According to Krige, (1964) the situation sometimes arises when the father of several daughters while traditionally in Africa might have difficulty in utilizing his assets and thus use it to hire labour. He can afford to be generous towards a kinsman who wish to marry his daughter, as in a mother's brother's daughter marriage and who might possibly come to live with him and compensate a couple for the deficit in male who will provide some insurance in old age. The surplus of the son is less easy. Here a man may have to borrow bride from near agnates more fortunately placed. He may secure such kind of loan by mortgaging the bridewealth of his future daughter.

### **Instances of Returning the Bridewealth: Contents and Situations**

While discussing the contents of bridewealth, one needs to remember the main division between perishable and non-perishable goods. The former are less likely to form the basis for the on-going series of transactions, which is regarded as intrinsic to bridewealth "Proper". It is more likely to be found as contribution of wedding expenses, to be consumed in the course of the ceremony itself. They may also be stored in the form of debts, but it is a debt specific to the bride's kin and therefore implies the particularized kind of exchange of spouse, found in those form of marriage which prescribe continuing transactions between a pair of groups.

The non-perishable goods that occur widely in African marriage payments are livestock, shells and metal objects especially hoes. In the case of the Zande, the

transfer of the spears plays a very important part of the bridewealth and the serviced render to the in-laws are also one major part of the bridewealth payment which is obligatory. All these are objects of a fairly generalized exchanged though large livestock have certain inherent limitations, especially when it comes to exchanging down. However, bridewealth transactions are typified by the very substantial cattle payment made by the patrilineal people of the Savannah country in Eastern and Southern Africa, as well as in the Sub-Saharan Region of West Africa. Here the transfer of cattle in marriage is linked to the acquisition of a wife but above all, to the production of children. Hence, the strength of those commonly quoted saying, "Bridewealth is child wealth" or "the cattle are where the children are not".<sup>11</sup>

The returnability of payments in the events of the dissolution of marriage is clearly linked to their use and hence the size and contents. Payments involving the transfer of rights in the fertility of the woman are likely to be spread over a period of years to be completed only after the birth of children. Similarly the premature dissolutions of the marriage means that the payments usually have to be repaid and since repayment would disrupt the economy of the woman's natal household, she was persuaded to rejoin her husband or enter into a new marriage. Consequently, it was associated with the situation whereby a widow remained married to her husband's kin either as a leviratic spouse or as an inherited widow. Whereas, the kind of "Terminal Separation" describe has to be associated with the low non- returnable payments where the residents of a wife are no material concern to her kin.

The situation no doubt differs from society to society. In some society in case of divorce the women were supposed to return the bridewealth depending on the number of children she bore. If she has no children she was supposed to return the whole bridewealth, and in some instance if she has many children than she was not supposed to return. If the women find another man and divorces, it is the lover who used to pay back the women's bridewealth to her first husband. Elsewhere, there is a custom that if

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<sup>11</sup> Good, Jack and Tambiah, op.cit., p. 11

the woman has not paid back the bridewealth proper then, she may cohabit with another man but she still is the wife of her first husband.

Bridewealth payments are often fixed amounts. This is the case for the Kipsigis and Gusii East Africa, and was also the case of many West African people. Among the Luo, the standard rates vary and the Nuer permit haggling in the byre. There is a close connection between the marriage of man and woman, the standard payment seems to fluctuate in relation to the cattle population so that an increase in the herds does not lead to cheap marriages while the bargaining process usually works out in such a way that only one marriage can be made from one herd at one time.

With regards to property, one man or woman is good as another and thus the system permits heterogeneity for which out marriage is a prerequisite, bridewealth is not always fixed and there are some variations which depend on the status. As for the daughters of high status men are concerned, they tend to get marked up rather than down as was the case with the daughters of Ashanti royals. In both ways the upper status group gains. These tendencies are no doubt universal concomitants of status differentiation but they played relatively little part in traditional Africa.

On the one hand selection is certainly playing an increasing part under modern conditions especially as traditional payments and services tend to get transmuted into cash, which is derived directly from the groom's earnings. In this process of computation there is plenty of room for bargaining and hence for the reproduction of inequalities. Whereas, bridewealth transactions seem formally to have varied with the status of the girl, nowadays it is the status of both partners that are involved. Here, it is essential to stress that in economic terms bridewealth has a levelling function.

By entering into marriage alliances, bridewealth achieves a double dispersal of property. Not only do the cattle pass in the opposite direction to the bride, they also bring in additional children who will divide whatever remains. One important aspect of bridewealth which needs reminder is its relationship with plural marriage. Women's

domestic roles are more complex than the theory allows and in any case polygyny occurs throughout Africa even where marriage transactions are “token” in quantity.

### 1) Issues of Stability and Divorce

While describing exogamy, anthropologist E.B Taylor (1888) in these words says,

“again and again in the world’s history, savage tribes must have had plainly before the mind the simple practical alternative between marrying out and being killed out. This might be the hostage theory of exogamy. The Paleolithic hunting and gathering bands- patrilocal bands in all probability exchanged women in order to live at peace with each other. The descent can regulate relationship within the same groups of often very large size and through this theory of exogamy comes out that exogamic rule is a positive rule for regulating relations between descent groups by means of a concubine”.<sup>12</sup>

In the case of African bridewealth, two modalities are followed. The first one is Evans Pritchard (1946), who stressed that among the Nuer, bridewealth was paid over a period of time and the progressive payment was the index of stability and when the full bridewealth is paid marriage is stable. The second one is of Mayer’s (1950) in his study among the Gusii, he talk about bridewealth paid in relation to the number of children born. In case of divorce, bridewealth is calculated and paid accordingly. The wife’s fertility and procreative ability is always stressed upon. Another important point is that, the Swazi among the Southern Bantu the practice of “marrying up” is preferred to “marrying down” and the aristocrats extract a large bridewealth for the women whom they “send down” and pay a lesser bridewealth for the women of lower status whom they marry.<sup>13</sup>

Among the Nuer, in a situation where the marriage is desired greatly by both the parties, the ceremony may be completed before the final bridewealth discussion has been held. If the son-in-law is respectful and industrious they will not break the union

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<sup>12</sup> Fox, Robin. 1976. p. 176

<sup>13</sup> Tambiah, Stanly. J. 1989. p. 427

because he takes a long time to transfer the final cows, for the marriage is not simply handing over a girl in exchange for cattle but is a creation of a series of new social relationships which once formed, are not easily or lightly severed, especially when the union is completed by the birth of the child.

Lancaster (1981) talked about, the sequence of marriage prestations followed in Gwembe valley is an opening gift of love tokens (*nhumbi*) signalled a more or less casual engagements. It depends on the approval of the girl's parent's followed by a variable probationary of bride service and sanctioned cohabitation in the girl's family compound. This is symbolized by the suitor's delivery of the betrothal prestations (*tsambo*) and after some time if the service and other factors are favourable, the groom was accepted as a legally recognised husband and junior members of his wife household upon delivery of ritual hoes (*badza*) and other goods.

### **The idea of Exchange and Purchase**

Marriage is not as simple as the rules of the preferential union might lead one to conclude. Every marriage takes more or less the form of prestations in which the price varies according to the persons rank and status in the society. The importance given to these aspects of the problem in native thought is expressed in the songs of rejoicing at the birth of a child. As when a boy is born the father exclaims "Let him grow up, let him become father of many children and if it is a girl; 'Let her grow up'!" May she be able to be given in marriage, and bring to her family buffalos, gongs, brandy, cloths etc.<sup>14</sup> The earnest desire to have children is for the boys to continue and propagate the family and girls to draw profit from them especially at their marriage.

It is seen that among the Haka Chin, a suitor who asks for a daughter in marriage is not refused, but is asked an exorbitant price. The brideprice proper varies between two buffaloes, two gong, two pieces of silk, several pieces of linen, a silken vase and four or five jugs of grog. If she is the daughter of a commoner, and three to four times

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<sup>14</sup> Gilhodes in Levi-Strauss, Claude 1969. p. 257

higher in case the girl is from the good family. An elephant tusk is included plus a slave, a gun, two pounds of silver etc. Of course, these prestations are made between groups and not individuals. There are number of beneficiaries or persons liable for the return gifts from the woman's side because, how ever considerable it may be, the bridewealth is only one of the numerable payments to be made when there is a marriage, or death or any other important occasion involving a relationships between two or more groups.<sup>15</sup>

Prior to the marriage of daughters, there are feast held in honour of the future bride which affect in the raising of her bridewealth. This is a custom, made as homage by the father or the brother to a daughter or a sister. Its observance contributed to the glory of the person's liability. Here, a grand feast, during which any number of pigs may be killed and an equal number of cloths spread out for the husband and the wife to trample underfoot. The same number of baskets of grain is also offered. After this ceremony, the bridewealth is returned, should the wife divorce her husband. The principal offering are accompanied by a considerable number of accessory prestations, and they call for counter prestations from the husband.<sup>16</sup> This kind of prestations, rituals and practices are also seen among the different Naga tribes of North-East India.

If a girl marries outside her village, the husband must find a foster parent for the bride in his own village. The owner of the house eat the meat offered by the bridegroom, and by this gesture he is be adopted as a male relatives of the bride and she will seek refuge in his house when ever she had some problems with her husband, and also in case of needs and illness. This practice is also found among the Sumi Naga tribes where there is a marriage alliance between the two village the broom find a person to look into the brides in times of needs and trouble by offering gifts of meat and other presents after which, it becomes obligatory and binding. The wife always remains under the protection of her family, who can at any moment call her back. If the husbands want her back, he must pay an indemnity and so long as it remains unpaid he

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<sup>15</sup> Levi-Strauss, Claude. 1969. P. 258

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p. 259



has only a right of sexual access to his wife under the regime of matrilineal residence. This shows that the brideprice have less to do with sexual rights, than with the permanent loss of the wife and her offspring. In case the couple have children before the matter is regularized by the payment of the brideprice, the children belong to the wife's brother or to the closest male relative.<sup>17</sup>

Brideprice is seen as an economic transaction by Scherer (1965) and he relates the lower rate of polygyny among the Tusi to the fact that they have clients to perform services where the man have only his wife. Despite their relative scarcity, the ratio being one cow: one adult man, cattle are the principle form of property and are highly valued. Many men acquire their cattle by entering into a client ship arrangement with a Tusi patron. He said that, although the intention to marry is in no way requisite for the obtaining of a client ship's cow, it can be safely assumed especially at present days, the collection of the necessary brideprice is one of the main motives for making a man enter into a client ship relation. Many owe their position as polygynist to the generosity of a patron.

### **Brideprice: Cross Cultural Variations**

Brideprice is transmitted in a process involving the giving of prestations occurring as part of a ceremonial cycle making certain activities incumbent on individual participants. According to Reyana (1977) among the Barma of Chad the accumulation of brideprice helps socialize the young men into their adult economic roles. The need of the young men to amass brideprice causes their marriage to be postponed thus, creating a time for socialization. Again, a state of sexual and social deprivation is created for the young men and can be ended only by the marriage.

Marriage again has to be preceded by the sequence of courtship transactions, which operates as a system of sanctions that reward the performance of adult economic roles. In order to marry they have to complete a cycle of ceremonies. While participating in

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* pp. 260-261

them they are said to *ui ne*, means “follow women”. The courting is not the neutral activity. Young man very often find themselves facing peer and adult pressure to enter marriage competition. Those who talk about or actually enter the competition are considered resourceful and good. Their peers like them and their kin’s are proud of them. The courtship ceremonies produce sanctions after the contest is finished. For the winners the meeting day (*kendar nja*) and the wedding day, (*nja tapada*) are primarily times when the crowds of friends, kin, neighbors, even enemies, congratulate him.

The bride’s family is the arbitrator of the marriage. After choosing the woman, a ceremony called *lumator* must take place after which a group of suitor’s male agnates or friend travel to the woman’s house, and present gifts, often in kind and ask permission for their kin to court their daughter. The courting permission is granted by the girl’s family to as many men as possible but the number of suitor the girl receives depends on her beauty as well as her family status which are both considered to be equally important.

Women were quickly married off after the suitable suitor has offered the largest amount she was likely to command. As for the man after the *lumator*, it is very important for him to demonstrate his eligibility by providing goods, services and promises of high bridewealth which are believed to signal his considerable regard for his prospective bride and her family. If the marriage is agreed upon the father formally ask his wife for her approval then the groom’s family should provide the gifts to the bride’s kin more specifically earmarked for the bride, her mother and father and a further should be given as well. This prestation is called “childprice” because it establishes the father’s paternity of children born of the marriage.<sup>18</sup> The marriage preliminaries and games are closed on the day of marriage.

Among the Bedouin (Peters, 1980) there is an instalments system of paying bridewealth which makes marriage as a process rather than a state of being. Thus marriage ultimately is an object of strategic manipulation for social political and

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<sup>8</sup> Reyna, op.cit., p. 59

economic self advancement. In cases where cross-cousin marriages are practiced, marriage payments are used to promote personal rather than group's social, political and economic interest. It serves to establish and strengthen affinal relationship and inter-group relations as well as to incorporate bride into her husband's group.

The Rebuke societies (Muller, 1978) are divided into two exogamous moieties, which marry one another in primary marriages i.e. the first marriage of the women. When a woman takes another man there is no refund of bridewealth. She is still married to the deserted husband and remains so up to the time of her death. All rebuke girls have institutionalized premarital relations within their own wife taking unit, before marrying into other moiety. A girl may have only one lover at a time but for the boy he may have several girl friends simultaneously. There is a premarital relation not only for the sexual enjoyment, but a generation later they determine the *Rebuka* type of marriage. The girl must be affines to the son of her mother's last lover before her primary marriage.

The bridewealth for the prescriptive marriage is high, whereas less is expected for the normal marriage. After the women has been married to a randomly chosen mate, she stays with him for a few week after which she is escorted to the prescriptive groom for co- habitation of about a month. She is now his official wife and she can remain with him after a prescriptive time without him having had to pay the bridewealth. Should she choose to stay with him there is no refund of bridewealth to the first husband for the wife can always return to him later. In case the wife does not like the prescriptive husbands she can go back to her first husband but he is still considered her husband and she can go back to him as well. There is a cardinal rule that a woman can have only one husband per wife taking unit. In such case the bridewealth amount to one third of what is paid for a normal marriage. Even among the Lotha Naga society the bridewealth is paid in instalments. Part of the bridewealth is paid in service and part in cash and kind. Till bridewealth is paid and a ceremony is performed the husband build a hut at the wife's compound and pay in services.

## **Bridewealth and Dowry: Different forms of Marriage Prestations**

Dowry is virtually confined to Europe and Asia. Like bridewealth, there are number of important variables to be taken into account while discussing dowry. Firstly there is the origin of the dowry i.e. whether it comes from the girl's parents or from her husband and his kin. The second alternative is indirect dowry. It is customary to spend large amount of money on weddings even at the risk of going deeply into debt. Marriott (1955) states that, in dowry marriage, the very fact that the girl is given in marriage makes the recipient superior, just as the act of giving the girl makes the donor family inferior. Though this view was criticised and disagree by the other scholars. Behind marriage is the feeling that ones daughter and sister at marriage becomes the property of an alien kinship group. In order to secure her good treatment, lavish hospitality must be offered and gifts made to her husband's family throughout life. The economic effects of this patterning of marriage are considerable. Not only marriage and other expanses are kept high, but quantities of goods follow woman in later years by the same non-rational path and the debt is incurred to fulfil marriage demands.

Srinivas (1955) while talking about prestations taking place during marriage, discussed dowry and bridewealth payments. He defends dowry by saying that dowry in its original form was given to the girl as a gift by her parents and he further continued by saying that there is a need to distinguish pre-British dowry and modern dowry. Accordingly, modern dowry is entirely a product of the forces let loose by the British rule such as monetization, education and the introduction of the organized sector. There is an attempt to equate a huge demand of dowry from the bride's kin by the groom to *Dakhina*, which itself is an attempt to legitimize a modern monstrosity by linking it up with an ancient and respected custom into a common and hoary Indian lives. The surprising fact is that, this imposture has been very successful. Bridewealth was always a fixed amount within an endogamous *Jati*, and the various prestations that needed to be made were also specified, dowry is characterised by asymmetry, uncertainty and unpredictability. All the expenditure might be on the bride's side only

and there is no rule as to what the groom's kin may ask. He also said that, the great expenditure is frequently incurred on weddings due to the bride's family's desire to vindicate their status, and less frequently to the demands of the groom's kin that the wedding be performed grandly.

The so-called indirect dowry is more common in North India than in South where, dowry proper exist in some parts a landed dowry prevails. Marriages are isogamous and this is reinforced by the preference for cross cousin, and cross uncle and nieces marriages. The custom of bridewealth which was universal resulted in a tilt in favour of the bride's kin as far as relations between the affines were concerned and it was the rule though it did not mean that prestations moved only in the opposite direction. Secondly, there is a question on the control of dowry, whether it remains entirely under the control of the woman or under the jurisdiction of the husband or forms part of a community of the property on which both partner can draw. It is likely to be returnable in the case of divorce since it is an endowment upon the woman, whatever managerial functions the husbands may carry out, the destination of dowry is the bride herself.

Thirdly, there is the content of the dowry. Bridewealth consist essentially of movable items though in the case of pastoral tribes, these may constitute the basic means of production namely livestock. Dowry may consist of any property what so ever. Land is often excluded but by no means always. It must be clear that the question of whether or not land was included in a woman's portion, either as dowry or as inheritance is of fundamental importance for the other aspects of the social systems. The splitting up of a holding can be prevented only by a complex exchange or by closed marriage and it is therefore not surprising to find closed conubium prevails where land devolves on women, as is particularly evident in the contrast between South and North India.

Dowry systems are inherently bilateral since they distribute relatively exclusive right in a manner that does not link property or patrimony to sex. It descends in a diverging way. If property diverges between the members of both sexes than it can never be

wholly contain within the boundaries of the unilineal descend group or within the groups of sibling. Men acquire their proprietary rights to mobile property and land by transmission through men and women are not permitted to inherit.

The bridewealth sees the transfer of property from one corporation to another, but the transfer is controlled. Since women are free to be married by man outside the natal corporations and nearly half of the marriages are of these sorts. If women inherited as wives and daughters, an uncontrolled run on corporate resources would ensue. This would be serious enough if mobile property would be involved, but if land was threatened the entire basis of corporate life would collapsed. Therefore, the lack of legal status of woman as heirs to property is related not only to the status of the individuals as heirs, but to the nature of the property owing groups.<sup>19</sup>

A critical difference between bridewealth and dowry shows itself in divorce or at the dissolution of marriage. If marriage breaks, then the bridewealth paid in whole or part is in theory returnable by the wife's family to the husband's family. Bridewealth and dowry has different potentialities in a way they can be linked up with the politico-economic institutions of the society where they are found. Bridewealth can neatly tie in with polygyny, with concubinage, with man of high status or great wealth acquiring woman of low status or in poor circumstances. Dowry on the other hand lends itself to being dressed up to as a gift that accompanies the gift of the virgin (*Kanya dana*). The conception which is ideologically central in Indian eminently lends itself to hypergamy. Here, there is an exchange of status for wealth and no doubt the dowry givers can themselves get the return by demanding higher dowries from their own wife givers.

In India, the 'gift of a virgin' accompanied by a dowry appears to be associated with the ideal of monogamy, an ideal that is symbolized in the notion of husband and wife being a united and inseparable pair which reach its ultimate elaboration in the institution of Sutte.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jack, Goody and Tambiah, op.cit., pp. 26-28

<sup>20</sup> ibid. P. 65

The Brahmanical evaluation of bridewealth payment is very clear. It is tantamount to sale of a daughter for profit and is therefore reprehensible. The recommended act is the gift of the virgin daughter. The classical literature is cognizant of both dowry and brideprice within the same society, but evaluates marriage with dowry as the more acceptable and prestigious form for the high caste Brahmins and bridewealth as practiced by the lower caste and is looked down upon. While recognizing that female inheritance and dowry sometimes shade into each other, Yalman (1967) stressed on the extremely important difference between the two. He writes that these differences arise because female inheritance and dowry has two different purposes. The former is merely a reflection of the general descent ideology of the *Kanyadans* the sons and daughters both inherits in the same fashion.

Dowry on the other hand is the result of a bargain and has a specific intention that of linking the daughter hence her family with a particular desirable son-in-law. Female inheritance is clearly associated with a bilateral ideology, but it also reflects a general interest in preserving the status of the offspring of both sexes. Dowry too carries both these implications. Fruzzeti (1982) says that, the gift of a virgin from the father to the husband is the greatest gift which a man can bestow. Here the virgin is freely given and on marriage her status is changed not only from unmarried to married women, but also from being a member of her fathers group to that of her husband. The purpose of marriage is said to be procreations, particularly in continuation of the male line. Though women are essential for that end they are regarded merely as respectable and transmitters, never the carriers of the line. The marriage prestations which are supposed to be the gift in the case of dowry can be rightfully demanded unlike the *dan* which can be freely bestowed. Women unlike dowry are not commodities.

While critiquing the definition of dowry and bridewealth, Bossen (1988) points out that anthropologists have tended to make female motivations and transactions invisible: it is typical to consider only what man do to get brides, but not what women do to get husbands, or other men, and how they gain access to men's economic contributions. She further argues that, even if we avoid the assumption that women are

commodities that are exchanged like bridewealth with the perception that certain types of rights in women are transacted, not the women themselves, it is still common to treat women either as a passive, homogeneous category, or as analytically anomalous and unpredictable.

Raheja (1988) argues that anthropologists have misconstrued the act of giving as simply payments by ignoring the ritual dimensions in which gift transactions occur. She further argues that the failure to distinguish between *phaslana* (share) and *dan* is part of an anthropological fallacy that ignores distinctions within the conceptual framework. Accordingly, the proper prestations and acceptance code, which ensures the well-being of the entire community is far more important than hierarchical considerations in structuring inter-caste relationships in the village. She writes that “the proper prestations and acceptance of *dan*, which ensures the well being of the entire community, is far more important than the hierarchical considerations in structuring inter-caste relationship in the village”.<sup>21</sup>

She points out that not all the prestations are lumped together in the Phansu world view as “gifts”. Instead there is a multitude of prestations, given for different purposes and articulating different relationships among kinsmen and various castes. Gold while reviewing this book in 1991 states that, strikingly, a person who regularly accepts such gifts from the dominant caste of Gujar landlords, Brahmans-pure priestly caste-and sweepers-the lowest of the low-becomes equivalent and the shocking thing in the Indian context is that the wife takers and out-married daughters are like priest and sweepers in that they too remove inauspiciousness by accepting gifts. The same gifts the Gujars give to Brahmans and Sweepers, they give to their married daughters.<sup>22</sup> For Tambiah (1989) the gift of the virgin is “the highest form of giving” and dowry is an essential accomplishment of her marriage. “A daughter is rarely given to a line that

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<sup>21</sup> Raheja, Gloria. Goodwin. 1988. P. 28

<sup>22</sup> Koram,, Frank. J. 1990. pp. 548-549. Wadley, Susan. S. 1990. p. 187. Gold, Ann. Grodzins. 1991. p. 128



does not demand dowry, for the size of the dowry reflects the prestige and honour of the line accepting the gift of the virgin".<sup>23</sup>

It is seen that bridewealth is not simply an item in an exchange system but it entails the dispersal of wealth in exchange for conjugal right and duties where polygyny is allowed. The more women you receive, the more wealth you give. Bridewealth acts in favour of equal distribution of women as it substitutes for sister exchange (a form of sister rationing). If the objects involved in bridewealth can be acquired by other means both productive as well as reproductive activity even then, the system will not be entirely closed. Nevertheless the higher the bridewealth, the more closed it will be and in many cases a premium will be placed on non-variability in payments.

In case of the African marriage where bridewealth is paid, women are independent but in the case of India where dowry is paid by the bride's family to the groom, the women are not independent. They do not go out to work and the dowry is paid as a means of securing a good position for the bride in her husband's family. According to Vatuk (1975) the wedding gifts, with the exception of those items explicitly designed for the bride's personal use becomes the property of the groom's joint household and its disposal is at the groom's parent's discretion. It includes cash, the gift given to the groom before the wedding, the household furnishing, utensils, clothes etc. In case the couple wish to set up the separate household, the parents might give them some stuffs brought in the *dahej* but here again the decision rests solely on the parents and the decision to take her *dahej* is not the bride's right. The jewellery, clothes and cash gift given to the bride by her parents and natal relatives becomes her personal property and she can keep it separately from the family's property and it becomes a substantial standard item given to her by her family.

Hershman (1981) gives a parallel account for rural Punjab Brahmin and jat household, in Punjab the total dowry is called *daj (dahez) or katt* but analytically it contains two distinct elements: firstly household goods after the joint family is divided, and

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<sup>23</sup> op.cit. Tambiah, op.cit., p. 421

secondly there are affinal prestations made to the groom , his parents and his various kin. In another place he reiterates that, there are two distinct elements in dowry: the trousseau and the personal possessions of the bride, and the affinal gifts made by wife-givers to wife-receivers. Standing and Donnan (1982) say that Hershman tries to show that though marriage does not result in any enduring relationship of inequality between intermarrying groups, nevertheless marriage created inequalities between intermarrying groups.<sup>24</sup>

The gifts such as gold ornament and jewelleries made by the groom's father for the bride are only for show and it is returned immediately after the marriage. The properties which the bride brought along are controlled by the groom's head of the family, his mother and sisters. The cash is controlled by the father, the household furnishing are used jointly by the groom's sisters and even passed on to their daughters. Only the small portion of property are locked away in her chest are controlled by the bride. Pocock (1972) also confirms that among the upper caste north Indian, the giving of dowry also have the implication that the higher caste women at marriage are invested or accompanied by the transfer of wealth. The father by contracting or investing a large dowries on his daughter raise the family relation and status keeping in mind that, the sons latter can ask for more dowries and the girls can hope to enter into the respectable families with little dowry.

In dowry system, the rich actively controls the property right of the daughters while the labourer did not. The daughter of the rich take their portion of the estate at marriage, while the poor have too little to make dowry settlements possible, but allow the daughter take their share when the property is redistributed at their parents death. It is this difference that gives rise to what is seen as a leaning towards patrilineal descent in the former case and bilateral descent in the later. Hence, also the equation, Rich=dowry=arranged marriage.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Standing, Hillary and Donnan, Hastings. 1982. p. 793

<sup>25</sup> . Opcit. Goody and Tambiah, p. 19

Though marriage with dowry is prestigious form in India, today marriage with bridewealth is also found to co-exist in many parts but their incident tends to correlate with hierarchal status. As Karve (1968) puts it, all over India there is the custom of giving bridewealth among the poor caste and of receiving dowry among the higher caste.<sup>26</sup> This is not only in India that the spectrum of marriage to dowry to bridewealth is found but, also that every marriage involves multiple transactions and payments, some unilateral and others reciprocal, so that it is said that the modalities of bridewealth and dowry co-exist in the same series with one or the other type of transactions gaining dominance.

The bridewealth serves to secure all the children born to a married woman, to her husband and his patrilineal group. There is a separation of rights in *uxorem* from the rights in *genetricem*, and that therefore the African wife must be said to enjoy the measure of sexual autonomy, a conclusion which is strengthened by the rules of compensation when adultery was charged. Dowry on the other hand, labelled the marriage payments that accompany the passage of women into the marriage, with the husband controlling the sexuality of his wife and the purity of the status of his children. In this context women of the lower caste are allowed to work outside and instead of dowry, a bridewealth payment are expected on their marriage and thus the economic value of their labour becomes more visible and divorce or separation are more open to them.

The propensity of bridewealth systems leads to male migration into the towns has an interesting corollary in the dowry systems. The considerations of status and honour dictate that, a woman has to acquire a certain measure of property before she gets married. It has been argued that dowry delays marriage because when the daughter takes her portion the familial enterprise has to be partly dismembered. Whereas, the marriage of man affects the fund in a similar way only if the property needs to be handed on to the next generation at the time of marriage. One situation where there is a delayed daughter's marriage is, besides the property cost of the dowry, a farmer

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<sup>26</sup> Karve, Irawti. 1953. p 132

loses the labour of the daughter both on the farm and the household. There is also a psychic cost to the parents, particularly to a mother, at the marriage of a daughter. She loses a companionship of a friend, confidante, and working partner.

Boserup (1973) Goody (1973) Schlegel and Eloul (1988) works on the premise that, bridewealth cultures were associated with higher status for women because it was an acknowledgement of the loss of women's labour power, while dowry culture was associated with lower status for women because they saw women as economic liabilities rather than assets. Papps (1983) on the other hand used the tools of economic analysis to postulate that bridewealth is the discounted value of part or all of the wife's share of marriage output, and that the value of this share must at least equal the bride's possible earnings in alternative households; the value of bride to her husband and to her own family, but also her value to all other potential husbands.

Kressel (1977) argued that the very equation of bridewealth and loss of women's labour is framed one sided. The son's bride moves in and take the place of the daughter who moves out, while the daughter's bridewealth is the offset for the son's bridewealth. She said that, this explanation becomes more and more questionable with increase in neolocal residence. The contribution of women's work to the house-hold economy decreases, while we often see a rise in bridewealth. She takes instances of the emergence of bridewealth payments among Northwest coast American Indians and the sedentarized Bedouin in two Israeli towns where the bridewealth payments varied widely depending on the degree of kinship between marrying families and their class status, to iterate that bridewealth here is related to 'social differentiation': bridewealth conventions are determined in relation to and as a measure of social distance.

It is very important to remember that in the Indian context, the assumed emergence of dowry to replace customary bridewealth payments is not necessarily a marker of women's declining status. An intriguing debate over this issues emerge in the early 1980's, where some researchers documented a distinct change in practice involving the cessation of bridewealth and its replacement with dowry, correlated with new,

lucrative economic opportunities for the groom. Rajarman's (1983) view of bridewealth as labour compensation, calculated as the value of women's economic compensation in the paid labour force and her unpaid labour contribution in terms of housework and childcare, minus the cost of maintaining her, comes out the dowry as an option to replace bridewealth only when the unpaid labour contribution is believed to be less than the cost of her subsistence and the paid labour contribution is less than unpaid labour minus maintenance.

Parry (1979) found that bridewealth was on the increase among the Rathi *biradari* in Kangra. Randeria and Visaria (1984) on the basis of their ethnographic data in Gujarat showed that payments are not just about the value of labour compensation, where multiple payments occur over several generations in both directions and bridewealth and dowry-like payments coexist among lower castes, both having increased substantially in the past decades. Kishwar (1987) argued that in the time of rising land acquisition among the Ho, wealthier families were reluctant to pay bridewealth to poorer families, while poorer families were willing to forgo bridewealth in order to make alliances with wealthier families.

Mulder (1995) took the context of the increasing prevalence of education for women and men and greater prevalence of consumer goods and measured bridewealth among the Kenyan Kipsigis. The situation was either to educate the daughter and marry her to an educated groom for a high bridewealth, or lowers the bridewealth and asked for high ranking wife takers to secure economic security and the potential political benefits. It was found that the bridewealth norms had changed across generations, but 'recovering' value for women or building alliances through marriages were both important goals.

Unnithan-Kumar (1997) research on Girasia women in Rajasthan, provides a stringent critique of theories that bridewealth correlates with higher status for women by demonstrating that women may act as mere token of transfer within a strongly patriarchal distribution of resources. She contends that 'brideprice' is not so much

recognition of a women's contribution into the household, nor a payment for the loss of a productive member, but compensation to the father and his agnatic group for past expenditure on her maintenance. Women here have no control over marriage payments, and no rights to any part of the bridewealth or affinal property. The patterns of negotiation between the father and the husband show them to be the 'markers of the transfer of wealth'. She argues that they are perhaps worst off than the upper-caste Hindu women because they may have no control on marriage payments decisions for the next generation.

Botticini and Siow (2003) said that the standard economic model of dowries, implicit in the seminal work of Gray (1981) assumes that dowry and bridewealth are used as pecuniary transfers to clear the marriage markets. The situation is such that when grooms are relatively scarce, brides pay dowries to groom and when brides are scarce, grooms pay bridewealth to brides. Dowry is a component of bridal wealth and as other components of bridal wealth grow, dowries will disappear and may be replaced by bridewealth or brideprice. Though, it faces two potential objections. Firstly, if the main purpose of dowry is to clear the marriage market, how marriage markets clear in societies without dowry or bridewealth. In societies that previously had dowries, bridewealth does not emerge when dowries disappear. Second, the standard model of dowries cannot account for why in many *dotal* societies the timing of intergenerational transfers is gender specific, with parents assigning dowries to their daughter leaving bequests to their sons.

Basu (2005) raised the question on where does one draw the line between 'gifts' in accordance with community norms and dowry? If dowry or bridewealth is seen or function as a form of inheritance, then the gifting is encoded with both material and emotional meanings and how this might affect the *de jure* inheritance practices and women's access to a fuller share of both natal and affinal resources.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter deals with the concept upon which the term marriage prestations is build and which all premise are based upon here. The meaning and concept of bridewealth as is understood by the different scholars and the different views they have and the stand they take. It deals more with a review of the literature to understand the long debate and the discussion that has continued over a period of time and based on these premise the next chapter on the Naga society will be looked at. Bridewealth as has been understood and how far is it true that it is an economic exchange as has been said and understood. The different kinds of prestations such as the bridewealth, dowry and the gifts which the both the family have to give each other during marriage. Some scholars have taken all this prestations as the exchange for the daughter or son during marriage. Thus, how far it is justified and how do one explain to that?

While trying to understand prestations it is seen that the daughter's bridewealth is used for the son's wife and the bridewealth paid for the son's wife come back in the form of the daughter's bridewealth. Thus, what goes out comes back in the family of orientation again though from different member. The question that comes in mind is that, what is the whole idea of this bridewealth? In case of dowry, the dowry paid for the daughter comes in the form of the son's dowry and though dowry is supposed to be a gift from the girl's parents to the girl and the girl is supposed to have a complete control over it, but how far is it true? Is it really a gift when it is being demanded by the groom to give certain gifts and items and proposal for marriage comes apart when it is not fulfilled? To what extent is it qualified to fit in the category of a gift? All these issues and concerned were posed which is very difficult to come up with a single solid answer.

While looking into the system and practice of the marriage prestations, it is found that every society has its own unique ways of presenting and making the marriage payments. Bridewealth payments are very widely practiced by the African societies and by the tribal societies all over and also among the Naga Tribes of North-East India though it is known and understood differently. While the systems of dowry is common in Asia and Europe. It is seen that one is not simply paying a marriage payment but

with these payment an alliance is created among different families groups. Among these primitive groups there is an idea of Exchange which plays a very important role in their kinship relations. Here, women are not being sold as it was mistaken in the notion of the term “brideprice,” but they exchange their women among each other. This in turn creates, a whole set of relationships, kinsfolk and family. Bridewealth is given by the groom as an acknowledgement of the services and care given by the bride’s family to the bride and as compensation for the loss they are going to occur by giving their daughter in marriage.

Sometimes in order to pay bridewealth, the groom has to incur to debt, which again has its significance in the economy of the society as well. Through the payments of the bridewealth, the husband acquires rights over his wife and the children that come along and so long as the payment is not complete the husbands is answerable to the wife’s natal family for his action. Again the bridewealth payment has a cyclical role because what one pays as bridewealth for the son comes back through the daughter in the form of her bridewealth when she marries.

There is again a ritual significance which needs to be looked at, because it carries with it many different aspects of the customs and rituals associated with the different society. As we have already seen that the marriage prestations and payments of bridewealth varies from society to society and the items and terms involved in it are varies. For some societies, the bridewealth payment is just a token gift while in others, it is substantial. Though these practices are changing over time, but the meaning associated with it needs to be looked at properly to understand different societies of its marriage practice, customs and tradition. Above all, why this bridewealth are paid in the first place and significance in the society and its continuation over a period of time and why it has still survived? We can trace the similarity between the practice of African bridewealth and the Naga tribes along with some characteristics of dowry as well. Thus, the next chapter makes a conscious effort to look into the practices of the Naga tribes, to understand marriage prestations in terms of bridewealth and dowry.



## Chapter 2

### *Social Structure and Marriage Practices in Naga Society*

#### **Introduction**

The state of Nagaland lies between 25° 6'N to 27° 4'N latitudes and 93° 20'E to 95° 15'E Longitudes. It has an area of 16,579 sq. Kms. The state is bounded by Assam in the west, Arunachal Pradesh in the north, Manipur in the south. It has an international boundary with Burma in the east. According to the 2001 census, the population of Nagaland is 19,88,636, of which the male population is 10.42 lakh and female 9.47 lakh. The density of the population is 120 per sq. km. and the sex ratio is 909 female per 1000 male.<sup>1</sup>

There are around sixty Naga tribes inhabiting in Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar. There are sixteen major tribes inhabiting the state of Nagaland such as the Angami, Ao, Lotha, Sumi, Chakasang, Chang, Konyak, Khiamniungan, Sangtam, Rengma, Phom, Yimchungru, Zeliang, Kuki, Puchury and Kachari.<sup>2</sup>

It is indeed very difficult to define and give a general account of the different tribes covered by the word "Naga" as there are both differences and similarities among them just as there are many aspects of their life and culture which is parallel to the other tribes of India and other parts of the world. As it is not possible to cover all the Naga tribes, the customs and practices of the few tribes living in the hill state of Nagaland have been mentioned by bringing in their unique institution and practices which will give a glimpse of the Naga societies. The main focus in this chapter is the institution of marriage and marriage prestations where in, the society and culture of the Nagas will be discussed. It also highlight how marriage and marriage prestations

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<sup>1</sup> State Human Development Report. 2004. p. 14

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* p. 19

takes place among the Naga society and the tribe such as the Angami, the Ao, the Lotha and the Rengma and Sumi have been taken as a point of reference.

The origin of the word “Naga” have been a source of much debate among the scholars. According to Hokishe (1986) the most accepted viewpoint is taken from the word “Naga” with its connotations in the Burmese. In Burma the Naga tribes are called “Na-Ka”, which means people or man or folk with a “pierced ear-lobe”. The piercing of the ear lobes is the widely practiced among the Naga tribes.<sup>3</sup> In-fact among the Sumi tribe, the piercing ceremony forms a very important initiation rite for the young boys about to enter into manhood. The piercing of ears marks the attainment of ‘man-hood’ for the boys. They are now fit to wear white cotton in their ears and join in the war dances performed on various festivals in the social life of the village.<sup>4</sup>

Jamir (2005) points out that, earlier all the members of the Nagas had pierced ears as their custom which was inherited from the ancient civilization. The custom allows the person irrespective of man or women having pierced holes to participate in their national ceremony and piercing ears was the necessary criteria to qualify in dancing ceremony as a citizen of their community. Even today all those people born before Second World War have big pierced ears.<sup>5</sup>

### **Society and Culture of the Naga**

The smallest social unit is the family or extended household. The basic interest of every Naga is in his family, the clan, the *khel*<sup>6</sup> and the village, which he regards as his culture and must not be interfered with. It is said that the Nagas are passionately attached to their land, system of land tenure, the arrangements for the government of

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<sup>3</sup> Sema , Hokishe. 1986. p. 3

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Jamir, N. Talitemjen and A. Lanunusang. 2005. p. 13

<sup>6</sup> Every Naga village is divided into a unit or colony which is known as Khels. There is a khel elders and representatives who look into the matters of the village.

his village, the organisation of cultivation and the administration of tribal justice through the village and the tribal courts.<sup>7</sup>

### **1) Kinship and Family**

According to Leela Dube (1974) broadly speaking, kinship includes such features as clan-especially their mythical origins, totemic associations and their role in exogamy and other units based on accepted kinship; family or household; cultural rules regarding descent, inheritance successions and residence; marriage regulations; customary kinship behaviour; and a list of kinship terms.<sup>8</sup> Like any other society, kinship and family plays a very important and dominating role among the Naga society.

The Naga have patrilineal society and the male ascendancy is complete with them. The family line is traced through father and the property is also passed on through the male line. The place of residence is patrilocal where in, they go to the groom's village and clan land but as a rule, they have to set up their own house. Thus, in practice it is verilocal and nuclear family. Joint family is not in practice though the youngest son inherits the family house. In case there is a widowed mother, he looks after her and takes care of her. Under the rule of exogamy, the mother comes from another clan an entirely different group of families. Among different Naga tribe, clan exogamy is practiced but unlike other tribal society, cross cousin marriage is not in practice.

Through marriage, a whole set of relations are created and the kinship networks are extended. Thus, kinship can be through marriage which is called affinal kinship and through blood or common ancestors which is called consanguine kinship. Since the society is patrilineal here, the sons inherits from the father and all the rights in women rest with the father until the girls gets married and after marriage it passes to

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<sup>7</sup> Elwin, Verrier. 1961. p. 9

<sup>8</sup> Dubey, Leela. 1974. p. 4

her husbands.<sup>9</sup> Through marriage, women are married into the groom's family and she becomes allied with her husband's family. It is thus seen that women are always under the control and domination of men without any space of their own.

The clan sociologically is as important as the marriage unit. Among the different tribe of the Naga society, clan plays a very important role in the function of society. The law of exogamy obligates marriage outside the clan, though the active participation of the clan today is not very discernible. Clan is recognized as a unit for *genna*<sup>10</sup> purposes, especially in case of death.

## **2) Village Administration, Politics and Customary Law**

The Naga society is governed and administer by the village Chief. Every village has a village Chief which is either hereditary or elected by the village members depending on the tribe. The village Chiefs have complete powers over the village administration. The Chief and the village elders looked into all matters of the village- the law and order situation, settle disputes and punishment according to the customary laws which have been followed since time immemorial. It was also the custom for the village Chiefs to arrange truces and alliances with other village or tribe and it was common for the Chief's son to marry the daughter of another village Chief to cement alliance and to bring to an end the enmity.<sup>11</sup>

The Naga society presents a varied pattern of near dictatorship and extreme democracy. The Sumi, Lotha, Konyak and Chang practiced a system of hereditary Chieftainship. The Ao, the Angami and the Rengma have more democratic system of

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<sup>9</sup> Hutton, J. H. 1968. p. 28

<sup>10</sup> Genna has its derivation from the Angami word "Kenna" signifying anything forbidden. According to Hutton (1969), the acts of worship have been spoken of as "gennas" because there is no suitable English word which describe the word and has become regularly used in the Naga Hills for various incidents of magico-religious rites. P. 189-190. Davis in Verrier Elwin book, Nagas in the Nineteenth century, 1969, has also described genna as used in two ways by the Naga. 1. It may practically mean a holiday, i.e. owing either to the occurrence of a village festival or some such unusual occurrence as an earthquake, eclipse, or burning of a village within the sight of his own. 2. Genna can also mean anything that is forbidden. Genna sometimes affect the whole villages, sometimes only some particular khels or a single household.

<sup>11</sup> Mills, J.P. 1937. p. 139

village administration. The Sumi have hereditary Chiefs which pass from generation to generation from father to son and the chief enjoys an autonomous power. Among the Lotha the chieftainship was hereditary, in the family of the men who originally founded the village but not necessarily from the father to the son. The most suitable man could become the chief by virtue of his character<sup>12</sup>

The Konyak have very powerful chiefs or *Ang* who are regarded as “sacred” and whose word is taken as the law. Even today there is a Great *Ang* (chiefs) who govern the village and the office of the *Angs* is hereditary. Even the *Ang* has to work hard to earn respect by giving out a feast, where people build him a new house—a noble house. They have sacred blood of the chiefs, pure and undiluted in their veins.

“There can be no more exclusive community than that of the great *Ang* clan, for as the kings of Egypt kept the royal blood pure by marrying their own sisters, so the great *Ang* take their wives from the great *Ang* clan and it is only the children of such a union that acquire the fathers rank”<sup>13</sup>

The Ao’s however, run their local self-government through elected bodies of elders who represent the main family groups in the village called Tatar. The members to this council are elected by the village from time to time.<sup>14</sup> With regards to the Angami, Hutton (1921) remarks: it is difficult to comprehend how in view of their peculiar independence of character, their villages held together before the coming of the British government.<sup>15</sup> The Angami were never ruled by the chiefs, and no individual ever have had the authority over the entire village community. The villages were run strictly on democratic lines and no one could command his neighbours.

The coming of the British to the Naga Hills brought to an end the power of the village Chiefs which was a great loss for the Naga tribes and it became next to impossible to revive the power because it is bound to disappear as the aggrieved

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<sup>12</sup> Mills, J. P. 1922. p. 96

<sup>13</sup> Furer-Haimendorf, von. 1939. p. 98

<sup>14</sup> Chib, Sukhdev Singh. 1980. p. 82

<sup>15</sup> Elwin, Verrier. 1961. op.cit., p. 7

party can always appeal to an alien law administered by the British magistrate who have the best intentions in the world un-combined with the knowledge of indigenous custom.<sup>16</sup> The British government during their early stage of administration in the Naga Hills introduced the institution of Gaon-Burah<sup>17</sup> in order to look into the administration of the village. After the settlement of administration with the Nagas by the Indian Government, with the Nagaland state, the Nagaland government introduced the institution of Do-Bashi. However, the institution of the Gaun Burah was continued as well.<sup>18</sup> Today in every village, there is a village council which consist of the Gaun Burah and the village elders and they settle the village dispute and administer law and justice in accordance to the customary laws of the land which is sanctioned by the constitution under article 371 A, the special act of 1962.

### 3) Economy and Religion

The village is a distinct unit of political and economic importance. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood, and the whole village economy is depended on agriculture. A great ambition of the villager is to have a bumper harvest and in the early past, one main important motivation behind the practice of head hunting was the belief to ensure good harvest.<sup>19</sup> The Nagas practiced two methods of cultivation; the shifting cultivation which is locally known as *jhum* or slash and burn cultivation, practiced by the Ao, the Lotha and the Sumi. In the Angami areas a more modern form of terrace cultivation is practiced widely. Rice is the main staple food and rice beer is the main drink of the people here.

One remarkable feature of the economy is that, absentee landlords are unknown in this part of the country and it is rare to find a man making his living by working for others.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the question of absentee landlords and a class of landless peasants do not fit in here. The village population as a whole remains gainfully employed in

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<sup>16</sup> Mills, J. P 1937. op.cit., pp. 139-140

<sup>17</sup> Gaon means village and Burah mean elders. Thus, it literally means the elder of the village.

<sup>18</sup> Sen, Sipra. 1987. p. 15

<sup>19</sup> Singh, Prakash. 1990. p. 152

<sup>20</sup> Mills, J. P. 1937. Op.cit., p. 75

productive activities and there is no surplus labour either. Apart from the agricultural activities they depend and engage themselves in handicraft making during the off agricultural season. Spinning, dyeing, weaving, painting on clothes, pottery, woodwork, leather making are a large part of the tribal economy. Hunting and fishing is one of their main social activities.

The traditional Naga religion is Animism. They worship nature and different spirits. They believed in three spirits; the spirit of the Creator, the spirit of the Sky and the spirit of the Earth. It was believed that the spirit are present everywhere and the offerings were made to them and to the souls of ancestors but they are rarely asked to actively intervene for the offerer's good. It is of supreme importance to avoid all the forbidden acts and the defaulters are believed to be punished by the spirit with sickness and in some cases even death.

The spirit in general is known by the Sumi as *Tughami*, the Ao calls it *Lichaba*, *Potsos* by the Lotha, the Angami knows it as *Kepenopfu* and the Konyak as *Gawang*. This divine spirit is the creator of all things and can bring good and evil upon men. The *Genna* is observed when the village Chief called for to perform the rites and rituals. The most potent religious ceremonies are the individual or village *genna* during which the works and contacts with the outside world are avoided. During the *genna* the spirit are to be addressed as to the purpose of the *genna* whether it is for the individual, the family or the village. The essential part of the Naga ritual practices is the sacrifice-*genna* pairing. During the *genna* period everything that is normally active becomes inactive; there is a prohibition on sex, work and consumption of certain foods and venturing outside the village.<sup>21</sup> All the misfortunes are attributed to the malignant influence of the evil spirit.

#### **4) The institution of Head-hunting and Feast of Merit**

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<sup>21</sup> Jacob, Julian. 1990. p. 84

The practice of Head-hunting probably is based on a belief that a soul-matter or vital essence of great power, which reside in human heads. It is believed that by taking the head from another village, a new injection of vital and creative energy will come to the aggressor's village when he brings the head home. It was attributed to the human and animal fertility. It stimulates a better growth, especially when the head is that of a woman with long hair. As a matter of fact, a woman's head was considered a more prized trophy for a variety of reason. Firstly, women were always given the maximum protection by the village folk and taking a women's head would meant penetrating deep into adversary's ranks with all its concomitant risk.<sup>22</sup> Another reason probably could be found in the greater amount of long hair to be obtained for the purpose of garnishing a warrior's insignia and most of all in the inevitable reduction, the killing of women would effect on the birth rate of the hostile village.<sup>23</sup>

According to Julian Jacobs (1990) the subsidiary involvement of women in head-hunting can be seen in two features. First, it is not a necessity for man to be married to take part in head-hunting raid. Second, headhunting by a man does not on the whole confer a right to ornaments for the women, as it does automatically for the man.<sup>24</sup> Thus theoretically it is seen as a cultural practice which can be continued without much involvement of women. In spite of everything that is said and believed, that women here enjoys equal footings with man, it is seen that women's role are assigned only within the four walls of the house or the domestic sphere, which is the private sphere and the public sphere that is outside the house is left to men as their sole domain.

Along with the practice of head hunting, the feast of merit is another important institution in the social life of the Nagas. The *Mithun*<sup>25</sup> sacrifice is the most popular private or religious sacrifice. According to Mills (1926) it is called the 'Feast of

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<sup>22</sup> Singh, 1972. Op.cit., p. 43

<sup>23</sup> Hutton, J. H. 1969. p. 164

<sup>24</sup> Jacobs, Julian. Op.cit., p. 131

<sup>25</sup> Mithun is a bison, which look like a bull, a kind of totemic animal used by the Naga as a sacrificial animal.



Merit'.<sup>26</sup> A central features of the traditional Naga life where the splendour, colour, and extravagance of Naga life are concentrated. The stones are erected and each stone represent a certain amount of wealth expended for, on setting them up a great feast is given out by some individual who thus perpetuates his own memory. Even the grave of such a person were specially decorated.

Verrier Elwin (1961) commented that, the Nagas are very procedure minded about the dress and in the olden days, the finest clothes are worn only by the head-hunter or by the donors of the Feast of Merit. These feasts consist broadly speaking of the series of ceremonies in a rising scale of importance leading finally to the sacrifice of the *Mithun*-the great creature which is the chief domestic animal and is used almost as a currency to settle a marriage or pay a fine.<sup>27</sup> The final gennas in the series, which not all men will attain, may involve not only the stone dragging ceremony, but also the erection of the Y-shaped post, or the adding of carved house horns. One common criteria for the celebration of the Feast of Merit among the different Naga tribes is that, only the married couple are eligible and no single individual whether he or she is rich or well off, a divorce or widow cannot offer this 'Feast of Merit' because both the husband and the wife have a conspicuous part to take up and roles to play.

While looking at the manner in which *Mithun* is used and killed in the feast of merit, Verrier Elwin (1961) mentions that,

“the bull killing sacrifice and the killing of the *mithun* in the Naga feasts are done almost in the Vedic manner, in each case the animal being killed by a sharp stake of wood which pierced its heart, and the important place given to the wife of a man performing these sacrifice is another point of contact”.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Mills, J. P. 1926. p. 257

<sup>27</sup>Op.cit. Elwin, Verrier. Op.cit., p. 10

<sup>28</sup> ibid. p.11

The giving out of the Feast of Merit was considered to be a ritual arena for men. In most of the communities, women are not allowed to give out the feast by themselves though women play an important role and there is an emphasis on male-female interdependence and cooperation.

### **The Social Institution of Marriage in Naga Society**

Among the Naga tribes, marriage is a systematically organized understanding between the heads of two households whereby the woman are transferred and recruited into the households. Such a transaction involves a reciprocal rights and obligation not only between two persons who are married but also between two household who forms an affinal alliance. The obligatory rules of exogamy are observed very strictly within an exogamous patrilineal group. These rules are, prohibition of the marriage between the people of the same family, lineage and clan which are rooted deeply in the concept of incest associated with supernatural sanctions. It is believed that the breach of exogamy may result in barren marriage or the children of such union may be abnormal

Marriage between two household within a clan territory enables the kinsman to maintain intimate relations. While analyzing the collected genealogies, it is observed that every new marriage is a transaction between any two lineages and there is no rule that a pair of lineages will constantly renew their marriage links. It is to be noted that during marriage, the transfer of women's right is never absolute or permanent in tribal jural and economic sense. The important aspect of her rituals, economic and jural rights remain with her patrilineal group and with the passage of time the women is drawn more and closer into her husband's lineage but she can never become the member of that lineage

#### **1) The *Morung* (the bachelor's house) and the girl's dormitory**

Till recent past the *Morung* continues to be a central institution and dominate the social and cultural life of the Naga village communities. It is in this *morung* that young people decide and contemplate on the marriage. The *Morung* or the dormitory for the young unmarried men is very prominent in most Naga village. It is in this *Morung* that all the young people of the society are trained in different walks of life. The *morung* is a multifunctional institution and is considered as the pride of the settlement, the guard-house, recreation club, and centre of education, art and discipline and have an important ceremonial purpose as well.

Mills (1922) said that, the Nagas talks of his happy *Morung*-days much as an Englishman talks of his school days.<sup>29</sup> It is in the *morung* that the young generation of the village is reared to manhood in the traditions of the particular tribe. Decaying “*Morungs*” indicate the decaying village and well-used or well-kept *morungs* a vigorous community. When the past is no longer glorified in and the future seems dark and uncertain, the “*Morung*” falls into decay. Young man spends the rest of their youth life in the *morung* till they get married and set up his own house with his wife. The Ao’s calls this institution as *Ariju*<sup>30</sup>, and the Lotha called this building *Champo*<sup>31</sup> and no women is allowed to set her foot inside the *Morung*. It is customary for the Lotha boys that when they get married and leave the *morung*, they have to pay a small fine of meat to their late companions as compensation for the loss of labour.<sup>32</sup> The Angami knows it as *Kichuki* and the Sumi calls the boys dormitory as *Apuki* and girls as *Iliki*<sup>33</sup>. Among the Rengma the *morung* is known by different names as *Rensi*, *Azughu* and *Awikhu*.<sup>34</sup>

There is a dormitory for the girls to sleep when they reach the years of understanding till they are married, corresponding to the *morung* for boys among certain Naga tribes as the Ao, Chang, Lotha, Rengma and Sumi. These are in the front rooms of

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<sup>29</sup> Mills, J. P. 1922. Op.cit., p. 25

<sup>30</sup> Talitemjen., 2005. Op.cit., p. 75

<sup>31</sup> Mills, J. P. 1922. Op.cit., p. 24

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.* p. 97

<sup>33</sup> Sema, Najekhu Yephtho. 1985. p. 36

<sup>34</sup> Mills, J. P. 1937. Op.cit., p. 50

one or two house in each khels. Among the Western and Eastern Rengma, the girls sleeping platform is high up under the roof. To get up to it a girl climbs a notched log and once there, is safe from male remorseless. Married women were not supposed to climb on to these platforms and for the man to do so is forbidden because it is taboo. Even the pounding tables below the platform are not supposed to be used by the lovers at night.<sup>35</sup>

## 2) The Rites of Passage

During the earlier past, there was a practice among the Naga tribes where the youngest and often the prettiest girls wear their hair closely cropped as a sign of virgin. The Angami used to practice a trial kind of marriage and it is commented that hardly one percent of these marriage led to permanent union. Just as a girl advertise her new status by growing a hair, the young man boast of his first love affair by decorating his black loin-clothes with three rows of pure white *cowrie*<sup>36</sup> shells, while a man succeeding in seducing either a married women or have a simultaneous love affairs with two sisters proudly adds a fourth strings of cowries shells to his lion-cloth.<sup>37</sup> The number of strings of *cowry* shells represents the number of women with whom he has a relationship. A young Konyak girl wearing leaden ring in their ears signify that they are not old enough for lovers. The girl is considered old enough to have a lover only when she changes the laden rings of her childhood to brasses. Thus, boys always know where they start and there is no playing at hide and seek and no risk of the reproaches of infuriated parents.

## Marriage Practices and Prestations among the different Naga Society

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<sup>35</sup> There is a belief that when a sexual act is commit on a pounding table in any house, it cause the food supply to fall and therefore it is forbidden for the lovers to meet on the pounding table. For more details see Mills, 1937. p. 53

<sup>36</sup> Cowrie Shells are used are while shells from the sea shore and it is used for decorating the costumes and is also won as neck piece.

<sup>37</sup> Furer-Haimendorf., 1939. Op.cit., p. 15

In every marriage, marriage prestations takes place in one form or the other. Among the Naga tribe, marriage prestations takes place during marriage. Since the prestations here is made by the groom's family to the bride's family it is seen more closer to the bridewealth. Here, part of the bridewealth can be paid off by the groom with his labour. The marriage ceremony varies from tribe to tribe and according to the merit of the case. The payment of dowry though not in very strict term, is paid and the payment of bridewealth is a must. Formerly, bridewealth was all paid in kind till recently the new currency came and replaced it partly. The amount of bridewealth is high among the Sumi, the Lotha and the Rengma and it is usually paid in instalments. Among the other tribes such as the Angami and the Ao it is very nominal and is just a token gift or gestures.

While contemplating on marriage, it is customary for the boys to propose the girl for marriage and thus an elderly man or women is send to the girls house to convey the message and the negotiator plays a very important role in the settlement of the marriage. An omen for the match is seen by strangulating a chicken. If the girl agrees to the proposal she is ask to confirm it through divination in her dreams and if she dreamt of good things, the proposal is accepted and if it forbade evil the proposal for marriage is rejected.

When the proposal is agreed upon, the marriage ceremony is held as soon as possible to avoid unforeseen obstruction or bad luck. If there is a death on either side of the two families, the wedding ceremony is postponed till a lapse of one year from the date of death. In some cases the marriage is even annulled before it takes place as it is considered to be an unfortunate matrimonial alliance simply because a death occurred in the family during the course of negotiations for marriage. The breach of engagement is shameful as it projects disgrace for the man and when such circumstance arise attempts are made not to divulge the performance of betrothal ceremony prior to celebration of the marriage ceremony lest it brings discredit to the parties involved<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Goswami, M. C. 1985. Pp. 21-22

## 1) The Angami Nagas

Among the Angamis, marriage is a fact through which the whole set of rules comes into force whereby women are transferred and recruited into the households. This kind of transaction follows reciprocal rights and obligations whose implication and significances could be better understood only in the context of wider kinship and social organization. Monogamy is the socially accepted practice and especially an Angami woman is strictly bound by this practice of monogamy, and a breach of this prescription on their part entails severe punishment from the society. On the other hand among man both monogamy and polygamy are practice though polygamy is not very popular.

The Angami do not have elaborate bridewealth practice though there is a slight variation in the practices between the Southern, the Western and the Eastern group. Among most Angami the bridewealth is a very nominal token gesture; a few chickens, a couple of pigs, and a spear, but in some village the sum of rupees twenty to hundred are paid as part of the marriage prestations. The groom presents a few spears to his own maternal uncle as a mark of respect, surprisingly there is no practice of giving anything to the girl's relatives.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, the girl's parents make handsome presents to the son-in-law in the form of paddy, rice beer and in some very exceptional cases even plots of land, but it has to be remembered that the father-in-law can make a gift of self acquired property only. The groom and his relatives are not supposed to visit the bride's house, instead they send an elderly woman with other two or three women as a go-between to the bride's house with an even number of hoes and rice beer in a pot of Lao as a token of present send by the groom to the bride.

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<sup>39</sup> Hutton, J. H. 1969. p. 220

Marriage amongst the Angami is more of a civil and formal one unlike other Naga tribes which are very ceremonial and ritual oriented. The most important part of the marriage ceremony is the distribution of the marriage meat. It is a task which needs to be carried out very carefully as there are certain customs which regulate the distribution of this meat, determined by the anatomical features of the animal. If a mistake occurs in the act, it is severely criticized and considered not a very good sign.

During marriage women's rights are transferred. The rights such as; the rights over a women's procreative powers and over the sexual services, rights over domestic services, rights over economic services and the rights of co-residence. The payment of the bridewealth is very important; it validates the transfer of rights over the sexuality of women. Though the economic rights are acquired by the husband, the girl's parents retains the rights to call her back when ever they feel needed either temporarily or permanently depending on the situations.

It is also to be noted that during marriage, women brings dowry with her. She not only brings her *Pozuopu* land during marriage, but also lots of other articles such as cattle, ornaments, clothes and paddy. All these articles are called *Tenumi-Shirphro* in Angami. *Pozuopu* land cannot be sold out and it is essentially a martilineally inherited property which is transmitted only through a female line, from mother to her daughter and daughter to grand daughter on their marriage.<sup>40</sup> The Angami follows five different types of marriage practices; The *Sheishe Keri* marriage, the *Meri Keri* marriage, *Hisu Keri* marriage, *Noho Keri* marriage and the *Thakra Keri* marriage.<sup>41</sup>

*Sheishe Keri* is the first type of marriage where all the traditional marriage rituals are performed. It is mandatory for both the couple to be young and the first marriage for both of them. It is essentially an arranged marriage and the parent plays a very

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<sup>40</sup> Goswami, B. B, Sarkar, J and Danda, D. 1988. Pp. 128-129

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 123. Goswami, M. C (Ed). 1985. pp. 32-34

important role. People married in this category do not usually marry for the second time. The second is *Meri Keri* marriage, where both the couple marry again, or one of them for the second time. Here the rituals of *Sheishe Keri* marriage are not observed except one rituals of the gift of rice beer by the bride to the bridegroom. The *Hisu Keri* marriage takes place when a woman becomes pregnant before marriage and she is compelled to name the person responsible for her pregnancy after which the marriage takes place between them before the birth of the child. Sometimes, marriage takes place by elopement and it is socially accepted by the society. The *Noho Keri* marriage is followed where the parents does not take active role. Instead the individual themselves arrange the marriage, a kind of love marriage. If it is the first marriage for both the partner, all traditional rituals are observed. In case of remarriage no rituals are performed. The fifth is the *Thakra Keri* marriage, where marriage is only symbolic. Here a physically disabled woman is married to another physically disabled man with very limited formalities. The only change it brings is that, the woman is allowed to grow her hair longer.<sup>42</sup>

## 2) The Ao Nagas

The Ao practice a monogamous marriage and can have only one wife at a time. Under the marriage laws, divorce is permitted if at all the wife and the husbands do not want to live together. The Ao's have *Chongli* and *Mongsen* group and there is variation in their marriage customs and practices. When a marriage proposal is agreed upon, a fish present called *Kilango* is given by the boy to the girls parents. After this the token bridewealth known as *Senment* is decided and a special payment is made by the young man to the girl's parents.<sup>43</sup>

It is customary for the man to work for about a month at the girl's parent's house and the girl for a month at his house. After this process, the man goes fishing with his friends and poisons the stream for fish where the girl's parents are presented with the

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<sup>42</sup> Goswami, M. C. Op.cit., p. 34

<sup>43</sup> Bendangangshi and Apok Aier, I. T. 1990. p. 135



large share of the catch. The girl's parents return some portion to the man, and the rest they send as present to the relatives of both the side also to the girls of the daughter age groups and this act is regarded as a public announcement of the engagement.

Everyone who receive the fish present from the girl's parent's bring a little return present of cotton, rice, cooking pot and many other things on the morning of the marriage-day.<sup>44</sup> In return the girl's parents kills a big fat pig and feed them and all the girls of the bride's age groups are to bring in two baskets of firewood each, where the parents of both the parties are given a portion of it and the rest is stacked at the new house. This payment is made in kind but the amount differs from village to village and from person to person. The girl's parents demand ten to thirty baskets of paddy with a *dao* or two and some other small things. In case the girl divorces within few months of their marriage, half of the bridewealth paid is returned. On the day of marriage, a special sacrifice is made to the God. A flawless cock is offered as special sacrifice given by the old man from the clan of the bridegroom on behalf of the newly married family to God the destiner of all kinds of blessings, for longevity of their lives, for bearing children like bamboo and cane shoots and for the riches.<sup>45</sup>

### 3) The Lotha Nagas

The Lotha tribe may fairly be said to have an exogamous system which is in the process of breaking down. Marriage between members of different clans is allowed everywhere and is especially common among the Southern Lotha. Among the Lotha polygamy is practiced mainly among the rich well to do man. Girls as a rule are married while young. Marriages are almost entirely matters of arrangement. As a custom the price paid for the wife is usually above rupees hundred. Marriage within the circle of a man's blood relations is not permitted. The bridewealth apart from the

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<sup>44</sup> Mills, 1926. Op.cit., p. 273

<sup>45</sup> Bendangangshi, I. T. 1990. Op.cit., p. 136

labour is always paid in instalments and never paid in a lump sum as to all intents and purposes.

The bridewealth is discussed and settled by the two families, and the bridegroom gives the girl a rain-shield, a small carrying basket and a *dao* handle. It is only after these preliminaries are satisfactorily settled, the ceremony of *tsoyuta* (eating and drinking) takes place and with this the engagement becomes binding. During this ceremony the male relative holds the bride and the groom's hand and swings his hand backwards and forwards eight times, praying that the couple, who by this ceremony are made man and wife, will live long and happily together. The bridegroom then kills a pig and gives about twelve pounds of meat to his father-in-law.

The ceremony of *ponyiratsen* is regarded by the Lothas as a sort of initiation into married life. If a bachelor is to marry a widow it would be performed for him. Were a married man to take a spinster as a second wife it would be performed for her, but were a married man to take a widow it would not be performed at all. The groom is forbidden to have connection with his wife before *Tsoyuta* and it is believed that to do so would result in the sterile marriage. The bridegroom continues to work in his father-in-law's house till the next festival comes around and the *Halem* ceremony puts an end to his rather laborious honeymoon.

The money which is paid by the husband for his wife is collectively known as *Oman* (bridewealth), but it is divided into a number of items. Hutton (1922) discussed the details of the marriage price amongst the Lotha's. The first payment is called *Chika*, and it is paid not to the girl's parents, but to her mother's father or mother's brother. The amount is Rs.1 and this is paid as soon as *Tsoyuta* has taken place. The second is *Nzuiman*, the amount can vary from Rs. 8-10 is paid to the girl's parents as a cost of bringing her up. The third payment is *Nvaman*, Rs.10, the price for not working in his father-in-law's house. The fourth payment is *Kitsoman*, Rs. 2, the price of not building his father-in-law's house. The third and fourth items are only paid in cases

where the bridegroom prefers to pay compensation rather than work in his father-in-law's house. The fifth item is *Halamman*, the cost of the pork given to the father-in-law at the *halam* ceremony. The sixth is *Tsangchuman* the amount is Rs. 2, which is paid in cases where the bridegroom does not distribute wood to the members of his father-in-law's clan. The seventh is *Sontsoman* and it is four *annas*, which is paid when the bridegroom does not build a granary for his father-in-law. The eighth is *Tsoroman*, where Rs. 1 is paid as the price for the bride's breasts, and the ninth is *Lentamoman*, where Rs.1 is paid as a price of intimacy with the bride. Man with land usually let the girl's parents cut one's field once or if not the tenth payment of Rs. 8 or 10 is paid instead. The eleventh item is *Otyai-etsoman*, the price of feeding the bride's brothers. This amounts to about two hundred and fifty baskets of rice, or Rs. 30 if paid in cash. The rice or money is paid in instalments often at long intervals. The result is that it is by no means uncommon to find a son paying off the last instalments of his old widowed mother's marriage price. Should a woman dies without payments, her husband makes a final payment varying from Rs. 200 to Rs. 50, called *Etchhiman*, the "price of death". Once *Etchhiman* is received, the girl's parents can no longer claim instalments of *Otyaietsoman*. If the woman dies leaving children behind, a payment of Rs. 1 or 2 called *Mingishi*, is made to her parents or their heirs, who can in this case claim any of the *Otyaietsoman* which may be outstanding.<sup>46</sup>

#### 4) The Rengma Nagas

For the Rengma, marriage is regarded merely as a civil contract, and no religious ceremonies are performed. According to the means of the bridegroom, the fowls, dogs and spirit are given as a present to the parents of the damsel selected and seek her consent along with that of her parents. A grand feast is given by the bridegroom on the day of marriage to the whole village. In return, they are obliged to present the newly married couple with a new house in the village. There is no question of a man remaining a bachelor because he cannot afford to marry, he marries first and may

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<sup>46</sup> Mills, J. P. 1922. Pp. 155-56

pay later. The marriage price may be paid in instalments and he is aware that hard work will produce a living from the soil.

It is very rare for the girl to have a lover before marriage among the western Rengma of the Southern group, where a fine for fornication used to be extracted which can amount to a cow and a pair of spears or rupees sixteen in the olden days. The fine collected is used for buying meat which is supposed to be eaten outside the village by the poorest of the poor of the village and the day is *genna* for the village<sup>47</sup>

Sometimes two rich families who wish to unite might arrange a marriage between a son and a daughter during infancy. In this case the father of the boy gives the girl's father a pair of small shell discs to wear at the end of her long ear-ornaments when she grows up. Such arrangements are considered very binding and it is a matter of "shame" and humiliation if the couples eventually do not marry. The bridewealth runs very high and it is possibly for this reason that polygamy is practically unknown among the Rengma Naga.

During the earlier days, the Rengma paid the whole marriage price in cattle and spearheads. Though, it has gone through some change and some amounts are paid in cash but till now, the spear-head must be included. It is believed that the union will be sterile if the spear-head are not included in the bridewealth payments. These spear-head are a true currency for the Rengma, which is made especially for payment in marriage prices. At a marriage two spear-heads go to the girl's father and on to the girl's mother's eldest brother. He is the person whose enmity is believed to cause sterility. The last is paid after the consummation, and he makes a return present of meat.<sup>48</sup> This practice of giving out spears as bridewealth is very similar to the Zande where, Evans Pritchard (1934) discussed how a girl's status of being single or married is known through the reply that, the spears have been given to her father. It

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<sup>47</sup> Mills, J. P. 1937. p. 43

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.* p. 207

implies that she is engaged or married, if no spears have been given to her, it implies that she is still single or unmarried.

The cash prestations vary according to the dowries of beads which the bride brings with her. For the rich man's daughter, the price paid used to be up to Rs 160 and for the poor man it varies from Rs. 50 to Rs. 60. It is believed that to receive a bridewealth for a daughter is in no way immoral sale of the girl and the price is a compensation for her leaving the clan and is of immense moral value. After all the formalities are through, the bridegroom with his parents and paternal aunty leads a cow to his future father-in-law's house and pays it over as a first instalment of the bridewealth signifying the marriage is now binding, though the marriage may take place after a year or two.

The most important preliminary for the marriage is the final settlement of the bridewealth for which the bride's parents give out a lavish feast where all the relatives of both families are invited. It is the girl's father who starts first by asking as much as he dare, and the youth's father protesting it as too much. An experienced man who acts as intermediary plays a very important role here. The price agreed upon is always Rs.10 more than the actual payment because it is understood that by letting his daughter go for less than the sum agreed upon, the father avoids the stigma of selling her. Meanwhile the groom builds his house, and the wedding is arranged to take place before the big *Lo Tsung Nga* (final clearing feast) in March.

## **The Laws of Divorce, Adoption and Inheritance**

Every tribe have their own customs and practices and the laws of divorce, adoption and inheritance differs from tribe to tribe though there is some similarity. All the properties are under the control of the male head of the family. In case of his death, the headship goes to the eldest son. The woman cannot dispose any property belonging to the family without the knowledge of her children and the relatives of her husband. There is no restriction on widow's remarriage. In case the woman chooses to remarry, she can remarry after a lapse of one year of her husband's death. When the wife marries before the time period of one year, the late husband's family can impose a fine on her according to the custom. Further she forfeits her right to property which is rightfully hers, had she not married within one year of her husband's death.

### **1) Divorce**

Divorce is accepted by the society and incompatibility of temperament can be one of the main reasons. However, it is said that the rate of divorce is generally less common with those tribes where the bridewealth is high, as it broadly involves the re-payment of bridewealth received. When the wife is responsible for the cause of divorce bridewealth is paid back. The bridewealth paid cannot be claimed back when it is the man who is at fault. Thus, the penalty for divorce is severe though very unequal between man and women. However, in a way it binds the marriage and keeps it intact among those tribe practicing bridewealth systems.

In case of divorce, a woman returns to her father's house until she finds another husband. If a woman divorces her husband on her own accord all her 'gift property' including land jurally becomes the property of her husband and children in most cases remain with the father. A wife is required to complete one agriculture season if she wish to divorce her husband because of his intolerable treatment. Woman committing adultery is considered a serious offence by the society. Among the Ao, if

one of the couple deliberately breaks the hearth-stone during the argument they will definitely separate but, there is a possibility of reconciliation. In case, one of them swears and breaks any iron piece, they can never live together again. In such a situation, the house site is abandoned and is not used until the purificatory ceremonies have been performed on it.<sup>49</sup>

Among the Lotha, when divorce occurs, the parents sometimes returns the full amount of the marriage price which they have received, plus a fine of Rs.10. In case where the marriage price is already being divided and spent, it is arranged that the aggrieved husband shall recover the marriage price from whoever marries his run away bride, plus compensation amounting to fifty to hundred rupees.<sup>50</sup> During divorce if the woman is at fault, bridewealth has to be returned and also pays a fine of ten rupees. In case, it is the man who is blamed for divorce, he cannot claim back any of the bridewealth which he has paid and he must also return the whole of the women's dowry and property. In addition, he pays a fine of Rs.10 as well.<sup>51</sup> Divorces for infidelity are very common.

## **2) Adoption**

Adoption is a recognized institution among the different Naga society. It is to be noted that, the Nagas have a patriarchal and patrilineal society and the line of descent is traced through the male blood line. Thus, the main purpose behind the adoption is to facilitate the transmission of line of descent and of properties so that, the line of inheritance may continue through the male line. It is also to ensure looking-after the adopter couple during the period of their frailty. The adopter confers the same rights and privileges on the adopted child as to the natural child in the family of adoption.

Unlike the Ao, Angami, Chang, Rengma and Sumi, adoption was practically unknown among the Lotha. Among the Sumi there is adoptions of the whole family

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<sup>49</sup> Mills, J. P, 1926. p. 275

<sup>50</sup> Mills, J. P. 1922. Op.cit., p. 156

<sup>51</sup> Mills, J. P. 1937. op.cit., p. 215

by paying the marriage price which is known as *Aqha Axe*. There is another practice of adoption distinct to the *Chongli* of Ao. Here, a man who wishes to make a particularly flamboyant display of wealth provided, he has done *Mithun* sacrifice three times, can adopt either a “*morung*” or a “*khe*” of his own village or another village. This is made possible by giving the adopted sons a live *Mithun* and a big present of meat, usually three to four cows and pigs, after which he is entitled to wear cane leggings.<sup>52</sup>

Adoption is attended by performing ceremonies and rituals, both on the part of the clan which is being deserted and the clan which is being adopted to and also on the part of the individual. For the clan which is being deserted, a pig is killed and paid for common subscription. Here, the eldest member of the clan breaks the feast followed by other in order of their seniority. The oldest member takes the chicken deep into the jungle and throws it so that it cannot find its way back to the village.<sup>53</sup> The main idea behind this act is to prevent the repetition of such an occurrence as the desertion of the clan by one of its members.

### 3) Inheritance

The question of inheritance is inter-related with the question of adoption. Only the male members can permanently inherit real property. If a man who has no male issue but have several first cousins, they will divide the property equally. According to the custom practiced, the father divided the bulk of his property during his lifetime amongst his son. When the sons marry and set up a separate house, they each receive their portion of inheritance from their father. It is the duty of the son who inherits the house-site to drag memorial stones to commemorate his parents and set them up in or near by the village.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Mills, J. P. 1926. Op.cit., p. 191

<sup>53</sup> Hutton, J. H. 1969. pp. 119-120

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.* p. 135-136



The property of any son dying without male children during his father's lifetime reverts to the latter but after the father's death, it goes to the youngest son who can keep or share it with his brother according to his discretion. In the case of the younger son himself dying without a male issue, his elder brothers share the property equally. In case of adopted sons the degree of the inheritance is determined at the time of adoption. Among the Lotha, there is a practice that, if one or more brothers have had their marriage prices paid and have been launched into the world by their father, they get less than the younger brother who is still yet to marry.<sup>55</sup>

It has been stated that a man cannot leave real property to his daughters. Without the male issue, the daughter takes all the land purchased by her father during his lifetime though among some tribes, it is contested upon by the male relatives. A man can never-the-less leave as much land as he pleases to the daughter during her but after her death, the property reverts back to the male heirs.<sup>56</sup> The personal property including cash and cattle are given to the daughters. A woman's own property goes to her children. Her personal ornaments are given to her daughters and if she does not have a daughter, it goes back to her father's heir even if she has a son.

### **Christianity and the Changes**

The beginning of Christian work among the Naga began with the visit to the Ao hills by Godhula Babu, an Assamese evangelist in 1871, and in December 1872, nine young men were converted and brought to Sibsagar for baptism by Rev. E. W. Clark.<sup>57</sup> The coming of the missionary into the Naga Hills brought about a tremendous change in the social and cultural life of the Nagas which has its advantages as well as disadvantages. The Christian missionaries were prejudiced in their outlook towards the tribal culture and considered western culture more superior than the traditional tribal cultures and its practices were considered paganistic and were discouraged.

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<sup>55</sup> Mills, J. P. Op.cit. p. 98-99

<sup>56</sup> Hutton, J. H. 1969. Op.cit., p. 137

<sup>57</sup> Downs, Frederick. S. 1983. p. 110-111

Through the work of the missionaries, the Nagas were brought in contact with the outside world for the first time and they come in contact with the people of different cultures. The other missionary activities were evangelisation, education and medical works. They put in the mind of the people that Christianity was more superior to other religion. The Nagas before the coming of the missionaries were animist but as they were thrown open to the wave of Christianity, many traditional social practices and institutions were discouraged thus creating a situation of cultural relativism. One of its major shortcomings was that, with the passage of time the Naga people lost many of the indigenous practices and institutions as it was discarded. Seeing this changes, which was very artificial Haimendorf (1967) wrote that,

cultural inheritance. Christianity and Naga culture seemed to him opposite poles, and on the side of the missionary there had indeed been few attempts to bring the two into harmony and build on that, which was valuable in tribal life”.<sup>58</sup>

The Christian missionaries brought with them the western education which was unknown to the people and for the first time schools were set up in the Naga hills. The Christian missionaries started the formal school in 1879 in Molungyimsen village followed by the establishment of a small printing press in 1883, with the aim to publish school text books and translation of Christian literature.<sup>59</sup> One of the main setbacks was that, many young people got stuck between the western influence and the traditional practices into which they were born into and this led to a situation of a cultural shock. The government officials and missionaries unfortunately took opposite views on what exactly was good for the Nagas, and a great deal of confusion have been caused in the minds of the tribesman.<sup>60</sup> The colonial administrations always legitimise and uphold the traditional village Chiefs and their authority, the missionaries policies on the other hand was based on the theory of superiority and inferiority and it therefore led to the breakdown and disruption of

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<sup>58</sup> Furer Haimendorf. Op.cit., p. 49

<sup>59</sup> Jamir, N. talitemjen and Lanununsang, A. 2005. p. 334

<sup>60</sup> Furer- Haimendorf. Op.cit., p. 50

traditional culture as the natives were not given any space to develop and grow. With the community spirit broken, individualism begins to assert itself, and the western idea of pride in the possession of goods fostered by the missionaries replaces the traditional pride in the lavish expenditure of his wealth.<sup>61</sup> Thus the sense of belonging and oneness which was once the base of traditional society was subjected to questions, which have opened up ways for the development of individualism, where the traditional custom and practices was challenged.

With the advent of Christian missionaries the *morung* which was once an important social institution now lay empty and discarded since it was discouraged by the Christian missionaries. The missionaries attitudes was “How could the Christian boy sleep in the house of the heathen”.<sup>62</sup> The Feast of merit once a very prestigious social institution which binds the society closer is now long gone. One of the main objections to any Christian participation in the feast of merit by the missionaries is the rigid enforcement to teetotalism, as to the Nagas a feast without rice beer was unthinkable. The Christians missionaries’ objects to the feast of merit presumably because the animal used in the feast are not just slaughtered but sacrifice with the appropriate invocations of the spirit.<sup>63</sup> Yet, one think that with a little trouble an institution of an essentially social and economic character could have been remodelled so as to be compatible with the Christian tenets. Today the rites and rituals involved in the feast of merit and its social and cultural significance is out modelled and the story of the feast and its significance is not clearly known to the modern Naga youth which itself is a change, a paradigm shift. Furer-Haimendorf (1967) comments that,

“were such an adjustment impossible, Europe would have long lost all its folk festivals and the Christmas would long ago have been condemned as a pagan symbol”.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *ibid.* p. 48

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* p. 47

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.* p. 48

<sup>64</sup> Furer-Haimendorf. *Op.cit.*, p. 53

With regards to the question of sexual immorality the comparison is wider, the non-Christians carry on pre-marital liaisons and they cannot be termed as immoral, as they are not sinning against their conscience or moral code. When a Christian engaged in such an act he is behaving immorally and the youthful liaisons are common amongst them, though far from being the normal and acceptable practice among the animist. In the village where Christianity flourishes the old system of age groups, each with allotted tasks, tend to decay and it shows that they no longer have necessary discipline and organization. The drinking of rice beer which is a part and parcel of the traditional Naga customary drink was strictly discouraged and prohibited by the missionaries, which led to secret drinking entailing hypocrisy and the adoption of evil substitutes for the comparatively harmless rice-beer.<sup>65</sup>

The converts started discarding the gorgeous richly embroidered clothes, and start wearing western clothes. It is very important to keep in mind that during the initial phase of Christianity, the teaching of the missionaries was completely against the traditional Naga cultural inheritance and practices and the young converts were completely brainwashed. Education no doubt has opened up new opportunities and avenues espically for women to become educated and economically independent. Many women are going for higher studies and joining white colour jobs in towns and have joined the profession of teaching and as nurses. Through the influence of the west on the Naga society, most young people are exposed to pseudo western life style with western music, clothes, language, etiquettes and mannerism which have affected their lives in a big way. They have discarded their ethnic lifestyle, clothes and traditions to adapt alien culture.<sup>66</sup> The traditional clothes and ornaments have thus been discarded and the western dresses like skirt, shirt and pants have taken over. The traditional ornaments are not given any importance, and the mindsets of the people have changed. Gold and silver are given a lot of importance, with the coming of new money.

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<sup>65</sup> Mills, J. P. 1926. p. 417

<sup>66</sup> Mehoratra, Nilika. In Channa, S. M. 1992. p. 177.

Mehoratra<sup>67</sup> wrote that Christianity no doubt has offered a new set of opportunity to the women to participate in public gatherings in church and participate in the discussion but women can never become a pastor and they are allowed to become only deacons in the church as well. It is thus seen that Christianity reinforces the institution of patriarchy which has been the backbone of the traditional Naga society. Today after a very long struggle some Naga tribe such as the Angami and the Ao have ordained women priest but among other tribes this is still yet to happen.

When it comes to the practice of marriage, the old system of traditional marriage ceremony was completely taken over by the Christian marriage also known as “Holy matrimony” solemnised in the church by the ordained priest.<sup>68</sup> On the auspicious day the bride, bridegroom along with parents, relatives and others go to church. According to the Christian practice, the couple is made to stand before the “Holy congregation,” and solemnisation of oath takes place after which the priest pronounce them as man and wife and the whole congregation stands as witness to the marriage covenant. There is no doubt that there is a fusion of the two systems for the ceremony- the Christian tradition and the Naga tradition. The feasting as well as gifts and presents involved are still very traditional but the manner in which marriage is conducted and performed are very westernised.

### **Women’s Status: Continuities and Change**

In the early past the institution of head hunting was a sign of manhood, bravery and valour. It was male centred and women were just used to receive the head in the village. There was no place for women and women were not allowed to go for war fare. They were not even allowed to touch the weapons of the man going for war and it was considered taboo and also a bad sign if the women touch these weapons. One thing which really reinforced the institution of patriarchy is that while taking a head, if the women’s head with long hair is taken, it is considered as a prized trophy.

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<sup>67</sup> *ibid.* p. 170.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.* p. 173.

In the feast of merit both women and man are supposed to play their own part but if we look at the role they both performed, women's role is just assisting in the domestic area of cooking and preparing the rice beer which the man folk consume in the process of celebration. Women weave and make clothes which adorn man after the feast to proclaim of his status. Women were not allowed to take part in performing the rituals. They are excluded and separated from man and are not even allowed to drink water from the same stream with man when they undergo the purification ceremony.

With regards to the status of women, there was hardly any up-liftment visible. In-fact with Christianity, patriarchy was strengthened more strongly, the women's position in the society in some way became more compromised. The institution of priesthood also marginalised the place of women and reinforced the institution of patriarchy in the society as it was a male oriented institution and women were not eligible for the priesthood.

There has always been a prevailing misconception by other people that the women in Naga society are free, liberated and privileged to enjoy a high social status. This idea is only a myth. Very often, Furer-Haimendorf, Von (1939) is misunderstood and quoted to justify the position of women in the Naga society.

“Many women in more civilized parts of India may well envy the women of the Naga Hills, their high status and their free and happy life; and if you measure the cultural life of the people by the social position and personal freedom of its women, you will think twice before looking down on the Naga's as savages”<sup>69</sup>

This has been referred time and again in glorifying the position and status of the women, saying that women in Naga society enjoy more privilege and they have high status in the society. But how far it is true is very questionable if we look at the past

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<sup>69</sup> Furer-Haimendorf, . Op.cit., p. 101

history and the present women situation. It is seen that sometimes women here have lower status than their other counter parts.

Even before the advent of Christianity, Naga woman enjoys freedom in the domestic and social spheres as the private sphere was considered to be the domain of the women and the public sphere the domain of man. Women were not allowed to take part in the decision making of the village and even to this days, while taking decision, if a person change his mind too often they are reprimanded by saying 'don't be like an old women.' It shows how women are looked down by the men folk and are considered not capable of taking any firm decision.

Men and women were allowed the freedom to freely mix, help and work with the other sex, but with regards to headship, property and inheritance and decision making in the society, women still are not given due privilege and opportunity. In fact we see many do's and don'ts laid down for women and if they do not abide by this rules, they are stigmatised and looked down and ridiculed by the society. No doubt the spread of western education has brought about some change in the society and women are now realizing their rights but women here still have a lot to catch up in order to improve their status in the socio-economic, religious and political sphere. The common understanding that the women in this society enjoy equal position with her male counterparts in the society needs to be done away with, because except for the few educated, women in the rural areas are not even aware that they are being subjugated and exploited by their male counter part under the domain of patriarchy.

The status of women today is no better from the earlier days. The force of patriarchy comes very strongly in their way for development. Even the state, under the control of patriarchy, works for exploitation and subjugation of the women in the state. The exclusion of women from the public life begins at the grassroots levels. The public life in the Naga Hills begins with the village council which takes all the important economic, social and political decisions. In the village administration women are not

the members of the village council and they are not even supposed to come near the place where the village elders are gathered.

The **Village Council Act** on paper mandates one-third representation for women, but the village council since time immemorial have been exclusively male domains. Even to contest elections to these seats, women have to take permission from the councils which generally are prompt to veto the proposals.<sup>70</sup> Thus in fact, genders bias is more visible in the state here. There is a desire among the women to take active part in the state politics and initially the leading women members appealed to the various village councils and political parties to nominate women to the representative of the state but the request and appeal falls on deaf ears and was taken as trivial matters. To nominate a women representative they have to drop the male members which the patriarchal state was not forth coming. Thus the participation and role of women in the state politics is at its minimal.

The very fact that, till date there has never been any woman representative in the state assembly is a reflection of how better is the women situation and status in this part of the country. An effort was made by the women organisation to voice out their right and in 2004 Rajya Sabha election, a women candidate was filed to contest but since she need to be nominated and seconded by the state assembly member who are all male and in display of male solidarity and blatant patriarchal bias the candidates name was refused to be proposed by any member of the state legislatures.<sup>71</sup>

Apart from the regular farm work and domestic chore that every women are expected to perform, they also earn by weaving and producing exquisite arts and crafts. The income thus generated goes to the family coffer and in most cases is used to support the education of the children. Sadly for the girls, the Naga society still expects them to come from school and tend to the household chores. The customary laws which are strongly embedded in the traditions of patriarchy are most restricting for the

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<sup>70</sup> Nag, Sajal. In Prasenjit Bishwas and C. Joshua Thomas. (eds.). 2006. p. 219

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.* p. 220



Naga women. Women here does not enjoy the property rights and divorced women usually have no right to keep or bring up the children, even if the divorce was not her fault and she is perfectly capable of looking after the children. Apart from the state high-handedness the assimilation of Christianity instead of evaluating their position has actually strengthen the bias against them.

With regards to the role of women in the peace and solidarity of the state, the Naga Mothers association which works for peace between the state and the insurgent group has also been sidelined. The very fact that the Naga women have been playing a great role in the peace making situation to bring about peace in the conflict ridden situation has been given great importance but the irony is that, in spite of every thing that they have done, they have no say at all in the decision taking.<sup>72</sup> Again when the proposal for the **Women's Reservation Bill** came in the Lok Sabha, the insecurity and viciousness of patriarchy came out in the open. The politics is being institutionalised by the patriarchy. The then chief minister of the state, S C Jamir vehemently opposed the reservation for women in the state. His successor Rio further makes a statement that, "our beautiful darlings are good for politics but not so good in politics." However without realisation he made a profound remark which demonstrate how women are shamelessly appropriated in politics but cannot be given a share in it by the leaders like him <sup>73</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The chapter starts with the social structure of the Naga society to highlights the socio-economic and political life of the Nagas. The Naga society being a patriarchal has always been a male dominated society. The institutions and social life of the Naga society is such that, women here hardly has any part playing which makes one wonder how far is it true to say women here enjoy more privilege in the society than in many part of the country. The marriage and marriage institution of different tribes

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<sup>72</sup> *ibid.* p. 209

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.* p. 217

has been discussed and to what extent women does participate in this institution and where they are placed by the social norms and custom of the society. The changes brought about in the peoples outlook to life and marriage over a period of time and the changes brought by the administrators and the missionaries have been discussed.

Even in the case of marriage, it is seen as an alliance between the two clan or family head where the role of women is not given any importance. It is the family elders who decide what to do and what not to do in the marriage. The whims and fancies of the girl getting married is hardly taken into consideration.

With regards to the institution of marriage and marriage prestations which was the practice of many tribal societies of the world at large and Naga society in particular has also undergone a change. Now the particular amount is not set out formally as bridewealth payment, but during engagement ceremony, the families of both the parties set together and decide on the details of the marriage, on what to do and what not to do and how much is to be spend. They decide on how many pigs and cows are to be used in the marriage process and it is mandatory for the groom to provide all that has been decided plus all the expenditure incurred on during the marriage. The normal expenditure for any wedding today comes to two to three lakhs for a simple marriage.

The Naga society as we know today is very different from the early past. A lot of change and transformation has taken place. Firstly, because of the colonial administrators, the missionaries in the Naga Hills during the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Secondly, the spread of education, impact of westernisation and modernisation has brought about changes in the mind of the people and the peoples perception and understanding to the cultural practices and institution has change some for better and some for the worst. The new wave of globalisation and liberalisation has brought the people closer in some way. In the recent years a lot of inter-tribal and cross-cultural marriages are now taking place, which is making the society culturally interrelated and intermixed which was strictly forbidden earlier.

## Chapter 3

### *Kinship, Marriage and Prestations among the Sumi*

#### Introduction

The Sumi are one of the major Naga tribe. It is not clear how the name originated but it is claimed by some that the name of their progenitor is Sumi. It is also said that the ancestors of the Sumi first uttered the word *Swemi* when he first came out from the heap of soil called *Achapo*, which was prepared by the ant. There is still a village called *Swemi*, in the Sumi country where their progenitor is believed to have settled for a long time.<sup>1</sup> There is another migratory story which suggests that the Sumi group entered the Mao country in Manipur state from Burma and stayed in *Kezakhonoma*. It is believed that there was a stone on which the paddy kept for drying used to get doubled in quantity. When the magic power of the stone disappeared, dispute cropped up among the ancestors and they left the place and established the Sumi, Lotha, Rengma and the Angami communities respectively.<sup>2</sup>

The Sumi tribe are scattered all over the state. They are mainly concentrated in Zunheboto district, the Dimapur district and they inhabit the northern part of Pughoboto in Kohima district of Nagaland. The Sumi areas are mostly hilly and their main habitat at present is Zunheboto district lying at the heights between 1500 and 2500 meters with approximately 1,54,909 Sumi inhabiting the 187 village. The density of the population is 123 person per sq km. The literacy rate of the district according to 2001 census is 63.38 percent, with the male ratio at 75.85 percent and female ratio at 54.16 percent.<sup>3</sup> The language spoken by the community is known as 'Sumi' which belongs to one of the subgroups of the Tibeto-Burmese family. The

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<sup>1</sup> Das, N. K. 1993. p. 154

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> State Human Development Report. 2004. p. 241

people speak only one language, but with a difference and the difference lies in the intonation and vocabulary.

In this chapter I will look at the different practices and customs of the Sumi Naga and how they are inter-related to marriage and marriage practices. It will also examine how the institution of marriage affects the place of individual in the society through the marriage prestations. Through these marriage prestations the status of the person in the Sumi society is determined and till today the stigma or prestige in other case is still attached to the person, his family and lineage. The main focus here is to look into the marriage and marriage prestations among the Sumi societies of Nagaland in the context of *Ame*.

With the advent of Christianity, the Sumi tribe has undergone a lot of changes in their tradition and customs. Some of their age-old tradition blended with the demands of modernity in the Naga society, while some still stands out for their complexity and uniqueness.

### **The Sumi Society and Cultural Practices**

Among the Sumi society, nuclear family is the basic unit of the society. The society is patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal. The line of succession in the community follows the male heir pattern and thus the father is always the head of the family. He is respected, feared and obeyed by all the family members and any conflict among the family members is settled by him. The whole community is divided into different clan groups and the *Kukami* (chiefs) and their advisors always have an upper hand in the society. Hutton (1968) writes that,

“the Sumi in his good characteristics, he is to some extent the Irishman of the Naga tribes, generous, hospitable and frequently improvident. He is very impulsive and very cheery,

and if easily depressed is never for long. In most unpleasant situation conditions he is easily moved to laughter and merriment and under all is a very strong vein of fatalism.”<sup>4</sup>

A great sense of solidarity persists among the Sumi villages. The sowing and harvesting activities are jointly started by the villagers. The reaping and sowing are initiated by the old persons calls *Amthau*, the first reaper. A person's loss or death in the olden days of head-hunting was considered a loss to the village as a whole. The entire village comes together during festivals for worshipping, performing and observing the rituals and during this time the poor in the village are helped by the rich.

One very important institution in the village life is that of the *Aloji*<sup>5</sup> or Field Company which comprises of both sexes in the case of the unmarried and they are pretty well self-component. They nominated their own *aloji tou* (Company leader), who decides which field to be worked at every day by his gang. The members consist of a person of about the same age group and a person enters into *aloji* as soon as he or she is old enough to be left behind to their own devices. After marriage, women left their own *aloji* and go to the *aloji* composed of the married women and widows only.<sup>6</sup> The composition of the gang depends almost entirely on age or contemporaries and marriage is the only factor which entails the virtual separation of sexes.

### 1) Village Administration and Hereditary Chiefs

In the pre-British period, the *Akukau* ruled over the Sumi villages. *Akukau* means the village Chief who rules over the village. Among the Sumi, the village is formed

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<sup>4</sup>Hutton, J. H. 1968. p. 26

<sup>5</sup> In a village, every age group in every *khel* has Field Company which is called *Aloji*. It comprises of both the boys and girls and the member can vary from ten to twenty and they take turn working in each others field. There is a leader in every *Aloji* who is called *Alojitou* and he decides on whose field to work on a particular day. The married man used to have their own *Aloji* group known as *Mucho-loji* and the married women have their own *Aloji* and are called as *Topu-loji*.

<sup>6</sup> Hutton, 1968. Op.cit., p. 153

by the *Akukau's* son and the village is named in his name. The headship is moreover hereditary and is passed on from the father to the son to the grandchildren. Only those person from the *Akukau's* bloodline can become that particular village *Akukau* and no one can contest this power. The Chief holds administrative, judiciary and executive powers within the village. Thus the main characteristic which separates the Sumi from the other Naga tribes is the possession of hereditary village chiefs. Among the Sumi the institution of hereditary village chief is still in practice. These chiefs have many privileges and they are generally in a position far superior to that of an ordinary Naga headman.<sup>7</sup> Under the section 13,3,5 and 7 of the codified Sumi Customary laws, the main founder of the village is entitled for chieftainship and even after his death his sons and grandsons have the legal right to inherit it.<sup>8</sup> These chiefs have many privilege for instance, their subjects cut their *jhum* and cultivate them for nothing. They also gets a portion of every animal killed in the chase.

The *Akakau* is really the secular official, but in virtue of his position as the chief of the village and leader in war he announces the *gennas* for the clearing of the village paths and for the purpose of war and peace. The *Akakau* no doubt is the most important element in the polity of his village. Yet, there are others whose role and contribution cannot be ignored as the *Chochomi*.<sup>9</sup> The *Chochomi* means the man who is pre-eminent and hence, one of the most important individual whom the chiefs employs to help him in managing public affairs. He serves as a sort of herald, whom the chief sends on errands to other villages, and as a deputy to manage the affairs of his own when the chiefs is elsewhere or otherwise engaged.<sup>10</sup> The position and number of *Chochomi* in a village depends on the discretion of the *Akakau* and *Kukami*. It is more convenient normally to have a number of *Chochomi*

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<sup>7</sup> Davis, A. W. 1969. Elwin, Verrier. Ed. pp. 372-373

<sup>8</sup> Rotokha, H. S. 2005. p. 1

<sup>9</sup> The *Chochomi* are those people of eminence in the village who are jointly elected by the *Akukau* and *Kukami* to help and assist them in dispensing their duty and to advise them in taking important decision and also to represent them when they are engaged in some other work elsewhere..

<sup>10</sup> Hutton, Op.cit., p. 151

and it is to the interest of the *Akukau* and *Kukami*<sup>11</sup> to keep the village contented and to help in settling disputes, to assist him in dispensing his power for a transgression of civil or religious customs, to learn the opinion of the community on any particular point and generally to take part in any matters which affects the whole community.

When the British came to the Naga Hills they introduced the institution of *Gaon Burah* (village elders) in each village and the power of the chiefs were given to them. A *Gaon Burah* is always selected by the villager and his post is approved by the government<sup>12</sup>. It was the hereditary village chief who took over this power among the Sumi and approved by the government and even today their post is hereditary. There is a system of manor lords among the Sumi society. The term 'manor' has been used here for what is really the unit of Sumi society, the organised community with the *Akukau* at the head and the *Mighimi*<sup>13</sup> at the bottom. If the term manor is permitted here it has its origin in the system of colonisation by the son's of the chief's accompanied by a number of his father's dependents called *Mighimi*, and also by the runaway thieves or broken man whom he can generally pick up.<sup>14</sup>

The right of the chiefs to extract work on his field varies from village to village among the different Sumi society. Every grown male of the village, including the Chiefs own brothers, is expected to do a certain amount of work for the *Akukau* in a year and there is no limited number of days. Sometimes, the chiefs must give a nominal payment of a little salt or a piece of meat to each worker. In some village where the chief has great personal ascendancy the amount of work which has to be done by his villagers is much more than sixteen days.<sup>15</sup> In 1946 the *Kukami Hoho*

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<sup>11</sup> Usually in the village there is one head chief called *Akukau* and other chiefs in all the khel called *Kukami*.

<sup>12</sup> Das, N. K. 1994. Ed. pp. 159-160

<sup>13</sup> *Mighimi* is a Sumi word used for those people in the village who are poor, without proper family to help and support. They are usually at the mercy of the *Akukau* who provide them with food and a plot of land to cultivate for the season.

<sup>14</sup> Hutton, Op.cit. p. 144

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* p. 147

(Chief Committee) in *Lazami* village fixed the number of days to work in a chief's field to sixteen but at present the work rendered to the chiefs is seven times in a year according to the Sumi customary law.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the changes that have taken place over a period of time, the Sumi still considers chieftainship to be the sole domain of man. However, the Sumi also has the history of having one women village chief, *Innoli*, Teli G. B wife of Ghofuna, from Ighanumi village. When her husband died in 1936, she took over the chieftainship and nobody contested her claim as she was said to be very smart, wise and firm and very just in her action, courageous and chivalrous than any other man. In 1937, she was officially recognised by the British administration as the Chief of her village and she was very successful and well known among other Naga tribe as well.<sup>17</sup> Yet, after a lapse of sixty-nine years in 1996, in western Sumi areas where the village chiefs still has the complete power, a lady took over the village chieftainship. Objecting the admittance of a woman in a male-dominated institution, the western Sumi G. B association called for a meeting where they passed the resolution that women cannot become village G.B, following the resolution the women stepped down from the position and in its place put her minor son. This is an indication of the male dominance over the Sumi society. Though women try to voice out their rights, it gets sidelined because the majority rules and patriarchy is so deeply rooted in the society

## **2) Property and Inheritance**

The Sumi community forms a patrilineal society. The son inherits the property after the death of the father. In case there is no male issue, the property goes to the brother's son and than to the father's brother's son and so on. The land property of the father is not divided among the sons and only the grand father's property is divided among the grandson's. The women and daughter is are not entitled to get

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<sup>16</sup> Sumi Hoho. 2002. p. 24

<sup>17</sup> Kiho, Ghovishe V. 2004. pp. 34-35



any share of the property. In case the clan members agree to divide or share the common property, the eldest of the member announce the decision in front of all the clan members. It is believed that the proposal for division is regarded as liable to entail unpleasant consequences on the proposer in the shape of an early death.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the person who first suggests division is entitled to take one first-class field of his own choice as the price of his proposal and he must sacrifice a pig to avert the consequences of his rash act, while the rest of the property is equally divided and the parent's house is inherited by the youngest son.<sup>19</sup>

As a rule, among the Sumi, land cannot pass to the women by inheritance or gift. In the case of a woman purchasing land with her own money it passes to her male heirs. If she does not have a male heir, it goes to her brothers or male relatives even if she has a daughter. However, a plot of land is also given as a part of the bridewealth payment to the girl's father by the groom and his family.<sup>20</sup> Land passing by inheritance ordinarily goes first of all to the sons of the deceased, who enjoy it in common.<sup>21</sup>

Even to these day, like any other patriarchal society, women are not allowed to inherit the clan property. However, with regard, to the parental property, it depends on the discretion of the parents. The father can divide the lands and all the other property equally among the children and no body can contest the decision. The family house is however given to the youngest son. With regard to food, when a chief has specifically lend a *Mighimi* many basket of paddy, he is entitled to repay with interest at the customary rates. Yet, realisation from person who cannot repay has to be left to the next generation and is therefore naturally often evaded entirely or satisfied only in part.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Das, N. K and Imchen, C. L. 1994. Eds. p. 157

<sup>19</sup> Hutton,. Op.cit., pp. 156-157

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* p. 156

<sup>21</sup> Rotokha,. Opcit., p. 1

<sup>22</sup> Hutton,. Op.cit p. 147

### 3) Law and Governance and Settlements of Disputes

As mentioned earlier, the disputes within the village are settled by the *Kukami* and *Chochomi*. The dispute of private right in most cases is settled by a compromise and agreement. In case of the breach of custom which affects the whole community, such as breaking a *genna*, a heavy fine is imposed on the culprit. The fine can either be in cash or kind depending on the seriousness of the situation. The penalty sometimes includes banishment from the village if the culprit is found to have repeated the same mistakes for the third time.

Should it be a case of personal injury to another person, a similar fine was extracted from the delinquent and handed over to the sufferer. On the issue of custom, the Chief holds ordinary authority, though a reference in difficult points was made to any one of his elders who have authoritative knowledge.<sup>23</sup> When there is a dispute over the existing fact, the chief and his elders usually decide the case based on their general knowledge and also by taking the situation and circumstances or character of the disputants which enable them to form a pretty shrewd notion of the real facts. In such a situation it is necessary to put the parties to the oath.

Sumi have different ways of taking oath depending on the situation and context. The most severe oath is the oath taken on the river *Tapu* (Doyang) river. No man who took a false oath on this water would ever cross the river or even enter it again, for it would certainly drown him, nor could he eat fish from the river during his whole life as it is believed that he will certainly die from it.<sup>24</sup> Time and again a man with a just cause shy away from taking this kind of oath, for it is not to be taken lightly. The oath from the village stream is another serious matter and a false swearer will never drink water from the stream lest it kill him, causing his bowels and hands to swell immoderately. It goes as far as to say that even a person who swears truly on the village stream should never drink of it again.

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* p. 163

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* P. 164

The oaths regarding ownership of land are taken on the earth in disputes, which is bitten and swallowed. So also is the earth taken from the grave, while the earth from the grave or disputed land will choke him who swears by it falsely. The oath on one's own flesh is also taken though, sometimes it merely entailed biting one's own finger. Oaths are also taken on the tiger's tooth and these types of oath are very popular with perjurers and this oath is taken by the village chief while fighting for the chieftainship. Earlier, the oaths on the tigers tooth are rather troublesome because they entail the observance of *genna* for one to three days by the village. This *genna* has to be observed by the village of any person who having been present at the swearing, re-enters his village the same day. This often results in the prohibition of people concerned in such an oath from returning to their village at once and from entering any other village.

Another form of oath taking is by biting a bit of the bamboo that has been used for hanging up outside the village the heads of enemy taken in warfare. The idea is that the perjurer will meet the fate of those which he bites upon and swears by.<sup>25</sup> The rarest and the most serious and dangerous form of oath is taken by cutting iron which if a man do falsely, the members of his clan die off without apparent cause. Such is the power of the metal when treated disrespectfully.<sup>26</sup> In the entire oath taking it is essential that the swearing should take place between the sunrise and the sunset, "that the sun may stand as a witness to the oath."<sup>27</sup>

### **The Importance of Tracing Bloodline and its Implication**

The Sumi has the history of tracing the blood line. The family line of a person is given a lot of importance especially while contemplating on the marriage proposal. A cultured person is recognised by the way they present themselves to the society. A person is asked of his family line of descent and through that his mannerism and character are known, whether a person is *Agi lono ighi* or through pure blood line

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<sup>25</sup> Rotokha., Op.cit., p. 1. Also see Hutton., P. 165

<sup>26</sup> Hutton., Op.cit., P. 166

<sup>27</sup> ibid

or pedigree. *Agi* literally means “blood”, *lono* means “through” and *ighi* mean “come”. Thus, it literally means coming through blood. It therefore implies that the persons ancestors since time immemorial has been leading a courageous, good and honourable life and that they were very respectable, well to do, a good warrior and well known through out. A person being called *agi lono ighi* among the Sumi is a very honoured and prestigious appreciation.<sup>28</sup>

This term can be used in another humiliating and negative sense as well. When a person does some act which is not acceptable to the society their parents and family background is traced. If they have any history of breaking the law and order of the society the stigma is attached to them. Moreover, it is pointed out that since their parents and family are from the line, even their children are a hindrance to the societal welfare as it runs through their blood. Both the good and the bad things which are passed from one generation to another through their ancestors are thus attached to this *Agi lono ighi*

It is very important to mention that like any other society there has emerged a middle class or the new rich class among the Sumi, who are very sensitive to this notion of *Agilono ighi*. The new class are trying to change the whole meaning associated with the term by redefining it. They are of the view that the term *Agilono ighi* is used when a person has a good moral character and is well qualified and the blood line of a person and his family has nothing to do with the term. Yet, there is another group who stick to the original meaning i.e., a person’s blood line is the most important with strong moral character and those who were and are respected by the society. They hold that a person does not set-up a village for the simple reason that he was not courageous enough to cross the border and lead their

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<sup>28</sup> Zhimomi, V. Hokuto. 1985. pp. 20-23. Achumi, Hekhevi. 2005. pp. 1-2.

So far no one has build up this concept but they have all mentioned slightly. This concept is build from the book mention and strengthened from the interview with Mr. Bohovi Sumi on 5<sup>th</sup> January, 2007 at Shoipu village and Mr. Hokishe Yeptho on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2006 at Satakha. It is also used simultaneously with the term *Agha Axe*. it looks into the person origin and if he or she is from *Agha Axe* they are *Agilono ighimo* means not in their blood line but if the person is a warrior, a *Kukami* or from leaders who lead people in war and other activities in the society it is said that they are from *Agilono ighi* means they are in their blood or through their blood.

people. Instead, he follow others by carrying the loads at the back of the leaders protection. If this is the case than how can he be called *Agilono ighi*? For it is said that a person who is *Agilono ighi* is brave and stand for the right cause of the people.

### 1) *Aqha Axe*

The term *Aqha Axe* is used by the Sumi in different category. The first is during the war time when a person is captured to be killed and is saved by some warrior or *Akakau* who steps forward and proclaims that the person belongs to him and will serve him through out his life. During marriage, the *Akakau* provides him with clothes, spear, dao and all the other small things needed for the marriage including necessary *Ame* (bridewealth) to be paid for his wife.<sup>29</sup>

The term *Aqha* is used and implied when a *Kumlhomi*<sup>30</sup> (poor people) does not have enough to eat and drink to sustain his livelihood, no clothes to clothe himself. An affluent person comes forward and provides him with all the items for consumption such as rice, millet, maize, corn, soybeans, beans, chillies and food items needed for one crop season, including a plot of jhum land to cultivate for he and his family. A person of this type is called "those person who have been bought" and is known as *Qhu*.<sup>31</sup> *Qhu* is done or provided only when you *Xe* the person in the first place. *Axe* is used when the person wants to get married and he does not have anything to give for *Ame* and all the necessary things are provided to him for his marriage by the *Akakau* or his manor. In *axe* the maximum items given are a cow, a plot of field, paddy and all the items used by man.<sup>32</sup> Thus, once a person is under the obligation of *Qhu* and *Xe* they become the member or clan of the manor under whom they are obliged to and become their *Aqha axe*.

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<sup>29</sup> Rotokha, .H. S. 2005. p. 1

<sup>30</sup> *Kumlhomi* is the term used for poor people in the society who does not have enough food to eat, live and survive and make the daily ends living.

<sup>31</sup> Sumi Hoho. 2002. p. 44. Also see Zhimomi, V. Hokuto. 1985. p. 23

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

In case the *Akakau* provides the wife, the expectation of repayment is limited to the guardianship of the daughters of any *aqha axe* who dies without any male heirs who are also *Mighimi*<sup>33</sup> of the same chiefs. The right of guardianship entails the right to take the bridewealth of the ward.<sup>34</sup> It is the obligation of the *Mighimi* to call the *Akakau* "*Ipu*" which means "my father" and in case he receives a wife from the father, he becomes a member of the father's clan and family. He has to provide him service whenever he is called upon and in case he kills any animal he has to provide the father with a leg piece.

If at all there is some misunderstanding or fall out between the chief and the *Aqha axe* and they want to go back to their family of origin, he has to leave behind all his children, property he has acquired over a period of time, cattle, granaries and everything to his father who has *Xe* him and paid his *Ame* during his marriage according to the custom of the Sumi. It is only after paying back the *Aqha Axe* that he can set up his new house but till he is under the obligation of *Aqha Axe* he relies on his father during his times of trouble and sickness. Once a person is under the obligation of *Aqha Axe* it is hereditary and is passed on from generation to generation, from father to son to grandchildren till this *Aqha Axe* is paid back.

The tie created between the Chiefs and his *Mighimi* is thus a sort of a mixture of a land tenure and adoption. It follows almost inevitably from its nature that the *Mighimi* is tied to his *Akakau*'s village and clan in particular which is quite close to the Jajmani system in the Indian context. The reciprocal duties exist whereby, besides having to provide for his *Mighimi* with land, the Chief provides them with wife when they are not able to get it themselves as there is a system of *Ame* payment. It is also expected of him to provide them with grains when they do not have enough to eat, protect their interest generally, a duty which frequently

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<sup>33</sup> *Mighimi* are generally used in the day to day life for those people who do not have parents to provide for and take care of them. Those people who are under *Aqha Axe*, *Anulikishimi* and *Akiwo* are also called *Mighimi*

<sup>34</sup> Hutton, J. H. 1968. p. 147

includes payment of fines for misdemeanours committed in or against other villages.<sup>35</sup>

Today, with the wave of Christianity and the impact of western education among the Nagas in general and the Sumi in particular, people are being set free from the bondage of *Aqha Axe*. Infact, the Sumi society and social structure has undergone a tremendous change through the medium of education the education. People who were earlier under the obligation are now becoming well qualified and holding important position in the government offices. They in turn are engaged in attempts to break down the concept of *Aqha Axe* altogether by moving away from this system completely.

The old practice of arranged marriage between the families of the same status has also been replaced by love marriage in many cases, which is weakening the institution of *aqha axe* system. But in spite of all these factors, even today, the line of descent and the social status of the ancestors are traced and taken into consideration while contemplating marriage. The bloodline of a person is considered very important and there is always a stigma attached to an individual who may be educated and prosperous in the present circumstances but if he is obliged under this *Axe* system, he is never considered to be of a pure pedigree.

Once this is done the person automatically becomes indebted or bonded to that family, which is called *aqha axemi* and this leads to the Jajmani kind of relationship. Any time, the chief can call upon the service of the indebted family, and that has to be obliged at any cost. This bond or debt becomes hereditary and it passes from generation to generation.

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<sup>35</sup> Achumi, Hekhevi. Op.cit., p. 1. Also see Hutton., P. 145

## 2) *Anuli Kishimi*

*Anuli Kishimi*<sup>36</sup> are those people in the village without a house, plot of land for cultivation, cannot earn their livelihood and who goes to the *Akakau* or influential person of the village and asked them if they can become their *Anuli Kishimi*.<sup>37</sup> While becoming *Anuli Kishimi* they go and asked if they can become their children and calls a person who adopts them as "*Ipu*" which means "my father". They thus live under the shelter and protection of the father who adopts them and every year a plot of field is given out to them for cultivation by their father. During the starting of Jhum cycle, the *Anuli Kishiu* approach the "*Apu*" with a small piglet, a cock, or goes fishing and takes the catch of the day along and ask the "*Apu*" for a particular valley or hill which he has in mind to cultivate.<sup>38</sup>

During the time for new vegetables and crop, as a sign of respect and honour, he takes the first fruits and yields to his *Apukishiu* and present him. When such a gift is presented by the *Anuli Kishiu* the *Apukishiu*<sup>39</sup> according to his *Anuli Kishiu*'s needs give him rice, rice-beer and other households consumption and accordingly, the relationship between the two are maintained. Also when his "*Apukishiu*'s" children get married, it is his duty to run all errands. Moreover, when the groom's party comes over he has to see to it that all the necessary things are done. Further, it is his duty to kill animals for the father when ever his father wants him to, as when ever his service is needed by his father.

When the *Anuli Kishiu* gets married, the *Apukishiu* keeping in mind the needs of *Anuli Kishiu*, provide him with clothes, grain and necessary household items but not as heavy as in the case of *Aqha Axe* and pays his *Ame*. This is where the points of departure between the two lies. In the case of *Aqha Axe* the person concerned

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<sup>36</sup> *Annuli* means children and *kishimi* means to become. Thus *Annuli Kishimi* becoming their children of who ever supports and feeds them. They also called the person as *Apu* means 'father', *Ipu* means "my father."

<sup>37</sup> Sumi Hoho. 2002. p. 46. Zhimomi, V. Hokuto. 1985. p. 24

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Mr. Bohovi on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2007 at Satakha town. Nagaland.

<sup>39</sup> The one who takes the place of the father by providing the *Mighimi* with all his needs and support him is called by the *Mighimi* as his *Apukishiu* and the *Apukishiu* calls him as *Anulikishiu* which means *son*.



become the member of the “fathers” clan and family but in the case of *Anuli Kishiu* he retains the identity of his original clan and family and has to render the necessary services when needed by his *Apukishiu*. When his children plan to get married he has to intimate his father of the plans and arrangement and ask for his opinion and blessing as well.

### 3) *Aki Wo*

*Aki Wo* are those people who run away from one village to another because they had some difficulties and problems with the village members and also with the chief. They thus run away at night to another village for shelter and protection. In the process they loose their house. With no place to stay, the person carry his basket to the *Akukau*'s or warrior's house and place it outside the house and tell *Akukau* that he is going to be his *Aki Wo*.<sup>40</sup> After which he sets up his house in the property and boundary of the *Akukau* by using their resources. These kind of people are considered very degrading to the society and they are never allowed to return to their village of origin.

The person gets adopted into the family and clan of the *Akukau* who saved him and protected him. Mills (1922), while talking about the adoption says that all the other tribes practice adoption in one form or another but among the Changs and the Sumi, the adopted man and his descendants become practically the serfs of their adopter.<sup>41</sup> Thus, three category of adoption are in practice among the Sumi and the case of *Aqha Axe* being the first, where the right and obligations are completely transferred to the “*Apu*” and this obligation is still in practice even today.

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<sup>40</sup>Zhimomi, V. Hokuto. 1985. p. 23. Sumi Hoho. 2002. p. 47

<sup>41</sup> Mills, J. P. 1922. p. 99

## Different stages in the Marriage Arrangement

Among the Sumi community, clan exogamy is practised though after seven generation from the father side and five generation from the mother side cross cousin marriage is possible.<sup>42</sup> Marriages within the same village are usually preferred as the Sumi village always have more than one clan and khel. Child marriage does not exist among the Sumi but the childhood engagement between the son and daughter of the Chiefs and rich man was observed though only in few cases.

The practice of *Ame* (Bridewealth/Bride price) among the Sumi has its implications on the social structure of the society. It is the groom's family who pays the *Ame* to the bride's family during marriage and the amount varies according to one's social status. This leads to the change in the social structure of the society because, if the groom's family cannot afford to pay the price either the chief or the affluent person of the village comes forward and pays for the groom which is called "*Axe*".

### 1) *Amivimi*

According to the Sumi custom since time in memorial, a person who is well off in every sense of the term such as from the blood line of *Kukami* and *Kivimi* (chiefs family and good person), a warrior, wealthy with lots of cattle herd and granaries and has a good social standing in the society is called as *Amivimi*.<sup>43</sup> When their sons and daughters grow up they search for a girl from the family in line with them and send the messenger to the girl's family asking her hands for their sons. During this period, if the boy and the girl started liking each other, the proposal is accepted and fixed. In the mean time the girl's parents check and inquire on the boy, whether he has a good moral reputation, trustworthy and also what kind of people his parents are, their family history and how they have lived life in the society. In

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<sup>42</sup> Sumi Hoho, . Op.cit., p. 45

<sup>43</sup> Based on the interview with Mr. Hokishe Yeptho on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2006 at Satakha, Mrs. Shitoli Jimo on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2007 at Satakha and Mr. Bohovi Zhimomi at Shoipu village on 7<sup>th</sup> of January 2007.

case the girl's parents find the match acceptable they reply back to the boy by telling him to ask his parents to come for the formal proposal of the marriage. When both the parties concerned come to an agreement, the boy's parents kill a big fat pig and invite the girl and her family for a feast to their house.

Marriage among the Sumi are arranged through negotiation. As a custom it is the boy who proposes the girl for marriage and not the other way round. While contemplating on marriage, many qualities are looked into. Zhimomi (1985), while describing about the Sumi's marriages write as,

*Timi lakhino anipu lukelo abolomi eno asholokumi kümütsü süno külakupu shi cheni. Kipitimi lakhino totimi lakhi sasü akibo shikeu vechewonono aküxulo kümütha kileno xüche keughi tische-tiyeh shiluve cheni.*

*Kughou kipitimi lakhino anipu lunike akükümsü xathaluve nikeno atüghüshi totimi kükülhoaye paghi cheju cheni, cheju keulo atüghushi apu azano küküye akipitiuno kükü sasü xüküqhalu nanike mokeno kimighiju cheni. Tithiuno atotiuye akipitiu kimiye anikea mokeno ithini ke ghenguno 'anisu' puwuno atotiu putsaju paghi cheni; atotiuno puloaghi aye apu aza viloasütsa piputove cheni, eno asütsa pisüve cheni. Tishiveno akipitiuno bolomi eno atotiuno bolomi ishi kuhono panongu dolo tinhemügha kili eno asholokutsa eno abolotsa kümütsü küpütsa wuve cheni.*

*Atsa qhive kethiuye aghi-anni kümütsülo ashi aji shipuno küpütsa kile cheni. Kipitimi eno totimi dolo akivishi tische-tiye shinikeu pulove kethiye aghianni lono alhukho pucheni. Alhukho pukeloye akipitiuno bolomino awoli hegheno tuxana akütsülo ghopuku eno tuxa no akulho shino puwo atotiuno bolomi tsücheni. Atotiuno bolomino ashi tipau buno abolomi, alaha-alimi, kümütsü kuhono ashi tipau buno aghami*

*enoalojimi kümütsü asa khocheni. Kipahi aghulhusa kijeshi tsu keno tino aju-aje alau shicheni eno tinhe mugha ghi tipau kiqu lono ithulu cheni.*<sup>44</sup>

This is read as, when a person takes a wife all the family members join together and they get married and set up a family. Through the marriage between one man and a woman all the misunderstandings and fallouts between the families are sealed for good through marriage.

Once a man decides that he should get a wife, the first thing that he sees is the girl's character and personality and her family status and history. In that he sees and compares whether the girl's parents can live in line with the guy's family i.e., whether both the families have the same social standing in the society. After that the *Anisu*<sup>45</sup> (go-between) is sent to talk to the girl in order to check out whether the girl is in favour of the guy or not. If the girl is in favour of the proposal, the parents are then informed and a word is kept with her parents. After this, the boy's family and the girl's family gather together and start exchanging things, discuss and share the family matters among themselves.

After keeping the word formally, during every occasion and celebrations, they visit and talk with each other with meat and rice-beer. By this time the boy's family kills one big pig and half of the pig including the head is taken as meat and half is cut into pieces and cooked and is taken and given to the girl's family. The entire girl's family and relatives gather and they cut that particular meat and give out to the relatives from all sides and also to the villagers and *Aloji* (field company) members. The bigger the meat piece, the more prestigious it is and the gift received also depends on the meat piece given out.

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<sup>44</sup> Zhimomi, V. Hokuto. 1985. pp. 25-26

<sup>45</sup> In this case the *Anisu* is usually the groom's father's sister preferably the elder sister. *Anisu* is an old woman who acts as a go-between the groom's family and the bride's family during the marriage proposal. She is the one who goes and conveys the marriage proposal to the bride's family.

After the selection of the girl, the boy along with *Anisu* visits the girl's house and the proposal is conveyed to her parents. When the positive reply is received the girl's family offer the food and drinks and the *Anisu* bless the would-be couple and this marks the formal betrothal<sup>46</sup>. This is to assure if possible, that any evil influence attending the proposed marriage shall fall on the *Anisu*, who is old and therefore unimportant or less susceptible, rather on the bridegroom. The *anisu* is asked whether she came with the authority of the intending bridegroom's parents. To this her answer is "yes" and asks for the girl's hand.

After the bride's parents express their satisfaction, a pig brought by the bridegroom's party is killed and distributed which is called *Azazhunala Shie*.<sup>47</sup> This completes the contract and the essential transfer of the girl from her father to her husband. The bridegroom's party selects the date, but not before the third day under any circumstance, on which they will come for the bride. Against that day the bride's family gets ready. Drinks and food are prepared to entertain the bridegroom's party and the entire paddy which are to be sent along with the bride is set ready and whoever she is to take with her. After marriage, when a man perform *Apisa*<sup>48</sup> ceremony, he must give his wife's mother one hind leg of the *mithun* he kills and must give her half a leg or any small portion of meat whenever he performs less important ceremonies.

When a man's sister's daughter gets married or when after his father's death, his father's sister's daughter is married, he must give her a present which may be anything to a nominal gift of meat - half a pig's leg or a small piece of meat to a large share of *mithun*. The girl's husband must than make a return, a definite sum is than agreed upon, according to the means of the newly married couple to be paid at leisure.

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<sup>46</sup> Hutton, J. H. 1969. p. 239. Also see Gosh, B. B. Eds. 1978. p. 44

<sup>47</sup> *Aza* means mother, *Zhu* means looked after *Lashi* means a meat for looking after. *Azazhunla* means way to mothers-beholding. Also see Hutton, J. H. 1968. p. 241

<sup>48</sup> *Apisa* is a religious genna where the man of the family go to the stream and observed a genna and clear themselves and their weapons such as dao, spears etc from the stream and during this *Apisa* they abstain from sexual intercourse with their wife.

## 2) *Ame Kugha* or deciding on the Bridewealth

After the approval by the girl's parents to the marriage proposal, a day is set for *Atsa Xatha*<sup>49</sup> (engagement day) where the amount of bridewealth to be paid is decided upon. As a sign of agreement, the *Anisu* takes a big chunk of salt along with a dog to visit the house of the bride's parents. She puts the salt into the thatch of the roof from inside the house facing the other side of the road which remains untouched and the dog is given to the bride's parents.<sup>50</sup> If at all any party change their mind all the gift items which they presented each other during *Tuluni* and other occasions are returned.

This visit is followed by the bridegroom, along with his friends or relatives chosen for his cleverness, who negotiate the amount of the bridewealth with the bride's parents and does his best to reduce it. After the bridewealth is fixed, the cattle and all the necessary items are brought over the same evening from the bridegroom's house if the marriage alliance is within the same village. In case the marriage alliance is between different villages, the approximate amount of the bridewealth is conveyed by friends of the bridegroom some way behind, and if what ever they brought is not enough they hand over what they have and assure to add more in the near future.

After all the cattle are brought together, the elders and village representatives dine at the bride's place latter in the evening. No matter how much *Ame* the bride's parents may be taking, it is asked according to the gift items they are giving to the girl and it is thus compensated by the gifts which they give to the bride on her marriage.<sup>51</sup> While deciding on the amount of *Ame* to be paid, the cattle brought by the groom (taken a first look) and after which the costume and ornaments which the girls parents are going to give the girl on her marriage such as the number of

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<sup>49</sup> *Atsa* means words and *xatha* means decided upon. Thus it means a formal decision or agreement to the marriage.

<sup>50</sup> Hutton, J. H. 1968. p. 239, Also supported by the interview with Mr. Hokishe Yeptho on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2006 at Satakha.

<sup>51</sup> Zhimomi. V. Hohuto. 1985. p. 28

wraparound, shawls, the neckpiece and ornaments as *Achiku*, *Achipa*, *Akusa* are shown. After this the two families sit together to decide on the bridewealth payment.<sup>52</sup>

The *Ame* is decided on the basis of *Aphi-Athome*.<sup>53</sup> Here a very good looking *Mithun* without any unwanted marks is taken and given to the bride's parents as *Aphi-Athome*. While giving *Aphi-Athome* if the *mithun* paid has some marks or is disfigured, it is believed that they will never prosper in life.<sup>54</sup> In case before reaching the bride's house the cattle got lost or die it is a loss for the groom and if there is a new birth on the way it is a blessing for the bride's family. While on the way to the brides house for deciding on the *Ame*, if the cattle start with the right leg it is said that the grooms side will come out more profitable but if the cattle starts with the left leg, it is believed that the brides side will gain more in the *Ame* payment.<sup>55</sup>

### 3) *Azanulashi*

As a sign of agreement a big fat pig brought by the groom is than killed for *Azajunla Shi*. Without cutting this *Azanulashi* marriage cannot take place.<sup>56</sup> From this the hind limbs of the pig is taken out and is given to the prospective son-in-law. This pig is killed specifically to acknowledge the fact of looking after and taking care of the girl by her mother and the meat piece is distribute specifically to the girls family and relatives from both side. However, the maternal relatives especially the mothers sisters are given more importance. A person cannot under any circumstance ask for more *Ame* once this particular meat is given out. After this, the breach of the promise of marriage by either party without the cause entails to a fine, according to the social position of the injured party.

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<sup>52</sup> Achumi, Hekhevi. 2005. pp. 9-10. Sumi Hoho. 2002. p. 5-6. Sema, Najekhu Yeptho. 1985. p. 23. Zhimomi, V. Hohuto. 1985. pp. 28-29.

<sup>53</sup> *Aphi* means body, *Atho* mean same and *Me* means price thus *Aphi-athome* literally means the price equivalent to the price of the body.

<sup>54</sup> Zhimomi. V. Hohuto. 1985. p. 28

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* pp. 27- 28

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.* p. 26

In *Azanijula Shi* the fragments of the meat are given only to the bride's relations and everyone who receives the fragments gives a basket of paddy, which is given to the bride to take to her new house. The pig head is given to the girl's maternal grandfather or it can also be given to the paternal grandfather or to the father's elder brother. The main preference is given to the girl's mother's sisters and other relatives. They also give her clothes, jewellery, paddy and other crops and vegetables and all necessary items on her marriage.<sup>57</sup> Besides, in the name of the bride's mother, a piece of meat called '*Azanula Shi*' has to be given to the entire bride's maternal uncles and cousins in order to sustain the relationship even after marriage.

#### 4) The Marriage Day and its Procedure

On the appointed day the bridegroom comes with a party of his relations and friends to take the bride to her new house. The bride's family on their part keep ready a considerable amount of paddy together along with the bride's gifts of clothes and ornaments, all arranged and ready outside her parent's house. On the day of the marriage, the bridegroom and his party feast at the bride's house which happens in the afternoon. After the feast the combined party of both the groom and the bride goes to the bridegroom's house. Some more minute rituals are observed for two to three days and with that the marriage ceremony is concluded.<sup>58</sup> While taking the bride to her new house the *anisuu* must be the first to pick up the load and give it to someone to carry it, after which the procession starts to the bridegroom's house.

*Aqhekishiu no atughüu shi wuni, Anisuu no pashelo shini, Kulaliu no aküthüu shini, eno Akhauqhu kipeu no abidiu shini.*<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Achumi, Heakhevi. Op.cit., p. 13-14

<sup>58</sup> Gosh, B. B. Eds. 1979. p. 44

<sup>59</sup> Sema, Najekhu Yephtho. 1985. p. 24



The first person to lead is the warrior who is called as *Aqhekishiu*. After him goes *Anisu* and the third one comes *Kulaliu* (bride), followed by *Akhauqhu Kipeu* (a person who carries the bride's personal property) as the fourth.

The bride on the marriage day wears a narrow red and yellow circlet of plaited cane around her head and carries a chicken in her left hand, and a stick which has a wooden top with a long iron butt-piece on her right hand. In some cases, the bride instead carries a dao which she presents to her husband. When the girl gets married and goes out from her parent's house the *Ani-Angu* (aunty-uncle), *Aza-Apu* (mother and father), *Apeu* (brother), *Ashopuu* (friend or maid), *anisu* (here it refers to the girl's father's sister), *Aqheshou Kipeu* (one who carry her stuffs) all this are decided and arranged before hand at her parents home and she gets married. It is the *anisu* who first leads and takes her out of the house. The *Ashopuu*, the *Ani* and the *Akhauqhu Kipeu* three of them along with the bride step out of the parent's house and boundary with the right foot.

In case, marriage is between different villages, before reaching the grooms village the girl is made to eat food. Also, the bride is not supposed to eat anything on her marriage night and she has to fast in accordance with the custom. On reaching the groom's house she has to step inside the house with her right foot and the aunty should step on the cold iron metal which can either be a dao or a spear or an axe while eating food and this metal is later on given to the *Anikisheu*. When the girl is about to step out of the house during her marriage the father prays for her as;

“*Ati kumugha, annuli kumghapeniu!*

*Adu ali*<sup>60</sup> *kumghapeniu!*”<sup>61</sup>

“May you be blessed with sons and daughters!

May you be blessed with cattle!”

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<sup>60</sup> *Adu* is the masculine term for cattle and poultry and *Ali* is the Feminine term.

<sup>61</sup> Op.cit. p. 24

After this prayer the father drops his daughter till the door way, but he does not step out of the door. The real father is never to take and drop the bride to her husband's house and it is only the mother and the father's brother who drops her daughter during her marriage. After she steps out of her father's house she is never to turn and look back. While on the way to the grooms house the bride is advised to walk carefully and never to trip lest she hurts her toe feet as it indicate a short life for her.

The next day a cock which is brought by the bride is killed and cooked and is served to the grooms family and relatives and a prayer is offered as;

*“Thalaxü ti gughuko toi, Achuwoti kughuko toi,  
Apukhu mutsu au mutusu kighishe wolupeniu”*<sup>62</sup>

“Like the spider's offspring's and the crab's numeral prodigy,  
May the nails of toes multiply.”

The whole party eats at the house of the bridegroom except the bride as she is suppose to fast that very night. On that night the bridegroom may not sleep in his house. The next day the bride and the *Aboshou* (friend) first eat together at the bride's groom parent's house and after which the whole party which accompany the bride can follow. After the food they all leave for their village. Small gifts are presented by the groom. The *Anisu*<sup>63</sup>, is given a basket of each sort of cereal brought by the bride, the *Aqhekishiu* and the *Aboshou*, the *Akhaughu Kipeu* are all given some money, the *Aluzhitoemi* (the leader of the field company) is given a chicken and a handful of small beans, and is called *Mini-lha me* (the price for stripping of the wraparound) and the bride's mother is given a hoe.

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* p. 24

<sup>63</sup> In this case the *Anisu* refers to the bride's paternal aunty, her father's sister who accompany bride to drop her in her new house.

The newly married couple observe *genna* the next day and may not go to the fields, as the bride is not supposed to do any kind of manual work. In the evening, the *Anisu*<sup>64</sup> kills and cook the chicken brought by the bride which is eaten by the newly married couple and the bride serves the rice-beer to all the bridegroom's relations and family. That night the newly wed couple sleep together and with that the marriage ceremony comes to an end.

### **Marriage Prestations and *Ame*: Types of Marriage**

Among the Sumi Naga tribe, "*Ame*" (bridewealth) is one tradition which plays a very unique and binding role in the Sumi's marriage. The *Ame* is paid by the groom to the bride's family. It is only after the amount of "*Ame*" is decided and paid that the marriage takes place. The amount of "*Ame*" depends and differs according to one's social standing and position in the society. The higher the social standing in the society the more is the amount of "*Ame*". It can be paid both in cash and kind. Unlike other Naga tribes, the *ame* or Bridewealth among the Sumi is not just a token gesture. On the other hand, in practice it is usually the village chiefs or the other rich man who keeps more than one wife, the ordinary villager being unable to afford. Thus, among the Sumi four different categories of marriages and *Ame* payment are in practice. They are, *Amini Kimiji Xe*, *Ashoghu Xe*, *Hatha Xe*, *Topunasho Xe*.

#### **1) *Amini Kimiji Xe*. (Highest category of marriage payment)**

The highest *Ame* is paid in this category of marriage. *Amini Kimiji* is one of the wraparound worn by the women where all the varieties of beads and precious stones used by Sumi such as *Achiku*, *Achipu*, *Achixathi*, *Achizu*, are stitched on the wraparound.<sup>65</sup> Every line of the beads and shells are different from each other. Among all the Sumi's wraparound this *Amini Kimiji* is the best, the highest and the

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<sup>64</sup> The *Anisu* here refers to the Groom's paternal aunty who acts as a go between in fixing the marriage.

<sup>65</sup> Sema, Op.cit , p. 23. Zhimomi, p. 27

most prestigious one. The *Kukami* (chief), the wealthy and those who perfect themselves all round in the society without any stigma attached in their name and those who have observed and perfected all the gennas can make this *Aminiji Kimiji* for their daughter during her marriage.<sup>66</sup> But again, it is said that the daughter becomes eligible to marry under this category only when her mother has performed all the rites and rituals associated with this *Amini Kimiji Xe*.

As a part of the rituals the parents of the bride have to give the bride *Amini Kimiji*, and along with it *Kiyepu Mini*.<sup>67</sup> All the wraparounds used by the Sumi are made in pairs with all the required costumes, tools and utensils in pairs (two each) including *Achiku* (a necklace made of precious stones) and given to the girl to take with her to her husbands house on her marriage. The shawls worn by guys such as *Avikiephi*, *Akhumi*, *Abophi*, *Tubophi*, *Ayaphi* and *Hekutha Khumi* (*akhumi* means shawl) worn by girls and varieties of wraparound as *Lotusu*, *Tsugumini*, *Ayemeni* and all the costumes worn and used by the Sumi are given in pairs. Even the seedlings of the crops and vegetables are given along with the tools used in the field.

It is mandatory that, in this kind of marriage what ever the parents made for the girl should be in pairs. It is considered a bad sign to give only one piece without a partner. Other costumes and jewellerys such as *Tsukoli* (earrings made of yellow orchid stem and red dyed goat hair), *Akutsukukha* (headgear), *Akusa* (armlets), *Asapu* (bangles or wristlets), *Achkula*, *Achiqhati*, *achipula*, *Achighopho*, *muzulichi* and *Avekha* (all this are different varieties of neckpeice) *Akichelachi* (waistband), and *Ayikusu* (metal stick) are all given as *Avina*<sup>68</sup> to the daughter during her marriage.<sup>69</sup> When all these items are given to the girl it indicates that a lot of money, labour and time were spend by the girl's parents to put all these things together as well. Even the home use such as different varieties of pots and basket

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<sup>66</sup> Shohe, K. Hosheli. 1993. p. 7

<sup>67</sup> *Kiyepu mini* means a wraparound called *Kiyepu*.

<sup>68</sup> *Avina* means when in marriage a *Avi* (mithun) is killed so to compensate for the killing of mithun all the costumes and jewellery are given to the girl which is called or is known as *Avina*.

<sup>69</sup> Shohe., Op.cit., p. 7

that are used at home such as *Asukhu* (wooden plate) *Aqhupu*, *Asuli*, *Akho*, *Amuto*, *Mehri*, *Apighi* and *Ayephu*<sup>70</sup> are all given to the girl.

In *Aminiji kimiji*, the *Avi* (mithun) has to be killed first, after which the brides family starts making the wraparound. The least number of *mithun* given as *Ame* (bridewealth) in this kind of marriage is sixteen and the maximum *mithun* paid is thirty,<sup>71</sup> though, depending on the gift of clothes and other items which the girl's parents made for the girl, the *Ame* is paid accordingly.<sup>72</sup> Besides *mithun* animals such as cow and pigs are also given, and the important items such as *Akuhagi* (elephant tusk), *Awu Sukukha* (a piece for tying on the hand), *Akuxa* (a red clothe tied on the shoulder), *Avabo* (men's headgear) and *Aghacho* (hornbill's feather)<sup>73</sup> are also included along with some cash. One needs to remember that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, money was very rare and sixteen person earns one rupee a day and with ten rupees a person buys a big *Avi*. When we look at the economy, the payment of twenty to thirty *Avi* as a part of the *Ame*, we can imagine how much of wealth was involved. Presently the cost of one *Avi* can vary from Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 40,000/- leaving aside all the other animals and items involved in the *Ame*.

In case all the rituals associated with *Amini Kimiji* are observed without any misgiving, the couple are believed to live long, lead a very rich and prosperous life in every sense. However, if any mistakes arise or something's are done incomplete and all the rituals associated with this *Amini Kimiji* are not fulfilled, it was considered as unlucky or bad omen and one of the partner may die very early or the couple may remain childless. For this, proper care and precautions were taken and very often people though qualify for this kind of marriage does not marry in *Amini Kimiji* because the rituals associated with it were difficult to fulfil and the

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<sup>70</sup> *Aqhupu*, *Asuli*, *Akho*, *Amuto*, *Mehri*, *Apighi* and *Ayephu*. All these are different kinds of basket made of bamboo or cane.

<sup>71</sup> One thing which needs to be kept in mind is that at present time one *Avi* (*mithun*) fetch from thirty to forty thousand.

<sup>72</sup> Zhimomi, V. Hokuto. 1985. p. 27

<sup>73</sup> *Avabo* and *Aghacho*. *Aghacho* is the hornbill's feather which is adorned on the *Avabo*. Usually three pieces of feather are put on the *Avabo*.

consequences of its shortcomings were very severe and it is said that one needs to have a big heart, patience and endurance.

When *Amini Kimiji Xe* takes place, on the day set for the daughter's marriage, a mat is placed outside the parents house and all the items which are being giving to the girl is taken out and displayed along with all the things which the girl has kept for her marriage called *Assana* for the young man and women of the village as well as for the villagers to see.<sup>74</sup> *Assana* is the secret wealth which the girl when she is still at her parents house gather for herself and it can vary from clothes to ornaments but it is said that she cannot keep cattle and land as a part of her *Assana* because it is as same as one person's life.

*Amini Kimiji* is not meant for wearing or to use and it is kept in the house for people to see. It is made solely for marriage and marriage alone and *Amini Kimiji xe* is a matter of pride and prestige for the family.<sup>75</sup> After the birth of the first child the beads from the *Amini Kimiji* is taken out. If the first child is a boy the beads called *Achiku* is taken out and is tied around the boy's arms with a black thread. In case of a girl the beads called *Achipusho* is tied on the girl's knee with a black thread.<sup>76</sup> Again when the daughters grow up and marry the person of the same status and qualify for *Amini Kimiji* marriage, a new *Amini Kimiji* is made and is given to her on her marriage.

When the food for *Ame Kugha* is ready a day is set by *Anisu* to bring together all the cattle that is to be used for *Ame* but this day is set only if the marriage is of *Amini Kimiji Xe* or *Ashoghu Xe* takes place. One important point which needs to be kept in mind is that in *Amini Kimiji Xe* where the *mithun* is used, the date is set for the marriage and after the *Azajunula* pig is killed, the groom calls the girl to his parents place and observe a genna called *Kichini*. The girl's brother and her friend

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<sup>74</sup> Op.cit. p. 29

<sup>75</sup> Shohe, K. Hosheli. 1993. p. 7

<sup>76</sup> Achumi, Hekhevi. 2005. p. 9. Supported from the interview with Mr. Bohovi Sumi on 21<sup>st</sup> December at Shoipu village. Mr. Hokishe yeptho on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2001 at satakha.

take the girl to the boys place. The girl here pours down the rice-beer on the front balcony of the groom's house to see what is in stored for her. It is believed that if the girl is a virgin, when the rice-beer is poured from her knee it will flow directly in between her toe-feet and if she is no longer a virgin the rice-beer will not flow down straight but will go in different direction. No matter what the outcome may be, after *Kichini*, the next morning the girl goes back to her parent's house and comes back on the third day after marriage.<sup>77</sup>

## 2) *Ashoghu Xe*. (Second category of marriage)

*Ashoghu Xe* is also called *Allapha Xe* by some section of the Sumi.<sup>78</sup> *Ashoghi* mean that everything is perfect and plentiful. Everything is as same as the *Amini Kimiji Xe* except that the *Amini Kimiji* is not used in this marriage. Here, the minimum *avi* given as *Ame* is ten and the maximum *Avi* paid is sixteen. Most marriages of the *Kuakenemi* (well to do families) are carried out in this category.<sup>79</sup> In this kind of marriage the parents of the both side tries to show off their wealth to each other and also to the neighbouring villages by distributing large pieces of meat. They also give heavy feast during the engagement party, marriage settlement party, and on the marriage day.

Even in this kind of marriage while on the way to decide on the *Ame* the biggest *Avi* should lead, followed by the other and the second biggest should be at the last. A pig is killed and the meat pieces are send to the girls relatives and *Aloji* during marriage. They in turn give her fresh vegetables and crops, chicken, baskets and pots as a sign of blessing which she takes along with her to her new house. After marriage the new couple never buy rice, but the girl's parents give her enough paddies to last for the whole year, sometime one whole granary is given to the girl and the parents also give them dogs, pigs and chicken to rear.

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<sup>77</sup> Zhimomi, V. Hokuto. 1985. pp. 28-29

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.* p. 27

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*

Those children whose parents have used *Avi* during marriage can be carried by the Shawl called *Aghumi*.<sup>80</sup> When the first child is born it is the obligation of the girl's parents to take care and look after her during delivery time and it is called *Shi Ghu*. They nourish her and feed her to be strong to start life and this tradition is still in practice among the Sumi today.

### 3) *Hatha Xe*. (Third category of marriage)

This category of marriage is mostly practice by a commoner and even here *Ame* is given though only a few cattle, clothes and ornaments are given as *Ame*. The groom's family are informed before hand on what all preparations needs to be prepared for *Ame*. The clothes and ornaments depend on the family status and if it is from a poor family sometimes nothing is given at all. In case the marriage alliance is between neighbouring villages, a particular plot is added in *Ame* as well and *Azajunila Shi* is also cut and distributed to family and relatives as well. But the departing line is that *Avi* which is a sign of prestige, honour and fame is not used in *Ame*.<sup>81</sup> It is also known by another name as *Moshomogho Xe* which means the poor, needy and not well to do.<sup>82</sup> Sometimes the marriage takes place at the simplest form using just one or two cattle and even the clothes and ornaments presented to the girl by her parents depends on to what extend they can provide.

### 4) *Topunasho Xe*. (Fourth category of marriage)

This category of marriage is practiced while marrying a widow, a widower, pregnant women or a woman who already has a child. In many instance it is the marriage between a widower and a widow for the need to take care of children, the house and all the other property. Here, no *azanulashi* is given to the relatives but a token of *Ame* needs to be paid which can be a cow or a pig or two called *Aphi Athome*.

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<sup>80</sup> Achumi, Hekhevi. 2005. p. 10

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Zhimomi, Op.cit., P. 27



## The Festival of Tuluni and its Significance in the Marriage Alliance

*Tuluni* has a very significant meaning according to the customs of the Sumi. Among the Sumi, when a person is seen carrying a heavy load of big wood or stone, it is generally said go and *Tulu* (help) him or her. Thus, *Tulu* means helping or supporting. *Ni* is used after a heavy or rigorous work, a day set for rest which is called *Ni*. *Tuluni* thus literally means helping each other and when all the works of the season are over, the day set to rest is called *Tuluni*.<sup>83</sup>

There is *Aloji* among every age group and they use to take turns working in each others fields. The *Alojitou* (leader of *Aloji*) decides on the work of the day and after they finish working in their field they work in some other people's field and earn money which they save for *Tuluni*. When the *Tuluni* month approaches they decide on whether to kill a cow or a pig, sometimes both for the celebration of *Tuluni*. It is usually celebrated in the middle of the year in the month of July and all the customs, rituals and gennas are observed while celebrating the *Tuluni*. For instance, if one of their member of the *Aloji* die during the beginning of the year, his share of food and drinks are served first before the other member of the *Aloji* eats till during *Tuluni* after which he no longer is a member of the *Aloji*.

The leader takes the initiative and make all plans and arrangements. When the animals are killed for the celebration if there are any damsels who is a part of the *Aloji*, a special share of meat is taken out and given to them. During *Tuluni* celebration the *Akukau* and other *Kukami* are given their share of meat called *Akuka Sa*<sup>84</sup> by all the *Alozi* group of the village.

To celebrate *Tuluni*, right after the weeds are cleared from the field, a straw is tied to the *Akuwo* (a tool used for clearing and cleaning small weeds from the field) and placed at the side of the field as a sign that *Tuluni* will be celebrated very soon. It is

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<sup>83</sup> Achumi, Hekhevi. 2005. pp. 35-35. Sema, najekhu yeptho. 1985. p. 19. Zhimomi, V. Hokuto. 1985. pp. 53-54

<sup>84</sup> *Akukau* means the chief and *Sa* means share. Thus *Akukau Sa* literally means *Akukau's* share

celebrated for four to five days. During this season all those young people who are courting invite each other and bring meat and food from the in-laws house and distribute this among the families and *Alozi* members as sign of the formal announcement of the engagement. Thus, during *Tuluni* all the engagements are made formal.

According to the custom that is in practice, during *Tuluni* it is the man who invites the girl for the feast and the girls accordingly invites the boy for the feast to her house. During these feast, the man while going to the in-laws place for feasting takes his friends who are smart and strong, good in talking, singing etc. In the early past when invited to the girls place, the groom-to-be is served food in a big wooden plate with lots of big meat pieces and food. If they finish every thing that is served, they are considered to be smart, and are praised and appreciated for their true man ship. However, if he cannot finish the food he is ridicule, laughed at and taunted at saying that if he cannot even finish the food, how will he setup a family and take care, go out and compete with other people as well. If in case the marriage arrangement is between different villages his manhood is tested through different means and variety of games. It is thus said that if a person wants to take a wife from different village he has to be smart, big hearted, have good physique and good in talking, thus exhibiting the character of being a man in every sense of the term.

When it is announced that tomorrow will be *Aghani*, (*genna*) today the whole village takes a particular leaves called *Ailo* and place it at the house. The marking of the *Ailo* in the house implies that we are *genna* and so no outside guest or spirit should look into or visit our house. Thus, the placing of *Ailo* is the sign to shooing away the bad spirits from the house.

*Tuluni* is one of the important *genna* amongst the Sumi. It is on this day that they invite their friends or relatives for the feast, especially the young couple courting each other and they gift each other with a big chunk of meat as a kind of making well known their intentions and plans. In case the *Akukau's* children plans a

marriage, it is not only the *Aloji* member, but the whole clan and village are presented with rice and meat. The unit of measurement for the meat piece to be given by the in-laws after the feast to the daughter-in-law to-be or the son-in-law to-be is as big as one stretched hand of a grown up man and a pieces of thirty to sixty meat pieces covered by banana leaves are put in the basket by the in-laws to-be to take home.

### **Profile of Women**

The Sumi women has been described as usually simple and plain, have a cheerful disposition and make their men folk faithful wives and dutiful daughters. They are generally chaste, good mothers and good housewives. The management of the husband's house being left to the wife and rarely interfered with, although polygamy is common the wives usually get along well with one another. The marriage is usually arranged on the basis of convenience and though the girl is never married to a man against her will, most of the arrangement is done by her parents and a wife is chosen primarily for what she can do rather than for her looks. The wife takes a very high place in her husband's house.

Free intercourse among the bachelors are not allowed among the Sumi to the unmarried girls as is the case of the many tribal society, and in any case sexual intercourse between the person of the same clan is regarded as incest either before or after the marriage which is punished by banishment.<sup>85</sup> There is a strict code of conduct and those girls with loose characters are looked down upon and are therefore difficult to find a good match for them. Marriage for them is possible only in the third category and *Ame* is very minimal-just a token gesture as she no longer remains chaste. The status of women in the earlier times was comparatively lower than that of man. Women never inherit any property and in the past women were not allowed to join the warfare, political affairs and religious activities.<sup>86</sup> They were

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<sup>85</sup> Hutton, J. H. 1968. p. 133

<sup>86</sup> Das, N. K and Imchen, C. L. 1994. Eds. p. 157

not even allowed to enter the *Apu ki (Morungs)*. A wife in the community is expected to do many works, such as managing the work in the fields and in the house.

The advent of Christianity and the spread of education have brought about a tremendous change among the Sumi women. These two factors have also changed their thought processes. Educated women today take part in political, religious and social activities and work both in the private and government offices.

The position of the women in the Sumi tribe, though they are possibly more restricted in the matter of the possession of the property and in the sexual licence than the women of the other Naga tribes, is probably higher socially, as it is morally at any rate so far as the families of the chiefs are concerned. The Sumi girl till her marriage live in the house of her parents unless she is send to the chiefs house or to some other protector, where she lives as one of the family and pays for her keep through her services. Though she is given plenty of freedom and goes to the field with her own *Alozhi* which consist of the contemporaries of both sexes till her marriage, she is carefully looked after.

The care which is given to the girl of the Sumi tribe is partly due to the desire not to damage her value in the marriage potentialities. For a girl who is known to have an intrigue commands a lower *Ame* during marriage as a rule. Accordingly, the fine for adultery with a girl of position is much higher than that for a similar affair with the daughter of a man of none, since the *Ame* of the latter is in any case much lower than that of the chief's daughter.

Earlier, the Sumi girl's head was shaved until she was regarded as approaching a marriageable age, when the hair was allowed to grow. Marriage of course is always on exogamous principles, and it is regarded as shameful to say anything at all improper before a women of one's own clan and still more so of one's own kindred. When a girl is betrothed she wears a plaited band of red cane and yellow

orchid-stem round her forehead, which she leaves shortly after her marriage. A girl's betrothal in the case of ordinary villager does not usually last long, but in the case of *Kukami's* daughter, marriages are sometime arranged for a long time before they can take place. Marriage in any case is never made against the girl's will, though it may often happen that she does no more than passively agree to the arrangement made by her parents or guardian.

Among the Sumi the *Ame* is very high, and it varies from the status of the person in the society. They are always paid largely in kind, and the girl in her turn brings with her, beads and an ornament which becomes the property of her husband and which to some extent are proportionate to the *Ame* paid by the husband. Besides, the girl's birth, her capabilities are also taken into account. A girl who is thrifty, can weave or is a hard and good worker in the fields commands a higher *Ame* accordingly. The *Ame* of the widow who has gone back to her father's house is very minimal than that of the girl previously not married, while a women divorced for misconduct, or who for some other reason is generally undesirable, would command merely a nominal *Ame*. On the other hand, the *Ame* for the chief's daughter are sometimes extravagant.

### **The Current Marriage Trends**

Christianity and western education have brought about a tremendous change among the Sumi society along with other Naga society. Especially with regards to marriage, there is a paradigm shift from traditional marriage to the western practices of white wedding in the church. Like any other society which has been swept by the wave of westernisation, the Sumi society now is fully blended with western ideals and traditional institution.

When we look at the marriage practice today, we can see that the second type of Sumi marriage is more in practice though not in its original state but mixed with the modern Christian ideals. We see both the Christian ideals and the traditional rituals

and practices running parallel with each other in the Sumi marriages today. Marriages are conducted in the church with the priest giving the vows and solemnising the marriage, the women wearing white wedding dress and man in suits which is purely the impact of the west. The new dress cultures of the west have completely taken over the traditional dress and costumes. The guests are invited and a reception is set up, and a lunch is provided. Because of the coming of new money, people are becoming more lavish while celebrating their wedding. They give out a very luxurious show of marriage, though it varies from person to person depending on their family financial position.

One important point which needs to be mentioned here is that at some marriages wedding cakes are served to the guest. In addition, they are given a big chunk of cooked meat piece wrapped in a silver foil which tells as to what extent people can be lavish in their marriage celebration. The giving out of meat piece is a traditional style but in a modified form using modern gadget. Again at the reception, one can see all the necessary household items being given out as gifts such as TV, fridge, sofa set, cooking gas, steel cupboard and many other gadgets. In some case, the parents or relatives even give out a brand new car as a wedding present which makes one wonders as to where the cash flows in from?

## **Conclusion**

In spite of the marriage ceremony being conducted in a western Christian style, the norms and procedures followed are still rooted in the traditional style. The general practice is that, while deciding on the marriage after the *Atsa Xutha* (engagement), the families of both the parties sit together and discuss and decide on the details of the marriage. It has to be mentioned that in lieu with the custom practiced since time in memorial the expenditure for the *Atsa Xutha* has to be bore by the girl's family. With regards to marriage, it is the duty of the boy to meet all the marriage expenditure.

Today, there is no such thing as deciding on the *Ame* but they decides on how many pigs will be used during the marriage and whether to use *Avi* or not. It is the duty of the groom to provide with all the pigs and all the items necessary for the wedding. *Avi* (mithun) is used and killed when the girl's parent's can arrange all the jewellery and ornaments for the girl during her marriage. In one marriage, the guy's family asked if they should bring *Avi* for the marriage but the girls parents refused because they cannot arrange all the necessary items associated for killing the *Avi*, specially a set of traditional jewellery and ornaments which is a must. Yet, in another marriage since *Avi* was killed, all the rituals associated with the killing of *Avi* is observed and performed and the bride's parents gifted her the whole set of jewellery and ornaments, gift of clothes, shawl and wraparound all in pairs. The traditional practice of giving importance to father's brother's and mother's sister's during marriage is still given a lot of importance and a gift is given to them by the newly wed and it is believed that if they have any misgiving it is not good for the couple.

Till today, when the girl leave her parents house after marriage, she is given a cock by her parents to take along to her new house. The girl's father never drops her or sees her off as there is a belief that if the father comes out and see her off all the wealth of the family will be taken by her. It is the girl's mother and her father's brother who take the girl to her new house. There is also a belief that the girl should not be given a used bed from the house as it is associated with a sign of bad omen for the girl and her new family. All these constitute the traditional practices and belief which is still continued though blended with the modern Christian weddings.

There is an emergence of middle class consciousness among some section of the Sumi today. The society is such that the new rich are very busy trying to show of their wealth by having lavish and extravagant wedding while there is another illiterate section swept off by the very idea of the west who are trying to copy everything associated with westernisation. On the other hand, a section of educated people are trying to do away with the new trend and revive the old traditions and practices. An effort is been made to bring back the importance of traditional dress

and costumes and do away with the idea of white wedding dress during marriages, which is a very modern construct. Now in some marriage people have started wearing the traditional shawls and wraparound instead of white gown, though the Christian principles are followed in marriage. Again, the food are served to the guest wrapped in banana leaves instead of a very conventional paper plates. But this revival has still a long way to go as very few people has the realisation.

When we look at the marriage practices today, there is no doubt the fact that marriage has come a long way from traditional to modern-western marriage, especially through the west, the coming of the new money, and through Christianity as well. We see fusion of both tradition and modernity in the context of Sumi marriages and again there is some realisation among the educated elite who are trying to revive traditional institution and practices in marriage by bringing back the old value of the traditional shawls and wraparound



## Conclusion

The present chapter is a worthwhile exercise to re-look the aims and objectives on which this study was based. The paper analyzed the bridewealth involved in the marriage prestations. Most importantly, the meanings and context in which such a payment is made was interrogated. Moreover, the contents and the whole process associated with bridewealth and reasons for such marriage prestations were also explored keeping the aims and objectives of the paper in mind. However, it was made a point so as to enquire how and why such prestations occurred in the very first place itself. In the due process of research inquiry, the basic idea of exchange involved in such transactions was analysed. One of the overarching theme of enquiry was that, the bridewealth payment system was located in the context of rites and rituals performed in marriage and the resultant relationships.

In the process, several pertinent points were taken into consideration. Different societies follow different practices and customs during marriage. Here, the marriage prestations in one form or another are paid though the mode which is culture specific. Broadly understood, marriage prestations may be reserved or used for those segments of the set of exchanges which are most directly connected with the union itself, and may refer to the goods given either by the wife's relatives or the husbands. The payment of bridewealth is the sign that the marriage has taken place, more like a wedding ring in the western marriage and also as an indication of the statuses of the various parties to the marriage agreement. It has been argued that when the bridewealth is received and kept by the bride's family woman are seen as property to certain extent.

It has often been held that bridewealth is particularly associated with patrilineal societies, where as it is absent or is replaced by bride service in the matrilineal communities. In Africa, bridewealth is common in patrilineal system and usually absent or insubstantial in matrilineal and the so-called bilateral societies where marriage with the bridewealth is one option among several. In case of exchange

marriage no bridewealth is paid, instead brides are exchanged where each bride acts as the other's bridewealth.

The debate regarding the proper usage of the term "Bridewealth" and "Brideprice" in respect to its social meaning or the economic transaction taking place is also pertinent to our study. The basic tenets of the debate are the kinds of transactions made that exist in primitive economies. There is an urgent need to establish unambiguous categories for classifying types of exchanges, appropriations, and transactions in small scale economies that are neither industrialised nor integrated by markets for labour, land, or produce.

The size of bridewealth payments varies from societies to societies and from group to group as well, depending on the situation and status of the family. The societies in which there is matrilineal descent groups, bridewealth consisting of livestock are statistically quiet insignificant. The relationship between high bridewealth and labour migration goes beyond the problem of the disadvantaged son. Polygyny which is so wide spread a feature of African marriage is made possible largely by the differential marriage age i.e. early for girls and later for man. Bridewealth and polygyny thus interact in an important manner.

In the course of studying the marriage transaction that takes places during the whole process of marriage, the social anthropologists came up with the term marriage prestations. Prestations is defined here as the act of paying, in cash or in kind and services what is due by law or by the customs. Marriage prestations are used for all the gifts and payments of goods and services, which are required in the process of establishing a valid and complete marriage.

As discussed earlier, there are different kinds of prestations involved in a bundle of institution called marriage cross culturally and bridewealth is one such kind of prestations, which is seen mostly in the tribal societies of the world, prominently among the tribals of Africa and Asia. The practices very close to this are also seen

among the different Naga tribes like the Lotha, the Rengma and the Sumi of North-East India. The prestations of bridewealth take place when the groom makes the gift or prestations to that of the bride's family. If we take this understanding of how the prestations are paid, both in the African society, the Naga society in general and Sumi in particular, we find that prestations go from the groom and his kin to the bride's family. The groom's families are the givers and the bride's families are supposed to be the receivers.

The Sumi practice of *Ame* does not equate to the category, which is called bridewealth because no doubt the *Ame* is paid by the groom to the bride's family but there is another prestations followed, given to the bride by her parents during marriage to substantiate with *Ame* which can be called counter prestations. Thus, the question arises as to where do we place the Sumi system of *Ame* and how do we understand it? The *Ame* system of Sumi categorically does not fit in the definition of either dowry or the groom price, and the nearest we can place is the bridewealth but it is complex.

It is also said that, the amount of *Ame* is decided and paid in according to the gift of jewellerys, costumes and attires, and all the articles used by Sumi prepared and presented by the girl's parents to the bride on her marriage. It is only when these items and presents are seen and their values are weighed that the amount of *Ame* is decided and agreed upon. Now, if we take this process of transactions into account, we see both the features of the bridewealth and dowry operating simultaneously and it makes us ponder on how do we conceptualise the *Ame* practice of the Sumi in the marriage prestations? As is already discussed it does not fit into the category of bridewealth proper and definitely not in groomprice or dowry as well.

In the concept of bridewealth, many a times the economic factors are given a lot of precedence, the compensations for the loss of the woman's labour along with the transfer of woman's progeny. It is seen that among the Naga and the Sumi tribe, the right of the woman always lies in the family of her origin and they always have the

right to call her back if they find any misgivings, though in this case the bridewealth or *Ame* needs to be returned according to the validity of the cases.

Among the Naga tribes it is said that during marriage the transfer of woman's right is never absolute or permanent. The important aspects of her rituals, economic and jural rights rest with her patrilineal groups and only after a passage of time the woman is slowly drawn more and more closer into her husband's lineage but she can never become a member of that lineage. On the other hand among the tribals of Africa once the bridewealth is paid, woman gets adopted to the clan or family of her husband and the husband and his kin retains the complete control over her.

The Sumi society has another system called *Aqha Axe* which is related to marriage. Here, the person who cannot pay his own *Ame* get obligated under this system to who ever pays his *Ame* during his marriage. But instead of the woman's relation getting affected, it is the man whose relation and position directly gets interfered, as he automatically become obliged under the *Aqha Axe* system. The relationship is like the manor lord and the surf or the Prajan and Kamin in the Jajmani system more closely in the Indian context. Thus, the point here is can we say that when *Ame* is paid in the Sumi context, is it an economic transaction where women are bought and sold like a commodity in the market? The truth is that, it is the man who gets indebted and become duty-bound which is hereditary, goes from generation to generation and passes from father to son.

Most societies where the prestations of bridewealth are paid are patrilineal, be it the Sumi and other Naga tribes or that of the tribes of Africa and the place of residence is patrilocal. The situation is quite different if we look at the different chapter and stage it goes through before coming to the patri-neolocal residence. With regards to the Sumi, the place of residence is patrilocal in the sense that, soon after marriage the bride goes to the groom's village or clan land and they set up their own house. There is no question of joint household. The payment of *Ame* is not done in instalments unlike the Lotha Naga tribe and the cases of the some African tribes. If

the *Ame* is not sufficient, it is just a matter of some days, a month or two within which time the whole amount of *Ame* is paid.

With regards to the Lotha Naga tribe, the bridewealth is paid in instalments and it can go on from year to year and sometimes one comes across the son still paying his mother's bridewealth. Again, the man has to pay the bridewealth in kind and in service. Consequently, many a time we see a man working for his in-laws over a period of years and in case the marriage alliance is between two different villages, the groom has to set up a hut at the girl's compound and work for his in-laws till the bridewealth is paid. After which he takes his wife to his own village and set up their own household. This is very similar to the Bedouin where bridewealth is paid in instalments, which make's marriage a process rather than a state of being because the whole process continues over a period of time.

In dowry system, the bride's family pays the marriage prestations to the groom's family. Here again, there arise a situation of givers and receivers. The fact that the wife is given for marriage makes the recipient superior, just as the very act of giving the girl makes the family giving out woman inferior. There is a feeling that through marriage, woman becomes the property of an alien kinship group and in order to secure her good treatment, lavish hospitality is offered and handsome gifts are made to the husband's family through out life. Among the Southern Bantu there is a practice of marrying up instead of marrying down and the aristocrats extract a large bridewealth for women whom they send down and pay a lesser bridewealth for the women of lower status whom they marry.

However, the situation is different because in the former case dowry is paid by the woman's family to the man's family and in the latter case bridewealth is paid by the man to the woman and her kinsman. In the case of Sumi and the other Naga tribe's while contemplating on marriage, the notion of the superiority and inferiority does not arise at all and woman never becomes the member of the clan where she is married into. The very idea of taking woman as property is alien here.

They are not considered as property or commodity that one can transfer her to another clan or family to become their property during marriage.

The very idea of the “gift of the virgin” accompanied by dowry among the Brahmins is another point which needs to be dealt with. It is regarded as the gift of a virgin, between two men, i.e. from the father to the husband which is supposed to be freely given and on marriage, her status is changed not only from unmarried to married woman, but also from being a member of her father’s group to that of her husband, even to the extent that she observes death pollution for her husband relatives but not for her own.

The purpose of marriage is supposed to be procreation, and particularly continuation of the male line. Women are regarded as merely the receptacles and transmitters, but never the carriers of a line. Among the Sumi society, women no doubt are not seen as the carriers of line of descent but, they have their own identity from her family of origin. The situation here is such that, a woman is never recognized by the members of her husband clan though she is drawn more closer to her husband clan with the passage of time but she can never become the member of his husband clan and her identity always remains with her family of origin. This is one of the main points of departure between the two society practicing bridewealth and dowry from the Sumi’s *Ame*.

There is a debate on whether the prestations of marriage given by the groom to the bride should be called brideprice or bridewealth. The prestations made by the groom to the bride was first called “brideprice,” but the term did not find favour among the anthropologists while discussing the “marriage prestations,” as it was understood that price emphasised only one function of the wealth; the economic function and price very often was misunderstood and taken as purchase of women. This led to the common understanding that once the brideprice is used, wives are bought and sold in the market, in the same way as other commodities. Evans-

Pritchard thus proposed the term “bridewealth” in 1931 to include and stress the other social aspects associated with it apart from the economic factors.

Among the Nuer, marriage is not considered to be complete till a child has been born, though the couple may continue to live together. The bridewealth paid here is very high and consists of forty heads of cattle. In case, the bridewealth paid is not sufficient enough the man remains indebted to the girl’s family for some time. When bridewealth is received here, it is distributed equally between the bride’s paternal and maternal kinsmen. The cattle are distributed in fixed proportion between the bride’s own family, her father’s family and her mother’s family.

Here, the maternal family of the girls plays a very important role in extracting the bridewealth of the girl which is quite different from the case of the Naga and the Sumi tribe. Among the Sumi, the prestations of *Ame* no doubt is very high but the degree depends on the status of the family. The maternal uncle and aunty is given importance during marriage and while distributing the *Azajunlasi* meat, in order to get blessing from them. They however, have no role in the payments of *Ame* and they have no share in it as well. It goes solely to the bride’s parents and her family.

Though, some similarities are seen among the Naga tribes and the Zande, when Evans-Pritchard talked about the use of spear to accentuate the girl’s status of being married or not. Among the Zande the girl’s status of being married or not is known by whether or not she has received the spears. Both the Angami and the Rengma Naga use the spear in cementing the marriage. Among the Angami though the situation is altered, the groom while finalising marriage gives some spear to his own maternal uncle as a mark of respect and seeking his consent.

The Rengma also used spearhead in bridewealth payments and these spear-heads are used solely for the marriage purpose and are never sharpened or used for any other purpose. The spear-heads received are also given to the maternal uncle, the person whose enmity is believed to cause sterility. The importance attached to

mother's brother among the Sumi and the Rengma is quite near to Radcliffe-Brown's stress on the place of mother's brother during marriage and the hold he has over the bridewealth which is known in Sotho (South Africa) as *ditsoa*. Whereas, among the Sumi the mother's brother does not have any hold over the *ame*, and it is only during marriage he is given some cash present and other gift as well by the bride and the groom according to their means and he also provides them with gifts and other necessary items.

The consent of the father to the proposal is regarded as a valid engagement. The husband brings the present of a bracelet which the girl wears on her wrist and she grows up wearing this pledge among the Zande. This is in some way very close to the practice of child engagement among the powerful families of Rengma. Here, the boy's father gives the girl's father a pair of small shell discs for the girl to wear as ear ornaments and she continues to wear this all through till her marriage. This kind of betrothal is arranged only when the boy's father is sure of the amount of bridewealth he is capable of paying.

Among the African tribes because of the need to pay large amount of bridewealth, it delays the marriage of the man in the society, especially if there are lots of brother's it delays the other younger brother's marriage as well. As for girls, marriage is early and this also give birth to the practice of polygamy among the older male in the society as the young man in the society could not compete in the marriage market. Earlier, among the Sumi tribe the powerful and the chief used to have two-three wives but such cases were very few. This was not because of the young mans inability to pay the *Ame* but it was in practice to as the powerful and the rich in the society wants to assert their status and power in the society.

It has been discussed by Radcliffe- Brown (1950) that the Africans distinguished between legal marriage and irrational union. According to him in order to attain the legal status, a series of transactions and formalities needs to be fulfilled between two bodies of kins and very often, the prestations of goods and services made by



the bridegroom to the bride's kin is an essential part in establishing the legality (i.e. the prestations of bridewealth) of marriage. The children born in the legal marriage are given a "legitimate" status in the society and it is only when the whole bridewealth are paid, the women's kinsman does not have any hold over the children.

When we apply this to the Sumi context it is irrelevant because there is no such thing as the legal or irrational marriage. Once the person is married, the children born always gets the name of the father and his family. Though, among the Lotha there is ceremony called *Ponyiratesen* which is regarded as a sort of initiation into married life and before *Tsoyuta* the groom is forbidden to have a connection as it is believed to result in the sterile marriage.

According to another perspective on marriage prestations and bridewealth he asserts that, marriage cannot be assumed to exist prior to the payments of marriage prestations. The case is different as in many societies we come across the practices where marriage takes place first and then followed by the payment of marriage over the period of years. The cases can be taken from the Lotha Naga society, the Nuer, Zande and Boeudio, where the marriage payment are paid in instalments, both in kind and in cash over a period of time. But till the marriage rituals are performed, the couples are not considered as married even if bridewealth is decided and paid partially.

It is often alleged that the payments of marriage prestations transform a mating relationship into "a socially meaningful process," and thus place it into the universe of relations as marriage, for which marriage and marriage payments are "complementary elements of the same thing". Comaroff (1980) further goes on to argue that, the payment of marriage prestations marks the status of women as being properly married. It confers the status of a wife on the woman and implies that a husband acquires control of power over his wife. But this point is very debatable because, even before the payments of the bridewealth the woman acquires the position of the wife once the marriage is decided and they start co-habitation. In

some case the woman acquires the status of wife but the children that she bears carries the mother's name and not the father's name till all the full bridewealth is paid.

The feminist scholarship does not find favor with the payment of the bridewealth and dowry prestations during marriage. They cling to the view that the payment of bridewealth is the transaction between men and it is the use of woman as a commodity and economic transaction of woman where she is sold off from one man to another. But if we carefully try to understand the point, these arguments have the risk of running into deeper water as the question that is posed before us is where does one place the payments of dowry then? If the payment of bridewealth is an economic transaction and the selling of woman like the commodity in the market, as the payment is made by the groom and his kin to the bride's parents and kin for marriage, the problem which cropped up is what is dowry payment then? Dowry here is paid by the bride's family to the groom and his family.

Dowry is supposed to be the gift at marriage for the girls well being in her new home and also to ensure proper treatment from her in-laws, but this payments continues over a periods of life and at different functions and occasion. Very often the supposed gift is demanded from the women's family time and again. Are we not to take these prestations as the selling of man in the marriage market? The dowry received at marriage is taken as a sign of status and prestige and the payment is continuous. If we examine the payments of dowry from the angle in which bridewealth is understood and argued, does it not fall under the same category?

Is it justified to look at the bridewealth as the selling of women and dowry as the selling of man to the highest bidder in the marriage market? All these questions need to be examined, understood and dealt with contextually. If the bridewealth is the selling of woman, very often it is assumed that women in tribal society are sold during marriage as bridewealth is paid than is it not the selling man in dowry system among the Indian society where it is largely practiced?

Moreover, bride price and dowry are seen as two types of marriage payment, where the bridewealth or brideprice is the transfer of resources conceded and the transfer of rights over her productive and reproductive capabilities. Dowry on the other hand is essentially a gift to the bride or the couple by the girls parents for the setting up of their new conjugal estate and is understood as different nature of gifts given by the bride's parents at the time of her marriage, usually in forfeit of claim by her on the immovable property of the parental estates. Does it mean that dowry is the compensation or substitute for the immovable property which she will not inherit? If this is the case, where does the problem of paying and demanding too much dowry fits in and the girl's parents having to fulfil all the whims and fancies of the groom's parents at all times.

Maya Unnithan-Kumar (1997) argues that, bridewealth is not the recognition of a women's contribution to the household, or a payment for the loss of a prolific member but it is the recompense to the father and his agnatic group for past expenditure and for her maintenance. The women have no say over the marriage payments and it is supposed to be man's sphere deciding on marriage payments, be it a bridewealth or a dowry. The patterns of negotiation between the father and her husband indicates women as the markers of the transfer of wealth and it was further argued that women here may be worst off than the upper caste Hindu women as they have no control on marriage payments decisions for the next generation. It is seen that even in dowry the amount to be paid are decided by the male head of the two families.

If we look at this state of affairs in which dowry are transferred, women here should be enjoying a higher privilege and freedom under the circumstances but instead, it is seen that women suffers more in dowry trying to meet the demands of the man's family over a period of time than bridewealth or *Ame*. The marriage payments are supposed to be a gift to her from her parents but do women really have control over this payments in dowry because very often it is used by the family jointly and the elder women in the family i.e. mother-in-law and sister-in-

law have complete control over it. The marriage payments in the case of *Ame* among the Sumi is paid to the women's family and it is said that according to the amount of *Ame* the girls parents present her with the gift of different variety which is for her and she dispose it at her own discretion. The gift that she receives during her marriage both from her parents and relatives is under her full control and she can utilize it according to her wishes and when she feels the needs. Her in-laws does not have say over the disposal over it.

The feminists understand bridewealth as the economic compensation for women's labour. Rajarman (1983) argued that, taking the unpaid labour contribution in terms of domestic chores, and subtract the cost of maintaining her, comes out dowry to replace bridewealth. This view is not very pertinent because if we look at how dowry is functioning and used it is the exploitation of women and her family and the situation of women here is at lowest because women are often tortured and troubled for dowry payment. Again if woman's family is not able to meet the requirement of dowry, the marriage may not even take place. Does not bridewealth place women at the safer place because women here are at the controlling ends and she holds the string?

Karve (1968) puts it that, all over India there is the custom of giving bridewealth among the poor caste and of receiving dowry among the higher castes. This is not only in India that the spectrum of marriage to dowry to bridewealth is found but, also that very marriage involves multiple transactions and payments, some unilateral and others reciprocal, so that it is said that the modalities of bridewealth and dowry co-exist in the same series with one or the other type of transactions gaining dominance. It is often found that there is a parallel prestations of both the bridewealth and dowry in practice and even among the Sumi along with the *Ame* there is the another gift from the women's side for her welfare which to some extend can be equate to dowry in its true sense.

Randeria and Visaria (1984) argued that, the payments are not just about the value of labour compensation where, multiple payments occur over several generations in both directions and bridewealth and dowry-like payments coexist among lower castes, both having increased substantially in the past decades. Kishwar (1987) took the stand that, in the time of rising land acquisition among the Ho, wealthier families were reluctant to pay bridewealth to poorer families, while poorer families were willing to forgo bridewealth in order to make alliances with wealthier families. Today, among the Sumi the *Ame* proper is not paid but during marriage the groom has to bear all the marriage expenditure and the cattle and pigs used for marriage has to be provided by the man no matter what the number may be. Other expenditure if the women feels necessary can come forward and help, and also the gifts, present and cash receives are the solely for the couple.

Among the Barma of Chad it is seen that the man has to compete in the marriage market and the willingness and readiness of the man to compete shows his readiness. Evans-Pritchard took the position that the instances where it is paid in instalments, the movements of such rights occur in con-commitantly reciprocal stages. The passage of bridewealth signals the alienation of various kinds of rights of a woman to her husband and her kin. The practice of the *Aqha Axe* system among the Sumi is quite critical looking at from this kind of angle. The cost-effect of the relationship is relatively different here. Instead of the women's rights being transferred the rights and obligations of man procuring woman get relocated to another man who paid his *Ame*. The man's right and duties are always under the control of another man and over the years he has to fulfil this obligation.

The Lotha, the Rengma and the Sumi does not in any way see the accepting of the marriage payments as immoral sale of the girl instead it is looked at as the compensation for the girl leaving the clan and is taken as immense moral value by the people here. The price agreed upon is always more than what is taken or received in order to avoid the misconception and the stigma that may be attached as the selling the daughter. But in the case of dowry, the dowry payment is more than

what is agreed up with gifts and presents accompanying it at every given opportunity either by force or by will. The marriage payments is understand to validate the transfer of rights of women's sexuality by the different Naga tribes and through this marriage prestations social organisation are believed to be strengthen among the Angami with reciprocal rights and obligations.

While discussing dowry and its payments, Vatuk (1975) talked about how the wedding gifts, excepting those items exclusively made for the bride's personal use becomes the property of the groom's joint household. All the items including the cash, the gift given to the groom before wedding, the household furnishing, utensils, clothes etc the disposal of which is at the discretion of the groom's parents. This is different from the *Ame* payment among the Sumi where there is a fusion of the feature of bridewealth and dowry. Here, we see that all the wedding gifts including the cash received during marriage are the property of the new couple and it is for them to decide how to use and dispose it. The parents of both the family has no say over it.

The discussion highlighted how marriage and marriage prestations takes place among the Naga society and the tribe such as the Angami, the Ao, the Lotha and the Rengma and Sumi were taken as a point of reference. The Naga have patrilineal society and the male ascendancy is complete with them. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood, and the whole village economy is depended on agriculture. The coming of the British to the Naga Hills brought to an end the power of the village Chiefs which was a great loss for the Naga tribes.

Among the Naga tribes, marriage is a systematically organized understanding between the heads of two households whereby the woman are transferred and recruited into the households. Marriage between two household within a clan territory enables the kinsman to maintain intimate relations. The *Morung* or the dormitory for the young unmarried men is very prominent in most Naga village. Among the Angamis, marriage is a fact through which the whole set of rules comes

into force whereby women are transferred and recruited into the households. The Ao practice a monogamous marriage and can have only one wife at a time. The Lotha tribe may fairly be said to have an exogamous system which is in the process of breaking down. For the Rengma, marriage is regarded merely as a civil contract, and no religious ceremonies are performed.

Among the Sumi community, clan exogamy is practised though after seven generation from the father side and five generation from the mother side cross cousin marriage is possible. Among the Sumi Naga tribe, "*Ame*" (bridewealth) is one tradition which plays a very unique and binding role in the Sumi's marriage. Among the Sumi the *Ame* is very high, and it varies from the status of the person in the society.

Divorce is accepted by the society and incompatibility of temperament can be one of the main reasons. Among the Lotha, when divorce occurs, the parents sometimes returns the full amount of the marriage price which they have received, plus a fine of Rs.10. Adoption is a recognized institution among the different Naga society. The question of inheritance is inter-related with the question of adoption.

The Sumi are one of the major Naga tribe. If we look at the Sumi society and other Naga society in general, a lot of changes have taken place. The coming of the missionary into the Naga Hills brought about a tremendous change in the social and cultural life of the Nagas which has its advantages as well as disadvantages. There was a shift in the society and in the outlook of the people and we can see the transition into three phases.

The first was the traditional culture and practices at its original undiluted state. The second is the coming of the colonial administrators and Christian missionaries, who brought with them the western education, the modernisation and westernisation. There was a tremendous change in the society and the people's attitude and perceptions was changed. Suddenly every thing that was traditional was

discouraged and discarded and there was a rage in the mind of the people in a blind race for western ideals and practices which was very new.

When it comes to the practice of marriage, the old system of traditional marriage ceremony was completely taken over by the Christian marriage also known as “Holy matrimony” solemnised in the church by the ordained priest. Especially with regards to marriage, the *Ame* and bridewealth began to droop and take another shape. Marriage as a social institution was completely distorted, and peoples understanding of cementing marriage vows also went through change. With Christianity, the Christian ideal were followed and marriage was solemnised by the church priest which was considered as the right and proper way of conducting marriage. These practices were very recent and they have no relations with the traditional culture and practices of the tribal people in any way. There was a paradigm shift in the styles and etiquettes of celebrating marriage.

Earlier, marriage feast was given out and certain rituals are observed at the bride’s house before the sent off. Now, we see the marriage ceremonies being conducted in the church with all the relatives, friends and acquaintances being invited to witness the marriage in a very grand fashion. Here, we can see the impact of both globalisation and consumer culture on the move. The very fact of church wedding and priest, the wearing of white wedding gown which is a symbol of being pure during marriage, is an indication of the work of globalisation. Again we see that people are so much swept away by the new consumer culture that they do not hesitate spending a huge amount of money for the marriage celebration, on the consumptions as well as on dress. If we look at the earlier practices, it is seen that bridewealth and *Ame* is very high, but it was not used for the consumption during marriage.

On the contrary, it was given to the bride’s parents and kinsman. Today, it has reached a stage where the amount for bridewealth and *Ame* is not specified and asked. Instead the man has to take care of all the marriage expenditure and it is



expected to provide with a good number of animals for marriage purposes which are all consumed during marriage. People thus, started holding a huge and luxurious party which is a show for their status and social standing in the society. The gift and present given are all very expensive and profligate. The traditional institutions and practices at this phase were at the disappearing ends.

The third phase is the realisation of the importance of tradition and going back rooted to traditions. People are confused and trapped between tradition and modernity. Only a very few intellectual are coming to this realisation where, an honest effort is being made to revive back the tradition. Though, blended with westernisation and modernisation and along with it comes the new wave of consumerism and globalization. Here, we see the society dividing into three categories. The first is the elite of the society who are rich and powerful. They are the new rich in the society and they do everything in a lavish and grand manner.

The second is the intellectual middle class. This section of people are realising the importance of preserving their traditions and culture. They are in the process of trying to revive the lost meaning of their tradition, and thereby, a great deal of credence is given to the local festivals and celebrations which were not there for some time. They are being promoted and celebrated in a very grand ways and style. Even with regards to marriage they have started organising in a very ethnic manner, with traditional costumes and ambience. However, this is yet to be understood by the common people as if the norms are trends are not followed, they are being criticized as hoarders. Therefore, bringing back one's own original tradition will still have to go a long way because there is a huge gap in the mindset and understandings of the people.

The third is the commoner and uneducated group of people. This group are so blind folded by the idea of westernization that, they try to follow and copy every thing that is west, without knowing the real meaning and use of it. Even in the interiors of the village we come across the villager going out of his way and getting married

in wedding dress, exchanging the wedding rings blindly, and giving out the wedding cakes. The problems that arise is that, they are not aware of the significance of all this and even the wedding rings are placed on the wrong fingers which show how without any sight people are following and taking in these practices.

Here, the instances of the African and some Naga tribes have been taken into account. The changes among the Sumi is going in one direction with globalization and consumer culture and the African context is another case. When we looked at the practices of the diverse societies across the continent, we come across lots of similarities cross- culturally. Different societies have different understanding and perception to the practices, but when we look at the whole idea of marriage, we see that prestations exist in one form or another which can be both ways, be it bridewealth or dowry.

However, in some societies both the features of dowry and bridewealth exist though one will be more prominent than the other. The African society and the Naga societies have been considered, taking Sumi Naga society as the point of reference to understand the marriage prestations in the context of Bridewealth and *Ame*. There is a need to understand and accept that, marriage prestations exist in every kind of marriage in one or the other form and this cannot be denied. In some cases it is the man who is most affected and at another, it is the women who are the worst hit. Thus, one should not generalise but make a conscious endeavour to look and study the minute details present along within the system and understand their meanings for the people.

These processes clearly indicate at transition in society. Whenever there are sweeping changes in every system, new marriages are attributed to older customs. Newer practices emerge, not necessarily compromising on traditional values.

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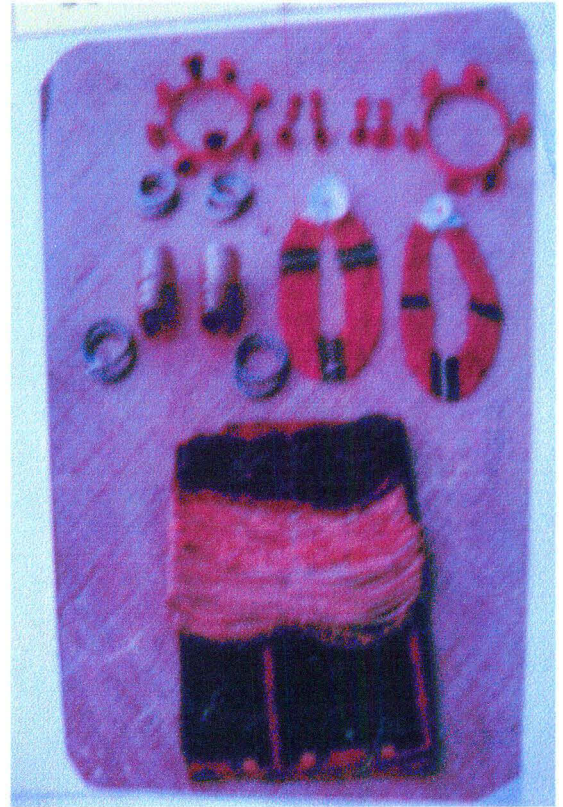
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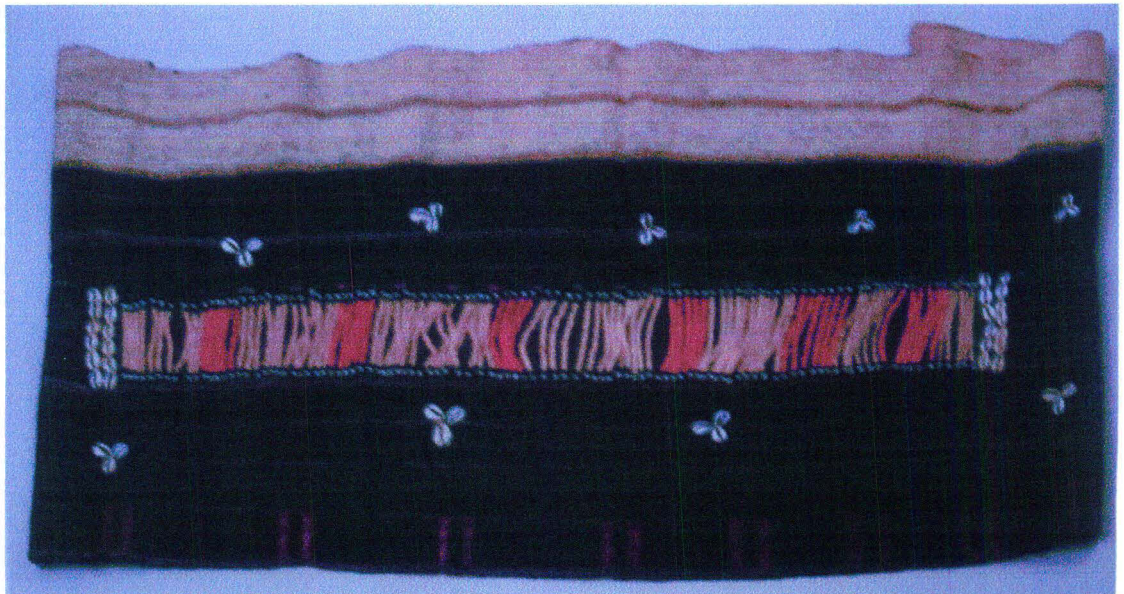
Zunheboto Town. 2006. G. B's and Elders Committee Yehzabo Eno Pimhe-Yeh.



A Sumi Couple wearing their traditional attire. The Man's costume; Avabo, Aghacho, Amulakuxa, Asaphu, Ashola, awu kukha, azuta, angu and Apukhu kuxa.



women's costumes; Akutsu-kukha, Tsukole, Asapu, Akusa, Achipa, with agha ghi, Akishelo-chi and Tsughu mini



The famous and most talked about, "Amini Kimiji". This Amini Kimiji is made in the highest category of marriage called Amini Kimiji Xe. The highest Ame is paid when this Amini Kimiji is made for the daughter and given during her marriage. All the gift items in this marriage have to be given in pairs.





The Angami Morung



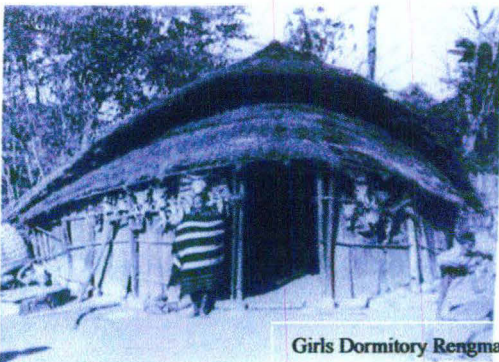
Konyak Morung



Ao Morung



Angami Morung



Girls Dormitory Rengma