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# The Various Aspects of the *Kurmi-Mahato* Traditional Marriage in Purulia District

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**Abstract:** The Kurmi-Mahato community, like other communities in Purulia, has its own marriage system. Meanwhile, their marriage system is diverse. Different types of marriages are common among them. The most common method is called *Dekha-Suna -Biha* or arranged marriage. *Am-Biha* and *Mohul-Biha* are the most significant in law because if those two mandatory rituals are not performed properly, the entire marriage is declared invalid. Side by side *Sindra -Dan* and *Sinor-Bodol* rituals are considered to be the most significant in terms of social and interpersonal relations. Above all the marriage system of *Kurmi-Mahatos* of Purulia is practical, consistent and balanced. Because there is a smooth process of remarriage as well as divorce and love marriage of boys and girls according to their own choice. Altogether, the marriage system of *Kurmi-Mahatos* of Purulia has become a glorious institution resplendent in its own characteristics.

**Keywords:** *Am-Biha, Mohul-Biha, Sindra -Dan, Sinor-Bodol.*

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## 1. Introduction

The first District Gazetteer of the erstwhile Manbhum district published by the British government clearly stated that the *Kurmi-Mahato* community had the largest population in the Manbhum district [1].

The society of Purulia is a vibrant tapestry woven from various communities, with the *Kurmi-Mahato* community standing out as particularly notable. Within their social structure, marriage is celebrated as one of the most cherished and joyous aspects.

Strong connections to the forest and nature are fundamentally woven into their traditions, reflecting a deep respect for their environment [2]. The *Kurmi-Mahato* community embraces a range of unique customs and rituals during marriage ceremonies that may seem unusual in today's digital age. Yet, these practices have played a crucial role in not only organizing their society but also fostering a strong sense of unity and belonging among their members over generations.

## **2. Review of the Literature**

Investigating the marriage system of the *Kurmi-Mahatos* of Purulia reveals several intriguing dimensions, yet researchers encounter specific obstacles, the most significant being the limited availability of Primary Sources. The *Bengal District Gazetteer: Manbhum* authored by H. Coupland stands out as a crucial primary source. Additionally, *Sanskritization vs Nirbakization* by Dr. Pashupati Prasad Mahato serves as the definitive secondary source on the subject. In contrast to the scarcity of Primary Sources, there is a notable abundance of Secondary Sources that contribute greatly to our knowledge of the *Kurmi-Mahatos* marriage system. Analysts and researchers from within the *Kurmi-Mahato* community have taken an active role in documenting their cultural practices, resulting in a significant number of publications. These books and articles cover a range of topics related to marriage customs, rituals, and societal norms, providing crucial insights that not only reflect the community's perspectives but also enrich the border discourse on Cultural Anthropology. Thus, the combination of utilizing District Gazetteers and engaging with extensive Secondary Sources creates a robust framework for understanding the complexities of the marriage system among the *Kurmi-Mahatos* of Purulia.

## **3. Constructive Analysis of the *Kurmi-Mahato* Marriage System**

The traditional *Kurmi-Mahato* marriage system of the Purulia district differs greatly from that of the other communities [3]. The *Kurmi-Mahato* marriages have an exceptional aspect, that is Daughter Dowery instead of *Bor-Pon* or Dowery. Although the amount was not much, only one *taka* to seven *taka*. According to this custom, the nine-year-old bride used to go to her father-in-law's house and take care of the housework from her mother-in-law. After reaching puberty, she would take care of all the responsibilities of the family with grace and indulgence in her husband. On the other hand, child marriage as well as adult marriage occurred simultaneously [4].

Generally, four types of marriage were practised here, namely, 1. *Deka-Suna-Biha*, or relationship marriage, or purely social marriage, 2. *Ghor-Dhuka-Biha*, or love marriage, 3. *Tana-Tani-Biha*, or forced marriage, and 4) *Shangha* or Remarriage [5].

Apart from these, some other types of marriages were practised in their society, namely, 1. *Sindur-Dhusa-Biha*, 2. Marriage due to a love relationship with the master's daughter while staying in the master's house, and 3. Cash marriage.

Usually, a marriage that is completed based on mutual consent of both parties is called *Dekhh-Suna - Biha*. Again, and if a love relationship developed between a boy and a girl and, as a result, the girl moved to the boy's house, it was called *Ghor-Dhuka-Biha*.

On the other hand, if a boy forcibly brought a girl to his house, it was called *Tana -Tani -Biha*. If a boy forced a girl to wear *sindur* or vermilion, the resulting marriage was called *Sindura-Dhusa-Biha*, and also if a person married the master's daughter while labouring in the master's house and then started living as a son-in-law, then the marriage would be recognised in the society.

In some cases, an adult son of a rich family in the above community bribes the bride's father with a lot of money to bring his daughter to marriage, in all these cases, it is seen that the bridegroom is lacking in some respects, and to cover it, he bribes the father to marry his daughter.

Remarriage has long been practised in the *Kurmi-Mahato* community. This is called *Shangha* [6]. The word *Shangha* comes from the word *Shangho*. Here refers to the *Kurmi-Mahato's* social Association. In English, it is called the *Kurmi* Confederation. According to the customary practice, all expenses of *Shangha* marriage are borne by the groom and his family. What exactly needs to be said here is that this marriage is performed in a completely unpretentious manner. After the above marriage, the bride, as usual, gets a proper place in the house of the groom and in society, i.e. respect and dignity [7].

Now let's come to the main livelihood of the above community, which is Paddy cultivation. As a result, they try to complete all the auspicious ceremonies, including marriage, only successfully completing the work of paddy cultivation, production, and collection. All social and religious ceremonies start after *Poush Songkranti* or from the 1st Magh of the Bengali calendar. In fact, so many *Monglanusthan* that start from the 1st Magh, the people of this community from different parts of the district gather; in this way, a get-together is held among them, and there are various talks, including marriage. This is how the *Deka -Suna - Biha* begins.

One more thing that needs to be said here is that it is customary for the daughter's house to be an active

initiative in their marriage; the activism of the groom's house is not normal; it is considered humiliating for the groom's house.

In their marriage, the opinion of the bride is very important. If the heads of both parties agree on the marriage, then the bride's opinion is sought, and if she doesn't agree, the marriage is cancelled.

Now comes the turn to see the bride. To see the bride, the groom goes to the bride's house as usual. The bride becomes very excited to see the groom. Various curiosities arise in the mind about how the groom is, and his mind dances with joy.

After the groom arrives at the bride's house, the custom is to give them a glass of water first, this custom is an ancient one and is still in use. As usual, the bridegroom looks closely at the bride. After the end of the bride-viewing phase, jaggery, *chira*, and curd, along with raw chillies, are given as food [8].

After the wedding day is finalized, the invitation phase starts for both parties. This work is entrusted to a handful of skilled people. They used to walk and distribute invitations to different places. Because, at one time, marriage cards were not in circulation. Those who were invited along with betel nuts. According to the ancient customs of the people, after going to the house of a certain person, a jug of water was given to him. After washing the feet of the person who came to invite in the water of the jug, the person coming threw up the betel nut in the small container and announced the marriage and requested that they must join the proposed ceremony.

The next step is *Ashirbad* or Blessing. Which is called *Duarkhunda*. It was held in both the house of the groom and the bride. In this, the bride is well decorated with the clothes and ornaments given by the bridegroom and placed on the *Tulsi moncho* of the house and near a straw that has been spread with rice, *durba*, and mango leaves. At the same time, the *Ashirbad*, or Blessing, was done by sprinkling water. Almost a similar ceremony took place in the groom's house.

The next step of marriage is added through the *Logon* ceremony [9]. This is first done in the groom's house. The *logon* is first arranged in a towel inside a container, and then it is delivered to the bride's house, which contains some materials for the bride to wear. It is said that as soon as the *logon* reaches the bride's house, all uncertainties of marriage are over.

Now let's see how the *logon* is tied. Usually, in the groom's house, an older person ties the *logon*. First, raw jute or flux is rolled, then yellowed atop rice, a one rupee coin, and a *horitoki* or betel nut are placed together on the *Tulsi moncho*. After the *logon* reaches the bride's house, the next step of marriage begins. This is the *Tel-Halud Makhano* or *Gaye-Halud* ceremony. It is done in both houses of the bride and the

groom. When the *Gaye-Halud* phase is over, a *kajollota* is given to the bride, and a *janti* (betel nut cracker) is given to the groom.

Now comes another custom known as *Biha-Sinan*. According to this custom, the sister's -in-law of both sides has to cut two spades of soil. Then the bride and the groom bathe in their own house right there.

Marriage is a very important social event in the *Kurmi-Mahato* family of Purulia. Therefore, it is very important to invite close relatives, relatives, and neighbours. The sister's husband, or *Bhognipoti* or *Bonhoi* of both sides, plays a very important role in their marriage, and therefore, he is given the honour of the chief adviser of the marriage. Those are most respectfully invited with two Betel nuts.

After the above steps are completed for the wedding, the work of marking the main moncho, or stage of marriage is started. To make the above *moncho* charming, young *shal* and *jam* leaves are brought from the forest, and four poles are dug into the hole on four sides. A temporary roof is made by covering the *jam* and *shal* leaves.

On the evening of the wedding day, the groom's nails are cut first, after which the groom's *Bhognipoti* or *Bonhoi* cuts a rectangular hole near the groom's house. After that, the bridegroom is placed on the yoke right next to the place and bathed by *shal* leaves on his head. After that, sandalwood and vermilion drops are applied on the groom's forehead, and a *topor* or *mukut* is worn on the head.

Right after this, the most important step takes place, called *Am-Biha*, or marriage with the mango tree, and marriage with the *mohul* tree. These highly significant rituals are celebrated in the bride's and groom's houses respectively with proper procedures., In this way, the *Am-Biha* custom is held at the groom's house, and the *Mohul-Biha* is held at the bride's House.

Now let's see how the ancient, uniquely styled *Am-Biha* is completed. Before leaving for the wedding, the groom is taken to a selected old mango tree. Before this, the selected mango tree is sanctified by spreading atop rice at the base of the tree and smearing it with *Kajol* and vermilion. Then *Bhognipoti* tied nine twists of raw thread to the mango tree. Then tie the mango leaf to the groom's right wrist with the thread.

Right after this, another unique ritual is performed. A few young leaves are taken from the holy mango tree and given to the groom to chew. Then the saliva juice, or spit, with mango leaf juice is taken from the groom's mouth and shared by the groom's mother, *pisima*, *kakima*, *jtheima*, etc.

*Am-Biha* is a very significant ritual. This ritual is heartfelt, tears come to the eyes of everyone present at that time. It has two practical meanings that are widely prevalent, namely, 1) The Tree is worshipped as

the main deity in the forest-born cultural context of the entire Jharkhand region, including Purulia, Hence the blessing of the tree deity is earnestly sought at every step of life in that region. Just as the mango tree yields a lot of fruit, the tree deity is also prayed to for the birth of many children among newly married couples [10].

On the other hand, a big ceremony takes place at the bride's house, as usual, on the night of the wedding. The ritual performed at the bride's house is centred around the *mohul* tree. In this, the bride is taken under the *mohul* tree, where she sits on her mother's lap and chews *mohul* leaves. After this, the husband of the bride's sister, who is called *Bhatu*, ties the right ear of the bride and the mentioned tree with a thread of seven knots and ties a bunch of *mohul* leaves on her hand. This age-old, most significant, ritual is called *Mohul-Biha*.

According to an analyst, this ritual is performed to create harmony between man and nature. According to other analysts, this ritual was probably created through the union of man and nature to complete the process of creation properly.

In terms of legal explanations, it can be said that if these two rituals are not performed properly, the marriage is considered incomplete. Therefore, during the divorce case of the *Kurmi-Mahato* couple, it was tried to find out whether the *Am-Biha* and *Mohul-Biha* rituals were done properly or not [11].

Once *Am-Biha* and *Mohul-Biha* are completed, both parties are prepared for the next phase. The groom and his companions start their journey towards the bride's house. At this juncture, the groom and his companions used the bullock carts. The bullock carts were well decorated and accompanied by the playing of Drums, *Tasha*, and *Sanai*. If the groom is rich, then the groom would go by *palki*. Besides, in a few cases, one or two *nachnis* or, dancing girls were taken to have fun throughout the night.

After that, when the groom and his companions reach the bride's house, the bride's party starts a mock fight with the groom and his companions, and finally, the groom's side wins. After this, when the groom arrives in front of the bride's house, the groom's father or uncle, and if they are not present, the older person among the groom's family, gives a drop of sandalwood to the bride's forehead and puts a small betel nuts with it. The rituals performed after this are two small vessels filled with water in which mango leaves are placed, after which the bride's brother stands in front of the groom. The groom pours water from vessels three times on the heads of the bride's brother. Similarly, the bride's brother pours water on the groom's head three times.

The rituals that are performed in the next phase are, respectively, 1) *Chok-Pura*, 2) *Duva -Bodol*, 3)

*Sona-Pita*, 4) *Dohi-Chang Machher Java Ultano*, 5) *Shala-Dhoti Luta*, 6) *Sinor-Bodol*, and 7) *Sindra -Dan*, etc [12].

The Chok-Pura ritual is observed in many other social functions, including marriage. It is controlled by the *pisima* or *fufu* of both sides.

The next episode is *Duva -Bodol*, or *Bati-Bodol*. In this case, the main companions of the bride and groom stand close to each other wearing turbans. Then the bride's father pours atop rice sent from the groom's house into a big bowl. Now, it is checked whether the items of the wedding are in order or not. The importance of the *Duva -Bodol* ritual is said to be that the fathers of the bride and groom stand before the five social dignitaries present in the ceremony and take an oath that henceforth their two families will share happiness, sorrow, joy, pain, suffering, and calamity. Even the lack of food and clothing will be solved by both of them together.

The next step is *Sona-Pital* ritual. Most probably it is taken from the higher castes. In this, the groom's father first touches the brass bangle and the gold and silver bangle on the ground and then puts it on the bride's forehead. Finally, all the jewellery brought for the bride will be given to the bride.

Next comes the *Chang -macher java ultano*. In this, the groom's father will shake the pot of *chang* fish and curd brought from his house three times. This ritual is said to pray for fertility and children for newly married couples.

The next phase is *Shala-Dhoti Luta*. First, the groom's brother will hold his *Bhognipoti*'s neck and pour water from a pot with mango leaves on the groom's head. Later, the groom will do the same. Then they feed each other *khilipan*. Then the groom will take away the dhoti from the bride's shoulder and then embrace each other.

The next episode is called *Sinor-Bodol*. It is another ancient, purely tribal custom. The role of barbers representing the groom's side becomes very important. In this, the barber will prick the fingers of both the bride and groom and take a little blood and absorb it on the torn cloth on the chest of the bride and the groom. This ritual is called *Sinor-Bodol*. It is believed that this is the proper marriage of hearts between the bride and the groom. They are both pleased by blood and from then they become one in mind and soul. According to some analysts, the wife actually becomes the husband's better half from that time.

The last important custom is *Sindra -Dan*. In this ritual, when the bride comes to the marriage moncho wearing a yellow saree, then the groom puts *sindur* or vermilion on the bride's *sinthi* three times. Just at that time, everyone present at the event said *horibol* three times.

If the *Sindra -Dan* episode is successfully completed, the bride is recognised as the lawful life partner of the groom. *Sindra -Dan* ends with the main wedding rituals. However, there are still some minor rituals remaining [13].

#### 4. Conclusions

Examining the marriage system of the *Kurmi-Mahato* community in Purulia reveals the strong influence of their ancient forest environment. Their marriage rituals and customs are beautifully adopted to reflect this natural setting. However, the challenges of modern life have begun to impact these traditional practices. Many rituals are not being observed as they once were, which presents an opportunity for revitalization and preservation. By recognizing the value of these rich traditions, we can work together to ensure that this diverse social institution not only survives but thrives in the modern world.

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