

CUSTOMARY PRACTICES REGARDING MARRIAGES AMONG MEOS OF MEWAT

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The Meos are still performing the several Hindu rituals in the same manner as the Hindus of their area. While doing field study, this author noted the observance of such practices at various places like, Choorshid, Lal Das, Hasangarh (fell in district Alwar), Garh-Azan, Shivali, SainjikaMandir (fell in district Bharatpur of Rajasthan) Dada Siyastab, Dadipiplasan, MandarKaChalla (fell in district Faridabad) Shah Chokha, JhirkaMandir, SohnaKund (fell in district Gurgaon of Harayana), etc.

The ceremonies of marriage amongst the Meos are customary and vary from place to place and district to district, state to state and even country to country. The author has examined in detail the old ceremonies and the changing attitude of the Meo community. Most of the old ceremonies have become obsolete today. Many more are likely to become obsolete in due course of time, it is therefore, considered necessary to record them for the benefit of posterity. Some of the ceremonies of the marriage are discussed below:

- i. *Selection of Bride Groom:* First of all, for the purpose of marriage, the father, brothers and other male relatives of the bride go out in search of a suitable groom in the villages of their community. The suitable groom has to be young and of Meo- descent. They adopt the customary practices and their daughters could be married only to suitors who followed similar customary norms of Meo society. This is the primary consideration of the parents
- ii. *ChoraRokna:* The girl's father or a brother or her uncle, usually accompanied by a Nai, pays a visit to the boy's village in order to meet the boy and to enquire about the family's reputation. If they agreeable for the match, they send a message to the boy's family to "Cook rice" for the guests, which signifies approval. If the boy's father approve of the match, he invites his kindered-members of the locality and village and the guests to have the rice in the evening. The guests are served rice with sugar and butter. The boy eats a morsel from the tray of the eldest member of the party, who gives him a rupee for accepting him.
However, it is clarified that whereas a contract of Sagai is broken by mutual consent of both parties to the marriage, neither party is under obligation to pay the expenses, if any. If there is a breach of contract without sufficient reason, the party who is responsible for the breach is under moral obligation to repay the expenses to the other party.
- iii. *Invitation (Communication of the Wedding):* The Marriage cycle begins in the month for Chait (March) when a formal communication of the wedding date is sent. This communication and the ceremonies associated with it are together referred to as BiyahLikhna. About one month before the wedding, the girl's parents send their family Nai or Mirasi the boy's parents with a letter proposing the date of the wedding and the number of guests they expect the boy's father to bring.
- iv. *ChakNautna:* About a week after marriage a ceremony called 'ChakNautna' (inviting the potter's wheel) is held. The boy's and the girl's mothers go to the potter's house in their respective villages with some women to perform the ceremony. The women draw a Swastika on the potter's wheel. They give gifts of grains, sugar and money to the potter's wife. The potter is informed of the date of the wedding and of their requirements of pots for the marriage. The women return, carrying a few earthen pots as a gift from the potter. Women sing several songs in a small gathering while they go to the potter's house. It is also customary that

the three or four teenage girls accompany them. The potter's wife gives earthen toys to these girls.

- v. *Inviting the Sawasni*: The term Sawasni literally means "female companion" and it refers to the groom's or bride's special companion who is usually an elder sister or father's sister are invited about two weeks before the wedding. The Sawasnis are given respectable departure after marriage by giving them proper bhet by the parents
- vi. *Tel (oil)*: A week before the wedding, the bride's family sends a confirmatory reminder to the groom's family through a Nai or a Kamin. No verbal message need be sent. The messenger delivers a small earthen pot containing tel (mustard oil), turmeric, and a two paise coin. This implies that bride's family does not anticipate any change in the plans for the wedding. The groom's father notifies his close relatives in the village of the receipt of this confirmation. A week before the wedding, the bride's family sends a confirmatory reminder to the groom's family through a Nai or a Kamin. No verbal message need to be sent. The messenger delivers a small earthen pot containing tel (mustard oil), turmeric, and a two paise coin. This implies that bride's family does not anticipate any change in the plans for the wedding. The groom's father notifies his close relatives in the village of the receipt of this confirmation.
- vii. *Peendi-Ka- Neg*: Seven days before the wedding, a ritual called peendi-ka-Neg (the giving of candy) is performed by the both the bride's and groom's families. Both mothers, with the help of the Sawasni cook Laddu with the rice and wheat flour, unrefined sugar, and ghee.
- viii. *Batna (Oil bath ceremony)*: Two days before the wedding an oil bath ceremony known as Batna is held for both the groom and the bride. The Batna Ceremony takes place in the evening. To use the groom's ceremony as an example the boy squats on a piece of wooden plank and a brass plate containing mustard oil, powdered turmeric, and a pot full of water is placed at his feet.
- ix. *Banvara*: Banvaraliterally means "village walk of the groom:.. It is undertaken a week before the wedding. The groom walks slowly to the village square at least twice and the women sing the songs praying for the long life of the future couple. On the first day the number of times Banvara is to be performed is generally three.
- x. *Mandho*: Mandho is one of the many rituals which is performed a day before the wedding in the courtyard of both the house. Pula is tied at the top of the gate of the house while seven Jehars (earthen vessels) covered with Gharia are placed at the bottom. A large quantity of the rice is cooked and all members of Patti, Meo elders and others close relatives in the village are fed at the house of the groom or the bride.
- xi. *Nauta (the contribution towards the expenses)*: Nauta is a contribution of money towards marriage expenses. Nauta is generally written down in a Bahi (account book) and is considered repayable on similar occasion. Nauta ceremony generally takes place at least a month before the wedding. The boy's father distributes Gur or gives a feast to the villagers and his relations and in return receives from them contributions towards the marriage expenses.
- xii. *The Arrival of Bhat*: In case of boy's marriage his mother's brother or her father arrives to present the Bhat (reward) on the afternoon of the day before the groom leaves for bride's village. In case of girl's marriage it may be presented at the time when she leaves for her husband's village. As soon as the maternal uncle arrives with the Bhat he is led to a relative's house, for he is not to enter his sister's house without the necessary ceremonies. In the evening, the potter arrives with seven sets of pitchers and some earthenware plates which are carried on the heads of a few women, who sing songs on the way. The potter is given 5 kilograms of Shakkar (brown sugar) one and a half kilograms of rice, and eleven rupees. The waterman fills the pitchers and he is also given 5 kilograms of grains and eleven

- rupees. The Khati (Carpenter) brings a wooden stool and a wire cane, and he is given five kilograms of grains, a quarter of a kilogram of sugar and five rupees.
- xiii. *Sehra Ceremony*: An elder brother's wife ties Sehra (a kind of crown with strands of flowers hanging in front worn by Meo-males at circumcision and marriage) on groom's head. In her absence, phuphi (groom's father's sister) takes the charge of it. The assembled women sing songs when this ceremony is performed. The elder brother's wife or Phuphi, as the case may be, is given from eleven rupees to eight hundred (according to the financial status of the person concerned). Some time their ego is satisfied by giving certain things in kind, for instance, buffalo, cow, goat, sheep and ornaments of different kinds.
- xiv. *Salam Ceremony*: The last ride of the day consists of taking a round of the village by the groom to offer Salam (an expression of regard) to the relatives, each of them gives him one rupee. After Salam ceremony is over, the groom goes to mosque to offer prayer just to seek God's blessings.
- xv. *Barat*: On the day of marriage, the boy puts on new clothes and his relations assemble at his house. After the boy's father has made presents to the family barber (Nai), to the boy's sister and her husband and to the Phuphi and her husband, the Phuphi puts a necklace of yellow beads, round the boy's neck. Then the boy goes to a nearby mosque and prays to the Almighty God for a successful married life. The women folk wait outside the mosque till the boy arrives. On arrival, the boy's sister receives a small present as an inducement to allow her brother to proceed to the bride's village.

NIKAH AND OTHER MARRIAGE CEREMONIES AFTER NIKAH

- a) *Nikah*: After the arrival of the groom at the bride's house the first and the most important ceremony to be performed is known as Nikah. This is the real Islamic tradition in a Meo Marriage which is performed in accordance with strict letters of Shariat. The purpose of this ceremony is a sine quo non and if it is proved that the ceremony was not performed the marriage will be declared void ab initio even without considering the incidental circumstances of the spouses. Among Meo, the Nikah is a binding ceremony which is performed with formalities of Mahammedan Law by a Kazi or his deputy. A marriage is never presumed from simple cohabitation. The Nikah must be performed according to Islamic rituals and practices. The Meo wedding is performed in mosque by a Moulvi or Kazi who is well versed in the teachings of Quran and the traditions of the Prophet (PBUH). The groom is seated facing Mecca and the Mullah facing the groom. The Barat and some of the relatives sit behind the groom. The Mullah reads verses from the Quran and administers an oath to the groom whereby he accepts the bride as his wife and says thrice.... Naming the wife..... *Meine Apne Nikah Mein Kabul Ki....Kabul Ki....Kabul Ki* (I accept her.... As my wife).
- b) *Tokri- KaNeg*: In the late afternoon, the Nai of the bride's family comes to the place where the Barat is housed for a ritual called Tokri-Ka-Neg. The groom's father and uncles hand him a basket containing shoe, clothes, and cosmetics for the bride and dry- dates and parched sugar- coated gram tied in red-cloth. A fixed amount is given to every Kamin of the bride's family by the groom's father.
- c) *Leek Ceremony*: On the third day, after feasting, the boy's father has to give something to the village menials, sweepers, chamars, Doms, Dhanaks, Faqirs, Bavarias, etc. All the brotherhood etc. assembled and before them to show off his wealth, the boy's father places, money more than he thinks will be spent on the Kamins. Those who are skilled in these matters settle on a sum with the girl's father, and taking that, return the rest to boy's father. This entire process is known as Leek ceremony.

- d) *Dahej Ceremony (Dowry)*: At the time of Bidai, the groom is seated on a plant. The bride's father then gives him an amount of money by way of dowry, which is considered a prestigious matter among the Meos. In some cases of Bharatpur and Alwar, amount ranging from Rs. 17,000 to Rs. 40,000 in cash have been given to the groom. It appears that the "groom price" which is rendered by the bride or her family to the groom or his family is a common feature in Meo- Society.
- e) *Milni (Farewell Ceremony)*: Towards the evening of the third day, the principal ceremony, viz., get together (Milni), takes place at the girl's house. The parents of the bride present the dowry, which is taken by the boy's father. The articles which are to form the dowry (Dahej) are displayed and shown to the assembled profession, including barati and biradari (brotherhood). Then the bride's father takes farewell and meets each Barati in person. While taking farewell he gives one rupee and sometimes five rupees and a silver glass, to each Barati as a token of love and affection.
- f) *Salam Ceremony*: Then comes the next important ceremony the Salam ceremony, i.e., an obligation on the groom to show respect and obedience to females including his mother-in-law. Before leaving the village, the groom is called at the bride's house for the Salam ceremony. He, along with his close friends, goes there, where they are offered Ghee Bura (Sweet-rice).
- g) *Jura Ghirai*: When the dowry has been presented and the parties have exchanged presents, and the Salam ceremony is over, the marriage procession starts back again, taking with it the girl. At this stage the girl's phuphi (father's sister) or sister appears before the vehicle of the groom and make a show stopping it. This is done in order to receive a small presents in cash or kind from the groom's father as an inducement to allow the groom's vehicle.
- h) *Other ceremonies*: Khodiya(a music show by women in folk at groom's house), FerPatta(allowing groom to visit bride's house any time after marriage),NayanKaNeg(claim of barber's wife),ManihariKaNeg(claim of family's bangel's wife), CharaiKaNeg(claim of driver from groom's father when the bride steps in the car), UtraiKaNeg(claim of driver from groom's father when the bride reaches the groom's house),Munhdikhai(a ceremony of showing the bride's face to the female companions of the locality and the village),SunjehriKaNeg, Khand Katora,Dassiyari(a visit of groom's family guests to groom's house),Mandho-Jhakai(a visit of groom's father to bride's father's house after the marriage is performed), are some of the ceremonies of Meo marriages which are performed before Chala takes place.
- i) *Chala*: Chala is the word generally used for Gauna. Since most boys and girls marry at a very young age, they do not start living together immediately after the marriage. The bride returns to her parent's home after a brief visit to her husband's house. She stays with her parents until another ceremony called Chala is performed. The Chala ceremony takes place after gap of at least one year or 3 years or 5 years or 7 years or 9 years, i.e., it always takes place in odd number of years.

CONSEQUENCES OF THESE CEREMONIES

Meos think that customary rites and ceremonies of marriage as discussed above are the heritage of their ancestors and they should be given due and proper social recognition. Nevertheless, the superfluous habits, excessive customs and ceremonies of marriage as discussed above are directly connected with the economic condition of Meos. In marriage, they indulge in unwarranted and lavish expenditure that with the failure of one harvest plunges them irretrievably into the debt of sahuakar(money-lender) of the village. Many of them burdened with debt contracted in the marriages, heavily mortgage their land to the sahuakars. Thus the comparatively unthrifty Meos have not been able to keep themselves free from debt and their land from mortgage. They neglect to pay the interest on debts already contracted for marriages, funerals and petty luxuries which rapidly grow and grow until they can have little hope for paying it off. Consequently, their economic condition is becoming



hopeless and they are mostly at the mercy of their so call sahuks who exploit them mercilessly and ruthlessly. They live so literally from hand to mouth, carelessly contracting debt for marriages, that when a year of drought comes they are thrown on the sahuks, who can make them with what terms he likes. With the result of exorbitant rate of interest is paid by the proverbially poorer and thriftless Meos. To reduce that burden that formerly appeared only in the bahies (Account books) of money-lenders they work day and night constantly. It appears that instinctively the Meo of Mewat seek abolition of the so-called ceremonies of marriage and their immediate replacement by shairat. The reasons are obvious because the superfluous ceremonies of marriage have badly affected their economy.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It can be safely concluded that a marriage among the Meos is an occasion for a number of rites and ceremonies. Most of the customary rites and ceremonies practiced on the occasion are analogous to the customs and rituals practiced by the sister communities of Mewat region. Some of the Meos with the help of Tabligh movement are trying to abolish the un-Islamic practices. In the modern days, the old practices regarding marriage have been left out by the Meo community and these are no more in practice. This is because of awareness of 'Hadish' and following 'Shariyas'/'Sunnats' of prophet Mohammad (PBUH) by the Meos. This speedy, oblique radical change came into effect because of education among young generation in general and due to Tabligh movement in particular.

REFERENCE

As the Researcher is himself a Meo by caste. Hence, the study is based on his own experience as well as he had paid several visits to Mewat Region to know the factual position of Meo customary practices regarding marriage and completed the present research work with the help of meetings with the old and experienced people of the Mewat Area.