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SOME CHANGES IN ORAON MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

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Introduction

During the December of 1956 the authors of this article camped at Mandar, a village about twelve miles away from Ranchi, and worked in a number of the neighbouring Oraon villages. Five cases of Oraon marriages were actually attended either in part or in full, and data on over a hundred cases (of which thirty have taken place within the last three years) were collected on certain aspects of marriage with the help of genealogical, case history and narrative methods.

The three villages with which we are mainly concerned are Katchancho, Hismi and Banjhla. The first is situated about half a mile away from the main road leading from Ranchi to Lohardaga, to the east of it. It is an entirely Oraon village with the exception of a couple of Lohar families. Hismi, which lies to the north-east of Katchancho, and about a mile away from it, has a mixed population of Oraons, of Hindus and of Muslim weavers. Banjhla is about five miles away from the main road in the western direction. One has to ford the Koel river to reach it. This is also an entirely Oraon village.

In the village Mandar there is a Roman Catholic Church and an adjacent first-rate hospital with modern equipment. The local population, including the Oraons, utilize the facilities of the hospital to a good extent. The church had been built about a century back, and the hospital has been in existence for a decade. Before this hospital was built, a small outdoor hospital used to function inside the church compound.

During the past two decades there have been developments in this area in many directions. A bus service plies between Gumla and Ranchi, and the buses always stop at Mandar. Every day nearly a half dozen times the buses go each way. Shops have been opened on the main road. These trade in sweetmeats and in stationery articles, soap, tea, kerosene and such other things which may be classified some under necessities and others as luxury articles for a rural area.

A school and hostel has recently been opened near Mandar. This is run by the local representatives of the Adim Jati Seva Sangh. Here, apart from following the ordinary school curricula, students are encouraged in raising cash crops and vegetables; also they engage in cultural activities like holding dances, etc., in their school hall and participating in the discussions of Brahminical Scriptural works.

In this paper an attempt is made to point out some of the present deviations from the old marriage customs as noted by Col. Dalton[1] and Rai Bahadur S. C. Roy.[2] The effects of Christian Missions, the opening of a regular bus service and the advent of shops along the main road have played their rôles in introducing new culture elements among these simple folk.

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[1] Dalton, E. T., Col. *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872), pp. 252-53.
[2] Roy, S. C., Rai Bahadur. *Oraon Religion and Customs* (1928), pp. 142–68.

Age at Marriage

Nowadays the age at marriage for both boys and girls, in the case of the non-Christian Oraons (known as Sansaris), varies between 8 to 12 years. The age at marriage for the Christian Oraons as shown in the genealogies is about 16 years for girls and 20 years for boys. This higher age seems to be due to the influence of the missionaries who insist on a higher minimum age at marriage. As noted below the traditionally approved age at marriage among Oraons was until a few generations ago adult for both boys and girls. The Mission influence has had the effect of reviving and retaining this age at marriage among the Christians. Our observations on the age at marriage for the Sansari Oraons give figures lower than what Roy has recorded. According to him, the average age at marriage for boys is between 16 and 20 and that for girls is between 13 and 16. Dalton's account is in agreement with what has been noted by Roy. Dalton's statement that 'the marriage of children is not in favour amongst the Oraons. When a young man makes up his mind to marry ...' clearly shows that a little more than half a century back adult marriage was customary among them.

Choice of Mate

Intra-clan marriage is strictly prohibited, though deviation from this rule was found by us. We refrain from noting the actual percentage of such cases recorded by us because of the fact that whatever information we did get from the informants was very reluctantly given, and there is reason to believe that actually more such marriages have taken place in recent years. Since these people believe intra-clan marriage to be incestuous, they have kept back from us the knowledge of a number of cases. Hence any definite statement made here by us would not be a correct representation of facts. The Christian Oraons also have a ban on marriage within the clan, though this rule is also broken at times.

From Dalton's account we find that a fair amount of laxity in sexual behaviour existed among the Dhumkuria (bachelor's dormitory) boys and local girls, but generally the actual partner in life was selected from outside one's own village. Though the parents went through a customary procedure of selection, their choice, it is said, always used to be the girl whom the boy had himself selected. The invariability of selection by the parents of the girl of the son's choice may have been over-emphasized. But on the whole it was so. This is different now. At present since the boys and girls are married in childhood, most of the young boys of any village are married persons and the girls who sleep in some widow's hut ('pél-érpā') are also mostly married girls. So, nowadays the procedure of selection that the parents go through is a very real one. They enquire about eligible girls for their son, and send an 'agua', who is generally a male cousin of the father of the boy—but sometimes a relative on the boy's mother's side, or even a family friend may be chosen for this purpose due to that person's keen sense of judgment and other abilities—to find a suitable match for their son. It is the duty of this man not only to enquire about the girl, and bring about a meeting between both the parties if he thinks the girl is suitable, but also to act as a sort of master of ceremonies throughout the marriage and its preliminaries. The negotiations invariably start just after the Karam Festival in the month of 'Bhado' (August). The 'agua' or the go-between visits the girl's house, talks to them and convinces them as to the suitability of the marriage. He is always treated with 'hānṛiā' (rice-beer) on such occasions.

Betrothal

After this the betrothal takes place. On invitation received through the 'agua', the bride's guardians take a few friends and relatives and go to visit the bridegroom's house to see the actual conditions there at first hand. They are feasted there. They do not any more pretend to go there on the pretext of asking for tobacco and lime, as has been recorded by Roy. After a few days, in some cases, the bridegroom's parents and relatives also pay a return visit to the bride's house. These visits are known as 'ghar-bar'. For sending invitations to the bridegroom's people and such other purposes, generally the bride's people also have a man, who functions like the 'agua' of the bridegroom's side, though he is not actually spoken of as 'agua'.

Then, generally, in the month of Kartick (October-November) the 'goṛ-dhoi' or 'khéd-noṛna' ceremony is held. On this occasion some friends and relatives of the bridegroom's father visit the bride's house. When the guests arrive, their feet are washed by the womenfolk of the bride's house and then they are treated with 'hāṇṛiā', rice and meat, the meat of fowl or pig being preferred. On this occasion omens seen when on the road by the bridegroom's people are taken into account and if these are good, the match is finalized, including the fixing of the date of marriage.

In a few cases, however, the date of marriage is not fixed at the 'goṛ-dhoi' ceremony. In such cases this is done during 'Sānni-Pāhi', the date for which is fixed at the 'goṛ-dhoi' ceremony. In a few cases this 'Sānni-Pāhi' never takes place. In Roy's account we find that the 'Sānni-Pāhi' is held at the bridegroom's house. But our data show that this ceremony takes place at the bride's house as well. There is no fixed rule of priority as to whether the 'Sānni-Pāhi' should take place first at the bride's or the bridegroom's house. In any case, this is when the fixing of the date of marriage takes place. On these occasions at both the houses feasting takes place. As usual, when the guests arrive, their feet are washed with 'karanj' oil and water over a brass-platter and the water is thrown over the roof. Roy records the fixing of the date of marriage at the 'Sānni-Pāhi' as 'Lāgān-Bāndhi'.

In one case only yet another ceremony took place. This is known as 'Mānjhli-Pāhi'. On this occasion, first the bridegroom's people visited the girl's house and then the bride's people came over to the boy's house, where the marriage-day was finalized, instead of during 'Sānni-Pāhi'.

During the 'Sānni-Pāhi' and 'Mānjhli-Pāhi', the bridegroom is presented with a rupee or so by the bride's father. The date of marriage always falls on either of the following days: the third, fifth, seventh, ninth, eleventh and the thirteenth day after the full moon.

'Kohā-Pāhi', an Important Pre-nuptial Ceremony

Two or three days before the marriage, the 'Kohā-Pāhi' takes place. This ceremony takes place twice—once in the bridegroom's house and once in the bride's house. It is decided beforehand in whose house and on what date it is to take place first. This is quite an elaborate ceremony, though not so elaborate nowadays as is found from the records of Roy. Very early in the morning the hosts get up and start cleaning the house, sweeping the courtyard and plastering the walls and floor with cow-dung paste. A canopy or 'māṛwā' is erected with branches of trees and leaves. Early in the morning the 'agua' comes there and a pig is killed in his presence and cooked. The pig is killed by beating it with a wooden hammer called

'mogrā'. He starts drinking right from that time. By and by the other guests (from the other party), sometimes numbering up to fifteen or twenty, arrive. Their feet are washed with 'karanj' oil and water. Some friends and relatives of the host are also invited. But their feet are not washed. They all sit down under the 'māṛwā', drink 'hānṛiā', chew tobacco mixed with lime, and gossip. In the afternoon the 'Pāhān' (priest) of the host-village comes and performs the 'āmmotrā' ceremony. He brings with him a sheaf of jack-fruit leaves rolled into tubes. These he distributes among host and guests alike. Then he is given a brass-pot full of 'hānṛiā' taken from a new pot. The 'Pāhān' now leads a procession of persons carrying each a jack-fruit leaf tube out into the open, where he spreads three leaves on the ground, and facing east sprinkles some 'hānṛiā' over the leaves and prays. This done, he does obeisance to the leaves and tears them up. He is helped by the 'Pānbhārā' or the priest's servant. He is then followed by all those who had come out with him carrying leaf tubes. Then a round of 'hānṛiā' is served to all from the pot carried by 'Pāhān'. This is the 'nég-boréy' or the sacred rice-beer, and this must be prepared in new pots decorated with vermilion paste. Now all of them troop back to the house and are once more regaled with 'nég-boréy'. For serving 'hānṛiā', sacred or not, each man is provided with a leaf cup. He puts it to his lips while he squats and another man pours the beer from a brass-pot into the leaf cup. Their capacity for consuming 'hānṛiā' is astonishing. After a time the guests are given some 'karanj' oil which they rub on their heads and limbs and inhale some of it, too. This is called 'tél-mākhi'. During this ceremony the village 'gorait' beats the drum. He has to do it off and on, and especially on the night of the marriage. He is paid about ten rupees for his services.

Next, the 'Bāñhi' ceremony takes place. A mat ('nég-pāṭi') is spread on the floor under the 'māṛwā' after turning the mat upside down three times, and the 'agua' and one of the men of the bride's party (seldom the actual guardian of the bride) sit on it facing each other. Two brass-pots filled with 'hānṛiā' are placed touching each other in front of them and a copper pice is balanced on the rims of the pot where they touch each other. Then fresh 'hānṛiā' is poured into the vessels till these overflow and the pice drops into one of the pots. The two persons then exchange their pots and drink, get up and embrace each other. While they embrace, they do a funny sort of dance in which they try to step on each other's feet. After this they sit down and the two parties start bantering each other. Throughout the ceremony a boy stands waiting near them with a 'billi', i.e. a lamp made with a wick tied around a sickle dipped in a brass-platter containing 'karanj' oil. The wick is set alight and fed with the 'karanj' oil. When they sit down, the boy withdraws into the house with his 'billi' and a woman gives marigold flowers to the guests, who stick these in their fillets and ears. This flower-sticking ceremony used to be done previously very elaborately ('punp-méjhnā') and on this occasion the bride-price used to be settled. After nightfall the hosts depart to their village in a dead drunk condition.

Next day, the hosts of the previous day become the guests at the house of the guests of the day before, and the whole ceremony is repeated. During the 'Kohā-Pāhi' at the bridegroom's place, he is made to salute by bowing to all his elders and the bride's people give him some presents. These presents are in the form of eight annas, twelve annas or such small amounts of money. Also, if the 'ḍāli' or bride-price has not already been paid, it is paid here and the clothes promised by the bride's parents are also handed over to the bridegroom's parents.

Preparations for the Wedding at the Bride's House

On the marriage day the people at the bride's house take their meal before sunrise. This meal is cooked the night before. They all have to fast till the ceremony is over. Only then are they eligible to eat the meat cooked for the occasion in the evening. The women spend the morning in sweeping and cleaning the house. Men fetch water and chop wood and do other rough work. The 'agua' either stays there from the night before or comes from the bridegroom's house very early in the day. Men and women drink 'hānṛiā' and chew tobacco and lime every now and then. The 'agua' chats with the menfolk and makes jokes from time to time to liven up the day. At about ten in the morning three bachelors of the village come and do what is known as 'dhān bichāno'. They are given a mat to sit on near the 'māṛwā' and a bundle of ripe paddy with stalk is handed over to them. Each of them laboriously fishes out stalks with practically all the paddies intact, and finally makes a big bundle. The three bundles are later tied together and used in making the 'kāṛsā'.

While the straw-bundles are being made, the three 'kālingās' are constructed by some men. A 'kālingā' is a thin bamboo strip, about a foot long, with three small cross-pieces tied with blue, red and white thread; then a marigold is stuck to the ends of the cross-pieces as well as to the top of the central piece. Also a garland ('kāṛsā-ghipoon') of marigold and blue thread is made by a man with the help of a bamboo-split needle.

Just before noon some women leave off drinking 'hānṛiā' and carry a yoke, some straw with the ears of paddy intact and an aluminium pot filled with water to a straw-heap at the corner of the courtyard. Now the paddy-bunch is tied to the yoke and a woman carries the bride to it. Generally, the bride wears only a piece of cloth around her waist like a short skirt. She stands or sits, whichever is more convenient, on the yoke. Now some women rub 'nāgrā-māti' (mud collected from the banks of the River Koel) on her head and 'bālkā' (powdered turmeric) on her body. Then, after placing a big 'sāl' leaf platter in front of her, her head is washed in such a way that the water falls on the platter. Then she is thoroughly scrubbed and bathed. After that she discards her wet cloth and wears a new 'sari', whereupon she is carried back to the house. The yoke is also carried back to the house.

Now the 'kāṛsā' is made. The paddy-bundle made by the bachelors mentioned earlier is washed, its stalk is introduced into a new earthen pot ('kāṛsā-bhāndo') in such a way that the ears of corn with some straw stick out on top. To keep it in an upright position, tender grass ('dubla-ghass') and rice are forced into the pot till the pot is absolutely full. A few sticks ('kāḍrikā') are also forced in. No mustard seeds are put into the pot, as has been recorded by Roy. Now some of the sticking out straw strands are plaited, and the rest are sawn off and an earthen lamp ('tātthi') is balanced on it. This is filled with pulse ('māsi'), salt ('bék') and mustard oil and is provided with four wicks made of rags ('sértā'). Now a rope is tied along the rim of the pot and the three 'kālingās' are stuck to it. Next, the garland is wound over the rope and the pot is balanced on a 'bindo' (a plaited straw ring for balancing round-bottom pots). Just before introducing the straw-bundle into the pot, marks with vermilion paste (with oil) are made both outside and inside the pot and a lump of turmeric ('tātur') is placed at the bottom of the pot.

Meanwhile, the three boys, who had made the paddy bundle, make a 'jurub'. This is a straw-snake. Sometimes, to give it a good shape, leaves and mud are also used. Round about 3 p.m. the village 'Pāhān' or

'Māhāto' (secular headman) or a male member of the 'Pāhān Khunt' leads the bride's party outside the house to perform the 'āmmotrā' ceremony. This has been described before. After that some sweets are brought by a woman and are distributed. These are known as 'bénjā lāḍḍu'. These had been prepared the night before. A 'lāḍḍu' is made of rice powder and ghee.

While all these things are being done, three brand new pots are brought near the 'māṛwā' by a woman. The mouth of one of the pots is slightly broken. The first two pots are called 'jhāṛā', while the *last one* (damaged one) is known as 'sāngé'. These are first cleaned and decorated with vermilion by a woman. About the damaged pot, they said that just as the bride and the bridegroom would have at least one companion, so would the 'jhāṛā' have at least one 'sāngé'. These are filled with water, and this water is used for 'bathing' the newly married couple at the end of the ceremony. Also, when the bridegroom goes back after the marriage is over, these three pots are filled with 'hānṛiā' for him to take home.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon a villager brings the news that the bridegroom's party has arrived at the village boundary, and the bride's people at once start making preparations for receiving them. If there are several marriages taking place in a village on the same day, which is mostly the case, the bridegroom's parties are led into the village one after the other, according to the seniority of the bride's family in the village. This has to be done as the bachelors have to go with drums, bugles and weapons, and as they move in a body, they can attend only one party at a time.

Preparations at the Bridegroom's House and the Marriage-procession

Now let us see how the bridegroom's people have been spending the day. They also prepare their 'kāṛsā' and 'jurub' and the bridegroom is also thoroughly scrubbed and bathed in a manner similar to what we have seen in the case of the bride. At about midday the 'Pāhān' performs the sacrifice of a fowl to the ancestral souls in front of the 'kāṛsā' and the 'jurub', which are kept in the courtyard, and sprinkles rice on these from a basket and does obeisance to these. Then two married women come and make obeisance to the 'kāṛsā' and the 'jurub' after sprinkling rice on them as the 'Pāhān' had done. Then they touch the feet of the elders who are present there, and picking one the 'kāṛsā' and the other the 'jurub' upon the head, start dancing ('Bénjā Nālnā'). Soon other women join them and some village bachelors come and start playing on the drums and bugles. Sometimes men also join the dance with swords and sticks. During the dance, the bridegroom stays inside the hut. When the dance is over, the bridegroom comes out of the house garbed in a 'kāṛiā' (loin cloth), shirt and 'kichri' (wrapper). He has a red fillet tied around his head and carries a sickle. The reason behind carrying the sickle has been quite aptly tackled by Roy.[3] After the bridegroom comes out, the procession starts, led by a married woman who carries a 'dāni' on her head. A 'dāni' is a basket in which some powdered rice ('tikhin-gunḍa'), turmeric, 'karanj' oil and vermilion in leaf cups are kept. A boy accompanies her carrying a lighted 'billi'. Sometimes they also carry several pots of 'hānṛiā', some of which are gifts for the bride's folk. These are carried by men in 'éptās' (carrying rods). It is also essential for men to carry sticks, swords, etc., for they

[3] Roy, S. C., Rai Bahadur. *Oraon Religion and Customs* (1928), pp. 142–68.

all must participate in the mock fight with the bride's party. If there are several marriage parties ('bārāt') starting on the same day, they start one after the other according to the seniority of the bridegroom's family.

On reaching the bride's village boundary, they take rest under a tree, have a go at the 'hāṇṛiā'-pots and then commence music. This attracts the attention of the villagers, who are already on the look out for their arrival, and news of their arrival is despatched to the bride's place.

Reception of the 'Bārāt'

As soon as the bride's people get the news, they start getting ready for the reception of the 'bārāt'. The married women bedeck their foreheads and the parting of hair with vermilion paste. Someone goes and fetches the 'gorait' (the village drummer) and the inmates of the 'jonk-éṛpā' (bachelor's dormitory). When these arrive, they are given 'khér' (a type of pea-seed) to eat and 'hāṇṛiā' to drink. Now two married women rub their hands in rice, salute all the male elders and pick up the 'kāṛsā' and the 'jurub', and go inside the hut where the bride is waiting for their arrival. Here the carriers of the 'kāṛsā' and the 'jurub' go around the bride thrice, who then, in her turn, does obeisance to these. Then they come out (not the bride) and at once the music starts. Big drums or 'dhol', kettle drums or 'nāgérā' and bugles or 'mbhér' are played. The buglers stand a bit apart, so that their very long bugles do not come in the way of the dancers, while the drummers take up their position at the centre of the courtyard. Then the two women carrying the 'kāṛsā' and the 'jurub' commence dancing. Soon they are joined by other women. Then again the women go inside the hut. When they come out, the earthen lamp placed on the 'kāṛsā' is lighted; also a boy brings out a lighted 'billi'. A third woman carries a 'kurra'. This is a brass-pot ('loṭa') filled with water. She holds a leafy mango branch in her other hand; she keeps dipping the branch in water and flipping a little water here and there. She has to sprinkle a little of this water on the person of the bridegroom as soon as the party meets the 'bārāt'. Many men also join in now. All the bachelors carry a straw-bundle in their left hand, which is known as a 'pusu', and a sword or a stick in the right hand. Thus equipped the party proceeds toward the boundary where the 'bārāt' awaits their arrival. As soon as the two parties meet, a mock-fight breaks out, which gradually blends into a wild dance performed mostly by men. Women of both the parties generally stand together and watch them. Then suddenly one of the men of the bride's party picks up the bridegroom on his shoulders and runs homewards. A few of the party follow them, including the 'kāṛsā' and 'billi' carriers. The rest stay at the boundary and keep on dancing.

The Marriage Ceremony

On reaching the house the bridegroom is taken into the hut and the doors are shut and the next ceremony is very jealously kept from the view of outsiders. Women are most particular in this matter and they only allow the very nearest male relations of the bride to watch it. The bridegroom's feet are washed by a woman of the bride's side; then a 'metate' is placed on the floor and is sprinkled with turmeric water. A yoke is placed behind it in the north-south direction. The bride and the bridegroom are then made to circle the 'metate' and the yoke three times and stand on the 'metate' facing east. The bride stands to the left of the bridegroom.

Then the bride gets down and stands in front of the 'metate' with the bridegroom standing behind her and she slides her left foot backwards and puts her heel on the left toes of the bridegroom, who holds her heel by circling his big toe and first toe around her heel. This is known as 'khéddé tirṭān', and is the final binding rite, according to our informants.

After this, all the males are ordered out of the room. Now the bridegroom applies vermilion to the forehead of the bride, and the bride also, in her turn, stretches her hand behind her shoulders and daubs the forehead of the bridegroom with vermilion. In some cases a married woman holds the hands of the couple and guides them when applying vermilion to each other's forehead. This is known as 'isung sindri'. Now they sit side by side, with the bride sitting to left of the bridegroom, and the women sprinkle a little water on them from the 'jhāṛā'. This seems to be an apology for a bath. After this the women sing all kinds of marriage songs sitting around them. These songs are supposed to be full of instructions to the inexperienced couple. Then about an hour or so before midnight the couple are led out under the canopy and are given a mat to sit on. Here they salute all the elders, most of whom were so long off and on drinking and dancing or sitting beside fire to ward off the bitterly cold December wind. These elders, after being saluted, apply vermilion to the foreheads of the couple. This ceremony is called 'sābhā sindri'. Then the whole assembly is once more regaled with 'hānṛiā'. At about midnight the meal is served—first to the bridegroom and the bride, next to the men and lastly to the women. It is generally composed of rice, 'dāhl' (pulse), some vegetables and pork. After washing the meal down with 'hānṛiā', they all retire for the night.

Farewell of the Bride

Early next morning the guests are once more offered food and drink from what is left over from the previous night. Then the bridegroom's party start homewards with the bride. The bride and the bridegroom have their whole body and face practically fully covered by wrappers. The bride carries an arrow in her hand by which she can be distinguished. Otherwise, if two children of about 9 to 11 years are allowed to stand side by side with large wrappers wound all over, it is useless trying to guess who is who. The bridegroom generally carries an iron-shod stick in his hand. The bride's parents and friends accompany them up to the village boundary and then come back. Then the bridegroom's party start their homeward march. One or two women from the bride's house always accompany the bride.

Reception at Bridegroom's Village

On reaching their own village boundary they stop a bit and start playing on the drums and bugles to let the villagers know of their arrival. Then they proceed. Just before entering the village the bride is picked up by a man and sometimes the bridegroom is also picked up by another person. They are thus carried up to the house of the bridegroom. The musicians and most of the party halt at the 'ākhāṛā' (dancing ground) or some other open space to do a spot of dancing. The young men and women of the bridegroom's house of the same generation as the bridegroom close and bar the door of the house and do not allow the couple to be carried in till the bride forks out an anna or two for each of these young in-laws. This ceremony is called 'bali muchnā'.

Now a woman, generally the bridegroom's mother, anoints with' karanj' oil and washes on a brass platter the feet of the carrier of the bride, of

the bride herself and of the women from the bride's house. The water which accumulates in the platter is thrown over the roof. After this the assembly sit down, drink 'hāṇṛiā', chew a mixture of tobacco and lime and take rest—the men under or around the canopy and the women inside the hut.

After some time, about half an hour or so, six pots—three new and three old—are brought in. Five girls, including the bride, now take up the pots on their heads, and go out in a single file. The sixth pot is carried in the hand by the leading girl, while the bride walks in the centre. They are soon joined by three or four young village women. After a time the bridegroom follows them carrying an 'épṭā' (carrying rod). He is accompanied by a couple of brothers, or male cousins or even friends.

The two parties assemble near a village spring or well by the paddy fields. The two parties keep a bit apart.

Now the bride takes some vermilion and turmeric from a leaf she has brought along, makes a paste with water and marks at three places on the stones of the mouth of spring or well, facing east. Then the girls clean their teeth with 'kāḍrikā' (twigs) which they take along, and wash their mouths. One of the boys now comes and helps the girls to wash and fill the pots with water from the spring. They leave two pots there, and picking up the rest on their heads, start back in a single file. The two pots left behind are for the bridegroom to wash, to fill up with water and to bring back to his house.

At a short distance they are followed by the bridegroom carrying the two pots mentioned above. He carries them in his 'épṭā' after washing and filling with water which he draws from the spring or well with the help of his companions.

Near about noon the bride and the bridegroom sit facing each other and take food (bhāth-khāi). Generally she is presented with a few rupees by the bridegroom's father for eating food at his house. In Roy's account we find that the bride used to refuse to take food and pretend to become angry unless she was 'pacified' by being presented with a few rupees by the bridegroom's father. Nowadays the bride eats first and then takes money probably because at such young age she has not yet learnt the art of seriously feigning anger in front of strangers and elders. After the meal is over, the assembly simply sit around and chat and drink till sun down, when after a bit of singing and dancing, the bride returns to her father's house.

After about two weeks or so the bridegroom, accompanied by a few men, goes to the bride's house where he takes food sitting opposite the bride and is paid a few rupees for doing the favour of eating there. Then he returns home. We find no mention of this payment in either Roy's or Dalton's account.

After this both the bride and the bridegroom keep on visiting each other—the bride's visits being more frequent—till a child is born, whereupon the bride comes to stay permanently with her husband.

The Bride-price and Marriage Negotiations

The bride-price is generally paid almost any time before marriage. It may be paid at the 'Sānni-Pāhi' or 'Kohā-Pāhi', or in between these during some informal visit or other. It generally amounts to about Rs.7 and a few pieces of clothes—'dhuties' and 'sarees'. Barring the bride-price, the two parties generally have to spend nowadays about Rs.25 during 'Sānni-Pāhi', about Rs.75 during 'Kohā-Pāhi', and quite an amount on 'hāṇṛiā' during the short informal visits during the negotiation period. The

actual amount of this cannot be traced. During the marriage feast, about Rs.30 has to be spent by the bride's people and a little less by the bridegroom's father. In all the overall expenses go up to about a hundred and fifty rupees on an average. Of course a wealthy man sometimes spends a lot more. Thus one person in Katchancho had spent Rs.150 during 'Kohā-Pāhi' alone.

It is a noteworthy point that during the negotiation and the ceremonies the actual guardians of the bride and the bridegroom have little or no say in the matters of fixing the date, or bride-price or other expenses. The negotiations are mainly done by the village elders led by the 'Pāhāns' and the 'agua'. The bride and the bridegroom are the least concerned parties. Till they are actually needed to perform this or that, they can be seen scaling walls or running and playing with friends or at the best sitting sulkily under protest after being admonished by an elder. They are just too young to feel either romantic or be afraid about the whole thing.

Comparison with Earlier Accounts

In Dalton's account we find that the bride-price is sometimes as low as Rs.4 only. But nowadays it is much higher when we take into account not only the cash, but also gift of clothes made along with the money. Roy has not mentioned the amount of cash anywhere.

Our observations show some departure from Roy's account generally in connection with the elaborateness of the ceremonies, apart from the question of age at marriage which has been mentioned earlier. Omens are not seriously considered these days. This may have happened due to Christian influence in the locality. For, once a marriage is arranged between two Christians, no amount of ill omens can dissolve it. Also, this phenomenon can be attributed to the general disintegration in the field of religion due to the two pronged attack by their civilized neighbours, namely by the Christian and the Hindu missionaries.

During all the functions, as described by Roy, it can be noted that practically at every step the guests or the host had to pay presents (one or two annas) to the women folk whose duties are to wash the feet, serve the 'hānṛiā', and so on. Nowadays 'hānṛiā' is always served to men by men and no money is paid to them. Also in other instances, no presentations are made. The 'Sānni-Pāhi' ceremony is occasionally totally dropped, and 'lāgān-bāndhi' is mostly done during the 'Sānni-Pāhi', when 'Sānni-Pāhi' is at all performed. The use of sword to ward off evil during the functions is very seldom found these days. The 'goṛ-lāgi' or touching the feet of elders by the bridegroom is done only once, and that is at the end of the 'Kohā-Pāhi'. The other ceremonies like 'Punp-mejhna' and 'Bāhi-Joṛnā' have lost all their elaborateness and 'Athkha Kadrika' was neither seen nor heard of from informants in any of the several cases studied by us.

From Col. Dalton's account it is seen that both the bride and the bridegroom take part in the dancing, riding on the hips of some one, at the border of the bride's village after the arrival of the 'bārāt'. But these days the bride, after she has taken her bath on the marriage day, never comes out of the room till 'Khiddé tirṭān' is over, while the bridegroom, almost immediately the dancing commences, is carried off to the bride's house. After the heel-pressing ceremony, the couple are not bathed. That is probably because the ceremony takes place at night, and the people do not have the heart to pour a pitcher full of water on children on a biting cold winter night. The mercury drops to about 4·5°C. during the nights in

December and January in this part of Chota Nagpur. In Dalton's and Roy's time the bridegroom's party used to start early in the morning and probably the bathing used to take place in the afternoon (unfortunately, the approximate time of arrival of the 'bārāt' has not been noted by either of them). But nowadays the 'bārāt' seldom starts before noon. In Dalton's account we find the mention of bathing the couple and the heel-pressing ceremony taking place under the canopy. But the whole ceremony is done now strictly away from public gaze inside the hut.

The ceremony known as 'gunḍāri dhuknā' was not come across by us. It seems from Roy's account that the bride used to be taken to her husband's house the same evening (of marriage). But it is never done so at present. The bridegroom's party always halts for the night there. After the party has returned to the bridegroom's house, the couple normally walk in; no baskets are spread for them to step on, and, what is most important, no 'dandakatta' ceremony is held there. The bride and the bridegroom go to fetch water after just a bit of rest. This point is very important from the point that Roy claims 'dandakatta' ceremony as one of the Oraon's original religious traits, i.e. it dates back to pre-Mundari influence era. This change only emphasizes our original hypothesis that the effects of Hindu and Christian missionary activities in this region have brought about a disintegration and loss of faith in their own magico-religious beliefs, amongst the Oraons.

The 'first bath and meal' is done on the same day, and not on the day after, as Roy records. That is because the bride, being only a child, has to be taken back to her parents before nightfall. The ceremony called 'Érā Kirtānā' has also been dropped these days for the same reason. 'Jhāṛā-gundā' are given with the bride even now, but our informants said that this is done because otherwise the bride's folks would think that the bridegroom's father is so poor that he cannot even afford to send a little 'hāṇṛiā'. Its supposed connection with fertility has been forgotten by them.

As we have noted earlier, there seems to be a tendency to reduce the whole procedure and condense the ceremonies as much as is possible, and mainly to do away with those portions where money has to be paid to the bachelors and maidens. As the only plausible explanation, we suggest that this change has come due to the deterioration of the general economic conditions of the Oraons. So far as the reduction of the age at marriage of the boys and girls is concerned, it clearly shows the result of Hindu influence, because the Christian Oraons even now marry their children at a comparatively later age. The use of distilled liquor purchased from local roadside shops seems to be a new addition. Though it is not very much in use yet, still the surreptitious presence of a bottle of distilled liquor is an ominous sign. These are very cheap and their consumption in large quantities may wreck their health in no time.

Marriage among Christian Oraons

A brief description of the marriage between two Christian Oraons does not seem, in our opinion, to be very much out of place here. The negotiations are done practically in the same way. Only the Christians try to avoid drinking 'hāṇṛiā' during visits, or at least they claim it. But we observed quite a good deal of 'hāṇṛiā' drinking in the solitary case of one Christian marriage that we had the chance of actually observing. Of course it is a fact, which should be mentioned, that the clothes that these poor people can afford to buy are absolutely insufficient against the cold

of the winter nights, and sometimes even of the days, and the only way to keep the body warm is to seek the solace of the pot of 'hāṇṛiā' when the fire has died down due to lack of fuel. Also, one cannot always sit at the fireside even if he can afford to buy an unlimited quantity of firewood in an area where jungles are quickly becoming scarce.

Though the Christian Oraons claim that the choice of life partner always depends on the actual marrying couple, yet more than one informant said that during 'ghar-bār', the parents of the bride and the bridegroom must intimate to each other their consent to the marriage. Otherwise it would fall through.

They have another ceremony after 'ghar-bār', which is known as 'loṭā-pāni'. The boy visits the girl's place, where he washes his hands and feet by taking a brass-pot full of water from the girl, and then hands it back to the girl, whose acceptance shows that they are both willing to accept each other as life-mates. After this they accompany their parents to the Church where they announce their intention to the priest. (They are all Roman Catholics in this village.) The priest next announces the engagement formally after mass every Sunday for three weeks. This is called 'Phukār'. In all these they show a blending of their old heritage with 'Western' practice in this that the settlement of the marriage is mostly an affair of the boy and the girl themselves who decide it mutually rather than following the orthodox Hindu way of letting the parents arrange it for them.

In the meantime, a fortnight after the first announcement, the 'Sānni-Pāhi' is held, followed by 'Kohā-Pāhi', which is held two days before the marriage. Only 'āmmotrā', which is a magico-religious ceremony of the Oraons, is not performed during 'Kohā-Pāhi'. The bride-price is as usual handed over preferably at the 'Kohā-Pāhi'. The bride-price in vogue among the Christian Oraons is the same as that amongst the Sansari Oraons. During these functions, the Christian Oraons seem to lay greater emphasis on feasting.

The marriage takes place at the Church at Mandar. The priest takes the formal oath of the couple in front of about twenty or thirty friends or relatives. Then silver rings are exchanged and the sacrament is administered. In the evening the wedding party takes place. In the case that we studied, it first took place at the bridegroom's house. The next morning the bridegroom's people went over to the bride's house and were feasted; and on the following morning they all returned with the bride. Expenses incurred in a Christian marriage are practically the same as in the case of the Sansari. What the Christians save by preparing a less amount of 'hāṇṛiā' is spent over the silver rings and more quantity of meat.

General Conclusion

From the above facts and discussions it can be seen that there have been changes in Oraon marriage customs mainly in three directions. First is the reduction in age at marriage. The introduction of the bus service has given a chance to both the Oraons and the Hindus to mingle more freely. Journeys to Ranchi to sell cash crops and buy metal utensils or cheap clothes are quite common among the Oraons. The traders from Ranchi and other towns also come and attend the weekly markets in the interior villages. Further the bus service has encouraged traders to open permanent roadside shops. These are only a few of the ways of contact between the town people and the Oraon villagers. Such contacts between them have naturally brought about exchange of views and cultural traits, and we

may suggest that the orthodox Hindu custom of marrying children off at an early age has been accepted by the Oraons through such contacts. The journeys to Ranchi and trade contacts have made them realize the high position held by local Hindus, who are lawyers, doctors, officers and business men, as compared with them.

Also we find in Roy's records that some of the negotiatory functions were practically one way. For example, the 'Sānni-Pāhi' was held only in the bridegroom's house. But nowadays a reciprocity is seen. We would suggest that this is also probably a borrowed trait from Hindu culture in this that negotiatory rites like 'āshirbād', etc., are always held in both the bridegroom's as well as the bride's house. In support of our suggestion we would put forth data from other neighbouring tribes who have had connection with Oraons in the past, like the Dravidian-speaking Marias and Murias of related culture or of the neighbouring Mundas. In the case of the Mundas, the betrothal ceremony takes place only at the house of the bridegroom. Some of the negotiatory functions are held in both the places, but here again Roy writes, 'In the matter of marriage, as in several other matters, the Mundas appear to have modified some of their ancient customs and practices in imitation of those of their Hindu neighbours of olden times.'[4] Among the Maria Gonds[5] and the Bison-horn Marias of Bastar, throughout the negotiation periods the bridegroom's parents and relatives have to go to the house of the bride and negotiate but not the converse. Among the Murias,[6] during negotiations, the parents of the bridegroom have to visit the bride's people twice or thrice, while the bride's people never visit the bridegroom's people for betrothal or such negotiatory rites.

The influence of Christian Missions, on the other hand, has helped them in preserving some of their older ideas such as allowing a boy and a girl to choose their mates when they are reasonably grown up. Also, some abhorrence towards drinking 'hāṇṛiā' in excess is slowly growing among them, although the sentiment is at all not yet strong.

We have attributed condensation of marriage rituals to general deterioration of economic condition. In support of that we would present the following data.

The population of Ranchi district as a whole has increased from 813,328 in 1872[7] to 1,861,207 in 1951,[8] and the population of Mandar Revenue Thana and Police station (with an area of 196 sq. miles) has increased from 33,041 in 1921[9] to 68,444 in 1951. The Oraon population alone of Ranchi has increased from 340,123 in 1901 to 440,100 in 1931 (the figures for 1941 and 1951 are not available).

The above data show us how the population of the area has risen gradually from 1872 to 1951. This is not by itself evidence of the fact that due to an increase in population land shortage has occurred and consequently there has been disintegration of the economic system, because reserve lands in the shape of forests might have been gradually taken up for cultivation with the increase in population. But side by side with our data on population increase, we find a huge increase in the number of agricultural labourers (from only 249 in 1911 to 24,022 in 1931 in Ranchi district. The figures for 1941 and 1951 are not available yet). This can

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4 Roy, S. C. *The Mundas and their Country*, pp. 436–40.
5 Grigson, W. V. *The Maria Gonds of Bastar*, pp. 249–54.
6 Elwin, V. *The Muria and their Ghotul*, p. 86.
7 *Census of India* (*Bihar and Orissa*), Vol. V, Table, 1911.
8 *Census of India* (*Bihar*), Vol. V, Table, 1951.
9 *Census of India* (*Bihar*), Vol. VII, Table, 1931.

only suggest the control of land by a limited number and lack of adequate land for the rest. The report on the 1931 Census supports[10] us in this matter. According to it, though the population had increased in Bihar considerably in 1931 (from 1921) '. . . there has been an appreciable decline in the proportion of working population engaged in Agriculture, Industry and Commerce', i.e. the resources were insufficient to provide for the growing population. Again, the deterioration of the economic condition of agriculturists can be seen from the following quotation: '. . . the petty agriculturist and the agricultural labourer are often hard to separate, and at the present census there would seem to have been a substantial transfer from the former to the latter head.'

[10] *Census of India*, 1931, Vol. VII, Report, Part I, pp. 186 and 193.

Photo : G. Chattopadhyay.
Feet-washing at bridegroom's place (Katchancho).

Photo: G. Chattopadhyay.
The guests are being treated to 'hāṇṛiā' at the bride's house (Banjhla).

Photo: G. Chattopadhyay.

Bathing the bride (Banjhla).

Photo : G. Chattopadhyay.

An advance party of musicians announce the arrival of 'Bārāt' at the village boundary (Katchancho).

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THE SINHALA TREE PRESS

By A. JAYASUNDARA

The tree press is still widely used for extracting oil from various kinds of seeds, roots, bark or herbs of medicinal value, by the Sinhala villagers in various parts of Ceylon. The tree press appears to be more prevalent in the interior regions of the country, where a majority of the population follow agricultural pursuits. The use of the tree press is not limited to a particular caste, as such. However it may be mentioned that the weaving of the 'Rinser' or Paha ('a' as in pat) is done usually by the members of the Rodiya caste, who either sell it at the weekly fair or exchange it for a quantity of paddy or other cereal. The other parts that enter into the composition of the press hardly require any specialized labour and hence are made by the villagers themselves.

The seeds usually taken for extracting oil are many though it may be said that Mee (Sinhala term), Domba (Sinhala term), Khohomba and Margosa are chief types. Medicinal oils are also extracted from herbs, roots, leaves, bark, etc., by using this press.

The tree press is composed of the following parts:

I. A hole is bored in the trunk of a thick living tree, at a height of about three feet from the ground, with a diameter of about 4½ inches to 5 inches and depth of about 6 to 8 inches.

II. Two wooden planks (*A* and *A'* in fig.) each having a length of about 5 feet or a little more and thickness of about 2 inches are taken. Their width at one end is about 5 inches and at the other is about 2 inches. Each plank has one of its surfaces, which we may term inner surface, flat, while the other three surfaces are rounded off, so as to give the outer surface a semicircular shape in cross-section.
About 6 inches away from the wider end, in the centre of each plank, a hole is made, having a diameter of about 2 inches.

III. A cylindrical wooden pole (*hb* in fig.) having a length of about 2 feet 6 inches and a diameter slightly less than 2 inches is taken.

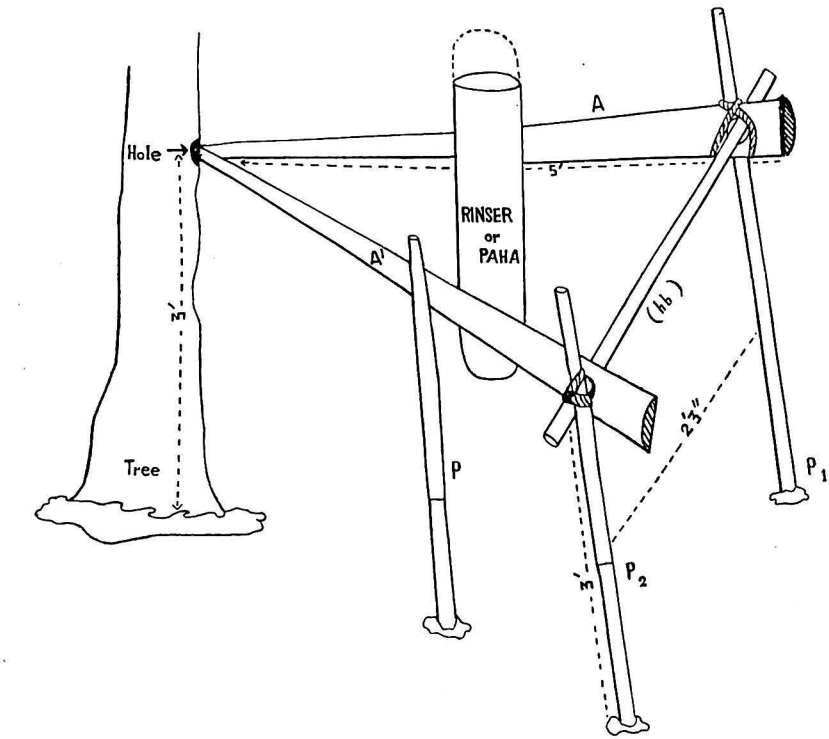
IV. Three other wooden poles are also required.

V. The 'Rinser' or the 'Paha' is a basketry container woven out of thin strips of cane. Sometimes fibres of barks of certain trees are taken when cane is not available. The pattern is twilling in three.

Method of Setting the Press:

The narrow ends of the planks *A* and *A'* are inserted into the hole in the trunk of the tree, in such a manner that the flat inner surfaces of both planks are vertical and face each other. Then the cylindrical pole is made to pass through the holes bored at the wider ends of both planks. This pole is kept in horizontal position by tying its ends with coir rope or rope made of the fibre of some jungle creeper to the upper ends of two poles p_1p_2 which are firmly fixed upright in the ground. One of the planks *A* is kept fixed by tying it to an upright while the other *A'* is made to slide freely along the horizontal pole (*hb*) so that when moved

to the plank A, their inner, flat surfaces come in contact. A third pole (p in fig.) is fixed upright in the ground at about $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet away from p_2, so as to set a further limit to the movement of the plank A'.



Then the 'Rinser' or 'Paha' is filled with crushed and steamed seeds, and placed near about the central portion between the separated planks. At the beginning of the operation, the upper part of the Rinser is pressed but as the process is continued the basket is gradually raised. In pressing out oil the plank A' is made to move towards plank A and then withdrawn. The process is repeated by moving the plank A' forward and backward. One man holds the Rinser while another pushes the movable plank, towards fixed plank. (Photo showing press only). The above details have been ascertained at the request of Prof. K. P. Chattopadhyay and the note written in consultation with him.

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AN OIL PRESS AMONG BHILS OF RAJASTHAN

By S. NAVLAKHA

1. An oil press, which I have briefly described in the following lines, came to my notice among Bhils during my field investigations on them in the early part of 1958. It was first reported to me at Kundal in the district of Banswara and thereafter its use was confirmed at different village settlements in the same district. Its use is now, however, gradually diminishing and usually only a few families at a settlement possess it, lending it now and then to others for their use.

2. The oil press is an extremely simple device for extracting oil. It consists of two prepared planks of wood almost identically shaped and of nearly same dimensions. Fig. I, drawn of the first press I saw, shows the front view of the two planks *A* and *B*: *A* which is slightly longer than *B* measures 23″ in length, 6″ in maximum width and 1·3″ in thickness. It is shaped so as to obtain a highly tapering upper end and relatively less so at the lower end. The broadest region of the plank, which is closer to the lower end, is immediately followed, further towards the latter, by two lateral notches. At the upper end a hook is formed on the front aspect of the plank by retaining some length (2″) downwards of this end thicker than the rest of the plank body. This is easily discernible in the lateral view from Fig. II. The plank *B* measures 20″ in length, 6″ in maximum width and 1·2″ in thickness. It is identically shaped with lateral notches at the corresponding position but is different from the plank *A* in its absence of any hook at the upper end. Both the planks are almost uniformly thick through their body except that the lower ends in either case are slightly thicker (by less than 0·5″) than the upper.

CHĀTAWĀ – BHIL OIL PRESS

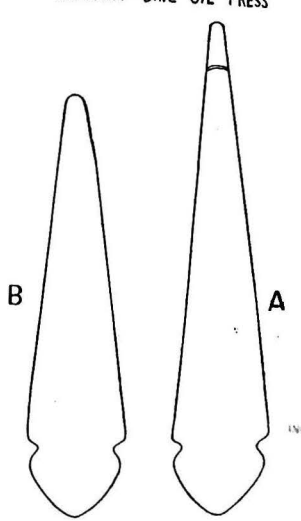

FIG. I. Front view

3. For manipulation of the oil press it is vertically placed. Plank *A* is tied to a hut pillar vertically from its hook with a *san* (sunn hemp) rope. Plank *B* is tied to the plank *A* at the region of their notches. The frontal surfaces of both the planks now face each other and become the interior walls of the press. Prepared and steamed oil seeds, contained in a cloth piece, are introduced between these walls. Another rope is wound round the pillar and the press (as shown in Fig. II) so that the manipulator, man or woman, now sitting on haunches on the ground facing the press puts one of his/her legs to rest on the lower end of the press and draws on forcefully at the two terminals of this rope. Thus a powerful pressure is exerted on the oil seeds between the press. The oil consequently drains out from the lateral sides of the press and is collected in a vessel kept just below on the ground.

4. The oil is extracted from *mahua* seeds. The collected seeds are crushed and then steamed. The latter is done by keeping them in a cloth over a pot with boiling water inside it. Sometimes, although rarely, oil is extracted from the seeds of *Kaleji* tree, which is used for medicinal purposes. The *mahua* oil, however, serves in a variety of ways, chiefly in eating.

CHĀTAWĀ – BHIL OIL PRESS

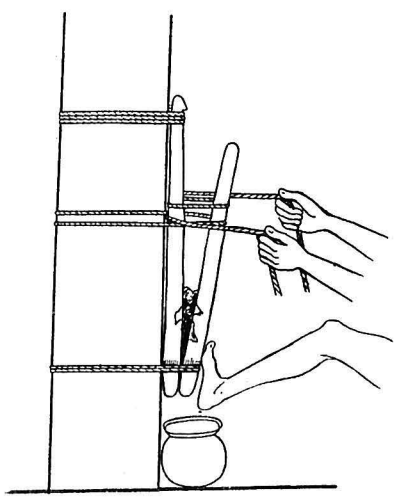

FIG. II. Manipulation