

# Kangra Marriages: Customs and Traditions (During Colonial Period 1846-1947)

## Abstract

The marriage was an important ceremony in the hills, as in the other parts of India. The marriage customs and traditions were very interesting and picturesque in the hills. There were certain rules regarding marriages which were followed by the hill people. Among the members of the three superior *bars*, (Brahmans, Kshatrias, and Vaisyas) the rules prohibiting the marriage of daughters with men of lower castes were exceedingly strict. Especially Rajputs were very particular on this rule and every group in this caste was affected by the custom. Due to that custom it was most difficult to obtain a suitable match for high-born girls, so gave birth to the custom of female infanticide. The different castes married as a rule among themselves, but could not marry persons of the same *zat*, or *al*. The lowest castes were just as strict in this respect as the high born ones. There were some very common betrothal contracts among the upper and lower classes in the area as exchange marriage, *dan-pun*, money, *jhanjarar* etc. The main ceremonies which were performed during the marriages in Kangra were started with *vivah-mahurat* or *kudmai* and ended with *gheraphera*. The dowry (*daj*) itself generally consisted of cooking utensils and furniture for the house; and most expensive item-gold ornaments and other articles of personal adornment for the bride.

**Keywords:** Marriages, Ceremony, Infanticide, Vivah-Mahurat, Samuhat, Jhamakra, Biradari, Gotar, Purohit, Jhanjarar-Marriage, Dowry or Daj, Lagan-Bedi.

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## Introduction

Kangra, lying in the lap of Dhauladhar, is one of the biggest districts of Himachal Pradesh. During colonial rule Kangra comprised of 2,544 square miles lying between latitude 31°.42" and 32°.28" in the north and longitude 75°.45" and 77°.02" in the east. Kangra was bounded on the north by Chamba; on the north-east by Kullu; on the south-east and south by Mandi and Kahlur or Bilaspur State; and on the south-west by Hoshiarpur district of Punjab. After the Anglo-Sikh war of 1846 Kangra, Kullu and Lahaul Spiti came under the direct control of the British. Soon these areas were clubbed together and formed into district and continued to be administered Directly by British till 1947 when India got independence.

## Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to explore the old customs and traditions of the Kangra marriages, as the Kangra marriages were very interesting and picturesque. So, it will be valuable to know about these customs and traditions as most of these have been disappeared with the passage of time.

## Methodology

The major part of this study is based on archival and published source material. Gazetteers, Settlement Reports, Administrative Reports and Contemporary source material has been consulted and analyzed for the preparation of this paper.

As usual, the marriage was an important ceremony in the hills, as in the other parts of India. The marriage customs and traditions were very interesting and picturesque in the hills. The parents as well as the closer elder relatives began to look around for suitable matches as soon as the child was old enough. Sometimes a middleman was used as a match-maker to find out the details about the social and financial standing of the family in question, and then the decision was taken on the basis of the

In the hills, it was the father of the boy that sent an envoy to search for a bride for his son.<sup>1</sup>

Among the members of the three superior *barns*, (Brahmans, Kshatrias, and Vaisyas) the rules prohibiting the marriage of daughters with men of lower castes were exceedingly strict. There was a strict custom, particularly among the Brahmans and Rajputs, according to which a man must always take a wife from a lower and give his daughters to a higher caste. Especially Rajputs were very particular on this rule, and although the same rule prevailed among the local Brahmans, though to a less extent. Due to that custom it was most difficult to obtain a suitable match for high-born girls, so gave birth to the custom of female infanticide. Coldstream, the Deputy Commissioner of Kangra had written that the custom of infanticide was by no means extinct. It was then practiced in a much more scientific method than in former days. He had mentioned some methods by which this practice was performed, which were, by starving the child, roll over the child, fling it about, and if these methods had not the desired result, give it some opium. The system adopted for prevention of this crime had only operated as a partial check because the families in which it was more usually committed were more or less influential.<sup>2</sup>

The prevention of infanticide, both in Kangra and in Jammu (where high caste Rajputs used to marry many of their daughters) had driven these Rajputs to great straits. Lyall had mentioned an interesting case of a Manhas Rajput, who had three daughters, not finding any son-in-law of sufficient rank according to his notions, kept them all at home till they were quite old maids. He at last found an old bridegroom of ninety, who married two of the three at once for a consideration, but died on the return journey home so that the two brides came back to their father's home. Shortly after, the third daughter ran away with a postman or letter carrier.<sup>3</sup> A Rathi Rajput can seldom get married unless he or his family give a girl in return or pay a large price for the bride in cash. The second class Rajputs and first class Rathis were very badly affected by this custom. They had to buy brides at high prices from Rathis, and had to give their daughters in marriage to the *Mian* or better class of Rajputs gratis, and beside it they had to give dowries with the daughters and get no returns.<sup>4</sup> The custom of taking wife from one step lower in his caste also created a problem for the last group in the caste ladder. So men of this particular group had to take wives from Kanets of Kullu or sometimes from the Ghirths. So there was a popular proverb in the area- "satvin piri Girthni ki dhi Rani ban jati he", which mean by this custom, in the seventh generation the Ghirth's daughter becomes a queen.<sup>5</sup>

The different castes married as a rule among themselves, but could not marry persons of the same *zat*, or *al*. The lowest castes were just as strict in this respect as the high born ones. With reference to the *gotar*, there seemed less strictness, though amongst most castes it was positively forbidden to intermarry in the same *gotari*.<sup>6</sup> Almost all the tribes prohibited marriages within the boys own *gotar*, his mother's *gotar*, his father's *gotar*, his mother's mother's *gotar*

and with the descendants of the father's or mother's sisters.<sup>7</sup> Among high-caste people it was considered wrong to take any payment for a daughter, but among most of the low caste it was customary to take payment for their daughters. Although this may seem contrary to morality there can be little doubt that it acted as a check on infanticide, and lead to girls being better cared for by their parents. The very common betrothal contracts among the lower classes in the area were as under:

#### **Exchanges (Atta Satta Ka Nata, or Batta-Satta)**

Except first class Rajputs and Nagarkotias Brahmans, 'batta-satta or atta satta ka nata' or exchange betrothals, were very common in Kangra. These types of marriage contracts were sometimes very complicated and perplexing. A will promise his daughter to B, on condition that the B will give his daughter to C, who again will promise his daughter to A. Sometimes there were five or six links in this chain and a breach of promise on the part of one will involve the whole arrangement in confusion, especially if some of the promises have been fulfilled.

#### **Money**

In this marriage contract a cash payment was made for the bride. This was a fruitful source of debt, and also acted as a check upon marriage. Numbers of marriageable young men were obliged to go without wives, owing to the big demands made by the parents of eligible young ladies, but it was much more common to mortgage the ancestral land and pay the demand. The people did not spend much money on the actual ceremonies of marriage, but by the custom they were obliged to pay high prices for women. At the time of first regular settlement (1849-1852) the price of a wife was from Rs.20 to Rs.40. but by the end of the nineteenth century the price of women had gone higher from Rs.100 to Rs. 400, or even higher. E.O'Brien had reported that due to buying of women a lot of land had been sold or mortgaged. There was hardly a *tika* of the 553 *tikas* in Taluka Rajgiri in which land had not been sold or mortgaged, in order to procure women.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Dharam or Dan-Pun**

In this type of betrothals no payment or exchange of any kind was made. This type of betrothal was common only among higher class Rajputs.

#### **Jhanjrara Marriage**

The Balu or Jhanjrara was a ceremony was to be gone through when a widow had to be re-married. The essential part of the ceremony was that the women had to bear the nose-ring, which she had discarded on the death of her previous husband. Although the presence of the Purohit and Nai was not compulsory, but generally, in some castes, like Jats and Ghirths, the presence of Lambardar and Chowkidar was essential to make sure that no dispute should arise in future. In these types of marriages the simple ceremonies were performed. The woman was brought to the house of the man and then the woman of the brotherhood assembled, put the nose-ring into her nose sing songs, and have a feast. But when the widow re-marriages had got legal status in British rule, and widow re-marriages became common in Kangra,

had now tendered to lose its original simplicity. Some caste had now begun too much display and show, as on the occasion of an ordinary marriage. For example, beating of drums and playing on musical instrument, which was seldom witnessed on such occasions, had now become more and more common.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Jararphuki Marriage**

In this type of marriages, when the men and the women were both of age, and they have mutually agreed to get married, all they had to do was to go four times round a brushwood which they set on fire. Sometimes, but not necessarily, the priest was also called for this ceremony. Originally this practice was confined to Gaddis and Kanets only, but now it was favoured by almost every tribe. Sometimes respectable people had also resorted to this ceremony instead of the ordinary rites where the latter would have meant a hindrance for them, for after all this romantic ceremony was sought after only in the case of what may be termed "love-marriages".<sup>10</sup>

The main ceremonies which were performed during the marriages in Kangra were as under:

#### **Vivah Mahurat or Kudmai**

This ceremony was to find out of an auspicious day for the marriage.

#### **Chhei or Layee Chhei**

This was the ceremony of cutting of a *Darek* or mango tree and this wood was used for the *Havan* to be performed on the marriage day. Songs were sung by girls and women on this occasion.

#### **Neundran**

In this ceremony the invitation of the marriage was sent to the relatives and the first invitation must be sent to the maternal house with sweet fried breads (suhalus or ghughus) and chanas (grams), to inform them of the dates of marriage ceremonies.

#### **Samhut**

At that time the Purohit will prepare the Laganotri, that was the datesheet for the different ceremonies that were to follow. Women spin thread to be used by the bride in her hair.

#### **Nandi-Mukh or Dandi-Mukh**

The deceased ancestors were worshipped.

#### **Shanti or Sandi**

this means the propitiation and worship of the nine planets. Oil was poured with a *drub* on the head of the boy and the following song was sung-

Surge te utare devate sandi ai baho,

Sada aun nahi hunda, Brahma Vishnu baho.

"Come down O Gods from your celestial regions, and sit down amongst us,

We cannot come up to you, come down O Brahma, Vishnu, sit with us.

#### **Jhamakra**

After sandi and Samuhat (bathing of bride and bridegroom in their respective houses), at this distinct ceremony of the area, a clay image of *nanu* (maternal grand-father) was made and the ladies from the maternal side tried to snatch the image while singing the songs, from the ladies of the father's side.

#### **Parsahi**

The boy was dressed up in new cloths, and wear ornaments and the *Sehra* of golden laces on his head.

#### **Janet or Barat**

All the male members of the bridegroom's house and relatives and all who had *bartan* with each other, represented the marriage party (*janet*) to the bride's house.

#### **Reeda Talwai**

Oil which was sent in a vessel to the bride's house was poured on the head of the bride and a very picturesque and coloured *dupatta* was sent for the bride.

#### **Barasui**

Presents consisting of clothing, or nament etc. were sent to the house of the bride.

#### **Agaya**

The priest of the bride's party come and worships the bridegroom.

#### **Lagan**

The girl was given away by her father after the priest had read his texts.

#### **Bedi**

That was circum-ambulation round the fire.

#### **Gotarachar**

At the time of the *Bedi* the girl was transferred to the same Gotar as the boy.

#### **Sirgundi**

The hair of the girl was combed.

#### **Bardhan or Vidai**

The bride and bridegroom depart, the dowry (*daj*) was sent and presents were made to the bride.

#### **Andron**

Entering the house of the boy.

#### **Dadansatatar**

The bride and the bridegroom bathe and walk around a *Daran* tree (an apricot tree).

#### **Chathurthi havan**

The bridegroom feeds the bride.

#### **Guna**

The bride distributes *Guna* of flour and the relatives made presents to her.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Gheraphera**

That was, the bringing the wife for good and all to her husband's home, like the '*muklaw*' of the plains, but bear little or no expense.<sup>12</sup>

There was no divorce among Hindus but all the tribes were of the view that immorality and change of religion were the only causes which justified a husband in expelling his wife. A woman expelled for immorality had no claim on her husband, but one abandoned for reasons other than immorality or change of religion can claim maintenance. All the tribes of Palampur tahsil was of that opinion that a woman once expelled will not be taken back, while all tribes in Kangra tahsil was of the view that if a woman remained chaste after expulsion could be taken back without any objection. The Rajputs, Brahmins, Khatri, Ghirths and Jats of Nurpur did not take such women, while Andauria Rajputs, Thakars and Rathis and Mahajans had no objection in taking back, same as the tribes of Kangra tahsil. The Rajputs, Brahmans, Khatri, Mahajans, Suds and Bhojki of Dehra tahsil

do not take back such women, while Thakars, Rathis, Jats, Ghirths and Sainis had no objection to taking them back.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Polyandry and Polygamy**

Polyandry was never practiced in Kangra proper, though it was practiced in native areas Saraj in Kullu and Lahul. However, it was not uncommon for a man of lower castes to sell his wife to anyone else who made a fair bid for her. Sometimes such agreements were executed on stamped paper and presented for registration. Polygamy was considered allowable, and was more or less practiced among nearly all the tribes. However, the difficult of procuring wives had acted as a considerable check upon this practice.<sup>14</sup>

#### **Dowry and Bride-Price**

Competition for royal grooms in Kangra lead to an escalation in the size of dowries and *Mian* in the area often married several times and collected a large dowry for each wife. But dowry was not the end that husband's family will get, for throughout the relationship they will get gifts from the bride's family. Every year they get presents of foodstuffs on the occasion of *Hariali puja*, which was celebrated during the rains. When the daughter had a baby, clothes to all the members of her household and silver ornaments for the child, were sent by her parents. On the death of her husband, her natal lineage sends her condolence gifts of cloths (*randepa*). The dowry (*daj*) itself generally consisted of cooking utensils and furniture for the house; and most expensive item-gold ornaments and other articles of personal adornment for the bride. On part of the dowry- a gift known as *Bagge* consisted of one or more tin trunks containing cloths and some ornaments for the woman of the groom's immediate *Khandan* and close female kin of other lineages. Before the wedding some gifts were also made at *sagan*, known as *tikka*. *Tikka* was brought to the groom's house by the bride's family *purohit* and consisted of clothing for the wives and daughters of his lineage, various utensils, some money for the groom himself and a large quantity of sweets. In addition, on wedding day, the gift of a gold ring, *dhoti*, a suite of cloths was presented to the groom by the bride's brother. So, on the whole bride's family had to pay a lot, in forms of gifts, throughout their life.<sup>15</sup>

The clans of the second *biradari* were the victims of the whole system. On the one hand they had to pay the large dowry, while on the other hand they had to pay bride-price to the Rathis. According to O'Brien the current rates of bride price in 1891 were upto Rs. 400 and this at a time when a soldier in the army was getting Rs.5 per month. So, these sufferers were always poor, and in debt, and their land was certain to be mortgaged.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Legitimacy and the Validity of the Marriage and Inheritance Rules**

The analytical distinctions of marriages were closely mirrored by the set of categories with which Kangra people themselves operated, and which served to discriminate between a bihoti, a rikhorar and a sarit. A bihoti was a woman whose current union was her first marriage; a rikhorar was a widow or a

divorcee who had contracted a secondary union and the third category – sarit – were concubines with whom valid marriage would not be possible on grounds of caste.<sup>17</sup> Congruent with the distinction between a bihoti and a rikhorar was the distinction between a lagan-ved and a jhanjarar marriage. Lagan-ved was the most prestigious type of marriage ceremony, and rated as only valid form of marriage. A woman can only go through such a ceremony once in her lifetime; and even amongst those clans which tolerate remarriage, the lagan-ved can never be repeated. Although a man may contract any number of lagan-ved marriages. A groom, who had previously been married, was known as duharju and his bride a noli.<sup>18</sup>

The jhanjarar rites were much shorter, less costly and less prestigious. The crucial part of the jhanjarar marriage ceremony was that the bride would resume the nose-ring (*balu*) which was a symbol of her married status and which she had put off at the time of her first husband. In addition to *lagan-ved* and jhanjarar there was a third type of marriage ritual known as *brar-phuki* which represented the minimum ritual possible. *Brar-phuki* ceremony can be performed though the bride had never been given in *lagan-ved*. This was rather a doubtful exception, as we can conclude that as far as a woman concerned, the *lagan-ved* ceremony was essential before she can enter the status of bihoti, and that the prior performance of lagan-ved was a necessary qualification for contracting a secondary (jhanjarar) union. A union with a sarit was not generally marked by any sort of ceremony. But it was said that in the old days, people of the elite Rajput families would sometimes give several *sarit* along with the dowry as handmaids for the bride and as bedmates for the groom. These girls would accompany the bridal couple on the seventh round of the sacred fire at the time of the *vedi* ceremony.<sup>19</sup>

The high caste people, who did not recognized the widow remarriage, insisted that only the children of a bihoti who had married according to *lagan-ved* rites were legitimate, while the people of other group who favoured the widow remarriage, recognized the legitimacy of the children of. As far as the top biradari Rajputs were concerned, a rikhorar the children of a rikhorar, *sarit*, or a woman married by *brar-phuki* rites, were not entitled to inherit although they can claim a maintenance allowance (*guzara*) from their father's estate. On this matter the Rathis and Ghirths drew the line in a different place. As far as they were concerned, the children of a rikhorar were also legitimate, provided that their mother was of clean caste. Although they recognized all three varieties of marriage ceremony as valid, but in practice they treat cohabitation, un-sanctified by any ritual, as enough to establish the legitimacy of the children and their rite to inherit.<sup>20</sup>

Except those talukas of Nurpur, where the tenures assimilated to the plains, it was the general custom of all the tribes in Kangra proper for the jheta beta or eldest son, to get something as jhetanda in excess of the share which the other sons inherit equally. But this custom was said to be dying out in

the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> The jhetanda share may be a field, a cow or ox or any other valuable thing. In Gaddis the eldest son got a twentieth of the paternal estate as jhetanda, but in return was saddled with an extra twentieth of the paternal debts, if any. The custom of inheritance by sons of one wife was known as pagvand.

If a man had more than one wife, on his death the inheritance by sons would be by the custom chundavand and not by the pagvand custom. According to chundavand custom, the first division of the inheritance was made upon mothers and not upon heads of sons. In this custom a sonless widow was also entitled to a share of her deceased husband's property.<sup>22</sup> This rule of chundavand was universal among all the tribes in Kangra proper, except the Gaddis, a large section of whom were guided by the rule of pagvand. 'Pichlags', that was sons begotten by a first husband, who had accompanied their mother to her second husband's house or were born there in, were not entitled to a share. But Gaddis and Kanets were of the view that if a man took a widow as wife, who was pregnant at that time, the child born will be reckoned his child, and no 'pichlag'.

With regard to widow's right to inherit, the Rajputs, Brahmans, Khattris and Mahajans were of that view that she holds for life on condition of chastity. The Ghirths and other similar castes were of the view that so long as she continues to reside in her late husband's house, she could not be dispossessed. With regard to daughters, all classes agreed that, in default of sons, an orphan daughter had an interest similar to that of a widow so long as she remained unmarried. The general feelings seemed to be that a daughter or her children can never be succeeded by simple inheritance, but in actual the daughters had occasionally been allowed to inherit. A father can, by formal deeds of gift, bestow acquired land on a daughter or her children.<sup>23</sup>

### Conclusion

So, in the end we can say that custom regarding marriages were very strict in the area. Especially Rajputs were very particular on this rule and every group in this caste was affected by the custom. Due to that custom it was most difficult to obtain a suitable match for high-born girls, so gave birth to the custom of female infanticide. The second class Rajputs was badly affected by this custom. They had to buy brides at high prices from Rathi Rajputs, and had to give their daughters in marriage to the high class Rajputs, and beside it they had to give dowries with the daughters and get no returns. The custom of taking wife from one step lower in his caste also created a problem for the last group in the caste ladder. So men of this particular group had to take wives from Kanets of Kullu or sometimes from the Ghirths. Almost all the tribes prohibited marriages within the boys own *gotar*, his mother's *gotar*, his father's *gotar*, his mother's mother's *gotar* and with the descendants of the father's or mother's sisters.<sup>24</sup> Among high-caste people it was considered wrong to take any payment for a daughter, but among most of the low caste it was customary to take payment for their daughters. Although this may seem contrary to

morality there can be little doubt that it acted as a check on infanticide, and lead to girls being better cared for by their parents. Polyandry was never practiced in Kangra proper but polygamy was considered allowable, and was more or less practiced among nearly all the tribes. However, the difficult of procuring wives had acted as a considerable check upon this practice. Competition for royal grooms in Kangra lead to an escalation in the size of dowries and *Mian* in the area often married several times and collected a large dowry for each wife. But dowry was not the end that husband's family will get, for throughout the relationship they will get gifts from the bride's family. The clans of the second *biradari* were the victims of the whole system. On the one hand they had to pay the large dowry, while on the other hand they had to pay bride-price to the Rathis. So, these sufferers were always poor, and in debt, and their land was certain to be mortgaged.

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