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## Traditional marriage system among Changthang nomadic in Ladakh

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### Abstract

Marriage evolved into an essential social structure as civilized civilization progressed. Marriage is the biological, psychological, cultural, and social union of matched couples. Other societies, like nomadic tribal communities, are mainly patriarchal. This research looked at the traditional marriage system of the Changthang nomadic people of the Ladakh area. It has been explored the cultural component of nomadic women's existence in contrast to other women, gender inequity, and the polyandry system practiced by the majority of Tibetan nomadic people. The economic, political, educational, and social standing of women has been emphasised. The Changthang people of Ladakh practise Tibetan Buddhism. Globalization, modernity, technology, and speedy communication are diminishing Ladakh's nomadic population. As a consequence of educational gains, women are more aware of their social, political, and economic rights. This study uses both first-hand and second-hand sources, such as interviews with Changthang nomad women, books, papers, case studies, and websites, among other things.

**Keywords:** Changthang, Ladakh, nomadic, polyandry, marriage, caste

### Introduction

Historically, the Mon and Dards were the first nomadic tribes to settle in Ladakh, with the Dards considered Aryans and the Mons from the south <sup>[1]</sup>. The first Ladakh dynasty was created in the 8th century by the Tibetan kingdom. The namgyal dynasty ruled until the 15th century, when it was overtaken by Kashmiri incursions. Ladakh is located in northern India and is the world's coldest and highest altitude Himalayan area.

Prior till October 31, 2019, it was formally a part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The Jammu and Kashmir restructuring act of 2019 split the state into two new union territories, the Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory and UT of Ladakh <sup>[2]</sup>.

### Changthang

Changthang is made up of two words: "Chang" (northern) and "Thang" (Plain). Changthang is a high-altitude plateau in the Ladakh region that borders Tibet to the east. Changpas, or "northerners," are nomadic nomads who migrate over this plateau with their cattle <sup>[3]</sup>. The Changthang are a semi-nomadic people that reside on the Changthang plateau and in the lowlands. They are Tibetan Buddhists who place a high value on religion. They live a modest existence and depend on animal products to fulfil their basic requirements. The Changthang are a nomadic pastoral group that moves from one location to another throughout Changthang tent-dwelling people who graze their flocks of sheep, goats, yaks, and horses on communally controlled pastures. They live in robe tents, which are constructed from yak wool and spun into thread by the families. Conflicts are discouraged in their traditional way of life, and they aid one another. They were compelled to leave their customary way of life due to socioeconomic developments. Animal products are the primary source of income.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.leh-ladakh-taxi-booking.com/practical-info/history-of-ladakh>

<sup>2</sup> <https://egazette.nic.in/WriteReadData/2019/210407.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Jina, P.S. (1999), The Chang pa of the ladakh Himalayas: some observations on their economy and environment. (pp. 94-105). Cambridge, UK.

### Women status in Changthang

Women have a vital role in nomadic life and other societies, participating in all activities within and outside the home. Most women are intimately engaged in work such as fetching water, cooking, household chores, milking, and feeding animals such as yaks, cows, and goats, and they perform all hard labour just like men. Women, like men, contribute significantly to economic progress. Their efforts, however, are largely disregarded. Changpa women not only produce children, but they also help male members domesticate animals. They are useful not just for non-economic objectives but also for economic ones. Changpa women are seldom given the chance to get a basic education, and parents prefer to send only their sons to school.

### Socioeconomic, Cultural and Political status

The pace of current change may largely be attributed to globalisation. The impacts of exposure to Western education, technology, and instantaneous communication vary significantly across the sexes. The Changthang people may be isolated in the mountains, but they are progressively adopting more contemporary ways of living. A few households even have cars, enabling them to go into town and stock up on food, clothing, and other necessities that are only available elsewhere <sup>[4]</sup>. Almost every household has access to a cooking gas cylinder, and most communities are linked by at least gravel roads. Their inhabitants rely on barley for sustenance, on animals for their flesh, and on sheep and yaks for their wool in order to survive the region's very cold climate. Changes in the city of Changthang's economy, government, and environment have been impacted by a number of historical events. Research on the Changthang people has been conducted extensively by independent India. Changthang was an important battlefield during the India–China conflict of 1962, negatively affecting the lives of people and the ecology of Ladakh. A lot of old power structures have been shifted about as a consequence of Changthang's political transformation. Women from Changthang have made significant contributions to the fields of economics, education, science, law, politics, and religion. Gender inequality and socialization practices are cultural constructs that determine women's status in any given society.

### Traditional Marriage System in Changthang

Since the dawn of human society, marriage has been the most significant and significant institution. Every culture has always had it, in some form or another, ensuring societal sanction to a physical relationship among men and women and establishing the foundation for the growth of the family, the basic unit of society.

Polyandry is practiced in the Changthang area of Ladakh, where women often have many husbands. Commonly, women will marry two or more brothers or cousins. When the oldest brother settles down with a bride, the rest of the brood tends to follow suit <sup>[5]</sup>. This means that most wives are senior citizens compared to their husbands. The first step in any marriage is for the prospective spouses to visit an

astrologer) in order to have their horoscopes matched. If you want to know if today is a good day to propose to a lady, you could ask her family. The groom's dad pops the question to the bride's family over a bottle of "Chang," a kind of brewed barley wine. Family and friends get together for wedding parties, and rituals are carried out. The elder brother and the bride get the khadak and are officially recognised as groom and bride, while the younger brothers divide the woman among themselves.

Women are more likely than men to leave their parental home after marriage. In some cases, a boy will accompany a girl to her home if she does not have any male siblings. Male presence in the family is regarded as an important factor in handling all of the difficult tasks.

### Types of marriage in Changthang

There are four types of marriage systems in Changthang, and most families prefer arranged marriage because it is less likely to result in divorce and is simpler than other types of marriage systems. However, other types of marriage exist, such as love marriage, marriage by exchange, and marriage by stealing, which is a very rare occurrence in today's world. They also promote widow marriages.

- 1. Arrange Marriage:** - In this type of marriage, parents are more important than the boy or girl. Marriage is arranged by parents and has a lower divorce rate than other marriage systems. In Changthang, this is the most common type of marriage.
- 2. Love Marriage:** - In this type of marriage system, the boy and girl have the freedom to choose their union. They decide to be married after falling in love with one another. In Changthang, after discovering their love, parents match the horoscopes of the girl and boy to see if marriage is possible. Because of modern-day communication, many people are involved in love marriages.
- 3. Marriage by Exchange:** - If a girl from Family A marries a boy from Family B, the B family will give a girl to a boy from Family A in a direct exchange marriage. However, these types of marriages are uncommon and usually occur as a result of the death of a wife in order to maintain their relationship with their cousin and to care for their children rather than by an outside stepmother.
- 4. Marriage by Stealing:** - Unlike Tibetans, Ladakhis practice this type of marriage. If there is mutual consent between the boy and girl but it is rejected by parents or anyone in the family, the alternative is marriage by stealing. This type of marriage is common in Changthang, and most women are taken by boys. A marriage obtained by stealing is later abused and poses a threat to many women. They steal women without regard for their parents or themselves. We can say that this type of marriage became forced marriage. However, over time and as a result of modernization, the practise of this type of marriage system has declined.

### Caste and Marriage

The Changthang people have adopted a caste system similar to that of Hinduism. They looked down on some groups and

<sup>4</sup> Dolkar Tashi, Azim Hummera, "Study on Basic Living Condition of Changpa Nomads", University of Kashmir India, Jan 12, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Namgial S., "Marriage and Changing pattern among the Changpa Tribe of Ladakh" 12 December 2015, Jammu and Kashmir, India.

would never marry into such societies [6]. As a general rule, a lady who marries someone from a lower caste cannot go back to her family. Because of her embarrassment, her family and friends shunned her. Women who marry into lower caste communities can face social stigma because of their new status. It would be quite difficult to marry someone from a lower caste in Changthang.

### **The distinction between nomadic women and other women**

Women in the nomad community have their own unique traits that set them apart from their more settled counterparts. Women in nomadic communities sometimes lack access to education since they are more likely to reside in rural locations with less resource. As we are all aware, education helps us become more cognizant of our inherent freedoms. It helps Nomadic women become more financially independent by resolving the problem of informational inequality. The women of a nomadic society go about their everyday lives in a world where they have little access to information. Most women in nomadic societies do not have a say in who they marry. As a consequence, prejudice against women persists in Changthang. Unlike in other cultures, girls in Changthang are entitled to the same share of the family's property and resources as males.

### **Case Study**

Changthang Samad inhabitant Tsering Dolma says she was married off at the age of 24. As far as she was concerned, her husband was a complete mystery. The only option she had was to agree to be with him. The fact that guys were given more opportunities than girls prevented her from attending school. Another Changthang woman, Jigmet Angmo, now 27 years old, tied the knot when she was only 23. She received her primary education at a local school. Her parents insisted on an arranged marriage, despite her wishes for a love union. The situation was different this time. She claims that the husband and wife knew one another before getting married. Another instance from Changthang is that of 65-year-old Sonam Angmo, who tied the knot at the tender age of 22. She married two brothers at the same time. One of them got a divorce from her and married someone else afterwards. She laments just sending her son to school among her seven children, since she also has six daughters. She claims that the ancient, traditional methods of marriage, such as marriage by robbery or trade, are hardly used nowadays. But in some outlying locations, people still get married in this way.

### **Magnificent Changes**

The Changthang are a semi-nomadic people whose marital customs have experienced radical shifts in recent decades. As a result of changes in the economy and society, they are giving up their traditional marriage structure and way of life. This is making polyandry less common. In the past, animals were vital assets while searching for a spouse or bringing one home. It used to take animals four or five days to make the journey, but as technology advanced, cars began to

replace them. Because of the importance placed on honouring and satisfying one's parents, most of their weddings were planned. Communication technologies have made love marriages more appealing than arranged weddings to modern consumers. To promote economic independence and reduce gender inequality, many modern-day parents send their children to school rather than keeping them at home to herd animals. Younger people don't always agree with the norm of only having one spouse, and couples of different ages are usually accepted.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, it's safe to say that the marriage system in Changthang, and the nomad culture more broadly, treat women unfairly. There is a lack of everything: knowledge, money, tools, and methods of communication. These factors contribute greatly to their marginalisation. Even so, the Changthang people have seen significant shifts in the last year. Parents of all generations, not just the younger ones, now encourage their offspring to pursue higher education. These nomad groups now see themselves as completely self-sufficient, opting instead to adhere to ancient customs that actively discourage contact with the modern world. Changthang culture and society in Ladakh have been disrupted by modernization, making it all the more important to hold on to the past for the sake of the future. In three separate accounts, participants describe how they were not encouraged to pursue formal education or given many options in the matter. In our society, girls have the same rights as boys do. The primary concerns were about castes, marriage, the status of those from lower social classes, and the educational disparity between sexes. Inherent in the purpose of empowering women and maintaining cultural traditions is a patriarchal understanding and perspective. As opposed to men, women accept without question the necessity of considering what others might think of them. Women's roles in society are defined by their socioeconomic standing. Despite the fact that women play a crucial part in everyone's life, men are always seen as superior to them. The conventional marriage system in Changthang is now experiencing a fast transformation. As a consequence of their increasing access to education, women are gaining confidence and power. The female literacy rate has lately increased, and there are now female engineers, physicians, and teachers. It's hard to criticise the system, but positive change may start with a single step, and that's why educated women and young people need to speak out. In the past, women were expected to remain at home and focus only on domestic duties and caring for their families. These tremendous shifts, however, may be attributed to the effects of globalization and education. Politicians, social activists, and businesswomen are all doing their best to include women's views when making policy.

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