

Marriage Customs of Christian Son Kolis

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Historical background in brief:

The Son Kolis, a fishing community of Bombay, seem to be very early residents of the Bombay area. The Gazetteer of Bombay City and Island speaks of them in the following terms: "Older than the coconut palm, older than the Bhandari palm tapper are the Koli fishing-folk of Bombay, among whom if any tribe, one must seek for the blood of the men of the Stone Age."¹ However, there is no certain information about the exact time of their immigration into the Bombay area.

Many of the Kolis are Hindus, but in Bombay there are Christian Kolis too. The latter are grouped among the East-Indians. As the toilers of the sea, the Son Kolis live in close economic symbiosis with the tillers of the soil, the agriculturists and other communities.

In Son Kolis inhabit the coasts of the seven islands. Baptista writes: "The present Island of Bombay, again, consisted of seven Islands: Mumbai, from which the present name Bombay is derived, Colaba, Al-Omanis, Mazagaon, Worli, Parel, and Mahim."²

All these islands were and are still inhabited by the Son Kolis. Their settlements still carry their name '*Koliwada*', which is the common name attached so the name of the village. It means 'settlement of Kolis'. The Island Mazagaon, it is believed, owes its name to fish. "*Machchagaum*" meaning 'fish-village'.³ The name Colaba is derived from '*Koli-bhat*' or '*Koli-estate*'.⁴ '*Bhat*', in the dialect of the Kolis, means estate.

The mother tongue of the Kolis is Marathi, the language of the State in which they live. But they have their own dialect which is a

1. The Gazetteer of Bombay City and Island, II, 2.
2. Baptista, 1967, 29.
3. Gaz. Bombay City and Island, I, 4.
4. Da Cunha, 1877, 64.

little different from Marathi. Punekar has written a monograph on the Son Kolis, but ignored the Christian converts of this community.

Marriage among the Son Kolis

The Christian Son Kolis strictly accept the fundamental doctrine of the Catholic Church that marriage is a sacrament; marriage is monogamous and indissoluble as long as one party is alive. The Koli Christians have, however, retained their traditional wedding customs and practices as seen in the following pages.

Unlike the Christian Son Kolis, the Hindu Son Kolis admit polygamy and divorce. Punekar writes: "Bigamy was once common among the Son Kolis. A man usually took a second wife, either for having a child, rather a son, or for work, as women are an asset to a Koli family."⁵ According to her sample study:⁶ of eighty-seven households, four cases of bigamous marriages were found. Divorce and polygamy were thus not unknown to them.

Endogamous Marriage:

As fishing is the specific occupation of the Son Kolis other endogamous groups of Kolis may follow their other specific occupations. The Mahadeo Kolis, for instance, are cultivators. The Dhor Kolis, who eat carcasses of animals, are bamboo cutters by profession and the Dhongari Kolis are farmers. There is a vast difference between the Son Kolis and Dhor Kolis. In contrast to the Dhor Kolis, who are considered to be the lowest among the Kolis, as they eat the carcasses of animals, the Son Kolis do not eat meat. The Son Kolis, as admitted by all the groups of Kolis, are the highest among the Kolis. For according to Punekar, the most probable explanation of 'Son Kolis' ("Golden Kolis"), is to indicate that they are the highest in social status among the Kolis.⁷ There is a similar division of 'Son' and 'Dhor' among the Katkaris too.⁸

Since the Son Kolis are an endogamous caste section, no marriage can take place between the Son Kolis and other groups of Kolis. If a Son Koli marries outside his caste, he is liable to be out-casted. K. M. Kapadia writes: "Caste exercises a tremendous influence over its members as it touches a man's life in all his social relationships. An excom-

5. Punekar, 1959, 93.

6. *Ibid.*, 94.

7. Punekar, 1959, 8.

8. A. N. Weling, 1934, 52.

municated individual finds his life miserable.”⁹ There is also a practical reason why a Son Koli marries only a woman of his own group: his occupation demands of Koli woman, who knows efficiently to co-operate with him in the fishing trade. The Koli woman is not only responsible for her tasks at home but also outside.

Above all, endogamy among the Son Kolis is traditional and is strictly enforced by the *jamat*. His occupation and his social relationships demand the cooperation of his community. Consequently, he is bound by the caste code to endogamous marriage. Today, due to factors such as education, modernization, change of occupation, there are some cases of intercaste marriages among the Son Kolis. As a punishment, the couples are fined about Rs. 200 by the *jamat* for the common collection, but no excommunicated as it was done formerly. However, intercaste marriage is looked upon by the community as wrong.

The Christian Kolis keep up the same traditional practice of marrying within their own community, but the partners must be of different *gotras* (exogamous septs). The Catholic law forbids any marriage between relatives closer than third cousins. In this respect, Christian Kolis traditionally fall in line with Catholic practice. However, their practice of endogamous marriage takes its origin from the caste-system. They retain the traditional customs of the marriage being arranged by the parents of the parties concerned. The practice of marriages being arranged by the parents was always prevalent among the Hindu Kolis inspite of education and urban influence.

Cross-cousin Marriage:

Cross-cousin marriage is not unknown among the Son Kolis. It was highly favoured in the past, though today it is not to the same extent practised. Today, there are a number of cases of cross-cousin marriages among the Son Kolis. But they are more frequent among the Hindu Kolis than among the Christian Kolis. For no cross-cousin marriage is permitted in the Catholic Church prior to a dispensation. Therefore it is gradually dying out.

There are other indications to show the former prevalence of cross-cousin marriages among the Son Kolis. There is a saying: “*Mammachi lakhe maji baikoo*” meaning, “the maternal uncle’s daughter is my wife”. During the marriage ceremonies, there is a custom of the groom’s sister putting a bar to the newly wedded couple not allowing them to pass in,

9. K. M. Kapadia, 1958, 118.

unless the groom promises to give his daughter to her son. Thus, the saying and the custom unfold the cultural trait of the cross-cousin marriage among the Son Kolis.

Cross-cousin marriage is the closest form, permitted among the Son Kolis. Other forms such as marriage between the children of two brothers or children of two sisters or uncle-niece marriages are strictly forbidden among the Son Kolis.

Bride-Price:

Among the Son Kolis no marriage proposal is finalized unless the bride-price is agreed upon. The bride-price is not only discussed among the parties concerned, but also formally proposed and solemnized in the presence of *patel* and elders during the *shakarpara* (betrothal) ceremony. Punekar says: "Formally, after the amount was fixed the father of the groom had to swear before the *jamat* that he would give the particular sum in the particular form".¹⁰ Formerly, the custom of bride-price impoverished the Son Kolis to a certain extent. If a Koli was unable to pay the bride-price demanded of the girl's parents, he was liable either to a restricted selection of a partner or to remain a bachelor. The latter alternative was not acceptable for the Son Kolis except for the sake of religion. For his occupation demands a wife. Besides, it would impair his reputation, as the people would look upon him saying that he has no money even to marry a wife. In order to lessen the social evil of bride-price the *jamat* of each Koliwada had reduced the amount of bride-price a few decades ago. But the fixed amount varies from place to place.

Certainly, there existed and still exists the custom of paying a bride-price. There is also an indication to show the prevalence of this custom. During the marriage ceremonies the groom's party brings gifts, such as *mangal sutra*, saris, blouses, ornaments, spices and edibles, put in a trunk. These gifts must be brought ceremoniously by the sister of the groom and handed over formally. Today, due to Hinduization, Christianization and the influence of the higher castes, the practice varies among the Son Kolis. Instead of bride-price, some of the Kolis practise a dowry system, where the *jamat* is not powerful. Where the *jamat* is powerful the dowry is paid as secretly as possible by some others. Having come into contact with the high class Maharastrains, the Christian and Hindu Kolis possibly adopted the custom of paying a dowry by saying: "*Sokari*

10. Punekar, 1959, 76.

dharmis devachi”, meaning “to give the daughter is a charitable or virtuous act”. This is also called ‘*kanyadhan*’.

“It will be obvious that the bride price economically has a compensatory function”, says Van der Veen.¹¹ It is true of the Kolis. For the Koli woman plays a great role in the maintenance of the household. She is an asset to her family. Thus says Punekar: “The Son Koli woman is more industrious and has many more duties to perform at home and outside than her male counterpart”.¹² If a Koli is a fisherman, his wife is bound to carry out tasks such as helping the man to bring the catch home, sorting out fishes according to their kinds, drying the fishes, selling the fish in the market, besides doing her household work. Therefore, she is economically a productive member to the family. Among the higher classes, namely the Brahmans, where a woman is a liability, the bride’s family has to pay the groom’s family. For the woman does not work besides doing housework and consequently she is economically a non-productive member.

When the groom’s party investigates for a marriageable girl the primary quality expected of the Koli girl is her ability for hard work. The girl must be strong and capable of doing the work expected of her. She need not come from a wealthy family. For Koli life is simple but hardy. The bride’s party too does not expect much of education from the boy, but that he is a man with a job, who can support a family. Of course, today the trend is gradually changing, and at least in certain localities, they look for an educated boy, in which case the girl’s party is ready to pay the dowry, instead of receiving the bride-price. For the girl is going to be a non-productive member. Thus bride-price or dowry plays an important economical role among the Son Kolis.

Superstitious Beliefs:

As it was prevalent in the ancient period of India,¹³ the Hindu Koli parents arrange the marriage after much consultation of omens, horoscopes and auspicious physical characteristics with the Brahmans; whereas most Christian Kolis have to give up this practice due to their adoption of Christian principles. Even so they retain some superstitious practices such as the practice of eating sugar as a good omen, while they consider the presence of widows and spinsters in certain marriage ceremonies as a bad omen.

11. Klass W. Van der Veen, 1972, 29.

12. Punekar, 1959, 34.

13. A. L. Basham, 1967, 167.

Obligation of Marriage:

The obligation to marry was strongly prevalent in the Hindu time. For procreation was a positive duty among the Hindus.¹⁴ It is still prevalent among the Hindu Kolis; whereas among the Christian Kolis it is slowly losing ground due to education and high esteem of the religious vocation. However, bachelors and spinsters are the objects of ridicule and whispered criticism. A Christian Koli must either embrace the religious vocation or the married life, for there is no other legitimate place for the bachelor or spinster in their society.¹⁵

Caste Form of Betrothal:

Both the Hindu Christian Kolis have the betrothal ceremony, i.e., *shakarṇpura*, in which a contract is signed by the parents of the respective couples in the presence of respective patels and a group of elders. Through the Christian Kolis have later adopted the common Christian form of betrothal, i.e., engagement ceremony, first and foremost they submit to the authority of their caste when arranging for a betrothal.

Preliminary Preparations

Investigations:

The parents make every possible effort to find a suitable partner for their son or daughter, but the formal proposal must come from the boy's party. When the parents attend other weddings or village festivals they come across girls of their caste. Once they think that a girl might be suitable for their son, they keep an eye on her. The parents try their best to find out all the details about the girl from people acquainted with her in the street while gossiping, near the village-well, while drawing water, and on the sea-shore or when she goes to church and attends festivities. They observe her modesty in dress, speech and walk. Above all they look for her efficiency in household duties.

As it was prevalent in the time of ancient India, among the Hindu and Christian Kolis too marriage was mainly an affair of the family without taking into account the consent of the parties concerned. This practice is still prevalent in the rural areas because of the social pressure due to the payment of dowry or bride-price. Moreover, people believe that marriages arranged by the parents usually turn out better, though

14. A. L. Basham, 1967, 167.

15. Baptista, 1967, 148.

for Christian marriage it is the law of the Church that the parties have to give their consent. However, there is a strong social pressure to the effect that boys and girls take the advice of their parents and elders into consideration.

Match-makers and their role:

In order to approach the girl's parents or party there existed among the Son Kolis (both Hindus and Christians) in the old days, though less so today, match-makers, either men or women, to arrange a successful match. The Gazetteer of India writes: "It is common to have professional match-makers among the Mohammedans. In rural North India the barber acts as a match-maker for non-Brahmin castes".¹⁶

Among the Son Kolis anyone can be the match-maker, if he or she is known for her popularity in that community and has the gift of persuading and moving parties. They possess detailed and complete information about the girls of their community. They are rewarded with cash and kind (usually dress) and publicly thanked for the service rendered.

The work of a match-maker is a strenuous business. The people have a saying in Marathi that "to make one proposal you have to wear out seven pairs of shoes". The match-makers play an important role in finding a suitable girl for the boy. They would discuss about the girl while engaged at work on the shore and at home during meals and on the street, lest there be any trouble or complaint after the marriage. Before the betrothal ceremony the match-makers themselves more or less fix up the dowry, articles and ornaments, though it has to be carried out formally during the betrothal ceremony.

Sugar Ceremony: (Shakarpara ceremony)

Soon after the match-makers have found a suitable match, the boy's parents fix up the date for the 'sugar ceremony'. This is called betrothal ceremony. It takes place at the bride's house to show that the boy takes the initiative to make the proposal. For the sugar ceremony the presence of the patel or patels, if the couples are not of the same village, god-parents and maternal uncles (social status) of respective parties is very important. The most important personages at this are the patels of the respective *Koliwad*s, as they are the guardians of the marriage customs of their caste and no marriage can be celebrated in their community without their sanction or approval. This ceremony is observed

16. The Gaz. of India, 1965, 547.

by both the Hindu and Christian Kolis. But the latter celebrate in addition to the Christian form of the betrothal.

This is the ceremony in which contract is signed by the respective couples in the presence of the village patels and elders. The amount of bride-price, articles and ornaments, are formally fixed in the presence of the patels, and the record is kept with them, lest there be any post-marriage trouble regarding this matter. In old times the amount of bride-price used to be about Rs. 500 to Rs. 1000; but since about 25 years the *jamat* consisting of seven patels brought down the amount of dowry to Rs. 200. The amount of bride-price differs, however, from place to place.

Rs. 12 is paid to the office of the patels, from which Re. 1 is due to the messenger (employed in the office) who announces the news to the villagers. Thus, the news is formally announced to the villagers. The Christian Kolis have retained this traditional custom of announcement, though there is the formal reading of banns in the church also. Rs. 10 is paid to the respective patels.

Among the urban Kolis the marriage is more or less an individual affair. But among the rural Kolis the marriage being a village and social event, the *shakarpura* ceremony and other following ceremonies are performed in the presence of patels and elders.

Engagement Ceremony:

A few days before the marriage, the boy and the girl are taken to the church for the engagement or exchange of rings in accordance with the Christian practice. A paper bond is signed with two witnesses from each party in the presence of the parish priest either in the bride's house or in the parish house. This ceremony is practised only among the Christian Kolis.

The engaged couple sit together during this Christian form of betrothal ceremony. But the couple are not allowed to be together when attending their traditional form of betrothal ceremony. During the engagement ceremony, the bride must behave shyly and be reluctant to talk to others. Her head must be covered with an end of the sari and she must keep it low. This behaviour is expected not only from a Koli bride, but from any Indian bride.

Celebration of Banns:

The reading of the Banns in the respective parish churches is particularly of a Christian practice. Since this practice is a rule in the

Catholic Church, the Christian Kolis are faithful to it. The banns are to be read on three consecutive weeks during Sunday Mass.

The day of the first banns is of great importance to the Christian Kolis. On this occasion the bride, dressed in an expensive sari, decked out with jewellery and flowers goes to the church accompanied by her near relatives and friends. On her way back home, relatives and friends accompany the bride to her house singing and dancing. The same procedure is carried on by the groom's party too. A festive meal is served to near relatives and friends.

Marriage Ceremonies of Christian Kolis

The marriage ceremonies of both the Hindu and Christian Kolis last for a week. The Christian Koli marriage begins on Thursday ending on the next Thursday; whereas the Hindu Koli marriage ceremonies begin on the first auspicious day after the betrothal ceremony. The marriage ceremonies consist of three major parts:

1. Immediate preparation from Thursday till Sunday.
2. Marriage proper on Monday.
3. Post-Marriage ceremonies from Tuesday till Thursday.

I. Immediate Preparation

Election of the Wedding Booth (mandap):

The erection of the wedding booth is made by near relatives; for they consider it as their obligation to do so. Unlike the urban people the Son Kolis share not only the happy events of marriage ceremonies but also shoulder the burden of work such as erecting the marriage booth. The washerman (*dhobi*) brings white sheets, which the villagers gave him for washing, to cover the top and sides of the booth. In return the *dhobi* gets a couple of rupees, and is allowed to take part in the wedding dinner not as an honorary guest but a ready-man to receive anything that is left over after the guests have had their dinner. People decorate the booth with twigs of mango leaves.

Both the Hindu and Christian Kolis perform a ceremony at the building of the wedding booth. Both consider that it is auspicious to have the entrance facing the East. They tie a branch of mango tree to posts. On the spots where they erect them they put betel leaves and nuts, a couple of coins and few drops of liquor. While the ceremony goes on, the women sing songs concerning the bride and groom and the

mandap. The same procedure is carried out in both respective houses.

The Christian Son Kolis have not retained the custom of the '*mer puja*' (worship offered to the plaintain trees). The Hindu bride applies turmeric paste to the plaintian trees; but the Christian bride does not do so.

Musicians:

When the *mandap* is erected the musicians arrive. There are two groups of musicians. One group consists of four persons playing the traditional Indian musical instruments, namely, a big drum played by both hands, a small drum played with sticks to accompany the drum, one long horn for blowing a steady prolonged note and another small horn playing sharp melodies pertaining to national and communal music. The other group, dressed in gorgeous military costume, plays modern brass instruments, drums and cymbals.

The former group is paid about Rs. 15 to 20 for three days with food and drinks. The music is of low quality and produced by a low caste community known as Mahars. The second band is paid about Rs. 50 and above depending on the number of men, instruments and the quality of dress. They are often Mohammedans, usually professionals. They play only on the marriage day. These musicians, inspite of being expensive, must be engaged because the custom demands it. They would appear stingy if they avoided the expenditure.

Presentation of Gifts:

This ceremony takes place at both houses simultaneously. Among the Kolis the groom and bride are seated at their respective *mandap* on Sunday evening (that is, on the eve of the wedding day). The bride's maternal uncles, god-parents present the bride with golden rings or any other article according to their status. The god-parents and the uncles are brought under the red umbrella accompanied with a band for the presentation. This is followed by the relatives and friends. First, the doners throw flowers on the bride as a sign of blessing. They sweeten the mouth of the bride with date fruit. The same thing is done by the bride to the doners in return. The date fruit is not eaten by either of them, but is put back on a *thali* (plate) after taking it near to the mouth. Among Christians the god-parents receive the same honour as the maternal uncles. For they are next to the parents caring for the spiritual welfare of their god-children. It is purely due to Christian influence. A special feature of this dinner is to pray for the deceased members of

the family. It has, therefore, a religious significance. After the dinner the *Te Deum* is sung as an act of thanksgiving.

Thus among the Koli Christians, marriage is a religious event not only on the Church level, but also at home during other ceremonies. For the Hindu Kolis there is also a religious significance by the performance of household sacrifice and prayers to house-hold deities.

Sara Ceremony:

After the presentation ceremony, *sara* (wedding sari) ceremony begins. The groom's party ceremoniously brings the sari in a trunk to the bride's house with singing and dancing, accompanied by a band. The trunk contains not only *sara* but also blouse, *mangal sutra* (bridal ornament), golden bangles and flowers. The remuneration to the tailor for stitching the blouse consists of half a bottle of liquor, coconut, a plate of *wadas* (edible) and about Rs. 5. The remuneration is ceremoniously taken to the tailoring shop.

For the ceremony, the patel or patels of the Koli community from each party must be present. The head patel opens the trunk and there begins the dialogue between the parties.

- Bride's Party: "*Ugar petin, duje petin, kayare*"
 "Open your trunk, what is in your trunk?"
- Groom's Party: "*Maja petin sadi, cholire*", meaning
 "In my trunk there are sari and blouse".
- Bride's Party: "*Amare petin bachere*", meaning
 "We wanted it today!"

The *mangal sutra* is the traditional ornament which the groom gives to the bride. It is in use by both the Hindu and Christian Kolis. Among the Hindu Kolis the *mangal sutra* is a necklace of black beads held together by a golden chain. But among the Christian Kolis, only a few black beads need be on the golden chain, as a remnant of the traditional beads. Today the *mangal sutra* with black beads has again become a fashion among the urban people. Therefore, the Christian Kolis have also adopted it again.

The *mangal sutra* is an external sign of a women's married state. A married woman is expected to wear it as long as her husband is alive; On the death of her husband she has to take it off and put it on the dead body. The *mangal sutra* is held in high regard by a Koli couple, for even during the time of starvation and famine they would not sell

it away; whereas other ornaments could be disposed off or lent or sold away. Whatever may be the economical status of the groom, the *mangal sutra* must be brought by the groom to signify that the bride belongs to him by the bond of marriage.

Breaking of Fast:

Sara ceremony is followed by the feastday dinner. For the sake of successful marriage, the groom's parents consult the *bhagat* (diviner) who gives the name of some married women for fasting. The women and the bride do not have any food for the whole day. After the *sara* ceremony, the dinner begins. They serve two dinners, one dinner, called the *gauri-cha-jewan*, is specially to honour those women who did fasting along with the bride. Having dressed in rich garments and bedecked with all their jewels, they take part in the dinner. The widows are not permitted at this dinner, as their presence is considered inauspicious. This is followed by the second dinner to the donors and the relatives. In many places, even among Christian Kolis, this practice is continued.

Saivar Ceremony (Umbarcha pani):

A group of unmarried girls, boys, and a few men and women well versed in their folk-songs, carrying new brass *handas* (water pots) go to the village well in a torch light procession. As the procession moves to the well, they pluck a few mango, and *umbar* leaves leaves on the way and put them in the *handas*. Therefore, the water is called *umbarcha pani*. As they go to the well in procession, a married woman, usually the sister-in-law, carries a *thali*, containing saffron, an Indian lamp, a handful of rice, a little oil, and a coconut. On reaching the well, the woman waves *arathi* to the well and to the group. Then, she applies saffron to the well and to the girl's forehead, sticking rice on it against the wall of the well. While some maidens draw water, others sing folk-songs and dance.

In old times the purpose of putting food and mango leaves and pouring a few drops of liquor was to appease the evil spirits. They believed that the evil spirits reside in the well. Though both the Hindu and Christian Kolis perform this ceremony, the latter do not accept its significance as an offering to appease the evil spirits. Hindu Kolis used to worship the deity of the well and apply turmeric paste to the well and to its idol. This has now become, however, the exclusive practice of Hindus.

Moya (Shaving Ceremony):

The bride's maternal uncle takes his seat on a stool. The groom is seated on the uncle's lap. The uncle's head is covered with a turban, into which a few mango leaves are inserted. The barber shaves the groom first and then the uncle and other near relatives. While the shaving is in progress, the barber becomes the target of fooling and jokes. The women take a particular delight in this ceremony and *haldi* ceremony. These jokes invariably consist of fanning the leathered face with the end portion of their saris, holding a slipper in the place of the mirror in front of the leathered face, mocking the barber saying that he does not know how to shave, or instructing him to shave only one side of his face.

A woman, usually the groom's sister, puts saffron on the forehead of the groom and of the uncle. They also put saffron on her forehead in return. Then she sticks a few grains of rice on the forehead where the saffron is applied.

Then four women held a bed-sheet spreadingly over their heads. A winnowing fan (*soop*) containing rice, date fruits, flowers and a golden chain, is placed over the bedsheet. As they wave the bedsheet up and down, the winnowing fan strikes the uncle's head. Then the conversation begins between the boy and the uncle.

Boy: "What will you give me?"

Uncle: "Elephant or horse".

Each time the boy asks his uncle what he would give, uncle promises one or the other thing.

Haldi Ceremony:

Chauk (a design drawn with lime or white powder) is drawn on the floor where the *haldi* ceremony is to take place. A number of triangles are drawn as a border to the rectangular lines. A short legged stool is placed over the *chauk*. A brass vessel containing *haldi* (yellow powder), one *thali* containing date fruits and another *thali* containing an Indian lamp, a few flowers, *kumkum* (red powder) and a handful of rice are placed in front of the stool. An elderly woman, seated leisurely on a small stool prepares a few wicks for the Indian lamp. Of course, the wicks for the Indian lamp could be prepared beforehand.

The bride begins to weep expressing her sorrow to her mother, father and the near relatives, as her marriage ceremony begins to sepa-

rate her from her family. In a patriarchal society the bride must live in her husband's house. She becomes the member of her husband's family, adopting their surname. She usually lives in a joint family until the husband's parents die. Stooping down, the bride with her folded hands touches the feet of her parents and the elders. This is done as a sign of homage to the parents before separation. The bride embraces her mother and the near relatives (only women) and comes to the stool weeping. This weeping is not always genuine, often a mere formality. It, however, is a must to weep for fear of the people, who might say, "She is ungrateful to her family".

A married woman (not widow), usually the sister of the bride, goes around the stool five times, followed by the bride. Both of them are connected by a *lukda* (a piece of cloth worn by the Koli women on the shoulder) from the woman's shoulder to the bride's. The woman carries a *lota* (jar) containing water. A coconut, surrounded by a few mango leaves, is placed over the *lota*. Both of them make five rounds and when the fifth round is completed, the bride throws rice on the four directions. Then, paying homage to the *patta* (grinding-slab) with her folded hands, the bride sits on the *patta*.

The woman applies *haldi* to the bride starting from her feet to face. Preference is given to the mother and other near relatives to apply *haldi*. Those who apply *haldi*, put date fruits into the bride's mouth and the bride does the same to them in like manner. Date fruits are taken up to the mouth but are not eaten by either of them. They are put back for the use of others. Then, the mother takes a coin (about ten *paise*) waves it around the bride's head and puts it in a *thali*, kept beside her. Then the bride or groom pays homage to her mother by touching her feet with folded hands. When mother begins to apply *haldi*, the bride again starts weeping.

Bangle Ceremony:

When important personages have completed applying *haldi* the bangle ceremony begins. Now, the bride is seated on the lap of the maternal uncle. The bangle seller, being seated on a mat displays different kinds of green colour glass bangles. The bangle seller puts ten bangles on the right hand and eleven bangles on the left hand. Since they are glass bangles, the bangle seller carefully puts them on her hands. In spite of that some bangles get broken during that ceremony. The remuneration to the bangle seller is about a kilo of rice, coconut, betel leaves, betel nuts, flowers and about Rs. 6. It, in fact, is economically

remunerative to him. For, the bangles do not actually cost that much. As a sign of respect to the bangle seller, the bride touches his feet with her folded hands. After the bangle ceremony, the *haldi* ceremony is continued. The colour of the bride's bangles must be green. She wears green bangles till her husband dies. After the death of her husband she must not wear green bangles any more. She breaks the green bangles on his death bed.

Bathing Ceremony:

This ceremony takes place in the centre of the *mandap*. First, the ground is decorated with a *chauk*. Over the *chauk* a *patta* (grinding slab) is placed. Four *lotas* are kept around the four corners. The woman, usually, the bride's sister, or cousin, officiates in the ceremony, as seen during the *haldi* ceremony. She must be married and not a widow. Carrying the *lota*, filled with water and over which is kept a coconut surrounded by the mango leaves, the woman goes around the *patta* five times, followed by the bride. After completing the first round, the bride throws some rice in four directions. Then, paying homage to the *patta*, the bride sits on it for the bath.

Five married women hold a *thali* over the head of the bride and sprinkle water by means of flowers. Removing the *thali*, the woman applies coconut juice to the bride's hair. Then, she gives her a bath in hot or cold water. When the bathing ceremony is at 4 a.m. she is given a hot water bath. They are rather hesitant to add cold water to it, even when the bride could not bear it.

Waving Arathi:

The woman puts saffron on the forehead of the bride and she also gets saffron in return. A piece of *wada* (home-made edible, used in a large amount on wedding days) is joined with a lighted wick, is waved from the right foot to the left foot bringing it over the head. When the wick was brought to the left side, the woman puts it on the *patta* beside her leg. This has been repeated five times.

Then she takes a mango leaf, weaves it up and down five times over her body. Breaking the leaf into two pieces, one piece is put at the back of the bride and another at the front. Taking a *thali* containing an Indian lamp, a little saffron, *haldi* and a handful of rice, the woman waves it around the bride. After *arathi*, the uncle carries the bride into the house. He must see to it that the feet of the bride do not touch the earth, while carrying her into the house. At home, the

bride strikes the stick, tied with mango leaves, on the winnowing fan. She then changes her dress.

II. Wedding proper on Monday

Leaving for the Church:

First the bridegroom leaves for the church under the umbrella (*chattar*), accompanied by his best men, with music and dance. Then, he sends the umbrella to the bride and she is also brought to the church ceremoniously accompanied by the band.

Ritual in the Church:

The bridal pair declare the consent according to the rites of the Catholic Church in the presence of the priest and the faithful. Their union is blessed in the name of God. This is the main part of the ritual in the Church.

Unlike the Hindu Kolis, the Christian Kolis have their nuptial ceremony in the church. This ceremony in the church is considered to be a village event rather than a mere church event. For this ceremony is done in the presence of the fellow Christians during Holy Mass. Among the Hindu Kolis the nuptial ceremony takes place in the bride's house in the presence of the Brahmin. This ceremony is exclusively a Hindu practice.

Back to the Bride's House:

After the nuptial ceremony, the groom and the bride with the accompaniment of the band and the umbrella (*chattar*) leave for the bride's house. The people accompany the couple singing and dancing. As soon as they reach the *mandap*, the parents of the bride come to the entrance to welcome the couple. The bride's mother puts sugar into the couple's mouth as a sign of love and throws flowers at them as a sign of blessing. The couple do the same to the parents in return. Then the bride's mother presents the groom with cash or a gift. Before the couple is taken inside the *mandap*, the sisters of the bride bless them with incense and demand money from the groom; otherwise, they would obstruct their entrance.

Invitation to the groom's parents:

After the wedding dinner, the bride's party ceremoniously gives an

invitation to the groom's parents. They give three calls to the groom's party telling them that they should take the bride and the groom to their house. All these calls are given accompanied with music played by the band, with singing and dancing of the boys and girls in fancy dress. At the third call, the groom's party goes to the bride's house in procession carrying the box in which the wedding sari, *mangal sutra* (bridal ornament) and blouses are kept. After their arrival the bride's party sends the umbrella and the band to bring the groom's parents. They are also brought to the marriage booth ceremoniously. On their arrival, the bride's parents proceed to the gate to invite them. Then, the groom's parents are taken to their honorary seats, near which is kept the box, containing the *mangal sutra*, wedding sari and other gifts.

At the groom's house:

The bride, dressed in the wedding sari gets ready for the departure to the groom's house. Traditionally the leave taking used to be very pathetic. The bride goes to her parents and to the elders to receive their blessing. On the way to the groom's house, the Hindu Koli bride visits the village deities and offers *puja*. As the groom and the bride reach the groom's *mandap* in procession, the parents of the groom and their party stand ready at the entrance to welcome the couple. The couple is again showered with flowers and presented with sugar. Then the parents present the bride with cash or kind

III. Ceremonies After the Wedding

The day after the wedding:

The Christian Koli couple go for Mass in their Sunday best. After the Mass the bride's maids and the best men take the couple ceremoniously with band and music under the umbrella to the bride's house, where they have their breakfast.

The couple goes to the groom's house for lunch. After the lunch, the invitation is given to the bride's party by giving three calls as before to the groom's party. After the parents of the bride have arrived at the house, liquor and grams are served to all. Then, the couple is taken to the bride's house ceremoniously. And from now onwards the two are permitted to sleep in the bride's house too.

Last Day Ceremony:

This is the last day of the week-long ceremonies; otherwise the **Kolis** have a number of celebrations during feast days in honour of the newly wedded couple. The near relatives of the respective parties give a festive meal to the couple and to their respective families. The expenses of this celebration are shared by the near relatives. After this celebration the near relatives leave for home.

On the last day the noise of the ceremony decreases gradually in order to indicate that the feast is coming to an end. After feasting merrily, the guests slowly depart to their places as the 'show' comes to an end and peace returns after a full eight days of noise, hustle and bustle in the village.

Conclusion

The marriage rites of the Christian **Kolis** show clearly how happily they have been able to adapt their Christian beliefs and principles to the old traditional ways of culture prevalent in their caste.

This is, of course, true only of those **Koli** communities which have retained their fishing trade. Some sections of the Christian **Kolis**, in **Bandra** specially, have in the time of **British** rule, abandoned their fishing trade and eagerly accepted jobs offered to them by the **East India Company**. Today they are clerks or hold other jobs in various departments of the government and in private firms. These **Son Kolis** have more or less severed their ties with their caste and sought admittance into the so-called **East Indian** community. They have adopted the **English** language as their mother-tongue and taken to western ways of living and dressing, in imitation of the **East Indians** in general.

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