

## The Meche of Nepal and their Life Cycle

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Research Article

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**Abstract:** The Meche community is one of the indigenous tribal communities of Nepal. They have been living on the bank of Mechi River in the eastern border of the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal. The majority of the Meche people are concentrated in the Jhapa District from time immemorial. They are considered as the subgroup of the Bodo community. It is considered as one of the endangered ethnic tribes numbering 10 out of 59 indigenous communities of Nepal. They worship a commonly grown cactus plant called '*Siju or Sijou*' (*Euphorbia roylena*; *Euphorbiaceae*) in the name of *BathouBwrai* (God). They are agrarian and living with a simple life. The economic condition of Meche community is not sound but they manage their daily meals well by various means. The Meche follows age-old cultural traditions over the years. They have a rich cultural heritage with their own identity and a way of life. They have a religion, language, literature, customs and traditions etc. The majority of the Meche people concentrated in the Jhapa District of Nepal. The Meche follows an age-old cultural tradition over the years. They have a well organized religion, culture, customs and traditions. Hence, the present study would focus on their ethnic background; society and their life cycle i.e. birth rites, marriage and death rites.

**Keywords:** Ethnic background, Society, Birth rites, Marriage, and Death rites.

### Introduction:

The Meche community is belonging to Mongolian racial stock is one of the indigenous tribal communities of Nepal. They have been residing on the edge of the Mechi River in the eastern border of the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal. The majority of the Meche people are concentrated in the Jhapa District from time immemorial. They are considered as the subgroup of the Bodo community. The Meche follows age-old cultural traditions over the years. They have a rich cultural heritage with their own identity and ways of life. They are agrarian. They have a religion, language, literature, social structure, customs and traditions etc. The economic condition of Meche community is not satisfactory but they manage their daily meals well by various means.

The Meche of Jhapa of Nepal, Mech of Assam and West Bengal are the same origin. The term 'Meche' is only used in the context of referring them in Nepal. The term Bodo was firstly given by Brian H. Hodson in 1846 A.D while he was in Mechi River during his four month stay with the Meche people of Jhapa District. He also said that 'Meche' is a name imposed by strangers (Meche&Kiryu: 2012: xiii).

The Aryan first used the term 'Meche' to refer a group of people who are socially backward equivalent to Mlecchas used in Sanskrit language and one time Nepali Aryan also started to call them as 'Meche.' Some Scholars like to assign the name of Meche to River Mechi, on the bank of which they are living from unknown past. Their origin, religion, language, culture, customs and traditions and ways of life are almost similar excepting few differences to the Bodos of Assam, India. (Meche (Basumatary) and Kiryu: 2012: xiii-xiv).

They speak the Meche or Bodo language, however, the present generation of the Meche community hardly speaks Bodo, and uses the Nepali language regularly in every sphere of life. It is due to the non-availability of the facility to learn the Meche language. There is no schooling opportunity for providing education to the Meche community in their mother language. Today they are conversant with writing and speaking the Nepali language. They have been losing the fluency on Meche mother language and the young generations appear to get Sanskritised with Nepali culture.

They are closer to the Bodo Civilization of India. They are the same people and they speak the almost same language with few local peculiarities. The majority of the Meche people very seldom call themselves by the name other than Bodo or Boro

There are total 47 Village Development Committees (VDC) and 3 Municipalities in the Jhapa District. Out of these 47 Village Development Committees and 3 Municipalities, the total 36 Meche villages are found under the 11 Village Development Committees (VDC) and 2 Municipalities of Jhapa District. According to 2001 Census, the total Meche population is 3,763 representing 0.02% of the Nation's total population.(Narjary, 2010:33)

Chandragari is the District headquarters of Jhapa. The District is surrounded by Illam District in the North, Morang District in the west, the Indian state of Bihar in the south and east, and the Indian state of West Bengal in the east

The Meche dominated Village Development Committees (VDC) of Jhapa District are: (i) Jalthal (ii) Gherabari (iii) Sarnamati (iv) Lakhanpur (v) Shoksoki (vi) Shanischare (vii) Anarmoni (Syaldangi) (viii) Jyamirgadhi (ix) Dhajjan (x) Bahudangi and (xi) Maheshpur; whereas two existing Municipalities are namely- (i) Bhadrapur Municipality and (ii) Mechinagar Municipality under the Jhapa District (Basumatary, 2018:66-69).

As per 2011 Census report of Nepal, the total population of Meche community in Jhapa District is 4867. (National Population and Housing Census Nepal, Volume-01, 2011:146). The 2011 Census states that, Jhapa has got a population of 812,650 that comprises the Meche and other communities like Dhimal, Koch-Rajbanshi, Satar (Santhal), Limbu, Gangain, Magar, Rai, Dhiman, Brahmin, Chetry and Newar. It is one of the 75 districts of Nepal (National Population and Housing Census Nepal, Volume-01, 2011).

### **Significance of the Study:**

i. The study of tribal ethnic community has become very important in the present-day context. The tribal communities are said to be vulnerable. Their living condition and consciousness are very low comparing to other communities. For this reason, they have been deprived in various ways. From time to time they agitate on the issue of self-determination and do outburst with their grievances in order to bring a considerable change in the socio-economic and political affairs and a geographical of the country.

ii. By virtue of owing a culture and custom, Meche in Nepal has been marked as a very poor tribal ethnic group. With the passing of time, their existence are jeopardized resulting in diminishing owing to

lack of consciousness towards education and other important factors like domination of various developed communities. Despite the intensity of these issues of Bodo communities living in Nepal at Jhapa district, very few studies have been conducted. Looking at the current state of affairs intrigued with those aforesaid problems of the Meche who deserves a detailed study remains yet uninvestigated and unexplored. Hence, the study of Meches community of Nepal has become prime significance in recent time to the investigator.

### **Purpose of the study:**

The purpose of the study on the Meche community of Nepal is as follows:

- i. To study the area of inhabitation (environment) of Meche.
- ii. To study about the Meche society of Nepal
- iii. To study the life cycle of the Meche i.e. birth rites, marriage and finally death rite

### **Methodology:**

In this study, both primary and secondary method has been adopted. The Primary data have been collected from the targeted group of the Meche people of Nepal.

The descriptive and analytical method has been adopted for this study. The secondary data pertaining to the Meche people have been collected from various literature, journals, books, periodicals, census data, and such other official documents. The participant observation method in the collection of data has also been adopted whenever necessary.

In this research work, 10 Meche villages were selected on a random basis. A sample of 300 Meche families collected randomly from these 10 (ten) different villages of Jhapa District, of Nepal in order to know their ethnic background, Society, and their life cycle i.e. Birth rites, marriage, and death rites.

### **Literature Review:**

The review of literatures on this topic is an ongoing process. It is also difficult to find out various literatures in the appropriate forum. Some of related literatures have been mentioned hereunder.

**The scholar Rev. S. Endle (“The Kacharis” reprint 1911: 81)** observes that majority of the scholars assume that the word Meche is originated from the Sanskrit word Mleccha, which refers to “an outcast from the Brahmin point of view, a non-observer of cast regulation.

**Mr. Kazuyuki Kiryu (“An outline of the Meche Language Grammar, Text and Glossary”, 2008: 3)** opined that “The word Bodo was first used by the Brian H. Hodgson in the year 1846. He used the name Meches but regards it as “a name imposed by strangers,” mentioning that “these people call themselves ‘Bodo’ which, of course, is the proper designation.” Hodgson regards Meche as a subgroup of ‘Bodo’ “who are now viewed as embracing only the Meches of the west and Kacharis of the east and south.”

Even though the people are recognized as Meche in Nepal, the people call themselves Bodo, and the self domination of the language is Bodo-ni-rau (Bodo General Language). In Assam Meche is pronounced as (Mes) while it is pronounced as (mets) in West Bengal. Some Meche in west Bengal is called Saivo. (“An Outline of the Meche Language Grammar, Text and Glossary”, Kazuyuki Kiryu, 2008:2).

**Mr. Santa Lal Meche (Basumatary) & Mr. Kazuyuki Kiryu (“Nepali English Dictionary, 2012”: xiii)** argues that “Both the Meche of Jhapa, Nepal and of Assam and West Bengal, are the same origin. Over the years, different authors have come up with a different explanation as how Bodo actually got to be called Meche or Bodo or Kachari. The Bodo is known by Meche in Nepal, the Meche in West

Bengal and western Assam, Bodo and Kachari in Central and lower Assam. By whatever name they may be called by their neighbors and wherever they may live, they are the same people and everywhere they speak the same language with few local peculiarities, and the people very seldom call themselves by any name other than Bodo or Boro.” The term Meche is used for both the folk group and the language which is given term by outsiders. The folk group prefers to use Bodo for both the language and the people. Besides, the Meche people accept their relationship to Bodo folk group settled in Assam state of eastern India.

**Dr. Kameswar Brahma (2009) in his book, “A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros”** gives an introduction of the Bodo community of Assam. He reflects the term and nomenclature of the Bodo, food habits, dresses, social structure, economy, marriage and family life of the Bodos and seasonal and agricultural festivals of the Bodos. The author tries to reflect the genuine picture of the Bodo society through this book.

**Bidya Sagar Narzary (2010) in his edited book ‘NepalniMechefwr’ (Bodo)** is a book pertaining to Meche community, and about their outlook, beliefs, philosophy, religious faith and other issues. The author also discusses the about traditional heritage of the Meche (Bodo) and their awareness about their own identity i.e social, political and economic ground. Again it deals with the Government of Nepal and its initiatives or role for the upliftment of the indigenous tribes of Nepal.

**“The Bodos of Assam, A Socio-cultural study” (2007) is written by Dr. HarkaBahadurChetryiAtryeya**, who highlighted the history, socio-cultural outlook, religious beliefs, language and literature, various problems and political settlement relating to the Bodo community in the plains of Assam. It also discusses heritage of the Bodos.

**B. N. Bordoloi in his book “Tribes of Assam” part-III (1991) reveals** about the origin and various social custom, culture and way of life of Meche community of North-East India

**SeetaSiwakoti (Olee) (2015) in her article “Religious Beliefs and Practices among the Meche Community of Eastern Tarai, Nepal”** focuses on the various issues like origin of the Meche community and their belief and practices as well as various socio-cultural issues. It also deals with the history and migration. Generally, this article is focused on the socio-cultural dimension of the Meche community.

**The Meche of Nepal, A doctoral Thesis (2018), written by Dr. DipenBasumatary.** This thesis basically reveals the origin, socio-economic status, customs and traditions along with the cultural life of the Meche community of Nepal.

**“National Population and Housing Census 2011, Nepal”** provides authentic and reliable information of demographic, social, economic, and spatial characteristics of the population and households. Apart from that, it provides information of total population of Nepal, and total districts of Nepal and its population against each district.

### **The Society of Meche:**

The Meche society is patriarchal in nature. The Father is the head of the family as well as he leads all the entire family affairs. After the death of father in Meche society, generally, the son inherits the property. The daughter also might inherit her father’s property at his death if he has no son.

Like the Bodo society of Assam, there is no any dowry system among the Meche community of Jhapa district of Nepal. However, the guardians of the girl are given an ornaments as well as furniture to her daughter as honour in the time of marriage. Yet it is not compulsory in the Meche or the Bodo society. It depends upon on the capacity or will of the girls parents.

The Meche community allows the divorce system. But the divorce is very rare among the Meche community. The priest as well as the Meche council has played a vital role in the case of divorce. There is compensation in case of divorce. If the case of divorce happens then the village council imposes the penalty compensation on husband for the divorced wife.

In the Meche community, there is adopted the widow re-marriage system. The Meche society is flexible in some extent; in the case of widow remarriage within their society. They have no restrictions on this issues. So, both the male and female are allowed opportunity to get re-marriage and to lead a happy life.

The child marriage system is restricted in the Meche society of Nepal. In the Meche society, the marriage age of boy is 21 years and above. For an eligible girl, it is 16 years and above. (Basumatary, 2018: 211-212)

Earlier the join family system was the main feature of the Meche family. At present time most of the Meche family or the young generations do not prefer the joint family concept. It is because of the acculturation and assimilation with the neighbouring people has brought changes in their life, family and social institution. The Meche community is also now gradually adopting the habit of the other culture.

### **The Life Cycle of Meche:**

The Meche community of Nepal also follows the three kinds of life cycle i.e. birth rites, marriage and finally death rites in their social life. These rites and rituals are discussed in details in their following poits.

#### **Birth Rites:**

The Meche community believes that '*Nomano*' (the main house) where goddesses '*Balikhungri or Mainao*', the goddess of wealth lives. So, the Meche people considered the *Nomano* as auspicious place for child birth. A bed specially prepared for the purpose of delivery with thatch is used by the women. Under the bed a piece of iron or a knife is kept so that neither the mother nor the new born child could be harmed by any evil spirit. There is not a maintained ritual ceremony to give name to the new born child in the Meche or the Bodo society. After the birth of a child name is given immediately after the separation of umbilical cord.

#### **Rice Feeding Ceremony:**

At present, the Meche people of Nepal also observed the rice feeding ceremony to their new born child. There is no fixed date for rice feeding for a new born child whenever the children want to eat rice; they fix an auspicious date for rice feeding. The parents and the family members and relatives first pray and worship their main God *Bathou* (God) by offering flower, fruits, traditional lamp (cotton string soaked with oil), then start the process of feeding rice to baby.

#### **Marriage System of the Meche Community:**

Marriage is a social institution of the human society. A man becomes fully social after the marriage. The social bond or relationship is strengthened with the help of marriage. The existence or the value of the society is meaningless in the absence of marriage. The society or social system is running through the marriage process.

The thinker Mazumdar, H. T., defines marriage, "as a socially sanctioned union of male and female, or as a secondary institution devised by society to sanction the union and mating of male and female, for purposes of (a) establishing house hold, (b) entering into sex relations, (c), procreating, and (d) care for the off-spring providing." (Mazumdar, 1996 :331).

The marriage basically involves the social sanction generally in the form of a civil and religious economy and authorising two person of opposite sexes to engage in sexual and the other consequent and co-related socio-economic relation with one another. The marriage or sexual relationship between male

and female is differing from community to community in the world. The sexual relation or the marriages within the relatives can be preferred in one society but prohibited in another society. It depends on the rules of marriage endogamy or exogamy of the society. The Meche community of Nepal strictly follows the rule of exogamy to hold the marriage. In the Meche community, generally the boy who selects his wife and marriage proposal shall have to be initiated from the boy's family.

Meche (Bodo) social group of Nepal mainly perform three lifecycle rites and rituals like '*jwnwm*' (birth), '*haba*'(marriage), and '*thwinai*'(death). A marriage affects social relation not only of the couples but of all their relatives. Like the Bodo community of Assam, the Meche community also called marriage as '*haba*'. The Meche or the Bodo word '*haba*' has a deep meaning. In the Meche language '*ha*' means soil or earth and '*ba*' means to bear something on the back. Thus the word *haba* means to bear the soil or it indicates the responsibility of the earth on the back. So, the Meche community of Nepal used the word '*haba*' mean to bear a great responsibility on the earth. Generally a person after marriage enters into circle of great responsibility. As per the Meche rule, the elders of the village give the newly married couple a new lesson about the duties and responsibilities. (Brahma, 1998: 65).

In case of marriage, among the Meche community same family name is common, however; cross cousin marriage is punishable. In the Meche community, men and women are strictly restricted to engage in any pre-marital sexual activity and any sexual offences are given heavily punishment. *Goida* (Mediator) arranges all the corresponding matters relating to marriage. The Meche folk group of Nepal consider Tuesday and Wednesday as the auspicious day for the marriage.

There are seven types of marriage practices are found among the Meche society. These are discussed in details in the following grounds:

- (i) Arranged Marriage (*Magi Haba*):
- (ii) Marriage by taking way of bride forcefully (*Bwnanwilangnai Haba*):
- (iii) Marriage by elopement (*Dwnkharlangnai Haba*):
- (iv) Love Marriage (*Bhagi Haba or Hamjajlainai Haba*):
- (v) Widow- Widower Marriage (*Randa- Randi Haba*):
- (vi) Marriage by adopted son in law (*Ghwrjia Lakhinai Haba*):
- (vii) Marriage by Service (*Dangowa Haba or Dhongkhahabnai Haba*):

#### **Arranged Marriage (*Magi Haba*):**

It is said as arranged marriage in which *goida* (mediator) proposes the marriage and mediates the communication between the family of bride and groom and arranges a small meeting between the family members of bride and groom along with a very close blood-related person. Three women and two men go to the girl's house and put few '*rang or fwisa*' (coins) at the altar of *Bathou* to buy the girl which is the social and formal proposal. If the offered coins are accepted by the bride family, the process of marriage is progressing and if it is refused to accept, no further communication is made in this regard. When the both sides are in positive approach for marriage and marriage is completed between the bridegrooms, it is said to be *amagihaba or* arranged marriage.

On amicable acceptance of the marriage proposal between the two families, the bride family honoured to the groom family by offering packed betel nut and betel leaf along with *mairong* (rice). The formal bargaining between the bride and bridegroom family sides regarding the cross exchange of flute and pig, dresses and ornaments by the groom family to the bride and by the bride family to the groom and also the expenditure relating to the musical party for playing of musical instruments on the day of

marriage in the house of bride. After the agreement of both the families of the all related conditions, the date of marriage is fixed. The relatives and friends are invited to the marriage by offering with couple of betel nut and betel leaf. But nowadays, they also use to invite their relatives or the well wishers through the wedding letter card.

The **Magihaba** (arranged marriage) process is of two kinds and only one process is generally followed. In one process, the groom along with the kin and relatives make a procession to the house of the bride in the night hours. On arrival of the groom's procession in the house of bride, they are well received with light refreshment with local **jou or jumai** (local wine).

The **Roja** (Priest) accompanied with the groom, and party goes to the bride's house and then starts to offer the flowers to the God **Bathou** and then chants the ritual tantras and mantras in their own language. The bride and grooms are then seated in front of the holy **Bathou** altar arranged in the courtyard in the house of bride and then cock and hen are slaughtered. The slaughtered heads are offered towards the **Bathou** God in eastern direction with a pray to the God blessing both the bride and grooms may pass their conjugal life happily in future.

On completion of the ritual procedure of marriage by the priest in the presence of the local people and friend and relatives of grooms side, the bride groom **somajkhokhulumw** (bow down to the community people) by offering betel nut and betel leaf on the '**bantha**' (a bell-metal plate with engraved decoration). The community's people present in the marriage ceremony to bless the bridegroom for their all round betterment in the future conjugal life. In this case, the groom comes to the house of bride which has been taken as her new home in the next day as '**Khwina**' (new daughter- in- law to a new family)

The next marriage process is such that the bride is taken to the house of groom for marriage by the family of the groom along with the 5 to 7 older family members including the eldest blood related man and women. In course of bringing the bride to the house of groom, the bride is fully garlanded with traditional ornament and colourful traditional dresses. The family members who are accompanied with bride are well received by the family of the groom. On arrival of the bride in the house of the groom, the Roja (Priest) starts the **fuja** to the **Bathou** God as their ritual procedure.

On completion of the marriage ceremony, the groom family offers a community feast to the people attending the marriage with **jou or jumai** (local beer), and **Omabedar** (pork). The above marriage procedures have some time change little in the urban areas to shorten the duration of marriage period.

#### **Marriage by taking way of bride forcefully (BwnanwilainaiHaba):**

Another type of marriage is called **bwnanwilainaihaba** as where the bride without her interest and consensus is forcefully taken by the groom and married without the consent of the bride family members on various ground. In this process as per the ritual procedure of marriage, inviting **Roja** (main Priest) and offering puja to the **Bathou** God to perform the marriage. But some time may not perform the ritual procedure depending on the circumstances. Some time groom family offers community feast to the people of their society as a token of formal marriage.

#### **Marriage by Elopement (DwnkharlangnaiHaba):**

The elopement marriage is that if the both bridegroom and bride run away from their houses without giving any information of their guardians. This kind marriage is performed after their return to the house of the bridegroom. Generally, this type of marriage is not encouraged in the Meche society. As per Meche rule, if the unmarried boy and girl staying together is always considered as illigel and unsocial. So, to perform this kind of marriage, the Meche village committee is imposed economic penalty on bridegroom as well as on the bride.

### Love Marriage (BhagiHaba or HamjajlainaiHaba):

In this marriage the boy and girl both love each other and marry together. If the guardian's of the girl or boy are mutually agreed for their marriage without any hindrance, the *HamjajlainaiHaba* (Arranged marriage) is performed. In case of any objection on the part of the bride family, the *DwnkharlangnaiHaba*(elopement marriage) takes place.

### Widow- Widower Marriage (Randa- Randi Haba):

The fourth type of marriage is known as *randa-randihaba* (widow-widower marriage). In this process, the widow is married by the male widow (who has lost his married wife and no formal *Magi haba* (Arranged marriage) has been done.

### Marriage by Adopted Son in Law (GhwrjiaLakhinaiHaba):

It is a kind of marriage where the bridegroom lives in bride's house after marriage. Normally, it happens between the boy who has no parents and the girl who has no brothers or male inheritance.

### Marriage by Service (DangowaVivah or DhongkhaHabnaiHaba):

*Dangowahaba* may be said to be a socially secured marriage to a widow with her children after the death of her husband. In this system, the groom marries a widow who may have children and lives in the house of the widow and takes all responsibility of the widow as well as her children and the people called this marriage as *Dangowahaba*. This marriage is socially accepted by the people of the community and is treated as formal.



Source: A Bimal News Letter of Nepali Folklore Society Vol.3 No.5 December, 2007. Plate # 5.01: Meche bride and bridegroom.





A Scene of Meche male during the time of his second marriage. Left is the groom, middle is first wife, and the right one is newly married second wife.

### Marital Status of the Family Head:

The analysis of collected data on marital status of the respondents of 10 Meche villages of the Jhapa District.

Sl. No	Name of village/ Municipality	Total Nos. of Respondent	Married Head	Un Married Head	No. of Divorcee/ widow/ widower		
					Divorcee	Widow	Widower
1	DakshinJorshimal	35	35	-	-	-	1
2	Uttar Jorshimal	52	51	1	-	11	2
3	Koptanpara	11	11	-	-	1	1
4	Asubari	19	19	-	-	1	2
5	Jyamirgadhi	13	13	-	-	1	2
6	Kochubari	24	24	-	-	-	1
7	Dhaduwa	23	23	-	-	2	-
8	Dhajjan	79	78	1	-	8	1
9	Ainabari	30	30	-	-	4	3
10	Parajungi	14	14	-	-	3	-
Total		<b>300</b>	<b>298</b> <b>(99.3%)</b>	<b>2</b> <b>(0.7%)</b>	-	<b>31</b> <b>(10.4%)</b>	<b>13</b> <b>(4.4%)</b>

Source: Field Survey

In respect of the marital status of the head of the respondent family of the ten villages, it is found that 298 (99.3%) are found married and only 2 (0.7%) are found unmarried. This shows that almost all

head of the families are mostly married person. In the analysis the number of divorcee, widow and widower of the responded samples, it is found that there is no any divorcee. The data represents that 10.4% are widow and 4.4% are widower.

### Endogamy and-Exogamy Marital Status:

The analysis of endogamy and exogamy marital status of the responded families heads are given in the following table

Sl. No	Name of village/ Municipality	Total Nos Respondent family head	Endogamy Marriage	Exogamy Marriage
1	DakshinJorshimal	35	31	04
2	Uttar Jorshimal	51	47	04
3	Koptanpara	11	11	-
4	Asubari	19	18	01
5	Jyamirgadhi	13	12	01
6	Kochubari	24	23	01
7	Dhaduwa	23	22	01
8	Dhaijan	78	69	09
9	Ainabari	30	26	04
10	Parajungi	14	14	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>298 (100%)</b>	<b>273 (91.6%)</b>	<b>25 (8.4%)</b>

Source: Field Survey.

As the table indicates that 273 (91.6%) marriages of the family head is based on the basis of endogamy, whereas 25 (8.4%) people are married through the exogamy marriage. So, from the data it is clear that the majority of the marriage is determined on the basis of their endogamy rule. The exogamy marriage is still socially not recognized in the Meche community of the Jhapa District of Nepal. Therefore, from the above data we can say that the present young generation of the Meche community of Nepal has not totally follow their traditional endogamy marriage sytem. It happens due to the impact of globalization as well as the sanskritisation.

### Age during Marriage:

The analysis of dataage at the time of marriage of male and female respondents of 10 (ten) Meche village of the Jhapa District, Nepal.

Sl No	Name of Villages / Municipality	Total NosR espo- ndent s	Number of Married Persons								No. of unmarrie d person		
			Male marriage age (in years)				Female marriage age in years				Total Married	Male	Femal
			16 to 20	21 to 24	25 and above	Total	14 to 16	17 to 20	21 and Above	Total			
1	DakshinJorshimal	35	07	13	11	31	01	01	02	04	35	-	-
2	Uttar Jorshimal	52	8	13	14	35	2	03	11	16	51	1	-
3	Koptanpara	11	02	01	04	07	-	02	02	04	11	-	-
4	Asubari	19	02	03	08	13	-	03	03	06	19	-	-
5	Jyamirgadhi	13	04	01	04	09	02	01	01	04	13	-	-

6	Kochubari	24	03	03	10	16	03	01	04	08	24	-	-
7	Dhaduwa	23	04	04	08	16	-	03	04	07	23	-	-
8	Dhaijan	79	12	17	33	62	6	01	09	16	78	1	-
9	Ainabari	30	03	10	04	17	04	05	04	13	30	-	-
10	Parajungi	14	01	03	07	11	-	01	02	03	14	-	-
	Total	300 (100%)	46	68	103	217	18	21	42	81	298	2	0
	Percentage with respect to male – female		21.2%	31.4%	47.4%		22.2%	25.9%	51.9%	100%	100%	0.007%	0%

Source: Field Survey.

In regards to the age of the respondents at their marriage time reflects that 21.2% of the male respondents married between the age 16-20 years, 31.4% of them married between the ages of 21-24 years, 47.4% married between the age group of 25 and above. For female, it is clear that 22.2 % female age 14-16 year, 25.9% at the age of 17-20 year, 51.9% female marriage at the age of 21 and above. So, from the above data it is found that the majority of the Meche male commits their marriage within the 25 years of age and for female the marriage is at the age of 21 and above. It is clear that out of 300 responded, only 2 numbers are unmarried and they are all male.

**The Status of Age at Marriage of Children of the Responded Families:**

The age at the time of marriage of children of the respondents of the 10 (ten) Meche villages of Jhapa District are shown in the Table.

Sl No	Name of Village / Municipality	No. of Respondent family	No. of married spouses and siblings	Age at the marriage									
				14-16 Yrs		17-20 Yrs		21-25 Yrs		26-30 Yrs		31-40 Yrs	
				M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1	Dakshin Jorshimal	35	M- 08 F - 11	-	1	3	7	5	3	-	-	-	-
2	Uttar Jorshimal	52	M- 26 F- 24	3	1	3	10	13	12	4	-	3	1
3	Koptanpara	11	M- 03 F- 03	-	1	2	2	1	-	-	-	-	-
4	Asubari	19	M- 06 F- 07	-	-	-	6	6	1	-	-	-	-
5	Jyamirgadhi	13	M- 08 F- 08	1	2	2	4	3	1	1	-	1	1
6	Kochubari	19	M- 09 F- 09	-	-	2	9	6	-	1	-	-	-
7	Dhaduwa	23	M- 10 F- 07	1	1	4	4	4	1	1	1	-	-
8	Dhaijan	79	M- 27 F- 23	2	7	8	12	12	4	4	-	1	-
9	Ainabari	30	M- 19 F- 15	6	9	5	6	8	-	-	-	-	-

10	Paraungi	14	M-05 F- 05	-	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	-
		300	<b>Total=233</b>	<b>13</b> <b>(5.6 %)</b>	<b>23</b> <b>(9.8 %)</b>	<b>31</b> <b>(13.4%</b> <b>)</b>	<b>62</b> <b>(26.7</b> <b>%)</b>	<b>59</b> <b>(25.3%)</b>	<b>23</b> <b>(9.8%)</b>	<b>12</b> <b>(5.1%)</b>	<b>2</b> <b>(0.8%)</b>	<b>6</b> <b>(2.6%)</b>	<b>2</b> <b>(0.8 %)</b>

Source: *Field study*.

The above Table reveals that marriage status of the children of the responded families of 10 (ten) Meche villages of the Jhapa District of Nepal, shows that ( 5.6 + 9.8) 15.4% spouses are getting marriage between the age 14-16 years where 13 (5.6%) are boys and 23 (9.8%) are girls. The next (13.4 + 26.7) 40.1% are got marriage between 17-20 years where 13.4% are boys and 26.7% are girls. Again, (25.3 + 9.8) 35.1% married between the age group 21-25, where 25.3% are boys and 9.8% are girls. Again, (5.1+ 0.8) 5.9% married between the age group of 26-30, where 5.1% are boys and 0.8% are girls. The last (2.6+ 0.8) 3.4% are married between the age group of 31-40, where 2.6% are boys and the 0.8% are girls. It is therefore clear that the majority of the Meche young girls hold their marriage within the age group of 17-20 years and that of male majority married between the ages of 21 to 25 years.(Basumatary, 2018: 206-212).

### Death Rites:

Death marks the end of the corporal existence, Says E.A. Hoebel, "Death has no absolute finality for any primitive people. All of them believe in the immortality of the soul." Death is one of the last and important of human being. No one of this world is free from that. Without questioning everyone is to accept it. The Meche community either cremates or buries the dead body on the decision of the priest. When someone dies among the Meche community, the first relatives are called and then the neighbours. The death body is kept in front of the house. The place where dead body is to be kept is cleaned with cowdung mixed with water. The head of the dead body is keep towards south. If dead person has daughter and son in law, then their presence is compulsory in Meche society. The body is not taken to grave until they are arrived at home. Then the son and daughter in law have to have bath and to rub with oil on the body. The new cloth *gamcha* is used as shroud to cover the body. In case of female a new *dakhana* (a female dress) is used to cover the body. Then all the relatives put the water in the mouth of death body from the bowl with coin. The relatives feed rice with meat and offer money to the body. *Roja* offers the sacred grass with a jar of water and says 'go' and 'comfortably' to the dead body as farewell. The eldest son carries the corpse from the front side. In Meche community both male and female participate in the funeral procession. There is a tradition that before digging the land the family member of the dead body should be bought from the earth with a little money.

### Death Rites or Sraddha:

The Sraddha or death rites is performed by the Meche community of Nepal on the 10 (ten) day from the day of the death of an adult person. If the decease is child or dies before before teeth growth, the mourning period is three days. If the child dies after teeth grown, mourning period is five days and in other cases it is nine days. The thinker J.Hastings observes that "The *Sraddha* the mid-rite of orthodox Hindus, known as the sraddha (Sanskrit, Srut, faith, trust, and belief) is a merely developed form of the primitive funeral feast and of the custom of feeding the death." (Hastings, 1952: 452). Generally the responsibility of conducting the whole ceremony rest on the eldest son of the death person. The eldest son of the dead mourn by wearing white clothes, and not eating any meat and drinking alcohol during the mourn period. These days, he should stay separately for mourning and perform all the rites.



*A Meche people wearing white cloth sitting with mourn after his father's death.*



*Source: A Bimal News Letter of Nepali Folklore Society, Vol.3 No.5 December, 2007.*

### **Findings and Discussion:**

The following are given as findings for this work:

- (i). The Meche community of Jhapa District of Nepal is indigenous tribal societies of Nepal. They have an identity and their own way of life. They have been residing on the bank of Mechi River in the eastern border of the Himalayan kingdom. They follow the age-old socio-cultural tradition from the time of immemorial. It is observed that their religion, language, culture, customs and traditions and ways of life are almost similar excepting few differences to the Bodos of Assam, India

- ii. It is also to be found that the Meche society of Nepal has been following the rites and rituals basically the three life cycles i.e. birth rites, marriage and death rites in their social life.
- iii The field level data of the concerned sample villages of the Jhapa District shows that all heads of the families are mostly married person. It is found that out 300 family heads 298 (99.3%) are married and only 2 (0.7%) are unmarried. On the other hand, the number of divorcee, widow and widower, there is not found any divorcee. The represent only 10.4% widow and 4.4% are widower.
- .iv The Meche are an endogamous community and prefers to marry within their community; while marriage between the Meche with other community is seen and it is called exogamy. It is observed that out of 300 sample families 273 (91.6%) marriages of the family head of the Meche community is based on endogamous, whereas 25 (8.8%) people are married through the exogamy marriage.
- v. It is observed that the age at marriage of the responded family head, majority of the family heads marry within the age of 25 years, while the marriage of female is at the age of 21 years and above. The data shows that 21.2% of male responded marry in between the age 16-20 years, 31.4% of them marry between the age of 21-24 years, and 47.4 % marry between the age of 25 years and above. On the other hand 22.2% female marry at the age of 14-16 years, 25.9% marriage at the age of 17-20 years, and 51.9% female marriage is at the age of 21 years and above. It is therefore reflects that the age difference between bride and groom is about 4 years.
- vi. Again, marriage age of children of the respondents' families of the study area, it is found that 15.4% are getting married between the age group of 14-16 years, where 13 (5.6%) are boys and 23 (9.8%) are girls. The next, 40.1% get married between 17-20 years where 31 (13.4%) are boys and 62 (26.7%) are girls, 35.1% marry between the age group of 21-25 years, where 59 (25.3%) are boys and 23 (9.8%) are girls. Again, 5.9% married between the age group of 26-30, where 12 (5.1%) are boys and 2 (0.8%) are girls. The last, 3.4% are married between the age group of 31-40 years where 6 (2.6%) are boys and 2 (0.8%) are girls. This shows that majority of the children marry between the age group of 17 to 25 years
- vii. The field level data of the concerned sample villages of the Jhapa District shows that all heads of the families are mostly married person. It is found that out 300 family heads 298 (99.3%) are married and only 2 (0.7%) are unmarried. On the other hand, the number of divorcee, widow and widower, there is not found any divorcee. The represent only 10.4% widow and 4.4% are widower.

### Conclusion:

In conclusion we can say that Meche people of Nepal have been living in the east- southern part of the Nepal with their rich cultural heritage. The Meche of Jhapa of Nepal, Meche of Assam and West Bengal are the same origin. They are considered as sub group of Bodo community of Assam. They have their own identity and a way of life. They have a religion, language, literature, customs and traditions, etc. Basically they have been observed the rites and rituals i.e. birth rites, marriage and finally the death rites in their day to day social life.

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