

THIRTEEN



MARRIAGE TERMINOLOGY AND TRACES OF MATRILINY

[163–169; 271–277; 262–266; 132–135]

THE TERMINOLOGY used by the Gilyak in connection with marriage is very distinctive from a sociological standpoint. The Gilyak language, like ancient Aryan and modern Russian, does not have a term which corresponds to the general English term “to marry,” the French *se marrier*, or the German *heiraten*, which are used for both sexes. The Gilyak, by contrast, have distinct terms for each sex. When we speak of a Gilyak man, we join the verb *gend* or *khg’end* (*g’e* being the stem) with *shankh* (woman) or *ang’rei* (wife), we arrive at *shankhg’end* or *ang’rei g’end*. But when a woman is the subject, a different verb *avind* (*av* being the stem) is used, with the corresponding addition of *nigivin* (man) or *pu* (husband), or without any addition, as simply *iavind* (*ie* (“him”) + *avind*) [132].¹

The following is a typical example taken from an old poem of the strict distinction which the Gilyak make between the terminology of the different sexes. The hero says to the father of his future wife, “*Iekhlun keil psindra*” (“I have come for her”). At that the father says to his daughter, “*Khun antkh psindra, iava*” (“This guest came to marry you—go to him”). The daughter answers, “*Khinka iavindra*” (“All right, I will go to him”).²

What is the essential meaning of these individual terms *g’end* and *iavind*? The meaning of the man’s term, *g’end*, is quite clear. It is a verb most often used in the Gilyak language for designating the taking or buying of something. In connection with marriage it has several meanings: receiving a woman as a legitimate wife; buying a woman by paying a bride-price; and lastly, in the sense of the Roman term *uxorem ducere*, the transfer of the woman to one’s own abode, as is commonly practiced by Gilyak today.

At first glance, the meaning of the woman’s term *iavind* is not quite so clear. In this form it is used in connection with marriage only; it simply designates the marriage of women. But it is not difficult to clarify the original meaning of the word from etymological forms close to it. First of all, we have *p’avind* (*pi* + *avind*), which means to support oneself, and “to live” in an economic sense. Here is a characteristic example:

¹ [**Editor’s note:** As in previous chapters, I employ the Latin alphabet transliteration of Gilyak words used in both the AMNH English and Russian typescripts. Gilyak words in this chapter most often, though not always, correspond to those found in Shternberg, *Giliaki*, rather than those in Shternberg, *Sem’ia*.]

² [**Editor’s note:** This paragraph is found in the AMNH English and Russian typescripts only.]

"*Nigivin n'enin pyrġ pavra*," that is, one Gilyak man lived by himself. If several persons are spoken of, this term means to live together, that is, to feed themselves together, to carry on a common household. From this originated the adverb *p'avind*, meaning "to be together." Further, a derivative form of the active case, *avind*, means to support somebody, to accept somebody in one's own care, or to adopt and feed them. It may also be used to designate feeding oneself, or grazing for one's self (*iavind e'khan*, literally, "a grazing cow"). Finally *iavind*, or *iavend*, means to warm somebody (by a fire) or to give refuge. Thus the term *iavind* applied by a woman to a man with the meaning "to marry him" formerly seems to have meant to take a man on her own support, to accept him into her house [133].

If this etymology is correct, and it is hard to doubt it, then it follows that formerly Gilyak were a matrilineal society like their nearest neighbors, the Ainu. As the terms seem to indicate, the husband moved to the wife's house. It is exactly the same with the man's term *g'end*, which means "to take for himself," indicating the modern patriarchy, when the wife moves to the husband's house.

At present the former meaning of *iavind* has disappeared so completely from modern memory that often people add to the verb *iavend* another verb, *vind*, meaning "to go away." As a result of this combination the expression *avind vind* literally means, "go away to take a husband on your own support." But this is an evident *contradictio in adjecto* because the verb *vind* signifies transition to the husband's house and consequently his support.

In the old Gilyak language, all terms for compatible matrimonial life were derivative forms of *iavind* (the woman's marriage term). The fact serves as a linguistic relic of the olden type of marriage. *Iavind* means to be married to somebody, the compatible marriage of two persons. For instance we have the expression, "*Itk amnakh vavin kuil itind*" or "Father ordered us to marry" (literally, "Father ordered us to support each other").

Even in the present-day life of the Gilyak we find a few traces of this matriliney. One of the formulas of a marriage right is an expression we mentioned earlier, "*Imgi arind iagnindra*" or "The son-in-law must be fed" (although the son-in-law takes his wife and lives separately from his father-in-law). Evidently this formula could only have emerged when the son-in-law moved to the wife's house or visited her regularly for a definite period of time, as is the practice among the Ainu. Among the latter the husband visits his wife regularly for a certain length of time, and the family of the latter has to feed him on the same basis, as now the family of a husband has to support his wife.

This formula has nonetheless preserved its vital meaning today. It is a set rule, for example, that gifts of food and a share of all catch must regularly be sent to the son-in-law. Furthermore, the *imgi* are ever-welcome guests in the village of their fathers-in-law and participate in the most important hunting enterprises. On distant hunting expeditions for sea mammals, the owner of the boat, also the head of the undertaking, issues a special invitation to all his *imgi* to participate in the hunting.³

³ We find a similar phenomenon among the Haida Indians, a purely matrilineal society. Here, as Swanton relates, a man calls together all his nephews, who are his potential sons-in-law, when undertaking a war. Cf. Swanton, *Contributions*, 69.

During that time the *imgi* are not only fed but on leaving they take along an equal part of the game and even presents. The attitude towards these youths is sometimes even more tender than toward one's own children. After all, since the *imgi* are the male children of a man's sisters or daughter, they are his nephews, who under a matrilineal organization would live with him. At the same time, the man's own sons and grandsons would go away to the homes of their wives, and would be quite alienated from him.

This obligation to feed nephews in the maternal line is a common characteristic of matriliney. Among several tribes, for example, as among the Polynesians, the right of nephews to property of the maternal uncle took an unusual form when nephews were permitted to rob their uncles without any penalty. This curious custom of a matrilineal society still exists among various tribes which switched to a patrilineal organization. Among the peoples of the Caucasus, the nephew has a right to steal his uncle's horse if the latter refuses to give it to him. Among the peoples of the Altai there is a proverb, "A nephew is worse than seven wolves" [134].

The role of the brother in marrying off a sister is even more typical. In many cases he, and not the father, plays the principal role in the marriage arrangements. He is the one who has to give the consent and he receives the bride-price.

There are many other traces in language and customs which could be considered as survivals of a matrilineal organization. When a Gilyak wants to say that he is married he says, "*Ni umgarvo ivra*," or literally, "I have the wife's village" (*ni* I + *umgar* wife's + *vo* village + *ivra* is). This expression corresponds to the Ainu mode of living as well. Among the Ainu, a husband and wife often live in separate villages. The former visits her for several months of the year and then returns to his own village. Besides his own village, then, a man has the village of his wife.

The term *pandf* is used for designating the origin of a man and means literally "birth's root." The term designates the place from where a man's mother comes, but not the clan of the man, nor the place of his birth, which is natural to expect in an agnatic organization. It is of interest to note here the veneration a Gilyak expresses towards the birth places of his mother and all her female ancestors. No matter how far away this place may be, every Gilyak finds an opportunity to make a pilgrimage. During my travels I was surprised many times to see the tenderness with which Gilyak approached the village where one of their ancestresses once lived.

In some places the Gilyak, on being questioned about their origin, still indicate the birthplaces of their mothers and wives. For instance, the inhabitants of the village Nyivo on the east coast of Sakhalin at the mouth of the Tym' River always insisted, "We are from Nyi-ur," that is, they originated from the village of Nyi-ur, located at the extreme northern end of the island. When asked to explain they replied, "It is because we take our wives from Nyi-ur." Evidently these people considered their origin from the birthplace of their mother because the wives of the Gilyak are taken from their mother's clan.

Still another fascinating survival is that, although children are generally given the names of their fathers' kinsmen, in some places children are still named after maternal uncles and various relatives of their mothers. In Nianevo on the west coast of the island the names are taken from the mother's kin as though the children entered into the mother's clan [135].

All these survivals are strange given the present agnatic organization of Gilyak society, but not so in the psychology of the Gilyak themselves. To the Gilyak, these are not survivals. This is due to marriage norms which ensure that the wife and the husband are cousins, children of a brother and sister, with men of one clan taking wives preferably from one and the same clan. The psychologies of the matriliney and the patriliney are hence interlocked. In principle there is no gap between paternal and maternal lines, as exists in those societies where marriage norms of the Gilyak type do not operate.

Finally, we might also entertain an influence over Gilyak matrimonial psychology being exercised by the Ainu, who according to legends continually made inroads into Gilyak life, as seen by their influence, for example, on religious institutions. Nonetheless, it would seem that their influence over marital rites was highly limited, as few similarities can be found between the two peoples' kinship terminologies or marriage norms.⁴

⁴ [*Editor's note:* This final paragraph, not found in the AMNH English typescript, has been modified to correspond more closely to the three Russian versions.]