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**LOVE AND MARRIAGE PRACTICES AMONG  
THE PAURI BHUYAN TRIBE IN KEONJHAR  
DISTRICT OF ODISHA, INDIA**

**Introduction**

Tribes in India are identified as ‘Adivasi’ or ‘Janajati’ or indigenous people throughout the history. Mahatma Gandhi named them ‘Girijan’ meaning, people living in hilly, mountainous areas. However many tribes identify themselves culturally in different names like “Bondo Highlanders” as *Remo*, Oraons of Chota Nagpur plateau as *Kurukh*, etc.

Orissa state is the home for sixty two out of total five hundred thirty three types of tribes inhabiting in India with 13 types of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). It is the highest in number with respect to tribal typological variation in India.

Pauri Bhuyans of Orissa come under the category of PVTG on the basis of the parameters laid by the Govt. of India (article 342, Constitution of India). Pauri Bhuyans identify themselves as a sub-group of the larger group, Bhuyan tribe. Bhuyans are also known in different names like Bhuiyas, Bhumia, Bhuinya. The name is derived from Sanskrit word ‘Bhumi’ (means land), for which ‘Bhuyans’ define themselves as “Son of the Soil” (Roy 1953). While the Bhuyans’ own version of the studied villages about the origin of their name depicts that “Bhuyan” means “owner of land”, which is further explained that Bhuyans were landholders. And Pauri (Pauri means people from hills and mountain) Bhuyan is defined as the Bhuyans belonging to Hills and Mountains. Pauri Bhuyans define themselves as people of high social status. As they say, their ancestors were strong and powerful people.

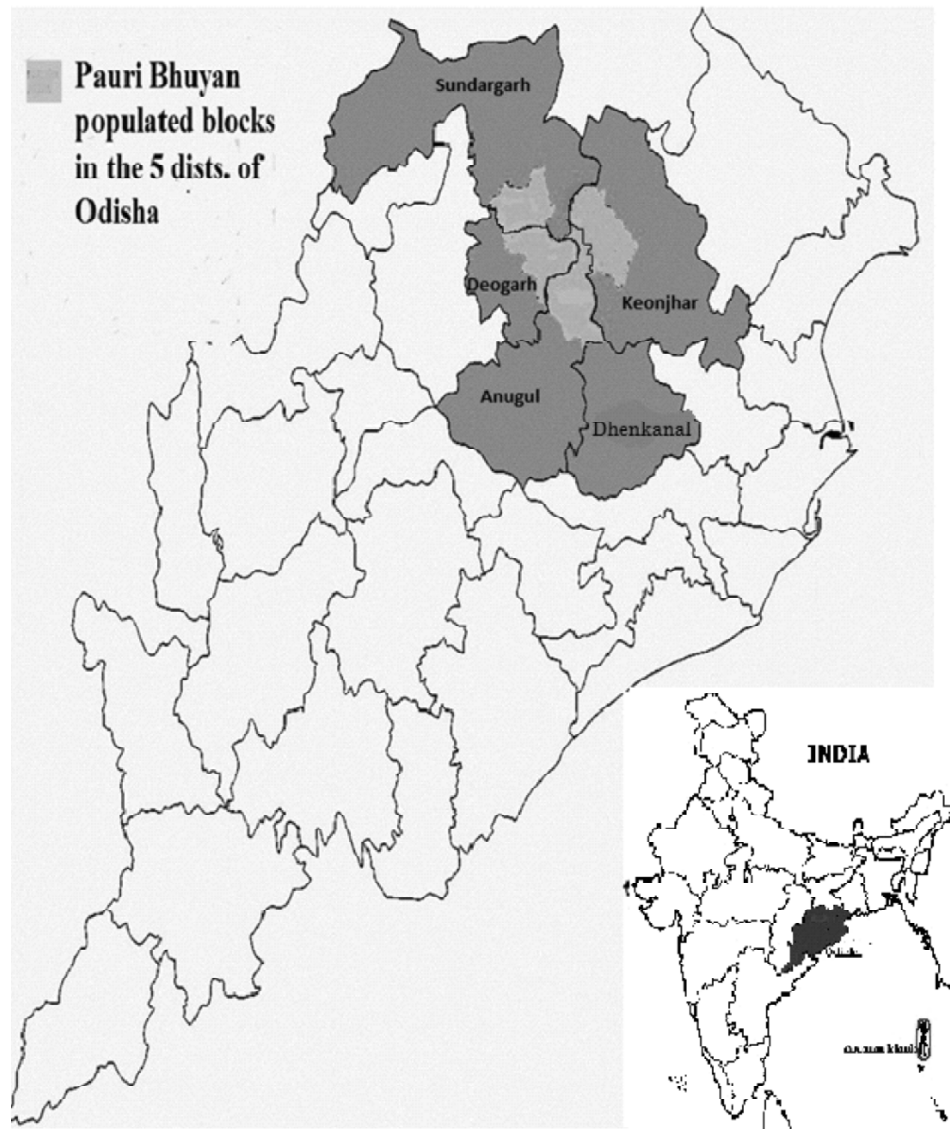
The tribe is identified as one of the most backward tribes with respect to availing social upliftment and modern educational facilities in the state as well as in India.

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Pauri Bhuyans live in a continuous mountain range from Sundergarh district (Banai Block) to Deogarh district (main concentration in Barcote block) through Keonjhar (main concentration in Banshapal block) and Anugul (main concentration in Palalahada block) districts (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Map of India and Odisha state showing Pauri Bhuyan populated area and their genetic relation**



As per the Pauri consideration, the population of Bhuyans (of which Pauris are a segmentary group) is spread all over the earth. Interestingly in human genome wide study project, Anthropological survey of India has found that Pauri Bhuyans share genetic similarity with the Andaman Islanders, the Jarawa, the Onge and the Great Andamanese by sharing 7 mutations of Andaman Islands characteristic haplogroup M31.

Pauri Bhuyans belong to Dravidian race (Dalton 1872) and linguistically, they are Astro-Asiatic-Mundari speakers (Roy 1935).

Very few studies have been undertaken with respect to social or cultural aspects of the tribe. While most of the studies were undertaken by or prior to the period of 1960s, it is important to study the influence of socio-cultural changes and the process of such transition among this primitive tribal group.

### **Comprehensive focus of the study**

Indian society has inconspicuously constructed the identity of the tribes or Scheduled Tribes (ST) as separate humankind. A strict differentiation has always been maintained between Indian castes and tribes in the sense that caste groups are modern and civilized section of the Indian society while tribal folks are savage aborigines. In same sense, the socio-cultural practices in tribal societies are identified as primitive along with their institutions as elemental. Many of the tribal researches in India are conducted with a priori presuppositions about the tribe or its aspects of interest as 'exotic'. Supplementary to this view, very few researchers in India have gone beyond such tradition of ethnography by analyzing the contrast to continuum between Indian tribes and caste groups. So, such prior conjectures about the tribe by majority of the researchers leave important socio-cultural aspects neglected or overlooked which in a sense juxtapose modern Indian civilization. The present paper focuses on socio-cultural aspects like love and marriage among Pauri Bhuyans. The practices involving love and marriage are perceived differently through diverse socio-cultural environments which are very typical in many instances. The study presents various aspects of love and marriage practices and at the same time discusses the morals behind such customary acts. It draws parallels between the "modern" and a tribal society with respect to justice, wisdom, moral and ethics like aspects in and around love and marriage practices, along with going through the folk history in this respect.

Ghurye (1932) opined about caste that endogamy is ideologically important but practically difficult. His diffusionistic aspect of Indian caste system explains that caste is fundamentally the product of underlying ethnic differences that are deployed, scrambled and rerationalized under conditions of continuing intercultural contact, assimilation and conflict. With respect to similar aspect in tribal society, the present study finds certain elements against the traditional wisdom of cultural homogeneity among the tribes.

Altruistic behaviour towards the community members and upholding individual dignity are the two striking characters of the members among most of the tribal societies in India. Such characters have important roles to play in human relationships like love and marriage. As it was observed during the present fieldwork that social vagaries that affect such characters like human trafficking, prostitution, beggary and such other social evils of industrial man were almost absent among the tribal society until recent times.

This paper discusses the parallels in patterns of two cultures— desire for social nobility of modern man and status of such characters embedded in the Pauri Bhuyan society. It also tries to analyze the interplay among the characters towards the continuance of such features in their respective cultures.

### **Methods**

The present ethnographic research was conducted among the Pauri Bhuyans over a period of one year in the Bansapal block of Keonjhar district of Odisha, India. The study was conducted in four different phases. During each field tour period, the authors stayed in the selected villages and made participatory as well as non-participatory observations. Interviews were conducted among the male and female members of the selected villages. In order to understand various aspects of the society one needs to observe the society and its members in different time and space. From this point of view, the authors, during their field tour to the study area kept looking into different facets of the daily life of the community from 4 am in the morning to late in the night. The visitors and relatives of the villagers were also interacted. There was no constraint with respect to data collection from males of both young and elderly sections of the villages. With respect to females, it was realized that elderly females were ready to discuss various aspects of the society and their social life while young girls were shy to discuss topics with respect to certain aspects like love.

Myths and legends were collected from the elderly people of the community as well as from the neighbouring tribes and caste groups. Myths and legends among Pauris carrying essences of other tribes like Juang were also discussed with such outer tribal groups. Secondary literatures were collected with respect to the studied aspects of the tribe. Out of the scanty availability of literature, it was observed that while few of the authors had discussed about marriage practices, there was no literature found regarding the perceptions about love among the tribe.

With respect to the socio-historical aspects of the tribe, the reported myths and legends in the present study correlate to such an observation made previously. The paper in the process of discussing the ethnographic observations about love and marriage also emphasizes on the recent changes

in this regard. At the same time, the paper puts forth socio-cultural, political and economic aspects of the society that affect marriage, along with the bearings of such aspects of marriage on society.

### **A historical perspective of marriage among Pauris Bhuyans**

As the Pauri Bhuyan of the presently studied villages under Bansapal block in Keonjhar district of Odisha say, they were being administered by the king before coming under British colonial rule during pre-independence period. Almost all the villagers of the studied villages remember the name Jatibhanj, the last king of Keonjhar Garh (kingdom) kings' dynasty. The palace of the king is located at Matia Bandha near Keonjhar town. As the Bhuyan legend explains, there was no king-ship tradition among the Pauri Bhuyans. They stole a prince from Mayurbhanj (a border district) kings' dynasty to make him their king and to celebrate with a statehood status. As the Bhuyan history depicts, there has been marriage between the kings with the Bhuyan women at various time.

Bhuyans at the beginning, provided the king with own women and girls, as co-wives and servants. The children from such marriages with the king were later identified as *Rajkuli* Bhuyans (Bhuyans from king's blood) (Mishra 1960). Similarly, *Kuthi* (palace) Bhuyan is one among the Bhuyan categories, which the Pauri Bhuyans define, as the descents of socially unrecognized relationship between king and Bhuyan women, working in the royal palace.

To the question that why the king is not from among them, the answer of the eldest Pauri Bhuyan man of one of the studied villages was– 'it is the kingly blood which is necessary to become a king and to administer the state which was not there with us'.

Pauri Bhuyans, in the studied area, identify themselves as Hindu though they worship gods and goddesses which relate to primitive religious beliefs like naturalism, animalism, etc. The prohibition and exhibition of marriage in Pauri Bhuyan society is regulated by specific rules. It is controlled by *Jaati* system which is similar to Hindu caste system in India. They prohibit marital relationship with other tribes beyond Bhuyan and in particular with Juangs, Mundas, Kolhs like tribes. Here it is worth mentioning that these tribes share same geographically inhabited area along with the Pauri Bhuyans.

Pauri Bhuyans have flexibility in establishing the marital relation with Bathudis and Gands which are the other two tribes cohabiting with Pauris in the same geographic territory. As per the narratives of the tribesmen, this flexibility to marry a Bathudi and Gond girl was not always there. There were strict marriage rules. In the time process, rules have got diluted. A historical fact, as explained by one of the senior members of a village, says, the eldest

son of certain well-known *Sardar* (chief) of their '*Pirha*' (council) once eloped with a Bathudi girl and latter married. The girl became the *Patabohu* (a social prestige paid to the eldest daughter-in-law). From that day a marital relation has been established with Bathudis.

A strict restriction is obeyed with respect to any sort of social interaction or transaction with *Pano*, *Dom*, *Hadi* (three low caste groups in Hindu caste system below the line of purity) and *Kumhars* (Potter). Again it is interesting to note that they consider Munda, Majhi and Nuthuri (those who eat cow meat) tribes as the three sub-group of Kolh, another tribe. These three are strictly prohibited with respect to socio-cultural relationship. It is a taboo to eat cooked food from Mundas and Nuthuris as they eat beef. Majhis do not eat beef, so a relaxation is given to Majhis and Kumhars (potters) in the form of sharing only *Handia* (a form of liquor), a cooked food. But marriage is restricted with Majhis and Potters. Similarly they do not share any type of cooked food with Juangs. Here it is informative that the major concentrated areas of Pauri Bhuyan population in Keonjhar and Anugul districts are also a major concentrated area of the tribe Juangs (Juang tribe is found only in the above mentioned areas of Orissa as well as in India) and both the tribes share a common population geographic area. The Pauri Bhuyan legends say that Juangs and Bhuyans are two brothers and the successors of a *Rishi* (seer). The *Rishi* had two sons named as *Janeik Rishi* and *Aneik rishi*. *Juang* is the son of *Janeik Rishi* while *Bhuyan* is the son of *Aneik Rishi*. *Janeik Rishi*, being the elder among the two brothers, places *Juang* as the elder and higher in social hierarchy to Bhuiyans who are the sons of *Aneik Rishi*, the younger one. But in practice Bhuyans regard Juangs as socially lower to them due to certain bad practices by the Juangs in the past.

Inquiring about the historical practice that placed Juangs lower in social hierarchy with respect to Pauri Bhuyans, the Pauri story unfolds as below:

Both Juang and Bhuyan were going to a foreign place together. On the way they saw a beautiful woman, whom Bhuyans define a demon. She was bathing naked. Both the brothers were lured by the woman. As any sort of interaction with her would be bad and would devalue their society, the Bhuyan restricted the Juang from interacting with the woman. After walking a little ahead, the Juang told the Bhuyan that he had a call of nature and he left the Bhuyan waiting at that place. After few hours when the Juang did not return the Bhuyan went on searching for him. And he, at last, found the Juang getting married to that Demon and eating cow's meat with her. Bhuyan got angry and left elder brother Juang there. Later Juang is made out-group by the Bhuyan as a result of the sin he had committed by marrying a demon and eating cow meat.

Bhuyan legends put forth the fact that Juangs and Bhuyans were brothers who got separated, for the cause that the Juang married a woman whom the Bhuyan depict as a demon. Further enquiry found that there was constant

social conflict between Bhuyans and Juangs which might have given rise to social construct of separate identity. Bhuyans and Juangs are two cohabiting tribes which, at a historic time, got into a rivalry on a woman issue in which the Juang succeeded to marry the woman and later the Bhuyan demonized her. Again as per the legends Juangs are the sons of a *Rishi* named *Janeik* (the meaning of the word 'Janeik' in local language is 'some local one') *Rishi*, from which it can be believed that the *Juangs* are the *Jan-jatis*, a local population group. Bhuyans being the sons of *Aneik* (meaning of the word 'Aneik' in local language is 'many together') *Rishi* explain the assimilation of various population groups. Other facts make this claim more substantial as, the Bhuyans have various categories like *Pauri* (those living in hills), *Rajkuli* (those with high social status, living in plain areas and directly associated with king), *Magadha-a* (having an ancestor from central-east parts of India named Magadh-now the state of Bihar), Kuthi, etc. But Juangs have no such cultural, geographic or nativity based group typological variations.

It is observable that the belief in rishis as creators of tribes, i.e. Aneik when rishi and Janeik rishi explain a considerable influence of sanskritisation on Pauri Bhuyans. When asked about their clan, Nagashya, name of a rishi and mostly found as a Hindu clan symbol the answer of most Pauri household heads. Further, Hinduisation can be seen as an active force spreading Hindu religious beliefs, to counteract the Christian conversation activities. It can be said that there has been a conscious effort among Hindu and Christian preachers to rope in the nonbeliever tribals to their brackets. So the present observation showing Pauris of following a strict socio-cultural restriction against Juangs for their cow eating behaviour may be due to the influence of Hinduization. Pauris' strict socio-cultural restriction against Juangs is a confirmatory stand to their religious acculturation and a possible apprehensiveness against embracing Christianity. This whole process in a sense is a course of change in a society from an informal belief structure to a formal 'religion-isation'. In other way, such acts by Hindu caste societies are problematically positioning the indigenous tribal societies with respect to the existence and continuance of their socio-cultural life. Here it is noteworthy that though ploughing in different parts of India is generally done with the help of bullocks, Pauri Bhuyans are the people who employ cows for this purpose. As Juangs eat cow meat this is another reason for which they are out-group for Bhuyans. As a matter of fact, Bhuyans are a larger community than Juangs and inhabit covering all the surrounding areas of major Juang habitations. In everyday life, close economic and trade activities take place between the two communities though there are particular socio-cultural riders. So a cultural stress was felt by the comparatively minor community, i.e. Juangs with respect to larger Bhuyan community. Juang council in recent time had decided to stop eating cow meat as they are being seen as out group by the neighbouring community. This process has brought a change among Juangs, by restriction for eating cow meat. But still they have not been socially included

as an acceptable group by the Pauri Bhuyans. Pauri Bhuyans of the studied villages say that though Juangs have stopped eating cow meat, the cow-eating blood is still flowing within them. Once again, they suspect that few elderly people still eat cow meat secretly. Living a caste hierarchy and distancing from out groups are the two of the important aspects of Hindu social system. But interestingly, in spite of adopting Hindu religion, the Hindu social hierarchical system has not assumed among the tribal group. Rather, they maintain a group hierarchy by placing themselves at the top, restricting other tribes like Juangs, Kolhs, Santals, Mundas, etc, as out groups on the basis of Hindu beliefs and practices like cow meat non-eater and eater. This format of 'New Hinduisation' is the innovation of fundamentalist Hindu preachers of medieval and modern India and is found to be supported by *babaism*.

In recent years, the cases of marriage by eloping with out-group and restricted tribes like Juangs, Kolhs are happening among Bhuyans which was previously not there. Elderly Bhuyan consider this trend as a devaluation of social morals, an outcome of development and economic empowerment. "Now, if someone faces restrictions in the village for such a deed, he or she leaves the village, earns his livelihood outside and does not need to pay a heed to the community. But previously there were not so much livelihood avenues nor social security available and so, all had to stay together and abide by the tribe's rules", the senior members of a village council opined.

If in any incident a Pauri Bhuyan boy or girl marries an out-group girl or boy, he or she faces permanent social ostracism. The father of the girl or boy, who has gone for a marital relationship with prohibited tribe, faces a temporary cessation of his membership in the tribe. He has to practice particular rituals against the deeds of his child. These rituals, practiced by the father, are the rituals that are practiced during death ritual of a member in the community. In the next, the Bhuyan council is called for. The *Patta Pradhan* (who is a priestly adviser to the council of villages) prepares ritual water by touching the feet of all the members of the council which is drunk by the father to become a part of the *Jati* (community) and simultaneously allowing re-entry to the tribe. Similarly while a Bhuyan boy marries a girl from other permitted tribes like Bathudi and Gund, the girl is ritualized and is made a *Bhuyani*, a woman of Bhuyan tribe. This facility is not given in case of marriage to prohibited tribes or castes. But it is noteworthy that the family never prefers to go for an arranged marriage of a boy or a girl beyond the Pauri Bhuyan community. Only love marriages with Bathudi and Gund are accommodated in the community.

Certain generosities with respect to marriage rules are also observed. The boy/girl marrying in prohibited or out-tribe can come to his father's house but neither can enter the parental house nor can stay there over night. He is provided with food, which he eats outside the house like any other out-group member. For the Pauri Bhuyan such children are like nonmembers of their



society. In recent time, few families are allowing their children get married in 'out-group' to stay for one or two days in home after which they have to leave. No permanent residence is allowed to such people in Pauri Bhuyan society.

During interaction, the elderly villagers say, in late 1980s and early 1990s, during the period of Indira Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India, there was an assimilation initiative by the Prime Minister to lessen the tribe differences between *Bhuyans*, *Juangs*, *Panos*, *Hadis*, *Doms*, *Patras*, *Chasas*, *Mundas*, *Kolhs*, and Muslims like twelve groups. A grand general feast was arranged on *Gonasika* Mountain (the mountain is one peak of the mountainous range of habitation of Pauri Bhuyan population in Orissa and considered to be holy by the community). In that general feast, food was prepared by the out-castes like *Juangs*, *Doms*, *Hadis* and *Kolhs* and was distributed among all on *Gonasika* Mountain. All were declared as one by the *Sarkar* (Government) and were told to share at all levels like marriage, rituals, etc. But this could not bring a permanent harmony among the castes and tribes in further time and got faded very soon. The Bhuyans of the studied villages define this act by the Prime Minister as a historic humiliation of their socio-cultural values. As they say it happened under compulsion. Again, this attempt by the *Sarkar* (government) is a major cause that prompted the increase in incidences of eloping with out-tribe as well as inter-tribe marriage with restricted groups, as explained by the elderly Pauri Bhuyan members of studied villages.

### **Selecting the right partner**

Bhuyan girls as well as boys consider marriage as the ultimate wish in their lives. As per the observation most Bhuyan boys like to marry in a village other than their own. Similarly the girls do. The average age of Bhuyan girls at marriage is 14 to 16 years whereas it is 18 years to 20 years for the boys. Generally Bhuyan girls do not like boys at late age. Boys with developed beard are taken as older and girls do not like to choose them as life partners. In the first year of the marriage, the woman becomes pregnant and the couple goes for child. It ensures that the woman will not leave the man and will not indulge in extra marital relations. But it was found to have led to many serious adverse social and health problems. High child mortality, maternal mortality and falling women health are the major problems of almost every family. As per the findings of the present study, 74% of the families of the studied villages have witnessed the death of their first child.

The Pauri Bhuyans, in recent time, define their marriage practices in mainly four broad ways: arranged marriage, marriage by elopement, love marriage by arrangement and marriage by capture.

In case of arranged marriage, the parents of the boy go on search for a bride for their boy. It is an important practice found in the studied villages

that the parents of the girl in the tribe do not go on a search for a groom. It is a general practice in Bhuyan society. It is the groom's side who has to come searching for the bride first. It was observed in 3-4 cases during the field study that as no groom's side visited, the girl crossed the marriage age and remained a maiden. But when a prospective groom's side visit and if both the sides agreed, then the marriage can take place. Incidences of such sort of marriage are comparatively less. In this type of marriage, the girl's side will be given a proposal from the boy's side first. Then the girl's side visits the boy's residence. A full fledged feast is given to them. *Handia* (traditional liquor) is an important part of this feast. The arrangement and distribution of *Handia* on such occasion is a sense of respect and an act of pursuance. In spite of all sorts of guest services the girl's side is free to deny the marriage proposal. It is not always definitive that the girl's side will agree and marriage will be fixed. The head of the village council explains, "Such practice has good social implication. It helps discouraging the demand for dowry".

The second type of marriage is love marriage. While a boy attains the age of marriage, he visits the other villages as a guest to his relatives. He stays there for few days. During this period of stay he goes on searching a soul mate. If he finds a girl of his choice in that village he starts interacting with her secretly. He attracts the girl towards him by clinching her *anchal* (leading edge of the clothes or *saree*) or by throwing flower at her. All these activities are done secretly. If the girl agrees it leads to further intimacy and love making. After three four days of such interaction, the girl elopes with the boy. But the boy with his prospective wife does not go to his own house, rather to a relative's house. The relative reports it to the parents of the boy but not the girl's. On the other hand, the parents of the girl go on searching for their girl to different villages to know the whereabouts of their daughter. At last, when they find their daughter, they may accept the boy as their son-in-law without any hesitation. But it happens with a symbolic exchange of words that "why did you flee with my daughter", "you should have informed us" and so forth. At this time, the boy's side remains receptive and tries to convince them. At last the parents of the girl ask her if the boy has brought her forcefully or she has come on her will. As she says that she has come on her will, the parents ask her that if she is happy with the boy or not. If she says yes then they leave her to stay with the boy. A formal marriage ceremony is conducted soon. This ceremony gives approval to the couple as husband and wife.

Beyond such secret love stories, there is another type of marriage by an open love affair observed in Pauri Bhuyan society which is also defined as love marriage by arrangement. Before explaining it in details, the incident that introduced the authors to such practice is worth presenting. It was like bellow:

During the night of 11th day of the stay of second field tour to the village, the author (SKA) was just preparing to go to bed. It was around 11 P.M. There

was little rain outside. The author heard a song coming from the middle of the village. He got up and tried to know the fact. He went on the way from where the song was coming. It was deep dark night. On way to the exact place, he came to know that there were two groups singing. One male and the other was a female group. The author waited and tried to listen to the song. Boys were singing two stanzas and then leaving it to the girls. The girls were singing another two stanzas and were leaving it to the boys. The author tried to understand the wording. He observed that they were describing each other's beauty in song.

The song unfolds like below:

*Tuma rang galani badali....badali.* (Your looks have become bright in recent days)

*Tuma cheheraa galani badali...badali.* (You are looking more handsome/beautiful now)

After listening to the song few minute from a distance, he went to the boy's group, sat near them. They immediately stopped singing. He requested them to continue singing. But they did not reply him and within less than a minute they left towards the part of the village from where the girls' voices were coming. The author could not comprehend the cause. He tried to follow them. But in dark night they soon became untraceable. The next day, he found one of the boys of the two who were singing last night. The author called him and asked about the whole matter. Although he was unwilling to talk about it at the beginning, he started to explain the author everything latter.

As he said, it's a Bhuyan way of selecting mate. In this case the boy and girl know each other and are in love. But it's the girl's wish to go for a singing practice. This singing starts towards early late night while people are preparing to go to bed. As per the plan the guest boy with one of his friends or relatives of his own age from the village sits in the verandah of the relative. Similarly the girl with one or two of her friends sits at her own verandah or at a distance from where they can listen to the boys. Then the singing starts. It continues till late night as long as most of the villagers get asleep or the girls' group stops singing. Then the guest boy goes to the girl he loves. He says some romantic words. This leads to some intimacy, most of the time ending with lovemaking. As it was explained by an elderly villager, this love song has many purposes to fulfill. Marriage through singing is considered as a matter of glory for the boy. Because during singing the boy mostly praises the girl, explains her beauty and other good qualities through song. This explains his knowledge and understanding the girl. The accompanying boy from the same village though helps him in this regard. The song is composed on the spot and is sung. This act of knowledge of the boy about the girl convinces and impresses the girl about the level of interest of the boy in her. From another point of view, many a times though the girl is in love with the boy, she does not want to marry by ignoring her parents. So, this is a way in which the girl and the boy express their will only before the parents of the girl but to others also. Again this is another way out for the girl to inform her parents and relatives about her love wishes. So, though the girl's parents know that their girl is

'singing' and the next possible happenings, they allow it. In Bhuyan society, the girls have liberty to choose their partners.

In marriage by capture type, the man captures and takes the woman of his choice by force to his home. The venues of capture are generally the village market and fairs, public festival, the way to forest, etc. After bringing the woman home, the man tries to convince her with his social status, property, house, etc. Knowing the incidence of capture of their girl, her relatives reach the boy's house. Previously serious fighting between the girl's side and the boy's side used to take place. The winning party takes the girl. Generally the boy's side wins as they remain prepared by gathering relatives and supporters with the apprehension of a serious fight. It is important to note that such happenings rarely lead to long term inter-village tension. It is considered just a part of the practice. During the present fieldwork, it was observed that such fighting is rarely taking place in recent times. Rather only a mock heated exchange of words happens. The girl's side asks their daughter if she wants to stay with the boy or wants to leave. During such situations, the boy's side remains submissive. General perception is that it is the responsibility of the boy to attract the girl towards him and to make her fall in love with him. If it does not happen and the girl is not happy with the boy, she is free to leave with her parents. Then a normal arranged marriage is done — the girl with some other boy. In no case the girl can be kept forcefully. But in such situations, where the girl shows hesitation to stay with the capturing boy, the boy's side along with few of the council members of their village council goes to the girl's village. They meet the parents of the girl as well as the elderly persons from village council. Further, a grand *handia* (cultural liquor) party is arranged for the girl's family and her village people by the boy's side. Gifts are also presented to the girl as well as her family. If all the people are convinced, the girl is requested to move to the boy's house. But it is noteworthy that in spite of all these arrangements, if the girl disagrees to leave for the boy's house then her wish is respected. But such situations rarely arise.

### **Pre- and Extra-marital relationship**

The Bhuyan society does not have any rigid restriction about love relationships. Though it is rare but sometimes, Bhuyan boys and girls develop pre-marital relationship due to which the girl may become pregnant or even unmarried mother. In such situation the village council is called for. The father of the child is identified and asked to marry the girl. This gives a happy ending to the love story.

But if due to any cause the father of the child could not be identified then the girl is left to give birth to the child. Then she is married to a suitable widower who will take care of the mother as well as her child. Bhuyans never go for abortion. They explain it in the way that every life is a god's gift and so it has every right to come to the world. If anyone has committed any sin, god

will punish him/her. Similarly they do not use condom or contraceptives. It has many causes, as perceived by them, like unnecessary, lack of knowledge, cost to pay.

Infidelity or extra-marital relations are very rare in *Pauri* society. But virginity is not necessarily considered a virtue in *Pauri* society. Or in the other way, infidelity is not a sin for them. But extra-marital relation in out caste is a taboo. If a woman or a man goes for such a relation then her husband or his wife is excommunicated. But if the relationship is within the tribe, the husband and the wife have to stay together.

Extra-marital relationship happens mostly among the men and women who were in love previously but could not get married. They get involved in intimate activities secretly while going to forest or agricultural field. But such cases are very rare. When such a relationship comes to the knowledge of the husband of the woman, there happens a quarrel between the couple. If it is not solved at personal level it comes to the village council. Mishra in 1960 observed that to avoid domestic violence, village council listens to the complaint. The council calls for the other man/woman involved in the secret affair, considered as the accused. The council tries to convince the individuals by saying—'it happens with humans in flesh and blood. It was our responsibility to unite you both, at which we failed. As you are already married and have own families you need to stay faithful to your spouses. So stop such activities for the sake of your familiar peace' (Mishra 1960).

But there is no strict sanction for the individuals involved. It was learnt that social prestige of an individual keeps utmost importance for a Pauri Bhuyan for which he or she carries a high moral within. So the fear of getting identified with immoral activity and being warned for such act in front of the whole village adequately influences an individual not to do it further. On the other hand, once got married, the man and the woman having love affairs prior to marriage generally do not take chances to further such acts. Again both the girl and the boy give each other enough chances to materialize the relation through marriage. If it could not happen, they break up the relationship with the consent of the both.

In recent days young girls working with different private companies are getting involved in sex with the outsiders sometimes.

### **Patterns of marriage**

Marriage is considered as a union between a man and a woman. The Pauri youth considers marriage as the most eventual occasion of the life while it is an event for celebrating social prestige for the parents and closely associated kin. There has been a custom of bride price among Pauri Bhuyans. Though the demand for dowry can be observed as a rising event among educated youth in recent time, it is considered as a moral devaluation by most

of the villagers. With respect to discussion with people from various age strata, it was observed that the tribe's culture is moving towards a transition with respect to marriage practices, i.e. from the practice of bride price to dowry. As Dharmu Dehuri, a senior member of a village council says- 'the idea of initiation of search for a match is always from boy's side is embedded with the social messages like, promoting the importance of women in society, encouraging the respect for women and their freedom and ultimately avoiding dowry. Such custom has been developed by the Pauri ancestors to maintain social harmony which is most important in a subsistent type of economy. Because the role of a woman is invaluablely important in the life of a man than the bride price paid for it. The recent trend is the influence of economic and social independence among the modern Pauri youth.'

During study it was also observed that there were maidens in families who had crossed the age of marriage. One of the reasons is, as no prospective groom came with a marriage proposal and as per the tradition girl's side never goes for a search, few of these girls remained unmarried. At the same time, the replacement of bride price by dowry is also active in the society though at a limited level. In other sense, it can be said that the tribal society is slowly but consistently moving towards a change in the economic and socio-cultural front.

With respect to pattern, the Pauri Bhuyans differentiate the marriage on the basis of *Bhai* (agnatic) relation and *Bandhu* (non-agnatic) relation. Marriage between *Bhai* (brother) relations is prohibited where as marriage with *Bandhu* (friend) relation is accepted. Similarly marriage in between same *khili* (extended lineage) is prohibited. Furthermore, though it is considered that *Pauris* have no clan organization, they identify their common ancestral history in a particular way. For example, if a Pauri Bhuyan carries a *khili* name *Jharnia* (from streams), then it means that the forefathers of all such people with *Jharnia Khili* belong to a common ancestral village named *Jharni* (English meaning streams). In the process the villagers might have migrated to different places but marriages between *Jharnias* is always avoided. As a common practice, people of common forefathers carry common surnames. So marriage of individuals with same surnames like *Swain* and *Swain*, *Pradhan* and *Pradhan*, *Dehuri* and *Dehuri* is also prohibited. Restriction of marriage with other particular tribes or people is also to be respected. No form of cross-cousin marriage, sorroratic marriage or marriage in exchange practice was observed among the community in studied villages.

Young girls of marriageable age maintain a relatively restricted interaction with grown up boys of the village in every day public life.

### **Joking relationship**

In Pauri Bhuyan society the male members crack jokes with implicit meanings with the young married as well as unmarried girls who fall in the

relation of granddaughter or sister-in-law to which the girls also respond lightly with smile. But elderly female play fewer jokes with the young boys of similar relations.

The adult young boys, in leisure, sit together and discuss about love and sexual life many a times. Sometimes, they are also accompanied by few middle aged men with whom they have a joking relationship. During this time, they discuss the common women features. But very rarely do they personalize any known women. They also play quiz with an answer in relation to love or sexual act or sex organs of both male and female. Sometimes very young boys are parts of the group. In such situation they are made the main respondents for most of the questions. As they could not answer and sometimes answer wrongly, it becomes a matter of joke. No such data could be collected with relation to young female as they commonly avoid. But on other sources it was revealed that they also do like that.

### **Conclusion**

In Pauri Bhuyan society, it was observed that women carry extensive social respect and individual freedom. Bhuyan tribal society as a whole and Pauris in particular have similarities with caste based Hindu marriage system. Again there are other types of Bhuyans like *Rajkuli* and *Magadha* who more seem to be like Hindu caste groups. It is noteworthy that though acculturation and external influences have brought changes in various ritual practices at society and cultural level during different historic times, the tribe still holds many of its indigenous characteristics. It is due to the tribe's long term interaction at the level of inter and personal, within tribe and in between, human and non-human environments.

In recent age, the educated and employed tribal youth mass has started demanding dowry. Though such practice cannot be accepted as a regular one but in general sense, the tribesmen feel that such trend spreads a disturbing message in the community. The society is more guided by customary values and morals than systematic laws. The very structure of the society gives space to accommodate the evens and odds in maximum possible ways.

The Pauri society can be defined as semi-patriarchal. Women after attaining middle age (about 30-35 yrs.) get involved in different societal activities in public equally with men. It is also interesting that most of the heads of households, while making major decisions, either consult their mothers and wives or act as per their guidance. The strong conjugal relationship and closely associated family system is the strength of Pauri Bhuyans. The council of elders acts as the guiding force.

While asked that if love marriage (which is considered amoral or even a taboo among many parts of India) is a right or wrong practice, all the respondents explain it as a divine blessing to get married after falling in love.

There is no particular season of marriage in this community (with respect to arranged marriage). If a family has a boy and a girl at marriageable age and wants to go for arranged marriage then it goes for the ritual as per the agricultural yield of the year. If there is a proper and sufficient harvest for that year, then they go for the boy's marriage. During drought season, the family prefers to give their girl married, if they have a girl.

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