

ISSN : 2395-4132

THE EXPRESSION

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

Bimonthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal



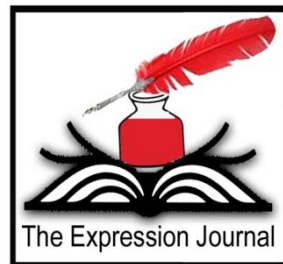
Impact Factor 6.4

Vol. 9 Issue 3 June 2023

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

Email : editor@expressionjournal.com

www.expressionjournal.com



EXPLORING THE EVOLUTION OF MARRIAGE AND ITS REPRESENTATION IN BENGAL'S FOLK ATHLETICS AND FESTIVALS: TRACING HISTORICAL STAGES, RITUALS, AND SYMBOLISM

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Abstract

This study explores the sociological and psychological aspects of marital behaviour in the North Bengal area, focusing on the influence of traditional games and sports on developing marriage traditions. It examines the historical development of marital unions, focusing on consanguinity marriage and the punaluya marriage system. Consanguineous marriage involves marrying individuals closely related by blood. In contrast, punaluya marriage considers all females within an unspecified human clan as wives, fostering a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood among its members. The Dol or Holi festival, an ancient religious observance, has significant historical origins and includes ritualistic dance performances, human sacrifice, and elements of sexuality. The festival has transformed, with a shift towards human sacrifice and the establishment of a domestic yuga. The discourse also includes the shift from consanguineous and punaluyan marriages to the paired marriage system, focusing on the intricacies and dynamics inherent in the latter. Traditional folk games, like the Cobatti game, manifest the intricate dynamics of paired marriage, where individuals come together to form couples and participate in ceremonial activities. The study examines the historical and cultural dimensions of marriage, the progression of marital traditions, and the impact of traditional games and sports on the understanding and manifestation of marital behaviour in the North Bengal area.

Keywords

Traditional Games, Folk Athletics, Marriage System, Sexuality, Ritualistic Practice.

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The institution of marriage possesses are lengthy and culturally significant chronicle, characterised by its progression from early stages in primitive societies to its contemporary manifestation in modern society. The North Bengal region has exerted a notable influence on the evolution of marriage customs through the practice of traditional folk athletics. This research examines the sociological and psychological analysis of marital conduct, specifically focusing on the role of traditional games and sports.

In ancient societies, engaging in sexual intercourse was considered a necessary obligation before establishing familial units. Morgan asserts that the contemporary institution of conjugality has evolved from a historical progression of diverse forms of marital unions originating from a context of open sexual relationships. Morgan's classification encompassed three distinct stages: the primitive wild stage, the Barbarous stage, and the civil stage. The practice of consanguinity marriage originated during the lower wild stage, whereas the institution of Punaluya marriage emerged during the upper stage. The Punaluya marriage system attained its lowest stage during the Barbarous Age, whereas paired marriage persisted until the later stages of the Barbaric Era. (Engels & Marx 226)

Examining the nature and attributes of marriage becomes a subject of scholarly discourse subsequent to identifying the social and historical phases that have shaped the development of the institution of marriage. During the advanced phases of unrestricted sexual activity, individuals in the lower sub-stage of the primitive phase adopted the practice of consanguinity marriage, thereby discontinuing the sexual union between offspring and their respective parents. In society, there were an acceptance of sexual relations occurring among both paternal and maternal relatives. Over time, however, the occurrence of sexual relationships between siblings has gradually diminished. (Morgan 447)

The subsequent phase of marriage based on blood ties or consanguinity is observed within the Panaluya marriage system, wherein all females belonging to an unidentified human

clan are regarded as wives to all males are born into the clan. This implies that a collective of individuals who identify as men can share a sense of fraternity with both their male counterparts and the female members of an unfamiliar human community. Additionally, they can establish a sense of sorority with their female counterparts, assuming the role of husbands in a conventional manner. The male members of the husband group are referred to as 'Panaluya' a term denoting endearment and camaraderie. Similarly, the female members of the wife's group are also known as 'punaluya' signifying a cherished partnership. (Engels 447)

The punaluya marriage system was established during the advanced phase of the primitive era and the early phase of the Barbarous state. This led to the gradual emergence of the paired marriage system. The practice of paired marriage is distinct from the marital system, as it permits a male individual to cohabit with a female partner for a specific duration. The nature of this relationship is characterised by its excellence and lack of permanence and rigidity, in contrast to the monogamous arrangement. The duration of a romantic relationship is contingent upon the mutual attraction and fulfilment of sexual desires between individuals of both genders. (Engels 222-223)

Nevertheless, the amorphous concept of marriage persists within various social customs, behaviours, and traditional pastimes. The renowned Dol or Holi festival, observed during the month of Fulgun in India, is widely recognised as a religious celebration with deep historical roots. The festival is presently observed in the form of a sporting event, wherein participants engage in the activities of Holi and swing. (Roy, 619)

The festival of Holi, currently observed as a religious celebration, originated from the social customs of early human societies. Originally, it encompassed the practices of human sacrifice and ritualistic dance performances with sexual undertones. Over time, it evolved to primarily involve human sacrifice and the establishment of a domestic yuga. The correlation between Holi and other festivals such as Radha-Krishna Jhulan, spring festival, Madan festival, and Kam festival needs more clarity; however, scholars recognise a connection between the Kam festival and Holi. The Swing Festival, a culturally significant occasion in ancient India, is commemorated by adorning the Shal Grumrupi Sabita instrument with the colour red. As mentioned above, cultural practice has undergone a gradual transformation throughout its history, culminating in the widespread recognition and prominence of the Kam festival during the sixteenth century. Scholars such as Oester and Dalton Saheb have recognised the prevalence of unrestricted sexual activity within primitive communities, including groups such as Santhal, Hoe, and Kota. The Hindu community commemorates this festival, known as the Dol festival or Blood playing, which serves as a reminder of the historical practises of uninhibited sexual behaviour in early societies. (Roy Bidyanidhi, 123)

According to Jagesh Chandra Roy, the manifestation of the sacred red hue emanating from the water gun can be attributed to its symbolic representation of Sabita's Diamond Ray. Niharanjan further notes that subsequent to placing Radha Krishna in the swing, participants engage in the act of showering them with a combination of flowers, kum kum, and Abir mixed water. Additionally, individuals partake in the practise of exchanging flower projectiles amongst themselves. The incorporation of water gun play within the celebration of Holi is a notable aspect to consider. The scientific explanation for the red colour emitted during Holi does not require any mythological interpretation, particularly when considering Holi as a commemoration of unrestricted sexual relationships. The colour red is commonly associated with menstruation across various cultural contexts, highlighting its significance in the realm of fertility. (Roy Niharranjan 618-19)

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 6.4)

www.expressionjournal.com ISSN: 2395-4132

The act of throwing blood during the Holi festival holds significant significance, as the predominant colours used, namely red and green, symbolise both blood and verdant foliage. Psychologists regard these colours as intuitive and sexual stimuli, respectively. The act of colouring has been regarded as a manifestation of intimate and sexual expression. Holi is a festival that has cultural roots in the celebration of sexuality, as well as the Madan festival, and religious beliefs surrounding fertility. There is no reason to question this association.

The water gun releases pigments resembling male sperm, which serves as a metaphor for the combination of colours. Holi is associated with historical accounts of uninhibited sexual relationships during the primitive era, which subsequently evolved into a ritualistic practise known as fertility magic. The utilisation of restrained sexuality as a means of facilitating fertilisation is purported to involve the simultaneous application of colour and water guns. (Engels 227)

The depiction of uninhibited sexual behaviour in the Holi game retains a somewhat indistinct presence, even after a considerable duration, reminiscent of the primitive societies of prehistoric eras. Subsequent endeavours were undertaken to conceal the customary observance, yet the essence of Holi had not been entirely eradicated. The prohibition of consanguineous marriages involving parents and children, as well as the prohibition of sexual relationships between siblings, whether they are closely or distantly related, represents a further stage in the evolution of unrestricted sexual partnerships. The prevalence of sexual behaviour has diminished compared to previous times, and while depictions of consanguineous unions and the punaluya marriage system persist in various social and behavioural customs, they are not explicitly observed in traditional folk games. The speculation and logical reasoning regarding the impact of wedding rituals on certain sports has not been adequately acknowledged or documented over the course of thousands of years. (Daltan 205)

Following the punaluya marriage ceremony, the emergence of paired marriage systems was observed. Previously, a male and a female cohabitated briefly. However, the female is presently wedded and entangled with a different male, resulting in a situation of heightened emotions that may idealize the child. The practise of the tied-up wedding can be observed in the folk games of North Bengal, wherein a collective of boys and girls participate in a ritualistic activity. This activity involves the formation of couples, wherein one individual assumes the role of a thief. These couples are physically connected through the act of holding hands. In the event that the individual with the ability to make physical contact with others engages in theft, they will assume the role of a thief, while the former thief will persist in participating alongside them. The paired marriage system is distinguished by its inherent stability and the capacity to dissolve marital unions between individuals of both genders. This phenomenon is observable in the Cobatti game, wherein the role of the thief is that of a partner who is unable to establish a sexual relationship with the female character due to her presence. This study examines the sociological and psychological aspects of marital behaviour in the North Bengal region, focusing on the influence of traditional games and sports on marriage traditions. It examines the historical evolution of marital unions, specifically consanguinity marriage and the punaluya marriage system. Consanguinity marriage involves marrying individuals closely related by blood, while the punaluya marriage system considers all females within an unidentified human clan as wives, fostering a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood among members. The study also investigates the Dol or Holi festival, a religious celebration with deep historical roots and now incorporating sporting activities. The festival originated from early human societies and evolved into a primarily human sacrifice and domestic yuga. (Crawley 363)

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The Swing Festival, a culturally significant occasion in ancient India, involves adorning the Shal Grumrupi Sabita instrument with red. The Dol festival, also known as Blood Play, serves as a reminder of uninhibited sexual behaviour in early societies. The incorporation of water gun play and throwing coloured powders during Holi carry symbolic significance, symbolizing blood and verdant foliage. Holi has cultural roots in celebrating sexuality, fertility, and religious beliefs surrounding fertility. The impact of wedding rituals on certain sports has not been adequately acknowledged or documented. (Roy Niharranjan 619)

The emergence of paired marriage systems, such as the Cobatti game, reflects the dynamics of paired marriage, including themes of fidelity and loyalty. Overall, this research sheds light on the historical and cultural aspects of marriage, the progression of marital traditions, and the role of traditional games and sports in shaping marital behaviour in the North Bengal region's existing commitment to another individual. In the context of the punaluya marriage tradition, individuals who are distantly related through siblings are deemed ineligible for engaging in sexual relationships. Consequently, men within this cultural framework consistently exhibit a strong desire to seek out suitable sexual partners. In the contemporary folk game, the role of the thief is assumed by the male participant who successfully locates a female participant.

The historical period characterised by paired marriage exhibited variations, particularly with regard to the dynamics of power between genders. Notably, there emerged a shift in which males began to assert dominance during a specific time frame. In the context of cohabitation, males were permitted to engage in additional sexual relationships with other females, while females were expected to demonstrate loyalty. In the event of a scarcity of loyalty, married women were subjected to severe societal retribution. The play's portrayal of social punishment may find parallels in the game, potentially stemming from perceived disloyalty among female characters. (Sengupta 120)

The assessment of this traditional game's criteria becomes evident in light of the escalating intricacy of societal structures, which has posed challenges for both children and adults in devising sports activities that encompass a wide range of complexities. The practice of the paired marriage system is not only exemplified by a solitary instance, but is also observed across diverse human clans. The contemporary marriage system remains prevalent within the Muslim community, encompassing distinct features such as temporary marriages for predetermined duration's, female ownership, and the absence of inheritance rights for offspring resulting from such unions.

Following the dissolution of the marital union, the wife is not granted spousal support from her former husband in the context of this particular matrimonial arrangement. Nevertheless, once the designated time limit is surpassed, the union is dissolved. Notwithstanding this, the wife takes note of the practice known as 'Hadatt' which entails waiting for the duration between the divorce and subsequent marriage. This depiction encompasses not only the dynamics of a marital relationship between a husband and wife but also highlights the prevalence of male dominance within the context of paired marriage systems, as well as the societal demand for females. (Sengupta 136-37)

The concept of the paired marriage system bears a resemblance to the practice of paired marriage observed in primitive societies, wherein the male individual assumes the role of the initiator by seeking a female companion. The institution of paired marriage serves as a poignant testament to the intricate nature of human existence and underscores the fundamental significance of upholding steadfastness and confidence within interpersonal

bonds. The folk game known as '*jor chhara chhari*' serves as a prominent illustration of the diverse marriage systems prevalent in India, which are structured according to the hierarchy of social advancement. The primary three phases of the social history of marriage are referenced, yet it is noteworthy to acknowledge that the custom of abduction marriage persists within a folk culture. The cultural phenomenon of marriage through female abduction is considered archaic and is prevalent across diverse human societies. The Coli clan, a cultural group that partakes in the practice of theft as a ceremonial element within their matrimonial rituals, encounters a hostile incursion amidst the course of this customary event. Kuku, a friend of the Coli clan, attempts to instigate a conflict by intervening when the groom places his hand over the bride's hand. (Morgan 365)

The interactive entertainment software Bouchi is a widely recognised game that enjoys popularity in several districts of Bengal, with a particular emphasis on the region of North Bengal. The activity encompasses a judicial setting, a circular playing area, and two competing groups. In this scenario, individuals belonging to different factions assume the role of guardians for all females, including wives. Should a wife come into physical contact with a guardian, she undergoes a transformation, being referred to as '*mor*' or '*mora*'. The game presents a significant level of difficulty due to the guards' consistent communication with the wife, resulting in the defeat of the wife's faction. If a wife is able to successfully evade the guards through cunning means, it will result in the declaration of victory from the wife's perspective.

The genesis of the game can be traced back to the ritualistic practice of bride abduction, which was prevalent during primitive times. Subsequent to the abduction, a confrontation between the bridal party and the groom party was devised, leading to the development of the game. The particular setting has endured for a significant duration, exhibiting a strong appeal to individuals in their childhood and adolescent stages of development. The deduction of the game's portion that remains constant is contingent upon the cognitive processes of the child. Upon careful examination of the game, it becomes evident that the groom's faction assumes the role of safeguarding the bride, whereas the bride's faction engages in a struggle to reclaim their daughter. (Engels 224-25)

The folk game '*jor chhara chhari*' serves as an intriguing illustration of the diverse marriage systems and their influence on societal advancement. The game's distinctive attributes and the intricacy of the rituals associated with it contribute to its widespread appeal among children and adolescents as a means of acquiring knowledge about diverse marriage systems and their corresponding rituals. The historical institution of marriage has exerted a profound influence on the progression of human civilisation, particularly through the occurrence of bride abduction and its associated dynamics. The aforementioned custom was formerly regarded as a cultural tradition bestowed upon recently wedded women in regions such as central and West Africa, as well as Polynesia. In contemporary society, the close bond between the bride and her brother-in-law is widely regarded as the final phase of this particular tradition. (Sur 121)

The historical contexts in which groomsmen initially held sexual entitlements towards the bride were firmly established. Nevertheless, these privileges experienced substantial limitations, resulting in a situation where solely a clergyman would partake in the consummation of the marital union during the initial evening subsequent to the nuptial ceremony. Wherein the priest was granted the privilege of engaging in sexual relations with the bride on the first night. This specific variant is frequently denoted as '*Guruprasadi*'.

In present-day society, the first evening is observed as Kalratri, which is associated with the mythological tale of Behula Lakshinder and the iron community. In the course of the evening, the husband and wife abstain from cohabitation as a result of the priest's exercise of sexual authority over the bride. Even during the period of their honeymoon, the groom persists in shouldering the emotional weight associated with the abduction of his daughter. As a result, he makes the decision to forcibly take his daughter and secrete her in an isolated setting, distant from their accustomed social milieu. (Hutchinson 12-15).

The pervasiveness of the marriage system in India is apparent through the widespread occurrence of abduction marriages within society and their manifestation in non-traditional wedding customs. If it can be proven that the Indian population was aware of this custom of marriage, it is not surprising to witness a similar occurrence being repeated in reaction, as the sexual element is kept hidden from the child's perspective.

An instance illustrating this phenomenon can be observed in Chira, where Vasanti Kira, the wife, selectively replicates solely the segment of the conflict that transpired in the child's presence, thereby eliciting a sense of exhilaration within him. The Bau Vasanthi game entails the engagement of two opposing factions in combat against each other. The majority of the rhymes primarily involve participants expressing their resilience through the verses or engaging in playful ridicule of their adversaries. (Montagu 120)

The Wife Basanti game is a customary game that is associated with matrimonial customs and delves into the profound connection between offspring and the institution of marriage. The game in question exhibits a diverse range of rhymes, incorporating frequent allusions to the art of puppetry within its verses. While certain rhymes may provoke disapproval among individuals who adhere to sophisticated social norms, they are generally more widely accepted and valued. (Engels 225)

Within the Brahmo society, a notable dichotomy arises between the concept of a regulated society and a recreational activity centred around the illicit acquisition of goods. Participation in behaviours that are considered indecent is commonly regarded as a customary and unremarkable practice. In this discourse, the primary focus will be directed towards a specific rhyme that originates from the Comilla district. It is important to approach the discussion of rhymes from other districts within sophisticated social circles with careful consideration and restraint. The play 'Bau Basanti' has experienced a disconnection from its initial socio-cultural milieu, leading to a diminished representation of the central motif of daughter abduction. Furthermore, the mechanical recitation of rhymes merely functions as a mere illustration of the play's swift advancement, resulting in the incorporation of numerous superfluous words that are incompatible with the present era. Differentiating between the individual games of Hadudu and his spouse Vasanti can frequently present a difficulty, as the amalgamation of the two can result in repetitiveness. (Siddiqui 281)

This study examines the sociological and psychological aspects of marital behaviour in the North Bengal region, focusing on the influence of traditional games and sports on marriage traditions. It examines the historical evolution of marital unions, specifically consanguinity marriage and the punaluya marriage system. Consanguinity marriage involves marrying individuals closely related by blood, while the punaluya marriage system considers all females within an unidentified human clan as wives, fostering a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood among members. The study also investigates the Dol or Holi festival, a religious celebration with deep historical roots and now incorporating sporting activities. The festival originated

from early human societies and evolved into a primarily human sacrifice and domestic yuga. (Sur 94-95)

The Swing Festival, a culturally significant occasion in ancient India, involves adorning the Shal Grumrupi Sabita instrument with red. The Dol festival, also known as Blood Play, serves as a reminder of uninhibited sexual behaviour in early societies. The incorporation of water gun play and throwing coloured powders during Holi carry symbolic significance, symbolization of blood and verdant foliage. Holi has cultural roots in celebrating sexuality, fertility, and religious beliefs surrounding fertility. The impact of wedding rituals on certain sports has not been adequately acknowledged or documented.

The emergence of paired marriage systems, such as the Cobatti game, reflects the dynamics of paired marriage, including themes of fidelity and loyalty. Overall, this research sheds light on the historical and cultural aspects of marriage, the progression of marital traditions, and the role of traditional games and sports in shaping marital behaviour in the Bengal region.

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