

CHANGING MARRIAGE PRACTICES

A STUDY OF MARRIAGE PATTERN AMONGST THE
JAIWARS

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AIM:

Aim of the study is to understand marriage pattern amongst the **JAIWAR** sub caste of Kurmi caste of village Chandpara (Bahraich district,U.P.).

OBJECTIVE:

1. To study different forms of marriage practices of Jaiswar sub- caste in Bahraich district of Uttar Pradesh.
2. To find out the relation between economic status of a family and their changing marriage practices within Jaiswars.
3. To examine the extent of absorption of brides from other castes within Jaiswars.

METHODOLOGY:

The purpose of the research is to find out answers to questions mentioned above. Qualitative **research** was conducted with the aim of gaining an understanding of the underlying facts through first hand interaction and experience. The kind of methodology adopted is determined by the nature of study and its requirements. In the current study we sought to learn as much as possible about the marriage pattern observed amongst the JAIWAR community. We tried achieving our aim through participant observation for the 15 days we were in the region and also by conducting **unstructured personal interviews** with the subjects along with a **questionnaire** addressing the basic information about the respondents. Another major methodology used during the entire procedure was **observation**.

SAMPLE:

The present study was conducted on a sample of 15 married women from the Jaiswar community of Chandpara village. The village lies in the Bahraich district which is one of the many districts bordering Nepal in Uttar Pradesh. We tried to cover almost every Jaiswar family of the village with varied socio-economic status. Besides the major sample, unstructured interviews and conversation with other family members of these brides (the sample) and the villagers also form a major part of the study and findings.

INTRODUCTION

Lately, the Census data has suggested continuous and alarming disparities in the sex ratio of the nation, especially in the northern states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Punjab. Such trends suggest different facts about the society and along with it come varied impacts that it lays on the functionality of prevailing customs and practices in the society. Many studies have been conducted to understand the reason for such pattern in sex ratio but it was not until recently that the researchers focused on the impact of the low sex ratio on the society. Marriage practices remains to be one area which seems to have been adversely affected, resulting in changing trends and patterns of marriage. It has been observed that there is occurrence of radical shifts in the ways a family gets a bride for their son. According to 2011 census, the sex ratio of U.P. was 912 females per thousand males; this leaves about 88 males out of 1000 without a bride within their state. Initially, the brides were brought from the adjoining states, strictly adhering to endogamy and following customs. But recently it has been observed that due to lack of eligible brides the highly rigid marriage customs have become relatively fluid and have started accommodating various shifts and changes such as neglecting the factors of region, religion, language and even caste. One major shift being, as Ravinder Kaur puts it, the ***across-region marriages***. “The need of women, for productive and reproductive purposes is now being addressed by getting a bride from a region with comparatively higher sex ratio and poverty. Marriages are increasingly coming to note in which men from UP, Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan are marrying women from West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu” (Kaur, 2004).

In this particular study, as we will see later, the brides are bought and brought from Bengal region. Marriage is one integral part of our nation, which remains intact and very important in all the communities, region and religion. It is that ritual which is a very important institution in our society. It is the source of dignity for families and a mark of legitimacy for the relationship of a man and a woman. The importance of this particular ritual is evident from the pressure society puts on the families with “eligible” sons/daughters and also the “bad name” that inability to marry off their children brings to the concerned families, especially his/her parents. It remains to be the most essential responsibility and aim of the life of Indian parents and it becomes even more important if you are a daughter’s parents.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE FIELD VISIT

A 15 days field-visit was conducted to a small village of U.P., situated in a district near the India-Nepal border. The village named Chandpara was like any other typical village to be found in the

northern region of the country. “Dihaat” as the village dwellers called their village, had widespread open fields and *Kachha* houses, where most of the population lived without basic facilities like that of an electricity connection, toilets, even a small land holding and minimal wages.

The purpose of the field trip was to get a clearer view of the marriage pattern amongst the Jaiswars. For this, we extensively interviewed around 15 women and their family members as well. We covered almost all the households of Jaiswars of varied economic status within Chandpara. Not getting into details of their living conditions for now, we would directly move on to what we could get about their marriage practices.

During the interviews we were able to talk to women whose marriage experiences helped us to identify 3 types of marriage practices: “a normal marriage” as they call it, one in which the bride’s side gives dowry, this marriage was called “chuttaa”; a marriage where brides were exchanged, such practice was called “badli”; and then there was a third category in which a bride was “bought” from a neighboring state (West Bengal in this case).

The marriage practices basically depended upon the economic status of the family, as will be elaborated later in the report, and one particular practice was not confined to a set of families/family (however, the exception being the buying of bride, which was found within a single family within this sample), but depended upon family’s socio-economic status. There were many instances where both “chutta” and “badli” were observed within the same family. It was first tried to marry off children (at least one) by giving or taking dowry, in a usual manner. But inability to do so leaves the family with no other option but exchange, which is again an open option only if they have a daughter in exchange. This, to an extent, can be considered a reason for large families with an average of 4 children. Daughter, in this particular community is not considered as a curse but a channel of marriage opportunity for male members of the family and hard cash in some case, which shall be elaborated later.

When we decided to go for this particular research topic, we had certain apprehensions and confusions regarding the marriage practices amongst Jaiswars as evident from the open ended and ambiguous title “Brides for...??” that we chose for our study. The void to be filled in the title is the main concern of our report. From the prior knowledge about the community we were not able to identify one particular way a person gets a bride, hence the title. Our main aim by the end of this report would be to provide a clearer picture of marriage pattern amongst the chosen community.

We try to analyze the entire course of interaction and field work under certain sub-headings, trying to address the objectives of the research and also giving a detailed and critical account of the field work conducted.

A HISTORY OF MARRIAGE PATTERNS AMONG THE JAISWARS

Jaiswar is a sub caste within Kurmis, who have inhabited this village since a very long time now. The major difference between other sub castes of Kurmis and the Jaiswars in this particular village is the disparity in the economic status. There is a huge gap between the property holdings of Jaiswars and the other sub castes of the Kurmis in Chandpara. As we went on to inquire about the history of the practice we were presented with a rather uncertain and hazy picture, especially regarding the brides bought from the adjacent states. The practices of “chutta” (dowry marriages) and “badli” (exchange) were prevalent since time immemorable, as Jaiswars claimed it to be the legitimate form of marriage practiced amongst them. Children were married off at a very early age either in exchange or under dowry system. The bride was sent later to her conjugal home at an age considered appropriate (around 15 or 16 years) for “gonaa”, a ritual that marks the official “vidaai” (sending away daughter to her conjugal home) of the daughter.

Buying of bride from adjacent states and that too of a different caste and region is a comparatively a recent development. Within the sample the oldest “across-region” bride was Rani (name changed) who is in the village for around 20 years now. There was another such bride in the village before Rani but she ran away after a few months of marriage. The villagers also told us about a few such brides who lived in the village long back but are no more, and even their families do not live there anymore. This information can be related to what Ravinder Kaur mentions in her essay titled “Across-region marriages”. She writes, “..there have been gaps in the frequency of such marriages. Evidence from Haryana (personal fieldwork) and Blanchet’s study reveals that such marriages peaked about 20 years ago and again in the late 1990s. The renewed frequency of such marriages may be attributed to the continuing importance and necessity of marriage, a further decline in the sex-ratio and the difficulty in poor areas in achieving marriage of daughters locally due to dowry demands.” (ibid, pg-2596). A similar pattern can be derived from the field interviews, where the family which had 4 “Bengali brides” talked about their inability to marry within their caste due to low economic conditions. Another reason that we inferred could be the unavailability of a daughter for exchange, since there were 7 sons and 1 daughter in the family. Amongst which one son (the eldest) got a bride in exchange of his sister, while 4 brought “Bengali brides”, one was married recently in exchange of his niece, while one remains still unmarried.

The impact of increasing population, stark decline of sex-ratio and prevailing poverty on marriages practices particularly has been eminent. As also discussed in the introduction, there have been considerable shifts and alterations within this particular ritual. Buying of brides is becoming the latest and prominently adopted trend of North Indian states, the evidence of this

can also be drawn from the radical shifts in the marriage patterns amongst the Jaiswars in the recent past

BRIDE PRICE AND BUYING BRIDES

There has been continuous mention of buying brides from adjacent states as one form of marriage practice in this particular study until now but before mentioning it any further it is important to draw out the difference between the three prevalent practices of trafficking, “bride-price” and “buying of brides”. All the process involves a payment in cash or kind by the groom’s side as contrary to the popular notion of dowry, but there remains a stark difference in the reason and the way they are practiced. Ravinder Kaur goes on to distinguish between several types of transactions and ‘marriages’ being observed. She writes, *“first, the buying/selling of girls for marriage should be distinguished from sexual trafficking in women. Trafficking is purely for profit in which women is like any other commodity being bought or sold....this is clearly an illegal activity. The second category is of marriage by purchase/sale. What distinguishes this category is that ‘marriage’ is a part of the transaction. Here, men who are unable to find wives and need them for domestic, sexual and reproductive services buy women from poor families. The man pays the girl’s parents to acquire a wife. These marriages are further differentiated from trafficking as the girl/wife is not passed on to others and is not one several ‘wives’ thus acquired. More often than not, she makes a stable home with a particular man, fulfilling the roles of wife, mother and farm labourer. Poor men who are unable to attract marriage proposals buy a ‘wife’ from another poor family which sells a daughter for a monetary consideration. Buying is looked down upon by most rural communities. Discussing what she calls ‘deviant marriages’ in the context of a rajput village in UP, Minturn (1993) reveals that when a man is not sought after for marriage it is usually due to “lack of education, poverty or scandal”. She goes on to say “Paradoxically, poor families who cannot attract wives and dowries for their sons may be forced to “buy” their wives from families too poor to provide dowries for their daughters. The term “buying a wife” is used to describe indirect dowry, the custom whereby the groom’s family gives money to the bride’s family, who use some of it provide dowry and keep some of it. Such marriages are disgraceful for both husband and wife, so purchased wives are often chosen from strange villages in order to minimise the resulting gossip” (p 63). While Minturn’s evidence points to the groom financing his own marriage and the dowry, there is a difference between marriages in which the bride’s family benefits monetarily and those in which no monetary benefit accrues to the parents – the case in across-region marriages. Further, marriages described by Minturn are between rich and poor families or between poor families of the ‘same’ community. The distinctive feature of across region marriages is that not only are the brides from ‘strange villages’, but also from ‘strange regions’ with a different language and culture. A third type of marriage exchange prevalent and accepted in India and elsewhere is the system of bride price where the bride’s family is compensated for the loss of her labour. Women as farm labourers are essential to most agrarian economies. Where their role in agriculture or their labour/income contribution to the household is ‘visible’ and acknowledged’, bride price is often the practice. Under this system, the family losing a productive worker gets compensated in cash or kind. A man may pay a certain sum of money to the bride’s parents at the time of marriage or pledge his own labour on her parent’s land for a specified*

period of time. Although on the decline, several communities in India have been known to favour bride price. Bride price marriages are not the same as marriages in which the women are 'bought'. Bride price marriage is the accepted practice in an entire community and is not seen as 'buying' the bride. The shortage of women can also potentially lead to a system of fraternal polyandry (sharing of one or more wives by several brothers); although there have been other reasons for its prevalence in areas where it was culturally accepted [Berreman 1975]. Some parts of Punjab and Haryana practised a 'surreptitious' polyandry induced by the low sex ratio and/or by economic considerations of controlling family size to prevent further sub-division of land. Trafficking, buying of brides and bride price marriages are thus analytically distinct phenomena. It is argued that the 'acrossregion' marriages discussed in this article, however, do not fall into any of these categories. The crucial difference is that in none of the cases documented does the bride's family receive any monetary or other compensation from the groom. The couple is united in a 'proper' marriage ceremony either in the bride's or groom's village (usually in the bride's village). Money is spent by the groom on travel to and fro from his village, on a minimal trousseau for the girl and a feast for the villagers after the marriage ceremony – this legitimises the marriage in the eyes of the villagers. It is specifically stated that the girl's parents do not want money in exchange for their daughter. At its end, the receiving family properly incorporate the bride into the family. Her status is not that of a concubine nor is she discarded after a while or passed into prostitution. The women go on to become mothers and even mothers-in-law. They settle down in their marital villages, continue to maintain contacts with their natal families and visits between the families take place even if they are not frequent (Blanchet's evidence of Bangladeshi women married into UP argues that the women are not allowed to maintain contact with their natal families and often choose to remain in Bangladesh when they are finally able to visit, sometimes abandoning their children and the husband – however, the evidence gathered for marriages within India is to the contrary). In several cases, a close relative of the woman, father or brother or sister, visits to assure herself/himself of the woman's wellbeing. Even if conditions are not found to be satisfactory the girl and her parents accept the marriage hoping for a better future. The women adopt the language and culture of the host society and consider themselves a part of that society. The host society accepts them as wives/mothers/mothers-in-law. Although the word used for them in Punjab/Haryana is said to be 'kudesan' (woman from a foreign land), in my research with families of several such women in three villages of Haryana, I did not hear anyone refer to them by this pejorative term. If the point of view of the men is that they have purchased their wives (more so in UP than in Haryana), the viewpoint of parents is not of not having sold their daughters but of having given them away in marriage under difficult conditions. However, this does not exclude the possibility of a category where women are 'bought' with money being transferred to the father, brother or mother. As the Bangladesh cases show, under conditions of extreme poverty and hopelessness parents may delude themselves into believing that they are sending daughters off to a better future than they can provide." (Kaur,2004)

The women in our sample basically belong to the second category where a wife is bought from a neighboring state that is then seen as serving all the purpose and functions of a wife.

DIFFERENT MARRIAGE PRACTICES:

The exclusive feature and the major reason for choosing Jaiswar community as the subject of study were the varied marriage practices performed by them. Finding three different marriage practices within a same community is a rare fact. Jaiswars, however are engaged in this complex pattern of marriage which is assumed to depend upon the economic status of the family majorly, while many other factors influence the choice of marriage practice as well. The open ended interviews, with the women of Jaiswar community especially, helped us to understand the three prevailing marriage practices. (Our interview schedule was focused on women's perspective as we sought to understand their perspective and role in the marriages they lived in and also their experience of being participants of such a complex marriage system). The three marriage practices can be described as below:

1. DOWRY SYSTEM:

This is the most common and prevalent form of marriage practiced across the country. Under this system of marriage, bride's family is expected to offer great amount of dowry ('gifts') to the groom's side. These gifts may include cash and kind both and is a prominently practiced ritual of Indian marriages. Initially these gifts comprised of a set of basic amenities given to bride and groom by bride's family, which served as blessings to begin a new life. These basic gifts included for example clothes and house hold amenities. But with the time these gifts have turned out to be more expensive and necessary 'gifts' from the bride's side, which have ultimately grown into a burden for a girl's parents and thereby also serves as a reason for increased practice of female feticide and hence a declining sex-ratio.

Such marriages in this particular community are called "chutta" and are practiced by the relatively economically better off families. Marrying off ones daughter by this practice is considered to be a deed of dignity and pride for the family, as was evident by the way women talked about it and during the interviews, especially when they were asked how they were married we received a proud and common response – " bahini humara to 'chutta' hua tha" (we were married as per dowry system) or " nahi nahi humare sare bachho ka to 'chutta' hua h" (all of our children got married according to dowry system). Out of the sample of 15 women, 6 women were married as per this practice. These families held a better economic status as compared to others; the male of these families had relatively better jobs and held more land.

2. EXCHANGE:

The second and the most prevalent form of marriage was "exchange" or "badli", as they called it. Within this particular practice a daughter was given in exchange of bride within the community. However, the exchange was not restricted to daughters; it could also be

made in terms of cash in exchange of a bride. Before explaining further it is important to examine different practices within this system. Basically there are two sets of exchange—

- A daughter in exchange of a bride.
- Cash in exchange of a bride.

This practice is determined on the basis of availability of a daughter or a female relative for exchange. The exchange of a daughter for the bride of their son was much prevalent; however there was also an example where a niece was exchanged for her uncle's bride. This particular marriage took place only recently and age of the girl was around 13 years. Another form of exchange was an option for those families which did not have a girl to be offered in exchange. Within this type of exchange the groom's family paid a sum of money in exchange of bride. One might wonder that if the groom's family was economically well enough to buy a bride then why wouldn't they practice dowry system. There could be several reason for this, such as inability to attract wives and dowries for their son, problem with man such as drunkenness, unreliable providence or an over age man or a man going for second marriage. Here the groom's family although pay a sum for bride but are considered successful in getting a bride from the same community. On the other hand bride's family who takes money in exchange of their daughter are looked down upon by others in the community as is evident from the statement of a 14 year old girl when asked about her opinion on taking money in exchange of daughter. Soni (name changed) responds to this question quickly saying, "hum ladki nahi bechat hai" (we don't sell our girls). Apart from these two forms of exchange there are two in which this system works:

- Exchange within two families: $A \leftrightarrow B$
Daughter of family A is exchanged for daughter of family B. This is called "badli"
- Exchange within 3 families: $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow A$
Daughter of family A is given to B whose daughter is given to family C who in exchange gives their daughter to A. Such exchange is called "badla tirpata"

3. **BUYING BRIDES:**

Borrowing the term from Ravinder Kaur the "across-region marriage" constitute the third type of marriage practice amongst Jaiswars. It is considered to be practiced by the families who are economically very weak and are thereby unable to attract or buy a bride for themselves from the same community. These families end up buying a bride from the adjacent state for a small sum of money taken by the 'dalaal' who conducts the entire deal of marriage. There was one 'dalaal' who arranged the four "across-region marriages" of Chandpara village. In such marriages, as also described earlier the groom brings a bride who belongs to another state, caste and culture. The bride belongs to

relatively poorer context and is readily given away by her family in exchange of a marriage feast and ceremony by the groom which legitimates the marriage in eyes of the society. The interviews conducted also described a similar series of events where a groom along with 3 or 4 other male members went and married the girl who was then brought to the village. The 'dalaal' takes his own fees for arranging the marriage, as told by the interviewees the amount for marriage was around rs 9000 to 12000 during their ceremony. The entire process was based on the lies and false promises mediated by the dalaal which are readily accepted by the bride's family who don't even bother to investigate and send away their daughters to an unknown location to hardly see her again. These lies included promises of better lives, big houses, better family incomes and land. The dalaal, although we failed to meet him, is said to have his daughter married in Darjeeling, who serves as the source of brides from there.

There were much chances of such brides to run away once they reached their conjugal homes and came across the reality. Hence they are prevented from moving out of the houses and remain under constant observation of their in-laws, especially during the starting few years of marriage. There were many such cases of running away which we were told about during the interviews. These "across-region brides" experience major shifts of culture, language, region and customs and continuously rigor to accommodate themselves in the new environment.

Marriage patterns: a comparative representation

The complex marriage pattern adopted by the Jaiswars is yet another example of a society with heterogeneous and entangled strands of rituals and practices which derive their existence from yet more complex arrangements and hierarchies of our society. A comparative analysis of the three above mentioned marriage practices may help in drawing out a less complex inference or at least an impression depicting the pattern in a better understandable form:

- There is a clear hierarchy in adopting the marriage practice by the families as per their economic status. We tried to analyze the economic status of the families based on the land and property families owned and the occupations the earning members of the family are engaged in. Based on this analysis we were able to derive the preference of practices as entailed by families belonging to one particular economic status.

Families belonging to higher economic status	Dowry system
Families belonging to middle economic status	Dowry system/exchange
Families belonging to lower economic status	Exchange/buying brides

- Families of middle economic status struggled and tried their best to marry off their children as per “chutta”. As Rama (Soni’s mother) elaborates upon the expenditure involved in “chutta” and “badli”, she goes on to tell us that although “badli” is considered to be a comparatively less expensive affair, it does not excuse one from the big expenses. The basic things such as clothes, jewellery, cash, and a feast are to be given. Total expense in a “chutta” may be as much as 2 to 3 lakhs and about 80,000 to 1 lakh is required in “badli”. While buying a bride may cost around rs 15,000 to 20,000 in today’s time.

This huge gap in the expenses clearly states the reason for preferable practices by the families belonging to different economic status. Also to be catered is the fact that these families have a comparatively larger number of children, which further influences their choice.

MOBILITY FROM ONE PRACTICE TO ANOTHER:

Everybody strives to attain higher goals in every aspect of life. It was no different in this case as well. Families belonging to lower economic strata tried hard to fit in a practice higher in hierarchy. The movement from practicing “badli” to “chutta” was a feature of a few families such as that of Soni, where inspite of the availability of a daughter for exchange, the family believed in marrying their children only as per “chutta”.

Similarly visible was the movement from “buying brides” to “badli” in Rani’s family, whose daughter was recently married in “badli”. Although, this movement can be attributed to the fact that now there was a girl available for exchange in the family, unlike the time when there was just one daughter available for exchange amongst 7 brothers. This movement can also be seen as a development and struggle for social name and dignity.

“BENGALI BRIDES”: THEIR SITUATION AND ACCEPTANCE

One of the main objectives of the field work was to study the third process of marriage practiced by the Jaiswars i.e. *buying brides*, specifically. Ravinder Kaur uses the term “Bengali brides” to describe brides from Bengal who were married off to various states of Northern India including UP, Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan. The term also, to an extent, stands relevant in explaining the phenomenon of buying brides observed during the field work. Although, ours is a very small sample and may fail to present a broader picture of the practice, but adhering to our sample and limitations we have tried to analyze the procedure of buying a bride from another state and also the current status of these brides in their family, community and the village at large.

Within the sample of 15 there were 4 brides bought from Darjeeling and nearby areas. All the women were married in the same family to cousin brothers. Amongst them 2 were bought in recent past only (about 3 to 4 years back). All of them lived in the same compound with separate set of 2 rooms for each. They lived in *kachha* houses, with more or less same structure and an open space outside, which served as a common area. All the four women were Hindus and while one was the native of Darjeeling district, rest three belonged to Dakshin Dinajpur district of West Bengal. Two of the women from Dakshin Dinajpur were relatives. Out of the four Rani and Shanti have been in the village for more than 15 years now and were well acquainted to village customs and practices. They also understood and spoke the native language of Chandpara village (which is Awadhi) well. While the other two women found it hard to converse in this language and also responded occasionally during the interviews.

The older brides, Rani and Shanti had to face comparatively much more issues in accommodating and adjusting in the village as compared to the ones who were bought recently.

If we make a broad statement then the acceptance of these brides by the family member cannot be questioned much, as evident from the interviews, as they were not presented with special hardships which were not experienced by other brides of the community as well. Although, the language and cultural barriers must have increased the degree of difficulty for these brides. As one of the interviewees share her experience:

I knew nothing when I came here; I didn't even know the place I was taken to as we sat in the train. I learned all the household chores after coming here. I did all the work and was kept an eye upon by my mother-in-law and other family members, who always suspected that I would run away. They didn't even let me visit my natal place.

But if seen in comparison to the status of other Jaiswar brides within their families, there was no prominent difference to be highlighted.

Social acceptance of these brides however remains an issue without much clarity. This is because of the ambiguous and varying responses we received during the interviews and

conversations with the villagers. Most of the respondents considered these brides to be of no different from other brides in the community. They saw them as part of Jaiswar community who, however, faced difficulties in adapting their customs initially but later got accustomed. Such were the opinions coming from the women of families who were considered economically well off. They allowed them in their homes, they worked there as full time house helps, and were interacted with no visible prejudice. However, a different side was presented by one other respondent who told us how they avoided going to their houses and have even restricted their children from going or eating at their houses as they were uncertain about the caste or religion they belonged to.

The acceptance of these brides in the community can also be seen in the acceptance their children get. They were well accepted within Jaiswars and faced no differences. This can be said on the basis of the fact that they were married within the Jaiswars without any kind of disparities, recent example being the marriage of Rani's daughter, who was married under "badli" this year in March.

CASE STUDIES

During the period of 15 days field visit we had varied experiences, meeting different people, hearing different voices, different thoughts, different lives, but all tied together under a community with similar practices and rituals. Within these different voices we found few with really striking stories, stories of their lives which left us overwhelmed and shocked at the same time. In this section we put forward those few stories. We picked out 4 case studies; we thought were worth being told exclusively. The reason for picking up these particular cases was to provide insights into the lives of 3 different woman of different socio-economic status, having experienced different type of marriages, one of each mentioned marriage practice.

CASE STUDY 1

Rani was the first woman we interviewed as part of our field research. And truly, she was one with most to share. We learnt a lot from her and thereby somehow she raised our enthusiasm about our field work. Living in a one room kachha house, Rani was one of the most outspoken and bold woman of the village. Welcoming us with a bright smile, she put forward her experience for us clearly. To begin with, Rani is a 35 year old lady with 6 children (3 daughters and 3 sons) from her marriage of 20 years. She was bought and brought to village Chand Para at the age of 16, while she was still a minor like all other brides. Her home comprised of a room and two small open areas, one used as a

kitchen and other as a store house for fodder. Although there was no electricity, but they did have a DVD player, a small T.V. and a radio. The room served more as a store room, where they had kept all their stuff stacked in several briefcases and a *dehri* (big mud container to store wheat and rice).

All the time we talked to her she simultaneously portrayed two different emotions, smiling with a lightening of remorse in her eyes, which she continuously tried to hide. She was one of the few ladies who could read and write (although only in Bangla, her mother language) and was very fluent in Hindi as well. She had read up to eighth standard and was later married off.

Talking about her life, Rani repeatedly and rather proudly told us about her natal place and the kind of life she had back there. She happily told us about the 'lavish' and modern life she had in Darjeeling where she wore nothing but jeans and a top and had never even entered into a kitchen. She learnt all household chores only after her marriage. Her father passed away very early and she was brought up by her mother single handedly who worked in tea farms. She proudly told us about how her mother always supported her studies and wished for a better fate for her. But things took a different turn for her and destiny had some other plans, as she explains. While talking about her marriage she showed completely different emotions. According to her, she and her family were tricked into this marriage by a *dalaal* (whom she continuously cursed) who told them all falsities about her husband and his economic status. It was her elder brother who agreed for the marriage, which then happened the following day and they immediately left for U.P. As Rani puts it, "hamko laga ghar ke paas wala U.P. h, par yaha pohochne me teen din lag gae, humare to bethe hue paer hi sooj gae the"(I thought I taken to the UP near home, but it took us three days to reach here, both my legs were swollen up), this statement of hers clearly states how clueless she was about her fate.

Later, she showed us around the house and came out with few photo albums, with photographs mostly of her natal family. She excitedly showed us the pictures overwhelmed while telling us about her brother and sister-in-law and their happy lavish life. There were few photographs of her 14 year old daughter's marriage which was in March this year. There was one sentence she continuously spoke "hum *shehar* (city) ki ladki ko *dehaat* (village) laa ke daal dia" (they dumped a city girl like me into a village). She also told us how she was not allowed to step out of home after marriage and was regularly snooped over by her mother-in-law as everyone feared she would run away and she also talked about the hardships she had to face to visit her natal house. Rani said that she had been very generous for not running away while she was supported by

her mother, who was ready to take her back. But as she puts it, she seems to have accepted her fate and couldn't do anything else but complain. When we asked her about her relations with her mother-in-law, she summed her reply in a sentence " pehle wo sunaati thi, ab wo ek bolti h to hum char bolte h (first she scolded me, but now when she says one I reply back with four.). The villagers however had other opinions about her. According to this version, Rani was a runaway who eloped with her lover from her school, only to return after an entire year after her lover abandoned her. It was told that she was brought by her husband, who was accompanied by four other men, directly from the police station where she reported after returning since a missing report a lodged of her. Also, they talked about her relations with her brother-in-law. According to a lady, when her husband came home then her brother-in-law went for work to Mumbai/Delhi and vis-a-versa. Rani wouldn't let her brother-in-law to even get married, according to villagers they both were in an affair.

CASE STUDY 2:

Rama along with her husband and 6 children (2 sons and 4 daughters) lived in a 3 room *kachha* house, with a small open verandah where we sat and 3 buffalos tied in the open space outside home. All her children went to school. Rama was around 38 to 40 years old and was the second wife of her husband, Manvarat. Hers was one of the families belonging to middle economic status. This was also one of the few families to own a bicycle, an "engine" in the field and relatively larger piece of land (about 30 bigha).

She briefly talked about her own marriage which was a "chutta", but it was a relatively simple ceremony as it was her husband's second marriage. Talking about her natal home she told us that she belonged to Methawa village, which was in the same district and not so far away from Chandpara. Her father was also a farmer and it was also an economically sound family.

She remained adamant on marrying all her children under the practice of "chutta", however difficult it might be for them, as according to her this was the "correct" form of marriage. However she did not deny that "badli" was also an option open for one of her son and daughter as the eldest son (15 years old) was already married as per dowry system.

Rama also described for us the expanses that occur in each of these marriage practices. She also presented her view about the "Bengali brides" in the village. She considered them as outcastes and refrained herself and her children from any kind of contacts or relation with them, although one of her niece was married in a house adjacent to these "Bengali bride's" house. According to her these men were unable to get a bride for

themselves because of their old age and hence believed that children should be married at an appropriate age or else it becomes difficult find a bride/groom for them.

CASE STUDY 3:

42 year old Maya was one of the few ladies who remembered her birth date and mother's name. Living in a well-built 2 storey *pakka* house, hers was the family with highest economic status in the sample. Also, it was the only family with a stable income and electricity and toilet in their home. It was a nuclear family of 10 members. Maya had 7 daughters and a son, out of which 2 daughters were married under dowry system (one whose marriage was during the field visit) and they intended to marry other children under this system as well. This was the most educated family we interviewed. However, Maya didn't have education, her husband was a teacher at BRC (Mehsi district) and all her children lived in the city for schooling.

She along with her daughter Nisha (who was pursuing B.Ed from Bahraich) elaborated upon the entire marriage pattern prevalent amongst the Jaiswars and also attributed the choice of marriage practice to the economic status of the family. As Nisha explained, *"one who gives dowry, expects the same for their son as well. This depends upon the family you belong. No doubt, there is an increase in numbers of families adopting dowry system now-a-days."*

According to Maya it was only the economic instability of a family that forces them to buy a bride. She also elaborated upon the acceptance of these bought "Bengali brides" in the community and negated any kind of disparities they face, especially in the village.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS:

The entire field work helped us get an insight of the complex marriage pattern that prevails in the Jaiswar sub-caste. The relation between the marriage practice adopted by a family and their economic status also became clearer, as we were able to identify instances where a change in marriage practice had occurred with a shift in economic status of the family. Most of the families in the sample belonged to lower strata of the society and like others, regarded marriage as one of the most important event of life. Underage children were married as soon as possible, so as to get away with the burden of this huge responsibility a family carries. With the increasing expenditure and a declining sex ratio the growing anxiousness of the families become clearly visible.

The need and importance of marriage is also evident from the practice of buying brides if one is unable to get a bride otherwise. The acceptance and absorption of such brides

within the community reflects upon the breaking down of the otherwise rigid marriage customs. It is the need and unavailability of a bride which have lead us into witnessing a changing scenario.

The small sample doesn't allow us to come to specific conclusions but it definitely presents a smaller version of the larger change in the marriage pattern within the society. It leaves us with a scope to identify and bring forward such radical changes occurring in the society with the changing times. Such complex marriage patterns also have certain adverse implications such as early marriages, running away of brides or even suicide in some cases. One such case occurred during our field visit as well. One of the young Jaiswar girl (around 12 years old) whom we interviewed was married as per "badli" and her *gonaa* was still due. Only after a few days of our field work, this girl ended her life when her elder brother continuously insisted on bringing her wife home as soon as possible. This young girl ended her life out of fear of going to her conjugal home which would have become mandatory had her brother brought her wife. Such atrocities are a result of complex web of customs and rituals our society impose on every individual. Throughout the report we have tried to understand the marriage pattern amongst Jaiswars, and also our aim was to find out what a bride was for, if a bride was for sale..???, was she available for exchange???, or was she simply a burden over her parents due to the dowry system. What we inferred was that it wasn't the bride who determines her fate but her family and their socio-economic status. Marriage, done according to any process, is of sole importance. Such instances portray the adverse impacts of poverty, lack of education, equality and employment. Every social injustice trickles down to these four basic shortcomings of our nation as a whole and it is these issues we need to address.

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