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## **Marriage Rituals in Banjara Community**

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### **A feminist view**

**Introduction:** Banjara's Community is characterized by its unique culture among various other communities in Karnataka. They have their own distinctive language, clothing, ornaments, arts, dance and lifestyle. However, the sweeping modern ways of living have made in-roads into their life too. This phenomenon has resulted in these people, specially their women folk, adopting to modern ways and merging with mainstream of society. Perhaps, it is also due to inferior treatment they receive just because of their distinctive dress alone. The cinema industry too have rather taken undue liberty of making their heroines don the banjara clothing to exhibit lewdness, which makes the Banjara's conscious of their dress. The educated Banjara's and the traders have been leaving their tandas (hamlets) to settle at the urban areas. However, they do keep contact with their folk by visiting the tandas to participate in festivals and other important functions, and more importantly to meet the kith and kin.

Banjara's are a courageous clan and willing to toil. During the British rule in India, they were strong ethnic group. This intense sense pride of Banjara's, made the British to apprehend that these people may rebel against them. Consequently, this apprehension made the British to declare the Banjara, as a "Criminal Tribe" under regulation No.26 of 1793. After the independence (1947), they have been included as Scheduled Castes in Karnataka and Maharashtra states and in Andhra Pradesh they are brought under the category of Scheduled Tribes. Banjara's trace their origin to Rajasthan - and are found spread all over the country. Though scattered, all banjara's have retained their ways of dress, ornaments, language and culture irrespective of

location. As the community is economically poor, they migrate to cities and towns in search of living as most of their tandas' are deprived of basic facilities like water, health-centers, schools and transportation. They can be found engaged in working in building construction sites, at sugarcane fields in places like Bhadravati, Coffee plantations and Kudremukh ore mines. Generally, entire family moves out as one unit. They can be seen working as daily-wage earners in various vacations at Bengalooru, Mumbai, Pune and Goa. In such places, they pitch tents in the open. This pathetic condition has resulted in them being sufferers on account of vagaries of climate. Their women cannot seek medical help for their sickness and even they have their babies delivered in these tents. Mother and child mortalities are not uncommon. Women folk of this community lead very precarious life.

The birth of a girl in the family meant that one more helping would be available. Fifty years back she (the girl) was not considered as "burden" on the family. Each house would normally comprise 5 to 10 females. This was no burden then. However, now because of emerging dowry system the birth of a girl is viewed with a feeling of burden. This kind of burdensome unwantedness has resulted in grooming the girls in a way that she does not belong to the family she is born in, but to the family she would be married to. She is indoctrinated to believe that "marriage" is the all-important event of life, and her life's fulfillment is in keeping husband, and his kith & kin happy and satisfied. She does not have freedom to choose her life partner. Among banjara's, girls marriage with her maternal uncle or with son of fathers' sister of the girl is arranged by the community elders. (Dr.R. Sunandamma, Janapada Sahityada Mahila Jagattu, Samata Adhyayana Kendra, Mysore -1997, Page-20). Since; child marriage is still prevalent in this community, girls by the time they attain the age of 18-19 years, they have 4-5 children. This drastically affects their health.

**Research Methodology:** The Banjara's are found spread allover the country. In Karnataka, they are found residing at tandas - a sort of hamlets' exclusively for them. These tandas are situated a distance away from the main village/town. For this study "A study of culture of Banjara women", ten "tandas" of Bijapur are selected. The topics on marriage rituals like, Garatani Toderu (breaking of blue bead strings of the girl), teaching of Dhavalu (a song of sad tone expressing praise of the girl) and Haveli (seeing off the bride to husbands home) etc, are discussed. These are the outcomes of interviews, discussions in the groups and response to questionnaires and participating interviews.

Marriage is an important function in any society. In most cases, marriage is not merely a union of bride and the groom but a bonding of the two families. Marriage rituals of the Banjara community are unique in many ways. The manner in which the womenfolk of the community, hug each other and wail in plaintive notes, surprises the on looking other social groups. "Why do they cry"? is their vain. The same curiosity and surprise is expressed when the Banjara women are found wailing in groups even at

market places. Why is that, no men cry, is their query. During the marriage ceremony, the bride cries by putting her hand around the neck of her kith like brothers, father, uncles and grand father etc., but men do not cry at all. The groom's mother sings a "dhavalo" – for the son telling him not to become a changed man (after the marriage), while the bride's "dhavalo" is a plea to her father not to forget her. Among the Banjara, men are considered to be possessing qualities of courage, strength, intelligence and common sense. Men are considered to be superior to women. If a man weeps, it would be construed as weakness in him and will be a subject of ridicule. The community attributes inferior status to women. The men are supposed to care and look after women. While they expect the women to be under the control of men – the men are supposed to be free from any binding. Therefore, the Banjara women bring out these sufferings, due to living under the control of father, husband and son in stages of their life, through these wailings, which are heard by the other women with empathy.

**Garatani Tool:** Breaking of the 'blue bead feet ornaments'.

Young girls of the community wear feet ornaments made of beads of blue, yellow and red colours. This feet ornament indicates virginity of the girls. During marriage ceremony, when the bride is moved out of the home, the assembled young women ceremoniously break this Garatani i.e. the "feet chain". During the ceremony the bride sings:

“Matte Todoyo Satona,  
Māri Je Yādiro Hāteya Geratiyo Jato  
Matte Kadoye Bhayero Māri Jainaye  
Bapur Hātero Mugalo Jo Mootiro Bhooriya  
Māri Jo Huśña Yādiro Petiro Māto

The bride laments and pleads with her friends not to break the beads (of feet chain). Do not remove my nose ring, gifted by my father. Do not disturb my hair, neatly combed by my mother. I am afraid of becoming foreigner to my folks. Then, the young women reply that for a girl permanent home is her husbands' and not mothers'. They also express their apprehension about the manner of treatment the girl would receive by the members of husbands' home.

During marriage, it is a common sight to see the girls' parents, where they implore with the husband and his family to treat the bride with kindness and understanding. In the Banjara community however, it is a bleeding heart praying for the happiness to prevail in her mothers' house. This is done in a ceremony called "Navaleri Bār Kado".

Navaleri Bār Kado – (Ceremony of moving out the bride from her mothers' home).

The ceremony symbolizes the bride being taken out of her home – to indicate near breaking up of all relationships with her mother's home. The bride's brothers now put a "tilak" on the forehead of the sister to indicate the farewell, and move her out the threshold of the main door by holding her hand. When the time comes to release her hand, the sentiments of the bride run high. She puts her arms around the neck of each family member and laments:

Oh my parents, elders, brothers and sisters.  
Be kind enough to excuse all my faults.

She remembers the happy times she spent with them, prays for their happiness and moves out.

Related to this ceremony of the Banjara, there is a story:

A brahmin residing in a town had three daughters. The brahmin earned his livelihood by conducting religious rituals at the temples. As the three daughters of the brahmin were growing, their town continued to suffer due to famine each successive year. The people of the town went to an astrologer to seek reasons for the drought. The astrologer said to them that the reasons for the drought are the three daughters of this brahmin – and the remedy is to take them out of the town. Accordingly, the brahmin took the girls to leave them in the jungle. At the jungle, there lived a couple named Razakidadi and Maulandad who had three sons named, Chauhan, Pawar and Rathod, who were of marriage age and were in search of suitable brides. As they saw this brahmin escorting his three daughters, they followed him and enquired about his journey. The brahmin narrated them about the decree of the town people to leave the girl in the jungle. Hearing this, the couple requests him to agree to give his three daughters named Nagavasi, Asavari and Khogarasi to his sons. And the marriage is done. It is the mother of these three jungle boys – Razakidadi – who teaches this "dhavalo" song to these girls.

Maro Bapure āngan Hari-bhari Hare  
Hariyatisu Harires  
Vandalasu Vadesaye  
Ghulvansu Ghales Limbudasu Lera Les Haveri

"Let my birth place be full of greenery. Let it spread like a branch of a peepal tree. Let it be useful like a neem tree" saying this, the girls bid goodbye to their father. The girl's town becomes free from famine. People are happy. According to this story, the Banjara's are a progeny of this family.

Woman can be said to be a manifestation of the 'mother nature'. As men try to keep control on the nature, so do they strive to keep women under their command and control. The story brings out a cruel thinking that, women can be considered as a cause for a town's famine and they can be sacrificed on that account. There are many incidences to show that women can be just sacrificed for seeking solutions to any weird

problems. This has been happening since time immemorial. Such inhuman rituals are made to appear as acts of great sacrifice or, even divinity.

And just because a brahmin had to give his daughters to low caste boys in marriage, the banjara women can never visit their parents home. The “Dhavallo” song is a song of deep sadness and remembrances of the girls’ parental home. Occasionally when they happen to meet her family members in the market places, they start crying in sadness. Only on rare occasions like demise of kith and kin that they visit the parents place. The lament of the Banjara is through songs sung by hugging the neck of their dear ones. This is called “Gālo or the neck. Moreover, during this ‘gālo’ they pour out their hearts feelings. The girl’s parents express the same feeling after she departs from her name bringing out their feeling of forlorn. Thus, among the Banjara both Gao and Dhavallo are songs expressing sorrow. These songs are composed and sung extempore and include all happenings and incidences. These are akin to folk songs.

Haveli: A farewell song of the bride:

‘Haveliye Rooparel chalayes

Sona bheet Bhandayes

Khayes Peeyes Nades Vades

Maare Nayak Bapuri Navari

(BT Lalitanayak Banjara footprints. Karnataka State Archives, Bengalooru, 2009, Page No.91)

Let the light of my fathers’ haveli illuminate the town.

Let the walls of the haveli be made of gold bricks

Let the people flourish in this town. Let them be happy

Whatever their own difficulties, the women wish best to their parental home and people.

### **Dhavallo:**

This song is sung by 4-5 married who sit circling the bride. The song depicts, the way she was brought up since birth and describes her time spent in playing with friends. The way she looked after the home helping the mother and supporting the father. How she was adored by her brothers etc. In the same song, further it goes on to describe the conditions of the husbands’ house – and the people there.

“Yadiyo Ahiya<sub>sss</sub>

Navameena Navdād petem Ghali

Baramena Savadhoyiye ya

Bapure Beti to Pālan gadero Raj

Pal Posan Kañ Sakabesare baa

Kalo Karund Pani Bhaveri vela

Om Zeemarya Raalo Jal  
Maachali Koon Bhandagi Ju  
Tari Beti Bhandai Bapu”

Oh! My mother you cared for nine months in your womb, then as a baby and a child.  
Oh! My father although you cared as a king would to his princess, but now you are  
selling me to others!  
I am caught like fish through bait. I am suffering.  
My life till far was a heaven, now the future holds dark.

Here, comparing her suffering to a fish caught by the bait at husbands home depicts her predicament there at husbands’ house. Such compositions bring out the status of women – and denial of their human rights and destruction. When a girl moves into husbands’ home, many of them tend loose their individuality and identity altogether and remain merged and act subserviently in the husbands home. This also brings out how gender inequality is put into practice through subtle methods by the society. The reasons for this gender inequality are an apt subject for further study.

In another song the bride says:

Nayak Bapuro  
Maar Sasaro cha kach  
Ghano Peetodiaradh  
Kai Sagai Keede Tam  
Dhav san Bholanāre  
Kai Kedu Bheeya  
Maari sasoori Khabarare  
Ghān Danjakaj Voi Sasarwadi mare”

I hear that my father-in-law is a drunkard.  
Oh! Elders, what you saw in that family to give in marriage?  
I hear that my mother-in-law is strong headed.  
How do I live there?

She remembers the goodness of her village people and proceeds to her husbands place.

Banjara women work hard. They sell milk, curds and firewood. They help in fields and look after the home and children. They have to look after mother/father-in-law. Children are made to work at an early age of 4-5 years itself. By the time, the girl reaches 10 years of age she is quite comfortable in taking care of young children and render help in household jobs. The parents generally do not insist on giving them any formal education. They are married off by the time they reach 14-15 years of age. After marriage she is fully involved in the service of her husbands’ home activities – and her personality merged into that home.

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