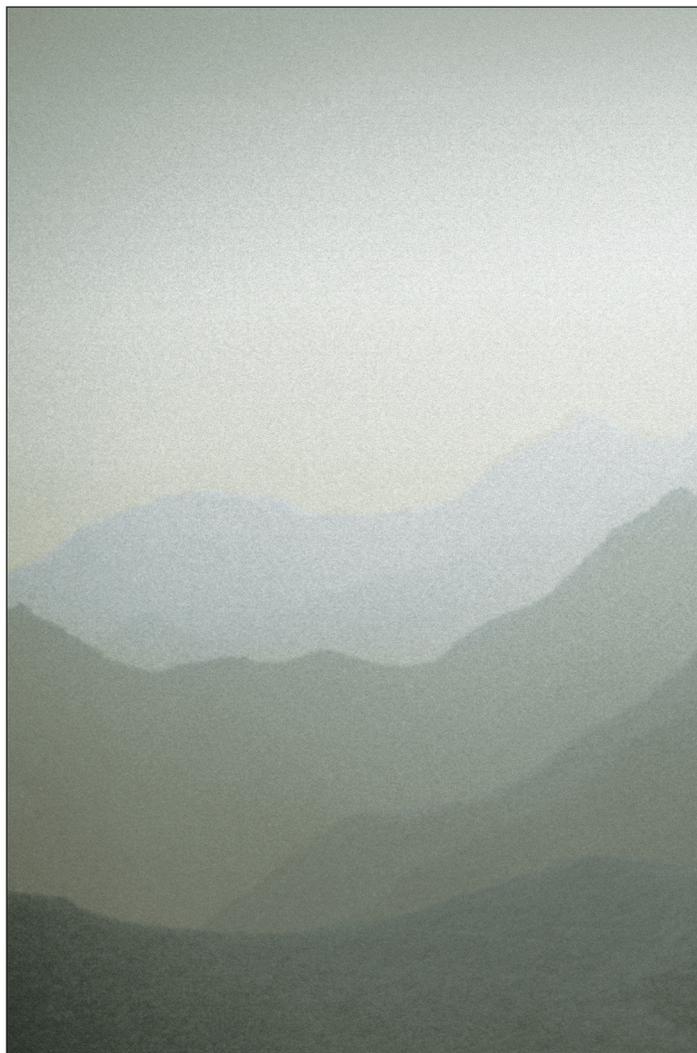


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PCHIRU SHEJNI: COURTSHIP OR SEXUAL COERCION IN RURAL BHUTAN?

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Abstract

This article takes a critical look at the practice of Pchiru Shelni in rural Bhutan. Pchiru Shelni is a local term for a traditional practice of courtship. The process involves men having sexual relations with women by stealth, with or without consent, typically by sneaking into a woman's bed or breaking into their houses under the cover of darkness. There has not been detailed research on the practice except for a small study conducted on the subject within the context of courtship. With this first ever qualitative investigation of the practice, this article argues that Pchiru Shelni practice involves both courtship practices and other elements of gender violence against women such as sexual coercion and sexual aggression.

Keywords: Courtship, Coercion, Night Hunting, Sexual Violence, Tradition

Bhutan is a small Himalayan Kingdom and is the least explored region in the academic world. Traditional Bhutanese literature is shaped by its culture and its language. Records from the seventeenth century show that Bhutanese scholarship is determined mostly by Buddhist religious philosophies. This explains why many of the early scholarly work in Bhutan were related to studies about politics, religion and biographies with a lack of literature on gender, sexuality and other social issues. Social studies are a new academic discipline in Bhutan. The Royal University of Bhutan started its sociology course in Sherubtse College in Eastern Bhutan in 2010. Another private college that offers sociology is the Royal Thimphu College which was founded in 2009.

As in many other countries, Bhutan has its own customs and cultures; one of the most known but least written about is the traditional sexual practice known as Pchiru Shelni. Depending on local dialects, the practice has different labels. Pchiru Shelni is the term used in the national language *Dzongkha*. In the literate world, it is popularly termed 'Night Hunting'. The process involves men having sexual relations with women by stealth, with or without consent, typically by 'sneaking' into or breaking into their houses either through windows or doors. This sexual practice is distinctly rural and always happens at night.

A first mention about Night Hunting appears in Barth and Wikan's study *Situation of Children in Bhutan: An Anthropological Perspective* (2006) where the description of the traditional practice of 'ambiguous courtship' refers to a process where the boy sneaks secretly into a girl's bed and then out quietly again.

The second reference to Pchiru Shelni in academic studies appears in Dorji Penjore's book in 2009 and his article in 2010 based on the same practice. He terms the practice *Bomena* which is a local term for Pchiru Shelni in Zhemgang, Bhutan.

Other documents that offer a minimal account of Pchiru Shelni include government reports on health where 'Night Hunting' is linked to sexually transmitted diseases, promiscuity, multiple sexual partners, early sexual experience and widespread extra marital affairs (Wangchuk, 2005). Pchiru Shelni practice is also occasionally depicted in films such as *Lengo* (2005) and *Gawa* (2012) and also appears in oral traditions in the form of songs and poems.

Background

Bhutan has a constitutional monarchy and is mainly an agrarian country with majority of its population living in rural areas. Agriculture provides livelihood for more than 65% of the population (NSB, 2010) of approximately 700,000 (GNHC, 2005). Buddhism is the state religion of Bhutan but Hinduism is also recognised and is concentrated in the southern region. Because of cultural differences, the practice of Pchiru Shelni is not known to take place in the southern region. This study has found, while most Bhutanese who follow Buddhism have a fairly liberal practice of sexual behaviour, Hindu culture is known to restrict such behaviour.

Several structures and cultural norms shape the practice of Pchiru Shelni. These include the geographical terrain, rural working patterns, house and sleeping structures and social norms. The rugged terrains of Bhutan, working pattern and sleeping behaviors of people play an important role in understanding how sexual relationships during Pchiru Shelni activities are formed in rural Bhutan.

Because the difficult mountainous terrain makes it difficult to construct good quality roads, people still rely on existing foot paths for transport and movement from one place to another. This explains why men sometimes have to walk long distances at night in search of women for sex. Bhutan is a developing nation and as such most of the farm work is conducted manually, rural people are occupied with farm work during the day and leave very little time for other activities such as entertainment and courtship. This is one of the reasons why Pchiru Shelni is conducted only at night. The traditional structure of constructing unsecured windows and the sleeping patterns of women in the houses determine whether men can gain easy access to the women at night.

Methodology

Information for this study has been gathered through a qualitative study using a semi-structured method of interviewing. Following strict rules of qualitative studies by providing participant information, consent and the assurance to maintain anonymity of actual participants in this sexual practice, two villages were selected for the purpose of this study. Bhutan has 205 *gewogs* (sub-district levels) (NSB, 2010) and each *gewog* has several villages. The number of villages has not been officially recorded but unconfirmed reports state there are more than 1500 villages. Only two places were

chosen because of time constraints and anecdotal reports that Pchiru Shelni is practised widely in these areas. Even though the practices were known to exist in many places, the locations were chosen for their convenience, availability and willingness of the participants to be part of this research. Another reason was also the good network of people already known to the researcher. Because the researcher was well-known to them, a comfortable interview environment was enabled. The locations remain confidential because of the sensitive nature of the topic, participant requests and human ethics restrictions. Another reason for not mentioning the name of the places is that population is sparse in Bhutan, communities are small and hence it is easy to figure out the identity of the participants even with little information.

The interviews and participant observation for this research took place over a period of three months from mid-August to mid-November, 2012. Three weeks each were spent in both the villages for actual interviews and observation of the behaviours of men and women at work in rural Bhutan and studying their daily lives. This included observing them at work places at the farms and watching men and women interact with each other. Conversations were observed as well as men and women physically being playful with each other. Sometimes, I was a silent spectator in a corner when women and men gossiped about extra marital affairs and talked about sexual experiences.

Thirty participants comprising young women, men, older people and key informants were interviewed. The younger participants were between the age of eighteen to sixty and had experienced Pchiru Shelni. The elderly participants were in the age group of between seventy and ninety and were interviewed for the purpose of oral narrations. Key informants were included to provide deeper insight and better information because of their ability to observe development in culture and people's behavior around them and are thus an expert source of information (Marshall, 1996). However, from the key informants, only selected interviews were recorded depending on their relevance to the questions asked.

The Practice

Pchiru Shelni is a sexual practice unique rural Bhutan. The practice is believed to have developed from absence of formalized dating protocols and a lack of time during the day. The term 'Pchiru' means night and 'Shelni' means to wander around (here it means men wandering in search of women). This behavior is seen as normal by many Bhutanese and accepted as part of rural life.

Pchiru Shelni is seen as a way for young people in the villages to have their first sexual experience. In eastern Bhutan it is known as *Yamlang* (reaching adulthood). According to a local saying 'young people in the villages are not considered adult until they had their first sexual experience'. It is also a medium of dating for the young people in rural Bhutan. While the relationships may or may not be long term, Pchiru Shelni provides a popular pathway for marriages in rural areas.

The practice of Pchiru Shelni involves three steps: planning, dispersion and execution. The planning stage involves two methods. One way begins with men gathering together during their free time after their day's work. Men then discuss

which women they know are likely to agree or can be coerced to have sex when they go out of their house at night. Sometimes, group of men are known to target one woman and most of the time, men look for multiple women so that each can have individual sexual partners if successful. The second method involves mutual arrangements between men and women.

The dispersal starts after dinner, when men wander out in a group and then disperse individually towards places where potential sexual partners live. Sometimes, small groups of two or three men target a single woman. Women never come to the men's houses; the men always come to find them. This could be because cultural norms dictate that men and women have different 'rules' guiding sexual behavior, with men stereotyped as sexually assertive and women as sexually passive (Crawford and Popp, 2003). The execution of the practice of Pchiru Shelni comes after potential sexual partners have been identified, and involves the process of studying individual women's houses to find possible entrances and escape routes, before finally getting into the beds of the intended woman as stealthily as possible. The entrance can involve quietly forcing open a traditional door or window, or by prior arrangement with the woman to leave a door unlocked. The distance travelled by men at night is determined by the availability of single women within a community. When there is a shortage of single women in the men's community, they sometimes travel longer distances at night looking for sexual partners.

Consensual sexual relationships in Pchiru Shelni are conducted through mutual agreements and are not problematic as long as two willing adults consent to have sex. However, what is seen as consensual forms only a small portion of this sexual practice. A major portion of the practice is found to be coerced.

In non-consensual Pchiru Shelni, the search by male perpetrators for potential sexual partners depends on their knowledge of the local area and identification of specific households where single women live. Men 'scope out' a particular house during the daytime if they know a single woman lives there, in order to weigh the pros and cons for a possible break-in. If the house has a number of other inhabitants, including strong male relatives and strict parents, then the men usually give up. They will also study the structure of the house and look for possible entry points. For instance, if the house is two or three storeyed, the men look around to see if the portable wooden ladders that farmers normally use for farm work are easily accessible.

After 1960 when Bhutan's first five yearly development plans commenced, better infrastructure and proper roads were introduced and rural areas have become more accessible to the urban people and vice versa (GNHC, 2010). As a result, people were presented with more opportunities to travel around and urban men became aware of the existence of the practice of Pchiru Shelni in rural areas. The English term 'Night Hunting' was coined after the urban men began participating in it. The urban men who are involved in the Night Hunting practice are known to be government officials, business men, drivers and tour guides while the women involved are always rural women, most of them illiterate and some of them semi-literate.

Discussion

The role of Pchiru Shelni as a means of conducting courtship in rural Bhutan is widely known. The majority of marriages in rural Bhutan are preceded by courtships initiated during Pchiru Shelni activities. Almost all the married participants in this study reported having met their spouses through Pchiru Shelni. What is undeniable is that this practice involves a significant amount of sexual violence. This conclusion may sound contradictory to the courtship theory. It should be noted that however, that the majority of the coercion takes place before the women finally settles down in a marriage. Hence many of the women have reported that they had been harassed numerous times while they remained single. It is understood that Pchiru Shelni also serves as entertainment for young people in the absence of proper entertainment facilities in the rural areas. However, there are many consequences associated with it, mostly negative due to problems with the way Pchiru Shelni is carried out. Occasional physical violence/aggression and frequent use of verbal coercion are reported, with problematic consequences for women and children.

Sexual violence in Pchiru Shelni

While violence against women is a common occurrence in many societies, there is particular violence related to specific cultures and coercive traditions that may vary from society to society. Likewise there are some unique types of violence and aggression committed towards women in the practice of Pchiru Shelni.

During the interviews, some male participants admitted being physically violent and abusive when women refused to have sex during Pchiru Shelni. Women interviewees have also recounted facing physical aggression and getting raped when their physical strength could not match that of men. Further evidence of the physical aggression inherent in Pchiru Shelni is the intention of *Bangchen* sex as stated by rural men participants. *Bangchen* is a *Dzongkha* (national language of Bhutan) term and in general it means use of force, pressure and manipulation including use of wealth, position and power to obtain something. Since there is no specific term for rape and coercion in *Dzongkha*, *Bangchen* is used by Bhutanese society to describe any physical aggression in sexual context. The media usually term rape as *Bangchen gi thole luedrel* meaning forced sex by being physically aggressive. Most male participants stated that while they go out at night to search for women at random, their 'Plan A' is to hope for consensual sex. If unsuccessful, then 'Plan B' is *Bangchen* sex.

Some men use non-physical methods to coerce women into having sex in Pchiru Shelni. Non-physical methods in Pchiru Shelni involve threats and intimidation. For example in Pchiru Shelni, men reported throwing stones at the houses of women if women refused to have sex. A question arises if stone throwing can be regarded as violence. This is an issue of boundary where a direct assault on the intended person is definitely violence but an attack on the property that indirectly harms the intended victim may or may not be understood as violence (Sharp, 1989). This is also an indication that men do acknowledge women have the right to refuse sex yet they express their anger at rejection through aggressive behavior. For fear of such aggressive behavior, some women participate in unwanted sex.

Another method of non-physical sexual coercion involves threats, intimidation and relentless requests. Such ‘verbal coercion’ positions the aggressor in a less domineering position and is a mild form of aggression. According to Adam-Curtis and Forbes (2004), verbal coercion includes “wearing down a person with repeated requests and entreaties” and even gestures that may not seem harmful but amount to sexual harassment (Adam-Curtis and Forbes, 2004: 99). For example, in Pchiru Shelni, women reported giving in to sex after men lie next to the women the whole night pleading with them.

The most common manipulative tactic used in Pchiru Shelni is the false promise of marriage. The false promise of a marriage is known to work in other cultures such as India where virginity and chastity are linked to family honor and a promise of a marriage may convince women to consent to an undesired sexual relationship (Bronitt and Misra, 2014). Bhutan has fairly liberal sexual behavior but the false promise of marriage works for a different reason in rural Bhutan. The matrilineal system of Bhutan allows women to inherit property, including farms, which means there is a need for farmhands. Owning a farm is not enough to produce crops. It needs labor: both men and women. Farm work is especially labor intensive where men are needed¹ for the very physically challenging work such as plowing and digging. Women make up for the shortage of men at home by getting married and having the husband take charge of men’s share of work. Thus single women and single mothers comply with men’s demand for sex during Pchiru Shelni in the hope of acquiring a husband to be able to help around the farm. In such cases, love becomes secondary and need primary.

Perpetration

Research has recognized four factors that are seen as aggravating the perpetration of sexual aggression against women. They are rape-supporting attitudes, rape-supporting social relationships, hostile and controlling definitions of masculinity and sexual promiscuity (Adam-Curtis, Forbes, 2004). The presence of all four factors cannot be confirmed in Bhutan because of lack of research on sexual violence. However, some factors such as controlling definitions of masculinity and sexual promiscuity have been definitely identified in this research.

Many men reported that one of the reasons for participating in Pchiru Shelni is to provide an alternative for lack of entertainment facilities in rural Bhutan. Another reason reported by male participants is peer pressure. Young rural men are known to compete with each other to boast of as many sexual partners as possible irrespective of whether it is conducted through legitimate or illegitimate methods. For unknown reasons, 108 seem to be the magic number after which men explained that they have to cut off a single fringe from their *kerey* (traditional men’s belt). The association of multiple sexual partners with masculinity is unmistakable here. This is similar to a study conducted in the USA where the “culturally endorsed standards” for men includes having sex with multiple women (Bowleg *et al.*, 2011: 545).

1 It is a taboo for women to plough fields. This is based on a traditional belief that women are inferior to men and do not possess the status to issue orders to an ox. I was told that the bulls will cry out of sadness if they are led by women in the field.

Sexual promiscuity by women is known to encourage excessive sexual behavior in men that leads to sexually aggressive behavior towards women. The idea here is that men see women's promiscuous behavior as signaling that they are sexually available. The perception of sexual behavior expressing an addictive sexual behavior is relatively a new concept (Giugliano, 2003). In rural Bhutan, to be 'easy' or 'loose' is one of the characteristics of sexual promiscuity as described by some male participants. There is no fixed definition in the Bhutanese language to describe a 'loose woman'. However, traditional Bhutanese beliefs indicate the term is used even with single women who have had two or more sexual partners. Most male and even female participants indicated that if a woman is known to have had sex with two or more men, then she is regarded as sexually promiscuous and becomes vulnerable to being targeted by men at night.

The strong grip of patriarchy in Bhutanese society is another relevant factor. It is evident that Bhutanese women live under terms and conditions set by a patriarchal society. This can be seen from the way Bhutanese men treat their women. People's reaction to male and female sexual behavior indicates two contrasting sets of rules. Pchiru Shelni is practiced in the name of culture but men make only feeble attempts to stop the practice. A typical example is found in the frequently heard in local saying such as '*Mo Khasho Lue sho*' literally translated as 'if a woman makes a promise then she definitely promises her body' whereas for men the corresponding saying '*Pho khasho nor sho*': 'if a man makes a promise it does not go beyond his wealth'.² However, for men, the saying '*sem shom na lue shom*' is a way of wooing women if the woman is hesitant to have sex. The saying translates as 'if a woman can accommodate a man in her heart, then she can surely accommodate his body'. These two sayings reveal a paradox in attitudes whereas the woman is branded a 'slut' in the first saying, the latter directly or indirectly encourages the woman to give in to male pressure. Such double standard views render women more vulnerable to sexual violence through disgrace of a woman's reputation.

Being single for women is risk factor for perpetration in Pchiru Shelni and for being selected for both consensual as well as non-consensual sex in Pchiru Shelni. Many men think single women are more sexually available than married women. Here the term 'sexually available' relates to unwedded women especially those who come from poor backgrounds. Some men stated that un-owned women (women without husbands) are seen as easy pickings by men and women's vulnerability (here without a male to protect her) makes them the very least sexually provocative and at the most more available for casual sex than married women. This concept is possibly because of the premise that because a woman cannot protect herself she is inherently 'available'. Thus 'singleness' for a woman is a state where she is not 'owned' by a man and the very circumstance of being without a men is seen by some men as alluring and enticing and even tempting, and certainly a reason for that particular woman to come to men's attention.

2 Here it refers to monetary gift or compensation paid by men and avoiding responsibility in future for any negative consequences that arise out of both consensual and coerced sexual encounter.

Though married women obtain respite from harassment in Pchiru Shelni, after divorce they are again seen as available. Several of the female participants in this study stated that being unmarried is a difficult life for them and most of the nights are spent in fear of men breaking into their houses. Thus, this study thus shows that marriage (for women) acts as a deterrent for some men.

Victimization

Similar to understanding the characteristics of the male participants in the Pchiru Shelni practice, it is also important to understand the characteristics of the women to find out why particular women have been singled out to be an object of sexual aggression/coercion. Understanding the background of those women who have been affected through engaging, willingly or unwillingly, in coerced sexual relationship (in this case, Pchiru Shelni) will be of value to designing prevention programs (Burgess, 2007). Although a substantial amount of information about why men sexually coerce women appears in the feminist literature, little is available on the backgrounds of women themselves. This is because studies on the subject have been discouraged for fear of blaming the victims, thus leading to a low level of understanding of victimization (Adam-Curtis and Forbes, 2004).

Most male participants indicated that rural women who are likely to be targeted during Pchiru Shelni activities are women who lived in simple houses where it is easy to break in, women who lived with illiterate parents and come from humble background because they cannot press charges due to lack of awareness of legal rights, women who are poor, women who are perceived to have a 'loose' reputation, and those who normally sleep alone.

Woman's behavior also seems to play a role in women becoming a target for Pchiru Shelni. Some of the male participants assume that any friendly gesture by a woman indicates her interest in sex. If a man smiles at a woman and she smiles back, then it is assumed that she is interested in having sex. If the man presses her hands and she presses them back, then this is seen to be a sign that she is available. As long as a man is targeting a particular woman, any sign of friendliness from her is construed as a positive signal to have sex. Such assumptions are contested by women during normal conversations (outside interviews); and they explain their behavior as trying to be polite which the men misunderstand. These accounts may sound like men are looking for casual sexual encounters but men have indicated that they target these same women for their Pchiru Shelni activities.

Consequences

The consequences of sexual coercion on women vary depending on the social, cultural, economic and political environment of a particular country. The Bhutan government does not provide unemployment benefits, social welfare to single parents, or foster care system to children without parents. If as a result of rape a woman becomes a single mother, she is responsible for the child, with minimal child support from the father only in few cases where he has been identified and made to take responsibility for his child.

Most women do not approach authorities for support; they suffer alone. Another option for some woman is to survive on the charity of relatives.

This study has found that the problems created by Pchiru Shelni are numerous even though the types of consequences may differ between consensual and non-consensual sexual activities. While women face direct risks of verbal and physical aggression that can result in psychological trauma, there are wider implications that can often result in unwanted pregnancies, single motherhood, loss of income and employment. Ultimately, the adverse effects of the Pchiru Shelni practices also take away rural women's ability to be self-sufficient and independent. Every woman interviewed for this research had one to three children from fathers: some unknown and some untraceable. Every one of them stated that they had undergone hardship as a result of unwanted sexual relationships.

Emotional well-being

Although nonphysical tactics for sexual coercion may seem less damaging than those using physical force, studies have widely reported that any type of sexual coercion has a range of lasting effects on the victims (WHO, 2014). Effects include increased anxiety, psychiatric conditions, sexual dysfunction and poorer social adjustment (DeGue and DiLillo, 2005). Sexual victimization has also been linked to lower self-esteem, social isolation, fear of intimate relationships and a reduced quality of relationships with long term romantic partners (Zweig *et al.*, 1999). Zweig *et al.* suggested that sexual coercion provokes emotional reactions that include anger, sadness, fear and anxiety. Because a major component of Pchiru Shelni involves sexual coercion, the adverse impact of these practices on women's emotional well-being is also reported to be high. Women reported worrying about suffering from anxiety as nights approached, unwanted pregnancies, and even losing their reputation in society after having been targeted by several men.

Health issues

Having multiple sexual partners has been linked to an increased rate of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (Yan *et al.*, 2009). Women involved in Pchiru Shelni activities not only have sex with men they know from their own village, but many men come from other villages and from urban areas. Because much of this involves coerced sex with multiple sexual partners, some women end up contracting STDs as do some men. Thus this health risk impact is shared among women and men.

Early pre-marital sexual experiences with strangers that sometimes take place during Pchiru Shelni have been a concern for the Bhutanese government because of the increased numbers of sexually transmitted diseases (STD), including HIV/AIDS, and teenage pregnancies (NCWC, 2007). HIV/AIDS once known to be an urban disease has crept deep into rural Bhutan through Pchiru Shelni (Dorji, 2011).

Increase in single motherhood, loss of working opportunities and jeopardized marriage prospects

An increase in single motherhood, loss of working opportunities and in some cases loss of future marriage prospects are some of the interrelated negative outcomes of Pchiru Shelni. One of the consequences that has a great impact on women is that educational opportunities become limited. Both the children and their mothers, primarily through

the poverty due to caring for children without the support of a partner, are either unable to access or continue further education. The Bhutan government provides free education until year twelve and through to college level if the students are able to secure good grades, but the parents are required to provide school uniforms, miscellaneous fees and stationery which is still a burden for poor families. The loss of educational opportunities can often limit access to good jobs. Many rural Bhutanese women who are mostly illiterate are disadvantaged in the first place but many who start education remain semi-literate because they are either manipulated to leave their education because of false promises of marriage or they become single mothers and are unable to continue. Many women already have children from previous partners and the welfare of these children is a big consideration in any future marriage negotiations.

Citizenship Problems

For women to register their children in the census in Bhutan both parents are required to be Bhutanese citizen (Citizenship Act, 1985) and hence a legally identified father becomes a necessity. This is one of the biggest problem women face as a result of coerced and uncommitted sexual relationships during Pchiru Shelni. Many women are left with children without a legally identified father. Many sexual relationships in Pchiru Shelni which involve coercion are limited to a single occasion or a brief period. Many men involved in coerced sex disappear from women's lives as soon as the women become pregnant. In the process many women end up seeking the help of relatives and legal support to track down the father of the child. In many cases, when the legal authorities are unable to trace the fathers, the women use bogus names, even those of their brother or father, which technically is incest. Another problem that this deliberate dishonesty creates is the probability of future inheritance disputes based on the names of the father.

Conclusion

Although sexual coercion is a major component of the Pchiru Shelni practice and has major consequences for women and children, the practice of Pchiru Shelni also serves some legitimate courtship purposes. Thus, this study recommends a reworking and reframing of Pchiru Shelni in order to expose elements of sexual coercion, enable a rethinking of the ways women are conceptualized within this practice and its harmful consequences. Furthermore, changes in government policies are needed to redress gender inequality, empower Bhutanese women, provide for their children and support their wider communities.

Recommendations for Government Policies

One of the biggest problems that this research has revealed is that the practice of Pchiru Shelni has always been associated with cultural practices. This association has many of the rural women believing that as a part of that tradition they cannot avoid consensual or non-consensual participation and must allow men to continue to engage in Pchiru

Shelni. While consensual sexual relationships can be left as traditional practice, any form of sexual coercion in the name of Pchiru Shelni should be separated and dealt as any other kind of sexual crime. This will serve two purposes: Firstly, it will deter men from citing cultural traditions to justify sexual crimes against women and secondly, it will separate abuse from tradition.

Another troubling issue that needs to be addressed is that some of the men involved in this sexual practice are urban men who occupy important positions in the community and are considered role models. Not surprisingly, while ordinary urban men take the trouble to go out in search of women for sex, men in authority have the luxury to demand that young women be brought to them at night during their visits to rural areas. Even though it is widely known who are involved, no one is known to be reported either for fear of reprisal or because of the notion that it is a social norm for men to participate in such activities. For this, there must be a provision in the law to deem it illegal to demand sexual rewards during their stay and also be deemed illegal for middlemen to offer sexual favors. The very presence of a provision in the law is likely to draw women's attention to the illegality of the practice and protect themselves and may possibly deter influential men from participating in it. Women must also be made aware that it is their right to refuse to provide sexual favors and it should be made clear that there will be no ramifications if they report it to authorities. For some, there may even be a facility to file anonymous complains so that women and whistle blowers do not fear repercussions.

There is a need for the government to introduce social welfare system especially for struggling single mothers whose sexual partners have abandoned them and who do not have reliable relatives to support them as is the custom in Bhutan.

An important change needs to be made in the citizenship law that requires both the parents to be Bhutanese to secure the child's citizenship. As explained earlier, without the father's name, it becomes difficult for women to track down 'run away' fathers of the children and register their children in the census. Irrespective of whether women are victims of sexually coerced relationships in Pchiru Shelni or victims of other sexual crimes, women should not be made to go through the hardship of tracking down missing fathers of their children. Bhutan- known for its Gross National Happiness (GNH) philosophy that places people's well-being before everything and claims that gender discriminations are subtle (CEDAW,³ 2006), will be honoring its principles if children with either one of the parents who is a Bhutanese and are born in Bhutan be granted birthright citizenship. This will also ensure more gender equality as single mothers will be relieved of the responsibility of tracking down runaway fathers whereas men can avoid accountability simply by being absent from the lives and women and children they have wronged.

3 Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

Recommendations for Future Research

Because of several factors such as the remoteness of the interview areas, time taken to cultivate relationship with participants, and transcription of interviews because of mistrust of technology, there was time constraint to carry out the interviews. This meant only rural people could be interviewed as participants. In future research, interviewing urban participants in Night Hunting is recommended. They could provide a wider understanding about these practices. Interviewing urban women is also recommended for their views about Pchiru Shelni and to find out what they feel about how men and society treat their counterparts in the rural areas.

This research does not include southern part of Bhutan where sexual topics are sensitive. Southern Bhutan is largely a Hindu dominated area and Pchiru Shelni is not thought to be practised because of the conservative nature of their culture. Whether this assumption is correct is not known. Therefore, a separate study in the southern part of Bhutan would be worthwhile. Though there may be differences from the rest of the country, sexual behaviour in the south could provide a useful comparison.

This study is a qualitative study because only a small sample of participants could be accommodated in the research. The area of research is also concentrated only in two specific locations. Though Buddhism is followed in most part of the country, it is likely that there could be minor cultural differences of which I am not aware. Depending on the location, the perception of Pchiru Shelni could be different. Thus covering a larger area of the country is recommended for the future.

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