

**Title of Paper: Does Traditional Culture determine Young Men's Sexual Behaviour and Attitude?
An Empirical Study among Primitive Tribal Groups of India**

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Abstract

The increasing burden of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and the vulnerability of youth and tribal population to it have formed the basis for the present study. This is a part of a larger study carried out for academic purpose among 414 male tribal youth.

Early age at marriage, early age at sexual debut, existence of pre-marital and extra-marital relationship with multiple partners are some of the serious concerns among the youth of primitive tribal groups. The youths are exposed to non-traditional world which has changed their viewpoint and making them lesser accountable towards their traditional life-ways. On the other hand, lack of definite social system or diminished social system for imparting sexual knowledge to the youth has been reflected in awareness level on sexual health. Sex with strangers or co-workers was seen from the study, direct bearing on the sexual behaviour and sexual health of the youth at large.

Key Words: Primitive Tribal Groups, Sexual behaviour, Vulnerability among Tribal Youth, Traditional Culture, Social control, and Youth Dormitory

Extended Abstract

Introduction:

By and large, Indian society is still rooted in traditions and people's attitude towards sex is influenced by values, which are peculiar to the traditional belief systems. Marriage is a norm in India. Since the last few decades, the age at marriage for both sexes has been rising by about a year per decade. As a result, a substantial proportion of boys and girls in contemporary India have to pass through a long period of heightened sexual desire (Nag, 1996).

Although unmarried men have more opportunity for sexual adventures (often with married women/female sex workers) than unmarried women, there is no mainstream society in India that actually encourages men to have pre-marital sex (Chandiramani et al, 2001). As in case of pre-marital sex, sanctions against extra-marital affairs and sex are severer against women. The Hindu concept of '*pativrata*'- the ideal for a woman to remain loyal to her husband under all circumstances, has no counterpart for men (Nag, 1996). Thus unmarried women for the fear of being called promiscuous find themselves unable to seek reproductive health services. However, women are now getting greater attention towards the emancipation of their sexuality. Sexual activity among unmarried adolescent women has been steadily increasing and so is the vulnerability towards STD including HIV (Tripathi et al, 2003).

Social and attitudinal changes and socio-economic developments during the post-independence period have lead to emergence of industrialist society and development of western oriented life styles. Western influence is evident in daily living, particularly in the urban areas amongst youth. Pubs, late night parties and discotheques are often frequented by young in metropolitan cities, exposing this vulnerable population to risky behaviours. Recent years have seen developments in electronic media and sex entertainment is available through video, X-rated films and internet.

Indian society presents a contrasting picture of notions about sexuality, attitudes and sexual behaviour. The society can neither be regarded as rigid, nor permissive with regard to the area of sexuality, making generalisation difficult. The behaviour pattern varies across regions and states, gender, sub-population, tribal and religious groups (Tripathi et al, 2003). Anthropological

literature on the tribal societies of India refers to the wide prevalence of pre-marital sex in many of them (Elwin, 1939, 1947), but the practice of pre-marital sex among the mainstream population is rare. In contrast to this, few studies also indicate that the practice is not that uncommon in both educated and uneducated and in both rural and urban population (Nag, 1996).

Being rich in cultural tradition, the tribal groups have their own code of conduct on sexual behaviour and related aspects including sexual health problems and health and treatment seeking behaviour, which felt to be explored in the present study, especially in terms of STDs. On such a background of understanding a primary research study was conducted to find out the nature, extent and the determinants of sexual behaviour of the male tribal youth among the two Primitive Tribal Groups in the state of Orissa, India namely, the Juang and the Lodha.

Methodology adopted for the Study:

In the present study both quantitative as well as qualitative techniques were used for data collection. In the quantitative part structured interview schedule was used. In the course of qualitative part of the study, techniques such as, in-depth interview, key-informant interview, focus group discussion and both participatory and non-participatory observations were adopted for data collection.

a. Sampling Design

Among the major states of India, Orissa stands in the first position to have the largest number of scheduled tribe population within the state (Census, 2001). More than 22 percent of the total state population are scheduled tribe. It also houses several Primitive Tribal Groups. Easy accessibility, logistic suitability and domicile status of researcher were the other reasons to select the state for the present study. The sampling for the study has been done in three different systematic steps. These are,

- I. Selection of district
- II. Selection of tribe
- III. Selection of village and respondent

In total, nine villages were surveyed in Kendujhar district and five in Mayurbhanj district in order to obtain the desired sample size among Juang and Lodha respectively. Juang lives in very small groups as compared to the Lodha. This was the reason for which almost double numbers of Juang villages were surveyed to get the desired sample size.

b. Selection of Samples for In-Depth interview and Focus Group Discussion

The list of male youth from primitive tribal groups who were interviewed during the quantitative survey was used as the sampling universe towards the selection of samples for In-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The detailed process of selection of youth for these qualitative components is discussed below.

In-depth Interview

Respondents for in-depth interviews were selected on the basis of the following criteria that might have some bearing on the sexual health and health seeking behaviour of the tribal youth among the selected PTGs. Using these criteria 16 possible combinations were prepared and tried to cover at least 4 cases come from each of the possible combination. The selection criteria were:

- a) Young Youth Vs Old Youth
- b) Literate Vs Illiterate
- c) Having Vs Not-having urban exposure
- d) Married Vs Unmarried

Besides this, in-depth interviews were also conducted with the village priest, traditional medicine practitioner and village headman as felt necessary. Along with all these in-depth interviews six key informant's were also interviewed, three from each tribal group.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Eleven focus group discussions were conducted in the field among the male tribal youth, six among Juang youth and five among Lodha youth. The topics like multiple sexual partners, pre-marital and extra-marital sex, safe sex and condom use, social stigma and the cultural practices regarding sex and sexual activities were addressed during the discussion.

c. Phases of Data Collection

The primary data for the study was collected by the first author. The entire field work was done in two different phase namely quantitative phase and qualitative phase. In the first phase the quantitative survey was carried out and after the data entry and cleaning, a preliminary analysis had been carried out and were addressed during the second phase of field work i.e. the qualitative phase.

For the purpose of data collection all English version questionnaires and guidelines were used. During the field work the questions were asked in local language and answers were coded in the questionnaire. Though both the tribal groups were well versed in local 'Oriya' language, in few cases interpreter was appointed and used for those respondents who were not very comfortable with any language other than their mother tongue.

d. Sample Size and Response Rate

The overall response rate of the study was 89 percent. As far as sample size is concerned, 93 percent of sample was covered among 'Juang' of Kendujhar district and 95 percent was covered among 'Lodha' of Mayurbhanj district against the desired sample size of 220 in each district.

Key Findings:

The study shows that most of the youth of primitive tribal groups get married at an early age, just below 17 years of age. A girl, likewise, gets married by the age of 15 or so. Arranged marriages are more common in number followed by elopement and to a lesser extent marriage by capture. Early marriage also leads to early age sexual activity among them.

An inquiry into the pre-marital relation with wife leads to the fact that nearly two third of them had pre-marital sexual relationship of some kind with wife and this inclines towards Lodha youth more compared to the Juang youth. It is seen that some of the married youth had relationship with wives one year or more than one year before marriage. This indicates the early onset of sexual activity among tribal youth. Lodha youth score more for longer period pre-marital relationship compared to Juang, but having pre-marital sex with wife is seen more common among the Juang. For this too, they (Juang) prefer wife's house as safer place to mate whereas

Lodha youth find field, work place and jungle as a safer place. Pre-marital pregnancy concerns less to Juang youth compared to the Lodha youth. But the fear of contracting disease in this act is more among Juang than Lodha youth. It may be mentioned that Juang youth are allowed to have sex with girls outside of their village and there is no problem of getting married even after pregnancy. But Lodha youth are not protected in this way.

Among Lodha youth more than half of such pre-marital relationship goes unexposed even for their longer period of relationship because people hardly suspects such kind of relationships in village. A good number of cases got exposed among Juang despite of their shorter duration and were forced to get married because they follow village exogamy. Also more than half of the unexposed cases may be due to shorter pre-marital relations which were immediately converted to marriage. The shorter pre-marital relationships of Juang youth can be explained in the following lines. The Juang gets intimate with girls from other villages which virtually become an open secret and due to social sanction and familial pressure etc., they get married at an earliest. But Lodha may have relations within the village which cannot be detected or suspected for which they are stretched longer.

A lesser number among the Juang youth who did not have pre-marital sex in comparison to Lodha youth also indicate that village exogamy kept some of them away from such act. Prevalence of extra-marital sex depicts the presence of socio-cultural norms like polygamy sanction, especially among the Lodha.

Prevalence of multiple sexual partners before marriage among these youth also depicts somewhat lose control over this matter. Lodha youth are seen more in number having relation with multiple sexual partners before marriage indicating their socio-cultural norms and also life-ways which is somewhat lack of social control. Prevalence of sexual acts with older women other than their girl friend before marriage also indicates somewhat lose social control among the primitive tribal groups. Life-ways like consuming alcohol and having sex is invariably reported.

Exposure to media and urban places is also evident among the people. This has also opened up opportunity to meet freely among the youth of different sex and also help changing attitude or perception towards many traditional inhibitions and customs.

Extra-marital relations prevalent among these tribal youth show that usually they continue with the pre-marital partner when they did not marry, as extra-marital partner after marriage. As a closely knit tribal group the previous partner, after marriage or so remain as relative of some sort for which the married youth can visit or meet her and indulge in sexual act at different frequency. Extra-marital relation is not seen as grave offence as no report of social action was found in the present study.

Sexual behaviour of unmarried youth of the Juang and Lodha was investigated the same way to test the validity of the second hypothesis. More Lodha youth experienced sexual act of any kind than the Juang youth. But frequency of sexual acts performed is more in number among the Juang youth. Penetrative sex among Lodha is more in number indicating their aggressiveness and indifference towards family or community reaction contrary to such concerns among the Juang youth. Sexual partners are usually of younger age to the male youth, but some involve with elder girls also. While all interactive partners are unmarried some of them among the Lodha are married women and divorcee or deserted women. If not girlfriend, the women involved are relatives of Lodha in some way. It is also seen that Lodha youth experience sexual act at an earlier age compared to Juang youth. The same is the case for their sexual partners. Resultant cause of sexual act among the youth may be due to the mutual desire or partner's desire or one's own desire. Among the Lodha youth own desire causes more sexual acts as compared to Juang youth, who, on contrary, involve in such acts basically due to partner's or mutual desire. Having a drink (country liquor) before sex is very common and dominant character among the Lodha youth.

Lodha youth favours field or jungle as a suitable place for the sexual acts, whereas Juang youth favours partner's house as a suitable place. Fear of getting pregnant from first to last sexual partner decreases along with the increase in concern for getting infected. Shift of relationship from first to last partner is lesser among the Juang youth and such shift is more in number among the Lodha indicating a relatively easy and indifferent relation with sexual partners over a period of time. Lodha youth's sex involvement is more exposed to village or community but no stern action or reaction was reported for either of them.

Lodha elderly youth feels that past times were better in terms of discipline and having respect for elders in society and social control mechanism which is fast diminishing at present. But Juang elderly youth feels that present time is better in terms of loosing social control on meeting and mingling between girls and boys and to know each other, whereas, in past time girls did not have good option to select their spouse.

In general the younger tribal youth feel present day is better in terms of freedom to meet and mingle with each other and to know each other out of social control. But while Lodha youth are vocal and practical against social control over boys and girls free relationship, the Juang youth still are reluctant to be carefree of such norms and very much aware and cautious about social norms and subsequent punishment.

The tribal youth use festivals, fun-fares and weekly markets as opportunity to meet their fiancées and plan for their own desired act. These events also offer the opportunity for partner selection and put forward their proposals. Dancing and singing in community and inter village festivals and ceremonies play important role for Juang youth in particular, because they cannot dance or marry own village girl. They had to dance and sing with girls from other village which is possible through such events only.

Having sex while being outside the village especially as migrant labour, is evident among some tribal youth. This is seen among the married youth also as they go alone for seasonal work in towns and indulge in sexual act there with strangers.

The study reveals that unmarried male and female youth among Juang spend nights in bachelor house separately. This place is the platform of getting knowledge about their socio-cultural norms and to some extent sexual life. Performing sexual act in such place is not known. There is social sanction in mingling with opposite sex of different villages, but sexual relation is not the social norm. Contrary to such norms, a somewhat loose social control over such relationship is evident as the study shows wide spread practice of sexual acts of varied nature among the youth. Thus pre-marital sexual activity is not institutional, but somewhat a controlled prohibition among the Juang. It is also seen that exposed relations usually ended up with socially sanctioned marriage. Thus a social back-up or support is always there for the girls having relationship with

their boy partners. The Juang youth are seen somewhat concerned about social sanction and act accordingly to some extent.

Contrary to such situation the Lodha youth are not strictly bound by social norms. They have levirate system and found indulging more in sexual act and also with multiple partners. Lack of village exogamy and other restrictions they find easy to get their partners for sexual acts. While Juang youth are generally confined to a single partner till marriage the Lodhas seem to changing their partners.

Thus, by examining all these characters we can derive at a conclusion that it is not the presence or absence of youth dormitory or any institutionalised instructions responsible for determining the sexual behaviour. It is the existence of social system like village exogamy, patterns of marriage like levirate and people's life style and extent of social control mechanism that influence the sexual behaviour and activities of youth of these two primitive tribal groups. From this conclusion we can say that social responsibility of concerned person and the social control authority on pre-marital pregnancy and exposed sexual relation which in turn might use as a shield to protect involved girls/boys in such act. Likewise, it is accepted that it is not the presence or absence of youth dormitory, but the social cohesion, norms and consequent life- style of people that determines sexual behaviour of youth.