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## The Wedding Tradition of the Banjara Tribe in Bargarh District, Odisha: A Cultural Study

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### Abstract

Marriage is an important part of society. It helps people make families and keeps the society going. This study explains the Banjara marriage tradition in Bargarh district, Odisha. In Banjara marriages, various rituals are performed that highlight the importance of community, respect for ancestors, exchanging gifts, and celebration. These may include formal engagement ceremonies, wearing special traditional clothes and jewelry, praying to family or village gods. It looks at how important customs and rituals such as arranged marriages, the Vaat chit and Gol Khayer ceremonies, Dhala training for brides, and the Garatani Todera rituals. All these traditional rituals and customs have helped the community keep its cultural identity and stay socially connected. The research also explores how factors like education, globalization, and urban living have influenced these traditions. Even with these outside influences, the Banjara community has shown strong resistance while also adapting by blending traditional practices with modern ways of life. This research aims to give a full understanding of how the community is managing to hold on to its Indigenous customs while also adjusting to modern changes.

**Keywords:** Banjara, Vaat, Gol, Khayer, Dhala, Todera

### Introduction

The Banjara community is special and different from other groups in Bargarh district. They have their own language, clothes, jewelry, art, dance, and way of living. They have also performed several cultural practices. Banjara Traditional marriage is one of them. But now, modern life is changing their lifestyle. Many Banjaras, especially women, are starting to follow modern ways and mix with the rest of society. One reason for this change is that people sometimes treat them differently because of their traditional clothes. Also, educated Banjaras and traders are moving out of their villages (*tandas*) and going to live in towns and cities. Marriage is a very important event in every society. It is not only the union of a bride and a groom but also a bond that brings two families together. It marks the beginning of a new relationship, not just between two people, but between two extended families, their traditions, and values. In the community, marriage holds great cultural importance and is celebrated with many unique customs and rituals that make it stand out from other communities. One such special tradition is seen among the women of the community. During the wedding, the women hug each other tightly and cry in loud, emotional voices.

### The Community

The Banjaras are a unique and interesting community in India. They have their own special culture, which is different from others and holds an important place in Indian culture as a whole. Their lifestyle is not like the people who live in the plains, and it is also not like the lifestyle of other tribal groups in the areas where they live. The Banjaras have their own customs, traditions, dress, and way of living that make them stand out. In different parts of India, the Banjaras are known by different names. Some people call them Lambadas, while others know them as Lambadi, Laban, Banjari, Labani. Even though the names are different, they all refer to the same community. These names change depending on the region, but the people and their culture remain the same.

The Banjaras are mostly found in the district of Bargarh, but they also live in other parts of Odisha. They are recognized as one of the tribal groups in Odisha. One of the most special

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things about the Banjaras is their language. They speak a dialect called Gor Boli. This dialect is unique and does not have a written script. That means it is only spoken and not written down. Gor Boli is made up of words from many different Indian languages, including Sanskrit, Hindi, Marathi, and Gujarati. Because their language and culture are so different, the Banjaras have managed to keep their identity strong over the years. Their colorful clothing, traditional songs, dances, and customs show how rich and lively their culture is. Even today, many Banjaras are proud of their roots and continue to follow their traditional way of life (Suresh, L. B.: 2009) <sup>[9]</sup>.

The word "Banjara" comes from the old Sanskrit term "Vana Chara," which means "people who wander in the forest." Some also believe the name comes from the word's "Van" meaning forest and "Jara" meaning to go the Jungle, which together describe people who travel through forests. These meanings show the Banjaras' nomadic way of life, as they used to move from one place to another, mainly for trading goods (Naik, D. B.:2000) <sup>[3]</sup>.

In the past, the Banjaras were known as nomadic traders. They would travel long distances, carrying items like salt, grains, and other goods on bullock carts, and trade them in different villages and towns. They played an important role in connecting remote areas with markets. Over time, many Banjaras stopped moving around and began to settle in permanent villages. In the state of Odisha, especially in the western region, Banjaras have made their homes in several districts. These include Bargarh, Balangir, Sambalpur, Kalahandi, Nuapada, and Sundargarh. Today, they are part of the local communities in these areas, though they still remember and respect their nomadic roots and rich culture (Panda, G.: 2021) <sup>[7]</sup>.

### Objectives of the Study

This study focuses on the wedding traditions of the Banjara tribe in the Bargarh district of Odisha. The main objectives of the study are:

1. To understand the importance of Banjara marriages in today's modern world.
2. To learn about the traditional marriage system and the steps involved in the wedding rituals of Banjaras in the district of Bargarh.
3. To identify the various social and cultural factors involved in Banjara tribal marriages, such as dowry, family roles, and community involvement.
4. To find out how non-tribal cultures and modern lifestyles are affecting Banjara marriage traditions.
5. To explore the role of music, dance, and traditional dress in Banjara wedding ceremonies.

### Methodology

This paper talks about the marriage customs of the Banjara tribe, a tribal group living in Bargarh. The study looks at how Banjaras get married, what rituals they follow, and what these traditions mean to them. During this time, the researchers visited many Banjara villages, which are called Tandas. To collect the information, the researchers used different methods. One method was called participant observation, where the researchers stayed in the village and watched the marriage events closely. This helped them understand what really happens during Banjara weddings. They also spoke to many people in the villages. These included the Tanda Naiks (village leaders), Bhats

(traditional storytellers), Dhadies (folk singers or musicians), and elderly women who know a lot about old customs and traditions. They asked both formal and informal questions to learn more about marriage practices, family relationships, and the roles of different people during weddings. The researcher talks to the Naiks of several Tandas for the collection of information about the marriage ceremony in the community like Srinath Naik of Kamalpadar Tanda, Dilleswar Naik of Khuntapali Tanda, Parbati Naik, Suresan and Shanti Naik.

### Marriage Practices

In this community, marriage rules are strictly followed based on clan and social customs. A man is not allowed to marry a woman from his own clan or sub-clan, as such marriages are considered inappropriate and against tradition. This rule is followed to avoid close blood relations and to maintain social order within the group.

Marriage alliances are also strictly prohibited with certain communities such as the Dapriya (also called Dapdiya), Dhadi, and Bhats. These groups are traditionally regarded as lower-status and forming marital relations with them is considered socially unacceptable within the community.

While polygamy (the practice of a man having more than one wife) is permitted, it is not very common and usually depends on social, economic, or personal reasons.

On the other hand, child marriage is strictly prohibited. The community emphasizes that marriage should only take place when a girl has attained puberty, meaning she is physically mature enough for married life. This practice is intended to protect the health and rights of young girls and ensure they are ready for the responsibilities of marriage.

The marriage customs reflect a mix of traditional values, social structure, and protective measures for the well-being of individuals, especially women. The marriage process traditionally begins with the initiative taken by the bridegroom's family, who express their interest by paying a formal visit to the Naik, the head of the Thanda (a tribal settlement or community) to which the prospective bride belongs. This initial step is rooted in community customs and reflects respect for the authority and role of the Naik in social matters. During this visit, the bridegroom's family seeks detailed information about the character, background, and reputation of the bride and her family. This information is gathered through the Naik, who acts as a mediator and ensures that the proposed match aligns with the social and cultural expectations of the community. If the bridegroom's family is satisfied with the findings and receives the Naik's approval, they proceed to the next step. With the Naik's permission and support, the family formally approaches the parents and elders of the bride with a marriage proposal. This approach is usually conducted with great respect and involves discussions regarding the compatibility of the two families, the cultural values they share, and the mutual expectations surrounding the marriage. Only after these discussions and mutual consent does the process move forward to further arrangements and ceremonies.

The marriage system is very different from other cultures in Bargarh district. It has three main steps like Segason (Pelli), which is the first meeting of the bride and groom; Engagement (Gal Khayer), where both families agree to the marriage; and Marrigae (Vaya Bhandar), which is the wedding ceremony.

### Segason (Pelli)

Segason is the first step in the traditional marriage process. During this stage, the Jats of the community, who are respected as the leaders, play an important role. They are responsible for managing all the customs, rules, and formalities related to the marriage. The Jats also help in building understanding between both families. They try to convince the bride's and groom's families to accept the marriage and create a good relationship between them. This step is very important.

### Gal khayer (Engagement)

It has consisted several items like Gal (Jaggery), Bhuja Chana, Coconut (Naral), Lota, Basta and pisa (one rupee coin) and Daru (Alcohol). A group of people, including the groom's father, some Jats, Naiks, and relatives, arrive at the bride's house. Both sides like the Jats and Naiks from the bride's and groom's families sit together in a circle. The Naiks and Jats talk about the reason for their visit. They mix a special ingredient called *gal* in water, which is kept in a pot or a lota (small metal vessel).

From both families, the Jats and Naiks take turns leading the ritual. They dip a towel into the *gal*-mixed water and give it to a Naik, saying:

"La Jal La, La Gal La" (meaning "Take the water, take the jaggery").

After that, they do a similar ritual with a one- or five-rupee coin, saying:

"La Pisa La, La Pisa La" (which means "Take coin friends").

This whole ceremony is called *Gal Khayer* and ends with everyone drinking *daru* (alcohol). Once the *Gal Khayer* is complete, the groom goes to live at the bride's home for three months before the actual wedding. During this time, the bride's family takes good care of him, offering food and gifts. Before leaving the bride's house after three months, the groom gives a cigar or neem stick to the head of the bride's Jat family as a sign of respect. During this time, relatives from both the bride's and groom's sides also play with colors, symbolizing the joyful bond and active connection between the two families.

### Vaya Bhandar (Marriage)

In Banjara culture, there is a special way of greeting called Dhala. Dhala means crying and singing at the same time. Banjara women do this to show love, happiness, sadness, or problems. They do Dhala when they meet family or friends after a long time. After Dhala, they talk normally. Every bride must learn Dhala before marriage. There is also a give-and-take custom called Len-Den. The groom gives 3 cows to the bride's family as a blessing and good wish for the bride and groom. This is called Karaar. If he has no cows, he gives money instead. This is called Mamloo.

### Bride's Dhala (In Gor Boli)

Yaadiye Aahyan.....

Na meena petem Ghali dukh sahi

Bare meena sapa kidiye yaadi maar...Aahyan

Baa re Aahyan.....

Beti karen koni Rajkumari ninger rakhade ris

Pal Pos thani sapa kardina re baa maar...Aahyan

Aaj mene tu par kar thani alga jaga de dina re baa maar...Aahyan

### English Traslation

Oh! My mother, you took care of me for nine months in your tummy, then loved me as a baby and a little child.

Oh! My father, you cared for me like a king care for his princess, but now, you are giving me away to others!

### Groom's Mother Dhala (In Gor Boli)

Beta maar Aahyan.....

Tane Na meena petem rakhadi

Tara haj haj ne sahi...Aahyan

Tu chhod thani mene kete jara re baa maar...Aahyan

Tane saha hiye karen atra dan chu re baa maar...Aahyan

Tu kete jarechhi mene chhoden re baa maar...Aahyna

### Eglish Translation

Oh! My son, I carried you for nine months in my tummy, then loved and cared for you as a baby and a child. But now, in my old age,

You leave me and go away.

### Dress and Ornaments

During marriage ceremonies, Banjara men and women wear special traditional clothes and jewelry.

1. Rumal is a turban that men usually wear on their heads.
2. Phetia is a long skirt with many folds, often decorated with rich embroidery.
3. Kanchli is a small blouse that covers only the chest and stomach.
4. Tukri is a decorated cloth worn on the head and back. It is designed with cowries (shells), beads, shiny mirror pieces, and coins.
5. Ghugri is a silver ornament that looks like a small pendant. It hangs from both sides of the hair and has tiny silver beads that almost touch the cheeks.
6. Bhuria is a gold nose ring worn on the right side of the nose, shaped like a ring or horn.
7. Har is a necklace made using old coins like rupees and 50 paise coins. In Bargarg, many Banjara women wear this necklace made of a special coins.
8. Topli is a silver ornament hanging on both sides of the face, attached to the hair. Both married and unmarried women wear it.
9. Balia are bangles made from horn. Married women wear them up to their shoulders, while unmarried women wear them only up to the elbows.
10. Wankadi are large brass anklets with a unique shape, pointing upward. Only married women wear these.
11. Mundari is a nose ring worn on the right side of the nose.
12. Bichhua is a toe ring that women wear on their toes.
13. Kada is a bangle worn on the wrist, usually made of metal or ivory.
14. Nath is a nose ring worn on the left side of the nose.
15. Gajra is a flower garland worn around the neck or in the hair.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, Banjara traditional marriages are rich in culture, customs, and strong community involvement. These marriages are usually arranged by the families, with the support and guidance of elders or respected village leaders, showing the importance of family ties and social unity in Banjara society. The wedding ceremonies include various

rituals, songs, and celebrations that bring together not just the bride and groom, but the entire community. Even though modern influences are starting to affect their way of life, the Banjara people continue to follow many of their traditional practices. This shows how they are trying to protect their cultural identity while slowly adjusting to the changes happening in today's world. Traditional Banjara marriages are not just about two people coming together, but also about keeping their customs and values alive for future generations.

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