



The Pawaras, their Endogamy and Customs: Deciphering the Social Interface through the Folk Narratives

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ABSTRACT

Pawara, a major Janjaati in central part of India, have been living their animistic existence nestled around the Satpuda Mountain with diverse type of small hamlets accustomed to the place they inhabit in. This *Jana* has been known for their distinct culture and traditions manifested accompanying folk narrative. Major bulk of their socio-cultural attributes have been preserved and sustained passing them through generations orally. Indian civilization, in general, is known to maintain clan purity through exogamy, which has been evident in the Pawaras Janas of India as well. Most of the community in India allow matrilineal endogamy, prohibiting the patrilineal, however, the Pawaras forbid both. Their marriage customs have been conducted distinctively, whereas the ceremonial attributes manifested through oral narrations cradle their indigenous episteme and inherit their cultural heritage.

The present paper would attend Pawaras marriage, as it is one of the three (birth-marriage- death,) ceremonial indicators of any man and his socio-cultural existence, that define his life transitions and manifest socio-cultural interface.

Keyword: Pawara, Janjaati, Animism, Oral Tradition, Folk Tradition, Marriage, Endogamy

The Pawara *Janjaati* is known as the sub-tribe of the Bhil, scheduled in the state list of Maharashtra, Gujrat, Karnataka, and Rajasthan, though the Pawaras deny their social affinity towards Bhil *Janjaati*, there have been certain similarities observed in certain rituals, customs and rites. In Madhya-Pradesh there is no entry to the Pawara, rather the same tribe is called Barela in the list of state's Scheduled Tribes. However, the nomenclature Barela, as it is conceived, is associated with their transition from Bahar (outside), Baherla (of outside) to the present recognition 'Barela'. Such existential status of being away from their heartland brought upon them a new identity. The regional distribution of Pawaras indicate their shifting location, which may help to trace their roots from Udaipur, Rajasthan, from where they might have been migrated towards the Satpuda mountain ranges, traceably at Pava Gadh, near Chhota Udaipur, Gujrat, to the adjacent region, laying both the sides of Satpuda mountain ranges. However, their shifting habitats as are known at present - Bare, Deh, *Rajwad*, and *Nemad* etc. conceive their regional identity succeeding after the name of the place. Accordingly, their identifying denomination has been *barovtya*, *dehvalya*, *rajwadya* and *nimadya*. *Rathwas of Gujrat* have been considered sharing close affinity and assimilations with the *Pawara-Barela* community and could therefore be perceived their variants. The influence of Rajasthani and Gujrati language is so evident over *Pawari-Bareli* that it adequately establishes linguistic route unveiling their expedition and their shifting journey through the states, through the ages.

Nevertheless, the Pawaras vaguely assume their roots at Pava Gadh, Gujrat, however, this claim lacks documented evidence to validate, nor their folk narratives have any such reference pointing this root. Some, speculations of Pawaras that trace their roots towards Paw, meaning riverbank referring to Narmada river, thus conceiving that their society might have been rooted in and have culturally developed in Narmada valley, and crossing it they have dispersed to the annexed region that spread over in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujrat, seem veracious. Thus, their name has been conceived after Paw meaning riverbank of Narmada and therefore Pawara, means, the community that lived on Narmada Paw (Bank) therefore Pawara. However, this claim opens another complex knot that seems little difficult to disentangle and authenticate with such speculation in relation to the people living in Rajasthan who possibly stayed at their roots are still called 'Pawaras' which has nothing to do with *Paw* or Narmada riverbank. There has been no speculation, nor data,

or folk literature indicating the Pawaras travelled towards Rajasthan from their roots at Narmada. Thus, possibly Pawara name for this society would have been an age-old tradition carried across the ages and regions and retained despite the community would undergone Metanoia. The Geo-ethnographical data C.P. Rigby reports in his 'On the Satpoora Mountains' published as a part of book 'Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society From May 1849 to August 1850, recorded meagre number of Pawaras i.e., 4268, and supplied a data stating the number of souls before five years were only 2570. "Most of them have settled in these hills during the last few years, having emigrated from the Native States bordering the Nurbudda. Ta the Akranee Purgunna, the number of these settlers now amounts to 4268 souls; five years ago, the number was 2570 souls" (C. P. Rigby 7) If the vast administrative Akrani Pargana indicate such paltry number of souls and point their recent migration from their native Narmada riverbank. However, it also opens the crux pointing, if the total soul estimated in the year 1845 were just 2570, their emigration possible would have been less than about 10-20 years old on the region. Most of the Pawara villages still included in Shahada and Shirpur tehsil then had zero Pawara population recorded in the report, denoting their migration have taken place only after 1850s on the Deccan plateau crossing the hills of Satpuda Mountain. Therefore, one pursuing study and trying to trace their roots is advised to trace a record older to C.P. Rigby's report. Or recover an age-old oral literature recorded in some colonial or historical diaries of the invaders. At least the available evidence through some scattered records and survived folk literature does not adequately supply or authenticate any claim, assumption or speculations.

Entire bulk of what Pawaras express, celebrated and manifest is unrecorded and unscripted, lacking a script to their language. The new generation would master the orature and knowledge repository through observation and by imitating directly to the knowledge holders mostly elderly people, called *daaya*. The *daaya* is singular term however is made plural by repeating it twice as *daaya daaya* to address commonly to the agedly people who often form the village *Panch*ⁱⁱ of the Pawaras. However, epithalamion has been women's monopoly and rituals are mostly narrated by men folk, though women and men are not prohibited from participating nor things are gender territorial, but observed traditionally the way they have been designed, set and demonstrated. Panch have been operative on two level, Gaon Panch (Village Panch) as the name suggest have been confined to Gaon means village. However, on larger scale Samaj Panch (Society Panch), constituted of all *Gaon potil* (Patels) of Pawara community, across the states form a supervising council called Samaj Panch. Most of the socio-cultural activities and their manifestations are seen performed abiding *shram*, *samuh* and, *sahakarya*, at the core of values and existential ethics, which have been evident in performing customary duties, rites, rituals, social gatherings, functions etc. These ethical arrays are apparently observable in their forestry/farming, weddings, construction of houses, and at different festive celebrations. However, the recurring duties are conventionally attributed to certain families who often form the *Panch*. The panchayat is formed thus for self-governance and by the group structured with certain positions: *Karbari*, Pujara-the village the priest, *Daaya* – the elderly people, Patel and gaon *pudharis*- the leaders. Some of these positions like Varati, *duli bonavnara*ⁱⁱⁱ (Palanquin maker) *Pujara* (rites performer) *Karbhari* (steward) etc., are even assigned traditionally to certain families in the village

Marriages in Pawara Janas are governed by customary law, administered by Daaya of both the villages take entire responsibility of marriage from engagement to marriage which lasts for about five to six days. The marriages are conducted sacredly, by worshipping the *Girhon*, a clan totem made of Sal tree. The rituals and rites are performed by gaon Pujara, traditionally volunteered for it by the gaon/village. He does it with a pride, as his position carries a great respect and prestige, though his work is part of shared stratified duties prerequisite of the Pawara society. Every village thus has families, or such persons assigned voluntarily for different customary works, deemed as prerequisite social duties without it involving monetary returns or gain. The social duties command great respect and prestige in Pawaras, is a sign that unlike the work distributions in the generals according to the monetary return and the respect that commands; Pawaras' such attainment of work is not associated with monetary gain, nor is linked with prestige issue or pride. However, the work labour does command great respect, therefore, the workaholic person is highly appreciated and socially valued. The son in laws, of the family lineages are therefore observed doing most of the labour works during all the family customary functions, gatherings and rituals etc. One can easily trace the family son in laws, for they are involved in all types of works that function may require, includes fetching drinking water, sweeping, cleaning, catering (liquor, bidi sticks, tea, tobacco, meal etc.) cooking and washing etc. with a great deal of pride and respect, which is rewarded well too by a feast called, *pavanay*^{iv} followed, exclusively for them, which is arranged with adequate stock of liquor and special meal prepared to host them with.

The Pawaras holds great esteem in maintaining their clan purity through ensuring exogamy, and the would be couple getting married are ensured through inquiries that they neither share either of lineages from matrilineages or patrilineages; not even distantly. There have been numerous Kuls/Clans, which in Pawaras are called *Jaat*, which means a common patrilineal inheritance, make it plausible in choosing interclan suitors, the would-be spouse and thus ensured the traditional clan purity is observed and sustain. The word *Jaat* in most of the Indian languages means caste, indicating hierarchal structure with descending order, often related with caste prestige, status and position. However, the colloquial term *Jaat* here in Pawari language, means a common clan lineages, that are not linked with any social arrangements or social positioning the term *Jaat* propagates in Hindus, neither it is linked with the work that forge into their caste recognition. The agricultural tools are prepared by carpenter, so do house is constructed by the members of the society, mostly voluntarily

as *lahya*^v. Rigby in his report conducted in 1849 submits, "They have borrowed nothing from the religion and superstitions of the Hindoos, and although carpenters, blacksmiths, and other artificers, are found amongst them, they acknowledge no distinction of sects. ... There are carpenters, blacksmiths, &c., amongst the Paurias and Wurralees, but no barbers or shoemakers." (C. P. Rigby 79-81) Thus, work distribution in Pawaras is not linked either with prestige issue nor with the social position. However, as Rigby points, they have been doing all skilful work required except as barber and making footwears, indicate their consciousness about the work and the caste associated with such a work. The Pawaras have Kuls (clans) of patrilineages, and not the caste which transit into discriminative social arrangement. The prevailing clans are – Vovovka, Bugwadya, Podyarka, Todovka, Jomborka, Ovaya, Murhya, Potlya, Khoydya, Ravtava, Chungod, Ohratya, Khovcya, Navodkya, Bhondarka, Konaha, Barya, Kiradya, Bamnya, Huvya, Daworkya, Boydya, Bhuslya, Ningavya, Thakrava, Sotya, Dudovka, Mota, Heltya, Mujaldya etc. Marriages thus take place between interclan, though matrilineages too are ensured to be avoided. In Pawaras, the matrilineage relations hold similar intimate purity and belonging as it does with patrilineages. Maternal sisters and brothers are held equally to the paternal, and therefore such endogamy is prohibited strictly. The rituals, customs and rites are the same across the Pawaras despite their habitat being different across the states within all variants, however some rites, and customs may differ *Jaat* wise.

Marriages in Pawaras is quite lengthy process, however they are often conducted and arranged distinctively and so do are classified accordingly as *Aytlu viyav*, *Motlu Viyav Churyu viyav*, *Vor Viyav* etc. along a type of marriage in which the son-in-law stays as 'Ghar Joway'^{vi} and abides himself to the service of his father-in-law till he pays off the agreed *dejo*^{vii}. However, he is treated equally like their own son, and the work involved is mostly of prestige like tiling agricultural land, driving cattle, weeding grass for the cattle etc. though with modern work opportunities, and the *Dej* tradition still sustained to attribute a great deal of respect to the bride and her family, who contributed in raising the bride, the amount of *dejo* is fixed across the Pawaras and administered through Samaj Panch to ensure that it remains affordable to the poorest, and therefore the custom of 'Ghor Joway' is almost dated and is out of practice. Deviation or breach in attempt of escalation of *dejo* is condemned and considered a social offence by such Samaj Panch who decide the amount of it. At present the amount of *dejo* is fixed amounting about ₹ 21000/-. Traditionally marriages in Pawaras used to take place post the month of Holi (*uv*^{viii}) in the month of *Okhatri*^{ix} till the beginning of month of June (*davovyur*), however at present marriages take place year-round except in the month of *Dandu*^{xi} and *Holi* (February and March).

In deciding marriages though the *Panch* from the *gaon* of the involved party play major role in fixing, conducting, and administering it, the bride gets equal opportunity choose her would be husband. The great quality rarely found in most of the Indian community, where therefore, love is permitted feeling and have been playing major role in ensuring the match. Rigby Observes, "The marriage ceremony is never performed until both parties have arrived at maturity: the young men are generally permitted to choose for themselves, and these are perhaps the only people in Western India amongst whom love has any share in forming the marriage tie." (C. P. Rigby 77) Interestingly, marriage is considered a sacred and a wilful tie and not social burden where women are reduced to some menial duties and raising its denied of full-fledged social life equal to her husband. The father of the bride is not burdened to pay the illogical demands of the dowry under prestige issue and social pressure. Girls are equally free and are held with pride that could be link with the practice of, they attract dowry from the groom and not the vice-versa. There has been teasing epithalamion addressed to the father of bride that appeal the father that he should not take more dowry, for it may bring more burden to their friend, the bride, to cause a hinderance to her freedom in married life. She shall be free of any dues so that she would be free to decide her life in her own:

Bahaka thodo debo leji

Benile nibhade na nibhade. (V. Sonawane 68)

Meaning: Father, do not seek more dowry as the daughter may not get on with her marriage. Remarriages are very common in Pawaras, and in past there have been polygamy in practice as well. The bride remarrying however is compensated by the present husband to the injured one, by paying back the marriage expenditure occurred to him. If not then, the father must compensate the expenditure to the injured husband so that his daughter would be unburdened to remarry, and the father may then reclaim the *dejo*. Girl in Pawaras enjoy equal privilege in enjoying freedom that is evinced in choosing her partner, as one oral specimen epithalamion collected from their marriage ceremony unfolds,

Jodule jodu veri te

Ubi reji maa bena

Ucho nicho veri te

Feki deji maa bena (V. Sonawane 68)

Meaning only if you find the groom compatible, you to get ready to marry, or else, do not submit, rather kick him off. Such bold expression and such rights are rare to be noticed in majority generals who endorse biased male chauvinism, and women are still socially subjugated and reduced inferior.

However, the traditional renditions epithalamion and the story chanted in performing the puja addressing to the first marriages ceremony in Pawaras of their deities – Raani kajal (rain goddess), the daughter of Kalarana (Cloud) was to marry Ourichand, and the rites of the marriage was performed by first Pujara (priest) Mavichur. However, on her wedding night, she fell in love with Raut/Rana Kumbay, who eloped her, and later they were

chased but the father accepted the marriage and gifted her a cloud. In Pawara wedding rituals, rites and in epithalamion they were commemorated as their deities.

Footnotes:

ⁱ Daaya, * literally means agedly people, however the term holds broader socio-cultural implications attached to it in ensuring the customary law and in implementing socio-cultural rites, ceremonies and delivering judgement. The daaya form gaon(village) and society panch who control all socio-cultural activities and ensure harmonious co-existence. Gaon Patel, pujara, Karbhari, gaon Daaya, etc., make the Gaon Panch.

ⁱⁱ Panch, means five, that often is expressed while addressed an arrangement to fix any socio-cultural attribute by commonly saying – paach manahe both leta/ mukli deta /vaatu kor leta etc., meaning let the five people meet, represent, convers to consent and decide. However, the panch may include more than five, who hold and control socio-cultural stakes, ensure them rightly executed.

Elderly people, five, people, sit together, send, have a talk.

ⁱⁱⁱ Palanquin in Pawaras are used to carry corpse to the graveyard.

^{iv} Pavnay, mostly hosted post social function, is a feast prepared accompanying liquor and food by the family, where customary programs like, marriage, post funeral rite etc., is conducted before it. Pavnay is culmination of any such functions and is conducted for the intimate relatives of the family before they disperse post such functions.

^v A prevalent practice in Pawara Adivasis (Khandesh region of Maharashtra) in which different works are done voluntarily by ensuring at least a member from each enamouring house extend free labour till the work is done. They are served with food by the host whose work is under process e.g., Constructing house, tilting agricultural land etc.

^{vi} The groom stays at in his in-laws till he repays the debt of dejo, though his wife too stays with him. After paying the amount of dejo that the groom abides himself by availing his labour, it often agreed in years by which the amount would be covered and then he would be allowed to take his bride at his native home.

^{vii} Dejo is kind of fixed amount decided by society and which is equal amount to every girl getting married and her father will receive that amount from the groom's family, though certain part of amount is given as a token of love and gratitude to those who have helped in raising the girl.

^{viii} Uvi means Holi, however the holi in Pawara tribes are celebrated differently and is called mother (Uvi Mavli)

^{ix} Okhatri, generally means Akshay Tritiya.

^x A month in Pawara Adivasi that falls in the month of June

^{xi} One of the months in according to the Pawara Janjaati usually takes place in February. Tribal months are observed according to the moon cycle, and each month begin with new moon.

Glossary:

PAWARI	ENGLISH
Lahya (n)	Volunteer labour
Paach	Five
Manahe	Men/people
both leta	Sit together
mukli deta	Send
vaatu	talk
kor leta	Do it
Aytlu	small
viyav,	marriage
Motlu	prodigious
Churyu	secretly
Vor	Colossal
Okhatri	Akshay trutiya (Though both are culturally different and mean it different)

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