




Pchiru Shelni

Night Hunting in Bhutan: Courtship or coercion?



Objectives of this research

- Offer an original contribution to the study of this significant practice;
- Contribute to scholarly understanding of gender equalities in Bhutan;
- Contribute to emerging international literature on distinct forms of violence against women;
- Contribute to understanding the ways in which particular forms of violence/sexual violence are linked to gender relations/gender inequalities and constructions of traditions and culture

Discussion for today

- ❖ Objective of this research
- ❖ What is Pchiru Shelni?
- ❖ What is Night Hunting?
- ❖ How do the two differ?
- ❖ Is it courtship or coercion?
- ❖ Impact on women and children
- ❖ Conclusion

What is Pchiru Shelni

❖ Pchiru Shelni is supposedly a traditional practice of courtship that takes place in rural Bhutan. The process involves men having sexual relations with women by stealth, with or without consent, typically by sneaking into or breaking into their houses. Even though these behaviours are seen as normal, there are several risks associated with the practice such as sexual coercion, rape and sexually transmitted diseases.

Rural Women



Typical Bhutanese Village



Temporary shed



Night Hunting

❖ The involvement of urban men arriving in villages to have sex with rural women overlaps with the practice of Pchiru Shelni. This offshoot of Pchiru Shelni is termed 'Night Hunting' and is widely known by the same term by the urban literate people and the outside world.

❖ People and the media have used the term interchangeably. However, this research has made a distinction.

Courtship or Coercion

- ❖ Believed to be courtship
- ❖ This research has shown that majority of sexual activities involve some form of coercion. The general assumption is that 80% of what occurs are coercion (Participant feedback)

Forms of coercion

- ❖ Physical Violence/ Aggression
- ❖ Verbal coercion/pressure and manipulation
- ❖ Lies
- ❖ Transactional sex as coercion

Who are at risk

- ❖ Single women
- ❖ Occasionally, married women
- ❖ Poor women
- ❖ Women without strong relatives
- ❖ Women who sleep alone in fields

Causes

- ❖ Poverty
- ❖ Alcohol
- ❖ Shortage of farmhand
- ❖ Desire for modern goods

IMPACTS

- ❖ Emotional well-being
- ❖ Marriage break-ups
- ❖ Loss of education opportunities
- ❖ Increase in number of single motherhood, loss of working and marriages opportunities
- ❖ Citizenship problems

Conclusion

❖ Both Pchiru Shelni and Night Hunting are not harmless practices as assumed to be. It was thought so because the law was lenient, women did not report sexual crimes and women suffered in silence. Other than pre-arranged and consented sexual activities, all other break-ins should be considered a sexual crime. Though there are laws to deal with sexual crimes, there should be a separate section to deal with Night Hunting just as there are with rapes. As horrible as rape is, I feel Night Hunting is no way better. In fact, the illiterate and the semi-literate rural women are taken advantage of by the educated urban men who are looked up to as people with better understanding and are expected to provide solutions to problems. The impacts on women and children are nothing short of coercion and abuse in the name of culture.