

Pung Practices among the Gurung – An Anthropological Perspective**Shanti Gurung¹****Abstract**

This article penetrates the Gurung pre-wedding ritual 'Pung' which is taken as the confirmation of marriage between the bride and groom's. The study of 'Pung' practices among the Gurung is one of the anthropological study which has not done any study yet through anthropological lens. Pung itself is one of the mandatory and strongest pre-wedding rituals of Gurung. This practice does not only tie the relationship among the two families but also consolidates the relationship among the Gurungs. After the Pung bride can make a choice of her stay and can move from parent's home even after having kids too. This study has been implemented through the ethnographic examination through participation, observation, and interview and questionnaire method with the Gurungs of Gorkha and Lamjung who have been living in Kathmandu. In this study, eleven respondents including five women, five men, one Klepri (the Gurung priest), one Jaisi (the Gurung fortune teller) and one politician (former village development committee chair person) were taken as a key informants by using convenient method and interview and observations were taken as a research design tool. Interviews show that 'Pung' rituals are one of the mandatory formalities to be done before wedding. According to the key informants they do not remember exact date of the practices about 'Pung' rituals. They even do not know how and who created those divisions of caste hierarchy among the Gurungs but have been following this ritual since they know. This ritual is also taken as the marriage itself (informal) and also opens for sexual intercourse, staying together in the same house and flexibility for the procurement.

Key words: Gurung, ritual, Pung, wedding, caste, caste hierarchy, caste division

Prelude

The Gurungs also popularly known as 'Tamu-mae' are the indigenous people of multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Nepal. The population census of Nepal held in 2011 reports that there are 3,25,622 Gurungs living in Nepal (CBS, 2011). Gurung, one of the

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largest populations among the indigenous groups have their own kind of culture, language, rituals and beliefs. After the unification, Nepal has its unity in diversity where different caste, ethnicity and religious people are staying in the country. Likewise, different caste, ethnicity and religious people started to celebrate their festivals and rituals in their own way. Different rulers created different difficulties, divisions among the Gurungs but they never left their rituals which their ancestors were following. Though having tough times in previous period of time, they are always aware of preservation of their rituals. Among various rituals '*Pung*' is one of the popular ritual among the Gurung which is celebrated before the confirmation of wedding.

Pung itself is one of the anthropologically done about the Gurung wedding ritual. It does not only tie the relationship among the two families but also consolidates the relationship among the Gurungs. Most of the culture and ritual studies are needed to be done as 'ritual' is one of the major domains of anthropological study. This ritual is also taken as the marriage itself (informal) and also opens for sexual intercourse, staying together in the same house and flexibility for the procurement. According to Victor Turner, culture is not power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions or processes causally attributed (Turner, 1975). Gurung people believe that culture, ritual and those kinds of events are one of the powerful factors that create cohesiveness among them.

Pung ritual plays an important role to decide wedding ritual after the agreement of bride, groom and their family. Gurung practices cross-cousin marriage and do not motivate for inter-caste marriage by ritual but somehow consider in elopement marriage. In some locality, they do capture marriage. If a man likes the woman, he looks for the opportunity where the woman is staying along. Due to the migration to the foreign land they have started to marry from the other caste and communities too. Modernization, migration and globalization have influenced a lot in Gurung wedding rituals and practices.

Though *Pung* ritual is one of the mandatory rituals before marriage it does not entail on inter-caste marriage and elopement marriage system. It is organized at the bride's house once the bride and groom families are confirmed the wedding. This ritual can be done even in the absence of bride and groom too. This study was done among the Gurung of Gorkha and Lamjung district but some of the rituals may vary in

accordance to their geographical cause not the ritual. So, based on the information provided by the *Gurungs* of Gorkhaand Lamjung, this paper particularly focus on the context, situation, practice and impact of the modernity in *Pung*.

Data and Methods:

This study was implemented through the ethnography examination. Researcher's own observation and interviewing with the key informants this study was done by the participating different 'Pung' rituals. Interview and observation was taken as the tool of data collection. In this study, Gurung people of Gorkhaand Lamjungdistrict who are living in Kathmandu were taken as key informants. It is a qualitative and descriptive in nature. Primary data were collected by observing, interviewing and questioning with the selected informants. Total of eleven respondents (four male, four female), one jaisi (Gurung fortune teller), one *klepri* (*Gurung priest*) and one politician (former village development committee chair person) were asked conveniently about the *Pung*. Field work was carried out on different time and location as the rituals were conducted. Some secondary data were taken from published and unpublished sources.

Pung Ritual: A Pre-wedding Ceremony

A "culture" is the system of such publicly and collectively subscribed-to models operating for a given group at a given period of time-the terms, forms, categories, images, and the like that function to interpret a people's own situation to themselves. Ritual plays an important role in keeping the system together (Ortner, 1978).

As Upadhyay(2017) said Gurungrites of passage is rituals occurrences that symbolizes their transition from one status to another. Embedded with rites of passage, there are different rituals they perform. GurungJ. (1977) states that *NamrashiJuraunu*, *Chhathi*, *Nwaran*, *Pashni*, *Putpute*, *Chhewar*, *Bibaha*, *AntestiKriya*and*Arghun (pae)* are the foremost.In Gurung culture marriage is the fourth rites of passage of their life to be performed. Firstly they perform *Nwaran*, secondly weaning, thirdly *Putpute/Chhewar* and marriage. It is assumed that the boy whose *putpute* is not done cannot perform their own wedding and death ritual formalities of their parents but the same ritual does not imply in daughter.If the boy has not performed his *Putpute/Chhewar*previously must perform right after his marriage.

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In patriarchal society like Nepal every person's role has determined by their social structure and culture. According to Bennett (2002) the categories of their daughter and wives are different in Brahmin community, where daughters were taken as a sacred and wives were taken as a profane. Differences between daughter and wives are not that much practiced among the Gurungs like other Hindu religion followers do. During the death rituals son and daughter have equal rituals but acts differently. In death rituals, married with other caste daughters, married from other castes wives and never married daughter's performance regarding their parent's death are forbidden. Touchability and untouchability on those kinds of rituals exist in Gurung ritual. The Gurungs termed it 'an ethical law' because they believe that deity is one of the strongest god to whom they never intend to make unhappy. If some of their descent marries with out of the Gurung caste the surname of children will be followed to their father's genealogy. It clearly mentions that the influence of patriarchy among the Gurungs are exists.

Pung is practiced by the Gurung of Nepal as their pre-wedding ritual. Likewise Tamang practices this ritual as *a'pong* and *Thakali* practices as a *'Khimi'*. These all rituals give the same meaning and purpose. In Gurung, different rituals are celebrated through different sign, languages and symbols. Rites of passage are a general theory of socialization articulated to denote rites marking the transitional phase between childhood and full inclusion into a tribe or social group (Gennep, 1960). Gurung culture does not represent only the formalities but those kinds of rituals consolidate more among their families, clans and other relatives. Those kinds of functions, rituals and performances create the cohesiveness among the Gurungs.

Marriage is an institution and it's universal. There are different rituals before marriage and after marriage in accordance with their religion and belief as Gurung people do. Among the Gurung *'Pung'* is one of the fundamental rites of passage to be celebrated before marriage. It is also known as pre-wedding ceremony among bride, grooms and their family. *Pung* as a material is a kind of alcoholic beverage, made by millet also known as millet wine, put into one wooden cup called *'theki'* and typically named *'Pung'* according to Gurung ritual. In any kind of Gurung rituals like (birth, wedding and death) alcohol is compulsory for good and bad rituals. When they do some rituals they do worship to their deities, sprinkle and offer a glass or bottle of millet alcohol to their ancestor.

While receiving the '*Pung*' alcohol in plastic and glass bottles are not accepted which do not give complete meaning and symbol of '*Pung*'. Only the alcohols brought in wooden cup is known or accepted as *Pung*. In Gurung marriage ritual '*Pung*' is mandatory function before marriage. This ritual seems arbitrary but has powerful meaning which helps to consolidate and confirmation of relationship between two families. Marriage as an institution embodied several types of marriage systems in the world. Besides love marriage, arranged marriage, cross-cousin marriages, levirate and sororate are common marriage types practiced around the world. These marriage practices depend upon the exogamy and endogamy rules within and outside of the community groups (Ember and Peregrine, 2002). *Pung* basically is celebrated only in homogenous marriage system. When a man asks for a hand of woman, a man himself does not go to the woman's house.

Before *Pung* confirmation, bride and groom side shows their '*Lho*' (twelve years animal cycle as Gurung follows Tibetan calendar) to the '*jaisi*'. There is always one mediator termed as '*kalle*' who mediates the responses from two sides. Gurung people normally do not follow *china*. They follow their twelve years animal cycle. When two *Lhos* are matches for marriage then parents allow meeting the boy and girl. If they both are agreed to marry only after that the bride side calls for *Pung*.

Jaisi sees the matching and unmatching of their *Lho* and '*Mewa*' (consists of four natural things – soil, water, wood and fire). Matching and unmatching of *Lho* gives powerful meaning for the wedding decisions. Whereas *Mewa* is one of the major supporting factors after *Lho*. Matching of *Mewa* shows the decision of marriage between couple. But decisions already made by couples do not concern those rituals if their parents reject to perform and they do elopement marriage as their parent do that suggestion and it does not concern about matching *Lho* and receiving *Pung*. After the agreement of two families, bride and grooms then suggestion of '*jaisi*' (Gurung fortune teller) plays a major role of *Sait* (an auspicious moment) for *Pung*. After getting *Sait* from *Jaisi* the male family gives the date and informs to the bride's family. As like both families prepare for the given date. From the groom side, some selected members and their closest relatives are invited for *Pung* and as a *Pung* groom's side brings with them two pots of *Pung* (single pot of *Pung* is not allowed), two pieces of fish (see Gurung 2018) and some snacks and fruits along with them as a *sagun*.

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Bride's side welcomes the groom's side in bride's home as groom's sides are there for '*Pungkahba/thuba*'.

Similarly, bride's side also prepares a feast for both families. If bride's father, mother or their parents are not presented/alive, the senior brother of the house decides and takes the responsibility of the ritual. In the absence of the family, a groom can come with his closest relatives or the guarantor from his closest one who can take the responsibility of the event. From groom's side they also bring some snacks like *Selroti*, fruits to reciprocate to the host family. Similarly, bride's family members especially the elders one welcome the groom's family in their home as guests. *Perungo/Perakhu* (small basket made by bamboo) is one of the mandatory asset where the groom side put's selroti and fish in that and bring to the bride's house as a *sagun*. And as a return bride's family also send back some foods when team grooms return to the home.

When groom and bride family gathers in bride's house then they start the ritual by mixing two sides of alcohol in one '*Pung*'. Specially, the senior person of the family does this. Mixing up of two sides of '*Pung*' in a single pot denotes the acceptance of marriage proposal formally and mixing of relation and making a single thread. They share the alcohol to each of the participants on the occasion of happiness. Specially the senior male of the groom's family offers a pot of *Pung* to the senior member of the bride's family and when they drink *Pung*, they say 'okay, our daughter is now your bride from now'. After taking *Pung*, both bride and grooms are called to take blessings from the elders. They bow down to the elders and take blessings. After *Pung*, they are declared as informal couple.

In *Pung* function there is no requirement of ornaments during the function but only two bottles of *Pung* is efficient to end the function of the day. During the *Pung*, lots of joking, dancing and gossiping creates the closeness of the participants. Some of the formal programs also conducted which helps each other to introduce the relationship of bride and groom with each individual. So, there will be whole one day program to be spent by both families. After the *Pung* bride can make a choice of her stay and can move from parent's home even after having kids too. Bride and grooms can participate in every good and bad functions of each other's family but do not transfer the deity of groom to the bride. Deity is supposed to be transfer only after the wedding rituals.

In the past, in Gurung culture marriages are arranged when daughters are in mid teenage and sons are at early twenties. So the previous generations married when the girl was too young i.e. around the age of thirteen and fourteen. Many Gurung men join the British, Indian army or in the UN Peace Keeping Forces. In Gurung culture, to become an army man is taken as a pride and supporting economic system in family. When a *Lahure* (an army man) comes in first vacation then choosing the bride and making confirmations of the wedding are the first priority. Most of the *Lahures* chooses his wife at his first vacation and marry in second or next vacation. If he leaves home before *Pung* the decision would be taken by his parents and ask a hand to his favorite girl who is supposed to study in class eight or nine. *Pung* on the other side can be done even in the absence of bride and grooms too. If the bride and grooms are aboard their families in the home town also can celebrate by fulfilling all the formalities by their family and elders. Another interesting part of the *Pungis*, the boy or girl can perform it by witnessing each other's photos too. In contemporary situation, they perform it from video calls too. In some context, parents do not allow to marry them just because of their unequal caste, economic and educational status. As a result, they do elopement marriage. In this context, *Pung* is skipped and after the acceptance of couple as a bride and groom they perform another ritual which is called '*Syorani*' (Saipata in Nepali term, it symbolizes the marriage acceptance from both side).

If the bride and groom both are abroad and decide to marry, they firstly talk to their own family and ask for *Pungin* their hometown if their parents are not along with them. Then their families coordinate and manage *Pung* program in a given date. On this auspicious occasion, a male side gives a word to the female sides that 'please forgive us if our son has done something wrong. But he liked your daughter and asked your daughter's hand. We will be responsible of every mistake if he has done.' As a consequence, the bride's family accepts the proposal and starts the *Pung* and from this day the groom family gives a word to the bride's family '*mare paap pale punya*' which is very familiar proverb in Nepalese culture.

After marriage woman is busy for household and child bearing-rearing as a household management and home maker. A *Lahure* returns to the platoon with full responsibility of his bride. The *Gurungs* normally do not put on engagement ring or cut cake by their ritual. They only offer two bottles of alcohol (*Pung*) from bride and

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groom's side. They only exchange and drink alcohol and confirms marriage. Lattermodernity and acculturation crossed its limit and started to cut cakes and wear wedding ring, different symbolic gold jewelries and modern designer wedding dresses. Otherwise, Gurung wear wedding rings only on the wedding day which is brought from boy's side not as a ritual but as a gift. If the wedding program is happening soon, they discuss about the date at the same day of *Pung*; and if the wedding is not happening soon they will give the confirmation about the date and make wedding plan coordinating each other. But the bride is not obliged to take responsibilities of her groom's rituals until she is bride of the house. But the reciprocity between two families becomes stronger after *Pung*.

Pung program is basically hosted by bride's family. Bride's family invites to the groom's family for '*Pung*' which is termed as '*Pungkhanu*' and groom's family becomes the guest of the day. Small kind of feast is to be organized by bride's family. At the end of the program groom's family leaves the bride's house by promising to come again to take their bride with full of music and people. *Pung* ritual makes easy environment and making familiar in between bride and groom. Formerly, couple would not know each other. The mediator '*kalle*' bring the purpose of marriage to the bride's home and after knowing each other's family *kalle* used to transfer the message each other's family. If the bride side is okay, then only other formalities would be organized. After *Pung*, bride and groom can stay in accordance with their convenience and that makes easier to cope of with the family and they prepare the things accordingly.

Doherty (1974) argues that kinship and marriage system forms perhaps the most organizing forces in adoption situation. Kin and marriage system may be considered as flexible adaptive mechanisms which grow in years of social interaction and are able to fit in a number of environments to provide important support to a society sharing a particular tradition. Marriage among the Gurung within the same cast has traditionally been important. Till sixteenth century, Gurung of Gandaki areas were totally unknown about caste hierarchy among the Gurungs and Hindu religion. On that time state created a strategy of 'divide and rule'. Later on, King Jagadhish Shahi showed false genealogy of Gurungs which was prepared by Bhojraj Sharma. Messerschmidt (1976) has claimed that this division is a Brahminical construction rationalizing Gurung history and social structure to fit Hindu caste hierarchical norms

and it was used in nineteenth century by Rana Prime Ministers to adjudicate social conflict between *CharJat* and *SoraJatGurungs*. Those kinds of false documentations created fraction, harshness and very unpleasant relationship among the Gurungs.

After the publication of that falsified document not only the Gurungs were affected but many of caste groups were facing those kinds of divisions, hierarchy and exploitation from their own and still exists in different communities. Almost all caste and ethnic groups in Nepal rarely permitted their brides at home if she belongs to lower caste. Those kinds of hierarchy set threatened on mind and could not openly do the rituals. Formerly, practice of '*Pung*' and marital system also practiced only in between *Char* to *Char* and *Sohra* to *Sohra*. Clan system became a kind of incurable disease among the Gurungs. If the boy and girl are already in relationship they did elopement marriage just because of the harsh of such a meaningless clan category, community and that giant caste hierarchy system which was forcefully laden by those so called rulers. Most of the parents tried to break their relationship too. They never accepted low caste Gurungwoman as their bride. If the boy did elopement marriage, they have to face whole consequences.

Those kinds of 'breaking' for their ruling was bearing by their family and brought a divisions among the Gurungs and as a result if the so called *Charjat* boy marry with *Sohrajat* girl then his family did not welcome and did not allowed to touch their hearth, participation in death rituals and deity worshipping practices because of the caste hierarchy system. If the so called *Charjat* boy offers a marriage proposal himself to the bride's parents are not accepted because of the fear of despises due to the caste hierarchy. It was mostly in the case of lower caste bride and family. Sincerity of Gurungs was totally confiscated by wise rulers creating caste hierarchy and clashes among the Gurungs.

One of the *Sohrajat* female (Kamala Gurung) shared her daughter's story. Her daughter was married with so called *Charjatan* Indian army. Firstly, they were supposed to do arrange marriage but his mother rejected the marriage proposal with *Sohrajat* girl and had threatening of not letting them enter in their home. As he was against those malpractices, he saw another same case in their relatives. They did elopement marriage and performed their wedding at gumpa and took his wife to India and stayed away from family, those malpractices and to protect his wife. They settled down in India and did not return to home for years. In some areas Gurung people

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started to hide their own caste and turned into so called *Charjat* caste. Those kinds of malpractices did not only break their heart but various relationships among the Gurungs. As a result, the rulers are beneficiaries of it. Nowadays, Gurung people started to open their eyes and realized the wrong things which have practiced by their ancestors.

After democracy, Gurung people also got chance to join school, got to learn something better for them which opened eyes for the good and bad. They started to differentiate between right and wrong issues. Similarly, new Nepal brought equal opportunity for all caste and class with quota system which added some rays of hope. Gurung people started to know the reality about their caste, clan and tribe. After knowing about the laden system of autocracy, they opened their eyes that they were blindfolded by the rulers. Gradually, they are trying to eliminate such a falsified documentations and 'incurable disease' of Gurung clan system.

Now, they understood the value of their ethnicity and they believe that there is no caste hierarchy among the Gurung. Gurung people are practicing marriage except their own tribe. Nowadays, except rare examples, there are no malpractices among *Charjat* and *Sohrajat*. Grandparents are also happily arranging '*Pung*' among the *Charjat* and *Sohrajat*. In every '*Pung*' ritual, advocacies regarding caste hierarchy among the Gurungs are doing by their seniors and educators. They have regression what they were following since long and giving suggestions to new generation not to follow that wrong path which was deliberately laden to the innocent Gurungs. In this case, one of the member of '*TamuHyulaChhojDhi*' expressed her experience that she was born in *Charjat* family and married with *Sohrajat* man as they did elopement marriage because of the rejection of their marriage by their parents. By experiencing bad moments with her parents and their families she is now advocating not to practice those bad rituals which help to break within our own. As a result her son married with *Charjat* woman and her daughter married with *Sohrajat* man which made such hierarchical balance in her family.

Those kinds of malpractices created lots of divisions among the Gurungs. Recently, the Gurungs have their organization regarding *Charjat* and *Sohrajat* which is the result of wrong direction of the rulers and politics. Not only in Gurung but in other caste people also have plenty of influences of caste hierarchical issues.

Except caste hierarchy the Gurung there are suffering from some conflicts and contradictions too regarding their ritual in accordance with their social experiences and cultural meaning. After having *Pung*, if the boy and girl separate unfortunately or break their relationship in their own choice, their parents need to fulfill the formalities by returning *Pung*. Before returning *Pung*, the consequences have to be finalized. At this time they do not drink any alcohol together. Just say that the bride and grooms are no more together. Over the past, most of the weddings were canceled because of the casteism, economic and social aspect. To return *Pung*, there would be no financial punishment, no auspicious time and no welcome and feasts. But that casualty probably spoils the relationship between two families but it does not go for longer.

Gurung people believe in myth and faith. As Bista mentioned 'fate' is the main director of our future, Gurung people realizes that main factor of breaking the relationship is because of their fate and it cannot harm the relationship of two families. Eventually, they forget the bad consequences and do fresh start of relationship between two families. As a formality, if boy cancels the marriage they have to go to bride's house and return *Pung* and if groom cancels the marriage then groom sides go to bride's house and return the *Pung*. At *Pung* returning time *Kalle* goes with the parents and talks about the consequences. If one of them dies accidentally before the marriage the relationship remains the same as they are committed in accordance with the wishes of bride and groom. If any of them (the alived one) wish to marry with another person is also easily allowed and accepted. In previous time, most of the brides became widow before marriage because of the grooms' death in war. The bride did all formalities as a wife and spent her life in the name of her soldier. So, '*Pung*' is one of the symbolic mediators which consolidate the relationship among Gurungs. This ritual needs to be preserved and practices by young generations too.

Conclusion

Gurung people from Nepal are traveling and settled down over the world for their better education and work purposes. Most of the youth Gurung males are serving as a soldier in British, India, French armies and UN Peace Keeping Mission. Whenever and wherever they stay but they never hesitate to follow their rituals. In contemporary situation, many youth Gurungs are staying in other countries for the purpose of job and education. Some are as a military service, some are for their better

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education and some are in business purposes. When a boy is adult he thinks about his family. His family also asks to him about marriage. If he is already in relationship, he asks his parents to see their 'Lho' for the matching and their marriage. If the boy is in relationship with the same cast, only can ask and celebrate 'Pung'. If the boy is in relationship with other caste girl 'Pung' is not celebrated. They do marriage directly.

Most of the youths who are living outside the country also try to preserve their 'Pung' culture and practice in their own according culture and ancestral practice. Because of the lack of resources they assume the similar things as 'Pung'. A pure millet wine 'alcohol' is not available in abroad; so they use other wine or alcohol as a 'Pung' but the wooden cup is mandatory and they bring themselves from their hometown for the purpose of important causes. But nowadays, cake culture is replacing 'Pung' culture and young generations are neglecting to follow their culture. Whereas, advocacies through different medias and programs, they are giving information and awareness to the youths to preserve their culture through their rituals. Latter, more new generations are learning and practicing their rituals.

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