

Traditional Marriage Customs and Rituals in Kashmiri Society

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Abstract: This paper presents an overview on traditional marriage customs and rituals in Kashmiri society.

Keywords: Marriage, Customs, Rituals.

1. Introduction

Human society as well as other societies i.e. animal societies began centuries ago and continue up to the time and will continue till the world comes to an end. The continuance of the individuals is possible only through the process of reproduction of animal life. The process of reproduction involves sexual interaction of opposite sexes. The process is an important characteristic feature of life. No society is possible without individuals and hence no society is possible without sexual interaction of humans. The animals have no regulated process of sexual interaction as they are not cultured beings. However, human society has a specialty that it is a cultured one. In the words of holy Quran Allah has given humans the freedom to accept or reject His laws. Animals have no such power. They follow as per their instincts and human follow instincts as well as their mental faculty.

Thus human being have regulated the sexual interaction between the two opposite sexes and institutionalized it in the form of marriage. The marriage institutions have been influenced by the socio-cultural environment of a particular society.

As a result of years of the process of marriage it has taken different shapes in different societies. It involves the religious dogmas and cultural norms. There are many traditions which have got annexed to this process.

The marriages ceremonies go on differently in different societies deepening upon various norms, traditions, religions, economic conditions etc. Thus different types of rituals have come into being and these rituals have become the symbols of performing a marriage.

The rituals are differently explained by different authors. some take ritual to be the basic social act” -Roy. RAPPAPORT¹. the sad author (1999, p. 24) defined rituals as the performance of formal, invariantly sequenced, and traditionally transmitted actions and utterances, such as what occurs at weddings or initiation rites. He further argued that rituals played a critical role in making us humans. Human

society required trust, and ritual was necessary to create that trust because, unlike language, rituals was indexical.

Similarly, in a more modern context, one’s willingness to participate in a nuptial ceremony or a fraternity initiation serves as a public indicator of one’s commitment. While no indicator is perfect, enduring rituals typically exacts a high enough personal cost to deter casual pretention. Learning a society’s normative standards – that is, the attitudes and behaviors leading to social approval- could be risky if one relies solely or even predominately on verbal instructions.

Furthermore, the most informative actions would have been those that reliably reflected the actor’s true intentions and belief commitments. Rituals actions fit this criterion. Rituals actions are not accidental or thoughtless. Instead, by their very nature, they are deliberate, meticulously executed intentional behaviors.”¹

¹ The essential role of rituals in the transmission and reinforcement of social norms (Matt J. Rosano southeastern Louisiana university)

A *ritual* is elaborated by following definitions;

It is a sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and performed according to set sequence.

Rituals may be prescribed by the traditions of a community, including a religious community.

“Rituals is pure activity, without meaning or goal.” (F. STAAL)

This (interpretation) has allowed the scholarly fantasy that ritual is an affair of the tremendous rather than a quite ordinary mode of human social labor.” (J.Z. SMITH).

“Ritual is like a favored instance of a game” (C. LEVI-STRAUSS)

“in ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined turn out to be the same world: (C. GEERTZ)

“Rituals are enactments or systems of actions and beliefs that each have a beginning, a middle and end”. Living religion by Janet Morrissey, Peter Mudge, Adam Taylor, Greg Bailey, Paul Rule.

In this paper we are going to discuss some rituals of marriage ceremony in traditional Kashmiri society. The data for the paper has been collected from primary as well as secondary source. The primary source comprises the respondents who have been

verbally interviewed and secondary source includes archival source.

The institution of marriage is back bone of every society. It is a sweet relationship between the husband and the wife. The development of this relation is co-related with the development of every civilized society in any part of the world. It is as old as down of the civilization. However, the nature and the concept of marriage under various personal laws keep on changing with the changes in the society and social order. The general concept of marriage requires the subsistence of the social unit of 'Family' which is the foundation of every society."²

². Endre Nizsalovsky, order of the family (1968) P.15

Marriage is a relation between male and female based on a compromise and mutual confidence to lead a social life together. It is a stable relationship in which a man and a women are socially permitted to have children implying the right to sexual relations. People do not marry because it is their social duty to perpetuate the institution of the family or because the scriptures recommended matrimony or because they have fallen in love with each other but because they lived in a family as children and cannot get over the feeling that being in family is the only proper way to live in society.³

³ Bhushans and sachdeva: introduction to sociology. (2014). Kitab mahal distributors – New Delhi.

Prof. Vinogradoff observed that, "it is not only an institution regulating sexual intercourse and kept by conjugal affection, but also an arrangement for bringing up of children and a partnership for economic ends and social co-operation, sometimes, one side and sometimes another predominates."⁴

⁴Vinogradoff, Historical jurisprudence, (2010) Gale, Making of Modern Law. Vol. 1 P. 169.

2. Marriage in Kashmiri Society

The institution of marriage has found to be more enduring than any other social institution. The people in every civilized society are interested in the maintenance of the institution of marriage as it is the foundation stone of society of which family forms an important organ. Marriage, a necessity for human being, is a fundamental pre-requisite for setting up of a family and as such the religious sanctity for it, gives birth to the various kind of morals to be followed in its performance. Kashmir being a multi-religious region, mainly inhabited by Muslim, has a set of ceremonies which the followers of different religion perform.⁵

⁵Gazetter of Jammu and Kashmir, Kashmir Region, vol. I, p. 234

Marriage is deemed essential for virtually everyone in Kashmir. For the individual marriage is the watershed in life, making the transition to adulthood; generally, this transition, like everything else in Kashmir depended little upon individual violation but instead occurs as a result of the efforts of many people. Arranging a marriage is a critical entailed some redistribution of wealth as well as building and restricting social realignment and off course result in the biological reproduction

of families.⁶

⁶Census of India, 1941, Vol. XXII, Part I & II by Capt. R.G. Wreford., p.13.

The inhabitants of the Kashmir observed several customs and beliefs like that of which were followed by other people of the state. It must be explained that the customs vary according to the positions and wealth of families and that there is a difference between the observances of the city people and the villager. But the chief incident in birth, marriage and death are the same. It is not out of place to mention that there are many points of resemblance between Muslim customs and the pandit (Kashmiri Hindu customs.)⁷

⁷walter Lawrance, (2005) The valley of Kashmir, New Delhi: Asian Educational service, p. 258

although there are certain points of similarity, and the curious prominence of the walnut, salt, and the use of the mehendi dye, will be noticed. besides the mehnzrat, or use of mehendi dye, in both religions there is the laganhir/saath name or fixing of the marriage day. Gulimuit, the, giving of money and jewels; the dress and the title of the bridegroom as mahaaraz and of the bride as maharaini. Phirsal, the visit paid by the bridegroom to the bride's house after marriage.⁸

⁸. Prof. A. A Suroor, Islam in the modern world, problems and prospects, K.U.: Iqbal Inst. Of Kashmir, p. 218.

Marriage is recognized as the bases of society, upon which the family structure and the birth of new generation depends. It is both religious as well as social institution. The society as well as religion has given it a proper recognition. Both wife and husband are considered very important in a family. The wife is personified as *Brand -e- kaien* (stepping stone of house) who reflects the welfare and the attire of married life. The recognition is also made public through different rituals and practices. These rituals and practices help to strengthen the relationship between the two parties. In Kashmir, the marriage is associated with a number of rituals and practices. Like other societies, *Khander* (marriage) among Kashmiri Muslims is considered very important for both the sexes. In actuality, the parents of grown up boys and girls feel uneasy unless they get their wards married. As soon as the *ladka* (boy) and *ladkhe* or *Koor* (girl) are considered to be mature enough for marriage, hectic preparations start to find a proper and suitable match. Most of the marriages are arranged ones. "Marriage has generally been a family affair and arranged by parents."⁹

⁹.M. L. Kapur (1962) studies in History and culture of Kashmir (Jammu: Trikuta), P. 194

"The selection was the exclusive privilege of parents or the guardians as it was believed that the children, however, grown up they might not be able to make correct choice because of their inexperience. The unmarried people did not even participate in the discussions about the offers received from various households, as this was regarded as an act of misbehavior."¹⁰

¹⁰Ishaq khan (1976) History of Srinagar (Srinagar : Aamir), P. 109.

In maximum cases, the professional match makers, commonly known as *Manziymyor* (go-between), are pressed into service to search for a suitable match. *Mazimyors* are both males and females, but, in maximum cases, it is the 'third gender' who have taken up this challenging job of joining two individuals. In olden times, 'The Muslim families, if possible, would marry their daughters to some near relation and, if it was not possible, they would ask some man of their own clan who, had more sons for a boy whom they would take to their house as *ghar- Jamie, gari- paeth (khana damad.)*'¹¹

¹¹.Walter Lawrence, op.cit P. 267

In traditional society the go between (*manziymyor*) has a role as follows: " if a marriage with a near relative could not be arranged , the father of a son, who had reached the years of puberty called in the services of a go-between (*manziymyor*) . This go- between was usually a man of great powers of persuasion and visit the families with marriageable daughters and would tell highly colored stories of the magnificence and generosity of his client. He then suggests marriage and would take his leave."¹²

¹².walter Lawrence op. cit. P. 268.

The go between fixed the marriage and before the date of *Nishini* (betrothal), it was obligatory to match the stars (horoscopes) of the prospective bride and groom. Besides this, the other factors which were taken into consideration while selecting a match were status and moral character of the family of the prospective match and their close relatives.¹³

¹³.Earnest Neve, (1915) *Beyond the pirpanjal*, London: salisbury square,op., cit., p. 33.

Once the two families agree for the alliance, a formal commitment ceremony would take place in the form of *Nishani* (engagement). The day for *Nishani* (engagement) was fixed and it was obligatory in this day for boys family to send vermilion (*heena*) and some gold and silver ornaments to the bride through the middle- man. Shortly after, the boy's father would go with a small party of relatives and friends with presents to the girl's house. The presents, as a rule consisted of gold and silver ornaments, cash, and some special sweets.¹⁴ ¹⁴.walter Lawrence, Op.Cit., p. 268. The wedding date *sath naam* is proposed by both the families.¹⁵

¹⁵.Earnest Neve, (1915) *Beyond the Pirpanjal*, London: Salisbury Square, op., cit., p. 33.

An auspicious day is chosen for *livun*, another ritual which is traditional cleaning of the house before a wedding. On this day, the floors of the Kashmiri houses are cleaned. This is also the day when the *waza* (family cook) arrives and puts together a mud –and – brick oven called *wuri* in the backyard of the house. This was where the traditional meals would be cooked for the wedding ceremonies.

Another ritual called the *maenzraat*, in which the women wearing red and blue pherans (Kashmiri gowns) would sing marriage folk songs for the *maenzraat*, (the night when vermilion would be rubbed on the hands and feet of the bride and the groom). Both the parties give feast to their friends and

relatives. *Heena* and ornaments continue to be sent to the bride. On those occasions, all the women in neighborhood and relation, that have been called to the feast stain their hands and feet with henna. Cheerful concerts are held by women day and night.¹⁶

¹⁶Tyandle Biscoe, (1992) *Kashmir in Sunlight & Shade*, New Delhi: Mittal Publication House, p. 157.

On the day of *yanowoul* i.e. the departure of the bride, the wedding guests present, relatives and neighbors, were served sumptuous feast mostly dinner. The food prepared by the *waza* consisted, variety of dishes. *Wazwan* is regarded by the Kashmiri as a core element of their culture and identity. Guests are grouped into four for serving of the *wazwan*. The meal after a ritual washing of hands, through a jug and basin called the *tash – t- nari* are passed among guests, with the name of Allah.¹⁷

¹⁷.Parvez Dewan, Jammu, Kashmir ladakh- Kashmir, name of the pubsiher date of publication p.32

Kashmiri *wazwan* is generally prepared in marriages and on other special functions. Some of the essential *wazwan* dishes are *Mayth maz, kabab, tabaq maz, rista, gostaba, aab gosh, marts wangan qorma*.¹⁸

¹⁸. P. N.K Bamzai, social and economic history of Kashmir, publishers year of publication.

However, before marriage procession leaves for the bride's house, the groom must visit the nearest shrine and the ancestral graveyard where he seeks the blessings. The groom and his party (*baraat/ yeni-woul*) leaves for the bride's house accompanied by a group of people.¹⁹

¹⁹. census of India, 1961, Mattan, Jammu and Kashmir, p. 22

On arrival of the marriage processions relatives of the bride greet the procession warmly. The father of the bride and the father of groom embrace one another symbolizing the solemnization of the relationship with a promise of a lifelong friendship. The women sing folk – songs on this day.²⁰

²⁰ Walter Lawrence, op. Cit., p. 269

On this day, *Nikah* or marriage contract is drawn up and the *Mahr* fixed. The deed cannot be drawn up without the consent of the bride and bridegroom. Some of their new relatives therefore generally represent them. The bridegroom's father had to pay the *Qazi*, and the mosque.²¹ ²¹. Tyandle Biscoe, Op.Cit., pp.156-57.

The *Qazi* would perform the *Nikah* ceremony by reciting the verses of Holy Quran and hadith related to it.

Departure of the bride too has interesting rituals, The eldest female member of the family or the bride's mother kisses the bride and the groom on the forehead. The friends and family members of the bride say good bye with tears in eyes. Often the bride weeps bitterly and seeks permission for departure from elders and parents.

The newly- weds were welcomed in the grooms house in a playful moment, the groom's eldest ant/sister would refuse the newly –weds entry into their home until she was given some cash or jewelry or kind. This is called *braand ratun* In the

joyful moment the eldest woman (mother-in-law of bride) of the groom's family approaches the room where the bride was made to sit, before kissing on the forehead of the bride, this ceremony is known as *Mohar tulen*. The mother-in-law of the bride used to offer present to the bride, in cash or silver or golden ornaments. In return, bride also offers presents to her mother in law, in the shape of an ornament or cash known as *hash kant*²²

²² Gazetteer, op.cit., p. 237.

The bride stays in the house of bridegroom for seven days. During this time, the bride's father needed to send various dishes and suits of clothes to the bridegroom's father. On the third day of the marriage dry tea, sugar and cakes were sent to the bridegroom. These are distributed amongst the bridegroom's friends and relatives.²³

²³ Tyndale Biscoe, op. Cit, p. 29

The bride would go to visit her parents after seven days of marriage. Her husband and a couple of children, probably those of her sister-in-law accompany her. The parents of the bride had to give the bride a set of new clothes. This is called *sath-rath* ceremony followed by another *phirsal*. This ceremony takes place when the couple visit the bride's parent for the second time. Once again, they are given new clothes to mark the occasion²⁴

²⁴ Census of India, 1961, Mattan, op. cit, p. 29.

The last ceremony related to the marriage of Muslims is *phire-yun*. This is equivalent to the modern day reception held at the girl's palace. The bride's brother and sister come to the marital home and escort the bride back to the parent's home for one day. The bride wears all the jewelry given to her by her in-laws and proceeds to her parent's home. The bride's family prepares a lavish spread of non-vegetarian delicacies for the relatives from both homes. After the grand meal, the bride and groom return to the marital home, carrying with them all the gifts presented to the bride by her parents. It marks off the beginning of a fruitful and happy life for the couple and their families.²⁵

²⁵ Gazetteer, op. cit., p. 237.

Change:

The system of marriage in Kashmir had undergone many changes previously it was done with simplicity with modern trends marriage are performed in a luxurious style. In present society both the boys/girl actively participate in mate selection. Both of them choose their mates according to their profession, education or family status. The role *manzimyor* (go between) has declined, as most of marriages performed today are love marriages. The go between are also active. The professional goes between have emerged now, who have set up their offices as well. It is also important to mention that go between as a profession fetches lucrative income now-a-days. There are also some organizations which work for mate selection. People also take the support of social sites.

With the emergence of new trends marriages is fixed in many different ways, the occasion of *thaf travin* (catch hold) is the

first step towards marriage. The boy/girl along with few family members go to some places like shrine/ park, if both of them like each other they exchange a gold ornament which is sign of indication that marriage is fixed. Or in some cases both the families book restaurant/ hotel where the exchange of gold ornament takes place between the boy and girl. In some other cases some members of boys family visit the girls family and if they like the girl they gift her gold ornament which means marriage is fixed.

Engagement ceremony: is one more occasion which both the families decide to perform. In which the boy's family along with all the close relatives with the girls family and gift the girl expensive gold ornaments, sweets dry fruits etc. The girls family prepare and serve them feast Kashmiri *wazwan*. as the boy cannot visit the girl's family on this occasion a separate *bati treim* (Plate with Kashmiri *wazan*) is sent to the boy along with that gold ornament for boy and mother of boy.

This occasion is then repeated from girls side in which the same thing is repeated. This occasion is very expensive. In olden times it was not so expensive as there was no such exchange of expensive gold ornaments at that time Kashmiri *wazwan* was not so expensive it consists of only seven dishes at the most but now it may comprise 21 or so.

In-between engagement and marriage the boy's family continue to visit the girl's family on special occasions like *idds*, *Eid milad un nabi*.

3. Conclusion

Modernization has negatively polluted the traditional system of marriage. The resultant influence of it may cause and have been causing serious marriage problems in Kashmir. Among the marriage problems emanating as a result of modernization are high rate of dowry. Due to modernization the marriages in Kashmir became too expensive and it became difficult for people to enter into marriage at an early age. The changing scenes in marriage have broken the traditional fabric of society. The traditional rituals and customs have lost their importance and new ones have emerged. Now these changes have connected economy to marriage. This has reduced the marriage to an economic activity rather than an activity which connects the families and provides a socio-emotional mate for spouse.

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