

Marriage Customs of the Pukhtoons: A Case Study of Hangu (NWFP), Pakistan

Syed Minhaj ul-Hassan

Introduction

In Pukhtoon society marriage is a special occasion for the bridegroom and his family because for majority of the Pukhtoons this is once in a lifetime opportunity. Therefore, they try to celebrate it in a befitting manner. These celebrations vary from family to family depending on the economic position of the family and the religious and village/area considerations. The religious minded people celebrate it simply by putting buntings on the streets leading to the house as well as putting decorative lights on the house for the wedding night. However, some people bring dancing girls and the male youngsters make them dance till late at night. In yester years this was more common and open for all. However, nowadays to a severe degradation of social values on the people try to restrict it to the close friends. Even some families have started avoiding such celebrations because on such occasions the youngsters get drunk which leads to fighting.

In some of the families, in the bridegroom's house, a special place is arranged for the gamblers for two or three days. Besides, the bridegroom or his friends also indulge in arranging alcohol for the friends who desire for it. They drink it on the night before the actual day of marriage called *Zhanrio Gharidal*. On this night the bridegroom's friends celebrate the occasion and generally remain awake all nights. In the bridegroom's house the females celebrate the occasion in their own traditional way. For the marriage all the family members particularly the young girls tailor many

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dresses for different occasions in various colours and varieties. The bride's family also tailors clothes, however, the male members do not tailor new clothes as they consider it shameful to celebrate the marriage of their females but the bridegroom's male family members do tailor new clothes.¹ Those guests who are invited from far flung areas also come for the wedding day. They stay for a day or two in the bridegroom's house. The bride's family normally do not invite guests from far flung areas, however very close friends and relatives are invited and they come a day or two earlier and stay for the marriage. In case the marriage is in the same village or among relatives, then most of the invitees are common and they are required to attend marriage functions at both places. In such cases they go one day to the bride's house and the other day to the bridegroom's house for meals. For meals the invitations go differently. Close relatives, are now-a-days invited for four meals or two days. Other people are invited for two meals or one day. Even people are invited only for lunch or in case of *walimah*, for *walimah* (a special meal, which has become common in the last few years). A decade or two ago the people were invited even for six or eight meals depending on the closeness of relation. But now as the life is becoming busy and the food expensive, the invitations are sent for much fewer occasions.²

There are many customs/ceremonies of the marriage. The complete order of these is as following:

Kweezhda

Pukhtoon's weddings are very colourful and joyous. When the boy reaches the age of marriage, his parents and sisters start searching for the bride. Seldom the boy or girl is asked about their choice, generally it is a family affair. It is the parents who select the bride and the family for the boy.³ Mostly the family members agree upon a girl and then tell the boy about that particular girl. In short, mostly *kweezhda* (engagement) is a family affair. In *kweezhda* the family members of the male finalises the terms and conditions with the family of the female. All matters about dowry and *khwara* are finalised and the girl becomes the fiancée of the boy.

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In Hangu area normally after one year or within one year after engagement the marriage is arranged because more than one year is considered as shameful and untraditional. However, in case of unavoidable circumstances, like the death of a close relative, it can be delayed.

Braakhai

After engagement on each special occasion *Braakhai* (gifts) are sent to the female fiancée by the family of male until the time of marriage. After marriage the bride's family sends the same to the bridegroom on occasions like *Bakar Eid*, meat of goat or lamb, whichever has been slaughtered, and cooked rice on other special occasions.

Neeta Cheekhlal

Once the families complete preparations for marriage the date of wedding is fixed. Among the Shi'a community they consult either *Tuhfat al-Awaam* or a religious person to see an auspicious day for marriage. The first two months of Islamic Calendar i.e. *Muharram* and *Safar*, are not considered to be suitable for any festivity including the marriage. Between two *Eids* i.e. *Eid-ul-Fitr* and *Eid-ul-Azha* too, the time is not considered good. If the families want to proceed with the marriage between the two *Eids* then they conduct the *Nikkah*¹ ceremony during *Ramazzan* in order to avoid the bad impact and hold the marriage between the two *Edis*.

Khwara Weerkawal

Khwara is the food stuff, fixed during the engagement time, which the family of bridegroom provides to the bride's family for marriage. Normally *Khwara* is provided three or four days before the wedding day. *Khwara* is of different quantity i.e. *Speetha Goon* (sixty times), *Panzoos Goon* (fifty times) and *Salwaiikht Goon* (forty times).⁵ At the time of

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4. During this ceremony the bride and bridegroom are made husband and wife by the Maulvi who in the presence of three witnesses asks the bride and the bridegroom, separately, whether they accept each other on the conditions mentioned at that time. On the affirmative response at each time, he declares them as husband and wife and prays for the success of the marriage.
 5. Main items of Kwara are the following: Basmati rice, lentils, ghee, gur (Brown-sugar), peanuts, wheat, balsam, mustard oil, sugar, firewood and black tea. A small

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buying *Khwara* both families inform their nears and dears to be present at a particular shop at the time of purchasing the food stuff. They are informed by the *Duma* (a person of low origin who is responsible for many jobs like, cooking and informing people for different occasions, hair-dressing etc. etc.) At this time the bridegroom family buys food stuff for the bride's family as well as for themselves.⁶

Khwara Sapakaawal

In order to clean *Khwara* both families i.e., the bridegroom and the bride, invite the *mohalla's* females and relatives to come and help them in cleaning the food stuff in order to get it ready for cooking during the wedding. These invitations are also sent through the *Duma* (female of *Dum*).⁷ Earlier *Duma* used to go for two or more times to ask people to come for different celebrations. Now-a-days due to their busy schedule or because they have become more prosperous than before, they go only once and inform about all the marriage - related occasions.

When the invitees gather for cleaning of *Khwara* they are, now-a-days, given the lunch. Around a decade earlier there was no such thing i.e., feeding the invitees. When *Khwara* is cleaned, the hosts distribute pop-corn and some sweets among the children and guests which are mixed with rice. This tradition of the past is still in vogue, however, in addition to this, the guests are also provided with small bags of pop-corn and sweets to be carried home.

Two or three decades earlier there was another tradition that after cleasing of *Khawara* the *Duma* was usually sent to the invitees' homes along with a big *Kashrai* (basket) of pop-corn to be distributed among them. Normally all those involved with the cleaning of *Khawara* took the pop-corn. However, those people who did not accept the wedding

amount of cash is also provided for the payment to *Duma*, who cooks food and helps in other rituals.

For the scale of two main items viz. Basmati rice and lentils there is a standard formula. According to this they ignore zero in the quantity and multiply the number with two; like in Shpeetha Goon (60 times) 6 is multiplied with 2 which would come to 12, that would mean 12 maunds. Among the 2/3 would be Basmati rice and 1/3 would be lentils. Dilbar Ali, a shopkeeper who supplies food items for weddings, interview by the author, Hangu (NWFP), 14 March 1997.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Many families have, in the recent past, started using printed invitation cards in addition to the *Dum* or *Duma* tradition. The term used for that system is *khabarai*.

invitation would refuse to take pop-corn. After getting this message the wedding family would make efforts to reconcile the concerned family. Normally the meeting would result in reconciliation between the two families. As the tradition of sending pop-corn has been abandoned, now the annoyed families tell the *Duma* at the time of invitation that they would not attend the function. Message is conveyed, through the *Duma*, in these words: "God bless them". This is enough to tell the wedding family to arrange for a reconciliation.⁸

Shawdai wral

In this tradition the family of bridegroom (female members only) take a glass of milk to the bride on the wedding night. The bride takes a sip or two and the rest is taken to bridegroom who would also drink some of it. This custom is gradually becoming obsolete, as very few people observe it.⁹

Juno wraiz or naammi cheenawal

Juno Wraiz is the first day of proper wedding ceremonies. On this day the would-be bride is formally asked to sit along with her friends at a particular place in a corner of the room. The bride would be sitting there till her departure to the bridegroom's house.

Warbaal

On the day of *Juno Wraiz*, in the afternoon, this custom is observed. In this custom the *Duma* brings wheat in a bowl, in which a candle is also lit. The *Duma* put this bowl of wheat and candle under a salver. The bride is asked to sit on the salver and seven unmarried young girls would either dip their fingers or would drink the fresh or sour milk, whichever is provided, and would put the remaining milk on the bride's hair. After that water is also put on her hair in the same manner. After this the *Duma* would comb the bride's hair and make small braid of her hair. She also put *Sandoor* (a powder like substance red in colour) in the parting of bride's hair with matchstick. Then the bride gets up of the salver and *Duma* takes a bowl and walks around among the participants who would put some money for her in the bowl.

8. Mrs. Syed Akbar Shah, interview by the author, Hangu (NWFP), 15 March 1997.

9. Mrs. Syed Sajjad Hussain, interview by the author, Hangu (NWFP), 16 March 1997.

Nakreezo lamdawal for naakhkaa ceremony

On the same day of *warbaal* the custom of *Nakreezo Lamdawal* is performed in the bridegroom's house in the afternoon. The women get together and a woman makes the paste of *Nakreezo* (Henna/Balsam) in a bowl for *Naakhaka* ceremony. Other women sing *Dolas Imami* (a religious song) and some women give money to *Duma*. Before taking it to the bride's house in the evening, they decorate *Nakreezo* plate with many things, like walnuts, olive, roses, candles etc. Then they take it to the bride's house for *Naakhka* ceremony.

Naakhka or Nakreezai

On the evening of *Juno Wraiz* the bridegroom's female family members bring *Nakreezai* (Henna/Balsam) in a decorative plate along with burning candles to the bride's house. During their march towards bride's house they continue to sing different songs. When the procession reaches the house, the bride's family and the groom's family make groups and they start singing songs in which they also call names to each other. After these songs the bridegroom's family start singing a religious song which is known as *Dolas Imami*. During *Dolas Imami* the bride's family and guests try to make disturbance by mixing other irrelevant words in it or making loud noise to derange it. During *Dolas Imami* one of the elder woman of the bridegroom's family put the *Khkail* (a traditional bangle made of brass) in the bride's right hand and then dye the bride's right hand and foot with *Nakreezai*. On the dyed hand the woman also puts five walnuts and some flowers in the bride's hand.

The *Nakreezai* paste, which the bridegroom's family has brought, they leave it in the bride's house so during the night the bride's friends could dye their hands and feet with that *Nakreezo* paste. During the night the bride's friends make fun by trying to blacken the faces of family members and friends. Most of the friends remain awake all the night and they don't let others to sleep by making jokes and singing songs.

Takht Drabawal

Meanwhile when the *Juno Wraiz* starts, in the bride's house, the marriage also starts in the bridegroom's house. However, this day is busier in the bride's house than the bridegroom's. On this day the bride's family arranges lunch and dinner for the relatives, friends and *mohallah waallas* (neighbours). During the lunch and dinner, traditionally, the

Another occasion of great importance for bridegroom's family is *Zhanrio Gharidal*. It is a ceremony in which the bridegroom sits on the bed, specially made for this ceremony in the middle of the lawn/courtyard. The complete order of the ceremony is like this: the bridegroom is given a pomegranate through which small wooden stick is passed, tightened with coloured strings. He is also given a sword which he is supposed to keep and carry for the whole day. Then an elder person fixes a turban on the head of the bridegroom, the turban is known as *Shalpatkai*. Then the bridegroom along with *Kharbala* goes to the nearest mosque to perform two *raka'at shukranah* (thanks) prayers. When the bridegroom goes to the mosque he covers himself with a white *Chaddar* (shawl). On his way to the mosque and coming back to the house the bridegroom and *Kharbala* become the target of youngsters and friends. They hit them with different kinds of unwanted materials like tomatoes, eggs and other rubbish materials. However, the purpose of hitting is not to injure them but just to make fun. They try to escape the onslaught by any possible method. When the bridegroom returns from the mosque, the bridegroom is asked to sit on a specially decorated bed which has been put in the middle of the house's courtyard. At this occasion all the female guests and male and female family members get together. For this occasion the female relatives and special female guests are given, *Shkaroona*¹⁰ the contents of which they throw in the air to celebrate the *Gharidal*. The male relatives normally throw currency notes in the air. The male relatives also resort to aerial firing at this occasion. All those things which are thrown in the air during *Zhanrio Gharidal* are normally collected by children. However, sometimes even elders collect those things. For *Zhanrio Gharidal* when the bridegroom sits on the decorated bed, very close relatives, normally the eldest sister, tie *Sehra* (a special garland) on the bridegroom's head. Among the Shia Muslims the females sing *Dolas Imami* at this occasion. One of the many *Dolas Imami* one is like this:

(Pashto version)

Khaistai maabubai saanga da seeree de
Dolas immamaan sa saara yad kum
da awal imam Ali wali Ali de

(English translation)

His bride is an evergreen bough.
 If we sing of the twelve Imams,
 Ali is the first and the foremost.

10. *Shakore*, the singular of *Shkaroona*, is a *mazree* woven tray. At this occasion it is filled with walnuts, peanuts and sweets.

Dolas imaman sa saara yad kum
da dwayam imam Hassan ali wali de

If we sing of the twelve Imams,
 Hassan is the second to Ali

Thus, *Dolas imaman sa saara yad kum*, makes the first line of each couplet, while in the second line of the couplet, all the 12 Imams of Shias are remembered turn by turn.

When bridegroom intends to leave the bed, he is asked to break a clay bowl which has been put besides the bed. After that the bridegroom goes out to the males who are assembled in a different place. Inside the house, after the departure of the bridegroom, the *Duma* puts *Sandoor* on the parting of hair of bridegroom's female relatives, in return she gets money from them, and they sing and dance around the decorated bed of the bridegroom, while outside the *Duma* distributes sweets and decorated boiled eggs. Some local jokers also gather at this occasion and they sing different kinds of hilarious songs. At this time some of the participants also throw currency notes on the bridegroom which are collected by the jokers. The friends and the relatives also resort to folk dances at the beat of drums.

Neendra

Neendra, a part of the wedding ceremonies is no more in practice. Under this custom when the bridegroom would come out of the house after *Zhanrio Gharidal* and sit in the *Hujra* (guest house) all friends, relatives and co-villagers would give money to the family of bridegroom. This was usually given to the *Duma* to be handed over to the family. It was a very good tradition as it was a kind of economic help of the family because the whole community was sharing the expenses of the marriage. Unfortunately this custom, a source of mutual financial help of the family concerned and a source of developing understanding and cementing and increasing mutual fraternity among the people of the locality has become obsolete.

Wrasee

When the *Zhanryo Gharidal* is completed then comes the *Wrasee* ceremony. If the bride is from another village, the bridegroom along with family members, friends and relatives would go in vehicular cavalcade (caravan) to the bride's house. A special car is decorated to bring the bride home. The bridegroom's family also takes the *Dooli* (cradle) and special quilts to the bride's house. The bride is taken to the car in the

Dooli and on reaching the bridegroom's village, once again she is taken in the same *Dooli* to the bridegroom's house. When the *Wrasee* reaches the bride's house, they are welcomed by the bride's relatives and villagers. They are treated with tea and biscuits. The females accompanying the bridegroom go inside the bride's house where the custom known as *Jaam Warthakawal* is observed. In this custom a *Duma* or any woman of the bride's family shows the dowry of the bride to the women assembled there with a brief commentary on each item that is shown.

Meanwhile, *Nikkah* rite is performed, if not been performed earlier. Then the bride's *Dooli* is carried to the car, normally by village youngsters. They would never hand over the *Dooli* to the bridegroom's relatives until they are given some money. At the time of *Nikkah* the village people take money from groom's family for different things, like mosque, *hujrah* etc. When the *Wrasee* starts their return journey, sometimes the village youngsters block the exit roads. At this occasion the youngsters again ask for money, this money is normally in hundreds and is spent on merry-making, great wheeling dealing is done at this time, as the youngsters ask for more while the bridegroom's family wants to give less. Ultimately some village elders intervene and settle the issue. When the *Wrasee* reaches the bridegroom's house a sacrificial animal (normally goat or sheep) is slaughtered at the main gate of the house at the time of entrance of the bride in the bridegroom's house. To get the sacrificial animal the youngsters try their luck, the more physically strong group succeeds in getting (snatching) the slaughtered animal which they cook and eat later on. Here too, those who are carrying the *Dooli* demand money from the bridegroom family, until and unless they pay the money the *Dooli* is not handed over to the bridegroom's family.

When the *Dooli* enters the courtyard, the women start singing *Dolas Imami*. The bride is supposed to step-down from the *Dooli* by taking out right foot first; in the same manner she would sit on the bed which means that she would first put her right foot on the bed. In the evening the bridegroom and the bride are asked to perform many customs. The first is that the bridegroom comes to the bedroom and stands at the entrance of the room, the bride stands inside the room facing the bridegroom in the door. Then they are given three sips of *sherbet* after which the bridegroom crushes the pomegranate on foot of the bride (during this custom the pomegranate is not actually crushed on the foot of bride, rather the bride takes out her foot from that portion of the shoe on which pomegranate would be crushed but keeps her foot in the rest of the shoe). Then both are

guided towards a bed where they sit and then one woman (a woman whom others consider to be of good luck/fortune) stitches and unstitches the sleeves of bride and groom with each other for three successive times, each time the bridegroom stands while the bride keeps sitting.¹¹ During this ceremony all the ladies assemble around them and make loud noises. Then the bridegroom leaves the place.

After that the bridegroom's family brings cotton seeds in a *mazree* tray (*shakore*). The bride takes the cotton seeds in hand for three times and each time throws it towards the women standing around her. If there would be any left over that is showered by the women on the bride. During all these ceremonies the bride's face is covered with wedding shawl, however, after the cotton seeds ceremony the bride's face is uncovered and shown to the women and close relatives.

Naamee shpa

After these ceremonies the bridegroom goes out and sits with his friends. He is not supposed to go to the bride's bedroom till late night. In yesteryears the bridegroom used to go to the bride's bedroom very late, however, now-a-days the bridegroom goes to the bedroom not that late but not too early as well. When the bridegroom enters the bride's bedroom, there too, they perform certain customs. When the bridegroom enters the room, he is supposed to greet the bride. Then he takes *shawl* of the bride which has covered her head, face and shoulders and spreads it on the floor and asks the bride to join him in two *raka'at* thanks prayers. After that the bridegroom sits with the bride on the bed and gives her some sweets (normally sugar) which is placed there by family women, then the bridegroom entangles his *keengar* (a traditional brass bangle) with that of the bride which both are wearing in their hands, and leave it in her hand. The bridegroom is also supposed to give some gift or cash to the bride.

Next morning the bridegroom is supposed to leave the bedroom before any other person of the family gets up to see him leaving the room. Then he goes to some other place to complete his sleep. The bride sits for another three days in the house and during this period the relatives (male and female) and village women come to congratulate the family and give money to the bride.

11. The basic idea behind the stitching and unstitching custom is that husband has the power to break the relationship (through divorce) whenever he likes.

Zhanryo teekaala

On the second day of the marriage the bride's family is supposed to give lunch to the bridegroom and his friends. When they reach the house and sit there, the young children in connivance with the bride's female youngsters plan to take away and hide the bridegroom shoes, if not possible, then any of his friend's shoes. To return the shoes they again demand money. As the bridegroom and friends know about this custom, they try their best to provide this opportunity to the hosts. After lunch, *Duma* brings dry *Halwa* to the guests, in return they give money to her. Then the bridegroom goes inside the house and pay respect (do salutations) to his mother-in-law and other close female relatives. Now-a-days another custom is getting fashion, i.e. the elder sister of the bride puts golden ring in the bridegroom's finger. The bride's family also sends food for three days to the bride, and the bridegroom family gives money to that person who brings the food.

Tara

On the third day of the marriage, the brides' family comes to the bridegroom's house along with other women of the town or village to spend the day with the bride. The bride's family also brings food along with themselves to eat in the bridegroom's house.

Ziarat na ubastal

After *Tara* day on any (supposed to be) lucky night the bride is taken to the mosque to give her freedom to go outside the house. Until this custom is performed the bride is not supposed to go anywhere outside the house. For this occasion they also carry some uncooked rice mixed with *gur* (brown sugar) mixed with water. When the bride along with other women go to the mosque, the bride fills a bucket from the well and fills a *lota* with that water.

Khiartee

After *Ziarat* ceremony, the bride goes to her parent's house for a day to collect all her used belongings, she stays for the day and returns to the groom's house at night.

Then starts the wedding meal. All close relatives invite the couple for lunch or dinner. After the meal when the couple would be leaving the

house, the hosts will give either sugar or money to the bride as sending the bride empty-handed is considered a bad omen.

