

## AN ETHNO LINGUISTICS PERSPECTIVE ON THE MARRIAGE RITUALS OF BURUSHASKI COMMUNITY OF KASHMIR

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### ABSTRACT

Life cycle rituals are the most important part of an ethno-linguistic study. Rituals incorporate stages like birth, adolescence, youth, adulthood, maturity and death. Every stage in life conveys certain cultural forms, as people travel through these stages. Religion and myth hold important positions in these rituals, as every religion has remarkable soul-changing encounters appended to both natural and sociological events that epitomize life. The semantic structure of the rituals can characterize the implications and meanings of the cultural terms used in the rituals. Through rituals, one can express convictions and demeanor towards one's reality and surroundings. In this paper, all the religious and secular rituals associated with the linguistic community from birth to death are analyzed. The main focus will be on the language use in different rituals and forming a cultural lexicon.

**KEYWORDS:** Birth, Customs, Death, Marriage, Rituals

### INTRODUCTION

According to "Cultural Anthropology, A Perspective on the Human Condition" by Emily Shultz and Robert Lavenda, life cycle rituals fit into four categories. These four categories are that the ritual must be a repetitive social practice, it must be set off from the routines of day-to-day life, it must follow some sort of ritual schema, and it must be encoded in myth. Turner describes a ritual as "A stereotyped sequence of activities performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests." The most common rituals are religious rituals, birth ceremonies/naming rituals, marriage rituals and death/ burial rituals. Sociologist Paul Conner ton has described the powerful 'collectivizing' role of rituals in human societies.

Burusho's possess a vibrant ritual life and their rituals are almost the same as that of Kashmiri's. In the past 120 years, they have been settled in Kashmir, and thus, slowly assimilated the Kashmiri culture. As a result, the use of Kashmiri cultural terms is reflected in their rituals and ceremonies. Mostly Burushaski and Kashmiri cultural terms are used for their rituals. There are many loan words in their vocabulary which have been borrowed as a result of the cultural contact between the two language communities. For some rituals only Burushaski language is used while as for others where there is no Burushaski equivalent, Kashmiri is used with a bit of phonological change.

### METHODOLOGY

The data for the pilot study was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source consists of observation at the field, interactions with informants and the secondary source consists of various agencies, books, newspaper clippings etc. The technique used to collect the data through primary sources were mainly observations –both

candid and participation, interviews, recording of both interviews and conversations, a sample survey on the model of house hold surveys and a sample survey of communication network through families.

### **Birth Rituals of Community**

In the Burusho community, the pregnant lady goes to her parents' house and stays there till her confinement is over. When the baby is delivered, *azaan* (Muslim call to prayer) is whispered (uttered aloud) into the right ear of the newborn by a known person or relative. The *azaan* comprises of: God is great (4 times), I testify that there is no one worthy of worship except Allah (2 times) I testify that Prophet Muhammad(PBUH) is the messenger of Allah(2 times) Come to pray(2 times)Come to success(2 times) God is great(2 times) I testify that there is no one worthy of worship except Allah (1 time).

These are the first words a baby gets to hear. On the occasion people with high financial status sacrifice an animal especially a sheep (at home) or offer money at the shrine where they had pledged in advance to do so. A religious dedication is also made at the birth of a child. The nursing mother is only given mutton soup and rice till she convalesces, which is a period of forty days after delivery. After child-birth, the mother must not pray, fast or touch the Quran. On the expiry of this period, she is bathed and dressed in good clothes. On the occasion, her relatives pay her a visit and bring presents for the child. The birth rituals celebrated by the community start with the aqiqah ceremony, which is widely performed by its members.. After ten or fifteen days of the ritual, the lady's in-laws along with their relatives visit the child, bringing sweets and gifts for it and also for the mother. The guests are served Kashmiri *wazwan*. In case of a baby girl, there is a ritual in which the baby's ears are pierced(in the center of the ear lobe). In olden days, this ritual used to be performed by grandmothers with a sterilized needle, but nowadays it is done by doctors. Circumcision is yet another important ritual done in the community. It is obligatory on the part of every Muslim parent, rich or poor, to get the male child circumcised as per the Islamic *Shariah*<sup>1</sup>.Every boy in the Burusho community is circumcised any time before he reaches adolescence. The main reason of this ritual is cleanliness and purity of the child. In olden days it was done by the hakims or barbers but nowadays a doctor operates upon the child. Kashmiri *wazwan* which consists of many dishes is prepared on the occasion and verses from the Quran are read. Alms are also given to the poor by some people in the form of money or rice. In this ritual it is prescribed to welcome visitors and family members and celebrate this occasion.

### **MARRIAGE CUSTOMS**

Marriages in the said community takes place along certain norms and procedures. Burushos, if possible, marry their daughters in near relations, belonging to their own caste, like Syed, Mirza, Hakim, and Maliq. Only the members of the community belonging to the 'Raja' caste do not marry with people having non-Raja caste. If a marriage with a near relative cannot be arranged, the father of the girl (who has reached the age of puberty) calls for the services of a match maker, usually a man who can relate stories of the magnificence and generosity of his client to a suitable prospect. When a suitable match is found, the date for the marriage is fixed according to the *sath*<sup>2</sup>. The bride on the day of marriage wears a long gown along with gold and silver ornaments like finger rings, bangles, earrings, necklace etc. In olden days the bride's clothes were made of a kind of cloth woven with expensive silk and golden or silver threads (*Zarbaab* and *kem khwaab*), but nowadays with change in trends, this kind of traditional cloth is no longer worn. The bridegroom on the other hand

<sup>1</sup> Islamic laws

<sup>2</sup> numerology

wears khan dress which is not too long and an English waist coat over the shirt. The head is covered with a turban. Kashmiri cuisine, consisting of 13-14 non vegetarian dishes, is prepared and served on the occasion of marriage.

Marriages among Burusho have to pass through various stages. The first stage consists of the preliminary visit by the family to the opposite partner then verifies his/her antecedents. These are arranged and assisted by the go between or the match maker. The main reason of this visit is to have a glimpse of the bride or the bridegroom and to ascertain the suitability of match suitable. The foremost consideration is the religious sect (Shiite Muslim); caste and occupation form the other concerns. This visit enables the families to acquaint with the other family. After the preliminary visits if the parents and close relatives are satisfied, the boy and girl gives the consent for marriage.

Once the match is found desirable, the second stage is validating through the engagement ceremony. It is the first function celebrated wherein guests from the groom's side come to the bride's home with gold ornaments, clothes, gift items and sweets. The guests are served with Kashmiri wazwan. The bride is adorned on the occasion by her friends and relatives and made to sit amongst the guests, while women sing songs to mark the occasion. After this ritual, the date of marriage is decided. In olden days, it was a tradition to invite people to a wedding by paying personal visits to their houses. The tradition, though not much in vogue is still practiced today in case of close relatives, friends and immediate neighbors. Sending invitation cards in such cases can be considered an affront. In the Burusho community, almost everyone is invited in this way only, as all of them reside at the same place, with only a few exceptions. A few days before the marriage ceremony, ladies from amongst the neighbors and relatives are invited to winnow the rice meant for the wazwan (feast to be served on the day of wedding).

A few days prior to the marriage ceremony, the bride's place is abuzz with activity. The bride gets a makeover and ladies keep on singing continuously throughout the day. In the evening the bride's plaits are undone with zest and happiness and her hair clips and ribbons are distributed among the unmarried girls. It is believed that the girls receiving these clips and ribbons will get married very soon. The 'night of henna' is the first wedding function. Henna<sup>3</sup> powder after being mixed with water is applied on the bride's hands in various designs for adornment. On this day separate functions are arranged for both male and females. In the morning the bride takes a bath, offers prayers and recites the Quran. Then all the ladies gather around her and sing traditional songs. The men folk of this community dance on their traditional Burushaski songs. Customarily, both the bride and the groom use henna on this day. The henna is applied to the hands and feet of the bride, and on the little finger of the right hand of the groom. After applying, it is left over for a few hours till it dries and is then removed. On drying, it imparts a reddish-brown or dark-brown color. Importantly, this ceremony of application of henna has to occur in the night. The function is accompanied by a good amount of fun and teasing and winds up with everyone showering their choicest blessings on the bride. Small, unmarried girls from the groom's family get henna for the bride. The girls also get to apply henna on the bride's hands and feet. The bride is bedecked in all her bridal jewelry. The henna function is followed by a dinner. The second day is the main day of the marriage ceremony. In the morning the groom takes a bath, wears rich clothes and sits at a place where he is shaved off by a barber. The bridegroom (fully dressed in the traditional khan suit) is made to sit on a carpet and is surrounded by all the relatives. While the shaving process continues, certain rituals like, Hamd-e-Khudah, Nat-e-Rasool (SAW) etc. are performed.

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<sup>3</sup>: is a powder made from the dried leaves of the plant *Lawsonia inermis*

A male relative (uncle, father or brother) of the groom dances on the traditional Burushaski songs and is afterwards gifted with some money (by the groom).

*Nikah* takes place either on the day of marriage or the day before. It is a sacred contract between the bride and the groom through which their union is legalized. It involves getting the consent of both the bride and the groom for being each other's life partner. *Nikah* is performed by a religious priest in the presence of witnesses. On this occasion *Khutba-i-Nikah* (marriage sermon) is read to solemnize the marriage. The amount of the *Mahar* (nuptial gift-a divine injunction) is fixed at this moment and consent of the bride and the groom taken, by a very close relative (usually Uncle) called *Wakeel* (legal guardian) in presence of two other persons called *Shahid* (witnesses) who too are close relatives of the bride or the groom. While giving the consent, the bride or the groom has to say '*Kaboolhai*' (yes), three times to confirm his/her approval of the marriage. The contract is written and signed by the bride and the groom and their two witnesses. The contract contains a set of terms and conditions that must be accepted by both the parties.

In the evening, the bridegroom comes to the bride's house (with much fanfare). The ladies in the family sing traditional wedding songs and the groom is showered with flowers and almonds (which is a typical tradition of Kashmir). All the relatives present at this function garland the groom. The groom and his entourage are then served *wazwan* in big plates called as *tramis*.

When the bride initially accompanies her marriage partner (the bridegroom) to his place, her face remains covered by a veil. After reaching the groom's house, the bride is received by some women intimates of the groom who take her out of the car and accompany her to the place where she is supposed to sit. All other women present for the reception keep on singing traditional songs meant for the occasion. After sometime, the new bride's mother-in-law comes for the unveiling ceremony. She greets the bride by showering her with almonds or candies. She then uncovers the bride's face by taking off her veil. The mother-in-law then presents the bride with some gift which is usually in the form of a gold ornament. The bride in turn also presents her mother-in-law with a gold ornament.

The next day in the morning, after the consummation of marriage, the bride's brother pays her a visit and brings her gifts (*Khabar*). On this day, the groom also holds a banquet (*walima*) at his place, to which relatives, neighbors and friends are invited. The guests get to meet the bride and present her with gifts. Before handing over the gifts, ladies usually kiss the hand of the bride, saying '*but but mubarak*' (congratulating). Presenting gifts, in cash or kind, forms one of the most important parts of a marriage. Money and jewelry are presented to the bride and the bridegroom on the day by all the invitees. However the celebration of this function depends upon the desire of the family.

## DEATH CUSTOMS

The members of the community bury their dead as per Islamic rules. After the death of a person, the relatives and close ones wail over the demise of the individual. All kith and kin participate in the grieving. When a man is at the point of death, a chapter of the Quran (preferably *Surah Yasin*) is recited.

An Islamic cleric directs the burial service. The eyes of the deceased are closed and the body is generally turned somewhat with the goal that it rests correctly. A sheet of cloth, long enough, is drawn over the body and a grave ordered to be dug for the deceased. People on the occasion abstain from wearing dark colored clothes, particularly red.

Washing the dead prior to shrouding and burial is obligatory on the part of every Muslim. It is a collective obligation of the society. The deceased is given a *ghusl* (washing/bathing) usually by a relative or a person who knows the procedure well. The people performing *ghusl* are recommended to perform *wudhu* (ablution) first. The dead body is then placed on a wooden board particularly intended for such a bathing and washed with luke-warm water. The customary practice is that the body is washed with a sheet of cloth placed on top of it. This is to keep the private parts hidden from gaze as per *Shariah*. Water is then poured over the body with the fabric on. Quranic verses ought to be recited and supplications made during this time. After the *ghusl*, the cadaver is wrapped in a basic and modest fabric, long enough to cover the whole body. It is always white in color and may consist of one or two pieces. The deceased may be kept in this state for a few hours, permitting admirers, friends and well-wishers to see the deceased for the last time. The body is then placed in a coffin (a wooden box) and carried by four to six men to the place where the funeral service is to be performed. To carry a bier/coffin is considered to be a very meritorious act, and relatives and friends, relieve each other in turns while bearing it on their shoulders. It is recommended to attend the funeral on foot. The Muslims of the group assemble for the absolution of the dead. A congregational prayer is considered obligatory for all. It is either performed in a mosque or in some open space near the graveyard. Ladies are forbidden to accompany the bier while men walk behind it reciting Quranic verses and supplications. A grave is usually kept ready for the dead even before bringing it for the burial. It is normally dug for the deceased by a relative or a companion or neighbor. The grave ought to be deep and wide and well prepared to accommodate the body properly. Its size varies according to the size of the dead body. The grave is dug in such a manner that the body of the deceased could be placed on its right side with its face towards the *Qibla* (Makkah). The body is lowered into the grave without the coffin (preferably feet first) by the grave digger and helped by others, amid chanting of supplications. Once the body is placed inside, each person takes up a fistful of earth and throws it in the grave. When the grave is completely filled, the earth over it is raised slightly than the surrounding ground to make it distinguishable. The grave is then marked by placing two unbaked bricks over its ends to identify its location. The grave markers generally ought to be basic, as raising structures over it and that too with inscriptions is strictly prohibited in Islam. But nowadays it has become quite regular for relatives to erect inscribed structures (gravestones), mostly in marble. On the completion of the burial, the opening chapter of the Quran is read. Usually the priest recites the prayer. Since it is believed that supplication of other Muslims on behalf of the dead will benefit the person, those present at the grave site supplicate on behalf of the deceased. Prayers are also made for the whole mankind and *Takbirs* (Arabic name for 'Allahu Akbar') resonate the air.

## CULTURAL LEXICON AND GLOSSARY OF LIFE CYCLE RITUALS OF BURUSHASKI

Cultural lexicon was developed so as to provide the definitions of the terms used in the culture. It describes the etymology and the cultural significance of the words. Cultural lexicon of the ritual terms are important part of ethno linguistics, and the concept reflects the extra linguistic knowledge about the world. The lexicon provides information from one language processor to another. It acts as a bridge between the language and knowledge expressed. Every language possesses a different vocabulary having different meanings and the origin of the words. Borrowing from languages like Kashmiri, Balti, Urdu, Arabic, and Persian have contributed to the repertoire of Burushaski cultural lexicon. The process of compounding features is also seen. Compounding or compound formation is the process in which two or more words are joined together to make a new word. Marchand (1969:11) talks of compounding as occurring when two or more words combine into a morphological unit, and Adams (1979:30) refers to the combination of two free forms, or

words that have an otherwise independent existence (as cited in Malmkjær, 2004:359, 360).. In the following terms the meaning and origin of the words is described.

**Table 1: Cultural Lexicon of Birth Rituals**

Terms	Meaning	Source
<i>jotis + dimanmi</i>	Meaning: delivery of the baby	burushaki +burushaki
<i>altakhar + kuz</i>	Meaning: pregnant lady	burushaski +burushaski
<i>niyaz</i>	religious dedication or offering	Arabic
<i>sopoya</i>	Nursing woman.	Burushaski
<i>voyang + kar</i>	shave off child's hair	burushaski + burushaski
<i>aqiqah</i>	sacrificing an animal at the time of child birth	Arabic
<i>sadaqa</i>	Voluntary charity.	Arabic
<i>aastan</i>	Shrine	Sanskrit
<i>ultumal+diyusas</i>	Ear piercing.	Burushaski
<i>sel</i>	A sterilized needle used for ear piercing.	Burushaski
<i>khatanhaal</i>	Circumcision.	Kashmiri
<i>quran + khwaani</i>	Quran is the holy book of Muslims + Khwaani means reciting the verses	Arabic+ Arabic
<i>piyaav + saal</i>	Piyav means sweets and gifts presented to daughter in law and the newborn after the delivery of baby and saal means feast arranged for them	Kashmiri +Persian
<i>wazwan</i>	wazwan means the multicourse meal of Kashmiri cuisine	Persian

**Table 2: Cultural Lexicon of Marriage Rituals**

Term	Meaning	Source
<i>talaq</i>	a form of divorce under Islamic law	Arabic
<i>hilas + gharatum</i>	unmarried boy	Burushaski
<i>dasin + gharatum</i>	unmarried girl	Burushaski
<i>kufu</i>	A suitable match for a boy or a girl	Arabic
<i>gar</i>	day of the marriage	Burushaski
<i>manzimyor</i>	go between (match maker)	sanskrit
<i>saath</i>	an auspicious time for doing some work	Turkish
<i>gharoni</i>	bride	Burushaski
<i>gharono</i>	bridegroom	Burushaski
<i>kemkhaab</i>	a cloth woven with (golden and) silver silken thread	Persian
<i>basha</i>	a kind of turban worn by the bridegroom on marriage	Burushaski
<i>ha + barainas</i>	to search for a life partner	Burushaski+ Burushaski
<i>saath + nama</i>	fixing of marriage date	Arabic+Persian
<i>dogru + ses</i>	invitation for the marriage ceremony	Burushaski + Burushaski
<i>biru + dosketas</i>	to separate chaff from the rice	Burushaski + Burushaski
<i>sharong + thap</i>	the night of henna	Burushaski + Burushaski
<i>tam + odilas</i>	to take bath	Burushaski + Burushaski
<i>gharing + etas</i>	singing songs	Burushaski+ Burushaski
<i>voyang + karetas</i>	to cut hair	Burushaski+ Burushaski
<i>hamde+ khuda</i>	praise the Lord	Arabic + Urdu
<i>naate+ rasool</i>	eulogy to the prophet	Urdu+Arabic
<i>nikah</i>	marriage contract according to Islam	Arabic
<i>mahr</i>	sum of money, which the husband has to give his wife at the time of marriage or later	Arabic

Table 2 Cont.,		
<i>khutba + i + nikkah</i>	a sermon delivered by imam at the time of marriage	Arabic + Arabic
<i>kabool + hai</i>	an expression used by the bride and groom to say (yes) three times to prove his/her will for the marriage	Urdu + Urdu
<i>nikah + nama</i>	Legal document is signed by the bride and the groom in the presence of two adults, so that the marriage becomes legalized. It contains a set of terms and conditions that must be accepted by both the parties	Arabic+ Sanskrit
<i>gharono ruyasbai</i> +	When the bridegroom comes to brides place with all the other guests	Burushaski + Burushaski
<i>mohar</i>	unveiling of the bride by her mother in law	Sanskrit
<i>ushkil + beri + nas</i>	gift given to bride by her mother in law on the day of marriage	Burushaski+ Burushaski+ Burushaski
<i>hashi + kaenth</i>	a gift presented to mother in law by the bride on the day of marriage	Kashmiri + Kashmiri
<i>walima</i>	Post wedding feast	Arabic
<i>batikush</i>	Gifts given to bride and groom in the form of cash or kind on the day of marriage.	Burushaski + Burushaski
<i>phiri + saal</i>	first visit of bride and groom after the marriage	Kashmiri + Arabic
<i>khabar</i>	bride's brother pays a visit to her	Persian

Table 3: Cultural Lexicon of Death Customs

Terms	Meaning	Source
<i>ghutas</i>	dead person	Burushaski
<i>janazah</i>	Funeral procession	Arabic
<i>daal + emanas</i>	death of a person	Burushaski
<i>qabar + qand</i>	grave digger	Arabic + Arabic
<i>sura + i + fatihah</i>	opening chapter of Quran	Arabic+ Arabic
<i>surai + i + yasin</i>	36 <sup>th</sup> chapter of Quran	Arabic+ Arabic
<i>inarai + alai + ghusul + echi</i>	bathing of the deceased	Burushaski + Burushaski + Burushaski
<i>chumanai + baan + kafan + a yolis</i>	enshrining the dead body in a white cotton fabric	Burushaski+ Burushaski+ Burushaski
<i>salat + al + janazah</i>	funeral prayers	Arabic + Arabic
<i>dafan+ etas</i>	burial of the dead	Burushaski + Burushaski
<i>ghusl</i>	bathing	Arabic
<i>ghusaal</i>	a person who bathes the dead	Arabic
<i>mayat</i>	cadaver or dead body of a human being	Arabic
<i>kafan</i>	(shroud) A white colored fabric wrapped around the dead person's body	Arabic
<i>tobud</i>	Coffin	Kashmiri
<i>lahadh</i>	space dug inside the earth in which the dead body is buried	Arabic
<i>qiblah</i>	a point towards which Muslims turn to pray	Arabic
<i>fatiha</i>	chapter of Quran	Arabic
<i>tutankay</i>	mourning	Burushaski
<i>waltilum</i>	observing 4th day after a person's death	Burushaski
<i>khatam+sharif</i>	A devotional prayer in which the verses of Quran are recited	Urdu+urdu
<i>lapcal+ chai</i>	salt tea	Burushaski+?

<i>samovar</i>	A Kashmiri kettle made of copper	Persian
<i>turma+tsindhi</i>	15th day from a person's death	Burushaski +Burushaski
<i>chehlum</i>	40th day from a person's death	Kashmiri
<i>Yol</i>	first death anniversary of a deceased person	Burushaski
<i>idaah</i>	period of waiting, a woman must observe after the death of her spouse	Arabic

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus, it can be concluded that the terms used in the life cycle rituals have various origins like Burushaski, Persian, Sanskrit and Arabic. Though the rituals are sermonized according to the Muslim shariah (law) which has its roots in Arab. Yet, the words are borrowed from different languages which are a result of cultural exchange with the Kashmiri speaking group.

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