



Institutional and Structural Changes in Pakhtoon Family and Marriage Systems in Kashmir Valley of Jammu and Kashmir, India

Mudasir Ahmad Lone

Department of Sociology, University of Jammu 180006, Jammu and Kashmir, INDIA

Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me

Received 19th November 2013, revised 17th December 2013, accepted 26th December 2013

Abstract

The proposed deliberation attempts to investigate into the socio-cultural changes in the institutions of Family and marriage among Pakhtoons in Kashmir valley of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The vast majority of Pashtuns is found in the traditional Pashtun homeland, located in an area south of the Oxus River in Afghanistan and west of the Indus River in Pakistan, which includes Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and part of Balochistan. Additional Pashtun communities are located in western and northern Afghanistan, the Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir regions and northern Punjab province of Pakistan, as well as in the Khorasan province of Iran. Throughout the Indian subcontinent, excluding Pashtun-dominated regions, they are often referred to as Pathans. Presently Pakhtoons inhabit almost every continent and country of the world since decades. Their long stay in other countries mostly the developed nations have favored the un-avoidable process of change and transformation of the major social institutions of family and marriage. The structural, traditional and cultural changes and transitions with respect to these two institutions are not only a matter of concern in Indian states like Jammu and Kashmir but a global challenge for Pakhtoons. Moreover the tides of globalization and modernization have further intensified the changes in Pakhtoon family and marriage to such an extent that neither of these two social institutions are traditionally intact. The present research paper will thus investigate such institutional changes among the Pakhtoons living in Kashmir since about a century. The study is based on fieldwork conducted in the Valley where it has been concluded that Pakhtoon family and marriage has witnessed structural and institutional changes as well with all such changes been and are still being intensified under the pressures of modernization.

Keywords: Assimilation, Culture, Customs, Family, Institutions, Marriage, Pakhtoons, Traditions, Women.

Introduction

Pakhtoons migrated into the Kashmir Valley about a century before and that is about in 1912. In the process of settling down, the Pakhtoons began to take cultural traits from the local cultural groups among which Kashmiris were predominant. In this way the basic ethnicity of Pakhtoons witnessed certain changes containing the assimilation process which has influenced the institutions of family and marriage too.

As the cultural groups move into new territories and come into social interaction with new cultural groups, new patterns of ethnicity are born and perhaps new boundaries are drawn. Same is the case with Pakhtoons, as structural and institutional changes occurred among them after they settled down and began living with other groups like Kashmiris and Gujjars in close proximity.

The Family System

An attractive feature of the Pakhtoon way of life is the joint family system which signifies their deep love for the family's solidarity and welfare. The desire of communal life emanates from a consideration of economic security and integrity. All the family members, even the married sons, live jointly in a house large enough to separately accommodate each married couple

under the authority of the father who, as head of the family, manages the family affairs and exercises an immense influence in his own domain. All the earning hands of the family, married as well as un-married sons, contribute their share of income to the common pool of resources. All expenses on food, clothing, education, health, birth, marriages and deaths are defrayed from this common fund. The mantle of authority falls on the eldest son's shoulders after the death of the father or when old age renders him unable to discharge his functions efficiently.

The present research shows that there is persistence of the joint family system among the Pakhtoons but as soon as the sons are married, nuclear settings are created for the new family. A few cases of extended families were also found. Table 1 below illustrates the status of family typology in the three main villages.

Changes in Socialization

With the separation of the sexes inherent in Islam, children are raised primarily by their mother and elder sisters. In the segregated atmosphere that prevails there is a great deal of competition for attention and affection, though men tend to be indulgent toward children. Boys are circumcised by their seventh year¹.

Table-1
The main family types of Pakhtoon society

Name of village	Type of family %			Average no. of family members	
	Joint	Nuclear	Extended	Joint	Nuclear
Wantrag	70%	25%	5%	12	7
Satranj Maidan	90%	9%	1%	12	7
Dadu	95%	5%	0%	14	7

Source: Field based data.

As the whole social scenario has changed, there are new avenues for the socialization of children. The political situation is not the same as it used to be or still is among Pakhtoons in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Now these people are educating their children in order to make them better socialized, economically secure and personally successful than as their parents or grandparents used to be.

Division of Labour in Family

Previously the strict observance of purdah resulted in a marked division of labour between the sexes. Today Pakhtoon women not only participate actively in agriculture but also are doing jobs. However, mainly the division of labour operates on the same lines as among Kashmiris where women are preferred for doing domestic work and looking after the family.

Modernization and Pakhtoon Tradition

The operational definition of modernization is a change from traditional customs to ones that are forcibly or voluntarily borrowed from a dominant society that results in changes in behaviour or customs. The first stage (changes in government, trade, and education); the second stage (changes in health, technology and transportation); the third stage (changes in family structure, religion and personal), and last stage (changes in behaviour).

The evolutionary process of globalization is beyond human control, according to functionalists. The dynamics of human demographics and the social structure initiate migration processes that gradually facilitate and widen the circle of culture contact to a global scale. Once the contact is made an evolutionary, progressive, irreversible cultural process is set into motion moving through competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation into a core culture².

From the perspective of Gordon, 1964, accompanying cultural assimilation are structural assimilation (gaining entry into associations and primary groups of the core society), marital assimilation (increased intermarriages), identification assimilation (developing identity and image linked to the core society), attitude assimilation (acceptance of physically diverse members of society), behaviour assimilation (absence of intentional discrimination against physically diverse people), and civic assimilation (disappearance of value and power conflict from society)³.

As is evident from the theoretical discussion above, modernization which is almost the another name of development in the developing countries like India, has always provided a considerable boost to the assimilation process for the Pakhtoon society in Kashmir more sharply for the last two decades. 95 % of the respondents irrespective of age, sex and literacy agree with the fact that any sort of modernization will always be benefited from at the cost of local language in the areas like English Education; at the cost of traditional costume in areas like media and communication; at the cost of moral values in the areas of women liberalization and at the cost of the Pakhtoon culture in the modern globalised world.

Modernization brings more choices, assets, luxury and comfort as most of the Pakhtoons believe. But for an ethnic group based on fundamentals of tradition and religion, it will consequently mean a lot of compromise with the value system as *Purdah* and working women cannot go comfortably together under such system. Most of the Indian traditionalists like Yogendra Singh⁴ have maintained that tradition and modernity can't go together without negating each other. Thus Pakhtoons had to choose and they opted for modernization and development and thus have to bear assimilation.

Housing Pattern Transformations

The household (*kor*) is the primary unit of consumption and cooperation and is conceived of as those who share a hearth or as a man and/or his sons. Three main types of domestic unit are found: i. the nuclear family; ii. the compound family, in which a patriarch and/or his sons and their wives live together and share expenses; and iii. the joint family, in which the nuclear families in a compound, frequently brothers, keep independent budgets. The fashion today is that soon after marriage a son starts his own nuclear family in 75 % cases in a newly built house or in extensions in the existing houses.

The housing transformation pattern involves external additions, internal alterations, the choice of housing consumption, and threshold stress. Two categories of transformation, namely add-in type and add-on type, were retained. The former consists of changes within the existing building and the latter means the additional construction done on the building or within the premises to increase its floor area. Tipple's⁵ two categories of transformation are conceptually add-on (external adjustment) and add-in (external addition). Emergent features/concepts include rental housing typology, bungalow housing type,

residential-cum-shop housing type, sharing of a kitchen, en-suite water closet, the popularity of toilets and a reduction in open spaces/courtyards; and the loss of reception to economic functions.

The rural housing values such as kitchen gardens, animal rearing, and keeping chickens dropped by nearly one-quarter. From respondents' respective oral compound histories, the fencing of compounds increased, while the application of vegetable building materials dropped significantly. "Space specialization" with high-density furnishing is another feature of the Pakhtoon spatial setting of this era.

The retention of core ethnic housing values and the loss of peripheral spatial quality suggest a cultural transition of the social group. This suggests that ethnic sustainability is challenged by the urbanization process. The traditional mud houses are no longer in vogue, however a few of such houses were found as being used to keep grass and cattle fodder in Satranj Maidan and in Wantrag villages where they are used as stores and cowsheds.

Marriage System

There are some cultural practices which seem to be unchanged and one among them is marital age. It has been noticed here that irrespective of the nature of social setting, Pakhtoons marry at a young age but there is no consciousness of ethnicity preservation in it like other cultural practices. For instance using the traditional hearth for making *Roti*, marrying at a young age has simply become a tradition among them and it has been found that once something becomes a tradition among Pakhtoons, they stick to it perhaps because it depicts a change in itself in their previous cultural status. Pakhtoons' love for modernization may be one reason for the various cultural changes as the present study reveals that historically Pakhtoons have been living a life of secluedness with segmented life and strict social set up and may have now become absolute and tired while living that way. The new generations have been found to welcome the modernizing changes in their traditional culture and there is a clear difference evident in ideology, costume and way of life of the older and new generations here.

The changes in the ideology have had more impacts on issues like this one as shown by the close investigation of the gender gap among Pakhtoons. As observed on occasions of marriage, fairs and festive gatherings, the young people seem to mix freely with guests irrespective of being from within or outside their ethnicity. Though there may be separate tents for males and females to celebrate the *mehandirat*, there are not as strict gender demarcations nowadays as they used to be even only thirty years ago.

Today Pakhtoons take rice with vegetarian or non-vegetarian *saalan* the same way as Kashmiris do. *Roti* is also eaten but not as an option or substitute to rice but historically, there is the

tradition of *roti* and not rice among them here. On festive occasions like marriages, the Indian or more precisely the Kashmiri *Wazwan* is followed not the Pakistani cuisine.

Although polygamy with up to four wives is permitted under Muslim law, monogamy is prevalent. Marriages are overwhelmingly endogamous within the clan and to a large degree within the subsection. Parallel-cousin marriage with father's brother's daughter is preferred among some tribes. Marriages are arranged by the couple's parents and their plans are generally fulfilled. The union is commonly contracted on the basis of bride-price. Frequently the bride's parents spend the money received in bride-price as dowry to meet the future domestic needs of the couple. A common practice is exchange marriage between close agnatic kin in which a sister or daughter is given and one simultaneously taken. Residence after marriage is virilocal, the bride coming to live in a single compound with the son, who receives separate quarters within it. The death of the patriarch of a family is frequently the time when such joint or compound families divide themselves into separate compounds. Despite the ease of obtaining a divorce under Muslim law, it is very rare among Pathans. The bride-price and the man's honour are lost if the woman remarries Caroe⁶.

Marital Customs and Change

Wadah (marriage negotiation): as a general rule, marriage is arranged by parents in Pakhtoon society and the boy and the girl themselves do not play any role in the negotiations.

Walwar (head-money): which forms part of the negotiations, is also determined at the time of engagement. In accordance with the Jirga's decision the suitor's parents agree to pay in cash the stipulated amount to the girl's parents on the day of marriage. A part of the payment is made on the spot. The rest of the money is paid on the marriage day. The dowry is usually meager.

Kwezhdan (Bethrotal): Customary overtures for betrothal commence with a visit by the mother or sisters of the boy, to the girl's parents. Negotiations for matrimony are undertaken either by the parents themselves or by friends and relatives. On precautionary grounds the girl's parents make searching enquiries about the character, education, occupation and other attributes of the prospective son-in-law. After an informal agreement has been reached, the boy's parents approach the girl's parents in a formal way i.e. a Jirga consisting of relatives and village elders call on the father or elder member of the girl's family. Similarly a female party calls on her mother on the day of public proposal. The Jirga decides on matters regarding ornaments, clothes, Mehr (dowry) and Sar (bride's price or head money). The ceremony is rounded off with distribution of sweets among the people in the Hujra.

Pakha Azada or Pkhay Artha: means free visits between the fiancée and fiancé's families. These calls upon each other begin a few days after the betrothal. The bridegroom's parents pay a

visit to the girl's house and present her with a gold ring or a pair of silken clothes. They also send her presents on Eid and other auspicious occasions. This is called Barkha or the girl's share. Once the girl is engaged, she starts observing purdah from her would be in-laws, both men and women.

Wadah (Marriage): Marriage ceremonies usually take place on Thursday and Fridays. Marriage festivities commence three days before the scheduled date of the actual marriage. At night village maidens assemble in the bridegroom's house and sing epithalamia called Sandaras to the beat of drums and tambourine. Three or four respectable but elderly women visit the house of the bride a night before the marriage for dyeing her hands and feet with henna and for braiding her hair into three or more plaits. The braiding of hair is generally entrusted to a woman with several male children. The bride's Jorra or special bridal dress and ornaments etc are normally sent a day before the marriage. The bridegroom serves two meals to his own guests as well as the bride's villagers. Usually the feast is given on the wedding day.

Janj (Marriage Party): The bridal procession is called Janj. On the day of a marriage, the village of the bridegroom wears a happy look. Old and young alike, wear their best clothes. The marriage party or Janj generally starts for the bride's village at noon time with musicians leading the procession. The Wra or female marriage party starts from the village to the sound of drums and the male participants let off their guns.

Nikah (Wedlock): The friends and relatives of the bridegroom assemble in the village mosque for Nikah, by the Pesh-Imam or the religious leader. On this occasion the bride proposes the name of bridegroom's brother, uncle or any other near relative as her Nikah Father (Attorney). The Pesh-Imam repeats the names of the bride and bridegroom three times and seeks the approval of the bridegroom in the presence of two witnesses and some village elders. After this he recites a few verses from the Holy Quran and declares the couple wedded to each other. The Imam is given some money for this religious service.

Naindra: At the time of Nikah, friends and relatives of the bridegroom contribute money to lighten his financial burden. This is called Naindra. It can be likened to a debt of honor or some sort of financial help repayable to the donors on a similar occasion. A proper record of the subscriptions is maintained and the names of the subscribers are entered into a note book for future reference.

Rukhsati: While men remain busy in target shooting, the female party gives a display of its skill in singing and folk dances. Divided into two groups they sing in the form of a duet. Sometimes they form a circle and dance and sing in a chorus. This is called Balbala. After this the parents bid farewell to the bride. The bride is handed over to the bridegroom's relatives in a solemn ceremony. One of her younger brothers takes her to a Doli or a palanquin and a handful of money is showered over

the Doli. The bride accompanied by the marriage party is led to a car or bus. The doli is carried on the shoulders if the distance is less than a mile. On the way back home one can witness scenes of merry making. The female party sings happy songs and men fire crackers and volleys of shots in the air.

On reaching the village, the village youths carry the doli to the bridegroom's house. They do not place the doli on the ground till they are rewarded. After this the bride is made to sit on a decorated cot. All the women hasten to see her face. The mother-in-law or sister-in-law take the lead in un-veiling her face and other female relatives follow suit. This is called Makh Katal. The bride is presented with some money on this occasion. The record of such donations is also kept for re-payment on a similar occasion. Thus the marriage ceremony comes to an end with the transfer of the bride from her natal to marital house and distribution of sweets both in the Hujra and the house.

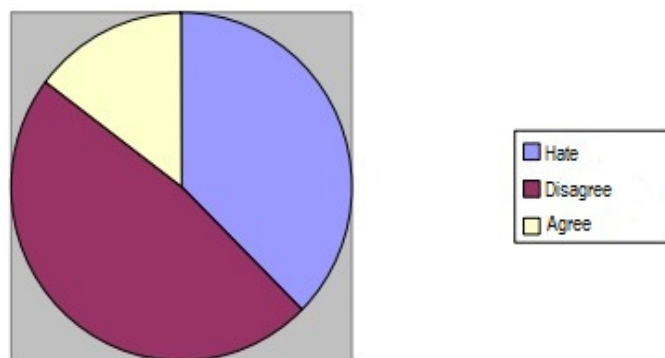
Wealthy people make a display of pomp and show at the time of marriage. The services of dancing girls and musicians are acquired to entertain the guests. The Pakhtoons in general feel reluctant to give their daughters in marriage to non-Pakhtoons but they are not averse to marrying girls of respectable non-Pakhtoon families. It is not usual for a Pakhtoon to take spouse from another tribe.

Pakhtoons also disapprove of overtures for the hand of a younger daughter in the presence of an un-betrothed elder daughter. Marriages with widowed sisters-in-law are common and a brother considers it his bounden duty to marry the widow of his deceased brother. The widow, however, is not compelled to marry her brother-in-law or anyone else for that matter against her wishes. In most cases widowed Pakhtoon women prefer not to marry after the death of their husbands. If she has children, it is thought most becoming to remain single.

Child marriages are un-common. Polygamy is practiced on a limited scale. A Pakhtoon takes a second wife only when the first one is issueless or differences between the husband and wife assume proportions beyond compromise. Divorces are not common as the Pakhtoons abhor the very idea of a Talaq or divorce. The word Zantalaq (one who has divorced his wife) is considered an abuse and against the Pakhtoon's sense of honor⁹.

Today marriage among Pakhtoons is all glamour, decorations and lights, music and feast with a few traditions as mentioned earlier in order to be worth at least for being called a Pathan. The ceremony starts a couple of days before the actual bridal ceremony to make arrangements for the big marriage feast in the coming days. Now there are firecrackers in place of guns; DJ has replaced the dhol and traditional shehnai; there is the modern version of Wazwan. Besides, there are a lot of customs which are exclusively new and have become a fashion at marriages among Pakhtoons including cake ceremony, grooming of the bridegroom and bride, singing and dancing in a non-traditional way.

During the present study no case of child marriage or polygamy as is prevalent in Afghanistan was found. There are, however, several cases of the latter in Gutlibagh, the largest Pakhtoon settlement in Jammu and Kashmir. The belief regarding these two social challenges in the present day society as found among Pakhtoons is shown in the pie diagram below:



General view of Pakhtoons regarding polygamy and child marriage

Figure-1

Source: Field based data

Miscegenation

Intermarriage between old stock Americans and white immigrant groups were acceptable as part of the melting pot narrative. Native Americans in the United States on reservations gained US citizenship with the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, and were encouraged to become integrated in the society through educational programs. The country welcomes celebrities of Native American background, such as Will Rogers and Jim Thorpe, and elected a Native American as vice president in 1928.

The mixing of whites and blacks, resulting in multiracial children, for which the term "miscegenation" was coined in 1863, was a taboo, and most whites opposed marriages between whites and blacks. In many states, marriage between whites and non-whites was even prohibited by state law through anti-miscegenation laws. By the early 20th century, many white Americans accepted that American culture was heavily influenced by African-American culture, but although they increasingly accepted and even celebrated this acculturation, most whites did not accept marriages between white Americans and African-Americans¹⁰.

Today in the age of modernity and globalization most of the countries particularly the developed ones have an outlook as normal towards inter racial marriages as to the intra racial. In India today lot of incidences through the length of the country are witnessed of marriages between people of different ethnic origins like between Gujratis and Bengalis or between North Indians and the South Indians. In the valley as the present research has shown marriages between Pakhtoons and

Kashmiris have been witnessed with clear implications of racial mixing and consequently misgenation. It was further found that the children so born are more likely to become Kashmiris rather than Pakhtoons because of the cultural dominance of the former people in both the cases whether a girl is taken by them in marriage or given away to Pakhtoons for that matter.

Conclusion

Today Pakhtoons take rice with vegetarian or non-vegetarian *salan* the same way as Kashmiris do. *Roti* is also eaten but not as an option or substitute to rice but historically, there is the tradition of roti and not rice among them. On festive occasions like marriages, the Indian or more precisely the Kashmiri *Wazwan* is followed not the Pakistani cuisine. The present research shows that there is persistence of the joint family system among the Pakhtoons but as soon as the sons are married, nuclear settings are created for the new family. A few cases of extended families were also found.

Pakhtoons follow the Kashmiri rules of marriage and residence with a few of their own like showering money during special dance (a faint form of traditional Attan) by family members of the groom or bride on *Mehandiraat*. Normally the married son, who earns, builds a separate house to live with his bride and in certain cases, the parents also make such arrangement for their son but the father still remains the head of household. Marriages with Kashmiris occur more often in the villages with equal or more population of the Kashmiri cultural group.

In villages with more or equal population of any other group like that of Gujjars in Rinhi Akingam, percentage of marriages with that group is again greater revealing clearly that assimilative changes in family and marriage are sometimes a necessity for Pakhtoons of the Valley in order to get into the social realm of the setting where they are living. Moreover contrary to the arguments made by Caroe, there is no stigma of shame and dishonour associated with the marital breakup or divorce nowadays. Bride price or *mehar* is in most of the cases paid by the groom or his family at the time of *nikah* and in some cases on precautionary grounds an amount is mutually fixed which is payable if the groom breaks the marriage by divorce. On the other hand if the woman demands divorce the said amount or the balance from the actual bride price (as there is provision of half payment of bride price on the day of *nikah*) are generally not paid.

As the whole social scenario has changed, there are new avenues for the socialization of children as the political situation is not the same as it used to be or still is among Pakhtoons in Afghanistan and Pakistan and because now these people are educating their children in order to make them better socialized, economically secure and personally successful than as their parents or grandparents used to be.

The traditional hearth was found in a single household in District Anantnag at Satranj Maidan which as per the family head is kept for use on some special occasions and not for daily use at all. Following the Kashmiri cuisine in such an un-differentiable manner clears the status of assimilation of the eating habits of Pakhtoons in the valley.

As found during the present study about 80 percent Pakhtoon women favour the present trend of their development and empowerment particularly receiving good education, doing jobs and giving away of the strict traditions like - *pardah*, sexual division of labour, belief like women should remain in the four wall, women cannot do any job and the like. There may be a little or more disfavour to these modern values regarding the women status by the dominant male population in their patriarchal society but the fact is that Pakhtoon women surely want to come out of the veil, receive sound education and skill, work as their males do and want to express them, their talent and skill to the people of the valley and to the people of the world.

The customs related to birth and the death rituals have eventually faded away as the birthday parties and other jubilee ceremonies like wedding parties are replacing the former traditions. There is more inclination towards the pragmatic systems of modern education which is one of the main factors of the decline of the *Madrasa* system of traditional education as still prevalent among the Pakhtoons of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Similarly the status of women in education and job sectors have improved to a considerable extent which shows a positive development from a global perspective yet indicates another area of cultural assimilation of Pakhtoons of the valley.

The local custom, particularly the traditions of marriage is to be recovered and retained as well. Ethnic endogamy as it always does have been found effective in the passage of tradition from

generation to generation. Marriage with Kashmiris as in Achabal in Anantnag was found to foster assimilation and even decay of Pakhtoon culture. Socialization needs a shift given the trend of nuclearity of family where the fashion of English education, internet and cable network leaves less scope for traditional language use and ethnicity.

References

1. Ahmad Aisha and Roger Boase, Pashtun Tales from the Pakistan-Afghan Frontier. New Delhi: Saqi Books (2003)
2. Lindholm C., Generosity and Jealousy, the Swat Pukhtun of Northern Pakistan. New York: Columbia University Press (1982)
3. Gordon M.N., Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origin. New York: Oxford University Press (1964)
4. Singh Yogendra, Modernisation of Indian Tradition. Jaipur, Rawat (2007)
5. Tipple G., Self help transformations of low cost housing: an introductory study, Newcastle: Cardo (1991)
6. Caroe Olaf, The Pathans 550 B.C. - A.D. 1957. Oxford University Press (1958)
7. Afridi Azim, Pashtun Customs Related to Weddings. [www.khyber.org] (2005)
8. Bahl Taru and Syed , Encyclopedia of the Muslim World. New Delhi: Anmol Publications (2003)
9. Dupree Louis, Afghanistan, London: Oxford (1980)
10. Feagin J. and Feagin C., Racial and Ethnic Relations. Upper Saddle River, NJ.: Prentice Hall (1999)