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Understanding marriage customs among *Bakerwal* tribe in Kashmir:

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Abstract: *Marriage is one of the important social institutions. It is a means of establishing a family through which the society perpetuates itself. Marriage in India is regarded as one of the most significant life-cycle ritual and is a familial and societal expectation. Every society employs certain forms of symbolic actions and physical symbols to communicate the values, expectations and ethos concerning marriage and family life. The Bakerwal tribe is very adherent toward their established customs and traditions. The concept of customs implies not only statistical occurrence of given behaviour but also a prescriptive dimension. For Bakerwals the disobedience to the custom means a sin against their social faith.*

Key words: *Customs, Bakerwal, Tribe, Kashmir*

1. Introduction

1.1. Bakerwals as sub-groups of Gujjar

The earliest documentary references to the *Bakerwals* of Jammu and Kashmir is from the year 1899. According to Rao and Casimir, the *Bakerwals* are not only ‘culturally akin to the *Gujjar* of the greater Punjab, Swat-Kohistan and the Kashmir area but also to pashtun, Awan and other communities. Their ancestors migrated from 150 years ago from the valley of Allahi and Kunhar, now in Pakistan’. The *Bakerwals* are generally in agreement with this account of their emigration into Jammu and Kashmir. It is uncertain whether the *Bakerwals* are originally from a specific pastoral community or ‘transhumant villagers’ who are now collectively recognized as the *Bakerwals* of Jammu and Kashmir. ¹



Picture 1: *In above image, Bakarwals can be seen along with live stock cattle while migrating from one place to another.*

Bakarwals are also found in every corner of Northern provinces of the Himalayan range, namely the states of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. The tribe is also known as Dhanger in several parts of India. In Jammu and Kashmir Bakarwals are stretched out in all the three regions Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. In Kashmir valley they are mostly found in the districts of Anantnag, Pulwama, Shopian, Kulgam, Budgam, Kupwara etc. *Bakarwals* plan their activities into four major segments of time: winter, spring, summer and autumn. Secondly, they act on space and plan their activities in outer hills (winter pastures) on migratory routes and Dhoks (summer pastures). They stay in the outer hills from December to mid-April. They plan their activities in this zone according to the demands of winter season. They are migrating with their flocks (goat and sheep) towards alpine pastures of the Greater Himalayas from the last quarter of April till the first week of July. During this time they cross different topographic zones successively on the route of migration and their activities are controlled both by the passing of time as well as crossing over the space zones in regulating their daily marches according to environmental conditions. From June to September they graze on the Greater Himalayas alpine pastures from a fixed location and the activities of the transhumant are controlled both by passing of time and utilization of space. They again start returning to the winter bases in the month of October with the same route of migration and reach the outer hills zone by November every year. The nature of their oscillation, the planning of annual and diurnal activities over space and through time is to be perceived in time-space continuum as their activities are correlated with the two most pronounced time cycles in the physical environment i.e., spring and autumn migration.² The *Bakarwals* are prominent in look: they are tall and well-built and live long and healthy lives, seldom falling ill. The men are tall, well-developed and sport long beards

which they dye with henna when they start to grey. They wear turbans and salwarKameez. *Bakerwal* women are also tall and strong.

1.2. Concept of tribal Marriage

Marriage is a universal social institution which admits men and women to family life but is also determined by culture. Author has cited definition of Mujumdar (1985) who defines marriage as “a socially sanctioned union of male and female for purposes of a) establishing a household, b) entering into sex relations, c) procreating and, d) providing care for the off spring.³The present form of marriage has passed through a long course of cultural evolution. Hence, there are many human societies having varied form of mate selection/acquire and marriage. Indian tribes possess a treasury of such varied cultural institutions. No doubt, the refined form of marriage is monogamy largely practiced all over the world, but since conception of Anthropology the practitioner of the discipline have brought forth the uniqueness and variation of different cultural institutions.⁴

The marital bond found among the tribes of India is found to bring together, not just two individuals, but two families even kindred and villages. It is a tool meant to secure for individual satisfaction of a highly personal character, but a social mechanism designed to create solidarity. The different tribes of North-eastern region follow different type of marriage customs, rules and regulations while establishing marital relations. The tribal marriages are contractual in nature and the ritualistic aspects are somewhat insignificant. The marriage customs are quite simple, the marriage being more social than the religious aspects of the union. About the marriage – rites of the Riangs, Tipras and others of Chittagong hill tracts, Lewin remarks that, at marriage there is no particular ceremony, but a great deal of drinking and dancing. A pig is killed as a sacrifice to the deities of the wood and stream. Then the girl’s mother pours out a glass of liquor and gives it to her daughter, who goes and sits on her lover’s knee, drinks half, and gives him the half; they afterwards crook together their little fingers. Presently, monogamy is generally prevalent among the different tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya but in the earlier days, polygamy was practiced by different communities of tribal society. Polyandrous families are prevalent among the Monpa tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Clan plays the main role in regulating the marriage of the tribal societies. The communities are expected to follow endogamy but exogamy regarding the clans.⁵

2. Research Methodology

2.1. TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION

To carry out the study, the techniques of interview schedule and observation were used to get objective and reliable findings.

2.2. SOURCES OF DATA COLLECTION

The present study involved both primary and secondary source of data collection. For primary sources, first-hand information was collected through interview schedule and observation in the field. The secondary source of information was based on books, book chapters, journal papers, unpublished thesis and newspaper articles etc. available on the topic.

2.3. Universe of Study

Gujjars and *Bakarwals* form the largest and most widespread group. *Gujjars* and *Bakarwals* are closely related tribes. Traditionally, both are nomadic pastoralist communities; the former are cow-keepers, the latter goatherds and shepherds. The two share similar social structure, have the same family (gotra) names and marry among each other. *Gujjars* are the largest tribe of Jammu and Kashmir. Of 14.93 lakh Scheduled Tribes counted in 2011, 9.81 lakh are *Gujjars*. *Bakarwals* are far fewer; only 1.13 lakh of them have been counted in 2011.⁶ *Bakarwals* have a presence in all districts of the State; there are a few *Bakarwals* in Kargil also, though there are none in Leh.

The universe of the present study will be the *Bakerwal* tribe of Kashmir and the study will be empirical in nature. At the outset a sample of 200 respondents will be undertaken based on simple random sampling taking into consideration the age and income

2.4. SAMPLING PLAN OF THE STUDY

A sample of 50 households' respondents (one adult member from every household was randomly selected for the study by using purposive simple random sampling. To have a representative sample, 5 thrust areas of the *Bakerwal* Tribe in Kashmir were located i.e, *Kachwan*, *Surmie*, *poshbaghRangada*, *Halanad*, *LeserShallnad*, *AhlanBalaGodole*, *Herpura*, *Bajbadi*, and *SagamKandiwara*. Out of the thrust areas, 5 households were purposively selected from each area (5x10=50) were selected as a sample for study. For each thrust area, a random sample technique was used to select respondents.

2.4.1. Gender

The two terms which often are used synonymously are sex and Gender. The term sex refer to a biological phenomenon, the term gender is a social construction. Sex is the apparent physical difference based upon the biological feature of men and women. Whereas sociologically, gender refers to a social division usually based on anatomical sex. Sex is a state of being male or female. This is an array of societal beliefs, norms, customs and practices that define 'masculine' and 'feminine' attributes and behaviours.

The sex distribution of respondents is shown in the table below:

Table 1
Sex Distribution of Respondents

S.No	Gender	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	Male	35	70.00%
2.	Female	15	30.00%
Total		50.00	100.00%

Source: - Field work carried out in 2017.

Out of 50 respondents, 35 (70 percent) were males whereas the number of female respondents was 15 (30 percent) only. The respondents were randomly selected and no discrimination was made on the basis of gender. However, the female respondents were forthcoming to respond only when the male head was not available at home. There were also cases where the male head of the family had expired and the role of the head has, therefore, been assigned to a female. Furthermore the observation made by the researcher revealed that so often women were not allowed to talk freely with the researcher because of their conventional approach. The researcher had to remain very cautious and attentive while wishing to interview any female respondent as the *Bakerwal* community was very orthodox in introducing the females of the families to strangers. The female interviews were achieved by researcher only during the stay offered by some family heads while giving their own respective interview and during that stay the researcher used get familiar with whole family (including females) as there is no match of the hospitality of respondent community.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. MARRIAGE CUSTOMS AMONG BAKERWALS

Custom is a habitual course of conduct observed uniformly and voluntarily by the people. Custom occupies an important place in regulation of human conduct in almost all the societies. In fact, it is one of the oldest sources of law-making. Custom is some kind of special rule which is followed from time immemorial. Law based on custom is known as customary law. Custom is frequent repetition of the same act; way of acting common, habitual practice; usage; method of doing or living.

Custom and ritual is another important component of tribal life. The customs and rituals influenced the *Gujjars* and *Bakerwals* life deeply. The *Bakerwal* tribe is very adherent toward their established customs and traditions. The concept of customs implies not only statistical occurrence of given behaviour but also a prescriptive dimension. Religion is one of the dominant factors, which influences the social life of *Bakerwals* life deeply.

For both *Gujjar* and *Bakerwals* the disobedience to the custom means a sin against their social faith. From birth of a child to a death ceremony certain custom prevails in the community which shows the religious importance. This community is Muslim by faith and one can easily see the influence of Islamic customs and Rituals over their life. Some of the important Islamic customs among them are those related to child birth, circumcision of male child, wedding ceremony and funeral rites.⁷

Table 2

Marriage customs among *Bakerwals*

S.No.	Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
3	How important are customs associated with your tribe	Very important	44	88.00%
		Less important	5	10.00%
		Any other	1	2.00%
Total			50	100.00%
4	Do you like the way you perform your customs?	Yes	46	92.00%
		No	4	8.00%
Total			50	100.00%

Source: Field work, carried out in 2017

In response to question in serial no 1 that how important the customs of the *Bakerwals*, associated with the tribe; majority of the respondents (88%) revealed that the marriage ceremony is the biggest rejoicing time for the *Bakerwal* community. In *Bakerwals* the customs of marriage generally start with the date of fixing ceremony and continue till the marriage takes place. In between there are lot of sub-customs and traditions. Some of the important marriage customs which are locally known as *LakriTokni*, it is practice and an enjoyable moment for bridegroom's and bride's family. This practice is done before the fixing date of marriage when the relatives of both the families as per their availability go to the forests and cut the wood and stock it for the purpose of cooking the dishes and other eatable things for the marriage. Both the families enjoy this moment very nicely and greet each other as this occasion is regarded a nice one and good omen. *MattiKhunni*; this is one of the oldest tradition present among the *Bakerwals* in which both the houses of bride and bridegroom decorate their houses by polishing before the date of marriage ceremony. Also an important ritual/tradition is associated with the *Bakerwals* i.e., *KapraBaterna*; in this tradition the father of the bridegroom buys clothes for his family, his brother's family and sister's families and the family of bride to be disturbed among them as gifts before the marriage. For this tribe, the disobedience to these customs and traditions is considered very bad. There are also some other important marriage customs which are done during the marriage like *Bughtar* ceremony, *Taman* ceremony and *Rasa*. These customs bind the societal ties among *Bakerwals* and they consider them important. The respondents said that these customs rejoice them and maintain societal harmony

between them. The remaining 5 respondents (10%) affirmed to carry out the old customs in the marriage ceremonies is a sin. The respondents gave the references of religious sources and proclaimed that the marriage should be performed in a simple manner and not to follow the customs or traditions which is not having any authenticity in the Islam.

In reply to question whether *Bakerwals* like to perform their old traditions and customs, the majority of the respondents i.e. 88% affirmed that they like their customs and traditions. It was observed by the researcher that the *Bakerwals* despite witnessing lots of change around it in mainstream society has been less affected so far as Kashmir is concerned. They have preserved their customs and traditions of marriage and have continued to follow them strictly. Thus, *Bakerwals* have retained their unique culture and traditions which includes marriage rites and rituals. A small number of 5 respondents (10 percent) are not satisfied with their customs and traditions of marriage because most of these customs and traditions violate the guidelines of Islam according to them.

3. 1.2. DRESS PATTERN OF BRIDE AND GROOM AMONG *BAKERWALS*

Not only the couple, but the guests attending the marriage ceremonies are often seen as well dressed. Marriage which is a union of two unknown souls of opposite gender is being solemnized in every society under their own customs and beliefs. Every preparation as well as arrangement is made before the marriage so as to make it a memorable event. The dress of both bride and groom is equally selected with utmost care in present modern age, so that it reflects a unique and pleasant personality. The *Bakerwal* community is also very keen in selecting the proper dress for the bride and bridegroom.

Table 3

Dress pattern of bride and groom among *Bakerwals*

S.No.	Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
5	What does the bridegroom wear on the day of marriage ceremony	<i>Khandress/vasket/ Lungi./ Ghana /Dussa</i>	50	100%
Total			50	100%
6	What does the bride wear on the day of marriage ceremony	<i>Firaqshalwar, Burqa, silver/gold ornaments/ Shawl</i>	50	100%
Total			50	100%
7	Is the dress code strictly followed	Yes	50	100%
		No	00	00.00
Total			50	100%

Source: Field work, carried out in 2017

In reply to question regarding the dress worn by the bridegroom, bride and whether they strictly followed on the day of marriage ceremony. Marriage preparations are made in advance as the garments such as *khandress*, *vasket*, *Lungi*, *Dussa* and *Ganna*. All the 50 respondents (100 %) affirmed that they wear the above mentioned dresses on the wedding day. *Dussa* is a type of shawl which is made by the artisan who is locally known as *Chapri*. It takes four to five months to the artisan to make a *Dussa* which is given as a present to the bridegroom by his father or mother or any close relative at the wedding ceremony. It makes the bridegroom look graceful. Besides the bridegroom keep the red handkerchief in his hands.

Ghanna is a type of bracelet which is made by sister of the bridegroom or by his cousins' sisters and is then tied around the wrist of the groom as a token of love when the marriage is sermonized.

All the 50 respondents (100 %) revealed that the brides typically wear *FiraqShalwar*, *topi*, *Burqa* and the bride is decorated with silver chains, silver Dolar, silver *sargast*, silver *mahail*, silver earrings, silver bangles, silver rings and silver necklaces called *Haseeri* etc. The bride also wears a unique cap which has a tale at the back which adds to the beauty and grandeur of the bride. It was also observed that the brides of the community never compromise with the traditional *Burqa* which is worn by the bride besides other garments.

It has been observed that the *Bakewal* community follows the traditional dress code very strictly and there has been no influence of other cultures on their dressing style for the groom as well as the bride. All the

respondents 50 (100 %) unanimously agreed that the groom wears *Khandress*, *vasket* and a turban whereas the bride wears *FiraqShalwar*, *Burqa* and a round cap with a long tail.

3.1.3. DISHES PREPARED IN MARRIAGE AMONG *BAKERWALS*

India is a multi-cultural and multi-religious country with a unique culture practiced by each community and the *Bakerwal* community have no exception. Different communities in India prepare a variety of dishes for the guests during a wedding ceremony. As for as the *Bakerwals* is concerned, they too have a special menu for their wedding parties. The below table will reveal the information regarding the feast served by *Bakerwals*.

Table 4

Dished prepared in wedding ceremonies among *Bakerwals*

S.No.	Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
8	What are the different dishes for the feast	Three to four dishes of <i>wazwan</i>	33	66%
		Seven dishes of <i>wazwan</i>	11	22%
		Dal/ curd/ salt/ vegetables	6	12%
Total			50	100%
9	Who is invited to the feast	Relatives	00	00
		Friends	00	00
		Neighbour	00	00
		All of above	50	100%
Total			50	100%
10	Do you celebrate <i>valima</i>	Yes	48	96%
		No	2	4%
Total			50%	100%

Source: Field work, carried out in 2017

The tribe has been got influenced by the mainstream population regarding the cuisine custom (*wazwan*). *Wazwan* is a multi-course meal in Kashmiri cuisine, the preparation of which is considered an art and a point of pride in Kashmiri culture and identity. Almost all the dishes are meat-based using lamb or chicken with few vegetarian dishes. It is considered an extremely generous gesture of hospitality among *Bakerwals*.

It was found that the majority of the respondents prepare dishes ranging from a few to seven in number. Out of 50 respondents (100 percent) a majority of them 33 (66%) respondents prepare and serve seven dishes on marriage ceremony; 11 (22%) respondents prepare and serve four dishes on marriage ceremonies. The seven dishes prepared and served include *Methi*, (it is made using different cuts of meat in which lamb intestines being the main piece of meat which is carefully cleaned and washed and boiled and used in the dish and stomach is also used.)*Kabab*(minced meat roasted on skewers over hot coals)*Rista*(meatballs in a fiery red

gravy)*Roganjosh*(tender lamb cooked with kashmirspeices)*Kurma*, (a mutton curry with coriander)*Tabakhmaz*(ribs of lamb simmered in yogurt till tender, then fried) and *Gushtaba*(a velvety textured meatball in white yogurt gravy)four dishes include *Methi*, *Kabab*, *Rista*. The remaining 6 respondents (12%) said that they are not serving *wazwan* for feast to their guests but cook some vegetables, Pulses and curd. The curd is presented by the relatives and neighbourhood people as a mark of gift to the household celebrating the wedding. In their local dialect, this practice is called *Bhanji*.

It was found that all the near relatives of the bride and the bride groom from both parental and maternal side are invited to the feast. Neighbours of the bride and bridegroom;s family are invited and special friends are also invited to the feast. It was found among all the 50 (100 %) respondents. The presence of guests, friends and neighbours bring charm to the marriage ceremony according to the respondents. Guests are seated in tents and the meal is served in a copper plate called the *trami*. The *trimi* arrive heaped with rice, quartered by kebab and contains piece of *methi* and *Tabakmaaz*.

The cuisine is served on the same day when the marriage ceremony takes place or the next day of the marriage ceremony which is known as *Valimah*. It was found that 48 (96%) of the respondents served the cuisine on the same day when marriage ceremony takes place while as a very small percentage of respondents (4 percent) celebrate *Valimah*.

3.1.4. CUSTOM OF STAYING BRIDE AT HER IN-LAWS AFTER MARRIAGE

Every society follows its own customs and traditions regarding marriage. Marriage is a sacred union between two families. For the bride, it is the beginning of a new life with different persons at different place from parental home. She performs various functions like cleaning the house, looks after her-in laws, husband, entertain their relatives and after becoming mother takes care and looks after her baby.

Modernization process has laid its considerable impact on the tradition and culture on every society throughout the globe. Muslim societies are equally influenced by the change, but still some customs performed during the marriage process have remained almost consistent. One of the similar customs in Muslim society of Kashmir mainly the first visit of bride after her marriage to her parental home (*SatimDoh*) is still prevalent. The immediate seven days after the wedding are also considered festive and most of the customs and rituals are performed during these days particularly at bridegroom house. It is a famous Kashmiri tradition that the bride wears seven different colours of suits on these seven days and does not do any regular household chores. On the seventh day of the wedding, guests from the bride's family are invited over for a feast at the groom's house. Once the function has ended, the bride takes permission from her husband and in-laws to go live with her parents for a few days and then comes back to her in-laws. *Bakerwals* is also one of the Muslim tribe and this custom is treated one of the important customs for the *Bakerwal* society as well. This custom among *Bakerwals* is known as *satwa*.The below table reveals the approach of the *Bakerwals* towards this custom.

Table 5

Custom of staying bride at her in-laws after marriage

S.No.	Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
1.	After how many days of marriage does bride come to her parental home	Three days	00	00
		Five days	00	00
		Seven days	18	36%
Total		Any other	32	64%
			50	100%
11	Do you invite the bride after the completion of ___ days at her-in –laws? If yes, what is the custom inviting her?	Yes	50	100%
		No	00	00.00
Total			50	100%

Source: Field work, carried out in 2017

In response to question “after how many days of marriage does bride come to her parental home” different responses were collected from the respondents. Out of 50 respondents that is (100 %); 18 respondents (36 %) affirmed that they bring their daughters back from their in- laws after seven days of the marriage. A big number of respondents i, e. 32 respondents (64 %) asserted that it depends upon the circumstances. If we move from our temporary placements to high altitudes after completing the marriage ceremony and fix the place for sitting somewhere where it seemed to be fit for the flock then it takes more than seven days to send or take back the bride from the in-laws. It is observed by the researcher that it is not any hard and fast rule that only after seven days the groom is to be send back to her in- laws. Also it is observed that the time duration for sending the bride back to her maternal place is not less than seven days. None of the respondents (0 percent) said that they send or take back their daughters from their in- laws after five days.

The custom of inviting the bride after completing seven days of more is observed by the whole *Bakerwal* community. After the completion of seven days of marriage the brother or any other near relative of the bride goes to her in –laws with some gifts including sweets, *Halwa*, Dates and invites the newly wed bride along with other family members. The bride and her-in-laws accepts the invitation. The bride is allowed to stay at her parental home for a few days by her in-laws before they leave for their home.

Conclusion

From the study it appears that both the trends of modernity and traditions are equally established in the marriages of *Bakerwals*. The modernity here is an indicator with respect of cultural and not the tribal stigma. Therefore it is clear that there are still some rights with respect of marriage that should be with boy and girl but are confined with their parents respectively mate selection or meeting the other partner between engagement and marriage and time of marriage. The old practices, rituals and beliefs are still significant and very important. The researcher concludes there is a process of continuity and little change in marriage among *Bakerwals*. The continuity indicates here that traditions and rituals while as little change is indication of some modern practices in marriage. The marriage process, mate selection, rituals and other marriage related ceremonies are still the same and are being done on classic traditional patterns but having said that the change factor always place its part. There may be different reasons for different changes but the fact is that these little change are taking place without any doubt. The inclusion of wazwan in cuisine, the replacement of electronic gifts from traditional gifts, document for Nikah (*Nikah Nama*) Kashmir and hindi movie songs sung in different days of marriages are some of the changes that can be widely seen.

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