

## Marriage and associated customs in Indus Kohistani culture

Talib Jan Abasindhi,

Executive Director, Indus Social Welfare & Development Organization (ISWDO)  
Indus Kohistan, KPK, Pakistan.

**Abstract.** Indus Kohistan is the last administrative unit (District) of Khyber Pakhtunkhawa (KPK) Province of Pakistan in the extreme North. People living in this mountainous region speak few Indo Aryan languages and therefore, they have their own ways and modes to live. Marriage and associated customs in Indus Kohistani culture shall be the topic of this paper to present. It is part of my research work on Indus Kohistani culture which was initiated back in the year 2002 and it is in its final stage of editing and formatting for publishing. In order to produce authentic information, a well reputed questionnaire, “outline of cultural materials (Murdock, et.al. 1971)” was used in data collection for this research work. This questionnaire is widely used for anthropological studies in South Asia. In addition to this, several individuals having varied ages were interviewed to get the required information, mostly the cultural values and traditions buried to the past. In order to obtain the relevant information about different traditions and cultural aspects; women folk, youth, old aged oral historians, farmers and teachers were interviewed. Apart from using the famous anthropological questionnaire, the relationship of the researcher himself to the area and culture is another aspect of authenticity of the work. There are least chances for misinterpretation of some cultural aspects, translating some words and phrases and bringing forth the true information. This research study shall be the only detailed information on the subject in Indus Kohistan, after its publication. It is well believed that this study shall be a greater resource for the researchers intending to work in this area in various fields. It shall also provide the gaps which the researchers can fill through their respective works in future. An attempt shall therefore be made to introduce this culture to outer world through this paper presentation. This paper shall therefore be a source of attracting the researchers to this least known area, its people and culture.

**Keywords:** Marriage, Indus Kohistan, Research, bride price and polygamy.

### 1. Marriage

Marriage as a social contract starts with an engagement in Indus Kohistan. The point of interest here is the engagements in childhood age. This is the reason that even some who become mentally or physically disabled at some time after birth may also go through this process. If one of the couple becomes disabled after the birth and engagement, the agreement (*nikah*) cannot be cancelled in ordinary cases. In severe cases, however, it can be cancelled.

Polygamy is practiced in the area of study for a variety of reasons. For example, if the first or second wife of a person is incapable of producing children, then the husband takes a second or very rarely a third wife. Likewise, if a couple has a couple of consecutive daughters, then this point also provides a chance for the male to take another wife. In addition, sometimes the factor of lack of understanding between the couple may induce the husband to decide to take a second wife. Similarly, sometimes a second marriage becomes a matter of compulsion for a person. For example, in most of rural Pakistan, the tradition of exchange of daughters, *badli*, is common. In this tradition, a girl is exchanged for a girl. Thus, if the brother in law of a person takes a second wife for one reason or another, he is compelled to follow suit. This is done as a way of taking the revenge. If such a person fails to follow suit, other family members do not consider this action of his good, and he is also considered as coward man, who could not defend or follow the desire of his sister who has been put into trouble by her husband.

Endogamy is another feature of the marriages in Indus Kohistani culture and is favored before exogamy.

Exogamy is however very rarely practiced in the area. The motive behind such a practice is the consideration of strengthening already existing relations and to take them into further depth. It is considered helpful in the social setup, especially during enmity, where the manpower is needed and only close blood relatives can be involved in it.

As has been described earlier engagements as well as marriages are carried out in very young age, and that is why young and free boys and girls are seldom found there. Therefore, if a person remains without a life partner for one or the other reason, he has either to get engaged to a small girl in the village or to marry a girl from outside the area, like Swat or Gilgit.

### **1.1. Wedding clothing**

It is very interesting to note that wedding clothes are made only for the bride, as the groom is not supposed to be present at the occasion of marriage and he has to go to outside on or before the marriage day. Thus, on the groom's side, all preparations are made in the best possible way, except the preparation of the groom.

The bride is prepared in a traditional style. Tremendous change has been made to this norm during the last couple of years, though. Formerly, a pair of loose trousers made of about 5—7 yards of cloth, a loose shirt and a head-covering were made for dressing the bride. This kind of dress was locally prepared by the women at home. The trousers were to be of a reddish color, with their lower ends very tight, and the middle part very loose, like the trousers used by the men of some tribes in the province of Balochistan. The shirt was also to be very loose, black in color and embroidered. Both the trousers and the shirt were to be looser, and different from the ordinary ones. The shirt was to be very heavy due to the embroideries and silver coins sewed to it. Similarly, the head covering was also made of black color with red strips on the outer edges. This is the way the bride was prepared in the past. But, the tradition has now been changed in most parts of the district; however, it does exist in few valleys even today.

Unlike in the past, the bride of the present age wears a watch along with other things that were used in the past. These things include a wrist chain, a finger ring, an ear- ring, a necklace and a bracelet. All of these things are taken from the groom's home at the occasion of marriage.

### **1.2. Specification of wedding time**

Wedding ceremonies are held in all seasons. But there are some speculations about the days and months for holding these ceremonies. Usually, the month before the fasting month, the month following the fasting and two months after the month of fasting are considered favorable ones for holding the marriage ceremonies. Likewise, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday are considered the best days for arranging wedding ceremonies. This trend, like many others is losing its place in the social setup of the area. The elders are more concerned than the young, and women care more than the men.

### **1.3. Marriage related customs**

Two days before the date of the wedding, both the parties inform their respective barbers to invite their relatives and friends to attend the wedding ceremony. They are advised and guided as to whom to call and whom not to. The guests assemble at both the homes of the respective parties involved one day before for a night. These guests include men, women, and their children.

After offering the 3<sup>rd</sup> prayer, both the men and women make selections from their respective sexes of the people to go in the wedding procession from the groom's home to the home of the bride's father. This procession is comprised of men, women, girls and boys as well as of the father or elder brother of the groom. After their arrival, they are served dinner after the dusk. Usually rice and a curry of meat or wheat bread broken in meat curry and mixed with butter oil is given to the guests. The men are served first, followed by the women and their children. At this occasion, the beef or mutton is given to them in their hands with equal distribution. Arrangements are made for them to sit in a circle. The women are standing around the circle and take turns to serve the guests. The men stay at the guesthouse and dinner is eaten inside the guest house or on the roof of it depending on the number of guests and the weather conditions. The women, on the other hand, are served the dinner inside the home, regardless of circumstances. The members of the wedding procession

usually take their dinner at the groom's home on the way to the home of the father of the bride, but on reaching there, they are offered dinner and have to accept it a second time.

After concluding the 5th prayer, a program is started by the hosts, especially by the younger ones, which is called *tamak lukhaon*. Literally, this means the demand for tobacco. In general, it is the practice in which the hosts' demands some money from the guests and in case of denial start to fight with them and try to take the asked amount of money by force. If the guests do not have enough young people to fight with the opposite group and feels that their position is weak, they easily accept the offer and give the asked amount of money, and otherwise, they refuse the demand and remain, prepared for the fight. Sometime this tradition turns the situation severe and creates a gulf between the two involved parties.

On the next day, early in the morning, after offering the Morning Prayer, the bride is dressed and prepared. Usually the bride, at the occasion as well as during the last night, starts to weep. There are two prevailing forms of the weeping. One is silent weeping in which the tears are flowing out of the eyes of the bride without any sound; this is the first form of weeping. In the second form of weeping, sound is involved and it is called *shang karon*. In this form of weeping, the bride usually remembers her parents, brothers, sisters and friends and weeps. Some of the things said while weeping are quoted in the lines below;

[1] Alas! My sweet mother remains away from me.

[2] Alas! (I think) I was a big burden on my sweet dad.

[3] Alas! My sweet brother has lost me.

[4] Alas! I would be obliged to the one who will visit the place of my dad.

The father of the bride arranges a big meal program on the next day for the relatives and the neighbors at about 10 o'clock. After both the men and the women have eaten the lunch, preparations are made for their departure towards the home of the groom. If there is a short and smooth distance between the homes of the two parties, the bride goes on foot, slowly. Otherwise, she is carried on the back of her brothers and uncles. The bride is accompanied by a couple of her relatives, men, women and children, besides those who have come from the groom's side. The people at the home of the groom, especially the women, are anxiously waiting for the arrival of the bride. As soon as the procession of people with the bride arrives near the grooms home, both the men and the women go to receive the guests of their respective sexes. Thus, the men are first received by the men of the host family and when they go to the guesthouse, the women come out of the home to receive the female members of the procession.

In the near past, on reaching to the home of the groom, some customs were to be performed which are no longer found in the cultural and social setup of the people of this area. One of these is to throw nuts, eggs and sweets over the head of the bride while entering into the home from the first outer door. The children used to remain in wait for all this stuff and after the throwing there used to be a fight among the children over these items. Thus the powerful and active children were snapping most of these items from the passive and weaker ones. The reasons found behind this custom are not known but people simply say that its immediate cause is to keep the children out from the bride; otherwise, they make noises and disturbance. Another one at the door of the bride's room followed this custom. Two women were standing on either side of the door, waiting for the bride to arrive, one of them holding a bowl of milk and the other a bowl of butter oil. Thus, at the arrival of the bride to the door, her right hand was dipped into the bowl of butter oil by one woman and the left hand into the bowl of the milk by the other. By following this custom, it was believed that the bride would have good luck in future and both of these items would be in plenty in her home.

Soon after the arrival of the bride to the home of the groom, preparations are made to offer them a lunch, even if they have eaten one at the home of bride's father. Special care is taken with this meal, and it is somewhat special in comparison with what is normally eaten. One point that should be born in mind is that the parents of the bride do not accompany their daughter, but stay at home. Sometimes, some of the mothers weep while their daughters depart, but this is unusual.

On the other hand, those attending the wedding ceremony from both sides usually congratulate the parents of both the groom and the bride with some gifts. Those attending the brides side take with them a couple of items like handmade bed sheets, pillow covers, tablecloths, head coverings, cloths and many other

small items. These items, along with some other ones prepared by the parents of the bride, are put together in a box for the bride and are taken with her. Those going to the groom's home take with them some money. The amount of this money depends on the relation between the two. Usually, it ranges between 300—500 rupees. These matters on both sides are entirely handled by the women.

After the lunch for those who came with bride, the box of the bride is opened. All the things present in the box are collectively called as *Kachora* in the local language. They are then distributed among the female and children relatives present at the occasion. This distributing matter is handled by the mother in law of the bride or in her absence by her sister in law. Great care is taken during this process that no one should remain without a share.

On the next morning, the bride is taken by her paternal uncle, maternal uncle, elder sister, or paternal aunt. She spends a couple of nights there and then is brought back to her home. This process is called as *guilaon haron* in the local language. Each of the above-mentioned parties takes her for a couple of nights in turn and then she is brought back to her husband's home along with some goods, for example clothes for the bride, shoes, head coverings, some sweets, suitcases, tea pots, cups and some fried wheat bread. When this process reaches its end, she remains at her husband's house for a couple of days and then her parents take her to their home. This phase is called as *satayn beyaon*. She spends a couple of days or even months and then comes back along with some household and personal items, as have been described earlier. The fried wheat bread brought by the bride is divided among the houses in the neighborhood of her husband's home.

Once she is brought back by her parents from their house, she becomes a permanent member of the groom's family and she remains there permanently. She then learns how to adjust herself to the changed and new environment. She is assisted in this by her husband in the very first night about the customs, values as well as the preferences of her husband.

The bride is, however, allowed to go to her parents' home occasionally and at special occasions, like deaths, births, at the occasion of both the *Eids*, and when somebody gets ill or injured. She has to get permission from her husband or the father- and mother-in-law and they in turn specify for her the number of days and nights she should spend there. She returns at the end of these specified days and nights. When she goes at the occasion of the *Eids* or births or to attend a marriage ceremony at her father's family, she in turn brings with her a couple of things, like dress suits for herself, head covering, shoes, soap and some rice (5—10kg)

#### **1.4. The death of the spouse**

In case of the death of someone's wife, he will try to get married again in a couple of months. This second marriage becomes a headache for him, due to the scarcity of unmarried adult girls available in the area on one hand, and the money on the other. The age factor also sometime becomes a hindrance in this connection.

As has already been described, in Indus Kohistan, engagements are held in childhood, for this reason adult and unengaged girls are very rarely found. Thus, to get a second wife, the person has to move towards other areas. If the person in question is young, he gets married very soon; otherwise, it takes a lot of time for him to find a girl or a widow. It is worth mentioning that persons above fifty also remain in search of getting married for the second time to a widow or even a young girl if possible. In some of the cases, it has been observed that the sons of a person's first wife arrange the second marriage for their father, after having noticed their father's interest in this regard. It has been acknowledged, after consulting a couple of cases, that they consider wife as the completion of the half into the full. According to them, life becomes too miserable and troublesome in the absence of a wife. She had have become an integral part of his life and that is why a man in his fifties feels an immense need of a wife. The wife is also considered a veil and modesty.

On the other hand, in case of the death of the husband of a girl or woman, she has no choice to select a man for herself as a second husband. She has no say in this regard. She is rather considered the property of the family and a matter of honor. But, at the same time, the womenfolk also seem to be happy with this trend and custom and they does not want to go outside of the family in which they have been bounded up and have spent a couple of years with the members of that family. Anyhow, her destiny remains inside the family for

being married for the second time. If a woman wishes to break the custom and want to marry with person outside the family, she is never allowed to do so, and in case a woman does so, the enmity develops between the two families.

If a woman is old enough and has a couple of married and unmarried children, she is asked about her disposition towards having a second marriage with a person inside the family. But, it has been observed in a majority of cases regarding older women that they do not prefer a second marriage, but rather choose to live with their children. On the other hand, when a young girl remains single after the death of her husband, she is not consulted, but is engaged to one of the brothers of the deceased one. If the deceased has no brothers, she is married to one of the paternal cousins of her late husband, even as a second wife.

## 1.5. Divorce

Divorce (*talaq*) is very rarely practiced in Indus Kohistan. It can be said that the rate of divorce in the village is equal to zero percent. The major reason behind this low rate of divorce is the existence of some cultural barriers. Divorce is a term which is not only disliked but hated by both sexes. It earns dishonor and shame not only for the couple involved but for the whole family. From the religious perspective, this is also frowned upon in Islam, though permission is given for the execution of divorce in special circumstances. According to the religious teachings, a special way has been established already there, which the followers are required to follow. Thus, in case of any divorce the people of the area follow the Islamic way. According to the customs of this area, the right of divorce is reserved by the man and the woman has no say in this regard. A wife cannot divorce her husband. There are no specific and clear grounds on which the husband can divorce his wife because he has to justify this very serious act before his relatives and the parents of his wife. In case of a divorce, the husband of the wife has to satisfy the family members of his wife, otherwise, an enmity will arise between them and they will shoot him for his very brutal action.

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