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HISTORICAL-ETHNOGRAPHIC AND ETHNOCULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF BIRTH, MARRIAGE, AND MOURNING RITUALS IN SHERABAD DISTRICT

Gulchehra Uskinovna Axmedova
Associate Professor, Department of World History, Termez State University, Uzbekistan

Abstract-This article examines the historical, ethnographic, ethnocultural and socio-functional characteristics of childbirth, marriage and mourning rituals among the population of Sherabad district in Surkhandarya region. These rituals are interpreted as complex sociocultural phenomena representing the major stages of human life. Particular attention is paid to traditions associated with childbirth, the forty-day confinement period, cradle ceremonies, matchmaking, engagement, wedding customs, funeral practices and mourning rituals.
Keywords: Sherabad district, Surkhan-Sherabad oasis, family rituals, childbirth, marriage rituals, mourning rituals, ethnography, ethnoculture, traditions, ritual transformation.

INTRODUCTION.

The historical development, social relations, spiritual values, and the process of national identity formation of every nation find their vivid expression in its system of traditional rituals. Rituals enrich the biological processes of human life with social and cultural meaning and serve as one of the important mechanisms defining an individual's belonging to a particular community. From this perspective, birth, marriage, and mourning rituals are of particular academic significance as universal cultural phenomena associated with the beginning of human life, the acquisition of a new social status, and the end of life. The Surkhan–Sherabad oasis, one of the southern regions of Uzbekistan, is distinguished by its ancient historical and cultural layers, ethnic composition, traditional economic activities, and rich ritual culture. In particular, family and domestic rituals that have developed in the lifestyle of the population of Sherabad District have evolved through the interaction of local ethnic characteristics, kinship relations, religious beliefs, and folk traditions.

In studying these rituals, they should be examined not merely as a collection of customs and traditions, but as complex phenomena reflecting the social structure, system of values, collective memory, and cultural identity of society.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODS.

In the traditional Uzbek family, the birth of a child is considered not only a biological event but also an important social occurrence symbolizing the arrival of a new generation into family and community life. In the lifestyle of the population of Sherabad District, rituals associated with childbirth have likewise been performed with the active participation of family members, relatives, and the local community. The primary objectives of birth-related rituals include caring for the newborn during the initial period, protecting both mother and child, and expressing good wishes for their health and future.

One of the important components of this process is the chilla period. The concept of chilla is closely associated with traditional folk perceptions of time and the life cycle. The forty-

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day period following childbirth has traditionally been regarded as a particularly sensitive time requiring special attention to both mother and infant. During this period, close family members paid particular attention to their care. In some families, customs such as limiting visitors, preparing specific dishes, and performing traditional protective practices have been preserved.

From an ethnographic perspective, chilla rituals combine two distinct layers: the first involves practical measures aimed at protecting the physical well-being of the mother and newborn, while the second reflects ancient folk beliefs concerning protection against negative supernatural forces. Consequently, these rituals demonstrate a syncretic combination of rational everyday experience and archaic mythological perceptions.

Studies relating to the Sherabad–Surkhan region have documented customs such as Chiltan Piri, Yetti Momani Yo‘qlash (invoking the Seven Mothers), and Moma Qildi, as well as certain folk practices intended to protect newborns. However, it would be inaccurate to assume that these rituals were performed uniformly in every family; their forms and meanings may vary depending on the neighbourhood, generation, family beliefs, and contemporary living conditions [1].

Another important stage in birth-related rituals is the beshik to‘yi (cradle ceremony). In folk culture, the cradle is not merely an object used to lay a baby down but also serves as a symbolic representation of family, generational continuity, protection, and upbringing. The participation of relatives and close acquaintances in the cradle ceremony signifies the community's recognition of the newborn child and their incorporation into the network of social relations.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS.

Customs associated with aqiqa (the Islamic sacrificial ceremony following childbirth), naming the child, the first haircut, the first steps, and the oyoq to‘yi (first-steps celebration) also serve to socially acknowledge the different stages of a child's development.

Thus, birth-related rituals in the traditional culture of the Sherabad population have developed as an important ethnocultural mechanism ensuring generational continuity, family stability, child upbringing, and communal solidarity.

In traditional society, marriage ceremonies constitute a complex social institution that extends beyond the union of two individuals, facilitating the establishment of new relationships between two households, extended families, and social groups. Among the population of Sherabad District, the marriage process has historically consisted of several stages, including matchmaking, obtaining consent, engagement, wedding preparations, the performance of the marriage ceremony, and bringing the bride to her new household. Each of these stages possesses a specific symbolic meaning and social function.

Matchmaking represents the initial stage of marital relations, during which the social and moral compatibility of the two families is assessed. The proposal conveyed through matchmakers signifies not only the intention of two young people to marry but also mutual respect between the families and the establishment of future kinship ties.

Historical marriage traditions of the Surkhan–Sherabad oasis include customs such as beshik kerti, etak yirtish, etakqa solish, and quloq tishlatish. Some of these customs were associated with symbolically establishing the intention of future marital relations between families during childhood. However, their existence does not imply that they were practised uniformly in all families. They should be regarded as local traditions associated with particular historical circumstances and kinship relations [2].

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Terms such as etak yirtish used in marriage ceremonies are of particular ethnolinguistic significance. Such expressions not only describe the external actions performed during a ritual but also preserve its underlying social meaning. The transmission of ritual terminology from one generation to another contributes to the preservation of historical memory and local cultural identity.

Material and symbolic exchange has also played an important role in wedding preparations. Studies concerning the Surkhan–Sherabad oasis have documented terms such as qo‘rda (agreement), ko‘gan to‘ldirish (an obligation associated with livestock), surug‘ (clothing and jewellery prepared for the bride), and borg‘i (traditional gifts prepared for the bride's family). These terms constitute important sources for understanding the local marriage economy, kinship relations, and the system of reciprocal obligations [3].

The social significance of marriage ceremonies is primarily reflected in the recognition of the newly established family by the community. Through wedding ceremonies, the new social status of the couple is acknowledged, relationships between families are strengthened, and traditional values are reaffirmed.

At the same time, certain forms of marriage ceremonies have undergone changes in the modern period. The shortening of ceremonial stages that previously lasted for extended periods, the reduction of excessive expenditure, greater independence of young people in decision-making, and the expansion of contemporary marriage practices represent the principal features of this transformation.

Mourning ceremonies are associated with the final stage of human life and embody people's perceptions of death, memory, generational continuity, religious beliefs, and social solidarity. In the traditional lifestyle of the population of Sherabad District, mourning ceremonies have served several important functions, including accompanying the deceased to their final resting place, honouring their memory, and providing moral support to the bereaved family.

Mourning ceremonies include the announcement of death, preparation of the deceased for burial, the funeral prayer, burial, the expression of condolences, and subsequent commemorative gatherings. The principal religious foundation of these practices consists of Islamic funeral rites. At the same time, certain customs historically developed within local folk culture have become integrated into these practices.

Time-related observances and commemorative customs associated with the periods of uch (three days), yetti (seven days), and qirq (forty days) should also be examined from a historical and ethnographic perspective. In this regard, it is important to distinguish between religiously prescribed obligatory practices and local customs. This is because certain commemorative days and the associated practices may vary across regions and individual families.

In his study devoted to the funeral ceremonies of the population of the Surkhan–Sherabad oasis, Ravshan Bo‘riyev examines the ethnic characteristics of these rituals, burial and condolence practices, funeral prayers, and commemorative customs. This research serves as an important scholarly source for investigating the mourning culture of the region on the basis of its local ethnographic characteristics.

The socio-psychological function of mourning ceremonies is also of particular importance. Collective sympathy, shared grief, and commemoration help alleviate emotional distress and restore social connections. Thus, mourning ceremonies are not merely religious or

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family-related phenomena but also social institutions that demonstrate the spiritual solidarity of the community.

A comparative study of birth, marriage, and mourning ceremonies using the example of Sherabad District makes it possible to identify their common structural characteristics. Each of these rituals represents a particular change in an individual's position within society.

Birth ceremonies signify the arrival of a new individual into the family and community; marriage ceremonies mark the acquisition of a new family status; while mourning ceremonies represent the transformation of social relationships associated with the deceased into forms of remembrance and respect.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, birth, marriage, and mourning ceremonies within the traditional lifestyle of the population of Sherabad District constitute a complex ethnocultural system embodying the historical memory, social experience, and national values of the people. Birth ceremonies represent the beginning of human life and generational continuity; marriage ceremonies signify the formation of new family relationships; while mourning ceremonies embody remembrance, respect, and collective solidarity. All these rituals serve to regulate social relations, preserve spiritual values, and ensure cultural continuity between generations.

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